Building a movement − Solidarity, activism and travel from North America to Nicaragua

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Many new forms of tourism have emerged over the past two decades claiming to provide an alternative, responsible approach to international travel. Unlike ecotourism and volunteer tourism, travel centered on solidarity activism has not been thoroughly explored in the academic literature. Through narrative interviews conducted with organizational staff, former travelers, and members of a rural host community, this study profiles three organizations that organize solidarity travel experiences in Nicaragua.

Qualitative analysis of the interviews and secondary materials including blog posts and videos reveals that staff, travelers and community members feel that they benefit from the exchanges that take place during solidarity travel. However, the study participants also articulated a number of concerns and issues with the practice of solidarity travel, including the limited nature of ongoing contact between travelers, coordinating organizations, and the communities that are visited while in Nicaragua. The experience of solidarity travel provided participants with a greater understanding of the connections between Nicaragua and North America, and a critical self-awareness for young travelers in particular, as many were experiencing the Global South for the first time. The successful translation of that exposure and awareness into activism is less certain and is identified as an area for future improvement of the overall solidarity travel experience.

Overall, this study contributes to the emerging literature on solidarity travel by comparing three organizations with different missions and methods, and showing how solidarity can be enacted in a variety of ways through travel. Through the inclusion of three distinct groups of participants, this study also highlights similarities and differences related to the way solidarity travel is experienced by members of these groups.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The research problem.

There has been a persistent tendency on the part of the tourism industry to re-purpose 'new' forms of travel – ecotourism, community-based tourism, and voluntourism - to suit the profit-oriented, expansionary worldview of the global tourism industry. The academic discourse related to these alternative approaches has followed a pattern of excitement, evaluation and dejection, as the transformative and progressive potential of the 'new' idea of the moment is lost through co-optation and depoliticization.

Now, as academics begin to question the practices of volunteer tourism, some have turned their attention to a more explicitly political form of travel that has been referred to elsewhere as activist tourism (Shinnamon, 2010; McLaren, 2003) or justice tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; Scheyvens, 2002). The term I use in this study is *solidarity travel*, selected in part because of its use by my research partners, and also because of the rhetorical links such a title makes with past patterns of tourism to Nicaragua. Solidarity travel, in my view, is not merely an alternative tourism, but rather presents, through travel, an alternative to dominant, hegemonic systems of education, politics and economics. Some of the existing academic work on this form of travel (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; Spencer, 2010) makes an ambitious claim: that solidarity travel can help build transnational networks of resistance to neoliberalism. In this study, I explore how these networks are built, by conducting critical, qualitative research on three organizations working to provide opportunities for North Americans to participate in solidarity travel to Nicaragua. As the literature review will reveal, prior academic work dealing with, or referring to, the topic of solidarity travel is limited, but the few studies that have been

done remain firmly at a stage of excited exploration. Scheyvens (2002), Higgins-Desbiolles (2008), and Spencer (2010) share a view of this kind of tourism and travel that is inherently positive, and all acknowledge that it is an understudied phenomenon. Another commonality among these three Australian academics is their focus on solidarity tourists, though to a lesser extent, Spencer (2010) expands her perspective to include some analysis of the coordinating organizations involved. In any case, there has been little to no incorporation of local partners' perspectives.

The studies undertaken by Spencer and others such as Shinnamon (2010) are also limited in that they take the form of ethnographic accounts of particular groups of solidarity tourists participating in specific tours. The longevity and character of the transformations and relationships built through these experiences is therefore not a major part of their analyses. Furthermore, these studies have been concerned exclusively with tourists as individuals, rather than the organizations these travelers may represent. Solidarity travel has thus far been seen to facilitate connections between citizens of the Global North and the Global South, but the links between local-level organizations that form the basis of international resistance networks have not been examined.

Finally, there has been a heavy emphasis on the 'tourism' side of solidarity travel, an activity that may be considered more comprehensively as activism and education. Understanding how participants, organizers and local partners describe and understand their own activities was one of the aims of my study.

1.2 Scope of the study.

This study explored the activities of three organizations working to provide solidarity travel opportunities for North Americans to visit Nicaragua. Each organization

has a different approach to solidarity and focuses on different activities, appealing to distinct parts of the travelling public.

The first of these organizations, Witness for Peace, is a US-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that has been active in organizing what they call 'solidarity delegations' for US citizens to Nicaragua since 1983. Witness for Peace attempts to develop an awareness of how US policy, in military and economic terms, has an impact on the everyday lives of Nicaraguan people. They organize tours for groups that are intergenerational, but also provide custom tours for particular post-secondary institutions. Witness for Peace attempts to build solidarity through exposure and education. They bring local community representatives and Nicaraguan experts to meet with travelling groups, and these groups also visit factories, community health and education centers, and rural farm communities.

The second group, Casa Canadiense, is a Canadian organization based in Managua, Nicaragua's capital city, but administered from Toronto. Similarly to Witness for Peace, Casa Canadiense attempts to build solidarity through educational travel opportunities for high school groups, largely from the Greater Toronto Area. These groups actively engage in community development work, participating in a project proposed and led by a rural host community during their time in Nicaragua. This experience is complemented by visits to markets, the Managua garbage dump, and to community organizations working in the poorest neighbourhoods of the capital city.

The third organization is the Union de Cooperativas Agropecuarias (UCA) San Ramón. An agricultural cooperative based in the municipality of San Ramón in Nicaragua's northern highlands, UCA San Ramón brings foreign travelers to a number of small communities in the area in order to demonstrate the realities of rural life and to

provide direct contact with the producers of organic, fair trade coffee. This unique tourism project is a recent addition to a broader program of social and economic supports that the UCA provides to area residents and is supported by host families and local youth who act as guides for the travelling groups.

Through interviews with organizational staff, community hosts and former solidarity travelers, this study presents and analyzes a variety of narratives about solidarity and international travel through the work of these three organizations in Nicaragua.

1.3 Research goal and questions.

The goals of my study are to critically explore how three distinct organizations approach solidarity travel, and to report the stories of participants, staff, and local hosts involved in solidarity travel between North America and Nicaragua. Following Creswell's (2009) suggestions for developing research questions, I have identified two broad research questions relating to these goals, and have supplemented these with a series of sub-questions.

Q1. How is solidarity travel understood and delivered by different organizations?

1. How does an organization's history influence its approach to solidarity travel?

2. How does this organization 'do' solidarity travel?

3. How does travel fit with the other activities of the organization?

4. How do these organizations cope with challenges and issues?

Q2. What are the experiences of those involved in solidarity travel?

1. What leads people to become part of solidarity travel as a host, organizer, or participant?

2. How is the solidarity travel experience described by each of these three parties?

3. What happens after the travelers return home?

4. What are the concerns of solidarity travel participants and how are they addressed?

1.4 Organization of thesis.

This thesis contains seven chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 reviews literature with the intent of defining solidarity and solidarity travel. The literature review contextualizes solidarity travel within academic discourses on alternative tourism, education, globalization, fair trade, and social movements. Chapter 3 describes the study location – Nicaragua. This is achieved through a detailed examination of recent Nicaraguan political history that also emphasizes the role of non-governmental organizations and the changing nature of international tourism in the country. Chapter 4 discusses my research design and methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter 5 describes the three studied organizations in detail, in an attempt to address the first research question listed above. Chapter 6 reports on the individual narratives of solidarity travelers, organizational staff, and local hosts. The final chapter revisits key themes from the literature review in light of the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6. It also reviews the research questions and sub-questions before suggesting areas for future research into solidarity travel.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction and structure.

While academic interest in volunteer, pro-poor, community-based and other forms of 'alternative' or 'responsible' tourism has grown substantially in recent years, literature relating specifically to solidarity through travel has been limited. Even so, I used these studies (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; Spencer, 2010; Shinnamon, 2010) to create an initial draft that revealed certain gaps and inspired the creation of my own research questions. After returning from the field in the fall of 2011, I realized that my review was incomplete and decided that it was necessary to look beyond the boundaries of tourism research in order to analyze solidarity travel as thoroughly as possible. The first section of this literature review provides a definition of solidarity and solidarity travel and concludes with a definition and explanation of hegemony and counter hegemony, and how these terms can be related to solidarity travel.

The second section of the chapter provides background information on solidarity travel, as it relates to existing literature on alternative forms of tourism. These topics are placed in the context of ongoing academic debates related to geographies of care, responsibility and generosity. Critically evaluating the academic discourse around other alternative approaches, such as ecotourism and volunteer tourism, reveals a certain pattern of excitement, evaluation and dejection, as the transformative and progressive potential of the 'new' idea of the moment is lost through co-optation and depoliticization by dominant actors in the capitalist, neoliberal world system. As the review will illustrate, current academic work on solidarity travel seems to be very much in a stage of excited

exploration, indicating a pressing need for a more thorough evaluation of the phenomenon in practice.

The third major section of this review begins by exploring the philosophical and ideological roots of critical pedagogy and comparing these ideas with the actual practice of building solidarity through educational tourism. This portion of the review discusses the various forms of educational travel that have been previously studied and lays the groundwork for an evaluation of the educational content and character of the solidarity travel experiences included in my study.

Having established the links between solidarity travel and its academic antecedents in tourism and pedagogical discourses, the latter half of this literature review deals with the 'what' and the 'who' of solidarity travel in practice. In particular, the fourth and fifth sections of the literature review explore the substance of this solidarity, which is referred to as 'another' or 'alternative' globalization and involves key concepts and components such as fair trade. The sixth and final section discusses literature regarding networks of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational social movements, looking closely at the argument that connections and relationships across borders are built and strengthened through solidarity travel.

2.2 Definitions

Understanding why solidarity tourism can be considered a distinct form of travel requires an appreciation for what solidarity means in theory and practice. Fogarty (2005) defines solidarity as including:

> "…an awareness of interdependency with others; an identification of and understanding of injustice in its specificities; a commitment to redressing injustices in one's personal life and institutional affiliations; and a cultivation of the "virtue"

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of solidarity through concerted human practice to redress power imbalances" (p. 85).

Adding to his general definition, Fogarty discusses three 'movements' that are essential to the formation of solidarity between people. First and foremost, he argues solidarity requires a situation of social injustice, where inequity exists, and there is an oppression of a particular group (p. 89). Once this primary condition is established, there must be a creation of what Fogarty calls 'mutual empathy' between the oppressed group and another party. Those involved will experience 'affectional solidarity' differently, but all involved must recognize their shared struggle to overcome injustice (p. 91). . Fogarty's third movement relates to the idea that resistance to injustice through mutual empathy must be articulated in a way that encourages the participants to take action. This means that, as he writes, "…solidarity is not just a sentiment, nor a cognitive assertion, nor even a volitional commitment. It must… evidence itself in activism for justice" (p. 94). By this definition, travel alone does not constitute solidarity, rather it is the continuing work and action that makes for a solidarity connection between people or groups.

Referencing these movements, Fogarty also clarifies the difference between conditions that invoke solidarity and those that invite altruistic behaviours – in the first place, solidarity demands a recognition of injustice, while altruism merely requires a perception of need (p. 96). Second, mutual empathy is necessary for solidarity, while sympathy is the approach taken by altruistic or charitable activities (p. 98). Another important difference between solidarity and altruism, according to Fogarty, is the commitment and continuity that is required for the former. Fogarty argues that altruism can be acted upon sporadically, as opportunities arise, whereas solidarity is only built through consistent and continuous effort and contact between groups and individuals (p.

102).

The particular approach to solidarity demonstrated by the groups included in this study is informed by the way solidarity has been understood and put into practice in the past. Nepstad (2004) highlights the difference between solidarity as understood by the 'Central America' movement of the 1980s and the more traditional, Marxist idea that was familiar to international supporters of the Cuban, Chinese and Russian revolutions. For Nepstad, that earlier form of solidarity was based around support for the struggle of the working class across political boundaries, whereas the Central America movement worked with the theological idea of accompaniment, which Nepstad describes as 'walking with the people of Latin America in their quest for justice' (p. viii).

In order to walk with the people of Latin America in a literal sense, and to develop the relationships that will lead to the mutual empathy described by Fogarty (2005), concerned individuals and groups from North America have found the need to travel and interact with people facing situations of social injustice and oppression. Fogarty argues that solidarity forms when technologies of tourism are 'used and then transcended' in order for travelers and hosts to realize their similarities and differences. This leads to a situation where, in Fogarty's words, "we have met the native and they are us, and yet not us" (p. 45).

Fogarty (2005) suggests that a major reason that North American youth seek out travel opportunities abroad which include a volunteer or service-learning component is their sense of alienation with market-driven life at home. Fogarty explains alienation in a Marxist sense – the separation of humans from their individuality and human relationships through the capitalist system of production and the structures of waged labour (p. 58-61). Pursuing travel that puts an emphasis on 'transcultural reciprocity'

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allows North Americans to participate in relationships that are not based solely on market transactions. It also puts participants in contact with rural, marginalized Nicaraguans that, according to Fogarty, are only 'partially integrated into capitalist relations of production' (p. 61).

Another definition and description of this kind of travel is offered by Scheyvens (2002) who cites Holden's (1984) view that justice tourism[1] seeks to promote "…a just form of travel between members of different communities… seeking mutual understanding, solidarity and equality amongst participants," (p. 102). Scheyvens then goes on to outline five main forms of 'justice tourism' – hosts telling their own stories of past (or ongoing) oppression, improving tourists understanding of poverty issues, voluntary conservation work, development work and finally, revolutionary tourism (p.105). Scheyvens adds that justice tourism is 'both ethical and equitable' and says it has the following attributes:

- it builds solidarity between visitors and those visited;
- it promotes mutual understanding and relationships based on equity, sharing and respect;
- it supports self-sufficiency and self-determination of local communities;
- and it maximises local economic, cultural and social benefits (p. 104).

These characteristics fit in well with Fogarty's ideas about solidarity in general. While Scheyvens' discussion of the variety of 'justice tourism' operations and practices is thorough and helpfully highlights some of the differences between organizations offering similar experiences, her overall conceptualization seems to focus on the re-telling of history and the possibilities of active participation in revolutionary or voluntary activities.

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[1] Scheyvens uses the term justice tourism, so I have included this formulation in reference to her writing.

This seems to miss the ongoing nature of oppression revealed by reality or solidarity tours as well as denying the possibility of a 'justice' character for tourism activities that do not necessarily occur in the context of direct action but rather emphasize observation and connection between peoples.

Mowforth, Charlton and Munt (2008) describe the rise of solidarity tours in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s as motivated by "…the romanticism of Ernesto Che Guevara and fascination for and sympathy with insurgent movements fighting for social justice" (p.13). However, they say that with the fall of the Soviet Union and the difficult nature and limited success of any prolonged struggle against the United States, such excursions lost impetus. The emergence of an anti or alternative globalization movement has 'inspired a rebirth' in such tourism, although the authors suggest that this resurgence is minor in significance and refer to these tours according to their thematic focus (fair trade, effects of globalization, human rights) rather than considered them to be 'solidarity tours' for a new generation. However, underlying the anti or alternative globalization movement is the idea that activists and organizations need to provide a counter narrative to the one being transmitted by governments, corporations, and elite interests. This counter narrative may not be as universal or consistent as the ideas behind communism or socialism in the 20th century, but I believe that solidarity still has conceptual relevance in this contemporary context. In part, this is related to the idea of hegemony and counter hegemony.

2.2.1 Hegemony, counter hegemony and solidarity tourism.

For the purposes of this study, the concept of hegemony is understood in connection with the work of Antonio Gramsci, a radical Italian trade unionist. Gramsci

based his social analysis, written in the 1920s, on the idea of a stratified class system in which urban industrial workers were to become the progressive force in overturning the status quo. Gramsci's original writings were published in the form of diaries and letters from prison, and he thus was required to employ metaphor and allusion to avoid censorship from authorities. As a result, in considering hegemony and related concepts for this study, I have relied on more contemporary interpretations of Gramsci's work, rather than the original source material.

Caton and Santos (2009) point out that Gramsci argued that dominant groups are able to maintain their power because they successfully use a number of cultural channels such as religion, the mass media, and the educational system to engineer the consent both of privileged and of marginalized members of society. Tourism, Caton and Santos argue, is one such cultural channel as it is a key site of constructing and transmitting narratives and for shaping discussions about people, places, and cultures. All of these topics are the site of struggle between the powerful and the less powerful members of any society – local and global (p. 191-192). Mowforth and Munt (2009) add that hegemony is never fully realized in capitalist societies - it is continually contested, so that for each narrative, there is a counter-narrative. As they suggest, "hegemony must be renewed, recreated, defended and modified and is inseparable from overtones of struggle." (p.51)

This may seem to have little to do with solidarity travel in the current century, but I believe it is possible to apply Gramscian notions of counter hegemony and struggle to this case, in a way that is similar to Mayo's (1999) use of Gramsci's work as a means of conceptualizing critical adult education. Mayo employs two key Gramscian categories – the 'organic intellectual', an individual or group of individuals that attempt to interfere

with the dominant narrative and generate a 'counter story' or counter hegemonic discourse (p. 41), and the idea of a 'war of position' in which relatively powerless groups arrange themselves in opposition to a far more dominant confluence of power and status (p. 38). My research suggests that in the case of the solidarity travel experiences included in the study, the organizational staff and the Nicaraguans who interact with travelers can be considered as organic intellectuals who are engaged in a war of position against hegemonic understandings of what tourism, development and the good life should be. Their counter hegemonic discourse deals with alternative globalization, fair trade, and the pursuit of human rights.

Fogarty (2005) also believes that there is a natural link between these Gramscian concepts and the practice of international solidarity travel. He argues that small-scale cross-cultural experiences create the conditions for the development of an understanding between people that is not based on the stereotypical or reductive approach taken by dominant forms of media and public education. Fogarty adds that if the discourse used by the tour coordinator or organizer is critical of the hegemonic version of reality, participants are,

> "forced to revisit their cultures of origin with a critical perspective. This concerns the construction of what Gramsci called an alternative hegemony. Such counter-discourse can become an element of a war of position" (p. 33-34).

However, Fogarty also points out the challenge involved in attempting to subvert or challenge hegemonic ways of understanding and organizing the world through tourism. The adaptability and resilience of global capitalism is substantial, which means that organizers of solidarity travel opportunities, and the participants in such tours, must be careful as Fogarty points out, "even the desire to practice resistance and occupy oppositional social locations, can be appropriated, commodified, and sold back to non-

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conformists at a handsome profit. In this way "revolution" tourism with its iconographic Che T shirts, Zapatista dolls, and Sandinista flags, can become big business, (p. 108).

2.3 Alternative tourisms – Where does solidarity travel fit?

From the very emergence of tourism as a dedicated field of study, some academics have questioned and critiqued the dominant forms of tourism in practice (Hall, 2010; Hutnyk, 1996; McLaren, 2003; Wheeler, 2005). At the outset, the challenge was drawing attention to the environmental and social impacts of mass tourism and the thorough discussion of these issues led to a number of alternative forms of tourism being proposed and implemented. Of these new approaches, ecotourism, community-based tourism, and volunteer tourism have each seemed to catch the attention of the academic community as well as developers, managers and planners of tourism.

However, there has been a persistent tendency on the part of the tourism industry to re-purpose these newer forms of travel to suit the profit-oriented, expansionary worldview of the most powerful players in the global sector. Reid (2003) views this capacity of the dominant actors in tourism to co-opt potentially progressive and transformative approaches as evidence of tourism being part of the 'cancerous' apparatus of global capitalism (p. 51).

Elsewhere, Hall (2010) has critiqued the apolitical and uncritical nature of much tourism research, which in his view has been too closely linked to a managerial perspective and seen as excessively pro-industry (p. 199). Hall's mission is to remind his colleagues of the central role power relations play in tourism interactions, especially when there are substantial gaps in economic and political power between tourists and toured. Furthermore, Hall writes about the way that tourism itself exercises power in host

communities, and the need to be mindful of this influence on the social reality of local people, whether or not they are directly involved in the tourism sector.

While Hall takes issue with tourism academics, Wheeler (2005) offers a different perspective, arguing that from the beginning, 'alternative tourisms' have been critiqued and challenged but that these dissenting voices have been largely ignored when it comes time for implementation and practice. In order to have a form of tourism that is practically and credibly different from the norm, Wheeler says we must "exit fantasyland and contextualize the… debate within the wider arena of power, economics, greed, racism and hypocrisy," (p. 263). Furthermore, he charges that the so-called holistic approach to planning ecotourism and other alternative forms of tourism has in fact been "hole-istic" in that those tricky issues and difficult questions are selectively overlooked and, in his turn of phrase, "dispatched into a black hole and quickly forgotten," (Ibid).

McLaren (2003) has observed that almost all forms of travel and tourism can be seen as more negative than positive and that the potential tourist could understandably conclude that the most 'responsible' form of travel is to hardly travel at all. To do that, however, would be to miss out on some vital opportunities to make connections with people and organizations far removed from our own localities (p. 60-61). Tourists who merely consume 'alternative' products and experiences are not part of this proposed solution; rather, she argues, they represent a major part of the ongoing problem. Instead, McLaren calls for a recasting of the tourist role, not as 'ecotourist' or 'voluntourist', but rather as an *activist*. This transformation involves traveling for explicitly political purposes and making a lasting commitment to the relationships built through such experiences (p. 141-142).

When it comes to political motivations and travel, Wheeler (2005) points out the general hypocrisy and inconsistency of the global tourism industry, in collaboration with governments and non-governmental groups focused on human rights. He observes that while certain destinations are promoted and travel-supported so that people might observe and report back to friends and neighbors (he gives the example of Tibet) other countries are excluded from this treatment and constructed as 'unsuitable' destinations (he cites Burma) (p. 266-267)

Fennell (2006) calls into question the prospect of altruistic connections through tourism by applying an evolutionary, biological understanding of the concept of reciprocal altruism. Due to the short-term nature and superficial quality of most tourist-host interactions, Fennell argues that profound and equitable bonding and network creation between hosts and guests is not likely to arise. However, he suggests that forms of tourism that involve repeated contact between individuals or groups, or those that foster connections that remain in place after the end of the traveler's sojourn with the host, may indeed give rise to legitimately altruistic relationships (p. 118).

Similar ideas regarding the difference between direct contact and relationships maintained at a distance are reflected in Barnett and Land's 2007 discussion of the geography of care. The authors introduce the idea of two distinct forms of caring – 'intimate caring', involving personal relationships, and 'humanitarian caring', involving individuals or groups with whom the caring individual does not have a direct relationship with. Another way of describing these relationships is 'caring for' and 'caring about' (p. 1066). While some ethicists consider caring about to be a less genuine sub-set of relationships than those that involve personal 'caring for' connections, others claim that there are four important characteristics of all caring practices – the capacity to be

attentive to the needs of others, the capacity to take responsibility for meeting these needs, the ability to provide care competently, and the capacity to be responsive to changing circumstances. (p. 1067).

Barnett and Land (2007) challenge the approach to motivating action that relies upon helping people recognize the way in which they are connected to distant others through unequal relations of production, what they describe as "complex networks of commodification and accumulation" (p. 1068). Trying to encourage humanitarian caring in this way puts the emphasis firmly on the care provider, overlooking the need for being attentive to needs and responsive to changing circumstances. Instead, the authors suggest that effective action and caring relations require a normative commitment to justice, as well as the opportunity to listen to and respond to others.

> "In the case of both care and responsibility, a crucial aspect in the motivation of action is attending to and responding to the expressions and claims of others. The fixation on chains of causality hides from view the degree to which responsible, caring action is motivated not in monological reflection on one's own obligations, but by encounters with others" (p. 1069)

Another concern for Barnett and Land (2007) is the assumption of self-interest and ignorance that underlies the approach to promoting responsibility through revealing links in terms of consequences.

> "It presumes that agency is a vector of blame, shame, and guilt, and that causal explanation is a prerequisite for motivating responsible, other-regarding action. This… informs a pedagogy which presumes that people need to be shown the consequences of their actions in order to be motivated to change behaviour, to take responsibility, to become more caring for the world around them"(p. 1070)

The authors present the idea of generosity – not as an alternative to responsibility as a moral theory – but as a form of politics, a 'modality of power' that people employ everyday in various place contexts, to sustain relationships in an interactive way (p. 1073).

Traditional academic and practical debates about geographies of care, responsibility and generosity generally do not involve situations in which there is direct, personal contact between the care 'giver' and the recipient population. Sin (2010) thus argues that tourism is in a fairly unique position, as the pursuit of so called 'socially responsible' tourism actually puts "the two 'worlds' (if they are indeed separate)… together into a shared space as tourists act out "care" and "responsibilities" in their travel destinations" (p. 984).

In critiquing the concept of responsibility based on unearned privilege, colonial or neocolonial history, Sin (2010) points out that the Global South is seen through this prism as incapable of solving issues of poverty, inequality and low human development without the altruistic intervention of actors from the Global North. This sort of assumption prevents the creation of *equal* relationships, although these connections may be considered caring or generous (p. 985). It should be pointed out that these problematic foundations exist not only in the realm of responsible tourism, but have also been recognized in the efforts of governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals engaged in development work. Sin reports that the guest-host relationship seems to differ significantly in the case of volunteer tourism. Rather than the local community members meeting the service requirements of their visitors, the contact and communication between the two groups appears to be focused on the friendly exchange of ideas and life experiences (p. 987).

Hutnyk (1996) links the common 'alternative critiques' of more traditional, conventional forms of travel to particular behaviours and approaches to travel on the part of the critic. Those that dismiss mass tourism as inauthentic tend to seek or claim 'once-in a-lifetime' status for their own travel experiences, while the concern over the negative

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impacts created by tourists and tourism is typically followed by stories of how the critic 'is doing it differently' (p. 9).

> "So many travelers express an ambiguous uncertainty about their mode of travelling and its relation to codes of exploitation that they identify in their own practice, at the same time as they differentiate it from all they do themselves. The formula 'Yes I recognize the Contradictions but I try to avoid them myself' is almost always a self-serving claim – a rationalization. At the same time, an intuition that this gambit is inadequate completes a popular reflexivity," (p. 11).

Westerners that engage in volunteer work, according to Hutnyk's (1996) observations, tend to have a limited understanding of some of the important dynamics at play in the encounter that is volunteering in the Global South. "Questions of cultural hegemony, international and class privilege, and the extent of relative economic advantage are, at best, understood in a vague, not an analytical way," (p. 44).

Hutnyk (1996) suggests that one of the 'most positive' outcomes from the presence of Western volunteers in the Global South is the 'politicization' that takes place during the experience and that manifests itself as the volunteers return to their home countries with a desire to do community work or participate in activism (p. 53). Hutnyk acknowledges that the pursuit of distributive justice and international responsibility that arises from travel experiences may be beneficial. However, he maintains that absent a profound critique of social, cultural, political and economic structures on a global scale the pursuit of even very 'alternative' forms of tourism and charitable work will remain problematic (p. 222).

> "Ultimately, travel 'alternatives' require transformation of the very conditions in which travel is pursued – a travel activism interested in unlearning its leisured privileges and working for its own demise in a new travel for all," (p. 223).

Raymond and Hall (2008) introduce the idea that cross-cultural interaction can overcome prejudice through the perception of volunteers and travelers as 'good people' in

Contrast to what community members may have believed about Americans or people from other places. However, while Raymond and Hall believe that this cross-cultural 'appreciation' takes place on the individual level, the community members come to see their visitors as 'exceptions to the rule' and the more entrenched stereotypes and negative characteristics associated with peoples and nationalities are maintained (p. 535-536). Raymond and Hall's research on volunteer trips of short duration (two weeks or less) revealed that the cross-cultural opportunities involved in these experiences led to the creation of memories, rather than the start of lasting personal connections to the community or individuals encountered on the tour (p. 537).

Research conducted by Sin (2009) reveals some uncertainty about how groups engaged in these activities label their travels – while some would consider themselves volunteer tourists, others, including representatives of the hosting organizations use the term 'international service-learning'. These differences matter, according to Sin, because each label implies a different focus for the activity.

> "Unlike volunteerism that seeks to provide unpaid work on behalf of others, the main focus of service-learning is on learning and personal development… the primary goal of service-learning is to cultivate responsible citizenship and encourage students' active involvement in solving social issues." (p. 482)

Sin also points out that the impact of a volunteer tourist experience is highly subjective and will vary substantially from person to person, even if they travelled in the same group and took part in the same activities.

> "What each volunteer tourist takes out of his or her experience often results from a complex interplay between his or her original motivations, the specific context of volunteer work (for example, the type of volunteer project and the approachability of the local community), and the composition of the volunteer team amongst other factors." (p. 483)

Some of the participants in Sin's study indicate that their experiences have caused

them to recommit themselves to their university studies or reconsider their academic and career paths. Sin argues that these experiences are an important part of the tourists' efforts to self-actualize and differentiate themselves from others in their home society – an activity that is part of the maturing process undertaken by young people as they complete high school and university and ready themselves for a new stage in their lives (492-493).

Following up with study participants in the years following their experience in South Africa, Sin found that only four out of 11 interviewees carried out further volunteering activities after returning, and that in three of these four cases, the individuals were already committed, regular volunteers before taking part in the volunteer trip. On the other hand, every one of the study participants had travelled overseas again, reinforcing Sin's observation that travel was a more significant motivator for participating than a desire to volunteer. (p. 494)

Sin (2009) concludes that a major problem with volunteer tourism is that it has tended to be apolitical, focused more on philanthropic and altruistic activities, rather than associated with political dimensions of citizenship and advocacy. In Sin's view, volunteer tourists were not encouraged to question why communities in host-countries needed volunteer services. Instead, there is a risk that volunteer tourists can be led to assume that aid-recipients were naturally poor, failing to understand circumstances, relationships and structures that impede aid-recipients' efforts to break out of the poverty cycle. (p. 496)

These observations lend credence to the arguments of Mowforth and Munt (2009) who caution that 'new' forms of tourism, whether they be eco, ethno, community, or volunteer-based, are all seeking to commodify less visited parts of the Global South. The authors claim this is a form of 'commodity racism', wherein the travelers desire to consume exposure to other people's lives and struggles becomes part of a fetishistic ritual

(p. 72). Mowforth and Munt also observe that while a critical analysis of the activities of supranational institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, and multinational corporations is important, so too must the actions of the organizations and travelers whose behaviour and approach to travel is presented as benign or benevolent (p. 61). In particular, they point out that organizations that offer 'reality tours' must acknowledge that these experiences are open to social construction and interpretation. Reality, the authors say, is in the eye of the beholder, especially when it comes to highly contested notions such as development and globalization (p. 222).

The threat to dominant forms of neoliberal globalization suggested in the late 1990s and early 2000s by the alternative or anti-globalization movements led to what Higgins-Desbiolles (2008) calls the 'usurpation' of many forms of alternative tourism. Industry engagement with these activities follows a 'dual strategy' of preventing criticism while pursuing new areas and populations from which to profit. By engaging with alternative tourism in a cosmetic way, the tourism industry is attempting to forestall, or avoid altogether, any kind of enforced regulation that would seek to rectify some of the negative impacts of corporate tourism through taxation schemes or pollution protocols (p. 349). At the level of international institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, large private sector players have seen an opportunity to gain subsidized access to developing world economies through the aid and loan mechanisms overseen by these international financial institutions (p. 352).

However, according to Higgins-Desbiolles (2008), "it is apparent that some proponents and contributors to the alternative tourism phenomenon hold a radical agenda not only to overturn an inequitable, unjust and unsustainable tourism system, but envision such efforts as a catalyst for a more humanistic form of globalisation." (p. 347-

348) Higgins-Desbiolles acknowledges that the idea of an alternative globalization might seem far-fetched or 'utopian' and claims that this realism is behind some who favour reformist approaches to tourism instead of a more revolutionary form. She points to the successful creation of worker's' cooperatives in Argentina and some endogenous development strategies underway in Venezuela, as examples of the 'other world' moving from the realm of possibility to reality (p. 359).

Cuba is a destination that, by virtue of its political exceptionalism, has long been a site of solidarity tourism (Spencer, 2010). This pursuit has taken on a different importance as the Cuban economy has become more dependent on traditional forms of tourism. Visitors from Canada, Australia, Western Europe and even the United States that have moral or political interests beyond the usual 'four s' attractions sometimes decide to return to Cuba on a solidarity or 'reality' tour facilitated by international or domestic NGOs, and it is this kind of visit that is the focus of Spencer's work (2010). Like Scheyvens and Higgins-Desbiolles, Spencer's view of solidarity tourism is inherently positive. She claims that because the tour participants are typically motivated activists before coming to Cuba, they are more likely to develop lasting connections and make the effort to continue their collaboration with the Cuban people they meet. They are also likely to form strong bonds with fellow solidarity tourists, considering the strong sense of 'communitas' that can be formed when a small group of like-minded people shares a short but intense experience together (p. 184).

Spencer's observations, which arose from extensive participant observation and interviewing of tour participants during their solidarity tourism experience, speak to the psychosocial changes that may occur for individuals in the active context of traveling. What is missing from this analysis is a sense of the longevity and enduring quality of these

transformations, and the real changes that might result from the connections between tourists and their Cuban hosts.

Berg (2008) comments on the critical self-awareness that characterizes many of solidarity or activist tourists she spoke to over the course of her study of 'Zapatourismo' in southern Mexico.

> "Most of the tourists I spoke to in this study had a strong concern for the positive or negative consequences of their actions and presence. Such consciousness to the settings around them becomes political when part of the tourist experience encompasses activism and revolution as a primary reason for being there." (p. 95)

There is a risk in pursuing solidarity between community-led social movements and relatively more privileged travelers from the Global North, as Berg observes in the case of the visitors who seek to engage with the Zapatista movement and various autonomous indigenous groups in Chiapas state. Problems can arise when the interlopers choose to speak on behalf of the movement, or when tourists discover that their priorities and ideologies do not match the needs and desires of the marginalized groups they are supposedly supporting (p. 109-111). Significantly, in Chiapas it is possible for independent travelers to engage in solidarity tourism – interacting with a dynamic and active revolutionary movement through the services of 'brokers' individuals or organizations that facilitate the connections between international visitors and local activists (p. 114-115).

Berg argues that, "…seeking understanding through face-to-face contact… is yet another strategy for putting into practice a more effective transnational activist relationship between foreign internationals and local actors in tourist locations." (p. 126)

Activities like those studied by Berg and Spencer, and that are analyzed in this study, can be seen as an example of what Shinammon (2010) calls 'emancipatory tourism'

as they aim to shift power away from the corporate, profit-driven tourist industry and "foreground the cultural exchanges between delegates and local people, believing this approach will be a catalyst for social change" (p. 333-334). Despite recognizing this potential, Shinammon also strikes a cautionary note that is reminiscent of the warnings issued by Hutnyk (1996), and Mowforth and Munt (2010). She identifies the privileged status of the travelers involved in these experiences, and questions the way hosts and local experts are paid a minimal sum. In short, Shinnamon, who studied reality tours conducted by the NGO Global Exchange in Costa Rica, openly questions the idea, promoted by Global Exchange itself, that these travel experiences are a form of 'anti-tourism'. Instead, she suggests it is possible to interpret these activities as a "respectful form of neocolonialism" (p. 335). Shinammon also questions the way that tour organizers put together itineraries and decide which organizations and speakers will address the travelers. She raises the possibility of important stories remaining untold due to the choices and preferences of the tour leaders and organizations that set the schedules. (p. 339).

