



# The Self Who Meets the Other: Deconstructing the “Well-Intentioned” Researcher Through an Ethic of Hospitality

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Volume 70, numéro 2, été 2024

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1112968ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.55016/ojs/ajer.v70i2.77869>

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Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

ISSN

0002-4805 (imprimé)

1923-1857 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Heringer, R. (2024). The Self Who Meets the Other: Deconstructing the “Well-Intentioned” Researcher Through an Ethic of Hospitality. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 70(2), 265–287.  
<https://doi.org/10.55016/ojs/ajer.v70i2.77869>

Résumé de l'article

La recherche anti-oppressive et interraciale est devenue omniprésente dans les milieux éducatifs. Bien qu'une certaine attention ait été accordée aux complexités qu'une telle entreprise implique, des aspects plus complexes et plus profonds qui sous-tendent de tels projets sont révélés lorsqu'ils sont examinés à travers le prisme d'une éthique de l'hospitalité. Basé sur une étude de cas centrée sur les expériences d'étudiants réfugiés noirs au Manitoba, cet article déconstruit le journal de recherche que j'ai tenu tout au long de ce projet. Quatre thèmes primordiaux et entrelacés sont mis en évidence et discutés : les décisions méthodologiques que j'ai dû prendre tout au long de l'étude, les ambivalences personnelles vécues, les sentiments d'impuissance et les implications (explicites) de mon identité blanche. Ainsi, le journal de recherche analysé ici révèle non seulement la nature aporétique de l'hospitalité, mais aussi plusieurs complexités éthiques liées à la poursuite d'une recherche hospitalière et anti-oppressive dans un contexte interraciel, qui n'ont pas fait l'objet d'une attention suffisante dans la littérature actuelle.

# The Self Who Meets the Other: Deconstructing the “Well-Intentioned” Researcher Through an Ethic of Hospitality

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*The pursuit of anti-oppressive, cross-racial research has become ubiquitous in educational settings. Although some attention has been given to the complexities such an endeavor involves, more intricate and profound aspects that undergird such projects are revealed when examined through the lens of an ethic of hospitality. Based on a case-study focused on the experiences of Black refugee students in Manitoba, this article deconstructs the research journal that I kept throughout that project. Four overarching and intertwined themes are evidenced and discussed: the methodological decisions I had to make along the study, personal ambivalences experienced, feelings of powerlessness, and the (explicit) implications of my White identity. As such, the research journal here analyzed not only reveals the aporetic nature of hospitality but also several ethical complexities involved in the pursuit of hospitable, anti-oppressive research in a cross-racial setting, which have not received enough attention in current literature.*

*La recherche anti-oppressive et interraciale est devenue omniprésente dans les milieux éducatifs. Bien qu'une certaine attention ait été accordée aux complexités qu'une telle entreprise implique, des aspects plus complexes et plus profonds qui sous-tendent de tels projets sont révélés lorsqu'ils sont examinés à travers le prisme d'une éthique de l'hospitalité. Basé sur une étude de cas centrée sur les expériences d'étudiants réfugiés noirs au Manitoba, cet article déconstruit le journal de recherche que j'ai tenu tout au long de ce projet. Quatre thèmes primordiaux et entrelacés sont mis en évidence et discutés : les décisions méthodologiques que j'ai dû prendre tout au long de l'étude, les ambivalences personnelles vécues, les sentiments d'impuissance et les implications (explicites) de mon identité blanche. Ainsi, le journal de recherche analysé ici révèle non seulement la nature aporétique de l'hospitalité, mais aussi plusieurs complexités éthiques liées à la poursuite d'une recherche hospitalière et anti-oppressive dans un contexte interracial, qui n'ont pas fait l'objet d'une attention suffisante dans la littérature actuelle.*

The pursuit of anti-oppressive, cross-racial research has become ubiquitous in educational settings. Several White (or non-Black) researchers have been engaged in exploring the experiences of racialized students in Canada, including refugees, in recent years (e.g., Baker, 2013; Guo et al., 2019; Selimos & Daniel, 2017; Stewart, 2011). The current study is yet another example of such phenomena. Although some attention has been given to the complexities such an endeavor involves, more intricate and profound aspects that undergird one's pursuit of anti-oppressive research in a cross-racial context are revealed when analyzed through the lens of an ethic of hospitality.

