

I remember being 17 years old, my high school graduation was a few months away, and I had realised that I no longer wished to pursue a Law degree or career in the UK. Extremely unsure and worried about my path, I confided in my mum, who simply asked me: *then, what do you want to do?*

I didn't know.

So, I decided I would study something that would let me know. In other words, since I didn't know the type of space I wanted to take up in the world, I needed to learn about the world in which I live. This desire led me to embark on a multi-disciplinary degree, specifically it motivated my decision to take on the Certificate of International Learning.

As I completed this certificate's requirements, I began to see some of the frameworks upon which our societies are founded and through which they function. Over the past four years, I have taken numerous courses that discuss global and local issues through sociological lenses – some of which were from the Department of Sociology. I was captivated by conversations on the four waves of globalisation as these discussions focused on creating a platform where I could effectively engage with the narratives and teachings of anti-oppressive scholars and activists of marginalised identities. These isolated concepts and systems which we explored in class began to intersect. For example, through learning about the global racial capitalist system, specifically its reliance on creating and blurring distinctions between sovereign peoples under the pretext of "race" and its reliance on the systematic and systemic devaluation of gender-based social labour, allowed me to welcome a more nuanced discussion to the topic of eradicating barriers to reproductive justice. In that I had the information to understand the fundamental differences between reproductive rights from reproductive justice. This distinction illustrated the ways in which "race", gender, class, age, the environment, law, and finances are deeply intertwined in an individual's health, bodily autonomy, and agency over their reproductive processes. These conversations allowed me to evaluate the way that centuries of accumulated gender-based and "race"-based violence permeate discussions about reproduction in Canada and in the countries that I grew up in, namely Nigeria and Tanzania.

Importantly, these intersections deepened my understanding of the use of social shame and legislation to deprive marginalised individuals of control over their body, in addition to the impact that the different types of colonialism these three countries experienced continue to shape the nuances of the reproductive justice conversation.

As I learnt how various systems of interlocking oppressions have morphed and adapted over the centuries to remain relevant to the time, a recurrent question that I wondered and was challenged by my professors to consider was: *why don't we have another system of global structuring?* In an attempt to begin to answer this mountain of a question, I first looked to my Linguistics, French literature, and Translation Studies courses. In the case of language, we see that power – be that political, social, or economic – is inseparable from our communication systems. From the morphological level, where certain words and morphemes hold greater social currency than others; to distinctions between languages and dialects, whereby certain speech varieties earn the prestigious title of *language* and even fewer languages hold a near hegemonic dominion over our academic, literary, and translated texts. In this way, I began to see the impact of homogeneous knowledge sources on the problem-solving process. In that to address a global-level concern such as institutional restructuring, we need to consult the various ways of knowing and knowledge sources across the globe. To further develop this answer, I turned to my Women and Gender Studies course, where we identified the inherently paradoxical nature of the original question. In that, we are fundamentally all products of the various interlocking systems of oppression. Despite our anti-oppressive paradigms, the way we conduct and communicate our research, our stories, and our teachings still align with the criteria imposed by these systems, for these are the systems in which we were socialised, educated, and continue to function. Therefore, those who have carved out a platform to share their findings are still those who have benefitted from these systems in some shape or form. Rather than becoming demystified, I took this understanding to motivate my desire

to, a., answer the original question, and b., contribute to the carving out of more space on the metaphorical table for marginalised global and local perspectives to be heard and considered.

With time I realised these intersectional concepts were interwoven into the daily experiences of various Edmonton communities. Prior to the pandemic, I had the opportunity to volunteer with CANAVUA's food bank as a part of the language learning component of this certificate. CANAVUA's food bank operated on the ground level of La Cité Francophone located in Edmonton's French district. Many of the food bank's clients were French-speaking newcomers to Canada, while a good handful of their volunteers had also been newcomers in the past 5 years. I found this experience invaluable as it allowed me to reflect on the way people create community in different contexts. Reflecting on my experience as an international student here at the U of A, as well as my previous experience growing up in Tanzania as a foreign national, I noticed that there is a tendency to build community based on similarities. These similarities can include place of origin, language background, hobbies, motivation to migrate, and structural barriers to a good standard of living after migrating. My conversations with the food bank clients and volunteers highlighted the balancing act between the difficulties and liberties newcomers to Canada face, especially when they identify with numerous marginalised communities. In certain spheres, they are welcomed and supported to express certain aspects of their intersectional identities in comparison to their experiences back home. However, the inverse is also true, in that there are aspects of their identities which they could celebrate and acknowledge back home, which now cause a layer of tension and discomfort in certain spaces. These conversations encouraged me to reflect on how I move and present myself in various spaces. Importantly, it pushed me to evaluate the extent to which I create a space for others to feel comfortable and safe appearing as their whole self.

To this end, I appreciate my decision to attend the intercultural communication training early on in my degree, as this training provided me with valuable language and resources to support my continued engagement with global and local issues throughout my time in Canada. While living

and working in Residence, I identified two fundamental gaps, a., a lack of awareness of the student process based on immigration status and other demographic markers, and b., the absence of an initial safer space in Residence for International students to connect with home while building community in Canada. The conversations regarding cultural humility and awareness informed my identification and event planning process, as I understood that the absence of these concepts presented challenges to effectively supporting our multidimensional resident population, despite our good intentions. Using some of the frameworks surrounding intercultural “competency” and sensitivity, I focused on creating presentations that informed my two target audiences – Residence student staff, and International students in Residence, respectively – of key information that could start the conversations about effective support of intersectional resident identities and navigating aspects of Edmonton and Residence culture that isn’t written down in a guide, respectively. To achieve this goal, I reached out to various campus services that serve these populations as well as students who identified as International, Indigenous, mature, first-generation, and domestic to inform the content of the presentation. In addition to the student process, this presentation highlighted the way that our language and mindsets may present barriers to inclusion, through the maintenance of positive and negative stereotypes and invalidating experiences.

Regarding the second deficit, in addition to a presentation, I worked closely with other International students from various countries to design an Orientation mixer featuring food items that reminded them of home, which they could easily access in Edmonton. The food aspect was crucial, as food is a major unifier in many cultures. The mixer also presented an opportunity to promote local Indigenous food services as an entry point to discuss the importance of understanding the land that we find ourselves on, specifically the peoples who from time immemorial have maintained a stewardship relationship with this land, their histories, and cultures.

In these ways, I have enjoyed and grown from my CIL experience and continue to question and learn more about the world in which I live.