As the previous paragraphs suggest, there are a number of groups offering tours in a variety of Global South contexts that seek to encourage participants to take action on issues relating to injustice or development, either during the course of their travel, or after their return home. Fogarty (2005) divides short-term visitors participating in this particular style of tourism into three categories – volunteer vacationers, development tourists, and solidarity travelers (p. 18). The first of these categories Fogarty associates with are first-time visitors to Nicaragua who participate in a service-oriented experience that is highly structured with a pre-set itinerary.

"Translation, orientation and constant accompaniment help them bridge linguistic and cultural barriers. They don't need to worry about the vulnerability of being alone, for they will always be with the group… Visitors don't need to explain to the community residents their reason for being there, it has already been established that they are coming to help. They don't need to decide how they will enter the community where they will work, since introductory rituals have been planned." (p. 18)

'Development tourists', in Fogarty's view, have a more nuanced view of the NGOs' role in Nicaragua, and an awareness of the limits of the short-term travel approach to issues more generally. Most are experienced travelers, sometimes having taken volunteer or service-learning trips in a number of different countries (p. 21).

"Whereas the first experience was 'life changing' because of the volunteers' emotional reaction to previously unimaginable abject poverty and cultural diversity, the second is a deepening of the strangely familiar as prior contextual knowledge ameliorates the chaotic intensity of images, sounds, smells and textures," (p. 398).

Solidarity travelers, meantime, exist at the upper end of Fogarty's imagined continuum of international visitors to Nicaragua. These individuals are committed to long-term relationships with Nicaraguan communities and activists, and have a much greater understanding of how neoliberalism and corporate capitalism are impacting Nicaraguans. Significantly, Fogarty claims that true solidarity travelers are comfortable about the idea that their most significant contribution to the solidarity movement will come through their actions in North America, not Nicaragua.

"They know that teaching others about Nicaragua and the social analysis process may likely result in more U.S. citizens involving themselves with Nicaragua. It can also produce policy changes at various levels of government that the solidarity traveler considers of greater importance than the material aid he/she might be able to send." (p. 22)

Whether or not we accept Fogarty's ideas about the development of solidarity travelers, it would be hard for first-time visitors to Nicaragua to achieve this status through their exposure to the issues and people involved without the travel experience

being fundamentally educational in nature. Positioning solidarity tourism in the academic literature on alternative, international, and experiential education is the goal of the next section of this literature review.

2.4 Learning through experience − Solidarity travel as alternative education

Ritchie (2003) provides two broadly applicable conceptualizations of tourism as education. The first, which is modified from an approach pioneered by the Canadian Tourism Commission, presents a continuum of learning and travel, with 'general interest in learning while traveling' on one end and 'purposeful learning' on the other (p. 12). Solidarity travel operators and participants would likely associate their activities with the latter end of that continuum. The other approach involves segmentation, with certain practices being seen as 'tourism first' and others 'education first' (p. 13). What is interesting here is that 'study tours' and 'edutourism', two of the authors' categorizations that may overlap with solidarity travel are seen as being 'tourism first' – certainly not what might be expected from a form of travel that has claimed to put a high priority on education.

If solidarity travel is a form of education, what kind of educational experience does it represent? A number of academics have observed that organizations that engage in educational travel typically focus on the idea of competence and skill development as a means of ensuring upward mobility for post-secondary students. Solidarity travel would seem to fit under an alternative approach, linked to the notion of social justice and the development of critical thinking and observations about issues in an international context. Tarrant (2010) argues that traditional education programs have failed to generate political engagement through their activities, leaving participants and students apathetic

to the idea of global citizenship (p. 439). Students may develop skills or be given opportunities to participate in local or international groups or activities, without encouraging a critical assessment of social and political conditions, these kind of educational experiences do not lend themselves to participants becoming aware of social justice issues once the travel period has ended.

Daly (2008) differentiates between two distinct kinds of global citizen - transformative and conservative. The first title is applied to a person who has developed a critical analysis of global structures and engages in self-criticism in order to affect these structures and seek out alternatives. The 'conservative global citizen', meanwhile, is a person who has a wide range of intercultural skills and experiences but has not developed a critical consciousness. In Daly's words, conservative global citizens would "simply use these skills to engage more effectively in the neoliberal global economy and increase their own personal gain in the form of prestige and accumulation of wealth," (p. 737-738). Daly points out that even the differentiation between transformative and conservative citizenship education is based on a troubling focus on students from the Global North. This, she argues, creates a problem for those seeking to provide citizenship education, because the capacity to choose between these categories at all is a product of unearned privilege (p. 736).

Trying to encourage the development of transformative, rather than conservative, global citizens through international travel requires a different kind of approach to the educational activities that will be part of the travel experience - both in pragmatic terms and in the sense of a more critical philosophy of education. Ashgarzadeh (2008) points out that post-secondary education has become increasingly focused on providing the skills for obtaining employment and ensuring upward social mobility, rather than a means of

training students to be conscientious and responsible in a sociopolitical sense (p. 335). In

order to disrupt this agenda, international educational experiences ought to be created

with some key aspects of critical pedagogy in mind. Asgarzadeh identifies elements

relating to power, privilege, voice and silence in particular (p. 359).

Among educational philosophers who have proposed alternatives to traditional

forms of education, two that have particular relevance to this study are John Dewey and

Paulo Freire. Dewey's (1930) core observations relate to the importance of context and

experience in educational environments – both student and teacher base their interaction

on prior experience and the physical space of learning will also have a major impact on

how the participants interact and what they take from this connection. All of these ideas

have bearing on the ideological foundations of solidarity travel, given that participants

and organizers view it as an educational space wherein prior experience and

understandings will be challenged and transcended by the experience of the tour itself.

However, Dewey warned that not all experiences lead to positive educational outcomes,

and that to avoid what he termed 'mis-education' experiences had to be carefully

monitored in order to avoid a negative outcome.

> "Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the
> growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender
> callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness," (p. 25).

The idea at the heart of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy is that learning ought to

be a collaborative process that takes place in order to empower and raise a sense of

critical consciousness within the student and teacher alike. Freire (1968) characterizes

traditional models of education as a 'banking' system, wherein knowledge is withdrawn

from the instructor and deposited in the students. By Contrast, Freire's *pedagogy of the*

oppressed and the *pedagogy of hope* involve co-construction of what is to be learned and an

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interchange (though not always reciprocal or equal) of benefits for all parties involved. These ideas form the basis of the operational approach for many NGOs and community-based organizations in Latin America, the very groups with whom solidarity travellers come into contact and attempt to build relationships. Freire focuses most of his writing on the process of the popular sector building critical consciousness through literacy and education. He does, however, discuss the way that privileged outsiders, like the participants in solidarity travel, might develop their own awareness of their role in the world, through critical education. Importantly, Freire points out that merely recognizing oneself, as a member of the 'oppressor group' is not the same as being in solidarity with the oppressed. This he claims "…requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is in solidarity; it is a radical posture… true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform objective reality," (p. 34).

The importance of allies in the oppressor class joining the struggle for justice is clear to Freire, but beyond the willingness to participate in such a project, he identifies two additional conditions that are required for this effort to be legitimate. First, the oppressor must stop regarding the poor or oppressed as a category, and recognize the individual humanity of each person who has been, in Freire's words "…unjustly dealt with, deprived of a voice, and cheated in the sale of their labour" (p. 35). Even when this recognition is achieved, a further leap is required on the part of the privileged outsider – to trust the oppressed to lead the struggle. Freire identifies a lack of confidence in oppressed people's ability to think and to know as one of the major prejudices and 'deformations' that members of the oppressor class carry with them in their initial efforts to join the struggle. "Our converts… truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the

transformation," Freire claims (p. 46).

Moving away from the original ideologues to their more contemporary interpreters, McLaren (2000)[2] argues that Freire's ideas, and those of Dewey, have been co-opted by certain elements of the educational and political establishment and de-politicized and de-radicalized, reduced to a form of technique regarding classroom dialogue. McLaren defines critical pedagogy as

> "…a way of thinking about, negotiating and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society and nation-state," (p. 35).

For McLaren, the problem with critical pedagogy as practiced currently is its unwillingness to trouble the deeper political and social questions that were at the root of Freire's work. This he attributes to the postmodern turn away from meta-narrative and the 'infatuation' with the localism and eclecticism of much 'progressive' inquiry. While Freire's work has been linked to popular education, non-formal education, adult education and other forms, McLaren notes that his thinking was not meant to be categorized or reduced in such an instrumental way. Instead, what was at the heart of Freire's ideas was the political, critical development of the participants in any educational system or space (p.150). This suggests that a fundamentally political project with education as one core goal, like solidarity travel, could be viewed as 'Freirean' practice.

Love or hope is a core feature of Freire's later work, and McLaren emphasizes that once again, it is not love nor hope on its own that is expected to transform or create new realms of possibility – rather it is these sentiments, combined with political will and social critique, that may achieve such ends. The only way to arrive at such an

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[2] The references in this section refer to Peter McLaren, while Deborah McLaren is cited in 2.3.

understanding is through reciprocal dialogue so that learners and teachers can understand the struggles and suffering of their partners in education, as well as placing their situation in a more complete context of previous relations (p. 172). More than merely 'critical', McLaren suggests that Freire's ideas ought to be considered as part of a 'revolutionary' pedagogy, in that they seek to not only critique, but also to transform educational practices (p. 185).

In practical terms, designing international educational travel experiences based on critical pedagogy, with a particular emphasis on power, privilege, and voice, has implications for the program promotion, preparation, delivery and follow-up. The subsequent paragraphs review some of the ways that existing tour operators have attempted to operationalize these concepts.

Tour operators, whether businesses or non-profit NGOs, must advertise the travel experiences they are offering, and this can lead to important issues of representation, accuracy and politics. Caton and Santos (2009) critically examine the print and online promotional materials for a particular form of study abroad experience –the Semester at Sea program, which employs international travel and cross-cultural connections as means of achieving educational aims. The authors describe the problematic, essentializing and exotic images used to attract students and their families to an experience that promises to 'be different' from other, competing approaches to study abroad. This suggests that the portrayal of solidarity travel through advertising also requires careful examination, considering the claims made about its progressive and politically responsible nature. The authors argue that from a marketing perspective, it is understandable for tourism brokers, whether non-profit organizations or for profit companies, to engage in the 'production of difference'. Marketers may justifiably feel that fewer potential participants will be

attracted to brochures and websites that feature images that are reflective of their

everyday lives in North America. Depictions of the exotic, the authors suggest "will be

much more likely to turn heads," (p. 202).

Promoting the kind of educational experience that involves relationship building

and the development of critical social analysis skills requires careful use of words, as well

as images. Casella (1997) describes the brochures and promotional materials of service-

learning style tour operators as 'simple productions' designed both for inexpensive

printing, but also to underline the differences between these groups and sight-seeing

agencies. He observes that in these brochures, travelers and hosts are often pictured

working together, while the language used typically reflects the critical approaches to

travel and educational experiences that inform these activities – such as 'liberating' and

'sharing struggle' (p. 127-128).

Of course, no matter how careful the organizers might be in promoting their

activities responsibly, participants may not be as aware of the problematic nature of the

inequality and poverty they may witness as part of their experience. One of the travelers

Casella profiles expresses disappointment in being unable to see the side of the

Dominican Republic she had been seeking. The barrio and its attendant poverty was not

on the itinerary as her travel leader sought to avoid these areas due to perceived risks and

an expectation that North American visitors would prefer to avoid being confronted with

such inequality. Casella discusses the ideological split that travelers with these desires

display, suggesting the presence of both a class and race-based voyeurism and an attempt

to uncover different perspectives or 'counterknowledges' (p. 177-178).

Recognizing these complex motivations on the part of potential participants,

Crabtree (1998) is cautious about the increasing popularity of short-term travel

experiences as part of post-secondary education. Whether called 'service learning' or something else, university administrators and admissions officers are sure to use the particular program offered at their school as a marketing strategy for future students. The risk, Crabtree believes, is in trivializing and minimizing the social justice and empowerment aspects of such experiences in an effort to emphasize the exotic destination and potential for vocational skills development (p. 202).

Once participants have signed up for the educational tour, there is usually some attempt at pre-travel preparation. Literature on how participants are prepared for educational tourism has highlighted the difficulty experienced by organizers who try to provide extensive preparation in advance. Phillion and her co-authors (2008) observed and interviewed a group of American university students who participated in an educational tour program in Honduras. Their research reveals the uncritical and limited appraisal of the experience by the students, despite a concerted effort on the part of the sending organization to prepare them by providing resources that would enable a deeper analysis of the structures and relations behind the poverty they were witnessing. The authors suggest that even when people are provided with the materials and experiences for analysis, they must still make the interpretive leap themselves.

In another paper related to preparation and information provided to tourists who were part of a service-learning experience, Hall and Raymond (2008) observe issues regarding effective communication in the absence of appropriate pre-trip training and in-trip evaluation. While most solidarity travel operators claim to do extensive work in this regard, Hall and Raymond's study reveals the need for critical evaluation of the content and effectiveness of such materials, and the provision of opportunities for reflection and analysis for participants as they are involved in the experience and after they return

home.

Fogarty (2005) points out that some NGOs prioritize political, economic and social analysis as part of the tour experience, and so utilize a variety of strategies to heighten group awareness including readings, audio-visual materials and moderated group discussions. However, he adds that these materials often remain unread or at most passively consumed by participants unless there is some sort of an accountability mechanism. Introducing such measures and opportunities can be made more difficult by the tendency the author observes for group orientation meetings to be focused largely on with logistical topics such as finances, immunizations, and itineraries (p. 299).

In between preparation and post-travel analysis and reflection is the tour itself, and some authors highlight the importance of working with participants as part of the daily travel routine. Farrell (2007) highlights the need for effective preparation and reflection activities in order to facilitate the kind of connections, solidarity and personal growth for people who participate – either as hosts or guests – in short-term service trips (p. 83). Wessel (2007) says that for many students, their first direct experience of another culture, and with another language (as is the case with many North American groups travelling to Nicaragua) is a very powerful event. No matter how extensive the pre-travel preparation has been in practical and academic terms, "the look, sound, feel, and even smell of another country cannot be completely felt by description or grasped by study," (p. 74). In the author's experience leading groups of students on short-term educational tours in the Global South, the primary objectives were twofold – to assist these undergraduates in their new experiences and information and, through reflection, aiding in their realization of the unconscious nature of one's own culture and how it influences behaviour and perceptions. While the program was meant to develop a sense of solidarity

between participants and the communities they visited, Wessel reports that the students "often struggled to get a 'feel' for the concept of solidarity… in general, students were more comfortable in work situations that were oriented toward charity rather than activism," (p. 83-84).

In fact, rather than a sense of solidarity with the people and communities on the educational travel itinerary, there is a chance that experiences of a short duration can reinforce stereotypes about poverty and the Global South. Grusky (2000) describes how such tours "easily become small theaters that recreate historic cultural misunderstandings and simplistic stereotypes and replay, on a more intimate scale, the huge disparities in income and opportunity that characterize North-South relations today" (p. 858). In an article describing their experiences leading small undergraduate groups on short-term educational trips in the 'developing world' Smith-Paríolá and Gòkè-Paríolá (2006) say that organizers and trip leaders must take special steps to both reveal and confront their own preconceived notions of the place they are visiting, as well as encouraging students to do the same (p. 76). The service-learning program coordinated by the authors included routine reflection discussions that were led by academic leaders – the two authors are professors and program coordinators. Challenges arose relating to students' inability to shift from the 'passive learner' role that is typically assumed in a classroom environment, so the group leaders attempted to make these discussion sessions less formal and structured. Ironically, this also created difficulties, as in some cases students seemed to take the sessions less seriously because of this informality (p. 79-80).

Managing expectations and encouraging critical self-awareness on the part of student participants is not the only important task for group leaders during a tour. Crabtree (1998) points out some of the issues inherent in bringing groups in to a complex

situation and offering service and possibly solidarity to a community. Any contact of this nature has the potential to create unknown or unintended long-term impacts, whether or not the group plans to return year after year. Raising the expectations of the hosting organization or community is a major concern, and the priorities of the outside group – to serve and to learn – should not be seen as the same as the priorities or agenda of the hosts, who may be involved in a broad-based struggle for economic or social transformation (p. 201).

Whether an international travel experience is labeled as 'service learning', 'study abroad', or a 'solidarity delegation', securing the kind of educational impact desired requires careful preparation and effective facilitation during the trip, but also the provision of structured opportunities for reflection and action after the group returns home. Myers-Lipton (1996) conducted research with students who participated as part of their course work in limited local community service during the regular semester, followed by a one-month project in Jamaica. He found that, compared to a control group, service-learning participants demonstrated an increased level of global concern. It is important to note that, while perhaps those who participate in service-learning projects may be concerned more with global issues in the first place, the control group actually showed a decrease in every aspect of international understanding over the same time period.

English (2002) believes that participants in such educational travel experiences may learn more once they have returned home than they do during their trip itself, as this time is essentially a whirlwind of activity and, for first time visitors to the Global South, a major culture shock. Having had the chance to return and reflect, some students respond through a combination of creativity and pro-activity – in other words, they become

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responsible for pursuing their own learning objectives, furthering their knowledge or taking action. However, English is also careful to point out that not every participant will be so self-motivated, encouraging leaders and educators to provide the opportunity for returnees to process their experiences and act on their learning (p. 243).

Young people who have participated in educational travel opportunities themselves support these observations. *Generation NGO*, a volume of first-person narratives about youth returning to Canada from study abroad or international volunteer placements, provides a sense of how the student travelers describe transformations in their perspectives on life in Canada. Looking back on a study abroad semester in Ecuador, Krpan (2011) claims that this experience enabled her to recognize privilege and notice poverty at home in Canada, something she had been unable to do previously. "I had been travelling through borders every day in Canada, but because of the privilege I enjoyed as a white, middle-class woman, they had been completely invisible," (p. 25). Having spent nearly two years teaching math in a small town in rural Namibia, Khan (2011) believes that her experience has made the interconnections between life there and life in Canada very clear. She was ultimately frustrated by the lack of 'impact' her teaching assignment had in the bigger picture. However, she felt empowered by her time in Africa and believes her greatest contribution going forward will be "…to encourage more Canadians to understand the world they live in and the kinds of challenges they would face if they had been born in another part of it," (p. 46).

Not every contributor to the volume felt as empowered through his or her travel experiences. Apale (2011) writes of her frustration upon returning to Canada with a new perspective on the connections between everyday life here and the challenges of poverty and inequality in other parts of the world. While she was motivated and eager to take

action, the apathy and inertia she experienced on the part of her peers and Canadians in general was deeply troubling.

> "I am… shocked at how limited is our capacity to care for others. I am disturbed by how infrequently education and awareness result in action or change. I am concerned by how easily daily life in Canada slips by. Time moves on, few things really change, and injustice… weaves it way through life, endlessly assaulting its favourite victims," (p. 99).

Apale's experience upon returning does not seem to have discouraged her from continuing on her path of struggle and support for the groups she interacted with while travelling. It does, however, highlight the challenge involved in exposing young, often idealistic people to the concept of struggle and solidarity without ensuring that there are supports and outlets for positive action on their return. All told, the task of building solidarity effectively through educational travel would appear to be a stiff challenge. Helping to create knowledgeable, transformative global citizens may be a vital part of supporting a movement concerned with alternatives to the status quo – a description of what this movement is focused on is the topic for the next section of the literature review.

2.5 Explaining alternative globalization – The goal of solidarity tourism.

The preceding sections of this chapter outline how the practice of solidarity travel can be seen as an alternative form of tourism and also as an educational opportunity informed by critical pedagogies – in both regards, as part of an effort to provide an alternative to a hegemonic set of practices in the field of international tourism and education. The solidarity travel experiences that are the focus of this study are also attempting to expose participants to alternative, counter hegemonic ideas about something more fundamental – the way that societies and economies are organized and

interact with one another. Arguably, the goal of solidarity travel is to build relationships and develop knowledge around alternative forms of globalization.

To understand how solidarity travel might work towards an alternative system, we must start by defining the dominant, or hegemonic, approach to the management of social, political and economic life in a global context. For the purpose of this study, neoliberalism is considered to be the philosophy and organizing ethic that dominates contemporary society. Treanor (2005) says that the bedrock of neoliberalism is the idea that markets or market-like structures are valued in themselves, and act as a guide for all human action. Harvey (2005) adds to this definition the idea that markets are believed to be self-regulating and most efficient when 'free'. In other words, the state is meant to ensure that markets exist and secure private property rights for individuals and corporations, but ought not to make any other interventions in the economy, whether at a national level or in terms of international trading relationships. Concretely, the pursuit of neoliberal economics demands privatization, deregulation, and liberalization (Scholte, 2005).

Although the roots of neoliberalism are economic in nature, the broader philosophical imperative became more evident as supporters of this approach demanded the pursuit and preservation of free markets in every aspect of human life. The privatization and 'marketization' of social services like health and education transformed the way that these activities were organized, as efficiency and return on investment became significant goals. The natural environment was also integrated into the market system, with economic value ascribed to air, water, and land. These policies were the bedrock of the substantive shift in Anglo-American political economy during the 1980s, and became essential aspects of the policy prescriptions of the World Bank and

International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment policies. In this way, many countries in the developing world were obliged to follow the tenents of what Harvey (2005) calls 'free market fundamentalism'. This pursuit of privatization, liberalization and deregulation across borders, assisted by international agreements and institutions like the World Trade Organization and encouraged by large multi-national corporations, became the hallmarks of what is called 'neoliberal globalization'. It is worth pointing out that globalization is widely recognized as a multi-faceted phenomenon with a history measured in centuries, not decades. Even so, the pace of change and the programmatic insistence on hyper-homogenization of national economies has led to much greater scrutiny of the current form and focus of our interconnections. Kotz (2000) argues that globalization drove the ascent of neoliberalism in the 1970s, as ideas that had been initially developed in Western Europe and the United States were applied in places like Chile under General Pinochet. Now, however, it is the neoliberal ethic that forms and structures much of the intentional efforts at economic and cultural globalization.

While powerful interests back the status quo and drive the process of neoliberal globalization to achieve greater market expansion and penetration all over the world, a movement has emerged to resist this project and in some cases, actively promote alternatives. This anti or alternative globalization movement has many reasons to resist. Scholte (2005) cites numerous ways in which neoliberal policies have failed to deliver improvements in human security, social justice and democracy. In fact, there is ample evidence to suggest that nearly 30 years of the neoliberal approach has made the situation worse in terms of income inequality, working conditions, social cohesion and the state of the environment (p. 12-15). With so many areas of concern, it is no wonder that the

movement that has formed is eclectic and heterogenous. Hartwich (2009) comments on the diversity of the groups committed to fighting neoliberalism.

> "Religious leaders and artists, environmental activists and globalisation critics, politicians of the left and the right as well as trade unionists, commentators and academics. They all share a passion to unmask neoliberalism as an inhuman, antisocial, and potentially misanthropic ideology or as a cynical exercise by strangely anonymous forces that wish to exploit the world to their own advantage" (p. 4).

The strength of a diverse movement may be that is has the capacity to focus on the wide variety of issues arising from neoliberal forms of globalization. The deficiency, however, is that it can be difficult to coordinate effective mechanisms and terms of protest. Veltmeyer (2004) critiques the focus of the global 'antiglobalization' movement for looking at the issue in the wrong way, advocating for the kind of change that is not likely to encourage the major, systemic shifts required to really make an impact on the lives of the less powerful (economically, socially and politically). He points out that many of the antiglobalization activities carried out in recent years have been encouraged or even partially funded by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in other words, by the very targets of these protestors. Why? Veltmeyer suggests that there is an effort to 'control opposition and dissent' and direct these forces towards what he describes as a 'system-bound solution' that respects the fundamentals of the global capitalist operation and looks to reform through dialogue.

The 'explosion' of NGOs that arose in Latin America during the 1980s sought to meet basic needs the state could no longer afford to provide while at the same time generating capacity and coherent opposition to global neoliberal capitalism, at least in theory. Veltmeyer argues that in practice, these latter aims have been replaced by

undeclared partnership with the very institutions and agents of neoliberalism that the NGO movement claims to challenge – in part due to pragmatic necessity and in part due to the cynical manipulation of these groups by agents of international capital (p. 173). Those groups that attempt to offer more radical solutions based on systemic transformation or 'confrontationalist politics' such as the Fuerza Armada Revolucionaria de Colombia (FARC) and others are sidelined from the official 'alternative' discourse promulgated through events like the World Social Forum (p. 172).

Where Veltmeyer does see examples of hope are in the 'second wave' of anti-systemic movements in Latin America that mobilized first in rural areas and eventually expanded into the cities. These groups, which include CONAIE in Ecuador, the Bolivian cocaleros and the Landless Rural Workers Movement (Movimento Sim Terra - MST) from Brazil, were joined in the later 1990s by a 'third wave' of movements based in the urban working class that opposed both national governments and the global capitalist system. Veltmeyer suggests that such groups have the organizational capacity to make the kind of revolutionary change the overall 'antiglobalization' movement cannot and calls for future efforts to be largely concerned with supporting these organizations through networks of global solidarity – the kind of links that could be built through purposeful tourism.

Rather than an 'antiglobalization' movement, Kurasawa (2007) describes the counter hegemonic mission as seeking *another* globalization – one that recognizes the important gains in connectivity and solidarity between people and their struggles against injustice without giving in to the neoliberal vision of corporate and governmental power (p. 181). Kurasawa calls on international networks of citizens and NGOs to work collaboratively in order to achieve human rights, particularly in the realm of economic

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and social rights. The 'solidarity' in solidarity travel would seem to be inherently concerned with such matters.

2.6 Fair trade – An alternative approach.

Fair trade is an example of how the international collaboration described by Kurasawa can operationalize the achievement of some of these economic and social rights, even in the context of overwhelming oppression and disempowerment. Conroy (2009) traces the history of fair trade as a concept and movement back to the post-World War II period, when faith-based organizations started working with European refugees to market handicrafts and food products in a direct way to the United States (and Canada, through the Mennonite Central Committee or MCC) (p. 322). By the 1990s, these organizations and others had shifted focus to small-scale producers in the Global South with a particular focus on craft production of retail goods in the case of the MCC's Ten Thousand Villages stores, which now number more than 160 across North America.

After the post-war period, European markets became the most important demand centres for fairly traded agricultural products, especially coffee and chocolate. The International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT) and the Fair Trade Federation (FTF) were the two major coordinating groups that emerged in an effort to standardize and regulate the growing flow of goods (p. 323). Closely linked to the emergence of such organizations was the push towards certification of fair trade products, which led in 1997 to the creation of Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO). National-level labeling initiatives formed the membership of FLO and by 2006 these members had agreed upon Fair Trade standards for twelve product categories. Key elements of these standards include a 'floor price' that covers the costs of sustainable production, a 'social

premium' above and beyond this floor price to allow producers to invest in their communities how they see fit, payment for goods in advance, rather than waiting until all the product is sold by retailers, and the signing of long-term Contracts between suppliers and retailers/wholesalers (p. 324).

These standards and the organizational practices have been widely accepted in the Global North where Fair Trade products are sold, but there has been more resistance from Global South producer groups, as they have recognized a lack of space for their interests and concerns to be raised within the labeling and coordinating organizations themselves (p. 326). Conroy also identifies a number of struggles ongoing within the Fair Trade movement, as well challenges from without. These internal debates have centered on the best way to incorporate larger scale (estate-level) producers into Fair Trade commodity flows, as this may take away from the explicit support for small, family-sized producers of coffee and other primary commodities. Another major concern is how to respond to the 'greenwashing' efforts of major multi-nationals like Wal-Mart, McDonald's and others that have begun to offer 'fair trade' options as part of a larger suite of goods available to their consumers (p. 333-337). Despite these significant debates, Conroy points out that Fair Trade seems to be growing in size, strength and scope with each passing year, and discussions are well underway towards developing standards for Fair Trade in services, such as tourism (p. 339).

Cleverdon and Kalisch (2000) identify several challenges to extending current fair trade definitions and practices to tourism. As an invisible, intangible product, tourism represents a number of different components and as such is not always controlled by a single 'producer'. The lack of a 'world price' for tourism is another difficulty. The authors suggest that without some internationally applied baseline, fair trade tourism

organizations would have a hard time determining what premium level would be considered fair or just. Another challenge arises in the lack of traditional organizations of tourism hosts, unlike unions of small-scale commodity producers that can act as local partners for fair trade groups (p. 176-177).

Significantly, the authors argue that any future definition or set of standards for fair trade tourism must emphasize the priorities of Global South tourism providers. Research cited by Cleverdon and Kalisch suggest the following areas of interest for the potential future beneficiaries of fair trade tourism - access to capital, ownership of resources, distribution of benefits and control over representation of the destination in tourist-generating countries (p. 178). According to the authors, fair trade tourism occupies a very limited niche in the current marketplace. As the capitalist, free-market system is the environment in which any fair trade tourism venture would have to operate, the question becomes how best to proceed. Accept the niche status and seek out excellence in adhering to fair trade practices at the cost of broader exposure, or encourage the adopting or perhaps co-opting of fair trade principles in an effort to reach as many travelers as possible (p. 181). Concerns over the small niche represented by fair trade in tourism lead Mowforth, Charlton, and Munt (2008) to question the ethics of promoting such elite forms of consumption, pointing out that the systems and patterns that underlie such attempts are perhaps reinforcing, rather that challenging, global inequalities (p. 46).

The challenge inherent in the effort to overcome systemic inequalities through an exchange of goods or services is explored by Cravatte and Chabloz (2008) who claim that the goal of fair trade tourism is to make the connection between the producer and consumer less abstract, through facilitating a face-to-face meeting. They refer to this process as 'de-fetishization' – an attempted reversal of the process that occurs in

conventional market exchanges, where the conditions of production and the resulting distribution of wealth are obscured from the consumer. However, Cravatte and Chabloz claim that the pursuit of fair trade leads to a 're-fetishization' of these products and services, suggesting that "(the) act of consumption has positive effects on the particular community that produced the goods and creates solidarity links between the consumer and the producer" (p. 234).

Cravatte and Chabloz suggest that the tourism organizations providing 'fair tourism' opportunities must 'construct a discourse' that allows tourists to negotiate the profound cultural and socioeconomic difference confronted when they come face-to-face with their rural hosts. This discourse often takes the form of a 'correct way' to enter into these relationships – a certain model for solidarity and a set of appropriate or inappropriate behaviours. For example, the groups studied by Cravatte and Chabloz insist on a 'no gift' policy, and request that travelers are judicious and respectful when taking photos (p. 236).

TDS – the group studied in detail by Cravatte and Chabloz – obliges tourists to sign a 'charter of tourism' that forbids gifts to individuals and is meant to ensure follow-up with community projects after the travelers return home (in this case, to France). This approach is meant to provide a structure to enable 'good solidarity' and prevent 'bad solidarity', but also seeks to overturn the roles played by host and guest in other forms of tourism. "The aim is to make the encounter more egalitarian and to take the protagonists out of the role traditionally imposed on them in this type of meeting - tourists as benefactors, villagers as obliged beggars" (p. 239-240).

What Cravatte and Chabloz make clear is the key role played by the particular organization involved in solidarity travel in determining a model for solidarity and

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creating a program that is meant to achieve particular ends. The next section of the literature review will discuss the relationship between the various participants in the solidarity travel experience – tour organizers, local hosts, and travelers – before establishing how all concerned could be seen as part of a broader social movement interested in promoting alternative globalization.

2.7 NGOs and social movements – Who is involved in solidarity travel?

'Hosts' and 'guests' have been considered the main participants in tourism activities since Smith (1977) introduced the concept. More recent research has indicated that there are a number of scenarios wherein this dual categorization is incomplete or inappropriate (Sherlock, 2001), and in the case of solidarity travel I believe there are three distinct groups involved. The first would be roughly analogous to Smith's 'guests' – travelers who participate in solidarity tours. The second group is made up of 'hosts' in the most direct sense, the community members and families that open their homes to these travelers and provide them the opportunity to witness everyday life in Nicaragua. The final group is made up of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that organize the travel experiences and provide facilitation and interpretation during the tour. The characteristics of the hosts and guests involved in each of the three examples of solidarity tourism are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. The remainder of this section reviews the literature on NGOs and how all three groups are engaged in a social movement through their participation in solidarity travel.

While much of the current literature on alternative tourism has focused on tourists and hosts as individuals, the connections that are built through solidarity travel may join *organizations* in bonds of shared struggle. Understanding the history and role of the NGO

sector in the host environment is therefore important. Molyneux and Lazar (2003) outline the way in which NGOs have become more significant in the pursuit of 'development' and progress towards achieving human rights in Latin America, especially since the debt crisis of the 1980s and the subsequent retrenchment of the state. They review a number of groups and their relationship with the state and critically evaluate the future trajectory of the third sector. While the NGOs that facilitate solidarity travel are largely based in the Global North, they interact with local organizations in the Global South in order to facilitate their actual tour activities, so understanding the strengths, weaknesses and external expectations on these partners is paramount for the success of such operations.

Fogarty's (2005) ethnographic research, which studied several rural Nicaraguan communities in considerable detail, revealed that the number of volunteer or solidarity groups, the interval between these visits, and even the length of time the community had hosted such groups did not adequately explain differences in the 'intensity of interaction' between hosts and guests. Instead, "the long-term impact had much more to do with the manner in which their interface was managed by the NGO that brought them," (p. 170).

Managing that interface means making choices about what to include on the tour itinerary, how to present information to participants, how to engage local partners and presenters and even whether or not to house travelers with families or in separate, group accommodations. Some decisions are made with convenience and practicality in mind, as Fogarty acknowledges that schedules are easier to keep when the entire group stays together, but the negative of greater efficiency is the reduced contact with local people. The creation of what he calls an 'organizational perimeter' prevents participants, particularly those who are young and lack language and cross-cultural experience, to step

outside the comfortable bubble of the tour group in order to engage with the very people with whom they are meant to build solidarity (p. 286).

As the organizer of the trip, the NGO and its staff have near-total responsibility for the travelling group when it is 'in country'. Fogarty describes this role as 'a formidable task' as even routine tasks are unfamiliar and require demonstration, all conversations and interactions with locals must be translated and group discussions facilitated (p. 294). There is usually little respite during the most popular times of year for travel, which often follow school calendars. Fogarty's study revealed that the number of interested groups generally exceeded the hosting capacities of the organization. With calendars filled by groups returning year after year, it is hard for new groups to find a slot in the schedule and the hosting organizations often have to decide between expanding their tour program and the other activities they engage in outside of hosting tours (p. 292).

The kind of role an NGO plays within civil society depends in large part on the way groups operate and how they are funded. Many assume an oppositional or counter hegemonic position, but Fogarty (2005) points out that in a place like Nicaragua, where such organizations are incredibly influential, it is more likely that NGOs also function as extensions of the state and as legitimizers of private enterprise (p. 233). Occupying such complex positions within Nicaraguan civil society means that it can be challenging for NGOs to be seen only as part of specific social movements. In many cases, these groups have seen a fair degree of evolution in their mission and through this process, a changing role and relationship with other NGOs and with the state. In order to better understand the relationship between NGOs and social movements, it is worthwhile to define social movements in general terms.