The original goal of this study was to examine the schooling experiences of Black refugee students in Manitoba, to understand how hospitable education has been to them and what made them feel (un)welcome in their schools. Moreover, I sought to do so by being a hospitable researcher-host myself. However, a post-structural analysis of the research journal I wrote during the study not only revealed the aporia of hospitality but also several ethical complexities involved in the pursuit of anti-oppressive, cross-racial research that have not received enough attention in current educational literature. Yet, as the numbers of racially diverse students continue to increase in countries like Canada, it is imperative that educational researchers be attuned to the myriad of complexities involved in the pursuit of anti-oppressive, cross-racial research in order to be constantly engaged in unsettling one's own biases, assumptions, and positionality, as well as re-evaluating the rigid research protocols in Western countries—facets that this paper seeks to explore.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Being myself an immigrant in Canada, I came across the theoretical construct of hospitality in the early stages of my academic career and was immediately fascinated by it. Considered an international right since Kant (Derrida, 2000b; Kant, 1795/2007), hospitality is “the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another” (Kant, 1795/2007, p. 21). The ethic of hospitality, as further explored by Derrida (who, in turn, built on the contributions from Immanuel Levinas' philosophy), is conceived as a law, a gift, an event (Derrida, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2007). Hospitality as responsibility is before reason, immediate, unlimited, and not based on reciprocity (Levinas, 1972, 1982). The self is immediately and unlimited responsible to the Other as soon as their face “speaks” (although this should not be understood as a beginning), and no one can be responsible for the Other but the self, and that without expecting anything in return.

As an event, hospitality is necessarily unpredictable, unforeseen: we cannot anticipate it, it comes “as absolute surprise” (Derrida, 2007, p. 451). It requires the resistance to any totalizing approach to the Other who arrives. In other words, there is no room for assimilation in hospitality, for any attempt to understand, comprehend the guest constitutes a violent act toward their infinite unknowability. Hospitality is given to the one of whom I do not even know the name (Derrida, 2000a), from whom I cannot expect anything in return—not even the possibility of being able to claim having been hospitable, for this is something only the guest can decide (Derrida, 1999). In addition, Derrida argued that hospitality is not expressed with the arrival of the habitual, pleasant guest, but it is through the arrival of the unknown, at a non-expected time, that the host's hospitality can be evidenced (Derrida, 2000a; Heringer, 2021). As such, the ethic of hospitality is necessarily unforeseen, unconditional, and uncomfortable to the host (Heringer, 2022).

Hospitality is an asymmetrical and sacrificial act, conducted not by prescribed rules but ethics itself for hospitality is ethics (Derrida, 1998, 2000a, 2007). As Derrida (2001) observed,

one cannot speak of cultivating an ethic of hospitality. Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others. Insofar as it has to do with the *ethos*, that is, the residence, one's home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, *ethics is hospitality*. (pp. 16-17)

However, the aporetic nature of hospitality is also widely discussed by Derrida. For instance, to say “welcome” to the Other is already to demarcate the threshold of one’s property. To say “make yourself at home” is already telling the Other that the home is not theirs. But as Derrida (2000a, 2007) argued, it is in the impossibility of hospitality that its possibility lies. In his semantical works, Derrida often resorted to the German word for poison (*Gift*) to support the argument that hospitality is an unconditional gift, but a “gift” can also be poisonous—or arguably, “a gift is always already a poisoned chalice” (Wimmer, 2001, p. 164). The fine line between hospitality and hostility (Derrida, 2000b) is what must keep the host always alert, constantly deferring one’s response to the Other so as not to respond irresponsibly—an act of *différance*, as Derrida (1982) coined: a peaceful, delayed response in resistance to our totalizing tendencies.

Hospitality is also not about surrendering mastery, either by making it a guest-centered or anarchical home. In order for hospitality to take place there must be a host who holds mastery (Derrida, 2000b). After all, “to hang out a sign saying ‘Come right in; there is no one at home’ is not the equivalent of hospitality” (Dewey, 1916/2011, p. 98). Notwithstanding, in hospitality the host is decentralized and the guest empowered with agency, creating an on-going tension that has no prior definitions or solutions but is rather constantly negotiated: “it is *as if* the stranger or foreigner held the keys” (Derrida, 2000a, p. 123).

Although some educators have already applied the hospitality construct as a metaphor to the educational field (e.g., Biesta & Egéa-Kuehne 2001; Bryzzheva, 2018; Heringer, 2021, 2022; Hung, 2013; Peters & Biesta, 2009; Ruitenberg, 2016; Zembylas, 2020), in this paper I extend the ethic of hospitality to inform the researcher-participant relationality. As I will show, several layers of complexity are evidenced when seeking to conduct anti-oppressive, cross-racial research in light of the ethic of hospitality—facets that must not be overlooked.

## **Methods**

This paper stems from a larger case-study project in which I sought to examine Black refugee students’ educational experiences in Manitoba. My original research was designed based on three primary data sources: individual interviews with five Black refugee students (aged 14 to 22), a critical discourse analysis of six provincial curriculum documents, and a research journal I kept throughout the study. In this paper, I will focus on the findings that emerged from the third data source (to know more about the other components of the study, see Heringer, 2023, 2024).

As Potts and Brown (2005) observed, “there is no fixed or bona fide set of methods or methodologies that are inherently anti-oppressive” (p. 281). Potts and Brown offered, however, three intertwined tenets that can serve as the cornerstone of anti-oppressive research: 1) it seeks social justice and resistance throughout the whole study; it requires more than good intentions and must rather challenge the status quo, which includes the ongoing critique of one’s own beliefs, biases, and epistemology as a researcher; 2) it recognizes that all knowledge is socially constructed and political: what is considered to be true is the result of social and power relations, and this awareness can be used to build emancipatory knowledge; and 3) it recognizes that research is embedded with power and shaped by relationships, so rather than approaching participants as objects, the researcher values the relationship with the people whose experiences are under study and tries to bring them as close as possible to the research process. These three methodological commitments, which appeared to be aligned with the ethic of hospitality, served as the basis for the present research, giving me more concrete directions on how to pursue hospitable research.

## Reflexivity and Journal Rationale

The concept of reflexivity has become increasingly popular among qualitative researchers as a methodological tool to legitimize or validate research practices (Benjamin & Dilletta, 2021; Pillow, 2003). As Pillow observed, four strategies to reflexivity have been commonly adopted in such studies. The first strategy, “reflexivity as recognition of self,” suggests the attempt to “recognize an otherness of self and the self of others” (p. 181). Although this strategy is valuable to some extent, Pillow argued, it can also lead to a mere disclosure of one’s positionality—a confessional tale that goes only so far and does not challenge the researcher’s privilege. This is particularly common and troublesome among White researchers who seek to acknowledge their whiteness in a section of an academic paper while being complicit in systems of oppression (D’Arcangelis, 2018). Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), for example, argued that despite the important insights brought forth by critical race theory, “apologist accounts serve only to bring whiteness to the center, giving space for white people to air their experiences of racialization, attempting to rescue themselves from the damages of racial thinking, and appropriating the language of critical race theory.” (pp. 82–83). Ahmed (2006) concurred observing that “antiracism practices” such as these is a performativity commitment that becomes nothing more than ticking a box. This strategy is also limited in trying to find similarities between self and the participant as if this would be sufficient to bring the two closer, or to understand the participant.

The second strategy is what Pillow (2003) called “reflexivity as recognition of the other” (p. 184). If the goal of qualitative research is to understand the experience of participants, this approach is taken as a way to “capture the essence” of the research subject (p. 184). Such strategy, however, has also not been without critique. For instance, looking through the lenses of an ethic of hospitality, to understand or to comprehend is to try to subsume the Other into the realm of the self, what the self can grasp, and is thus a totalizing gesture. Pillow also called attention to the danger of recognizability. That is, the subject in such approach is only recognizable to the extent that they are representable—all hinging upon the researcher’s power.

Pillow (2003) then discussed a third strategy, “reflexivity as truth,” which is simply “the idea that the researcher can ‘get it right’” (p. 185). In other words, the claim is that through much reflexivity, the researcher may be able to reach the truth about participants. Although the desire to be accurate about participants’ experiences is surely desirable, at the end of the day it is still the researcher’s voice that sews all pieces together. The product of reflexivity is hopefully truthful but never the truth.

The fourth strategy commonly adopted is “reflexivity as transcendence” (p. 186). The idea in this case, Pillow (2003) observed, is that reflexivity can enable the researcher to transcend themselves, their biases and worldviews, which can serve to (mis)represent research subjects. Such attempt, however, is not only impossible but also detrimental to the qualitative research. As Gemignani and colleagues (2024) argued, the researchers’ reflexivity is what promotes, not prevents the interpretative process. In the words of Freire (1968/2018), “one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized” (p. 50).