According to Fuchs (2010) social movements are the political response of civil society to "ecological, economic, political, social, and cultural problems of modern society," (p. 113). The author makes a distinction between traditional social movements, which he claims were largely concerned with the means of production and the appropriation of nature. In other words, economic matters involving unions, and the conservation movement. 'New social movements' as they are called in the literature, are concentrated on human values, cultural issues, and non-material conditions of life. Fuchs identifies human rights, and equity concerns relating to gender, sexuality, and race as particular areas of focus (p. 122). The author adds that these new social movements are faced with networked forms of domination, a combination of state, corporate and media power. As a reaction to this, their logic of organization is frequently based on decentralized transnational networks, global communication based on the Internet, and virtual forms of protest. Given that the site and topic of protest is decentralized and global, it makes sense that the challenge has taken the form of a decentralized global protest movement that calls for, in Fuchs words "global participation and global co-operation and suggests that the degree of democracy, justice, and sustainability of globalization should be increased," (p. 132).

Fuchs (2010) argues that at critical phases of protest, new social systems emerge whose form, content and effects are not determined, but are dependent upon old structures. The emergence of new protest issues, methods, identities, structures, and organizational forms start as singular innovations for small groups, and if these spread within the wider 'protest system' then there is the potential for system-wide transformation. Solidarity travel may create connections that provide the network and nodes for these possible transformations.

There are a number of factors that have contributed to an enhanced organizational capacity for social movements in Latin America over the past decade, according to Deere and Royce (2009). These include growing levels of rural literacy and education, the 'telecommunications revolution' (internet and cellular telephony in particular) and the emergence of supportive trans-community and transnational networks of advocacy and solidarity. These networks involve relationships between organizations that are voluntary and reciprocal, and are based on communication and exchange that is 'horizontal' in nature. The interaction between members of such advocacy networks helps to provide voice to issues that might be silenced in one context or another, while also providing an "echo back into their own countries" (p. 8), by bringing alternative perspectives to bear on domestic debates.

Two such transnational networks are the CLOC (Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo) and La Via Campesina, but despite the many positive contributions made by such networks, they have their limitations. Deere and Royce (2009) point out the difficulties experienced by CLOC and La Via Campesina in trying to incorporate representation from national-level indigenous organizations (such as the Confederacion de Nacionalidades Indigenas de Ecuador - CONAIE). These groups are wary of joining because of their concerns about 'diluting' specifically indigenous demands and agendas, and the prospect of subordination to the largely white or mestizo (mixed-race) leadership of the larger, broad-spectrum collectives and coordinating groups (p. 14).

Tourism, undertaken on equal terms and with the intention of seeking just outcomes, is a potential mechanism for overcoming some of the issues faced by these larger transnational networks. Solis Librado (2009), as President of the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA) in Mexico, described a program of

'endogenous eco-tourism' development designed and implemented by the organization and its partners (the Swedish International Development Agency *inter alia*). The creation of the Indigenous Tourist Network of Mexico (Red Indigena de Turismo Autonoma or RITA) involves the work of outside consultants but all the substantive decisions are taken by indigenous peoples and are meant to offer livelihood alternatives while at the same time protecting fragile habitat and endangered species in culturally appropriate ways. There are serious challenges, however, in terms of the administrative, financial and technical capacity of RITA in comparison to various private operators and providers of ecotourism experiences for the international market in Mexico. The idea stressed by Solis Librado is that while tourism ought not to be seen as the 'only alternative' for indigenous peoples, it is a fact of life and self-governed, self-managed approaches may be the best way forward (p. 219).

Studying the impact of tourism experiences on social movement participation, using the activities of Earthwatch International as a case study, McGehee (2002) conducted before and after surveys with volunteer vacationers to determine pre-trip behaviours and post-travel behavioural intentions to see how the experience changed their engagement in a social movement focused on the environment. Analysis of these surveys revealed that the 'network ties' developed through participation in the Earthwatch expedition had a statistically significant impact on further or deeper involvement in social movements once travelers returned home. The aspects of the survey meant to measure gains in self-efficacy, on the other hand, did not reveal a significant relationship (p. 136-139). The author includes a significant caveat, however, acknowledging that Earthwatch volunteers were no doubt 'highly efficacious actors'

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before they ever signed up for an expedition. Their options for engaging in social movement activity were thus already well-established (p. 140).

Beyond the changes in behaviour and intentions shown by respondents, their demographic profile is quite revealing. The vast majority of respondents were white/Anglo (92%) and over 70% were female. On average, respondents had at least some college education. The largest group (38%) consisted of graduate school alumni (p. 134). McGehee's study provides some insight into the way that tourism experiences might influence social movement participation, but it is important to note that her approach to understanding how and why people engage in social movement activity is informed by one particular theoretical perspective – resource mobilization theory. Nepstad (2004) believes that resource mobilization theory, which was the dominant paradigm employed by North American academics to explain social movements in the Vietnam War era, is far too reliant on its fundamental belief that people are rational actors. She suggests that in the case of social justice movements, 'deep emotion' is very significant in creating the motivation to join the struggle, as much as making a calculation based on logic and rationality (p. 10). Nepstad further argues that the major approaches to studying social movements tend to overlook the central role that people and their individual biographies play in these organizations. She quotes James Jasper, who writes "individuals are not mere bearers of structures or dupes of culture. They act, albeit within certain limits." (p. 7-8).

Similarly, the idea of explaining social movements through the idea of a 'collective action frame', a theoretical approach that has gained currency in more recent times, fails to explain why some people respond to the way an issue is presented while others do not. Again, Nepstad suggests that more attention be paid to the biography and social

background of movement members, particularly recruits (p. 15). Ultimately, she suggests an analysis that considers culture, biography, and resources as vital and interactive elements of a social movement (p. 18). In many studies, Nepstad suggests that researchers focus on factors that move potential recruits from 'attitudinal openness to actual participation' rather than on how those prior attitudes came to be in the first place (p. 78).

Eddy (2011) conducted a comparative study of people involved with a variety of rights-focused organizations, including Witness for Peace, which revealed a number of different pathways towards becoming involved as an international employee with these groups. One such approach is that of 'nonviolent activist', which Eddy associates with key educational and activism experiences during the participant's time in college or university. Travel was also an important driver.

> "All of the respondents in this pathway either studied abroad in college or traveled, lived or worked abroad (and in almost all cases, in countries of the Global South) while in their late teens or early 20s. Travel experiences often brought personal encounters with victims or narratives of human rights abuses linked to US foreign policy," (p. 223-224).

However, Eddy points out that experiences in educational, activist, or travel environments are rarely sufficient on their own to guarantee committed activism in the future. Instead, these initial exposures to injustice and counter hegemonic struggle are only converted into substantial activism through the dynamics and presence of organizations and networks of support in the potential activists' home communities (p. 245-246).

One interesting aspect of the activities of social movement participants in the contemporary era is their reliance on computer-based technology to connect and coordinate. Buechler (2011) outlines many of the important positives of using tools like the Internet, email, and social media, emphasizing how they can lower the costs of

recruitment, organization and mobilization and provide virtually free publicity (p. 221). The impact of expanding movement identities beyond face-to-face networks is also a significant plus, the author argues. On the other hand, Buechler also cites a number of concerns over the use of the Internet, email and social media in social movements. First, the kind of communication enabled by these technologies are not a perfect substitute for actual personal contacts, and are thus less trusted by some movement participants. Second, the Internet is a "space subject to commodification and corporatization" that could threaten democratic access and would be particularly troubling for the alternative globalization movement. Finally, these communication technologies are 'equal opportunity', meaning that conservative movements, agents of social control, and even governments can also employ these tools to attempt to maintain the current status quo (p. 221-222).

Ultimately, the distinction between social movements and other actors that may use similar tools and techniques to engage people in their activities depends on what the movement is trying to achieve. Fuchs (2010) highlights the fact that even protest is not automatically progressive and critical – the content of protest is what determines that status.

> "Critical protest is oriented towards the future, it identifies possibilities within existing society that help to improve the situation of mankind and to reach a higher and progressive level of societal organization." (p. 130).

Considering the centrality of content and context, the next chapter explores the origins, influences and trajectories of social movement activity in Nicaragua.

3. Context – Studying Solidarity Travel in Nicaragua

As will be outlined in the greater detail during the methods chapter, the choice to study solidarity travel in the particular context of Nicaragua involved a combination of personal factors and academic rationales. Fogarty (2005) argues that Nicaragua is a unique site to study transnational civil society for four reasons – the history of revolution, most specifically the Sandinista period of the 1980s, the central role that NGOs, both domestic and international, play in providing essential services, the long history of US state and corporate power influencing political and economic life in Nicaragua, and finally, societal fragmentation that has resulted from geography, natural disasters, and civil war (p. 15-17). The purpose of this chapter is to more fully explore some of these topics, beginning with a history of Nicaragua and its relationship to the United States before, during and after the Sandinista revolution of 1979. The development of tourism in the country will also be discussed, as will the important role that NGOs have come to play in the present day.

3.1 A history of violence – Somoza and the Sandinistas.

From 1933 onwards, Nicaragua was ruled by the Somoza family: first Anastasio, his eldest son Luis, and finally his younger son, Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Kruijt (2008) argues that Somozas' power base revolved around their control of the Guardia Nacional, a military police force that had been established by the US Marines during their earlier occupation of the country. It was due to his position as head of the Guardia that Somoza had been provided the chance to become the head of state. As time passed, the family consolidated power by making economic and political deals with members of the elite, ensuring the support of both Liberal and Conservative parties and families – the two

traditional powers in Nicaragua's domestic politics (p. 27). Having the military police at the heart of the political structure under the Somozas meant that dissent and protest was met with violence and political opponents were often jailed and tortured. So long as the economic and political elite remained loyal to Somoza, the regime was in little danger from the labour, student and peasant-led movements that the Guardia routinely suppressed through intimidation and corruption (p. 28). While the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional, known as the Sandinista movement or FSLN had started in the 1960s, it remained a fringe group largely supported by students and rural peasants in the north of Nicaragua, particularly in the department of Matagalpa. The Guardia made several violent raids in 1967 that led to the death or imprisonment of many of the FSLN cadre leaders. According to Kruijt, the 1972 earthquake that devastated the capital city, Managua, became a vital incident on the path to revolution. Somoza and his family interests controlled the sectors of the economy that stood to benefit from the reconstruction and he ensured that the money sent by the international community remained exclusively in these hands. This broke the alliance between the Somozas and the rest of the Nicaraguan elite, providing the opportunity for resistance and opposition groups, such as the FSLN, to access sources of funding and even establish a presence in and around Managua (p. 29-31).

The FSLN were a Marxist group heavily influenced by the Cuban revolution and specifically the approach to guerilla warfare promoted by Che Guevara. These links were strengthened during a period of exile during the early 1970s wherein several important leadership figures were sent to Cuba. Besides Guevara, Lenin and Marx, the FSLN were also influenced by the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire and the Catholic theology

of liberation, both of which had become increasingly influential in Latin America during the late 60s and early 70s (Kruijt, 2008).

Buechler (2011) explains the success of the Sandinista revolution as a social movement through the convergence of numerous mechanisms. The Somoza regime's infringement on elite interests prompted many of these powerful families and individuals to withdraw support for the dictatorship. There followed several 'suddenly imposed grievances' through regime blunders which then prompted other governments, particularly neighbours like Costa Rica and Honduras to re-think their relationship with the Somoza regime. Ultimately "the concatenation of mechanisms converted a revolutionary situation into a revolutionary outcome," (p. 198). This revolutionary outcome was achieved on July 19, 1979, when the Sandinistas took Managua and assumed control over the entire country.

Following the success of the Sandinista revolution, one of the first priorities of the new regime was to pursue an aggressive literacy campaign throughout rural Nicaragua, based in many ways on Freire's (1968) ideas about pedagogy of the oppressed, which suggests that literacy education for the popular class enables peasants and workers to engage with the world and act as agents for their own development. The literacy education drive, held over eight months in 1980, was very successful, reducing the overall rate of illiteracy from 52 per cent to 12 per cent. (Kruijt, p.101-102)

While the FSLN had the support of the world's socialist countries, their relationship with the regional superpower changed dramatically with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Jimmy Carter had welcomed members of the Sandinista leadership to the White House and even offered money to support reconstruction and disarmament. After his inauguration in January 1981, Reagan immediately sought to

isolate the Sandinistas, and his administration embarked on a campaign to convince not only other countries in Central America, but also the US public, of the danger posed by Nicaragua to the 'American way of life'. Sandinista leaders were aware of the need to fight back on the battlefield of public relations, and tried to support efforts by faith communities and the broad US-based peace movement to encourage an alternative narrative about post-revolutionary Nicaragua (Kruijt, 2008).

3.2 Revolutionary tourism or political hospitality?

During the Sandinista period from the late 1970s until 1990, the country was seen as an attractive place to visit for 'tourists of revolution' (Ferlinghetti (1982) quoted in Babb (2004), p. 542). Known colloquially as 'Sandalistas' these privileged, young, North American or Western Europeans came to experience and in some cases actively support what many considered to be the most significant process of social change in the hemisphere since Cuba's 1959 revolution (Babb, 2004). Even though their motivations for travel were anything but conventional, the impact of these 'Sandalistas' on Nicaraguan society followed a familiar pattern of tourism development in the Global South, as guidebooks, guesthouses and, eventually, a tourist 'ghetto' in Managua sprang up to serve their unique needs (p. 544).

The Nicaraguan government saw these international visitors and volunteers as valuable supporters of the revolution, not merely for their instrumental contribution to the local economy, but also for the legitimacy and global scope they offered to the broader project of remaking Nicaraguan society. As the 'Contras', funded, trained and armed by the United States government, began to wage their bloody counter-revolution in the mid-1980s, Nicaragua became an ever more risky place to visit and the

'Sandalistas', motivated by solidarity with the revolutionary aims of the Sandinistas, were joined by thrill-seeking travelers searching for a conflict hot spot (p. 545).

Hollander (1986) called this kind of travel 'political hospitality' and offered the following definition. "Political hospitality consists of highly organized and purposeful efforts on the part of governments to display their political system and its various institutions in the most favorable light to foreign visitors; it is but one expression of the determination to persuade outsiders of the superior virtues of the society" (p. 28). Hollander argued that this form of tourism could only truly be achieved in places where the government monopolizes power in a non-democratic way – specifically under Marxist-Leninist regimes. Further conditions are also identified for the successful implementation of political hospitality - like government control over material and economic resources, a desire to shape the international perception of the country in a positive way, and the presence of a 'docile' population that believes in the government's official version of reality (p. 28).

At the time of writing, Hollander clearly saw the Sandinistas as another example of such a regime, following in the footsteps of the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Vietnam, not only in terms of political ideology and repressive tactics, but also in their similar patterns of encouraging a certain kind of tourism from North America and Western Europe in particular (p. 29). Hollander believed that Nicaragua's approach to political hospitality owed much to the Cuban model, and suggested that the exile of several key members of the FSLN movement in Cuba prior to the Sandinista revolution allowed them to see first-hand how encouraging political travel could help in the future. Two core components of this approach to political hospitality are identified – first, what Hollander calls 'ego massage', ensuring that the experience of visitors is pleasant both

physically and psychologically – and second, 'selective display' wherein the itineraries of political tourists are highly controlled and the opportunity to meet with dissidents or experience the negative consequences of the revolution or society are limited or eliminated altogether (p. 30).

Hollander observed that the Nicaraguan approach to political hospitality aimed not only to promote a positive image of the Sandinista revolution abroad, but also sought to shift public opinion in the US to such an extent that the Reagan administration's open support of the Contra would become impossible (p. 34). According to Hollander, the desire to participate in such political tourism was directly related to the social and economic conditions of the home countries of the tourists. He suggested that the popularity of travel to Nicaragua was due to anger about the domestic policies of Ronald Reagan, and a more general dissatisfaction with social and economic inequality in the United States (p. 29).

> "An enormous reservoir of goodwill has been available for the Sandinistas. Political tourism to Nicaragua quickly became a major expression of support for that regime. The Nicaraguan authorities, well aware of the political importance of public opinion in the United States… developed an ambitious program of political hospitality." (p. 30)

Members of the anti-war movement that had been organized and inspired by events in Vietnam during the 1960s and 70s were, according to Hollander, 'naturally drawn' to Nicaragua in the 1980s. He lists many organizations that worked stateside to organize tours of Nicaragua in collaboration with - or at least with the blessing of – the Sandinistas, calling this 'a vast network' responsible for bringing more than 100,000 US citizens to visit between 1979 and 1986 (p. 35). Hollander quotes a number of prominent political tourists, criticizing them for seeming to accept the version of Nicaraguan reality that was presented to them by the Sandinista regime. "The visitors' apparent suspension

of critical faculties enhances the quality of their experiences in Nicaragua. Few are inclined to question the official versions of life in Nicaragua as rendered." (p. 36).

Hollander also quotes Jaime Chamorro, then editor of La Prensa, who would later become chief economic adviser in the post-Sandinista regime led by his mother, Violeta Barros Chamorro; who expressed similar concerns about the open-mindedness of political travelers.

> "Some honestly come to investigate, but most come to confirm what they already believe . . . They are sent down here by groups that are partial to the Sandinistas, and once they get here they are quite ingenuous. They believe everything they are told." (p. 36)

Hollander's view of these visitors to Nicaragua was quite negative and likely related to his career-long, indeed life-long, anti-Communism. His support for the aggressive foreign policy of the Reagan administration is widely recognized and celebrated by other commentators on the right of the political spectrum in the United States (Nordlinger, 2002; Wilson, 1992). However, criticism of solidarity travel was not limited to those with an opposite political view. Chris Hedges (2002), a New York Times correspondent who covered Central America in the 1980s, describes the activities and attitudes of a Witness for Peace delegation to Nicaragua. Visits to prison farms and demonstration projects were carefully stage-managed, Hedges writes, and the although some members of the group seemed aware of these issues, that did not change their attitude towards their Nicaraguan hosts nor diminish their outrage at the United States government (p. 36-37).

While Hollander describes solidarity travellers as naïve and overly credulous, Hedges offers a different perspective, suggesting that these individuals were buying into the same "intoxication of force" that supporters of US policy had been influenced by

(p.34). Support for the Sandinista or the Contra was a means for people to fill their lives with meaning and purpose, celebrating American power or the power of others, but in either case, ignoring the messy realities of war.

3.3 Counter-revolution and the 'Central America Movement'.

For all their early successes on the domestic front and the general relief felt across Nicaragua when the Somoza regime was removed, the Sandinista government struggled to maintain popular support as the 1980s continued. Although external factors like the closure of US and many European markets and a lack of available credit made economic management challenging, the FSLN made matters worse by establishing their own systems of corruption and alienating important figures in the country's economic elite and middle-class. Soon, many of those who had the means were leaving Nicaragua and removing another important source of potential investment. Besides these economic issues, which were contributing to substantial inflation and increasing shortages of food products, the Sandinistas had trouble keeping the Catholic Church and independent media happy. Eventually, the leadership made a damaging decision to close the major newspaper *La Prensa*, something that only played in to the anti-communist narrative promoted by the Reagan administration. According to Kruijt (2008) also problematic were the deteriorating relationships with indigenous populations on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, who felt disgruntled by the FSLN campaign to resettle peasant farmers from the central parts of the country (p. 115-119). All together, these factors enabled counter-revolutionary forces, known collectively as 'Contras' to gain a foothold and begin a drawn out campaign of violence and destabilization.

Peace (2008) describes the Contra war as an undeclared guerilla action carried out

by former members of the Guardia Nacional under the direction and funding of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and its regional proxies. The Contras targeted pro-Sandinista civilians, killing, kidnapping and destroying farms and properties. The CIA also conducted covert strategic operations on its own, including the bombing of military installations, oil storage facilities, and most infamously, mining Nicaragua's harbours in 1984, effectively blocking all ship-borne forms of trade and aid for the Sandinista regime (p. 64). Horton (2004) points out that many external observers and foreign academics portray the Contra forces strictly as a product of US support and elite resentment of the Sandinistas and their policies, particularly those related to land reform and redistribution. These studies tend to overlook the tens of thousands of Nicaraguan peasants who joined the Contra forces or worked as active collaborators throughout the 1980s (p. 171).

While the military aid provided by the US was a major advantage for the Contra once they were able to recruit supporters, Horton (2004) argues that it was not determinative. Rather, the local elite that felt threatened by the Sandinista revolution employed their traditional positions at the top of patronage and power networks to present a highly space-related argument for opposing the FSLN. This was an effort to pitch the traditional, rural way of life in the Northern highlands against the revolutionary approach of the Sandinistas, which the pro-Contra elite suggested was linked to the urban environment of Managua and its surroundings. Ultimately, Horton suggests that these ideas were more persuasive than the class-based rhetoric promoted by the Sandinistas during the same period (p. 173-174).

No matter what factors were most responsible for creating and sustaining the conflict, the cost of the war was high. In terms of human lives, both Horton and Peace cite close to 30,000 Nicaraguans killed, with many thousands more wounded, and 35,000

internally displaced. In economic terms, Peace estimates a price tag of 9 billion US dollars in damage and lost productivity (p. 65).

The anti-war campaign in the United States used grassroots pressure to challenge the official government narrative on the nature of the Sandinista regime. The focus of these efforts was the official military aid approved by Congress to support the Contras. Despite an early success for the anti-war movement, the re-election of Ronald Reagan in 1984 gave the pro-Contra members of congress the confidence and political capital to reverse course and resume official aid. In the final years of the conflict, aid was again restricted to non-military aspects, but the CIA arranged an illegal means of supporting the Contras, later exposed in the Iran-Contra scandal (p. 65). Despite the mixed record of the anti-war movement on military funding, it is believed to have played a significant role in preventing a full-scale invasion of Nicaragua. Peace (2008) cites Oliver North, the central organizer of the Iran-Contra scheme, as claiming that the most significant deterrent to an invasion during the 1980s was public opinion in the US – the anti-war movement led by groups like Witness for Peace had focused a great deal of attention on raising public awareness and promoting opposition to this potential course of action (p. 66).

Certain organizations involved in movement were clearly supportive of the Sandinista government and the aims of the revolution. Witness for Peace, along with other faith-based groups, sought to maintain political neutrality while acting in solidarity with the Nicaraguan people – but this distinction was not necessarily very clear, as these groups certainly supported many FSLN reform initiatives, especially those in the interest of the Nicaraguan poor (p. 67). The anti-Contra war movement included many small-scale organizations that were by turns religious, leftist, or pacifist in nature. This diversity

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might have led to significant challenges in coordinating the movement and determining their political goals, but this did not become an issue. Peace argues that participants were very aware of the serious divide that had split the Vietnam protest movement between more moderate members and those who advocated for a more radical approach, and sought a middle ground or compromise position (p. 68).

With so many groups working towards the same political ends, coordinating efforts to avoid duplication was critical, particularly given the relative lack of resources the anti-Contra war movement had at their disposal compared to the pro-Contra lobby and the Reagan administration. Witness for Peace, with its commitment to bringing US citizens to the war zones in Northern Nicaragua, was relied upon to provide grassroots support for lobbying Congress members. It was also at the forefront of the effort to provide educational materials and direct news 'from the front lines' of the Contra war. Given the limited nature of news coverage from traditional media sources in the US, the eyewitness testimonies provided by Witness for Peace staff and delegates provided essential context and a counter-narrative to the messaging promulgated by the Reagan administration and the pro-Contra lobby (p. 69-70).

Despite the efforts of activists in the United States the Contra war made a major contribution to the collapse of broad public support for the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Kruijt (2008) argues that not only did the need to fight guerilla opponents redirect many of the country's scarce economic resources towards military expenditures, the nature of the 'low-intensity' warfare created many zones within the northern countryside where regular activities, such as farming, became completely impossible. As the Contra forces grew in number and capacity, thanks to direct and illicit support from the US and its close allies in Honduras and Costa Rica, the Sandinista leadership made the choice to

institute universal military service for young men. This draft created another wave of outmigration for those who could manage to leave, and a profound shift in opinion against the FSLN from those who could not (p. 122-126). A combination of the above factors, and the clear message from the United States that an FSLN victory in the 1990s election would lead to a continuation of the war and economic blockade, meant that the FSLN went down to defeat against a coalition of opposition parties led by Violeta de Chamorro, a member of an elite family that owned *La Prensa*.

3.4 Revolutionary legacies and the neoliberal present.

While the Sandinistas conceded control, they remained an influential force in Nicaraguan politics throughout the 1990s and beyond. Daniel Ortega, the leader of the FSLN during the revolutionary era, and now serving his second consecutive term as Nicaraguan president, spent the period from 1990 until 2007 out of government but enjoying a great degree of de facto political power. Kruijt (2008) points out that the Sandinistas controlled and continue to control many local political organizations, trade unions and the student movement, meaning that Ortega has been able to use his influence to incite street protests at various times during the Chamorro regime and during the rule of her successors – Arnoldo Aleman and Enrique Bolaños. Beyond this close relationship with key actors in the popular sector, Ortega used what Kruijt describes as an "unscrupulous willingness to make a deal with any politician holding power," (p. 157) to ensure the continued viability of the FSLN and more importantly, of his own personal brand in Nicaraguan politics. The outcome, as many political commentators in Nicaragua and abroad see it, is a new Sandinismo that is quite far removed from the broad-based movement that led the revolution of 1979. Instead, Ortega's government,

elected to comfortable majorities in 2007 and again in 2012 is a highly personal form of populism, with Ortega acting as a type of new-era caudillo with little but personal interests at the heart of his political program, as much as he maintains the symbolic links to the FSLN past (p.162).

The legacy of the Sandinista revolution when it comes to the relationship between the US and Nicaragua is largely rhetorical, Kruijt (2008) argues. For all that Ortega implies that his administration refuses to accept US influence or external control, the fact remains that Nicaragua must meet with the International Monetary Fund twice annually to review budget plans and economic performance. The Central American free trade agreement (CAFTA) signed with the United States during the Bolaños administration has not been repealed and in fact the economic links between the US and Nicaragua are as close as any time before 1979. The clearest form of neo-dependency Kruijt observes is the increasing reliance on remittances from migrants (illegal or otherwise) living and working in the US. The figure cited here is close to $3 billion annually for Nicaragua (p. 167).

The Sandinista defeat in the 1990 elections brought neoliberalism to Nicaragua and with it a very different approach to tourism. Recognizing that two decades of political violence had effectively removed their country from the radar of most 'conventional' tourists, the state, through the auspices of the Institute of Tourism (INTUR) and with the support of international financial institutions, set about re-constructing Nicaragua as an attractive tropical destination. According to Babb (2004), this included the creation of new resorts on the Pacific coast and the refurbishing of transportation networks and accommodation facilities in the major cities. (p. 546)

Not only did these efforts take the form of physical reconstruction, they also involved a careful revising of recent Nicaraguan history, effectively removing any

reference to the Sandinista period. Babb (2004) cites two videos produced by the Nicaraguan tourism ministry to promote the country that used images that predated the 1970s and then skipped ahead twenty-five years (p. 547-548). In addition, important Sandinista-era monuments like the tombs of revolutionary heroes and the Museum of the Revolution in Managua closed completely or fell into neglect and disrepair. Even though the official approach to tourism sought to sweep the Sandinista past under the carpet, Babb notes that several organizations continued to focus on the recent revolutionary past in their tour itineraries for American travelers in Nicaragua (p. 551). Although her article was written before the re-election of the FSLN in 2007, Babb accurately predicted that revolutionary monuments and legacies would re-emerge as an important part of Nicaraguan tourism.

The organizations identified by Babb (2004) are representative of the first wave of NGOs that became a critical part of Nicaraguan civil society during the revolutionary period. These groups originated in the churches, labour unions and political solidarity organizations of Europe and North America, and their first roles were to assist Nicaraguan farmers with the coffee and cotton harvest during the Contra War. Fogarty (2005) notes that following the electoral defeat of the FSLN in 1990, these groups faded away, but the importance of NGOs in general merely increased. Newer organizations were funded by foreign governments and corporations and had as a fundamental goal the maintenance and expansion of the market economy while providing services that the reduced Nicaraguan state could not afford to offer its own citizens. Significantly, these NGOs described their efforts not as post-conflict rebuilding, but as improving the economic and social welfare of people following the socialism and mismanagement of the Sandinistas (p. 249).

While the post-conflict era has ended, the neoliberal one has not, and Fogarty (2005) argues that the vibrant NGO sector in Nicaragua is a critical component that enables neoliberal capitalism to continue in that country. Twenty eight per cent of Nicaragua's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) comes from foreign assistance, and 70 per cent of this is channeled through international and domestic NGOs (p. 271). Without this financial support, the material conditions of life would be even worse for Nicaraguan people already living in poverty or on the margins of society. Groups that host tours often do so in combination with other activities like providing important social services or economic opportunities to these underserved populations. In some cases, the travelers fund raise or act as outside buyers for artisanal products that poor communities are producing with the help of NGOs. The duality of this role makes it hard to condemn or praise the efforts of NGOs in Nicaragua. As Fogarty says, such groups can on the one hand be considered agents of globalization in that they attempt to tie small-scale producers into niche international markets in order to generate profits. At the same time, these opportunities represent an escape from an exploitative wage labour economy that accumulates surplus capital in the hands of socio-economic elites. In this way, NGOs are subverting the logic of neoliberal globalization and providing a feasible alternative (p. 273).

4. Methods

4.1 Introduction – Qualitative, reflexive research.

This study can be classified as qualitative and reflexive in nature, and follows the general framework of narrative inquiry. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I discuss the details of my research process including data collection and analysis, but I begin by explaining my choice of the fundamental research characteristics mentioned above and outline some considerations relating to narrative research that informed my approach.

Collecting quantitative data on solidarity travel through a questionnaire might be less time consuming than more in-depth interviews, and the information gathered by using a survey could be more readily generalized across cases and circumstances, but these characteristics do not correspond well to my research objective, which was to explore the delivery of solidarity travel through the experiences of participants. My choice of qualitative research, rather than taking a quantitative or mixed-methods approach, arose primarily for personal reasons relating to the way I perceive the relationship between researcher and participants.

In terms of valuing participants, I intended to build a trusting and collaborative connection between myself, as the researcher, and my participants so that we might take some initial steps towards an active and positive transformation of the practice of solidarity travel. Considering this, I felt the need to approach my participants as complete human beings and collect information in a manner that retained this sense of wholeness throughout the research process.

When it comes to epistemology and ontology as it relates to research, I find myself identifying most strongly with the characteristics outlined by Guba and Lincoln (2005) as 'constructivist' and 'participatory' in their classification of paradigms of inquiry. This means I view reality as relative and co-constructed in local and specific circumstances, while my 'theory of knowledge production' or epistemology involves the co-creation of experiential, critical and subjective findings in collaboration with participants. These philosophical foundations suggest a natural affinity with particular research processes, namely those that are dialogical and hermeneutic, and which focus on the collaborative political action that such inquiry may make possible (p. 195).

Choosing a critical topic does not automatically imply a critical approach to research, although it can be argued that to apply a critical lens to a critical practice is both logically and ideologically consistent. My research topic is critical because the subject matter – solidarity travel - can itself be seen as a form of critical response to dominant forms of tourism practice. Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) make reference to eleven core 'domains' of critical theory, and I believe my research fits within at least nine of these, including being focused on critical enlightenment and emancipation, achieved in part through an interest in critiquing economic determinism, ideology, hegemony and technical rationality.

Another key reason for choosing a critical subject relates to its under-representation in existing tourism research. Tribe (2008) searched the CABI abstract database, which compiles results from over 400 publications, for a variety of terms relating to critical theory, theorists and concepts, and found fewer than 700 articles citing such influences or approaches out of more than 35,000 articles published between 1974 and 2005 (p. 252).

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The critical approach to tourism research is not without substantial drawbacks, and one that I consider to be quite troubling is the privileged role that the researcher plays in the collaborative process of co-creating and co-describing realities and research findings. Guba and Lincoln (2005) describe the typical posture of the critical researcher as that of a "transformative intellectual" (p. 196) who arrives on the scene with the capacity to create change through advocacy and activism. Due to a combination of this implied expertise and the sometimes alienating language of critical theory, *control* over the research process remains largely in the hands of this 'transformative' figure. In an effort to at least partially address this issue of control over processes and outcomes, I have included a reflexive aspect in my research.

It is important to note that there is not one form of reflexive practice that can be universally applied to all research situations, but Feigherty (2006) cites Alvesson's (2004) conception of four general sets of practices - destabilizing, multi-voicing, multi-perspective and positioning. The latter set of practices resonates with me, especially in the sense that 'positioning' views the researcher as a networker responsible for recognizing and exposing social and political forces involved in research (p. 276).

There are a number of limitations to this type of reflexive practice. Alvesson characterizes the problem as a 'hero' paradox, in that through positioning, a reflexive researcher may claim to have successfully negotiated or even transcended systemic constraints. Feigherty (2006), meanwhile, focuses on the highly idiosyncratic nature of the actual approach taken to position oneself as a researcher in social and political terms. This individualistic approach can confound attempts at determining research validity (p. 277). Furthermore, reflexivity in general cannot be seen as a curative measure that negates or overcomes the presence of problematic power relations within research

practices. Guba and Lincoln (2005) cite issues with persistent 'regimes of truth' in reflexive research and the problem of unclear boundaries when it comes to blending the voices of the researcher and the researched (p. 199).

In this study, 'the researched' can be divided into three groups involved in the formation and maintenance of connections through solidarity travel – the individual tourists, the representatives or employees of hosting and coordinating organizations, and the 'toured' community members at the local level in Nicaragua. To represent the dynamics of the solidarity travel experience as thoroughly as possible, all of these perspectives are included in this study. I use the words 'voices' and 'stories' to describe these varied perspectives quite deliberately, as I have used narrative inquiry as a means of teasing out how members of the three groups identified above represent the connections they have built through solidarity travel.

Narrative inquiry typically involves the interviewee telling a story, while the interviewer's role is to listen and record these tales. Chase (2005) encourages narrative interviewers to *invite* stories as well (p.661, emphasis in the original). It is important to note that the need to make active 'invitations' to research participants will depend on a variety of contextual factors, including the level of formality involved, the physical space where the interview takes place, and the cultural background of interviewer and interviewee. Chase argues that 'interview culture', with its Western roots, has 'gone global' in the sense that people all over the world know what it is to be interviewed, and value this interaction epistemologically. Even so, she also points out that there are important differences in understanding that can arise in cross-cultural research scenarios (p. 670). While I share important cultural characteristics with two of the three groups involved in my interview process, the Nicaraguan participants understanding of narrative may be informed by the

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Latin American tradition of *testimonio* – a form of personal storytelling that Chase describes as having an 'emergency' character rooted in problems of repression, poverty and the struggle to survive. In terms of voice, a *testimonio* "stakes a claim on our attention" in an assertive way that is rarely seen in Western narratives (p. 668). As I engaged in interviews with participants, I noticed a significant difference between the analytical, somewhat detached reflection carried out by staff and travelers from the United States and Canada, and the more emotive, personal recollections that Nicaraguan participants shared with me.

My 'interview guide' was informed by the three-dimensional space approach to narrative. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use the concept of three-dimensional space as a metaphor to illustrate how narrators[3] can conceptualize continuity, interaction and place-situatedness as "pointing them backward and forward, inward and outward, and locating them in place" (p. 54). With such a central focus on the participant's 'storying' of experiences, a narrative interview must be fluid and flexible. Narrative inquiry is described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as a 'field in the making' and this observation has two important implications for my research. First, I approached my own process with respect for the emergent quality of narrative, doing my best not to stifle possible stories or overlook important silences. Second, I did my best to be mindful that the freedom in research design and interpretation required for respecting emergence was not absolute. The temptation to tailor narratives to match expectations or desires is one way such flexibility can be abused. I tried to be wary of composing or inviting narratives

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[3] 'Narrators' refers here to participants narrating their own stories in the interview, as well as the researcher narrating these interviews through analysis and response.

that follow, in Clandinin and Connelly's words, "the Hollywood plot, in which everything works out in the end" (p. 181).