All these strategies, Pillow (2003) summarized, are expressions of “comfortable reflexivity.” What is missing, however, is “a reflexivity that seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous” (p. 188)—that is, an *uncomfortable reflexivity*, one that pushes the reader “to analyze, question, and re-question her/his own knowledges and assumptions brought to the reading” (p. 189). Such disruptive practice entails,

the ongoing critique of all of our research attempts, a recognition that none of our attempts can claim the innocence of success (even in failure)—with the realization that many of us do engage in research where there is real work to be done even in the face of the impossibility of such a task. (Pillow, 2003, p. 192)

In order to foster my attentiveness to power relations and how my positionality could influence the research, I decided initially to keep a research journal where I would register what I noticed in my relations with students during each encounter as well as how they responded to me. Research journals—also referred in the literature as “diary,” “log of activities,” “researcher-generated document,” or “field notes” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Richardson, 1998)—have been increasingly adopted by qualitative researchers, especially in cross-cultural contexts, as a way to promote transparency, deconstruct the researcher’s biases, and help the researcher rationalize one’s own thought processes (Annink, 2017; Jasper, 2005; Ortlipp, 2015). Common kinds of research journal writing are observation notes (a thick description of what the researcher sees, hears, feels, etc.), methodological notes (procedures taken throughout the research), theoretical notes (such as theoretical connections), and personal notes (describing the researcher’s feelings, fears, pleasures, etc.; Richardson, 1998). Doucet and Mauthner (2008) also emphasized the importance of the researcher’s on-going reflexive writing “to chart and document how relations between researchers and their subjects are always in ontological flux and subject to endless interpretation” (p. 404). As Richardson (1998) argued, writing is a way of knowing, a process of discovery. Therefore, in order to examine the schooling experiences of Black refugee students in Manitoba, it was of utmost importance to examine the role I played as the (White) researcher, self-as-instrument (Richardson, 1998; Tracy, 2010), engaged in such endeavor.

### **Context, Writing Process, and Analysis**

After receiving institutional ethics approval, I began (or tried to begin) this study in October 2020. Schools had just begun their activities in a remote format, teachers and educational leaders were overwhelmed with the changes and adaptations, thus making room for research was not a priority at the time. As a consequence, trying to recruit students became extremely challenging. Even throughout 2021, the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic were still in effect and hindered my ability to recruit participants through the public school system. The five Black refugee students I interviewed were recruited with the support of community centers in Winnipeg. Students who were interested in participating had to obtain their parents/guardians’ signed consent (or sign the form themselves, if they were of legal age).

The research journal was typed directly on my personal laptop. Although in the beginning of the research I thought I would write on the journal only after each interview conducted, my first meeting with a teacher (who was trying to help me recruit students) revealed several feelings, thoughts, and ideas that I realized also had to be registered. Each entry was dated (most of the times with the time also included) and consisted mainly of reflections about the recruitment process, experiences/feelings when interviewing participants, students’ comments that stood out for me during the interview, a description of the analytical process of transcripts, and theoretical insights I had along the way. It should be noted that in the beginning of the journaling process I was being cautious not to mention any proper names, but as I became more engaged and spontaneous in my writing, I stopped refraining myself. Therefore, for the purposes of writing this

article, any words that would reveal the identity of the people or institutions I was in contact with have been removed and replaced by a descriptor in brackets that could maintain the original meaning of the sentence. All the other entries have been presented as originally written—with contractions and expressions and oftentimes without proper punctuation or grammar, as I would typically write very quickly so as not to forget anything that was coming to my mind.

After all interviews had been conducted and transcripts analyzed, I began reading the research journal for the first time, following a post-structural thematic analysis (Richardson, 1998). Post-structuralism posits language not as a by-product of subjectivity, but constitutive of it. As Richardson (1998) explained: “language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves, our *subjectivity*, is constructed” (p. 349). A critical analysis of the entries thus sought to foster more than research transparency (Tracy, 2010); it sought to unveil how I came to “know” the data. In other words, the scrutiny of my own language aimed not simply at understanding myself reflexively but the self who met the Other.

## Findings

Four overarching and intertwined themes emerged through the analysis process: the methodological decisions I had to make along the study, personal ambivalences experienced, feelings of powerlessness (especially due to ethics protocols), and the (explicit) implications of my White identity. In the next subsections I present a summary of each.

### Pivotal Decisions Along the Way

The numerous challenges I encountered when trying to recruit participants (especially because of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic) required that I made pivotal shifts in the study’s design and methods from what I had originally planned—particularly the use of compensation, the number/length of interviews, and recruitment process/documents. Such decisions, however, revealed a myriad of unaddressed ethical decisions I had already made (consciously or not) before the beginning of the study. For example, although I had sought to write an information/consent letter to families without academic/theoretical jargon, the first time I realized how inaccessible my recruitment documents could be to refugee families was during a meeting with the vice-principal and a teacher of a school who were willing to help me recruit students:

Meeting with the vice-principal and ELA teacher of a school. They know two families who may fit the criteria. I feel happy and excited about the hope of being able to recruit students. The teacher asks me about the level of English that is required. She mentions that the family arrived in Canada shortly ago, so speaks almost no English. The information letter is mentioned and I wish I had developed it with a more basic language level. I worry that refugee families will not be interested due to language limitations. I feel powerless for not being able to talk with them myself. (January 25, 2021)

Besides the worry about the language, that initial meeting ignited many other ethical questionings in me, which I carried and pondered about throughout many weeks:

I wonder if I should change my methods, have just one interview with students and potentially offer compensation. I feel a big dilemma inside me, as I don’t like the idea of giving compensations. Will students be interest in participating for the sake of the research itself? How long should I wait until I change my recruitment strategies? Should I make an amendment now, tailoring the

information/consent letters? It’s been almost 4 months since I received REB [research ethics board] approval and I still haven’t been able to recruit. (January 31)

Such tension leads us to ask, when does hospitality begin? Derrida (2000a) noted that the first act of violence is committed when requiring that the foreigner ask for hospitality in a language imposed to him: “must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him in our country?” (p. 15).

Originally, I had planned to meet with students (in-person) 3 to 5 times, for about 30 minutes for each meeting, so as to allow me to develop a stronger connection with students and so that they could collaborate in the meaning-making of findings. However, given the recruitment challenges and how there was a general fatigue in the population (including students) for having to be on the screen all the time during the pandemic, I realized that my plan had to be changed. The following two entries (written with a few weeks of delay hence the absence of a specific date) evidence my realization that those were major decisions that needed to be registered:

I apply for an amendment as a shift in my methods. I decide to interview participants only once and have two follow-ups via email [to give them the opportunity to review their transcript and answer some follow-up questions]. I also re-write the letters sent to families. (Early March)

Week after week I try different community centers and reaching out to school divisions which haven’t responded, and a principal who said I could contact again in the spring. I’m honestly feeling that no one will be willing to participate if teachers/principals/coordinators don’t buy the idea. I feel like I will eventually have to offer compensation for participation, which is something I did not want to do. (End of March)

Then, in early April, I decided to make the changes I had been wondering about:

After a lot of thought and deliberation, as I was reading an article about the importance of giving back to (Indigenous) communities and the need for direct and clear benefits for participants, I decided to submit yet another amendment and now offer students a \$10 Tim Hortons gift card. I am getting anxious too because I feel that if I don’t recruit them this month I may not be able to until the fall. I also created a poster with very few words, very clear and “attractive” so that principals can share that directly with students. I realized that my original strategy was not the best one and I could have approached this in a much simpler way. I also realize now (also reading the Indigenous research article) that my desire of community engagement, albeit stemming from good intentions, could be potentially harmful—did I think of that when trying to recruit them in the middle of a pandemic? (April 6)

Despite my desire to be an anti-oppressive researcher, it is evident from my journal entries that my decision to offer compensation and to change my data collection methods was greatly influenced by my research agenda. After all, it was only after the months without success that I started deliberating about this decision more carefully—thus evidencing a myriad of (un)ethical decisions I had already (unconsciously) made when planning the research that had remained latent until then. I am then reminded of Derrida’s (2000a) warning against practicing a “hospitality *out of duty*”:



For if I practice hospitality “*out of duty*” [and not only *in conforming with duty*], this hospitality is no longer an absolute hospitality, it is no longer graciously offered beyond debt and economy, offered to the other, a hospitality invented for the singularity of the new arrival, of the unexpected visitor. (Derrida, 2000a, p. 83)

Furthermore, I see today how my desire to quickly get started with this research not only revealed my own inhospitality but, in many ways, prevented me from adhering to the pillars of anti-oppressive research (Potts & Brown, 2005) that I had been aiming at. That is, many more aspects that had to be considered were overlooked by my assumption that I was ready for it. But as that last journal entry expressed too, I realize that my desire to adhere to an anti-oppressive framework might have impinged on my responsiveness to the context we were living in and how detrimental to students’ well-being my research could actually be. In some moments, I even wondered whether this research was worthwhile and the extent to which its benefits would outweigh the burden I was creating on others (e.g., constantly emailing educators and community center coordinators to try to get their help). It is hard to imagine how much different my research could have had begun given the pandemic context, but today I feel I should have sought the advice of educators and leaders who work directly with Black refugees to be able to approach this study in the best way for them (especially given the fact that I was relatively a newcomer as well). Moreover, I wish I had had the opportunity to meet Black refugees and their families prior to the beginning of the study so that I could have heard from them what they thought would be important to be studied (which is an important facet of anti-oppressive research) and how they thought would be the best way to meet with them—yet another limitation imposed by the pandemic as well as the nature of an institutional REB, as I will discuss later. But as it turned out, I was like “the master of the house, [who] ‘waits anxiously on the threshold of his home’ for the stranger” (Derrida, 2000a, p. 121). “And from the furthest distance that he sees him coming,” Derrida continued, “the master will hasten to call out to him: ‘Enter quickly, as I am afraid of my happiness’” (pp. 121, 123).