Narrative has long had an important part to play in other research methodologies such as ethnography, but as a coherent approach in its own right narrative inquiry has struggled for broad recognition (Chase, 2005). The personal nature of interpretation and analysis is one of several issues that have been raised by critics of narrative inquiry as an approach to qualitative research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advise novice researchers, such as myself, not to dismiss such criticism but rather to be 'wakeful' while engaging in all stages of research. 'Wakefulness' is essentially another way of describing a process of ongoing critical self-reflection (p. 184).

Being 'wakeful' during the process of pre-study, data collection, data analysis, and writing this thesis was fairly straightforward and felt natural. Finding an effective means of presenting these observations in the written text was a far more difficult task for me. Although I have used the personal pronoun in various parts of this thesis, I was reluctant to acknowledge myself in certain chapters, such as the literature review and to some extent, in the findings chapters that follow this section on methods. As a result, my attempt at positioning myself within this study is constrained to a number of places, rather than running through the entire document.

I acknowledge that this may be a mark of a novice qualitative researcher, which is an important aspect of my positioning in this research – I am very much a beginner, rather than an expert. This lack of experience does not detract from the material advantages I enjoy as a member of a dominant social group in both a local and global context. As a white, able-bodied, middle-class male from North America, I perceive myself at the centre of a nexus of unearned power and privilege. Acknowledging my

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privilege does not mean I transcend it, and I feel that during the course of my research process I have engaged in some problematic practices relating to the connection between researcher and participants, despite being made aware of such issues in an abstract sense prior to 'entering the field'.

In a more positive sense, I have become increasingly comfortable over the course of this research project with leaving a pretense of objectivity to one side. My personal and academic experiences, including an undergraduate degree focused on critical development studies and a year abroad in Ecuador where I worked on a community-based tourism project, have led me to support alternative approaches to globalization and the use of travel as a means to promote and achieve social justice. In the early stages of preparation and writing, I tried to approach solidarity travel without acknowledging the way in which my own experience was shaping my attitudes and choices. However, I am not an unbiased observer or evaluator of solidarity travel. My prior interests and activities, and my beliefs and values are such that it would be more appropriate to describe myself as a supporter.

4.2 Identification of organizations

The process of identifying partner organizations began during my earliest stages of selecting a thesis topic and developing my research proposal. I was fortunate to have two personal connections in Nicaragua, both classmates from my undergraduate studies in International Development at Trent University. One, a Nicaraguan national, was able to provide general information and contacts with a number of potential organizations that host international travelers for service learning or solidarity tour experiences. Having engaged in some initial communication with several of these groups, Witness for Peace, a

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US-based organization that has been active in Nicaragua for more than 30 years quickly emerged as an ideal prospective partner for my research. This sense of being a good fit was only enhanced when I learned that another friend and former classmate from Trent, this one a US citizen, had recently been hired to work for Witness for Peace in Nicaragua.

In my research proposal, I indicated an intention to work exclusively with Witness for Peace and use their operations and tours as the entire basis for my data collection process. However, as I explored the range of organizations engaged in solidarity travel activity I realized that to do so might limit my perspective. By the time I arrived in Managua for fieldwork I had decided to partner with at least two organizations – Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense. This latter organization was attractive to me because it offered a Canadian take on solidarity and travel to Nicaragua.

The opportunity to work with the Union de Cooperativas Agropecuarias (UCA) San Ramón came about after I recognized the organization as a consistent host for international groups that travel to Central America on fair trade tours. I should clarify that Nicaragua is home to many UCA groups, and several of them are actively involved in providing tourism experiences for foreign visitors. UCA San Ramón happened to respond to my initial email before any other organization did, and through further communication it became clear that the staff and community members would be willing to participate in my research project.

4.3 Data collection and analysis

Having selected organizations to work with, I then began the process of data collection, which took the form of in-depth interviews. Selection of participants was quite straightforward with regard to organizational staff and community members involved

with UCA San Ramón – the small size of each organization meant that I could interview all staff members working for Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense. UCA San Ramón is a larger organization, but only two staff members work directly on tourism, so I was likewise able to interview both.

The interviews with staff members took place at their office spaces in Managua and San Ramón during the five-week period I spent in Nicaragua in the summer of 2011. The interviews were all tape recorded with the participants consent and ranged in length from forty to ninety minutes. I encouraged the interviewees to describe their involvement with solidarity travel, in a manner consistent with the three-dimensional space approach – looking forward, looking back in a temporal sense, and looking inward and outward to consider the people and relationships that helped to put them in their current position. In general, the interviews were largely unstructured conversations. After the participant had concluded their temporal and interactive reflections, I asked four questions that were slightly more directed to aspects of solidarity travel that I was interested in. They included: what does solidarity mean to you; how has your involvement in solidarity travel made a difference to that idea; how would you describe the strengths and weaknesses of the travel experiences you help to organize and of the organization you work for? These questions were not necessarily asked in the same order with the participant, as they often came up in a 'natural' way at a variety of points during of the conversation.

Interviews with community members in San Ramón took on a slightly different character – although I still sought an open conversation and tried to allow for unstructured reflection along the same parameters related to the three-dimensional space approach, I was conscious of being more defined in my questions and less comfortable with periods of silence from the participants. This I believe related to my conducting

these interviews in Spanish – a second language that I feel comfortable enough to converse in, but within a certain limit in terms of ambiguity and uncertainty. When silence would prevail after I asked a question, my tendency was to break that silence to clarify that my question had been well understood. During the interviews conducted in English, I did not feel the same pressing need to ensure that something was not lost in translation. In addition, the community members I interviewed in San Ramón were in the midst of other daily activities during my time in the area, so I felt the need to limit the amount of time I was asking them to devote to the interview. These conversations lasted between twenty minutes to half an hour, and were collected over a period of three days.

Former solidarity travelers, the final group of study participants – were identified in collaboration with staff of Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense. At the outset of the process, this task was made challenging by the fact that neither organization felt comfortable passing on detailed contact information for past participants without obtaining consent. Eventually, a number of potential interview subjects were identified by organizational staff, and then contacted informally via email and social media. Once these individuals gave their permission, their contacts were shared with me directly. Given that respondents were located throughout the United States, past Witness for Peace delegates were all interviewed via Skype, though the Casa Canadiense contact was able to meet in person for our interview. These conversations ranged in length from forty to sixty minutes and took place in late fall 2011 and early winter 2012. All together I interviewed 22 people, ten organizational staff, seven community members, and five solidarity travelers.

In order to provide additional background and to help verify or confirm the experiences of participants, I was able to access a number of documents and videos

relating to the solidarity travel experience from the participant perspective. Specifically, I was able to use weblog entries made by touring groups from the University of Portland (UP) and Miami University[4]. The UP group also produced a thirty-minute video reflecting on their solidarity tour of Nicaragua with Witness for Peace, and I used the information and testimonies from that film in a similar way. I became aware of the blogs and the video through interviews with travelers from these two groups, and accessed these websites shortly afterwards. In the case of the UP group blog, each post was signed and so I have included authorship information below each entry that appears in this thesis. The Miami university blog entries were not always signed, and therefore not every entry is associated with a particular author in this text. The UP video was shot throughout their time in Nicaragua, and then edited and produced following their return to the US. I accessed the video via YouTube, where the Moreau Center – the program that organized the UP tour – has an account. Having watched the video, which is approximately 30 minutes in length I transcribed direct quotations from identified participants and some of these passages are incorporated into the findings presented in Chapter 6. The video and blogs are all available to the public.

The analysis of these documents involved a process of content coding according to key themes or categories already established through the interview process. This means that because my interviews were conducted in a manner informed by the three-dimensional space approach, the interview transcripts and the video and weblog material were analyzed with a focus on continuity, interaction and place, as these ideas emerge in the written material. Content analysis is most commonly associated with grounded theory approaches to qualitative research, but Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasize the

[4] Miami University is also known as Miami of Ohio, as it is located in Oxford, Ohio.

usefulness of analyzing documents as a means of triangulation in narrative inquiry (p. 113).

Once I had transcribed my interviews, I read through them looking for aspects related to continuity, interaction and place. Having done so, I organized the individual study participants' narratives in a temporal sense, so that the section begins with the study participants' ideas and activities around tourism and solidarity before getting involved directly with solidarity travel, then following their interactions with travelers - or in the case of the travelers, with hosts and organizations - during the period of the tour. Finally each group narrative deals with what happens after the tours have departed Nicaragua and returned to the United States and Canada. Within these broadly defined stages of the narrative – before, during, and after – the sections are organized according to themes that emerged through the analysis of transcripts and content. This 're-storying' of the narratives is consistent with data analysis processes outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2003). Some researchers have gone further in re-storying the narratives presented by their participants, but in this case I felt that limiting my re-organization to stages in time and broad themes was more appropriate. This was due in large part to my inability to follow-up with all study participants in order to co-construct themes. Although I my attempts to include participants in the process of analysis were unsuccessful, I was able to collaborate with a number of participants as part of the initial interview. Essentially, as part of our discussion related to solidarity travel and my study, I was able to bring up other interviews and information and mention some preliminary ideas and interpretations. By engaging my participants, particularly past travelers, in this conversation, I was able to hear how they felt the narratives of others were consistent or divergent with their own experiences.

It is also important to note that the process of analysis and writing the thesis were not completely sequential and separate stages. Instead, I engaged in a cycle of analysis, writing and reflection, wherein themes were created, reconsidered and refined when considered in the context of other chapters and sections of the thesis.

4.4 Study limitations

There were three important limitations to this study – time, limited selection of past travelers, and a lack of continuity between North American organizations and Nicaraguan community members. I will discuss each of these aspects in detail.

Time is a limiting factor for almost any research project, but in this particular case, I found that the dynamic nature of the organizations I studied meant that as soon as my time 'in the field' had passed and I was moving towards data analysis, significant developments were occurring in the organization's mission and approaches to solidarity travel and their operations in Nicaragua. It is perhaps inevitable that this would be the case, and is likely not an eventuality that could have been better anticipated, given that these changes were influenced by events and factors outside my control and beyond the scope of my understanding at the time I was planning my research trip. Even so, in an effort to mitigate the impact of this limitation, I have incorporated an update on both Casa Canadiense and Witness for Peace and their activities in Chapter 5.

The second limitation was referenced in the previous section – as organizations were unwilling or unable to provide contact information for a range of past participants, my study relied on the responses to informal contact the organizational staff received. Therefore, I was unable to ensure a range of respondent profiles in terms of demographics, period of time since their trip to Nicaragua, and most significantly, their engagement with the organization and their travel experience. It can be argued that this

study design would have created a certain selection bias no matter how large the pool of potential interview subjects had been, given that only those past travelers who were still interested in the themes and particulars of solidarity travel would have been inclined to participate. However, relying on organizational staff to recruit study participants through informal channels established a further filter – the individuals who eventually responded and agreed to participate in my study were all still in contact with current staff. This means that my study is highly idiosyncratic and this has implications for any attempt to generalize my research findings. As a qualitative study, my goal was not necessarily to produce research that could be generalized in a broad sense. However, even within the scope of the organizations I focused on, the nature of my recruitment process makes it hard to conclude with any strong statements about the nature of solidarity travel as delivered by the organization in question. On the other hand, by focusing on a small number of participants, I have perhaps been able to present individual voices and stories in a more complete way.

Finally, the Nicaraguan community that I visited and whose members I interviewed is not part of the travel itinerary of either Casa Canadiense or Witness for Peace. Ideally, I would have preferred to include a community directly involved in hosting groups brought to Nicaragua by either of these organizations. However, in the case of Casa Canadiense, their partner communities change year on year depending on an application process whereby tour groups are matched with projects. Witness for Peace has long standing connections with a handful of rural Nicaraguan communities, but staff members were hesitant about my including one or more of these places in my research. This has to do with Witness for Peace's approach to compensating their host communities and families, and I understood their desire not to overburden their partners. While the

resulting research lacks continuity between the North American organizations and the

Nicaraguan perspectives, I feel that the inclusion of the third host organization

incorporates another approach to solidarity travel that would have been overlooked had I

not been forced to look for a different Nicaraguan community to visit.

5. Solidarity Travel Organizations – History and Background

5.1 Introduction

Each of the three organizations that form part of this research project have different approaches to solidarity and focus on different activities in their tour itineraries, appealing to distinct parts of the travelling public. This chapter examines in detail the organizational history and approach to solidarity travel for these three groups.

The first organization, Witness for Peace, is a US-based NGO that has been active in organizing what they call 'solidarity delegations' for US citizens to Nicaragua since 1983. Witness for Peace attempts to develop an awareness of how US foreign policy, in military and economic terms, has an impact on the everyday lives of Nicaraguan people. They organize intergenerational tours for individuals unaffiliated with any specific organizations, but are increasingly providing custom tours for particular post-secondary institutions. Witness for Peace attempts to build solidarity through exposure and education, bringing local community representatives and Nicaraguan experts to meet with travelling groups, and bringing these tourists to factories, community health and education centers, and rural farm communities.

Casa Canadiense, the second NGO included in the study, is a Canadian organization based in Managua, Nicaragua's capital city, but administered from Toronto. Similarly to Witness for Peace, Casa Canadiense attempts to build solidarity through educational travel opportunities for high school groups, largely from the Greater Toronto Area. These groups actively engage in community development work, participating in a project proposed and led by a rural host community during their time in Nicaragua. This

experience is complemented by visits to markets, the Managua garbage dump, and to community organizations working in the poorest neighbourhoods of the capital city.

The third organization is the Union de Cooperativas Agropecuarias (UCA) San Ramón. An agricultural cooperative based in the municipality of San Ramón in Nicaragua's northern highlands, UCA San Ramón brings foreign travelers to a number of small communities in the area in order to demonstrate the realities of rural life and to provide direct contact with the producers of organic, fair trade coffee. This unique tourism project has been a recent addition to a broader program of social and economic supports that UCA provides to area residents and is supported by host families and local youth who act as guides for the travelling groups.

5.2 Solidarity through peace and policy change - Witness For Peace.

The Sandinista revolution of 1979, and the subsequent attack on the new government by counter-revolutionary 'Contra' forces supported by the United States government, formed the background for the creation of Witness for Peace in the early 1980s. Hearing stories of the impact that this armed violence was having on rural communities in northern Nicaragua, a diverse group of peace activists decided to travel to the site of this fighting to see what, if anything, they could do. Returning home from this initial exposure to the front lines of the guerrilla war between Sandinistas and Contras, the travelers began to discuss ways of spreading the word in the US. Griffin-Nolan (1991) describes the initial stage of negotiations between what would become Witness for Peace and the Nicaraguan government. This discussion about an appropriate role and feasible operations for such an organization revealed that the Sandinistas themselves were hoping

to encourage travel from the US to Nicaragua. "Quite simply, it wanted planeloads of US citizens to see the country and the revolution for themselves" (p. 47).

Nicaragua had already been a 'mecca' for the past several years, attracting what Griffin-Nolan (1991) describes as 'the solidarity of the world' – a solidarity that went beyond travel. The revolution led also to the marketing of Nicaraguan coffee, a growing international audience for Nicaraguan poets and musicians and the widespread popularity of the theological reformation represented by the Liberation movement within the Catholic priesthood.

Travel was a significant component of this solidarity movement. Language institutes drew students and young people, coffee brigades were organized in the manner of the Venceremos sugar brigades that had helped to harvest Cuban sugar after the 1959 revolution there (p. 53). As for Witness for Peace, there was some early debate between founding members and activists about the best approach to take. Some argued in favour of a permanent, long-term presence, while others wanted a series of short-term trips to "tear open people's hearts, open their eyes, and blow their minds." (p. 62) In the end, it would happen both ways.

Once the basic model had been determined, with a long-term team supporting the activities of short-term delegates, Witness for Peace decided to offer two forms of delegation travel. The first was a one-week, fact-finding trip with little exposure to the actual war zones in the north of the country and the other a more intense and involved two-week tour that included the risks of visiting a conflict area. As it happened, almost everyone who expressed an interest in travelling wanted to go for the longer, more risky delegation (Griffin-Nolan, 1991). The delegations became tightly-knit groups even before departing for Nicaragua, in no small part due to the extensive training and preparation

groups would receive (p. 81). The experience of the delegation often inspired a change in activities for those delegates who were able to shift their careers or studies rapidly. Some returned to Nicaragua to be part of the long-term team, or to work with other organizations. Griffin-Nolan (1991) suggests that the idea of accompaniment - which was the major focus of the solidarity actions taken by Witness in the early days – had a lot of resonance in Nicaraguan culture, which tends towards collective experiences. Putting the Contra war in the public eye back in the USA became the most important follow-up action of the returning delegates. For some, this travel experience was a first exposure to peace activism, but the core of the new organization was very experienced in the field of raising public awareness for anti-war or pacifist campaigns dating back to the protest movement in response to the Vietnam war (p. 93).

As Witness was beginning to emerge as an independent organization a lack of diversity was recognized very quickly. As Griffin-Nolan (1991) puts it, "like many peace groups, the founders were all white and highly educated. The programs they devised, the culture, and the image that began to evolve made Witness appeal to white, educated people. In later years, Witness struggled to overcome this limitation by conscious outreach and inclusion efforts, which produced mixed results" (p. 67).

According to Weber (2004) the accompaniment aspect of Witness for Peace's activities in the 1980s can be seen as carrying on a historic tradition of rights-based activism that utilizes accompaniment to support the oppressed or at-risk population. Weber cites the 'freedom riders' of the US civil rights movement as a particularly valid antecedent to the Witness for Peace volunteers and delegates that came to Nicaragua in the 1980s. A key element that links those doing the accompaniment work in both situations is their relatively privileged citizenship status in domestic and international

terms (p. 22).

> "It is, in large part, the whiteness of the Witness for Peace activists that gave the organization its political clout, limited as it was... This is not to imply that activists were non-reflexive on this issue... the organizations used their privileged positions, as predominantly composed of middle class Euro-Americans, to challenge US hegemony. These citizens drew on their privileged social locations to gain political access... and claim authority to challenge the US government on Nicaragua," (p. 54).

In terms of numbers, the Witness for Peace movement was 'white' to an extensive degree. An internal report referenced by Weber (2004) recorded the racial diversity of delegation participants from 1983 to 1991 – of nearly 4,000 people surveyed, only 110 identified as African American, 94 as Latino, 14 as Asian American, and 11 as Native American (p. 54). One important concern raised by some former Witness for Peace activists was that the 'whiteness' of the organization made it difficult for leadership and members to recognize the systemic links between US foreign policy and the race and class-based discriminations inherent in many domestic policies. Weber (2004) argues that a lack of lived awareness of these issues prevented the work being done in Nicaragua from being linked to important rights struggles 'at home' in the United States (p. 60-61).

A key aspect of the Central America peace movement in general, and Witness for Peace specifically, was the religious character of the biographical background and organizational cultures involved. Nepstad (2004) shows that this missionary-led, faith-based approach to framing the issue of the US role in Nicaragua allowed for certain strategies and resources to be employed, and attracted a certain kind of recruit to the movement (p. 70-73). For Nepstad, the Central America solidarity movement recruits she encountered in her study shared a number of important biographical elements – they had been part of religious yet liberal/progressive families and thus were quite receptive to the 'framing' of the Nicaraguan situation presented by missionaries and movement leaders

that spoke of the situation in social justice terms informed by Christian faith (p. 82-85). Further, these individuals all mentioned having their worldviews and political ideologies influenced by major historical events and changes that took place in earlier decades, specifically the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and for Catholics, the Vatican II council (p. 88). Finally, many of these movement recruits had spent time on cross-cultural exposure trips, student exchanges, or study terms abroad. These experiences created an awareness of the marginalization and poverty faced by residents of the Global South, as well as creating the basis for a more critical appraisal of the role played by the US government in these places (p. 89-92). The biography and background of the eventual recruits made them open to participation in the Central America solidarity movement, but it was the solidarity travel experience that completed the conversion to full participation. As Nepstad (2004) describes, the intent of the first Witness for Peace delegations was to "…radicalize mainstream American Christians by exposing them to the human consequences of US foreign policy" (p. 117). The conversations and activism that took place once delegations returned home formed an important front in the struggle to convince an even broader swath of the American public that the Reagan administration's support of the Contra was immoral and wrong.

Witness for Peace took the approach of exposing its short-term visitors to life in the countryside for a brief period, but the majority of the delegation was spent in meetings with religious, political and social movement leaders in Managua. Other groups brought people from North America to work as *brigadistas* in the fields, picking cotton and coffee alongside Nicaraguan farmers. In all cases, Nepstad (2004) claims that the major contribution of the solidarity trip was to educate but also to inspire strong emotional responses to what the travelers were experiencing. These emotions ranged from anger

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and outrage at the realization of what kind of impact US foreign policy was having on ordinary people in Nicaragua (p. 120 -122). For some of the participants in solidarity delegations, this sense of anger was also turned inward, leading to expressions of guilt and personal shame. An increasing awareness of these potentially debilitating emotions on the part of delegation leaders led to the creation of daily reflection and discussion sessions during the trip, to allow participants to unburden themselves in a supportive environment (p.123).

In addition to these 'negative' emotions, solidarity travelers also expressed deep affection for the Nicaraguan people with whom they interacted. Bonds of solidarity were formed based on shared identity as Christians, parents, or farmers. These connections were accompanied by a sense of hope that the struggle to remake Nicaraguan society could teach activists from North America how to work for similar goals on their home soil (p. 124-126).

When it comes to explaining the end of the Central America solidarity movement, Nepstad (2004) turns to another theoretical approach to analyzing social movements – political process theory. This approach explains the rise and fall of movements on the presence of (or lack thereof) political opportunities and the chance of winning concessions through activism or protest. In the case of the Central America movement, there were a series of events that closed what political opportunities activists had taken advantage of earlier in the 1980s. First, the Central American presidents signed a peace accord in 1987 that set the stage for the end of open hostilities between Sandinistas and Contras, as well as the end of foreign military aid and a plan for disarmament. While peace did not fully take hold until the end of 1989, the perception for many observers and movement participants was that the process had begun and the major *raison d'être* for the movement –

US interference in Nicaraguan affairs – was no longer a major concern. The end of Ronald Reagan's presidency in 1988 seemed to reinforce this sentiment as his successor George H.W. Bush, "…actively downplayed Central American foreign policy" in Nepstad's (2004) words (p.138).

Even while the solidarity movement began to lose currency with the broader public, movement participants were still quite confident that the Sandinistas would win the 1990 elections that had been mandated as part of the peace plan. When the FSLN lost in a close yet decisive manner, some movement supporters became disenchanted. Nepstad (2004) reports that for some organizations in the movement, the election result and subsequent end of the revolutionary period led to a 50 per cent drop in donations and a similar reduction in their mailing lists (p.139).

The negotiated ceasefire and Central America-led peace process at the end of the 1980s was positive news for the peasant farmers and marginalized groups with whom Witness for Peace worked with, in that the insecurity and danger that had characterized rural life during the guerilla war promised to diminish, if not disappear outright. However, the negotiated peace, along with the unexpected (at least for the solidarity movement) electoral defeat of the FSLN in 1990, eliminated Witness for Peace's main objective. Without the threat of a US invasion, and with a negotiated settlement working to end the Contra war and disarm the guerillas, funding support from the United States collapsed, as did the desire of the broader public to participate in short or long term travel to Nicaragua. Facing this remarkable change in political circumstances, Witness for Peace had to determine how to proceed with their activities in Nicaragua. "Activists had to decide whether the organization should cease to exist or change its mission and program. The fundraising crisis… made it difficult to enter into a lengthy decision-making process,"

(Weber, 2004, p. 107).

Despite these difficulties, Witness for Peace did go through a process of listening to local partners and determining where their solidarity efforts could best be directed. The end of the war did not mean the end of poverty, nor the end of dependent economic and political relations with the United States. Thus, Witness for Peace chose to shift focus from the violence of the Contra war to the 'economic violence' of trade agreements and structural adjustment policies. The organization's choice of the phrase 'economic violence' was quite deliberate, Weber (2004) reveals. Organization leadership felt it would allow for a shift in focus without a shift in the overall framing of the issue, which remained based on the idea of injustice and immoral relations between the US and Nicaragua. "The primary focus of solidarity work in the United States has shifted to organizing against policies such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement, or CAFTA, and the understanding that debt and poverty are likely to increase under the current global economic system," (p. 10).

Once these new activities were established in Nicaragua, another choice was made, this time to spread out to incorporate long-term volunteer teams and short-term delegations in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Starting first in Guatemala, then later spreading to teams in Mexico, Cuba, and Colombia, Witness for Peace expanded their model of solidarity action in Nicaragua to other parts of the region impacted by similar US policies and the dynamics of the international economic system (Weber, 2004, p. 127-128).

Witness for Peace works on a decentralized model, with the various international teams coordinated out of a national office in Washington, D.C. This office is also the central point for all of the organization's lobbying efforts directed at Congress and the

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federal government. There are a series of regional committees that manage local initiatives and help to recruit participants for solidarity trips. In keeping with organizational tradition, these groups are referred to as delegations. There are typically a handful of scheduled delegations every year, and this information is publicized through the regional committees and on the main Witness for Peace website. These delegations are usually organized around a theme or focus area, which varies according to destination. In the case of Nicaragua, delegations are often organized around exploring the 'roots of migration', which is of relevance to a US audience given the status of illegal immigration from Central America as a current issue in domestic politics. However, these scheduled tours are sometimes postponed or cancelled due to lack of interest (Witness for Peace 2011, personal communication). Instead, the delegation calendar, particularly for the Nicaragua team, has recently been filled with custom delegations organized in collaboration with a particular group – often a social justice class or student group from a post-secondary institution. For instance, during the spring and summer of 2011, typically the busiest time for delegations, the Nicaragua team hosted eight different custom tours and only one that was organized from within Witness for Peace itself – the annual 'teen delegation' that brings young people together from all over the US.

   While there are subtle differences between each custom tour experience, the basic approach is relatively uniform. The delegations last between ten and 14 days, and depending on the case, groups may continue on in Nicaragua to do more traditional tourist activities or carry out a project component with a different organization. Witness for Peace does not engage in development project work as part of their solidarity travel experiences. Each group does spend time visiting a rural host community – one of four small communities in the north of Nicaragua with whom Witness for Peace has a long-

term relationship. Typically, this rural homestay lasts several days, meaning that the majority of the tour is spent in and around Managua, where Witness for Peace is based. Delegates stay in a group hostel run by the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD) that is conveniently located just a few blocks away from the Witness for Peace offices. During the day, solidarity travelers are taken to visit markets, community organizations, and sites of historical and political significance around Managua. All groups visit the US embassy at some point during their time in Nicaragua to hear the 'official' vision of how the United States policies impact and influence Nicaragua. Witness for Peace staff lead the groups, providing facilitation and translation for guest speakers who generally speak Spanish only. On a daily basis, travelers are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and discuss their impressions with other group members. Witness for Peace staff also facilitate these reflection sessions, and lead a concluding session in which groups are encouraged to develop an action plan for their return to the United States.

The Witness for Peace motto is 'transforming people, transforming policy', but while they attempt to direct participating groups towards resources and opportunities for engagement in political advocacy work, there are limits to the organization's capacity to monitor or support post-trip integration and consolidation of travelers individual commitment to the movement. Chapter 6 reveals that in addition to hosting delegations, the three-member Nicaragua team has to maintain relationships with local organizations and host communities, as well as actively monitoring the effects of US policy in Nicaragua. Since 2009, the Nicaragua team has also spent a great deal of time focusing on events in Honduras, after a coup removed the democratically-elected President, Manuel Zelaya. While delegations are not travelling to Honduras at this point, staff members do participate in fact-finding trips and then report back to the organization and

the public through the website and weblog. This first scheduled delegation to Honduras is set for November, 2012, and the Managua-based staff are now referred to as the Nicaragua-Honduras International Team.

5.3 Solidarity through education and project work - Casa Canadiense.

While Witness for Peace has had to adapt its themes and central motivations for their solidarity travelers over the years, Casa Canadiense is an example of a hosting organization that has begun to shift its approach to solidarity through travel by shifting its focus from service to exposure. Founded in the early 1990s by a group of educators from the Greater Toronto Area, Casa has always existed to create links between Canadian youth and their Nicaraguan counterparts. The impetus for the creation of the group came from individuals who had themselves been exposed to the concept of solidarity through travel to Nicaragua during the Sandinista period, and these experiences encouraged them to create an educational opportunity for Canadian high-school students.

Located in a working-class neighbourhood in central Managua, the heart of Casa Canadiense's operations in Nicaragua is the 'casa' itself – a house that serves as the organization's offices and the home base for two local coordinators, Canadian citizens who are employed for a two-year term. The house is also equipped with group accommodation quarters, and high-school groups stay right at the Casa when they come to Nicaragua. Much like Witness for Peace, tours are concentrated at a particular time of year, generally close to spring break in March or April. Because the organization is unable to accommodate all groups in such a short time frame, some high schools arrive earlier in the winter semester.

Unlike Witness for Peace, the coordinators employed by Casa Canadiense do not

accompany the high school groups when they are in Nicaragua. Instead, this facilitation and translation role is Contracted out to a number of available and capable individuals. The teachers that accompany their students from Canada are also centrally involved in debriefing the group after meetings and experiences. The Casa Canadiense model for solidarity is much more centered on the rural community homestay when compared to the approach taken by Witness for Peace. Nicaraguan communities apply to Casa with a project for which they are seeking fundraising and volunteer support. In past years, school groups were given the opportunity to select projects that interested them, but recently this process has changed so that the Casa coordinators, in collaboration with an advisory group of Nicaraguan partners, select the organizations and assign them to each of the school groups that are scheduled to travel to Nicaragua that year (see Chapter 6 for details). The students in each group are then responsible for organizing a fundraising campaign to support both the community project and their own travel to Nicaragua. Once they arrive, they travel to the community to help in the execution of the project.

Casa's Canadian operations were, until this past winter, exclusively volunteer run, which greatly limited the organization's capacity to coordinate preparation for the travel experience and post-trip reflection and action. This had been left in the hands of the teachers affiliated with each partner school. However, thanks to a successful grant application in the winter of 2012, Casa Canadiense hired a part-time staff member responsible for providing opportunities for students from different schools to collaborate on projects and initiatives once they return to Canada. Thus far, this has included the creation of Youth Advisory Council that encourages students and past participants to advise the Casa program committee and board on ways to improve the travel experience. For the first time in the organization's history, students from different schools were able to

meet together in early spring 2012 to debrief and discuss their travel to Nicaragua and the next steps to take toward solidarity. The organization has also started a group blog to provide participants with a place to share their stories and experiences in terms of both travel and activism, and a 'return delegation' consisting of young Nicaraguans made the trip to Canada in the spring of 2012.

5.4 Solidarity through fair trade promotion - UCA San Ramón

Tourism is not the central mission of the Union de Cooperativas Agropecuarias (UCA) San Ramón. In the 1980s, the Sandinistas instituted agrarian reform, which delivered thousands acres of land to peasants and workers in cooperatives. After the 1990 elections, cooperatives lost government support as funding and technical assistance were cut off. Furthermore, the state company dedicated to marketing all grains and coffee produced in Nicaragua was also eliminated. In some cases, local elites expropriated cooperative property that had been part of a land reform and redistribution program under the Sandinistas.

In this new context, the idea of forming a local peasant organization was developed. In 1991 three cooperatives decided to join together in order to prevent smallholders from having to sell their coffee to intermediaries at artificially low prices (UCA San Ramón, 2011).

UCA San Ramón was incorporated in April of 1992, and it grew rapidly, expanding to 31 member cooperatives by 1995. At that early stage, the priorities of the organization were to legalize the land titles of its members, and obtain credit to help make small farmers more productive. Access to fair trade certification for coffee by the Fairtrade Labelling Organization (FLO) has guaranteed a base price for coffee greater

than the local market and also offers a bonus of ten dollars per quintal, a weight measure equivalent to 100 pounds or about 46 kilos. However, in order to receive this benefit, UCA San Ramón and its members have had to comply with onerous safeguards and standards established by these certifying organizations.

Some of these standards involve what Jayadev and Bowles (2006) refer to as the increase in 'guard labour' for producers and other participants in ethical commodity networks. Essentially, more work must be done to ensure that production meets environmental and other standards in order to be certified as organic or fair trade. Not only does this additional work increase people's burden in terms of time, the nature of this work is supervisory and disciplinary in nature. Ironically, the authors point out that non-ethical production requires much less 'guard labour' that does the farming or production of ethical commodities.

Lyon *et. al* (2010) add that the change to fair trade production methods has altered the gender balance in coffee farming work. On the one hand, significantly higher 'gourmet' quality requirements tend to increase women's labour burdens since women typically perform key quality-producing steps such as washing, drying, and selection. On the other, fair trade–organic cooperatives may gain access to technical support and credit support, allowing them to purchase mechanized equipment that can dramatically reduce women's labour (p. 97).

The benefits to women are quite substantial, as they have been encouraged to participate in regional organizations like UCA San Ramón and its member cooperatives. Women are also able to hold title to their own land, and FLO payment procedures ensure that income is distributed directly to producers, avoiding the problem of women being denied access to their income from coffee farming by husbands or male relatives.

Despite these substantial gains, the membership of UCA San Ramón have been experiencing the problem of diminishing incomes from coffee production for the last number of years. Lyon and his co-authors (2010) observe that fair trade–organic coffee prices have been stagnant for ten years and show a sharp decline when adjusted for inflation, especially when compared with average prices during the early 1980s (p. 102). Specifically in Nicaragua, Wilson (2010) reports that Nicaragua's coffee exports collapsed in 2001, dropping to levels only 50 per cent as high compared to the previous year. The immediate consequences were that as many as 3,000 coffee farmers had to foreclose and credit to the coffee sector collapsed, as banks cut lending by 80 per cent compared to 1999 levels (p. 84).

In his field research in rural Nicaragua, Wilson (2010) found that one of the most significant barriers to increasing solvency as described by peasant coffee farmers was the limited amount of coffee under cultivation and their aging coffee plots. In Wilson's study, the average farm size reported was six hectares with two of those devoted to coffee production. (p. 87) This is consistent with the land parcels in San Ramón, where family farms varied from four to ten *manzanas*; a Nicaraguan unit of land measurement equivalent to ¾ of a hectare. These farms were all mixed-use, with substantial portions devoted to corn and bean planting. Coffee plants were generally seen as a third priority crop, unsurprising given the local families' status as 'subsistence plus' producers.