### **Researcher’s Ambivalences**

My journal entries evidence the roller coaster of emotions I went through as a researcher, especially in terms of recruitment and the quality/content of the interviews, a process during which I would often go from a place of hope and excitement to despair and worry. A careful analysis of the entries, however, reveals how such ambivalences were intrinsically connected to my identity, personality, previous research experiences, and expectations. For example, the way in which I would quickly shift from feeling excited to frustrated is quite evident in the following two entries, which were written just a few minutes apart from each other, as I was about to begin what would be the third interview:

Right before I begin the third interview, I received a reply from yesterday’s participant (I had sent her the transcript in the afternoon) saying “It felt good talking to you about my feelings, I liked that, and hopefully one day we can meet”—She can’t imagine how happy her words made me feel, and even more excited for the interview that will begin in a couple of minutes. (May 29—almost 5pm)

I had a feeling and my intuition was right—the student has not showed up for the interview ... so frustrating. I tried calling and texting but it’s not on service. (May 29—5:15pm)

The case above illustrates how my emotional fluctuation was often directly related to the frustration of not meeting a student I had planned to receive, for whom I had made arrangements (often in a very inconvenient time for me). I was, in a sense, experiencing the unforeseen nature of hospitality yet not enjoying the fact that it is also always uncomfortable for the host to be waiting for the foreign guest who appears “like a ghost” (Derrida, 2000a, p. 37).

Ambivalences were also evident even before interview arrangements were made: when my excitement for finally being able to hear from a student interested in participating was accompanied by the discomfort I experienced for not receiving messages with the grammatical accuracy I was used to when recruiting participants for previous research projects—something I had not anticipated (or at least not the effect it would have on me):

After days of emotional struggle and second-guessing the meaningfulness and purpose of my research, today I finally received the first email from a student. I don’t know if it’s going to work but just receiving this email made me think so many things. I second guessed having just refugees (and not “immigrants”). I thought about the fact that the students are emailing me without knowing that I am white, without knowing my name or anything. I also realized that I am going to be receiving emails from students with very poor grammar and/or disconnected sentences, like the email I received today. Of course that bothers me. (May 5)

Reading the end of the entry above makes me dismayed and appalled at myself—not being a native English speaker myself and advocating for those who arrive in this country as refugees, how could I be experiencing such discomfort? But more than feeling uncomfortable within myself, my perfectionism, especially as it relates to grammar accuracy (or should I say my desire for whiteness?) seems to have informed my relationship with (potential) participants from the outset. Following Derrida’s (2000a) observations, it is as though I felt that my “home” was being violated, thus rendering me “virtually xenophobic in order to protect or claim to protect one’s own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one’s own hospitality” (p. 53)—an issue I explore in the forthcoming subsection Being a (White) Researcher.

Besides my pondering about recruiting “immigrants” and not just refugees (which was definitely not my intended focus but what appeared to be a necessary shift given the recruitment challenges), the entry above also evidenced an unforeseen ethical dilemma I faced, which was my realization that students would probably not have known that I was White until the moment we met online—another issue to which I will return later. But the fact that I only met students in the moment of the interview, an encounter mediated by our cameras and screens, was also the source of another unexpected ambivalence I experienced: my desire to see the student. When the first student and I had to turn off our cameras due to his poor internet connection, I felt really frustrated, as if I had lost a major point of contact that I had sought for months: “I felt very happy seeing him and it was frustrating to have to turn off the camera due to the internet connection” (May 27). Why was I so bothered by the “voice without a look” (Derrida, 2000a, p. 31)? By being able to see students’ smiles and having them see me (and even compliment my hair) made me feel they were happy and comfortable to speak with me—an assumption that was certainly soothing and reassuring to me as it was to many educators teaching online during the pandemic (see Heringer & Piquemal, 2022). On the one hand, it is possible that the face of the Other is exactly what makes the hospitality gesture possible (Derrida, 1999), the open door that “calls for the opening of an exteriority or of a transcendence of the idea of infinity” (p. 26). But might it also be possible that such desire expressed my willingness to know them, as a totalizing gesture, and thus

break the law of absolute hospitality?

A similar situation happened with the fourth student I interviewed. However, the entry I wrote after that meeting starkly contrasts with the frustration I experienced earlier:

That was THE BEST interview so far! I am sooooo grateful for it! First of all, I must say that the audio was perfect so that makes a huge difference. She called me one hour earlier than scheduled (thankfully I was home and basically ready) saying she was feeling a bit sick so she wouldn't have her camera on. I honestly didn't mind so much because I wasn't feeling like being on the camera either—the convenience of COVID ... She was SO thankful for my research and thanked me so much. At the end of the interview she said “I was talking to you as if you were a friend, it was nothing formal.” She said how much she appreciated my questions and it was really interesting how she was TRULY interested in knowing how I wanted to bring about change from this research. She was so articulate and spoke so much about the existence of racism in schools. I am REALLY thankful for this interview. (August 14, 5:30pm)

It is curious how not being able to see the student in the fourth interview did not seem to bother me. I believe, like the student, I too was not feeling the greatest on that day and thus not having to be on camera felt more comfortable to me as well. Noticeable too, is how my excitement and thankfulness were directly related to having been able to understand her well and to have heard what I had been expecting to hear, which was their experiences with racism in school. It is noticeable, then, how my perceived sense of powerlessness experienced when the first student had to turn off the camera was in fact not necessarily caused by the camera itself being turned off, but directly associated with what was convenient for me at a given time and my desire to grasp, comprehend the Other—gestures that are in fact an attempt to subsume the Other in the self.

Given the necessary nature of the interviews (i.e., through Zoom), I encountered many technical challenges that could have been avoided had the interviews been conducted in person. But my journaling evidenced how the challenge lay not only on connection/sound breaks, but on my own deficit perspective and my inability to understand:

I start listening to the audio and working on the transcript and I remember that during the interview I was also frustrated that I couldn't understand what the participant was saying very well due to his accent. I think during the interview I was wondering (and probably hoping) how much easier it would be to interview a young adult who has had more time to practice English. (May 28–4am)

It is noticeable thus how I attribute the communication “issue” to the student (“his accent”), rather than my own limitations as linguist and listener. The entry above also alludes to the fact that my desire for convenience and fulfilling my research agenda might have accompanied me throughout the entire project. How much could the dearth of studies conducted with Black refugee youth be evidence of researchers' unwillingness to embrace such (inner) challenges?

I particularly felt extremely frustrated when I could not understand what participants were saying during the transcription process (a disappointment further emphasized by the fact that I never heard back from participants after I sent out their transcripts for revision/data analysis collaboration), as the following entry illustrates:

The experience of going through the first transcript yesterday was very insightful and made me remember things I heard in the other interviews. However, I felt that so much was lost in the first interview due to the poor internet connection and also because the participant did not seem to have a comfortable level of English. I certainly did not anticipate not being able to communicate with students

because of their language limitations. I feel that I will also have to listen to the audio recordings again to try to understand it better—the first transcript is really broken. (August 28, 2021)

Besides being outright evidence of my deficit perspective (“their discomfort with English,” “their language limitations,” “their broken transcript”) and my ingrained assumptions/expectations, the entry above and the one that follows also reveal my unfulfilled desire to know more:

One thing that I was thinking today is how it would have been so good and helpful for me to be able to meet again with the students I interview. There are so many things I would like to ask them further—especially the first interview, which today I realize how unprepared I was or maybe how much better I could have done it today. But I guess every first interview is not as good as the following ones. (September 8)

My journal also reveals how I felt extremely pleased when meeting an eloquent student, a participant with a strong mastery of English skills—an enthusiasm that does not seem to have been present when interviewing students who were not so proficient:

I just finished transcribing the interview and it was quite hard to understand. During the interview I was struggling to understand her sometimes and now the transcription was also tough. But I was able to get some very rich data still! So grateful! (July 11–7:15pm)

Although I finished the entry on a positive note, it also seems that I was more concerned about the data I could get than the challenge in fostering a relationship with the student. The enthusiasm with which I wrote certain entries appear to have been directly related to how I pleased I felt by the student’s ability to share her experiences in a way that I could comprehend. Where do language and hospitality intersect? Language, Derrida (2000a) said, is necessarily something that “never ceases to depart from me” yet also “what I part from, parry, and separate myself from” (p. 91). This “auto-affection” of hearing ourselves speak in turn creates a resistance to any departure from the language of self. As it seems then, my desire to hear my own voice, the language I could comprehend, obstructed the very same door I sought to open.