Wilson (2010) argues further that due to a lack of government subsidy for small farmers in Nicaragua, the producers of fair trade coffee are extremely vulnerable to what he terms the 'simple reproduction squeeze'. This process is triggered when peasant commodity producers confront falling prices and rising household costs; declining productivity caused by labour or land exhaustion, rising production costs, and market

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uncertainty caused by "no assurance that there will be increased returns to labor commensurate with the costs incurred." (p. 88)

This 'coffee crisis' inspired an attempt at diversification through tourism promotion. Harvey and Kelsay (2010) discuss a specific area of Costa Rica that was targeted for the development of a coffee tour. Their experience reflects some of the challenges and limitations faced by communities in San Ramón. Shrinking farm sizes, the pull of the city and international migration for those families seeking more economic security, and the relatively remote nature of the areas being off the tourist trail in either Costa Rica or Nicaragua (203). The success of launching the project, as in San Ramón, depended on two factors, external support and local champions, and the willingness on the part of the regional agricultural cooperative to try new initiatives and diversify activities beyond the agricultural commodity production activities with which they were traditionally involved (202). Costa Rica certainly enjoys a more established tourist infrastructure and a larger share of the international travel market than Nicaragua. However, early indications from the development of coffee tourism in Los Santos are good news for communities involved in the San Ramón project, particularly for those like El Roblar, that seek to incorporate a retail link with their coffee products.

Chesworth (2010) describes the experience of 'Just Us', a small coffee-roasting firm based in Nova Scotia. This small business heard from customers and activists that a tour to visit producers of the coffee they sold would be well attended. They organized their first tours in 2008 and have been collaborating with a cooperative of indigenous coffee-producing communities in Mexico ever since. Their tours are small and focused on creating direct contacts between the producers and consumers of coffee. The tour participants live and work alongside the community members for several days, learning

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about the process of growing and processing coffee at the farm level (p. 177). In interviews, past participants reflected on the 'life-changing' nature of the tour experiences, especially focusing on their new awareness of the difficult labour involved in picking and processing the coffee fruit (p.178).

Goodwin and Boekhold (2010) describe the development of a coffee tour intended to expand livelihood options for small-scale coffee producers in Tanzania. The tourists who participate do not have their experience mediated by a guide, but rather deal directly with farmers in small groups. The focus and initial point of discussion is coffee and the farm experience, but "…the conversation soon expands into a personal encounter about school, children and football – with both the farmers and the tourists asking questions on the other. This is not a conventional tourist experience; it is much closer to the host and guest paradigm," (p.185).

> "The tourists leave having enjoyed a meaningful social encounter with a Tanzanian coffee farmer, gained a practical understanding of the effort required to grow coffee and produce the beans, and a keen awareness of the difference in price at the farm gate and on supermarket shelves. This is an understanding and experience that probably ensures that tourists will go home and talk about the importance of buying fairly traded coffee" (p.186).

Like in the case of San Ramón, the farmers who host tourists in the Tanzanian program have very small farm plots, meaning that very little coffee can be produced in a given year. Because of this limitation, the economic contribution of tourism participation overhauls that income earned by coffee farming very quickly. As those early adopters who hosted tourists in the early 2000s began to see substantial gains, the desire to participate in the coffee tour rapidly expanded within the hosting communities (p. 191).

The organizations profiled in this study encompass a range of perspectives, approaches to solidarity, histories, and communities in which they operate. Organizations

such as Witness for Peace, Casa Canadiense, and UCA San Ramon are shaped and re-shaped by individuals, both those that work for the group in question, and those that are served by its activities. The subsequent chapter discusses the personal narratives of some of the individuals who have been part of the solidarity travel experiences provided by these organizations.

6. Findings

This chapter includes three sections, each corresponding to a different group involved in solidarity travel. First, the staff stories from North American organizations are analyzed, based on interviews with ten individuals who have worked or currently work, with Witness for Peace (six individuals) and Casa Canadiense (four people). In the second section, the travelers' tales are explored, based on interviews with five former solidarity travelers who have visited Nicaragua through one of the two North American organizations. Some of the interviews with solidarity tourists took place well after their return to North America. Results from the analysis of touring group-created videos and blog posts are presented in this section, for the 'in the moment' reflections and observations, provide insight into travelers' perceptions and experiences before and during the solidarity tours.

The final section of the findings chapter discusses one rural 'host' community and a local Nicaraguan cooperative that arranges tours focused on fair trade coffee production. Interviews were conducted with two organizational staff, six heads of household involved in accommodating tourists in their homes, and one local guide responsible for leading the tourist groups around the community and explaining the coffee growing process.

6.1 Findings: Staff Stories

6.1.1 Introduction

For all of the organizations included in this study – Witness for Peace, Casa Canadiense, and UCA San Ramón – interviews were conducted with staff members in

their Nicaraguan office spaces, located in Managua for the first two organizations and in San Ramón in the final case. Ultimately, the interview responses from the two UCA San Ramón staff differed significantly from those of organizational staff from Casa Canadiense and Witness for Peace. As a result, these responses are incorporated into an analysis of the seven host community interviews from San Ramón, as all these individuals provide a Nicaraguan perspective on solidarity travel.

There are a number of characteristics that staff employed by solidarity travel organizations share – on the most basic level, they tend to be young people, recent graduates from a first university degree, with an academic background in international development and previous activism experience at the community or campus level. All of the staff members interviewed had traveled or studied abroad in Latin America prior to their current employment and most came to know about the organization they now work for through earlier travel or activism experiences with other organizations.

In terms of the model of solidarity demonstrated by the organizations, interviewed staff members seem to have a critical, reflective approach that questions both the effectiveness of their work in a specific way and the more general limitations of solidarity travel. What is more, it appears that both Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense encourage this internal critique and work towards improving their operations based on the recommendations of staff.

6.1.2 Joining the movement - Study, travel and serendipity.

There are a number of ways that staff members discuss their first exposure to Nicaragua and the possibility of solidarity work. Every interviewee cited a travel experience, if not in Nicaragua, then to a similar location in Latin America and the

Caribbean, as an important formative experience that raised awareness about the

location but also about the connections between these places and their own lives in

Canada or the United States. Some of these travel experiences were labeled as 'service

learning' or 'solidarity trips' but this did not necessarily translate into practice as the

following quotation from Amanda illustrates.

> "My first experience in Nicaragua came on a service learning trip in 1997. I was really interested in going on a trip like that, and it just happened that those dates worked best for me – so it wasn't anything in particular about Nicaragua that was interesting to me at the time. I never would recommend anyone participating in a trip like the one I went on – there was no interpretation to speak of, and so we were facing a double barrier of the language and the big differences in culture. It was a group tour for youth, so there were people like myself, just out of high school, and others all the way up to age 30. It was a pretty lengthy trip – five months including overland travel from Canada through to Central America, and four of those months were spent in a community setting. Even so, without the benefit of interpretation, there was really only so much that we were able to understand about what was going on and why" (**Amanda**, former coordinator, Casa Canadiense).

Amanda mentions her somewhat unintentional choice of Nicaragua as a

destination, and for others, including Brooke, Nicaragua was in fact a second choice for

travel and eventual work opportunities.

> "I had spent a whole year away from the States on my study abroad experience, and it just happened that the last country I spent time in was Nicaragua. Actually, I had really been interested in returning to Mexico and I wanted to pursue something there but when I saw there was an opportunity with Witness in Nicaragua I thought it might work as well." (**Brooke**, international team member, Witness for Peace)

Others counted on personal connections or coincidence to make their connections

to the country or organization.

> "For me, the most fruitful travel experiences I have had involve personal connections, rather than sightseeing or something along those lines. I traveled to Nicaragua after my first year in college to visit my friend, who is Nica and lives in Managua. It was my first time in a country that is majority poor… so looking back that experience really stands out for me. This same friend was the one who alerted

me to the fact that Witness was hiring staff for their Nicaragua team." (**Riahl**, international team member, Witness for Peace).

"My first experience in Nicaragua came on a women's studies course at the University of Manitoba, there was an exchange component with a university on the Caribbean coast. The professor was actually one of the founding members of Casa and so we stayed here when we first arrived. Amanda was the coordinator at the time, so I got to know her and learned about what the organization does." (**Lindsay**, program coordinator, Casa Canadiense)

For some staff, Nicaragua had not been on their travel or study itineraries prior to

taking up employment with their organizations, but the experiences they had elsewhere

had initiated a process of thinking about issues, connections and solidarity work.

"During my university education I took a field course in Ecuador on conservation biology and cultural anthropology. It was a bit of a strange experience, in that we were very much in a self-enclosed bubble, travelling from place to place on air conditioned buses, not really spending much time with Ecuadoreans. It felt funny… later, I took a trip to Cuba independently, to visit farms and community supported agricultural projects. I used some contacts from my connections in Canada but in general it was a situation where I would show up at a farm and ask if I could work for the day, talking to them and so on. That, to me, was more of a solidarity experience." (**Ian**, delegation coordinator, Casa Canadiense)

"When I was in college I traveled to Mexico with the American Friends Service Committee and that's where I realized, I think, that solidarity is pretty complicated in practice. It's not an easy thing to carry out. The key component is being self-reflective and questioning the decisions you are making." (**Galen**, former international team member, Witness for Peace, and Contract facilitator, Casa Canadiense)

Galen's travel experience sparked an interest that he intended to follow up on

after continuing his studies, and it was through a friend's recommendation that he

discovered a deeper family connection to the work he was about to begin.

"After I graduated from college, I wanted to go back to Latin America to work on my Spanish – people knew I had traveled and volunteered in Mexico and South America so someone suggested Witness for Peace and I thought it was completely up my alley. The focus on US policy, and the history of the organization is really amazing and that it was a pretty radical organization was attractive to me as well. It wasn't until I had decided to apply that I found out that my Mom had traveled to Nicaragua with Witness in 1985. I knew, obviously, that she was really engaged

with anti-war and social justice movement activities at home, but I had no idea." (**Galen**)

6.1.3 Linking philosophy with practice.

With travel and educational experiences informing their choices, and friends and family pointing them in the direction of Witness for Peace or Casa Canadiense, the prospective employees had to determine if these organizations worked in a way they could agree with, as Riahl points out.

> "The idea of going to another country… I wasn't naïve about the arrogance that can come with that position, the outsider identifying problems outside their own context. At the same time, it was pretty clear to me that I needed to make change in my 'community' and in a nuanced way that could include other places. Living in Nicaragua but facilitating the education visit of US citizens meant that the change process was one intended for the United States, the root of the problems that we address is US foreign policy. So this really coincided well with my philosophical outlook about making change. I don't consider our work as that of a development organization. Some development organizations have a political outlook but I find that we are unique in that we incorporate those political ideas and goals right into our analysis. All of this was evident to me from the Witness website and through the job application process."(**Riahl**)

> "I had first come to know about Witness and their work in 2003 at an anti-free trade rally in Miami, and after that I checked their website periodically. I really found that what I was involved in at the time was really quite similar, anti-war, peace activism sort of stuff. So when I eventually decided to leave grad school and look for work opportunities I knew that I would be pretty comfortable working for an organization like this." (**Christine**, international team member, Witness for Peace)

The organization's philosophy is revealed to staff in two distinct ways – the pedagogical approach to educating travelers, and through partnerships with local speakers and homestay communities. Most of the staff interviewed were very positive about the pedagogical approaches of their organization, which in the case of Witness for Peace is based around 'exposure' through meetings and workshops. Casa Canadiense,

meanwhile, incorporates a project element to their work with groups of students from

Canada.

> "Casa had six or seven years of history before I became the coordinator, so I sort of picked up on what had been happening through my conversations with the outgoing coordinator and with some of the founders of the group in Canada, but I was the one who sort of labeled what we were doing as 'service learning' – it was more a matter of finding a name for what the school groups were doing in Nicaragua when they came down. Gradually we have shifted away from such a focus on building and projects, the groups were pretty wedded to that idea and there was a need for critical discussion around issues of power and perception." (**Amanda**)

That Casa Canadiense was open to a change in their pedagogical approach is

seen in a very positive light by staff. They point out that it was previous staff members

who initiated the change, rather than the teachers or founders of the organization and

that the transition, while not yet met with resistance, requires careful ongoing attention to

ensure that the school groups understand the motivations behind the shift.

> "The push towards more exposure, moving groups away from the 'doing' and towards more listening, that has been pursued by a series of coordinators and other volunteers we've had in the recent past. One key figure was James, who was a participant in one of the school trips early on. He became really involved in the Toronto social justice scene and then became coordinator for two years. He questioned what we were doing and how Casa operated with communities in Nicaragua and really moved us towards where we are now. So it hasn't come from the teachers or schools, and it hasn't been the founders of Casa initiating these changes." (**Amanda**)

> "At Casa we have decided that we want to walk the line between that approach and have more involvement in service learning. We're integrating more exposure activities in Managua and more facilitation and debriefing from Casa coordinators and facilitators during the trip. There is a lot of education to do on the Canadian side so that there is an appreciation for this new approach. There tends to be a sense that the group isn't 'doing' anything if they aren't building something, but if the partner community doesn't want something to be built… We don't see anyone dropping out but its important for us to see how the schools feel as the transition is made." (**Katie**, program committee member, Casa Canadiense)

Katie's comments reveal another important motivation for the recent changes in Casa's approach – recognition that in order to work in solidarity with Nicaraguan communities, the needs of these partners ought to be made paramount.

> "The way it used to work was that the high school groups would fundraise for their travel and any money that was surplus would be directed to projects. The schools would decide what they wanted to fund, and the coordinators in Managua would seek out communities that were interested in being involved. So that, if a school group wanted to do a project related to water, Casa would have to find a place that wanted to be part of that. Now we solicit proposals, and match as best as we can with the school groups. Because before, with the schools saying 'we want to do this or that', and then giving money to the partners, we couldn't necessarily build long-lasting relationships with the communities." (**Katie**)

This shift towards longer-term partnerships with Nicaraguan communities and an 'exposure' model of travel that focuses on meetings, workshops and dialogue with organizations and experts could eventually bring Casa Canadiense's operations closer to the model currently used by Witness for Peace. The Witness approach to delegation travel emphasizes the workshop and meeting approach, with a short rural homestay component near the end of the experience. The staff has found that this approach allows for a lot of information to be shared and knowledge gained, but it is also exhausting for both staff and travelers alike.

> "When you are leading a delegation, it's a pretty intense beast. There are so many levels you are operating on – you have to facilitate, you're responsible for logistics, maintaining the pedagogy you've developed, managing the relationships with the host communities and the speakers, and so there are moments where you are just overwhelmed. The pedagogy that Witness uses for delegations is really incredible and effective. When you combine the meetings throughout Nicaragua with the time spent in the community homestay, you can sometimes see a pretty amazing shift in the perspectives of the delegates and how they are inspired to become agents for change." (**Galen)**

> "When it comes to changing or improving the experience, the first thing that comes to mind is to have a longer trip. That might give delegates more space, and not to have every thing so packed in. If they were here a bit longer, they could also see more of Nicaragua, right now almost all the time is spent in Managua, then four days at most in a more rural setting in another department." (**Christine**)

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Not only are Witness for Peace staff asked to perform a variety of roles in the course of a delegation's visit, these roles can sometimes put them in the position of seeming to have expertise and the capability to represent a Nicaraguan perspective, despite their best efforts to avoid this connection in the minds of the delegates.

> "We do serve a number of roles, we are chaperones, we are the go-to people for safety or health concerns. We did first aid training. We are obviously translators; we know how to get around the city so in that sense we are guides. Part of the curriculum involves a historical tour of Managua that we facilitate. We also deliver lectures and run workshops on the history of neoliberalism, CAFTA and US foreign policy. The big thing that stands out to me is that we are trying to fight off the notion of being experts. We know we aren't and we strive not to play that role. Sometimes, delegates feel more comfortable directing questions to people with whom they share a language and spend more time with. My personal strategy is always to redirect and suggest that they should bring that up in our next meeting. Our philosophy is that we are taking people to 'the experts'." (**Riahl**)

Casa Canadiense, meanwhile, attempts to hire Nicaraguan facilitators whenever possible, allowing the coordinators in Managua to focus on relationship building with their partner communities. Staff members from both organizations cite the rural homestay component as being a very significant time for the travelers, as it allowed some of the more abstract concepts about economic and social inequity to become very apparent and immediate. Casa Canadiense groups tend to spend a majority of their time, between one week and ten days, in the homestay community, while Witness for Peace delegations typically spend less than a week in the rural setting.

> "The transition doesn't really become apparent until the end, right about the time of the homestay component. Even when it seems that they aren't being inspired by the meetings and the material, in the action planning event right at the end it sort of clicks into place, and until that moment you just don't know how it has affected people." (**Brooke**)

> "In an ideal world I would like to see a day or two of work, the students participating in a community work party, and this would give people exposure to how projects are part of community development. Exposure to how communities

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here organize and act… there are some really important lessons to be learned." (**Amanda**)

Of the staff members interviewed during the course of this research, Galen was in the unique position of being able to comment on both the Casa and Witness model of solidarity travel. Having spent two years as a Witness for Peace international team member, he chose to remain in Managua working as a Contract facilitator for a variety of delegation travel groups, including Casa Canadiense.

> "The Witness for Peace approach is one where there is no money or material provided for the community, but we will both grow through our contact and relationship. On one level, its important to keep this model of solidarity alive, rather than escaping guilt through providing material support, but at the same time, Witness for Peace's mission is to change US policy and despite some minor success, US policies for the most part march on as before. So for communities where we have had relationships for ten years, it makes sense for them to ask what kind of an impact their connections with Witness have had. I think it makes sense to consider other models that might more effectively be in solidarity with the communities in the interim. In that way, I think that Casa and Witness have things they can learn from one another. That Casa groups are in the *campo* for a week or nine days allows them to build a different kind of relationship in their homestays, and participating in a community project can encourage people to consider the community's situation very directly." (**Galen**)

6.1.4 Preparing groups to travel, and dealing with diversity.

Two areas of concern brought forward by staff in both organizations had to do with the pre-travel preparation of delegates and the diversity of the travelers and the organizations themselves. In all cases, the interviewees demonstrated a critical awareness of their positions in a larger system of privilege and power, where their status as white, educated and relatively well-off people provided them with status and an opportunity to participate in a movement that has fairly high barriers to entry in terms of resources and political status. For instance, delegation fees are high enough that lower income people would likely be unable to participate. Also, traveling across international boundaries

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requires the possession of a valid passport. Trying to encourage an awareness of this

shared privilege among delegates was seen as part of the task, as is attempting to lower

barriers so that people without status or resources could potentially become solidarity

travelers in the future.

> "Diversity of the group I think is one of the issues we are still working on, and in many ways it depends on how the groups are organized. As they do fundraise to support their travel it is possible for the groups to support students who might be less well-off and that has in some cases led to a real diverse group of students, which is great for the local partners as well… the other side of the groups getting caught up in fundraising is that it becomes easy for those kind of activities to replace learning time before the trip." (**Amanda**)

> "In my experience, deeper education beforehand leads to a deeper experience on the trip, so in our communications with the school groups we are really wanting it to not just be about itinerary and logistical stuff, but also around readings, discussions and issues-based stuff. Preparation doesn't necessarily have to be very complicated – it's important to have a group talk about why people want to be doing this, why are they participating in the trip? People will have different answers, and it helps to get everyone thinking about motivations and perceptions of themselves and their relationship to the issues." (**Lindsay**)

> "The decisions we make have global and political impacts, so how can we make decisions in solidarity? That's what our work tries to answer. There are limits that kind of hinder the solidarity nature of this work. It takes so much more effort and money trying to bring one Nicaraguan to the US when compared to a large group the other way. Ideally, it would be as much of a two-way street as possible, but what we are able to do is participate in a larger movement to create a more just immigration and travel policy in the US." (**Riahl**)

> "I think its important that people who are in positions of relative power have the opportunity to be the newcomer or outsider in a situation, because once people have experienced that there can be a different level of empathy for those in that position on an ongoing basis. This is how we can build a new generation of advocates for social justice." (**Ian**)

Pre-travel preparation packages tend to include a lot of logistical information,

although both Witness and Casa provide readings for future delegations. In the case of

both organizations, the international team members and coordinators are not responsible

for ensuring that pre-travel work or reading is done. For Casa groups, that role is played

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by teachers, while delegation leaders or regional coordinators take on the task as best they can in Witness for Peace delegations.

> "Its really up to the coordinator on the ground to do the pre or post-trip work. This could be someone that comes from the university or delegation leaders. For those that apply to come through the WFP regional delegations then relate back to their regional coordinators. I think there are pluses and minuses to this approach… we aren't the ones who get to facilitate the whole process so perhaps the dialogue isn't as focused or potent as it could be. But, this way we can reach a wider variety of people – people can take their experiences in a number of different directions, its very open in that regard." (**Riahl**)

> "It is always better when delegations have some sort of structure in place to prepare people before they go on delegations, even in terms of the Spanish language component. I'm not sure how you would standardize that, maybe along the lines of Witness for Peace chapters on campuses, to maintain the cycle of preparation, delegation and follow-up." (**Christine**)

6.1.5 Keeping track of transformation.

Staff interviewees had a range of responses when asked what happens after the delegations return home to the United States and Canada. One common thought expressed was that the kind of personal transformation that could take place during an exposure trip would be hard to measure or track in any substantial way. Others expressed a sense of the limitations to solidarity though a single travel experience, but hoped that the delegates would be inspired to continue learning and pursing social and economic justice in their own lives. In terms of participation with the organizations themselves, there seemed to be more frequency of direct contact and continued participation in Casa Canadiense activities and administration than was the case for Witness for Peace, something attributed by staff to the dispersed nature of the organization's presence in the US.

> "I think it's important that Casa reinforces the idea that change happens in Canada with student's families and communities and through a more systemic understanding of issues. We have had students move into volunteer positions with

Casa, one now sits on our program committee. But we could do more in terms of figuring out how to reach out to alumni more effectively. We have been really conscious of trying to put a younger face on our board and committee activities, and really engaging with social media. It's as simple as noticing that there are comments from alumni on photos or posts on the Casa Facebook page and responding directly." (**Amanda**)

The use of informal contact with former delegates and participants through social media was a common response from many of the staff, and there was a recognition that a lack of organizational resources prevented much in the way of more formal follow-up or evaluation for groups and group leaders.

"The idea is that people return to the USA and work to make change in their communities. We have a decent amount of informal Contract with delegates afterwards through Facebook and email. They send us articles they have written for campus or community news sources, keep us informed about the follow-through of their action planning. I have seen that there are a wide range of results in terms of getting involved in solidarity work." (**Riahl**)

"I think when the delegations first come back to the States, they've just done the action planning and so there will be a little spur to action. But past that point there's not as much contact with us. Maybe groups come back again the next year, or there will be contact with regional coordinators. Sometimes people who went on delegations a number of years ago are back in Nicaragua and they want to touch base with Witness, so they will come and chat. That's another form of follow-up that we get involved in." (**Christine**)

Some interviewees emphasized that the transitory nature of the solidarity travel experience could leave the real, ongoing work of solidarity to the coordinating organizations like Casa and Witness, through their longer-term interactions with Nicaraguan partners.

"When I think of solidarity, I think of some kind of reciprocal relationship or one where that reciprocation can or should be part of it. With the homestay families, we stay in contact with them in between delegations, and we hear that from their perspective, delegations come, and there can be six months or so in between visits, not from the same group, but from any group. So if delegates don't send pictures, or find some way to stay in touch, then the people from the community don't feel that they are making an impact or are part of their lives. So it's a moment of solidarity, during the trip, but it isn't constant." (**Christine**)

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"Solidarity is a long-term project. We've had relationships with individuals and communities for well over a decade. The importance of maintaining those long-term contacts, not personally but through organizational continuity, is vital. Sometimes people have to be aware of the danger of 'one-click actions' because they can offer a sensationalized, diminished view of the issues. The delegates are not here for very long and they may never come back. But Witness is here to stay. Change takes time, if it does happen, so solidarity is about sticking with it."
(**Brooke**)

With limited capability to bring 'reverse' delegations back to North America, staff from both organizations recognized the uni-directional nature of solidarity travel as limiting to the development of lasting relationships. Witness for Peace brings one or two 'experts' or community representatives to the United States every fall for a campus speaker's tour. Casa Canadiense has managed to bring a small number of community members to Canada to participate in workshops and awareness-raising activities.

"There seems to be more willingness to grant visas and so on to people coming through the well-established groups. But there are limits to what Casa can do as a smaller, less established organization. It's something we have to build in to the consciousness of the high school groups coming from Canada. Experiential learning is a really valuable way to build global consciousness, but we do have to ask why people want these experiences for themselves and figure out other ways we can encourage the development of that kind of education. People want to feel connected, if you are looking for your place in the world, then travel is one way to help find it, but then we have to also explore other ways of approaching it."
(**Lindsay**)

Another question raised by a number of interviewees was whether or not a solidarity travel experience could be considered successful if delegates felt informed and empowered enough to remain in North America and do solidarity work from their home communities after returning from their initial trip. The alternative approach, as suggested by some participants, would see the delegates have the desire to continue traveling to Nicaragua as a sign of the impact and success of their original solidarity trip.

"How do you measure the impact of an experience like this on a young person? Maybe they change ideas about their career or the way they live their lives on a daily basis. That can be a really appropriate measurement for these trips. If people

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are interested in coming back, does that mean the trip has been successful? Or is it more successful if people don't want to come back? I guess a successful connection between people means that they wouldn't feel the need to come back in order to maintain that relationship. At some point, in-person communication is really important, you don't have to tell people you are supporting them, because you are actually demonstrating that." (**Lindsay**)

"In my view, you don't need a lot of these kind of experiences, maybe two or three at key points in your development. The occasional exposure trip makes sense to me. (**Ian**)

"One former delegate let me know that she was joining the Peace Corps. Someone else wanted to get in touch with Los Quinchos (an organization working with street youth) because she was hoping to come back and do a long-term volunteer placement with them. The thing is, we can never be sure if people would have engaged in certain kinds of action anyway, or come to Nicaragua a few times, even without being part of the delegation." (**Christine**)

Christine's final point, that solidarity travel may attract those pre-disposed to

activism and the struggle for justice, could mean that this form of tourism serves more to

confirm people's ideas about oppression and poverty rather than transforming their

perspectives through exposure and dialogue with others. When asked to reflect on this

possibility, the interviewed staff members observed that their own perspectives on

solidarity and oppression had changed through their work with Casa and Witness,

leading them to believe that transformation through travel was a true possibility for

delegates as well.

> "My work here has changed my perspective on what it means to be anti-oppressive. Prior to this, a lot of my perspective was informed by theoretical analysis and now I realize the need to put that to one side and honour the perspectives of people on the ground that are actively experiencing this oppression. I'm not dismissing my perspective entirely, but acknowledging that my analysis is incomplete… and that I need to pay attention to these other perspectives, particularly those people that I claim to be in solidarity with." (**Riahl**)

> "I think it is quite possible that people's attitudes are reinforced by this kind of experience. I grew up in the US and things are much more dichotomized there, the right-left divide is pretty obvious even in high school. So, I feel that Canadian youth exist on more of a range of attitudes. Even if you do accept that it takes

some basic interest in these issues to want to participate in a group like the ones traveling to Nicaragua, there's always room for growth and improvement, and critical analysis of your own position. It can be good too, for people who are feeling and acting in solidarity already to affirm that they are doing the right thing. People, especially young people, can sometimes feel that they have things figured out but experiences like exposure travel can make them aware that they still have lots of room for change in their lives." (**Ian**)

The idea of small, incremental transformations on a longer journey towards greater solidarity is a theme that was reflected in conversations with returned travelers, whose narratives form the basis for the next section of research findings.

6.2 Travelers Tales

6.2.1 Introduction

Former solidarity travelers share some important characteristics with the organizational staff profiled in the previous section. Most participants discussed some previous experience with educational, volunteer, or solidarity travel, and all were students or recent graduates. Many, though not all, were directly engaged in academic programs that explored of the themes and focus areas of the organization they had traveled with. It is important to note that for the most part, these tour participants were at an emergent stage of involvement in the solidarity movement, and several participants discussed their time in Nicaragua as an important catalyst for further study and engagement with these issues.

Individuals' prior experience and knowledge, as well as the particular dynamics of the touring group, are vital elements that shape the way study participants experienced solidarity travel in Nicaragua. However, both through post-travel interviews and in the analysis of Internet journal postings and videos filmed during the trips, a number of key experiences or moments were emphasized. In the case of Witness for Peace delegations,

the homestay experience, where travelers spend a few days in a rural community, was seen as a highlight, as was the experience of visiting the Managua city dump and a fair trade textile plant. Participants involved in these delegations also had much to say about the 'action planning' sessions held at the conclusion of the tours, which were intended to provide an opportunity for groups to focus on how they would work upon their return to North America. For participants involved in travelling with Casa Canadiense, where the homestay forms the majority of the time spent in Nicaragua, this time spent working side-by-side with Nicaraguans on a project of local interest was seen as the key element of the tour, but the meetings and conversations with academics and Nicaraguan NGOs were also mentioned.

All the study participants reflected on the necessity of good communication and support for travelers before and after the tour. The general opinion was that the better prepared a group was, the more they would get out of their time in Nicaragua and the more effective they could be after they returned. A number of former travelers have gone on to help lead delegations or participate in initiatives linking North America with Nicaragua, and these individuals in particular focused on the need for good preparation and follow-up.

6.2.2 Discovering delegation travel.

Many of the groups travelling with Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense are made up of young people. In the latter case, this is due to the organization's mandate to bring Canadian high school groups to Nicaragua. In the case of Witness for Peace, the organization has since the 1990s organized an annual youth delegation to Nicaragua, drawing interest from across the United States. Witness for Peace also has regionally-

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based delegations from various parts of the country that attract travelers of various ages.

However, in recent years especially, most of the delegation traffic to Nicaragua has been

through groups affiliated with specific universities in the US. Representatives from these

groups arrange a delegation itinerary in collaboration with Witness for Peace and send a

group of students, sometimes but not always, accompanied by teachers or support staff for

the delegation itself. Therefore it is through these third-party organizations that most of

the interviewees had first heard of Witness for Peace. Sara, a first-year student at the

University of Portland, became aware of the trip to Nicaragua through the university's

centre for student leadership and service.

> "It's called the Moreau Centre for Service and Leadership and they provide
> different options for service in the Portland community, food banks, homeless
> shelters, and they also provide service learning trips, so the Nicaragua trip is one
> of those opportunities. For us it was called the Nicaragua Immersion – they offer
> all these different options, like a 'civil rights plunge', a mini-internship to Kenya. I
> thought it seemed really interesting so that's how I got involved in it." (**Sara**,
> University of Portland)

Other university-based groups are student-run clubs that decide to pursue

international solidarity travel as an activity. One such group is the Students for Peace and

Social Justice group at the University of Miami in Oxford, Ohio. The group typically

commits to fundraising and preparing every year for an 'alternative spring break' trip to

South or Central America, and in the recent past has started a partnership with Witness

for Peace. As Megan explains:

> "The information on partner organizations is passed on through the leadership of
> the group so we found information about Witness, apparently our group had
> travelled with them four or five years before my time. So that was an option that
> was out there. What they stand for, we thought was very compatible with what we
> were trying to do." (**Megan**, University of Miami)

For travelers at this stage of their academic lives, the desire to participate in a trip

of this nature is sometimes driven by prior coursework. Others have an ongoing scholarly

interest in a topic related to the country or some of the economic, social or political issues

that were the focus of the tour. A video shot before and during the University of

Portland's 2011 trip to Nicaragua reflects such motivation on the part of some students.

> "I chose liberation theology as the thing I wanted to study because I do a lot of
> campus ministry stuff at school, but also because it is a very different way of being
> religious that we have in the States. It's much more politically driven and in their
> services there's a recognition of them being hurt and that the government maybe
> has messed up but there's a freedom about them and that yearning and urge to be
> something different that is moved by Christ, by their spirituality and religion."
> (**Joanna**, University of Portland video)

> "I had done research on the historical process of the Sandinista movement prior
> to the 1980s, one of the things I was most looking forward to was talking to
> Nicaraguans to see how they view their history. I had no idea that the United
> States had such an influential impact on their history." (**Joe,** University of
> Portland video)

While solidarity travel to Nicaragua is an intriguing option for students majoring

in Latin American studies, politics, economics and the like, some participants come in to

the experience from very different academic backgrounds, viewing the trip as an

opportunity to learn about topics they would be unlikely to encounter in the classroom.

> "Being an engineer it's all math and science and that's all you ever look at so I'd
> never really focused on politics ever. I think this experience will inform me a little
> bit more on being a bit more of a conscious consumer. It's hard to think about
> where the stuff that you buy comes from and hopefully this will give me a view of
> the other side of that. It's easy to just pick what's cheapest but you don't think
> about the producers and the impact that has on their economy." (**Carolyn**,
> University of Portland video)

The level of prior awareness and academic investigation of Nicaragua and

relevant issues may be a significant reason for university-aged travelers to participate in

solidarity tours. However, those who arrived in Nicaragua as part of high school groups

are often driven by the desire to have a first experience in a different environment. Aaron,

a high school senior at the time of his trip to Nicaragua with the Witness for Peace youth delegation, was at first most interested in travelling to Mexico, but his parents' concern over security there forced him to consider other options. Mika, a participant in the 2005 youth delegation, was motivated by an interest in worker's rights but remembers knowing very little about Nicaragua prior to her first visit with Witness for Peace.

> "I was looking at three different organizations travelling to Mexico, and Witness for Peace was the one that also offered an opportunity in another part of Central America. I was really looking to get outside of my comfort zone in the US and expand my horizons." (**Aaron**)

> "I'd always been interested in politics and just was starting to get more familiar with some of the US foreign policy. I had never been to Latin America before, but I remember attending some talks from Global Exchange about sweatshop conditions and US foreign policy and that sort of led into my interest in the trip." (**Mika**)

6.2.3 Preparing to plunge.

Whether the travelling groups were made up of university or high school students, and no matter the level of previous experience and knowledge, all the study participants had a lot to say about the trip-specific preparation they went through prior to departing for Nicaragua. The form this pre-travel work took varied from group to group, but in the case of groups that are part of an educational institution, often involved regular meetings to plan fundraising and provide background information on Nicaragua and relevant topics related to the upcoming tour.

The Miami of Ohio students group, for example, selected the central theme of their tour – free trade and the roots of migration – in collaboration with Witness for Peace. They then led a full-year independent study course where students were responsible for sharing research on relevant topics with the rest of the group, and

professors are invited to lecture on certain topics throughout the fall semester. Their

interaction with Witness for Peace was largely focused on logistical matters.

> "We had a main contact person here in the US, who kind of made sure that we had all of our stuff together in the initial stages of getting this organized. Then we made contact with the team in Nicaragua, with Riahl, Christine, and Brooke, and we did a couple of Skype chats to get to know them beforehand. They also sent us a couple of info packets. One was a safety, preparation, packing list kind of thing, and the other was all about current events, politics and issues. A lot of that we had seen and discussed in our course because we tried to form the content around would be talked about when we were in Nicaragua so that we wouldn't be sitting there and not knowing anything about the topic. They were great in terms of getting us prepared." (**Megan,** Miami of Ohio)

Having students lead their own preparation process was also the approach taken

by the University of Portland group, as the Moreau Centre brings one or two students

from the previous year's 'plunge' to lead the excursion the following year.

> "Usually two students who have already gone on the Nica Immersion will lead the trip for the following year. We have meetings throughout the year, in the first semester its once a month and in the winter term once a week to prep because we have to fundraise and get to know everybody in the group. So the coordinators run those meetings and are in charge of fundraising too. They also bring in guest speakers, so we had teachers come in talking about international travel, someone else spoke about cultural differences. We also managed to have a class for the group going on the Nicaragua Immersion, a communications class that they tired culture into it, so we all had a class together in the winter." (**Sara**, University of Portland)

For the high school groups travelling to Nicaragua with Casa Canadiense, the pre-

travel preparation is left in the hands of the teachers who facilitate the trip. Generally,

these groups are led by at least three educators, and in many cases the teachers are part of

the chaplaincy program at the high school. The preparation, while also intending to

provide background information on Nicaragua and the issues that will be discussed on the

trip, is centered on the idea of solidarity and connection between the students and the

communities they will be visiting.

"They've been doing this trip with Casa to different parts of Nicaragua for years… there were four teachers who were the coordinators on our end and they had lots of experience with these trips. So my first exposure to this kind of cross-cultural solidarity travel was very thorough and very much with the focus of solidarity. They were really, really good at communicating to us as young people that this wasn't a service trip, this wasn't a missions trip. We weren't going to help people; we weren't going to do charity. They focused on the justice aspect of it and on the solidarity piece. I'm not sure they used that word with us, but now, in retrospect I guess that's how I make sense of it." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall Secondary School)

The advantages to participating in a group that comes from a particular educational institution become clear when assessing the interviews with study participants that were part of the Witness for Peace youth delegation. In these cases, the preparation in advance of the trip is limited and made more difficult by the fact that participants are brought in from all over the country and may not be able to make it to meetings and events prior to joining the group for the actual flight to Nicaragua.

"I was coming from the West Coast, from California, and most of the other participants were based elsewhere so I wasn't able to take part in any of the meetings before the trip. I had email contact from the coordinator, and we talked on the phone, but that was mostly about logistics, what to pack, if I needed immunizations, things like that." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

For those youth delegates able to make the meetings, the preparation process was similar to those described by the university-age participants, in that the future travelers were in charge of learning about issues and presenting this research to one another.

"The first time we met was during the school year – she (the delegation coordinator) gave us an assignment to bring back with us the next time we came which would be in a month, after school was already over… my particular area of research was on the history of Nicaragua so I had to bring something back and present it to the rest of the group. There was also – some people did a study on coffee, some people did a study on politics, other people did one on the economy as a whole." (**Aaron**, youth delegation)

6.2.4 Encountering poverty – Managua and meetings.

Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense may enact different approaches to

solidarity through their activities with touring groups, but both begin with a series of

workshops and meetings shortly after the delegations arrive in Managua. As most groups

have about two weeks or even less to spend in Nicaragua, travelers have a very busy

schedule throughout their stay. This is particularly true in the initial days of the tour,

spent in and around Managua, when the organizations are trying to fit in as many

meetings as possible. The web journal entries and video footage prepared by the Miami

of Ohio and University of Portland groups attest to the pace of these introductory days,

and the struggle some students experience with the hot, humid environment of Managua.

> "I feel like I am exhausted, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally, but it
> is well worth it. I feel like I have been given an immense amount of information,
> and I'm left to grapple with it and to see what is my role here, what am I supposed
> to do in the world as a graduated senior with what I have learned in Nicaragua
> and pairing that with what I have learned in university. So I feel that, going
> forward, those are the questions I am going to be asking myself… for the rest of
> my life. What's my purpose?" (**Joanna**, University of Portland video)

> "We had a lot of meetings and speakers but they went in to almost every aspect of
> Nicaragua. We learned about the economy, the environment, how people find
> work and the conditions of work. So, I felt I got to know a lot more about
> Nicaragua than I ever expected to." (**Sara**, University of Portland)

The pace was similarly intense for high school or youth groups, but these travelers

also look back on the meetings and exercises in a positive way, believing that this

approach was an effective way to introduce knowledge and new perspectives.

> "I'm glad it was that (educational), but when I went into it I had thought it was
> going to be a lot more hands-on. I thought that we were actually going to be going
> to places… there was one day where we helped transfer stones from the river in
> our rural placement, to the road to fill some potholes. So I thought that we were
> going to be doing a lot more stuff like that the whole time, but when we actually
> got there we were driving through the communities, learning about the history,
> learning about the impact that the United States has had on Nicaragua. It was

effective in a whole different way than I was expecting and I'm kind of glad that it was what it was." (**Aaron**, youth delegation)

"We started off at Casa Canadiense, stayed there for a couple of days and did a tour of Managua. They are really good at showing you the rich of Managua, and the poor, and the garbage dump, the Contrasts within the big city." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

One way that both Casa Canadiense and Witness for Peace attempt to showcase the extreme inequality of Managua is the 'market/mall' excursion. The touring group is first taken to Mercado Roberto Huembes, a typical Nicaraguan market in the heart of the city where lower income families go to purchase groceries and sundries. The groups are divided into pairs or groups of three and given the task of attempting to buy food for an average Nicaraguan family of six while keeping to a strict budget. After this activity, the travelers are taken to one of several North American-style malls in the southern part of the city. This experience, and the impact is has, is described in detail by Joe, a member of the 2011 University of Portland group.

> "I've always had a more laid-back, relaxed personality, and I found myself completely out of my element at the market. Here one needed to be assertive, aware, and direct. When asking for the price of food, I struggled to negotiate a price I felt was fair. My Spanish mumbled out weakly, and I found it difficult to communicate even basic questions in that foreign environment. We ended up with 2 lbs of potatoes and a small can of peas, all for 38 cordobas. I felt a rush of relief upon exiting to fresh air. I hadn't expected this to be my experience at all. The mall was the exact opposite: expansive, cool shade, clean. People sat by their laptops at the food court, strolling leisurely. Apple Stores were next to Video-game stores and pet shops. It was very similar to malls in the United States. I felt at home, to be honest. And when that thought struck me, it was a discomforting realization. The disparity was grotesque, of course. It spoke to inequality for the country of Nicaragua, but I was also perturbed by what it meant for me personally." (**Joe**, University of Portland blog)

The other experience which stands out for most of the returned solidarity travelers involves on the Managua city dump, known locally as 'La Chureca' and the community that lives off of sorting through the garbage in order to salvage and re-sell metal and other

valuable refuse. Groups are brought in to see the dump, but also to meet with Yamileth

Perez, a former dump resident who has devoted her life to providing much needed health

and social services to this underserved area.

> "I believe that the image which will stick with me for the rest of my life is the image which was the most brief; as we drove into the village of squatters living next to the dump: we did not enter the dump itself, but through the haze of the sunset, we could all make out the figures of people sifting through the massive mounds of garbage. People-human beings-living off of garbage, being forced to eat things that even pigs won't eat. Not something that is forgotten easily, nor should it be. No one deserves to live such a life, much less children. Yamileth's story is as heartbreaking as it is inspiring, and speaking with her, in my opinion, has been the greatest blessing of this trip so far. She is an incredible woman who has done much with her life, and given her drive and beautiful spirit, I have no doubt that she will do much more to improve the conditions to those relegated to living in that community, and inspire others to do the same. Just walking through the village, it was clear the sense of community that these people have, and the beauty of their closeness against such a povertous backdrop was truly an experience, the likes of which will never fail to inspire me." (**Drew**, University of Portland blog)

> "Yamileth Perez, she's a community health worker in La Chureca. She was really outstanding, in my mind, with what she was doing with her community health programs, having grown up in La Chureca to now be working there… and there were other people very much like her, it was a series of people that we saw that, while they had no obligation to become community leaders they stepped up because they thought it was the right thing to do. I think that a lot of times, people from developed nations see other countries as incapable, without the ability to do things to better their own situations, desperately awaiting the intervention of a church group of something of the sort. I would argue that although support and justice from the rest of the world are needed, and are moral responsibilities, there is an incredible amount of strength present there, which, given the opportunity, can do wonderful things. (**Megan**, Miami of Ohio)

6.2.5 Figuring out fair trade.

Another 'compare and Contrast' experience that is used by the hosting

organizations to help illustrate significant issues involves back-to-back visits of textile

production facilities on the northeastern edge of Managua. First, the touring group visits a

textile plant located in a free-trade zone, where multinational clothing firms bring in

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partially finished products for final touches, avoiding import or export tariffs and taxes.

Following the carefully controlled corporate tour of this facility, the group is brought to a

so-called 'fair trade' textile production centre, where a worker's cooperative produces

clothing and household products for the domestic and regional markets. The differences

in working conditions are quite pronounced, and the fair trade environment provides a

good platform for the most profoundly involved populations to converse with visitors

about the impacts of free trade agreements like the Central American Free Trade

Agreement between Nicaragua, other countries in the region, and the United States.

> "Walking into the first manufacturing plant (also called a "Maquina"), the first
> thing I couldn't help but to notice was the fact that it was HOT. I mean REALLY
> HOT. I had to ask myself, how could someone spend hours a day working here?
> But they do. All 1600 of them do. It is difficult to describe in words what it looks
> like to see over 1,000 people working furiously at sewing machines, trying
> desperately to make as many sweaters as they can in order to make slightly above
> their minimum wage.
> All I can tell you is that it was a surreal thing to see. Moreso, they were all working
> furiously to make North Face Fleece jackets; a common sight in my hometown.
> Emilio, our tour guide at the plant, tried very persuasively to convince us that this
> was one of the better manufacturing plants, and that such poor conditions exist for
> workers because there exists no other way. Regardless of one's opinion on the
> necessity of such materials to come at a low cost to the consumer, it is clear that
> these workers have been stripped of much of their human dignity. There were no
> smiles, no pride in their work; only sweltering heat, cramped spaces, and
> sweltering heat. This led me to ask myself; at what cost comes efficiency?
> After this experience, we got to see the opposite end of the spectrum; a woman
> named Maria and her small clothing company, called "Nueva Vida" ("New
> Life"). While it was still searingly hot (as it tends to be around here) in the
> maquina, words cannot fully describe the Contrast. Workers were smiling,
> chatting as they went about their work, and seemingly took great pride in what
> they were doing." (**Drew**, University of Portland blog)

> While the excursion to the free trade and fair trade zones leads most travelers to

have negative opinion about the working conditions in the free trade area, some student

travelers are able to see certain benefits for workers in the first location.

> "Inside we saw them produce fleece jackets for Patagonia, North Face, Eddie
> Bauer, to be sent to the US and Canada. Visually, it seems that the workers are

treated well, I don't know if that's completely true but what we saw suggests that its probably one of the better ones (free-trade zones) and I was happy to hear that they were able to unionize and that the salaries they have here are higher than some of the other factories." (**Geoff**, University of Portland video)

Prior to visiting the textile production plants, most of the travelers have quite limited knowledge of what free trade and fair trade means for workers in Nicaragua, and the underlying concepts behind the pursuit of free trade agreements, such as neoliberalism. Having been exposed to these impacts and developing an understanding of the rationale for both systems, the travelers often take on the role of informing their school communities about these issues after they return to North America.

"I had some previous knowledge but on the delegation, learning about free trade agreements, I mean, CAFTA passed the day we got back from that delegation so that was a big focus of our trip. We heard about it from a variety of different perspectives, from farmers, from sweatshop workers. Prior to that I didn't have much information about CAFTA at all. I did the readings before going on the trip, but I don't think I knew much about free trade or neoliberalism before the trip." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

"One of our biggest successes was getting more fair trade items in our university market and having them prominently featured with a little sign explaining what is good about fair trade and what the difference is between fair trade and free trade. We had two articles written in the student newspaper about some of the issues we had been exploring and learning about in Nicaragua and I wrote an article for a newspaper for the city newspaper where the college is. It's a small town really (Oxford, Ohio - population 21,000) but it got out to some more people so that was good." (**Megan**, Miami of Ohio)

Despite the success reported by the Miami of Ohio group in terms of awareness raising, participants from other groups suggest that it is difficult to convince people who were not part of the solidarity trip to apply the lessons learned about the drawbacks to free trade.

"I think it's a difficult thing to do, because I think for a lot of people, having the exposure and the physical experience, you can then relate to the issues – I get that there are people who grew these bananas, and maybe Del Monte or whoever, aren't doing things sustainably for those people and so how can I, here in Canada,

be standing in solidarity with those banana growers. I don't know how you can do it without the personal exchange." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

6.2.6 Barriers to understanding.

The 'personal exchange' mentioned by Rebecca is a vital part of the rural homestay portion of the solidarity tour experience. For the most part, Casa Canadiense groups spend more time in the rural setting than do groups that travel with Witness for Peace. Depending on the time available, these latter groups spend three to five days in one of the communities that Witness for Peace has an ongoing relationship with. In the case of Casa Candiense groups, the destinations vary from year to year, depending on which communities have successfully applied for a project that is partially funded by Casa and that the touring high school group will be working on during their time in the community. While the travelers are willing workers, the amount they are able to materially contribute is limited; something that they are made aware of by their own group leaders.

> "I think it was good to have both kinds of activity, because I'm not the kind of person who just wants to listen. I mean, I enjoyed that part but I want to know what I can do. I think it's an American kind of thing or maybe just a human thing where we want to automatically see change. So when we were building I was like 'okay now this is change, something is happening' but now I kind of look back and wonder what exactly did happen. I mean, we helped a community, I know there's going to be this school, more resources for them but what did I get out of it? I think I got a lot more than they did." (**Sara**, University of Portland)

> "We were going to participate in a lifestyle with someone in a particular neighbourhood, and while we were there we would also be funding a project. So when we were there we working on building a sports complex. You're supposed to be helping with building something or implementing something but really you don't have the manpower that they do because they're used to working in that climate with their tools and they are much more effective. That was sort of, I thought, the ironic piece of our travel, and our teachers were good at bringing us back down to Earth, telling us not to elevate our egos about the trip and our role. You go with a goal to build something or do something for them because that's often what the rest of your community at home wants to hear. They want to know

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that you have a purpose and that you're doing something to better the community. Then you end up getting there and you throw their (the hosting community) entire two weeks off, because they've got their routines and now all of a sudden you've got this delegation to deal with." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

Away from the job site, the time in the villages is spent in one-on-one or small group conversation with host families, who let the visitors sit in and even participate in the daily routines of rural life. The conversations are sometimes quite limited due to the lack of strong Spanish on the part of the visitors.

> "We had two of the teacher facilitators had spent time in Nicaragua before and they spoke Spanish fluently, so they were the translators for the group. I had a strong French background and Italian, so that really helped, and they really emphasized to us that it didn't matter if we couldn't speak the language, there's other ways you can communicate with people. That's very true, but it reaches a point where it becomes frustrating because you have a lot of ideas and you want to be able to ask questions. You can communicate on a very human level without language, but when you want to start hearing stories and understanding a history of a people, or even just what they do on their day-to-day basis, it can be very frustrating. I think all of us, the twelve students, were picking up a word here and there and stringing some basic phrases together but it wasn't much beyond that, so the teachers had to step in and provide translation if we wanted to go further in depth." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

Witness for Peace does not make Spanish fluency or training a requirement for travelers, and while some of the university-aged groups have one or two members with solid language skills, other groups face similar issues in trying to communicate with their rural hosts.

> "About half of us spoke some Spanish, I've been speaking it since I was little so I was fine, but for me one of my biggest roles on the trip to Nicaragua was trying to make sure that the people who didn't speak any Spanish still had a good experience and still felt like they got a lot out of it." (**Megan**, Miami of Ohio)

While language barriers clearly do exist, the experience of living and in some cases working alongside people from these rural villages was clearly significant for the returned travelers. The chance to connect directly with people living in very different circumstances was seen as valuable, and despite the short duration of the time in

countryside, travelers left convinced that there had been a real opportunity to share life

stories.

> "I think what surprised all of us was the level of connection that we got with the people – they seemed very welcoming and very willing to share their stories. We were told by a few people, 'we don't like your country, we actually hate the United States, but we love the people who come down to speak with us and we hope that you'll spread our message back up there'."(**Megan**, Miami of Ohio)

> "We would ask questions, after the Witness for Peace speakers or sessions, and someone would always ask why do you think its important for a young group like us to come down to Nicaragua and learn about these issues and talk about them with people. Almost 99 per cent of the time, every person would say 'so you can tell our story, because we can't go back with you, so you have to tell our story for us'. I thought that was awesome, I can't even think of the words for it. I remember specifically my host mom in the community we visited with Witness for Peace, she would tell me, and get pretty emotional about it, she'd say ' my hope for you is that you tell my story, of Regadio' which was the community that we were in. She joked too that 'maybe one day you'll get to the big house in Washington DC and you'll be the president or you'll meet the president and you'll sit down and talk about Nicaragua'. And I was just blown away by that." (**Sara**, University of Portland)

6.2.7 Planning for action.

The idea, shared in conversation with Nicaraguan community hosts, that a central

responsibility for returning travelers is the telling or re-telling of the 'real' story of life in

Nicaragua, is one that was taken up by all of the groups involved in this study. The

specific approaches to that eventual sharing of information and perspective with home

communities in North America took shape in part through action planning workshops

and discussions facilitated by Witness for Peace or Casa Canadiense as a means of

drawing the delegation travel experience to a close. These sessions are meant to inspire

and organize groups towards taking concrete steps to solidarity on their return to Canada

or the United States. Participants were universally positive about these action-planning

opportunities, identifying the time as vital for reflection and fundamental to the eventual

success of any activities that did take place following their trips to Nicaragua.

> "In the moment it was really good to have – Gail had all the group come together and brainstorm ideas about what was plausible for them to do in their area, and also to have a plan for what to do when we went to Washington D.C. What she suggested that we do in our own communities was writing to our local papers and discussing how the free trade agreement (CAFTA) has been harmful to people in Nicaragua, and how we should not be supporting the US entering in to new free trade agreements… we talked about how we could write similar letters to our congressmen and how important that could be. She was also talking about how when she has times for past delegates come to speak to future travelers, that we could do that." (**Aaron**, youth delegation)

> "I thought that the action planning was absolutely wonderful. Each year we've tended to do the same thing once we're back in the States. Once you get back to school from that spring break time there's always a lot of exams and papers due so people's minds aren't fully in it, so I thought it was really good that we did the planning while we were still in country and still face to face with the three Witness For Peace coordinators. So, I thought it was awesome and this year we had a lot of really passionate individuals on the trip who at the end of the trip really wanted to make a difference but had no idea how to do it, or even where to start. I thought it was good that they led us through it but they also didn't just give us the answers. They let us use our own skills and our ideas to form something that would really work for us, and it did work. We accomplished many of the things we set out to do when we got back." (**Megan**, Miami of Ohio)

> "It was very helpful, because we had learned so much and done so much. We spent a few days at a hostel at Laguna de Apoyo. We spent the time kind of unwinding and then we had the action planning process. So we were asked 'who are we' and 'what roles do we play' as individuals and as a group, and we came up with answers like we are citizens, family members, part of the University of Portland community, role models and stuff like that. I thought the way they had shaped the activity was very meaningful because once we talked about our roles then we had to figure out what we could do within those roles." (**Sara**, University of Portland)

Witness for Peace also arranges another important session for their travelling

groups at the end of their time in Nicaragua. Having heard from a variety of community

representatives, experts and activists on a range of issues relating to US foreign policy and

its impacts on Nicaragua, the travelers visit the US Embassy, an imposing edifice located

in a heavily guarded compound on the outskirts of Managua. This is meant to provide

another, official, perspective on the United States' role in Nicaragua, and acts as a

powerful incentive for the touring group to return to their home communities with an

alternative narrative to share. The Miami of Ohio student group blog outlines their

frustrations with the experience.

> "We spent the entire morning and early afternoon preparing ourselves and our
> questions, with a quick break for lunch. Since our time at the embassy would be
> limited, we wanted to be prepared with our questions and to have the worded
> perfectly so we could avoid any allowing ambiguous answers. Once we were
> done, we each had a question to ask and topics ranged from developmental aid to
> immigration to politics to economics. Finally, we made it to the embassy and
> through all the security and then met with three people from the embassy—an
> economics representative, a political counselor, and a woman who has worked
> with USAID there for over thirty years. First, they gave us a bit of an overview
> for the embassy in general and its role of serving American citizens and of
> promoting development, democratic values, and human and labor rights. Then
> we got to ask our questions, which ended up taking up most of the time. Asking
> the questions taught us a lot both in the actual answers we were given (though
> sometimes real answers were evaded because of the policy lines and such) and in
> how the US government and policy works, something also really important to
> know). I think I might speak for all of us in saying that we did get a little frustrated
> by how they answered and their interactions with us but we had to still constantly
> remind ourselves that they were not the ones making the policies (especially ones
> we disagreed with), just defending and representing them." (**Miami of Ohio**
> group blog)

When groups return to the United States or Canada, their capacity to carry out

the action plans they developed before departing Nicaragua seem to depend heavily on

the kind of institutional support they can count on in their home communities. Groups

that travel as part of a student-run or school-administered program are able to meet

together and move forward with events and use existing networks of local organizations

that provide opportunities for volunteer activities in local communities.

> "We partner with a group in the town called Oxford Citizens for Peace and
> Justice and so we brought our experiences to them and they helped us with
> organizing some political things, looking at different laws and proposals going
> before the government and developing petitions and so on. There was also a
> photo exhibit and a series of talks. I realize that most of the people that were there
> came because they were given course credit for it, but we still had a really great

turnout. A couple of years ago we tried to do the same thing with the class talks and we only got five or six people at the most, but this year we had upwards of 50 people and we held those for three nights in a row. There's a stereotype around Ohio that Miami is a school full of rich kids who don't care about the world, so for us even getting 50 people out to a talk about the issues behind people's Coach purses and North Face backpacks was a pretty big success." (**Megan,** Miami of Ohio)

"Post-travel we had a little re-integration seminar, just checking in with us and how were feeling being back in Canada. We did a lot of pre and post trip work. Leading up to the trip we were doing a lot of intense preparation – learning about economics, politics, history, the language – and then talking about the realities of cross-cultural travel, about what happens to you when you are thrust into a new community and how that affects you." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

"The Moreau Centre is very good with the returning experience, providing lots of different outlets for our plans and activities. So for example, we visited Los Quinchos and the Moreau Centre has contacts and programs within the Portland community so that we could start working with street youth or vulnerable youth in this area, or even state-wide. One of the things we talked about is 'where do we go from here' after we come back home and we made all these goals and plans and I think for some of us we wanted to see change happening like, in a snap, and its really hard to. I have to remind myself that we have to start small before we can get bigger. I've had to struggle with the idea that I've come back with all this knowledge, now I need to do something, when in reality that is kind of hard. So I guess we need to start within the university community." (**Sara**, University of Portland)

Outside of the group related activities and opportunities provided from her affiliation with the Moreau Center, Sara outlined some individual actions she chose to undertake on her own initiative, inspired by particular experiences in Nicaragua.

"As a US citizen we have a lot of responsibility but also opportunity. Before the Nicaragua Immersion I was not a registered voter. I didn't really think to be registered voter made a big difference, but once we came back from the trip I realized that it does matter, because when you vote, you can look at the views of the candidates on free trade or fair trade. I started to think about that and how I can help to make change so I am now a registered voter and I am going to get involved in voter registration campaigns to encourage other people to be part of change as well. I also became part of the fair trade club that we have on campus. I had known about the club before going to Nicaragua, but I didn't know what fair trade was. And having been in a fair trade and a free trade textile factory in Nicaragua I wanted to come back and join the club right away." (**Sara**, University of Portland)

For returning members of the Witness for Peace youth delegation, having to

return to home communities as individuals meant that it was difficult at times to take an

active role in sharing knowledge about Nicaragua or advocating for policy changes in the

US. Aaron, a recent returnee from a youth delegation, explained that his return home

was simultaneous with a major transition in his life – moving away to attend university.

> "We came back in August, and at the end of the month I started my freshman
> year at UNC (University of North Carolina) Asheville. So I've really been
> preoccupied with getting settled in. Since I've been in Asheville, I've noticed that
> there's this program called Advance that works with underprivileged school
> children, I applied to that and I want to work with that program. I'm not doing it
> this semester because of my class schedule, but I am definitely more of an
> advocate for programs like that, and interested in them, than I was before I went
> on Witness for Peace." (**Aaron**, youth delegation)

The delegation coordinator for the youth group had been in touch with Aaron

prior to their trip to Nicaragua, but he found there was little communication after his

return, making it hard to plan any coordinated actions with his fellow travelers. One

group activity that had been pre-arranged was a gathering in Washington D.C. to visit

lawmakers and the Witness for Peace national office, but Aaron was unsure of his ability

to attend.

> "I definitely am not in contact with people the way I want to be. I'm occasionally
> in contact with some of my friends from the delegation but I haven't heard from
> anyone in maybe a month, and I haven't noticed anything from Witness for Peace
> on Facebook or otherwise. I'm not sure if I will be able to make it to the meeting
> in Washington, I don't have a car and I'm not sure how much transportation
> might be." (**Aaron**, youth delegation)

Asked if he felt more communication from Witness for Peace would be helpful in

supporting his efforts to become involved in like-minded groups or encourage self-

direction actions, Aaron agreed, adding that online communication using email or social

networking sites would be most effective. Other interviewees, even those who travelled as

part of a university organization, share these sentiments, relating to the need for more

direct follow up from Witness for Peace.

> "Having more formal follow-up might be important. We have so many ideas but we don't know how to go about making them happen. During the action planning they gave us a lot of help and suggestions, but I think it would be a good idea to get in touch with groups again, just to sort of make sure that the ball is rolling. I'm sure there are lots of delegations though and not too many people working for Witness for Peace… If I got a packet full of paper, I would read it but I really prefer interaction. If there's a form of social networking that would work that would be great. It's better if it's personal and conversational." (**Sara,** University of Portland)

> "Especially our age group, when we are moving around a lot – every year in a different location so its much better to use email or other online means, and we aren't killing a bunch of trees that way… I subscribed to the Witness for Peace online newsletter and their Facebook feed has a lot of really important stuff too. It's great, because there aren't too many sources for real news out there and so I try to read whatever it is they put out there, Witness for Peace and other groups like that." (**Megan**, Miami of Ohio)

Mika, another former youth delegate, traveled to Nicaragua in the summer of

2005. Her reflections on how the connections between Witness for Peace and her fellow

delegation members lapsed over time are similar to Aaron's observations above.

> "I was in touch with people shortly after, like within the year or two after while I was still in high school. We sent a few emails back and forth afterward and we are friends on Facebook but we haven't really stayed in contact as the years went on. I don't know if that's true of other groups as well. For me, it was a shock to come back to the US and it happened really abruptly. I wish I had had more time to debrief, but we came back through Florida and then I had a different connecting flight and so I was running to catch the plane and saying goodbye to everyone in the airport so it was a shock to be all of a sudden by myself and going back home and not with that group of people that I had been so close to during the trip. Maybe it would have been good to have some more formal way of staying in touch and finding out what other people were up to and supporting one another." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

Having been one of only two members of her delegation hailing from the West

coast of the United States, Mika was unable to attend the fall trip to Washington D.C.

However, the initial lack of contact with Witness for Peace did not prevent Mika from

becoming active on issues relating to her experiences in Nicaragua.

"I had a support network back at home through a local activist organization that helped me prepare to speak in front of my school and gave me all kinds of opportunities to do something with the stuff I had just learned… I was lucky to be able to do something with it and have that support, and maybe not everyone from the delegation had that. We had a lot of support on the delegation, with reflecting and debriefing and all of that was really important but then after the trip there wasn't much of that at all. And I think that's really important to have that so that you don't feel helpless and unable to do anything… Especially, you know, you're in high school. We just learned so much about CAFTA and then we get home and it passes and you don't feel like you have much power to change things. How do you turn your experience into something when you are no longer in Nicaragua and are no longer with the 16 people who have had the same experience? Instead you are back at high school and surrounded by people who don't know what CAFTA is, or anything about free trade." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

It was only after leaving her home community to attend university that Mika restored contact with Witness for Peace, a process she initiated herself.

"I did get to see one of the trip members a few years later so that was fun, and after that I sent a few emails back and forth with Gail and I made a donation once to help someone else come on the youth delegation to Nicaragua. I was also in contact with Witness for Peace to bring a speaker to my college, so we did do that. He was from Oaxaca, Mexico and we brought him to speak about corn and privatization." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

6.2.8 'I want to make a life of it' − Changing personal paths and plans.

In the weeks and months following their return to North America, the participants actions are focused on communicating their experiences in Nicaragua and engaging with organizations that work on issues such as promoting fair trade, social justice, and community solidarity. In the longer term, the experience of exposure travel in Nicaragua may also have an impact on the future plans of the travelers. Interviewees believe that their plans of study and career aspirations were in some way influenced by what they had seen in Nicaragua.

"I was thinking sciences, I wanted to become an orthodontist, but in my Grade 12 year, I was sort of awakened to a global community, through not just the travel component, but I was starting to see the world as very connected and I started to change my ideas about what I wanted to study. I decided I wanted to study

environment and human geography, but then I took some religious studies classes, and peace and conflict studies classes, and so I went in that direction. It was all very connected to my experience in Nicaragua, and that became the inspiration for a lot of papers for classes or the courses that I would choose." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

"I'm a social work major so it's something I am passionate about, I'm still forming my ideas about whether I want to go into community or clinical-based social work, but I'm leaning more toward community after all of this." (**Sara**, University of Portland)

"When I came back after the WFP trip I gave a lot of talks about my experience in Nicaragua, about what free trade was, in my high school and so on. So then in college, the major I chose was 'critical social thought' – its an interdisciplinary degree where you can choose from a number of different disciplinary approaches, get a theoretical grounding and then also gain some practical experience. My focus was resistance to neoliberalism in Latin America. So yeah, it was directly related to what you learn about with Witness For Peace." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

Recent returnees revealed a strong desire to return to Nicaragua for a longer period or at the very least, pursue similar travel opportunities in the future. For Aaron, these plans seem to be related to the value placed on international and volunteer experiences in admissions processes for graduate programs. In Sara's case, she believes her previous experience as a solidarity traveler could make her an effective coordinator of such trips in the future.

"I am definitely thinking of going back to Nicaragua after college, because I have seen that in order to get in to business schools I would need two years working with a business or a non-profit, so I have thought about learning Spanish and working with Los Quinchos for up to two years." (**Aaron**, youth delegation)

"I want to look into other service learning trips, and I want to see if there is any other connections the Moreau Centre has with Witness for Peace. I see how much the United States affects other countries now, before I just saw things through a very 'American' lens and now I've seen it first hand. I actually had talked to a few different people about returning to Nicaragua it's something I'd like to do – I hate using the word helping, but becoming more educated about issues down there and seeing what I might be able to do. It's crossed my mind multiple times about maybe working for Witness for Peace, because I know their mission and what they do. I'm pretty sure that everyone that we had working with our delegation were from the US, so they know about that American mindset and how, when we go in

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to a different country and how we view things, so I kind of feel like I know how that transition would be." (**Sara,** University of Portland)

Sara is also aware, however, that while her ambition is to work internationally, to change the 'American mindset' requires work in the United States itself, perhaps as a first priority.

> "I think that because I now see the connection that the US has with other countries, I feel almost like part of those other countries. I've felt a deep connection with some people in the communities we visited. The US, we're a very hard headed country sometimes and it's a challenge but one thing I'd like to do is try to get through to those people, so my ultimate goal is to work internationally, but I realize that I have to start within my own backyard before going on to the bigger picture." (**Sara,** University of Portland)

Returnees early in their academic careers, like Aaron and Sara, look forward to further travel and potential work abroad, whether generally or in Nicaragua specifically. For those former solidarity travelers who visited Nicaragua several years prior to being interviewed for this study, a common response to the initial solidarity travel experience has been to participate in further study abroad opportunities during their undergraduate degrees.

> "It was almost five years, four and half years later that I came back. I had wanted to come back for a while…the opportunity came up to study abroad for a semester, the theme was 'revolution, transformation and civil society' which is a lot of what you learn about in the two weeks with Witness for Peace. Before I came back to study here I took an independent study reading a lot about Nicaragua, but coming here again, I actually returned to the community where we had done our homestays, Ramón Garcia, and heard about their stories in more depth. I mean, the youth delegation was a lot for me to take in at the time, I'd never been to a developing country before and everything happened so fast. There's only so much you can learn in the 12 days we were in Nicaragua, so having a longer time, staying with a host family, it just sort of deepened what I learned regarding neoliberalism, the revolution and also changed my perspective on the Sandinista party. But, I was also struck by a lot of things that hadn't changed very much." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

Mika's experience during her second sojourn inspired a new organization, Podcasts for Peace, in collaboration with the marginalized, impoverished community

known as 'La Chureca' located in and around the Managua city dump. Immediately after

graduation, Mika returned to Nicaragua to coordinate the creation of the organization.

> "I did my final project right in that community and my advisor there, who is a community leader, we came up with the idea together and it just sort of expanded from there. I put together the proposal for the grant, and then about a month after I graduated I came down and here I am. A while before there was a radio program in the municipal dump, but it wasn't really active because it would only happen once a year when people came down from the university in the US and spend a bit of time with the kids and do some programs. So the idea was to expand it to include more kids, and not to just focus on La Chureca, which gets a lot more attention that the surrounding areas." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

Even when Podcasts for Peace was in its first months of operation, Mika was

willing to host delegations and several groups travelling with Witness for Peace have

visited the project's headquarters in Managua.

> "We actually had a few delegations come, including this year's Witness For Peace youth delegation, so that was a really wonderful experience for me and I think for them as well because they could see someone who had gone through the same experience six years earlier, and had the desire to come back and work with the communities. That's really what the Witness For Peace trip is for, it's to get people interested and knowledgeable. That trip is not to 'help' or even to try to change things, but to learn, so that in the future you can build off that and then eventually change foreign policy in the US or change things elsewhere in the world." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

For Rebecca, an ongoing interest in Nicaragua that was inspired by her first trip

with Robert F. Hall and Casa Candiense led her to return during her undergraduate

degree at St. Jerome's University.

> "We have a program at St. Jerome's – Beyond Borders – so I went back for three months, by myself, and I lived in a host community in Esteli. What it did for me, I think, was plant a seed in my head that the world is bigger than just Canada, there's things going on elsewhere. I felt when I left the first time that I wanted to come back, which I did. The first trip sort of had a spin-off effect which wouldn't have happened without the initial experience." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

Following her study term in Nicaragua, Rebecca became involved with Casa

Canadiense directly, serving on the organization's advisory board, while also expanding

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her activities beyond Nicaragua and groups working or travelling there. For the past three years, she has led an annual trip for students in residence at St. Jerome's to visit a fair trade coffee cooperative in Peru.

> "We decided that, we're providing this coffee for our students, wouldn't it be great if we could get students to participate in an experience in the coffee growing community, so for the last three years we have been traveling to Peru for a two-week trip and students stay in the community and see how their coffee is produced. It becomes a very tangible thing, using coffee to understand trade." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

Still an undergraduate student herself when the first trip was organized, Rebecca was substantially influenced by the approach taken by the teachers from Robert F. Hall and the Casa Canadiense facilitators she had interacted with on her first trip to Nicaragua.

> "I had really great leaders the first time I went to Nicaragua – they are all remarkable facilitators and I learned a lot from them. So when I had the opportunity to start a solidarity trip with St Jerome's I used a lot of those lessons and remember their approach. It's really interesting for me as a facilitator and carrying the burden – I mean you have risk management and all these other things, making sure that emergency situations are avoided. There's a lot more weight put on you as a facilitator, but at the same time it's very rewarding to see the transformation happening in students. It's a trip that's very carefully facilitated, because I really emphasize that it's not a trip to help, or a trip to change a people or a community – it's about realizing some things within yourself and allowing yourself to change and learn and grow – it's rewarding to see that happen." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

Above all, Rebecca drew on the effective pre-trip and post-trip sessions facilitated by her high school teachers in planning the fair trade travel at St. Jerome's.

> "What I was able to bring to the trip we do here that I learned from the facilitators of the trip to Nicaragua is the importance of pre and post travel, because I think a trip like that is useless if – a, you're not aware going into it, and b, you come home and its like you pick up where you left off. I think that happens naturally anyways, no matter how much planning and re-integration you do, oftentimes you're just like 'that was a trip, its in my memory and in my past but now I'm back in Canada and I can do all the things that I have access to here'. I'm guilty of it too." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

Another approach to continued involvement and repeat travel to Central America

is demonstrated by Megan, who joined the Students for Peace and Justice group at

Miami of Ohio in her freshman year. Over the course of her undergraduate years, Megan

travelled to Guatemala, Peru and Nicaragua on the group's alternative spring break trips.

Megan served as group president in her senior year, taking on a central role in organizing

their trip to Nicaragua in collaboration with Witness for Peace. Having graduated from

Miami, she has moved on to medical school at Ohio State University, and believes that

her continued involvement with Students for Peace and Justice set her on a life course

that centers on working internationally as a medical doctor.

> "I think its important to expose people to these issues at a relatively early age, because I think if I had learned about these things now, in my first year of med school, I wouldn't have the time to structure my life and what I'm doing around it. Now that I do have a variety of connections, it is easier for me… Right now I'm pretty bogged down with med school so it's hard to do too much besides study but as a lifelong goal I want to live there, I want to make a life out of it. I don't really see myself as someone who will work in the US at first. I know there are all different levels of that, there are doctors who do the two week trip once or twice a year, but I do think that I want to have a continued presence somewhere. Ideally either in a refugee camp somewhere, or in a place with a lot of famine, disease or epidemics, with like a group like Doctors Without Borders." (**Megan**, Miami of Ohio)

Preferences aside, Megan does recognize that working closer to home could also

allow her to provide important support for underserved communities.

> "If I do have to work in the US at some point, I'd like to work with impoverished communities or with immigrants. Right now I am working with a free clinic in Columbus as a Spanish translator, and it's incredible in a city like this that has wonderful health care available, there are groups of people with no access to it. So, there's need everywhere." (**Megan**, Miami of Ohio)

6.2.9 Should I stay or should I go? Reflecting on the local-global debate.

Megan's recognition of the presence of underserved or 'needy' communities in the cities and towns in North America draws attention to one of the common critiques of international solidarity travel – that solidarity and the pursuit of social justice can start close to home, rather than requiring a trip to Central America. The participants in these solidarity tours are well aware of this idea, and in some cases, self-critical for their participation in an international trip.

> "I just wonder sometimes, what is the point that this is serving? I've been shaped and affected as a global citizen by these trips but sometimes I think they're not doing as much good as they are intended to. Especially the really short term ones. I mean, even as the facilitator for the trip through St Jerome's, I am pretty critical of it and I wonder, is this what I want to be supporting? Do I want to start being counter to this kind of travel? The distribution of resources isn't equal. If you are putting this much time and money into making these kind of trips, maybe it could be more useful to take all of those dollars being spent on airfare and everything else, and redistribute that in a way that is more accessible to everyone." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

> "What I wanted to get out of this trip is to have that recognition and really put faces and names and people to that global issue in my mind but at the same time when I come back I don't want that to stop me from recognizing the poverty that exists locally." (**Drew**, University of Portland video)

Others do sense a difference between the poverty witnessed in Nicaragua, and that which could be confronted by doing more local solidarity work. Another argument in favour of international solidarity and exposure travel is the idea that such experiences enhance and broaden a sense of responsibility for others beyond one's immediate surroundings.

> "Desolation is everywhere, it permeates everything… the multi-faceted nature of poverty in Nicaragua is not something that can be grasped in one night at a soup kitchen in Portland." (**Rachel**, University of Portland video)

"I think a trip like this, for students thinking about themselves as citizens, it broadens and deepens what they understand as citizenship. We are part of a world community – you get a much deeper sense that we are all brothers and sisters. Also, as people from the United States coming to the developing world realize we are in quite a position of privilege and we have more means to make a difference. Also, our considerations of how we vote and how we are active broaden, so it's no longer a matter of which congressman would best represent my interests, but how do they represent the common good. A trip like this, academically, brings what you're learning to life." (**Pat**, University of Portland video)

Participants repeatedly cited the idea that solidarity travel can bring 'learning to life' and that direct conversations and interactions with communities in Nicaragua provide a depth and agency to 'the poor' that is not necessarily well expressed in textbooks.

"As a social work major coming out of college, you apply everything to everything you learned. I see a lot of the issues that we talk about in class. We put faces to those issues. We talk about rural poverty, and here we're driving through it. We see kids on the street with no shoes, kids who were huffing glue because they were hungry, so it's putting a human face to everything we were reading. It's so, so valuable to be here and smell it and feel it rather than just reading about it and being lectured to about it." (**Jo**, University of Portland video)

"It seems a lot more real when you are talking to someone who will be affected by CAFTA or who has been affected by price inflation, then to read theories about it. It's important to see the person and hear their struggles, and not idealize or glamorize that either but just understand what's going on. I guess it makes it easier to see people as people too, not as a problem, or an impact." (**Mika,** youth delegation)

"I don't think people get a real grasp of it until it stares them in the face. People think about poverty but they might see it more like the commercials on TV, I have a few friends who are like that, I have tried to tell them that it is so much more than what they are seeing. There's a voice in the background of those commercials talking about how you can just send 25 cents a day, but the person whose image is on the screen has so much more to say than just, 'can we have a few cents of your income?' I think it is important to be able to talk to these individuals and see where they are coming from and their history and their families."(**Sara**, University of Portland)

The choice of whether to act globally or locally comes up again when returnees consider how best to proceed with solidarity work after an international exposure trip like

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those organized by Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense. Rebecca, who has chosen to

focus on working in Canada, argues that the advantages to working locally relate to

greater awareness of context and the ability to access resources. Mika, who is committed

to working in Nicaragua, suggests that with an open mind and a willingness to learn,

international work can be effective, albeit challenging.

> "I think there is a big movement outwards, people are trying to get away from their hometown, their context. The students that I am working with on the St. Jerome's trip are starting to think about things that they are going to do with their lives and the work they want to do. I ask where they feel they are going to be most effective, most influential as someone who is going to be studying or working. It's interesting because they reflect on that and often decide that where they can be most effective is right here, in their own community, where they know the language, they grew up here, they have their networks, they understand the history, they understand the politics." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

> "A lot of it goes back to what I learned about the history of Nicaragua and the politics and I think a lot of people lose sight of that and or they don't even have that to begin with when they come down to do charity work. Without knowing the history, without having the practical experience, the learning component on the ground and also at the level of theory, it can be really easy to stereotype people, even when you are working supposedly in solidarity with them. It's really important to learn how to be flexible, and to have your preconceptions challenged… not to fall into assumptions about what your experiencing and labeling it so that it becomes more comfortable. Uncomfortable experiences happen, and it's really important to let them happen and not try to deny that it's out there." (**Mika**, youth delegation)

At the heart of travelers' discussions about local or global activism and the best

way to carry on working in solidarity after their return from the Nicaragua tour is the

basic question of how (or if) the experience has influenced them to be more engaged with

the issues facing Nicaragua. Some return feeling challenged, but empowered with

knowledge and eager to start communicating and working for change.

> "I think that when I came back from Nicaragua I now have a working knowledge of what I am pissed off about! I wanted to know what is wrong with NAFTA, what is wrong with CAFTA and I want to be able to articulate that to people. It's not just a temporary, three-week thing and it's not just about building a house and

feeling good about yourself. It's about coming back and making lasting change."
(**Monica**, University of Portland video)

"I think that the most scary part for me is realizing that it is such an overwhelming problem… what is my service going to do at all, is it really going to change anything? But one person can make a difference, even if it is just one community, if I can impact just one person then that would make me feel somewhat successful." (**Maddie**, University of Portland video)

Others believe that their experience in Nicaragua confirms a sense of similarity

and shared humanity driven by the personal exchange and connection that their

itineraries allowed.

"The biggest part of the trip for me was connecting with people… and the fact that although we live such different lives they wanted to share their stories with us and to understand where they were coming from, and at the same time they wanted to know about us, which I thought was interesting. Travelling in general, but especially this kind of travel makes you realize how small the world is and how alike we are, we have different circumstances but we are all basically the same." (**Megan**, Miami of Ohio)

However, enthusiasm about the experience is in some cases combined with a

critical awareness about how much work remains to be done after the trip is finished,

especially as service learning trips are becoming more prevalent as rite of passage for

young North Americans.

"At the time I went (2005), the program was pretty unique, at least in our school board, the Dufferin-Peel board. No one else was running a program like this but now these types of trips are everywhere. It seems like every school is doing them… It's almost become fashionable – different points in history have different things at that point in time are the 'right' things to do. I don't know. Sometimes I feel like we are moving in the right direction and we're getting better at it and closer and closer to solidarity. But some trips like this are doing the complete opposite of what they say they are all about – I mean, you have these young people who still have a lot of growing and maturing to do and they are going with their cameras and their candy and blowing up balloons for kids and saying 'take a picture of me with the kids' and then putting it on Facebook so everyone can see." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

Even when the trip in question is effectively facilitated, and the participants return

committed to action and carry out their plans, the group involved is relatively small. For

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some participants, this may mean that the solidarity movement built through such

experiences is limited to an already committed core group of very active people, rather

than engaging a broad coalition that can more effectively bring pressure to change

policies and attitudes.

> "I think, based on my experiences, this type of travel attracts a person who is already willing to learn how they can seek meaning in their own life so they are effecting positive change and so they can be activists working towards development in positive directions. Maybe that's three per cent of the population, maybe less. Probably less. What happens to everyone else? How can you make this type of understanding available to everyone else? Those who don't have the money, the time, the resources, the influences in their life to be outward travelers? The rest of Canada, the rest of Robert F. Hall, people who aren't going to be on a trip like this, they are the majority, so if you are continuing to empower the already supported, empowered people, how does that help Nicaragua? Because everyone else is still buying what's cheap and continuing to have broken relationships." (**Rebecca**, Robert F. Hall)

Host communities in Nicaragua share this concern over the relatively small

number of tourists looking for a solidarity or exposure experience. While valuing the

financial and non-economic benefits provided by the travelers who do visit, Nicaraguans

involved in hosting fair trade delegations would welcome more frequent visitors. These

observations are part of the next and final section of this chapter.

6.3 Nicaraguan Narratives

6.3.1 Introduction

To better understand Nicaraguan perspectives on travel that aims to create

solidarity and build relationships across borders, I selected a small-scale organization that

has established a tourism product centered on fair trade and intercultural exchange. The

Union de Cooperativas Agropecuarias (UCA) San Ramón is a non-governmental

organization operating in the regional municipality of San Ramón, near to the northern city of Matagalpa in the Nicaraguan highlands. UCA San Ramón focuses on coffee cultivation and production for the benefit of cooperative members in a number of smaller communities in the surrounding area. In recent years, a community-based rural tourism program has been established to encourage economic diversification for cooperative members and skills training for the children of local farmers facing difficulties in finding paid employment in their home communities.

This program, dubbed 'agro-eco-turismo rural' by the organization, is managed by UCA San Ramón staff in the main offices located in San Ramón itself. Two full-time employees are responsible for coordinating visits from domestic and international tour groups to the coffee-growing communities around the region – depending on the tourists' specific interests, the size of the group, and the time they have available, they will be sent to one of four host communities, La Corona, El Chile, La Pita, and El Roblar. I visited El Roblar and had the opportunity to interview six local cooperative members who host visitors in their homes, as well as one local guide.

6.3.2 Bringing visitors to El Roblar.

El Roblar is only 30 kilometres from San Ramón, but the drive to the community takes the better part of two hours, thanks to the steep and winding road that is mostly unpaved and impassable after heavy rains. Compared to the difficult journey to El Roblar, the other communities that participate in the tourism program are much closer to San Ramón and Matagalpa, meaning tourists with fewer than three full days to spend in the area do not visit El Roblar. Although this means fewer tourists, those that do come to the community have more time to spend with their host families and the local guides.

Twenty seven families live in the community, and eight of these participate as hosts in the rural tourism program. The four young guides who accompany tourists during their time in El Roblar are the sons and daughters of host families. In order to take part in the tourism program, the household must be a member of one of two coffee cooperatives active in El Roblar – Cooperativa Daniel Teller Paz, which is open to male members of the community, or Cooperativa Femenil El Privilegio, limited to female residents of El Roblar. These cooperatives, in turn, are members of UCA San Ramón. The men's cooperative is the older and more established group in El Roblar, yet only two of the host families are members of the 'Daniel Teller Paz' group. The remaining six are all part of the women's cooperative, which emerged as a splinter group from the original cooperative in 2004, after a number of female members became frustrated with their lack of influence within the larger group. While most households in the community are part of one of the two cooperatives, the El Privilegio group is home to the only female-headed households in El Roblar. All are involved in the tourism program.

In keeping with cooperative practices, the tourism program coordinators in San Ramón attempt to distribute visitors as equally as possible between host families. Most hosts have a limited number of beds available, so larger groups are divided between several homes in close proximity to one another. Even with this approach to distribution, several months may pass before another group of visitors arrives. When I came to El Roblar in late August 2011, I was the first tourist in nearly four months. Given this infrequent flow of tourist traffic, it was not surprising that every interview I conducted in El Roblar included some sense of frustration at the low level of visitation. The coordinators in the UCA San Ramón offices are well aware of these concerns but are also limited by the preferences and requirements of the tour groups themselves.

"I would say that yes, there are not as many visitors to El Roblar, compared to those that travel to say, El Chile or La Corona. But when a group contacts us and asks to arrange an itinerary of two days, with one overnight, this makes it basically impossible to send them to El Roblar." (**Catarina**)

"There is the matter of travel – if the group has organized its own micro-bus they are often not very willing to attempt the drive to El Roblar, as you know, once past the paved section it becomes very muddy and rough so there can be problems with insurance and so on. And the regular bus passes just once a day. Even beyond this, the conditions for guests in El Roblar are not ideal. The various families are quite distant from one another, so larger groups have to walk a fair bit to meet up with their companions who may be staying elsewhere. Also, some of the families in El Roblar haven't got indoor toilets and this can be a problem for some groups." (**Gioconda**)

While both Gioconda and Catarina were born and raised in the San Ramón area, neither come from El Roblar itself, and they admit they are not able to visit the community very often. To gather information on the tourism operations and operators in El Roblar, they rely on visiting community members who come to San Ramón often on business relating to the coffee cooperatives.

"I would say that I see someone from El Roblar every week, not in a formal way, but they are here in the UCA offices, mostly for other reasons but we will talk for a few minutes about what is happening there. They do ask, sometimes, on behalf of the participating families, if we are expecting any tours. Generally, though, the larger groups are arranged some time in advance and then we are able to communicate this to the communities that will be on the itinerary." (**Catarina**)

Travelers that visit the outlying communities of San Ramón often do so as part of a group, which vary in size from seven to twenty-five people. Most groups are domestic travelers, typically class trips from secondary schools or universities elsewhere in Nicaragua. The foreign visitors are usually on a longer trip in Central America or Nicaragua and include a few days in San Ramón as part of the their travel. In almost all cases, the primary reason for the visit relates to coffee production and the cooperative system. Both Catarina and Gioconda spend most of their time making arrangements with tour leaders, coordinating arrivals, activities, and providing quotes for prospective clients.

This leaves little time for planning promotional or marketing initiatives to attract more
visitors.

> "Basically the promotional aspect is falling behind because we don't have time for
> it. In reality many of our groups come every year or maybe twice a year – this is
> true for the Nicaraguan school groups as well as the groups from overseas. These
> coordinators may make recommendations to other groups, who then contact us,
> but we generally haven't made too many new contacts on our own." (**Gioconda**)

> "What I have seen over the five years I have been working is that we might have a
> volunteer or visitor who comes to San Ramón on their own, then some time later
> they have collaborated with a group and they return this time on a more planned
> trip. This is more common with Nicaraguans than foreigners. We don't see many
> foreigners here who just show up without contacting us first. You don't read about
> UCA San Ramón in a guidebook for example, and for people who are interested
> in coffee there are a few places in Matagalpa that are easier to find." (**Catarina**)

For Catarina and Gioconda, their current roles in the tourism operation are
merely the current stage of an ongoing involvement in training and employment
programs facilitated by UCA San Ramón. As the daughters of cooperative members from
the community, both took advantage of school support programs that provided financial
assistance for their post-secondary studies in business and tourism administration.
Combined with the on-the-job training coordinated through UCA San Ramón and the
network of cooperative unions elsewhere in Nicaragua, Catarina and Gioconda have
developed skills and experiences that they hope to apply in other areas of the organization
in years to come. Above all, they are glad to have an opportunity to work in their
hometown, rather than migrating to Managua or even abroad.

> "In my own case, I really enjoy the tourism aspect – I did courses specifically
> related to tourism management at the university, so I do have that experience and
> it would be good to help build the program for the future. We have some plans
> and goals that I would want to see happen. Of course, the tourism program is
> quite small in size compared to other areas of UCA San Ramón, particularly the
> coffee part. There are many more opportunities for people to work in
> administration of that aspect, so when I decide I want a different challenge, I
> might move to that part of the organization." (**Catarina**)

"I have three older brothers, and only one is still in San Ramón. He's the oldest, and he has a family of his own, so he has now started working on part of my parent's land. He has his own coffee and corn and so on, but it isn't very much land, so it isn't a very stable life. Right now, the price is good for coffee but in the past it has not been so high, and it could fall again in the future. If that happens it becomes impossible to live as a farmer. My other two brothers both live in Managua now. They were able to finish high school and had some work with UCA here, but they decided to go to the city. I am happier here – I like living where I grew up, it is much cleaner and quieter than Managua." (**Gioconda**)

6.3.3 Tourism - Creative response to a coffee crash.

The concerns expressed by Gioconda related to the volatility of coffee prices were the driving force behind the development of the rural tourism program itself. Faced with a long period of very low coffee prices in the early 2000s, UCA administrators were looking for a way to keep farmers in the area and contributing to the cooperative system. The idea for a tourism project came from elsewhere in the network of cooperative unions, as it had been tried in other situations with some success. Prior to the organization of the formal tourism program, the community of El Chile hosted some infrequent tourists intrigued by the traditional textiles produced in the community. Trying to expand the program to other parts of the region proved difficult at first, according to the UCA staff.

> "I wasn't working for UCA at that point, in fact I was still at school in Matagalpa, but I understand that there was some doubt from people that there would be interest from tourists for trips focused on coffee production or rural life. I think the idea was that the weaving was what attracted people, so why would they come to places where that wasn't happening." (**Catarina**)

> " We had a few people who were interested right away, in all the communities. These were leaders in their own communities and helped very much to convince their friends and neighbours that it could be worthwhile. To be honest, we had a few groups set to come up based on their previous connections to other UCAs in other places. Having some tours already set made it easier to convince people to participate. I think it would have been much harder if we were trying to suggest that it would work without have any tours confirmed." (**Gioconda**)

In El Roblar itself, the genesis of local involvement in the tourism program is remembered in a slightly different way. Dionicia Valdivia, the head of the women's

cooperative and one of the earliest participants from the community, recalls that the while

her organization was receptive to the overtures from UCA San Ramón, the more

established men's cooperative was less interested.

> "We were a very new organization, and we didn't have many members. We had
> left the Daniel Teller Paz cooperative because we had very little influence
> compared to other members. I don't want to accuse all the members, because
> some are very good, but the fact was that we had the opportunity to have our own
> group and so several of us decided to try. It was a very difficult time – the price of
> coffee was extremely low, and it had been for a long time. To give you an idea,
> now if you take a quintal[5] of coffee beans to be processed you will be paid almost
> 20,000 cordoba[6]. At that time, the price for the same amount was only about
> 9000. So, you couldn't really get by on that much. People were abandoning their
> farms to work in Managua, or on the (Pacific) coast." (**Dionicia**)

For Dionicia and the other members of the women's cooperative, the desire to

participate in hosting tour groups came from this economic hardship, but also a comfort

level with providing accommodations and food for long-term visitors to the community.

For several years, families in El Roblar hosted a number of young Danish volunteers, who

stayed for at least three months and volunteered in the local primary school teaching

English and trying to promote various environmental initiatives.

> "There were the people from Denmark, and also some students from the United
> States, that were also helping with the school. They stayed for quite a while,
> months actually, and we really got used to having people living with us. If you can
> imagine, they were here at a time when this house had no electricity, we still had a
> latrine, and there wasn't the separate room for guests. We got to know them very
> well!" (**Dionica**)

The experience with long-term volunteers was also good preparation for the

cooperative approach to hosting tourists, as the community participants decided that the

volunteers should split time between the families that were willing to host them over the

course of their time in El Roblar. The difference between these arrangements and the

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[5] A unit of measure equivalent to 100 pounds or about 46 kilos.
[6] Approximately $90 USD at 2012 exchange rates.

tourism program initiated by UCA San Ramón was in the direct economic benefit for the

participating families.

> "So we would have one student here for two weeks, and then they would switch houses and stay with Mayra Gamez or Wilfredo Guevara[7], they would then get to know others in the community and other activities. For example here we had one young guy from Denmark and he had never been on horseback before. Now we haven't got any horses but Wilfredo does, so this was where he was able to learn how to ride. Sharing the responsibility for the hosting of the visitors was good for us, because at first we didn't receive anything – it was part of the arrangement, they provided something to the community, so we were providing a bed and food. Eventually, their organization decided to offer some small amount per week, to help with the additional costs of food and so on." (**Dionicia**)

6.3.4 Cordobas and choices – Benefits and challenges of tourism.

While prices vary slightly depending on the group, current prices per person for

the tourism program are $2 USD per day for food, and $5 for accommodation. With the

capacity to host up to five visitors in her home, Dionicia can earn as much as $60 in one

weekend, a significant amount of income that has allowed her to make a number of

improvements to her property. In the typical style of homes in the Nicaraguan highlands,

the family home is a rustic clapboard structure on a concrete pad, with zinc roofing

sheets.

> " We have had the house in this location for over ten years, and but we have expanded the platform in the rear so that we could install the toilet. Previous to that we had a latrine a few metres downhill, so this is a big improvement in comfort, but also its more sanitary for us even when there are no tourists. We have been able to separate a room just for visitors, and we purchased mattresses and mosquito nets for those beds. I think the extension of electricity to this part of El Roblar was also made a priority because there are three of us in this area who are hosting tourists. There are more houses in other directions away from the centre of town, but they were not electrified until very recently." (**Dionicia**)

Beyond the physical improvements to her property, the increased economic

security provided by her involvement in the tourism program, and more generally her

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[7] El Roblar residents and participants in the tourism program.

participation in the local cooperative, has meant important peace of mind for Dionicia.

When asked what she valued the most about being part of the program, she mentioned

her status as a divorced woman and head of a large household in an underprivileged area

of a very poor country.

> "My husband had been part of the cooperative and when our marriage ended I
> had a lot of difficulties in maintaining our farm here and I was very close to
> leaving to join my two sisters who live in Managua. But thanks to the cooperative
> and thanks to the money from the tours I am in a better position. I'm the mother
> of 13 children, and the youngest four will all be high school graduates and this is
> more than I could have hoped for before I started with this." (**Dionicia**)

As one of only two male participants in the tourism program, Wilfredo Guevara

does not share Dionicia's relative vulnerability. In fact, he enjoys more economic security

than most other members of the El Roblar community, due in large part to his relatively

large property, and he faces fewer concerns about eventually subdividing his farm

between many children. His motivation for joining the tourism initiative was related to his

perception of the need for leadership in the community and for his family.

> "I decided pretty quickly to become part of the program when it was first
> suggested. I think I have benefitted a lot from my involvement with UCA and the
> Cecocafen[8] They had helped me in obtaining official titles for my land, I had the
> chance to invest in my farm through their financing, so yes, I had a lot of trust in
> what they were doing. But someone had to say, yes, we are willing to participate,
> and I thought it would be good to do so. At first there were five of us, and I think
> the proof of our success is that the program is growing, now we have added more
> members. We have a saying here 'una solo golondrina no significa verano' (one
> single songbird doesn't make it summer) which is to say that it requires a whole
> movement to make things better." (**Wilfredo**)

Closer to home, Wilfredo sees the act of hosting guests, particularly those from

other cultures, as providing his own children with the valuable opportunity to interact

with others unlike themselves. Furthermore, he believes that the requirements for

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[8] An umbrella organization of coffee producers active throughout the Nicaraguan highlands.

participation in the program are encouraging responsibility and equality within family

units.

> "When the first foreign volunteers came to live with us here, my sons were quite young and they were completely shy. When the visitors first arrived, the kids ran away into the house! Now, my young daughter is about the same age, and you saw the way she responded when you arrived. She greets people, she has the confidence to introduce herself and this is really important for me to see. To give my children that kind of experience I think will be really helpful to them when they are older. My boys for example, they were able to benefit from the Danish students being here for a long time, they have been studying English at school and this will be important for them… when we first started in the program, we didn't practice the best hygiene and so on, this was a big emphasis for the people from UCA because they knew this would be valued by the tourists. Also, they have always been very clear that there has to be harmony within the home if you want to host tourists. You can't have abuse or angry words. So, as others see how participating benefits our family this can be a goal for their own homes too." (**Wilfredo**)

The history of Nicaragua, with the Sandinistas, Contras and their brutal war

throughout the 1980s, is a significant part of Wilfredo Guevara's own life, and the impact

of the brutal war is visible on his property. Situated on a high plateau, Guevara's

farmhouse and guest quarters offer a stunning view of the far northern reaches of the

Nicaraguan highlands, a beautiful area that was the site of hill-to-hill fighting between the

Contra forces and Sandinista troops. A covered scenic viewpoint on Guevara's land is

now surrounded by corn fields but during the most violent years of the conflict, the

position was much sought after as it provided the opportunity to use light artillery on the

surrounding areas. Despite these powerful echoes of the infamous past, many visitors are

not intrigued by these connections.

> "The war was a very hard period for me, and for this area. We are quite cut off, just the one road towards San Ramón and it was much more of a track for trucks than it is now. So we were targets for the Contra, as was any isolated place. I think that it is important to share the history of this place with others, but really most international visitors are here to see the processes of coffee growing, and maybe enjoy the quiet rural life we have. They don't ask much about it. Sometimes they are not even aware of what 'Contra' or 'Sandinista' is referring to. I'm sometimes

upset to talk about it in detail. It was violent and ugly, families fought against themselves, on both sides. I spent a lot of time away from here. I didn't want to fight, and if I had stayed I would have been forced into it, on one side or another." (**Wilfredo**)

The almost singular focus of tourists on coffee production when in El Roblar is something that all interviewees mentioned, in one way or another. While it makes sense to the hosts that tours based on 'meeting the producers' or supporting just commerce would be centered on the commodity of interest, they feel that there is more to their lives than coffee production, and more to merit attention in their community. The scenic features of the community are substantial, but waterfalls and panoramas are not unusual in the area, something that the veterans of the program, like Guevara, acknowledge.

> "I would like to show people to the waterfall, to point out the small areas of original primary forest that we have nearby, but the fact is that unless people are here for a week or more you need to make choices. And there are other waterfalls and forests. What we have that is a bit different is the cooperative and the chance to show people about coffee. I think tourists also really value the chance to see how we live in the country." (**Wilfredo**)

Outside of the feeling that there is more to showcase in the community than just coffee production, another challenge relating to the tourist's focus on coffee relates to the timing of visits. Several participants in the program pointed out the difficulties in balancing their hosting duties with the actual work of harvesting coffee. This is especially challenging for those families who live in the 'village centre' of El Roblar, as these houses are some distance from the family farms, making it hard for people like Marco Antonio Salgado to supervise cultivation while tour groups are present.

> "Not all of us live right on the farmland, as you saw with Dona Dionicia and Don Wilfredo. The busiest time of the year is when we have to collect the ripe coffee beans and process them. There is about two weeks where have to work very hard to get the beans in. Obviously, this is also a time for tours to visit, because they can see the process of cultivation. My farm is about twenty minutes walk down the road, so I have to be there from the morning and through the day to supervise the

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pickers and run the 'beneficio'[9]. There have been times when I had to turn down the option of hosting visitors because I was too busy. This is too bad, because there aren't many visitors at other times of the year." (**Marco Antonio**)

Despite feeling somewhat aggrieved about the difficulties his situation has presented, Salgado has been part of the tourism project since 2005 and has no intention of dropping out. While this option is available to any participant at any time, and he admits to considering it in the early stages of his involvement, Salgado ultimately sees that the project has brought and number of important improvements to his property, but for the community at large as well.

> "You know the intention of all the programs relating to UCA San Ramón is to distribute benefits as widely as possible, in that way we can convince other people in the community to join the cooperative and also contribute actively. So for example, one investment we made as members of the tourism project was to apply for a loan to construct a water filter. There are three of us here in this part of El Roblar, so we could have put in individual filters for our homes, but we chose to take a loan to build a larger one that others around us could also use. There is also a greater cleanliness in the community – since tours started coming we now have places to put garbage, we maintain pathways and signs to make the place more attractive. This is good for everyone." (**Marco Antonio**)

The goal, suggested by Salgado, of encouraging greater participation in programs and the cooperative system, has been at least somewhat successful in El Roblar. After several years of having five host families in the community, 2010 saw three new members join the program. One of these new hosts is Maria Jesus Zamora, who cited the community benefits as helping to inspire her choice to join the tourism group. Another important factor in her decision was the family connection she has as the eldest daughter of Dionica Valdivia.

> "My mother was very important to my choice to join, I saw the changes to her house and that she was always very positive about the experience. I am also realistic about it, which I think is also important. I would like to make

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[9] A pulping station where the tough outer shell of the coffee bean is removed.

improvements to my house here, put in a toilet, improve the interior, but I can't expect to do that right away. It will take a few years." (**Maria Jesus**)

Much like her mother and Wilfredo Guevara, Zamora spoke about the positive impact of exposing her two young daughters to visitors from other places and cultures. The idea of providing these experiences, when combined with improving the family's financial capacity to afford secondary and post-secondary school for the coming generation was a key benefit for all the community members interviewed. For Zamora, however, a sense of responsibility to her mother's generation is also part of her commitment to the project.

> " As a woman in El Roblar I am benefiting from the actions of my mother and others who started 'El Privilegio' some time ago. The chance to be involved in a local women's cooperative is very important, and we of the younger generation need to be active members and provide leadership as our mothers and neighbours age. Since the cooperative existed the same small number of people have had to take on the tasks of being president, travelling to San Ramón to represent the community and so on. It is a chance for me to continue to improve our community and our lives by participating." (**Maria Jesus**)

Another common remark, particularly among the female participants in the tourism program, is that tourism activities are seen primarily as an extension and benefit for the cooperative rather than a separate concern. Although my questions were relating to involvement in tourism activities, the conversation would always lead back to discussions of the cooperative and how tourism could help with achieving goals generated by this larger group in the community. One future project that is particularly linked with tourism is a plan to produce coffee for sale locally. The current cooperative system involves the women of 'El Privilegio' selling all their marketable beans through the UCA San Ramón offices. While this avoids the costs involved in transporting beans to Matagalpa and the risk of being taken advantage of by unscrupulous middle merchants

looking to make a profit, the cooperative members in El Roblar are still concerned that

the more lucrative stages of the coffee production process take place elsewhere.

> "We have been discussing the idea of buying a small roaster to install here in the community, so we could then take control of the entire production cycle – right down to packaging and selling our own completely local coffee. The travelers we see, the groups who come on fair trade tours especially, are concerned about buying coffee that is grown responsibly and where the profit goes mostly to the producer. I think they would be very interested in buying coffee from El Roblar." (**Maria Rivo**)

The idea of self-controlled production for coffee grown in El Roblar came about

in part due to a series of field trips taken by participants in the tourism project to similar

rural tourism operations elsewhere in Nicaragua. Having this opportunity to travel and

meet people in similar situations was one of the key benefits for Mayra Gamez, another of

the earliest adopters of the tourism project in the community.

> "The growth of our own cooperative is based on the support from UCA San Ramón, and the inspiration from visiting other groups in Esteli and Chinandega. We are able to make these delegations to learn from others because of our involvement in the rural tourism program, so we have learned a lot and shared our own experiences too, the exchange is a very important aspect for me." (**Mayra**)

In addition to developing organization capacity and learning new skills relating to

hosting tourists and preparing food, Gamez credits her involvement with tourism for a

transformation in her own perceptions regarding her life in El Roblar. These changes go

beyond the introduction of ideas like recycling and the importance of improved hygiene,

and relate to the value she places on her role as a farmer and mother.

> "At first, I was uncertain about why there would be interest in visiting a place like El Roblar, but as the groups came and showed such interest and valued what we were doing as a women's organization, and as rural farmers, I felt a lot more confident. The idea that what we have here is valuable and interesting wasn't really something I had considered before. I mean, you have tourists coming and they are very excited when you tell them that all the food, except maybe the rice, that they eat here was grown on our own land. The milk is fresh, all the fruit is right around us. That has changed the way I prepare food for my own family

now, before I would go to Matagalpa and buy packaged food because I thought those were better and more healthy." (**Mayra**)

For the Gamez family, tourism has provided an important employment opportunity for Mayra's eldest daughter, who has joined the program as an apprentice guide. According to Mayra, the tourism project is an important source of income for people like her daughter who have no land of their own and little immediate prospect of obtaining any. Even so, it is unlikely to be enough to sustain her daughter in the longer term, and that is why the 'El Privilegio' cooperative is seeking other revenue streams like the coffee roaster.

> "It's a shame, when I look at my daughter, because she is developing her skills as a guide and this is helping to increase her pride in being from El Roblar and being part of the project. When you are young, without a family of your own, then the few dollars a month can seem like a lot, and definitely there is a lot more money in guiding than there is in working as a day labourer here, cultivating beans, coffee, or corn. But that won't always be enough, and so we as the leaders of the cooperative and of the community have to develop new plans, expand the programs that now exist, and come up with different ones, if we want people to stay." (**Mayra**)

As an apprentice guide, Mayra's daughter Joseling makes $8 USD per day. This wage seems more substantial when compared to the daily earnings that coffee pickers make during harvest time. These labourers are paid approximately 50 cents for each full basket of coffee beans, and most collect between seven to ten baskets in a day's work. In both cases, however, neither sector offers regular work, rather a hectic period of activity followed by several months of underemployment. The guide positions are thus ideal for young people who are still pursuing secondary or post-secondary education, as they can make themselves available at short notice for a tour. In El Roblar, two experienced guides are able to lead groups independently, and are in the process of training Joseling and one other apprentice. These guides make $12 per day, and fill their time between tour groups

with their studies and other work on the family farm or as agricultural day labourers in

the San Ramón region.

6.3.5 Hopes for a brighter future.

The guide assigned to accompany me during my time in El Roblar, Daniel

Zamora Valdivia, was informed by the UCA San Ramón office a day in advance of my

arrival, and had been helping his uncle clear brush outside of Sebaco (a small city located

an hour outside of Matagalpa) in preparation for bean planting season. When I left the

community, he returned to his duties on the farm, where he earned less than $3 USD per

day. Unsurprisingly, Daniel would prefer to work as a guide more frequently, as he is

currently in the process of saving money to pay for university courses in Matagalpa.

> "I have been working as a guide for three and a half years, I started just after
> completing secondary school. The cost of continuing at university is beyond what
> I could afford if I only worked on my mother's farm or for my uncles, so without
> the job I don't know what I would have planned. Even so, I still need to make
> another payment to the university before the end of next month, classes will start
> in October and if I can't manage to pay the entrance fees I will have to wait until
> the next intake, which is in January." (**Daniel**)

Zamora Valdivia was comfortable with the prospect of leading tour groups, given

that his mother, Dionica, had been hosting volunteers and tourists in her home for several

years. He credits his friendly nature with helping him succeed as a guide, and thinks his

confidence in dealing with groups of foreigners is due at least in part to his early exposure

to visitors in his home.

> "I really remember the Danish volunteers who lived with us. There was one in
> particular, Morten, who did not speak any Spanish when he first arrived, so we
> had to communicate however we could, with our gestures and so on. It was good
> for us, as kids, to get comfortable and also to be patient with visitors. I was pretty
> well prepared when I decided to become a guide, and then UCA San Ramón has
> a very good training program. I have been to all the other communities where
> their guides have been working for a lot longer. So I watched and saw how they

would interact with groups and answer questions, now I am demonstrating for the two girls who are the apprentice guides here." (**Daniel**)

Like all of those engaged in hosting tour groups, Daniel has noted the primacy of coffee production as the driving interest for most of the tourists he interacts with. This singular focus can sometimes lead to very specific questions, and leaves little time for covering other areas of typical life in El Roblar.

> "There's no question, the people that come with a focus on 'comercio justo' are usually very excited to learn a lot about the coffee harvest. They are pretty surprised when we talk about how little we are paid as producers. They also want to know details about fertilizers, shade growing, that kind of thing. To be honest, even as someone who grew up working on the coffee harvest, I wasn't very aware of all the details. I had to attend a few workshops provided by UCA San Ramón to be able to answer those questions, and even now, there are questions that I don't know anything about. I have to tell people to talk to the experts at the main office in San Ramón." (**Daniel**)

At 19 years old, most of Daniel's contemporaries are no longer permanent residents of El Roblar. Several friends, and his own sister, work for UCA San Ramón in other programs relating to health promotion and environmental education, but others have migrated at least semi-permanently to cities like Matagalpa and Managua. One popular route out of the countryside for young men is through the Nicaraguan military, and it was an option Daniel considered when he turned 18.

> "The army provides you with a much better wage than anything you can earn here, and that is important for anyone who wants to buy their own land. I wanted to join, but there is a minimum commitment of ten years, and you can be sent anywhere in the country. Quite a few people end up on the Atlantic coast, and with the situation in Costa Rica and Honduras right now, it is more risky to be committed to the army.[10] Besides, I want to study English in school, and I wouldn't be able to do that unless I went through officer's training and then the commitment is even longer." (**Daniel**)

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[10] Nicaragua has an ongoing border dispute with Costa Rica, and the political situation in Honduras is uncertain following a 2009 coup.

Daniel's desire to study English has emerged from the difficulties he has experienced with some groups that come to El Roblar with very little Spanish. Having a guide who can also provide services in English would allow groups who do are not capable of speaking Spanish or do not have the services of a translator to visit El Roblar more comfortably. Furthermore, he recognizes the value of English to his employment prospects within the UCA San Ramón organization.

> " There have been tour groups that can't really communicate very well with us. This is hard for them, and we have heard a few times about groups that don't come to El Roblar because of the language issue. So, training in English is good for me personally, as well as for the project here. I'm aware that this is a good role for me to fill for now, but eventually I am going to want to do more, to do something different. I have been to Matagalpa for school, and to Managua to visit my aunts who live near the Mercado Mayoreo and I don't have any desire to live there. It's very hot, and very crowded. I really like it much better here. But, I also know that my mother has to consider all of her children when thinking about her land, and there is not a lot of good property available nearby. To make a living at farming, you have to have enough land." (**Daniel**)

As the person from El Roblar who spends the most time with the visiting tour groups, Daniel has the greatest opportunity to build a relationship with these tourists that lasts beyond the actual time spent in the community. However, the only ongoing contact he could recall comes from those long-term volunteers who spent months, rather than days, in El Roblar. This observation is supported by the presence of photos and mementos sent back to the families from the former volunteers, and the display of Danish flags in the windowsill of Wilfredo Guevara's home.

> "People will tell us that they would like to keep in contact, they can send things through UCA San Ramón, but I haven't seen that happen yet. I think it is difficult, you have tour groups that pass through all of Nicaragua and Costa Rica in two weeks or a month, and there are a lot of communities and people that they visit, so I don't think its possible to expect that they will be in contact again. I have only seen that with those volunteers who really shared our life for a longer period. There is a different kind of relationship that you create in those cases." (**Daniel**)

The experience of one small community in hosting tours focused on fair trade coffee production shows that while the economic benefits of such a program may be small and unstable, they can still make a substantial difference to families with few other resources to rely on. What is more, the non-economic benefits cited by residents of El Roblar are substantial, including increased exposure and greater confidence in dealing with strangers, as well as changing priorities around the quality and value of rural life and self-sustaining agriculture. For the people interviewed, tourism is seen as an important aspect of a larger commitment to collaboration and diversification that is trying to secure a viable future for young people to remain in these outlying areas, providing options for those who would prefer not to migrate for economic reasons. However, the current approach to tourism is seen by some as being overly concerned with supporting just commerce and sustainable production and as such, is too narrowly focused for the community. Furthermore, the short-term nature of the visits appears to be limiting the kind of ongoing relationship building that could facilitate a deeper sense of solidarity between El Roblar's residents and their infrequent visitors.

6.4 Summary

While the participants of this study come from a wide range of backgrounds, and have participated in solidarity travel in different ways, there are some important similarities in their narratives. All have described, in one way or another, significant transformations in their perspective and opinions of the other people involved in solidarity travel. Travelers claim to have a better understanding of the lives of the Nicaraguan people they have met, and vice versa. In a similar way, all participants spoke about the way that their experiences of solidarity travel have motivated changes in their

own capacity to self-analyze and understand their place in the world. This is an interesting result considering the very diverse nature of the participants involved in this study, and it needs to be emphasized that the way in which these individuals describe such transformations varies greatly. Still, I would argue that a rural Nicaraguan discussing a greater awareness of how their own produce might contribute to the health of their family is quite similar to the realization on the part of a college freshman from the United States that their vote can be used to promote fair trade between the two countries. These similarities and other important findings are discussed in the context of relevant greater detail in the subsequent chapter.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

To summarize the research I conducted into solidarity travel between North America and Nicaragua, I link several significant findings to my two primary research questions and discuss how these relate to the existing literature. Following this discussion, a number of implications are suggested for travelers and organizations, and I make suggestions for future research directions on the topic of solidarity travel. I conclude the thesis by mentioning three unique contributions of my study to the academic literature on solidarity travel.

7.1 Enacting solidarity – Diverse delivery methods.

The first of my research questions related to the way that the three organizations – Witness for Peace, Casa Canadiense, and UCA San Ramón – understood and delivered solidarity travel experiences. The 'practice' of solidarity travel varies substantially from case to case, though there are some core similarities. These include the focus on economic alternatives to migration and low-paying work in urban or peri-urban areas, and the time spent with host families in rural settings. Both North American organizations also clearly outline for participants an idea of what sort of behaviour they consider will lead to 'good' solidarity with Nicaraguans, echoing the solidarity charter mentioned by Cravatte and Chabloz (2008).

One important way that the case study groups vary in terms of their 'delivery' of solidarity travel experiences is in the presence (in the case of Casa Canadiense) or absence (Witness for Peace) of project work that participants contribute to through fundraising efforts prior to the trip and volunteering their time while in the community. Avoiding this

sort of material contribution helps to maintain a certain level of consistency with Witness for Peace's discourse and practice - building solidarity through relationships and intercultural communication. However, it would be inaccurate to categorize the activities of Casa Canadiense's groups as a form of volunteer tourism. One major difference involves the language that is used by staff and in organizational materials. Rather than employing 'giving' language, or appealing to a sense of charity, Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense offer solidarity and work as concepts to explain their activities in Nicaragua. For many volunteer tourism operations, Sin (2010) recognized the centrality of 'giving' language in the fundraising activities that occur before some trips, and in the discourses of the tourists themselves (p. 495).

Beyond language, in evaluating structural inequalities existing in the pursuit of volunteer tourism in Cambodia, Sin highlights the passive role local communities often play in deciding what kind of volunteer activity takes place during these encounters. Although the projects may be planned and prioritized by the community or its representatives, the volunteer groups still need to agree to participate in the project. Communities require contacts with groups that facilitate volunteer tourist travel in order to engage in these exchanges. For Sin, this means that an unequal amount of power and control remains with the visitors and their coordinating agents.

Participants in my study, particularly returned travelers, cited care, responsibility and generosity as motivations for seeking out solidarity travel opportunities. Tour organizers revealed that they actively discuss many similar points to those raised by Sin and others (Mowforth and Munt, 2009; Barnett and Land, 2007; Hutnyk, 1996) with travelers and Nicaraguan colleagues in an effort to acknowledge the inequalities of power and privilege that exist when relationships are based on these sometimes problematic

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concepts. The 'encounters' described by Shinnamon (2010) as one-sided affairs where the travelers offer little of their perspective or life stories sound similar in nature to the meetings and discussions carried out in Managua by Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense. Significantly, the Global Exchange tours studied by Shinnamon do not seem to include any rural homestay component – which as the findings section of the thesis reveals, is seen by travelers and organizers alike as a venue where a more complete exchange of perspectives is possible.

The volunteer trip to South Africa that Sin (2009) studied is similar in some important respects to the 'Nicaragua Service Plunge' carried out by the groups from the University of Portland included in my study. The student groups are involved in a rural work placement, and also spend significant time learning about the social and political context of the country at large, through meetings and tours facilitated by local 'experts' (p. 484-486). In Sin's study, however, a desire to travel is a more common motivation for participants than wanting to contribute to the life and well-being of the host community through volunteer work (p. 488-489).

Based on the exploration of the roots of the three studied organizations, there are clear links between the initial impetus for the creation of the group and the way they organize solidarity travel now. It is noteworthy that of the three groups, both North American-based organizations were created with the central purpose of facilitating connections through travel. UCA San Ramón, on the other hand, developed a travel program in response to the needs of its membership for diversified economic opportunities. In all three of the organizations, travel is one aspect of a larger organizational mandate. Staff members devote more time to maintaining relationships with local partners and community members, gathering information to support advocacy

campaigns, and serving the community through other important programs. This has two significant implications. First, having other responsibilities and areas of focus makes it hard for the organizations to provide consistent and thorough follow-up and support to returned travelers. As English (2002) points out, expecting travelers to be responsible for their own reflection and continued engagement in activism is inviting the chance that some individuals will not be self-motivated. However, the fact that organizations prioritize their relationships with Nicaraguan partners actually reflects quite well on their commitment to solidarity. Fogarty (2005) points out that continuity and constancy of contact is what makes solidarity possible. It is structurally challenging for travelers to maintain connections with Nicaraguan host families and organizations directly, so they rely on the organization they travel with – Witness for Peace, Casa Canadiense, or UCA San Ramón – to do the work that is necessary.

7.2 Creating critical consciousness.

Fogarty (2005) suggests that an essential element of solidarity travel is the opportunity to learn through social analysis. The agroecoturismo program in San Ramon seems narrowly focused on coffee production, and this may prevent learning or social analysis from being realized. However, the travel experience for foreign visitors to San Ramón is certainly an inter-cultural immersion that allows for direct contact with people who live in remote rural villages. Difficulties arise, however, in the lack of consistent preparation for groups that arrive in El Roblar looking to learn about coffee, fair trade, and rural life. Exposing participants to pre-trip preparation that is consistent with the aims and approaches of the tour organizers can help in shaping the transformative aspects of the travel experience. This is consistent with Eddy's (2011) assertion, that young people

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with a pre-existing level of critical consciousness who then take part in international solidarity travel may have a greater capacity for transformation. While Eddy links this characteristic to eventual employment with activist organizations, I believe the idea can be applied more broadly so as to include even elementary levels of social movement participation and engagement.

Of course, simply providing readings or audio-visual materials is not enough. It is important to be informed about the historical context of a place like Nicaragua, its relations with other parts of the world, and the socioeconomic and political situation that prevails in the country. This material on its own may lay the foundation for possible transformation, but it should be accompanied by an awareness of how to think critically about society and one's place in it. Fogarty (2005) calls this practice 'social analysis' (p.12) while Freire (1968) would describe it as conscientization.

Conscientization is an ongoing process by which a learner moves toward critical consciousness. It differs from "consciousness raising" in that the latter may involve transmission of preselected knowledge. Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness—in particular, awareness of oppression - being an "object" of others' will rather than a self-determining "subject." The process of conscientization involves identifying Contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming part of the process of changing the world (Goldbard, 2006).

Solidarity travel can be said to 'raise the consciousness' of participants – but does it conscientize? I argue that it contributes to both, so long as the tour incorporates sessions that are dialogical and participatory, like the power and privilege workshop undertaken at the start of every Witness for Peace delegation. This kind of opportunity provides the space for participants to expose the layers of privilege and power that surround them and

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others. Then, over the course of the tour – the meetings and discussions with community leaders and activists, the homestays with rural farm families – these same participants may identify Contradictions between these experiences and their previous understandings related to poverty, inequality and justice. As the tour ends and the delegates create a action plan for their return to the United States, or Canada, travelers are invited to continue participating in a process of transforming themselves and their communities. My research reveals that organizers and trip leaders carefully consider the kind of educational outcomes they desire, select a philosophical foundation to encourage these results, and then carefully prepare, facilitate, and provide opportunities for action and reflection after the trip is finished.

What is more, all participants in this study - whether travelers, organizational staff, or rural Nicaraguan 'hosts' – discuss the dual process of consciousness raising and conscientization that has occurred through their participation in solidarity travel. They may not use these exact words, and indeed there is a range of vocabulary used to describe the transformation. Some, like Riahl, Lindsay and Mika, express their thoughts in a very analytical, academic way that is clearly related to their formal studies on these topics. Others, like Sara or Wilfredo, use different words but are fundamentally describing the same thing – a shift in their perspective and understanding of the other parties involved in solidarity travel, and an increased self-knowledge of how they play a part in the overall set of relations between North American and Nicaragua.

For all three organizations, developing solidarity through travel is an actively evolving process. In the case of UCA San Ramón, their tourism program is relatively young, but it is growing at the community level. With 2,600 visitors annually (UCA San Ramón, 2011), the priority is to expand the number of tourists so that community

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partners are satisfied with the additional income they can derive from their involvement in the program. Growth of this nature is not necessarily possible for the other two case study organizations, which both face limits to the number of groups they can feasibly accommodate at their current size. In the case of Casa Canadiense, staff and volunteers have led a substantial evolution in the model of solidarity employed by the organization. Control over project selection has shifted to Nicaraguan communities and student groups are now encouraged to participate more analytical, reflective activities during the tour, which will no doubt assist the travelers capacity to understand the concept of intercultural solidarity (Wessels, 2007).

Witness for Peace, meanwhile, continues to deal with a question that has been part of the organization since its inception – the appropriate way to acknowledge and work with the privileged position that most staff and participants enjoy in American society (Weber, 2004; Griffin-Nolan, 1991). The organization actively attempts to bring together interested staff members on a collaborative committee that makes suggestions for their internal practices, and uses a critical gender and race theory approach to providing facilitation and social analysis training for delegations.

7.3 Bound by biography?

The second of my research questions related to the stories that participants (local hosts, organizational staff, and past travelers) told about solidarity travel. Sub-questions relating to these stories related to what drove people to become involved, what they shared about their experiences during the solidarity tour, and how they described what happened after the tour was over and travelers returned home.

Becoming part of solidarity travel relies on having an opportunity and an

inclination, to participate in such an experience. For hosts, the driver of their participation seems closely linked to economic necessity. Wanting to avoid the necessity of migration to the city or abroad, heads of household and young people in El Roblar were interested in the chance to earn money and develop relationships with outsiders. Casa Canadiense and Witness for Peace staff that participated in this study share a number of key biographical characteristics that are similar to those discussed by Nepstad (2004). Family or academic interest in issues relating to inequality and social justice, a previous history of travel to Latin America and exposure to the realities of life for marginalized people there, helped to open people's minds to the possibility of working for an organization that provides solidarity travel experiences. Eddy (2011) argues that when privileged Westerners are exposed to counterhegemonic narratives through international travel, "their accumulated intellectual and cultural capital may be thrown into doubt and reevaluations of their worldviews may ensue" (p. 245). Simply travelling, however, is not enough to encourage participation in domestic political activity or international solidarity work. This requires a critical edge to their previous education and interest on these matters.

There is a certain degree of overlap between the responses of organizers and that of certain past travelers. Some in this latter group had been part of solidarity travel or study abroad opportunities before their tour of Nicaragua, and this encouraged them to get involved again. For others, this trip represented a first experience in the Global South and with solidarity tourism, so once again academic interest, or social influences including family, peers and religious affiliation emerges as quite significant.

The diversity of prior travel experiences within the small group of participants in this study makes it hard to classify travelers according to Fogarty's (2005) system of

volunteer vacationers, development tourists, and solidarity travelers. While the description of the first category, with an emphasis on pre-planned itineraries and group activities sounds very similar to the travel experiences organized by Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense, the participants do not fit perfectly in this category, particularly because they lack the sense of certainty that their volunteering and service-related work will be effective and demonstrate far more self-awareness that Fogarty associates with 'volunteer vacationers'. Ideally, the power and privilege sessions and educational workshops in the early stages of a Witness for Peace or Casa Canadiense delegation would provide participants with the deeper understanding of neoliberalism and globalization that Fogarty associates with 'solidarity travelers'. The intention of the action planning sessions at the end of the travel experience is, at least in part, to suggest that North America is the most effective venue for future activism and work in solidarity with the Nicaraguan people. However, the narratives contained within this study reveal that not all past delegates are particularly conversant with the concepts of privilege or neoliberalism, and many are also very open about their desire to return to Nicaragua or venture to other 'similar' parts of the world in order to gain more experiences. From this perspective, Fogarty's middle category - 'development tourists'- may best describe the travelers profiled here.

7.4 Building a broad movement.

According to Casa and Witness staff, and past travelers, people who participate in these experiences tend to return to North America with a substantially altered worldview. They describe their transformation as having a better understanding of the larger structural forces underlying social problems in Nicaragua, and also openly discuss

rethinking their lifestyle, career, and relationships to others. Related to all of this is a desire to advocate for Nicaraguans, and others living in poverty at home and abroad.

However, all respondents noted the difference between this desire and an actual capacity to do advocacy work that they felt would 'make a difference'. The travelers were passionate, but many struggled to make the leap into action and movement participation. This was especially true for those returned travelers that did not benefit from travelling with a group and returning to the structures of an organization, whether student-led or university-run. From envisioning these changes to actually enacting changes, Kiely (2004) finds that former participants have undergone transformations in a number of different areas: political, moral, intellectual, cultural, personal and spiritual (p. 11-14). He likewise recognizes that because mediating personal, structural, and contextual factors hinder young people's capacity to act, it is unrealistic to assume that taking action to transform one's lifestyle, institutions, and policies will be an easy or smooth process.

Another important element of the post-trip experience is the emotional challenge that returnees feel. Kiely describes the difficult nature of re-integration as a 'chameleon complex' which represents the internal struggle between conforming to, and resisting, dominant norms and practices in North American culture and society (p. 15).

> "Participation… can trigger extremely powerful visceral, emotional, cognitive reactions from students who begin to critically reflect on long-held and taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves, their lifestyle, career, relationships, social problems, and unjust hegemonic dimensions of the world around them," (Kiely, 2004, p.18).

While travelers may struggle emotionally as they attempt to convert their passion into action, the host community members in Nicaragua carry on with their day-to-day lives. They often have long periods between groups, and they do not report much in the way of ongoing contact between themselves and former guests. This is consistent with

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what some academics like Hall and Raymond (2008) have predicted about short-term connections – they are more likely to create memories than relationships.

Enacting solidarity on an ongoing basis involves hard work, a commitment to particular organizations and a consistency in terms of physical presence and contact with partners. However, the solidarity-related behaviour promoted by the organizations included in this study is open-ended in nature. In other words, Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense do not try to exclusively encourage travelers to build closer connections with the organization alone. Instead, people are encouraged to become a part of the movement in any way possible. This allows for a great diversity of tactics and permits people who have been exposed to numerous issues to choose those areas that they are most passionate about. One result of this open approach is that it is challenging to measure the impact of travel in terms of increased participation in organization-specific activities, since people are encouraged to make a range of contributions to a very broad movement. This can be particularly tricky when organizations seek funding from government agencies and other groups, because these groups often prefer to support projects and activities where impacts can be tracked and measured easily.

On the other hand, the narratives of participants included in my study reveal that they are motivated to engage in a wide range of activities related to diverse issues once they return to North America. This would seem to counteract the argument put forward by Mowforth and Munt (2009) that these tours do not engage people in broad based movements but rather remain very focused on a particular issue or special interests.

7.5 Changing the world one traveler at a time?

Almost all of the past travelers and organizational staff were able to identify

important limitations of solidarity travel – the lack of ongoing contact, the chance that participation is an exercise in privilege and questions about the real impact these tours have on the lives of Nicaraguans, were common topics raised in these narratives. On the one hand, this reflects well on the self-awareness and critical nature of participants, which echoes the observations of Berg (2004) in her study of 'zapatourismo' in Southern Mexico. However, as Fogarty (2005) points out, solidarity between North American youth and rural Nicaraguans is a particularly challenging type of solidarity, as it involves an interaction is between those most marginalized and those most privileged by the status quo (p. 67).

Another key concern expressed by some participants in this study relates to the extent to which the efforts of organizations like Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense are serving to reach a wider audience and contributing to a greater effort to achieve some of the major shifts in the way of organizing society and human activities. The enthusiasm of certain academic work that has explored the ideas behind solidarity, justice, or emancipatory tourism has contributed to this sense that such activities are constructed differently and have the potential to, in essence, change the world (McLaren, 2003; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; Shinnamon, 2010; Scheyvens, 2002; Spencer, 2010). These authors see solidarity travel as unsettling hegemonic understandings and patterns of interaction between Global North and Global South. I am also largely in agreement that the activities and organizations described in this study can be considered as counterhegemony in practice.

Even so, it is appropriate to acknowledge a different, perhaps more critical view of this approach to travel. Authors like Hutnyk (1996), Hedges (2002), Butcher (2007) and Mowforth and Munt (2002) suggest that organizations like the ones profiled here do not

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adequately recognize their links to and participation in a global tourism system. This can apply to the practice of solidarity travel in general, as well as the particular areas and activities that are part of the tour itinerary. The pursuit and promotion of fair trade instead of free trade, for instance, has been accused of accepting a slightly ameliorated version of global capitalism, rather than countering with a more radical or revolutionary approach to economic and social organization (Hussey, 2011).

The idea of intercultural solidarity as a goal of a travel experience for young people may be more palatable to some critics than charitable work or resume building through volunteer tourism or 'service learning', not all are convinced. Mahrouse (2011) argues that invoking solidarity is a means for privileged North American or European travelers to feel better about engaging in a leisure activity (albeit one that would certainly be classified as 'serious leisure') that relies directly on the poverty and oppression of the hosts. Rather than undermining or challenging privilege, solidarity travel may give its participants the opportunity to overlook it.

In my study, a number of responses from participants could be interpreted in a way that supports this critique. Several of the young travelers, especially those entering competitive fields such as law or medicine, describe their tour experiences as means to strengthen their resumes and applications for graduate school and jobs. The responses of Aaron and Megan, for example, correspond to Daly's (2008) category of 'conservative global citizen'. Other participants, like Mika and Rebecca, reveal a great deal of critical self-awareness and a change in perspective developed through their exposure to solidarity travel. They have become 'transformative' global citizens, but even so, they are to some extent focused on joining the system as it is, creating NGOs and new travel opportunities for others. Choudry (2010) identifies a tendency towards professionalization and a

proliferation of NGOs run and created by well-meaning Westerners. The solutions and strategies proposed by such groups often have the unintended consequence of displacing or eliminating from the decision making process the people most directly affected by oppression.

There is also a different way to read the *testimonio* of the community hosts from El Roblar. On the surface, the 'benefits' of tourism related by Wilfredo, Mayra and others seem to be unproblematic – their exposure to tourism and travelers has led them to see their way of life as self-sufficient and admirable, rather than backward and shameful. However, these sentiments can also be seen as forms of internalized oppression, identified by Padilla (2001) as "the turning on ourselves, our families and our people – distressed patterns of behaviour that result from the racism and oppression of the dominant group" (p. 65). From this perspective, why does it require the approval of outsiders for the people of El Roblar to change the way they perceive themselves? This way of looking at the tourist-host interaction suggests that the people of El Roblar who participated in my study are dependent on outside visitors not only for the additional income that they represent, but also for the psychosocial benefits they derive from the interactions.

When it comes to 'changing the world' writ large, the record of accomplishment of the organizations included in my study is difficult to measure. Witness for Peace was created to challenge the Reagan administration's policies and support for the Contra forces during the 1980s. Peace (2008) and Weber (2004) argue that the actions of Witness for Peace, combined with other groups that formed part of the Central American peace movement, helped to prevent a full-scale invasion of Nicaragua. Since the end of hostilities and the organization's transition to a focus on economic justice and fair trade, there have been fewer triumphs in terms of substantial policy transformations.

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The idea that Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense have been raising awareness through travel is harder to challenge, but it is worth pointing out the limited niche that these activities occupy when considering the overall flow of travelers from North America to Nicaragua. Witness for Peace brings several hundred delegates on solidarity tours every year, (Witness for Peace, 2010) while the Casa Canadiense total is even more modest[11]. The small scale of these organizations make it hard to support assertions that the world will change dramatically as a result of their alternative approach to solidarity through travel. However, to focus on this exclusively would ignore the possibility that by raising awareness and encouraging the development of critical consciousness these groups have had a substantial impact at a personal level. In keeping with Fogarty's (2005) idea of developing solidarity slowly, over time, the creation of an anti-oppressive, self-aware activist does not happen in one moment, or in one short-term trip to Nicaragua.

My study reveals what these organizations do well when it comes to encouraging the development of critical consciousness, and it suggests an area where there is much room for improvement. From the narratives of travelers and organizational staff, it is clear that both Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense do a very thorough job of bringing travelers' attention to the power relations and networks of privilege that surround all of us, and that are enacted when people attempt to enter into relationships of intercultural solidarity. Through their careful use of language, and by facilitating workshops and activities that reveal these previously hidden or ignored dynamics in a non-confrontational way, the staff are able to encourage travelers to explore their own

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[11] In 2011, eight school groups participated in Casa Canadiense facilitiated tours. The average group size is 25.

privilege and provide the means to potentially address these issues. By carefully observing their own behaviour and the actions of travelers when they are in Nicaragua, the organizations are able to identify problematic patterns, like the disrespectful use of photography described by Riahl. Furthermore, the organizations turn that attention inward and evaluate their own practices and structures that may be replicating inequalities.

However, once the touring group leaves Nicaragua to return to Canada or the United States, the close attention that has been paid to their activities and the organizational support for their transition towards a different and perhaps more profound self-awareness ends. As Kiely (2004) points out, for young people the return home can be a profoundly troubling time, where the challenge to their world view and their realization of their involvement in global systems of oppression and inequality can leave some returnees paralyzed with feelings of guilt and disassociation with their previous lives. The 'chameleon with a complex' that Kiely describes requires a great deal of support, and I would argue that it is at this stage that the efforts of Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense could be improved. As the narratives of travelers like Mika and Aaron suggest, when young people return from Nicaragua and do not have the benefit of an organization or experienced contemporaries with whom to collaborate, it is possible to become frustrated and disengaged from the issues to which they were exposed and became passionate about in Nicaragua. Even those participants, such as Megan and Sara, who did benefit from traveling with a group, note that they experienced some level of this frustration as they struggle with the apathy of others and the slow pace of change.

While the narratives of past participants has led me to the identification of this particular area for improvement, the stories told by organizational staff explain why this is

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the case. Witness for Peace and Casa Canadiense are small organizations that are pushed to the limit of their resources, financial and otherwise. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, travel is only one of many activities for which staff have responsibility, and this means these organizations must be creative when coming up with effective and efficient ways of improving their interaction and follow-up with travelers after their tour. As Buechler (2011) and others have pointed out, there has been a great deal of excitement around the potential for online tools and social media to be used in such efforts, but these tools may not be as useful in this case. This is due not only to pragmatic issues around the access to internet and computers for some participants in the solidarity travel system, for those in El Roblar especially, but also because of the paradoxical nature of using highly impersonal technologies in an effort to build solidarity. Staff members, like Brooke, Christine and Amanda, recognize the danger of the reduced commitment to a cause that is possible by 'one-click actions' through social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter or online petitions, whether created by the organization itself, or a more generic campaign such as the actions promoted by Avaaz.org. Developing solidarity requires constancy and work, so perhaps the best approach for the organizations profiled in my research would be to provide all travelers with resources and contacts so that they might easily engage in solidarity actions in person when they return to Canada or the United States. This, combined with communication of the ongoing work in Nicaragua, might be the most effective way to encourage the development of new activists.

7.6 Research implications

This study and its findings have implications for three distinct groups – potential solidarity travelers, organizations involved in offering alternative tourism experiences, and

academics. I have discussed the implications for academics in the subsequent section on future research.

For travelers that might be considering taking part in a solidarity tour in the future, I hope that this research displays the challenges you will face after returning from such an experience. For travelers, transformative potential of solidarity travel is substantial, but changes will not happen overnight and are less likely to happen at all if the tour is not taken as seriously as it could be. The first and most important element of taking solidarity travel seriously is to be very thorough in selecting the group with whom you choose to travel. I hope that this thesis has indicated how challenging it is to work in solidarity and how essential it is for hosting organizations to have deep and well-maintained links in the communities in which they work.

Once you have chosen the organization with whom you will travel, ensuring that you will have a network of activist groups or peers to support you upon your return and re-integration is also vital. The solidarity travel organizers profiled in this study are dedicated to providing what support they can, but they have limited resources and will not necessarily be able to do much effective follow-up after the trip is over.

For organizations that are engaged in international service learning, study tours, or volunteer tourism, there is an understandable temptation to appeal to certain segments of the travelling public by using the language of solidarity and partnership. Making such claims ought to be more than a branding exercise. Working in solidarity involves a commitment to building relationships that are based on equality of power and a constant willingness to be critical of your organization and be challenged by your partners. Having leadership, a structure that lends itself to openness and embracing evolution, and change in mission and action, are vital characteristics.

7.7 Recommendations for future research

Current and future tourism researchers that are interested in solidarity, resistance to economic determinism and social movement participation, will find much to explore in the realm of solidarity travel. In the course of my study, I became curious about a great variety of related topics that were, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study. I would recommend the following four areas for future research into the phenomenon of solidarity tourism.

First, my study has been very focused on the concept of solidarity and how it is understood and enacted by these three organizations, and the individuals involved in the practice of solidarity travel within these groups. There are many other frames or lenses to explore the interactions between North American travelers, mediating organizations, and Nicaraguan communities. One, as alluded to in the preceding section, would be to thoroughly interrogate the power dynamics and relations inherent in these activities, considering the political economy and discourse of solidarity travel in the process. Alternatively, studying these organizations in a more comparative way, by considering structure, funding sources, the ways in which they claim and maintain legitimacy at home and abroad, would also make for a very interesting topic within the field of NGO or social movement studies.

Within a similar realm, it would be interesting to explore the role of religion for participants and hosting organizations. People deeply involved in some form of Christianity founded almost all of the organizations that I read of or learned about, during the course of this study. The links between the Sandinistas, the Central American peace movement, the Catholic theology of liberation, and faith-based activism have been

studied extensively (Nepstad, 2004; Smith, 1996; Morris, 2004). However, many evangelical and inter-denominational groups populate the NGO sector in Nicaragua and other parts of the Global South. The links between their theological and philosophical foundations and their mission and practice would be fertile ground for further study.

Another interesting project that may be more appropriate for a doctoral dissertation would be to conduct a longitudinal study of a solidarity tour group from recruitment, through participation and re-integration, checking in with group members on a regular basis after they have returned to Canada or the US from their international solidarity trip. This approach might provide interesting insights into the transition from excitement and inspiration into committed action and solidarity work. Having the same group of participants would allow for the researcher to witness and report changes within the same group of participants.

Finally, this study has considered three case studies and the narratives of people involved in building solidarity between the Global North and the Global South. As academics like Freire (1968) and Fogarty (2005) have pointed out in their own work on intercultural solidarity, when the cultural and socioeconomic divide between visitors and the people they meet is substantial, building effective connections and strong relationships is an even more difficult task. It would be interesting to study, whether comparatively or in isolation, programs and organizations that work on building solidarity within Canada, or within Nicaragua. There are important dynamics of power and privilege that would still be at play in such encounters, but the issues of language and distance between partners in solidarity would perhaps be less significant. These 'intra-cultural' or domestic solidarity trips may use similar models or different approaches compared to the organizations included in my research. There likely could be different outcomes in terms

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of participants' capacity to act continuously in solidarity with people from their own country, as opposed to working across international boundaries.

7.8 Concluding remarks

In profiling the work of three organizations providing solidarity travel opportunities, my research has revealed that there are different ways of enacting solidarity that arise from the history and philosophy of the organization in question. Through interviews with staff, Nicaraguan community hosts, and travelers, my study has highlighted the transitions and transformations that have come from participating in solidarity travel.

My work contributes to what Pritchard, Morgan and Ateljevic (2011) describe as 'hopeful' tourism research, an emerging paradigm that involves critiquing dominant and powerful practices and providing a forum for just forms of tourism and research. This study builds on the work of other researchers such as Fogarty (2005), Higgins-Desbiolles (2008), and Spencer (2010) in studying the connections and transformations developed between people involved in solidarity travel. My research findings are consistent with some of the ideas and concepts developed by these academics, while challenging or suggesting alternative interpretations in other cases.

In particular, I feel my research offers three unique contributions to the emerging literature on solidarity travel and tourism. First, in profiling three distinct organizations with different missions and methods, I have shown how solidarity can be enacted in a variety of ways, and how these variations in 'delivery model' have implications for the kind of connection and transformation that results. Second, by analyzing the narratives of organizational staff, Nicaraguan community members, and solidarity travelers, I have

been able to highlight the similarities and differences regarding the impact of solidarity travel as experienced by members of these groups. Third, I have proposed a different way of describing the potential of these activities, rather than the 'world changing' rhetoric employed by other academics (Scheyvens, 2002; McLaren, 2003; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008). By looking at the impact of transformations on a personal level, I argue that solidarity travel, as profiled in this study, has contributed to substantial changes in the perspective and approach of participants. However, my research has also revealed an important challenge that organizations could address in the future if they mean to be as effective as possible. Building on the work of Kiely (2005) and Fogarty (2005), my study confirms the challenges faced by travelers, particularly young people, on their return to North America and suggests that the organizations that have facilitated their experience could pay more attention to supporting these individuals through their transition. In so doing, the next generation or cohort of committed solidarity activists will continue to be educated, motivated, and inspired to action.

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