Paradoxically, although the goal of conducting interviews was to explore students’ life stories, it is evident how prior knowledge of the participant in my previous research experiences (e.g., name, email, telephone, profession/workplace) was now a gap causing me to experience a great sense of discomfort every time a potential participant was enlisted with the help of the community center, as this entry illustrates:

Thinking about it now, I observe how the paucity of information about the participant prior to the interview is not something I am used to as a researcher and something that certainly does not appeal to me, it makes me uncomfortable. (May 27—Afternoon)

Once again, Derrida (2000a) reminds us that absolute hospitality does not begin by asking the Other what their name is, however loving or well intentioned that may sound. It is rather what is offered to the unknown, anonymous Other. To what extent was my discomfort and willingness to know associated with my perceived need of control/power as a (White) researcher-host?

## Being a Host, Being a Hostage

I embarked on this journey informed by an ethic of hospitality and the desire to be a hospitable researcher-host for students. But as Derrida (2000b) had already indicated, in hospitality “the one inviting becomes almost the hostage of the one invited” (p. 9) given its necessary unforeseen, unconditional, and uncomfortable nature. Indeed, throughout this study I frequently felt powerless, as a hostage to participants and others who I needed in order to conduct this study (families, educators, and service providers). My relentless emails to schools and community centers were accompanied by my anxious waiting and hoping that someone would demonstrate the willingness to help me reach students. But when that finally happened, I still felt as a hostage given that I basically had to accept scheduling the interviews at any day and time to fit the students’ availability—which were often inconvenient to me. After all, I did not want to risk losing any of them. On many occasions that meant that I stayed home on a weekend afternoon/evening, waiting for a participant who never showed up:

This is so frustrating—it’s the second time that this student stands me up. The staff from the community center (who was supposed to show up to ensure the student joined the meeting) hasn’t showed up either. I guess this means this student just doesn’t want to participate and I’m back to having just 2. (June 4–7pm)

Although I had never asked the coordinator to have a staff member join the meeting, their absence certainly magnified my frustration.

In many ways, I also felt a hostage to the ethical protocol I had to abide by, which prevented me from shifting and adapting my methods as quickly as needed.

Last night, I received an email from a community center saying that they had an interview scheduled for me today. My first reaction was of thrill, excitement, and even butterflies in the stomach—is this finally happening? Was I ready? But as soon as I was about to send them the Zoom link, I realized that I still needed the parent consent form. For one second, I was tempted to proceed without it—after all, it has been so long since I have been trying. But I thanked the coordinator a lot for their help and pointed out that I need the parent consent form first. Will I receive that? I don’t know. I probably won’t be able to conduct the interview today after all. (May 27–Morning)

The same happened many other times, including an instance on July 20, when the student joined but his father was not there to provide with his oral consent as he had anticipated, so I could not proceed with the interview.

Although I understand the importance of institutional research ethics boards and its protocols (which is a committee I have had the honor to serve and something I emphasize when teaching research methods to graduate students), having to follow the protocol I had submitted often made me regret those, especially when they prevented me from conducting an interview with a student who was ready for it. Having to obtain parental consent from students who were so mature and for a study with minimum risks for participants (not even to mention the approval of school divisions and coordinators of community centers) created layers of delay and difficulties that many times made me want to give up the study or at least regret the route I had taken—but which seemed to be the only/best option during the pandemic, when many extracurricular programs had been interrupted and when I could not be physically present in schools or community centers, opportunities that could certainly have facilitated the development of relationships with students,

families, and educators. As Derrida (2000a) observed, “the master of the house is at home, but nonetheless he comes to enter his home through the guest—who comes from outside” (p. 125). The guest becomes the one who invites the host.

### **Being a White Researcher**

It was only after I began the data collection process that I realized that students would most likely not know that I was White prior to meeting me on the screen, given that all the interviews were arranged through community centers. This realization made me quite uncomfortable, as if I were not being fair to them. After all, as students mentioned in the interviews, they often do not feel comfortable relating with White people for the fear of saying something “wrong,” for having to fight stereotypes all the time, etc. (see Heringer, 2023). Would they have accepted to participate had they known I am White? Although I started reflecting about this issue as I proceeded with the interviews, I did not do anything to address it (e.g., providing more information about myself in the consent form)—an inaction that might be directly related to my unwillingness to submit another amendment to my research ethic protocol (I had already submitted several, and each amendment takes at least a few days to be approved). To what extent was I truly committed to anti-racism and to what extent was that mere performativity (see Ahmed, 2006)?

It is ironic that I was intentionally not focusing on students’ lives prior to moving to Manitoba in the interviews, but I asked them (as part of the initial, demographic questions) which country they lived before moving to Canada. This seemingly innocent question turned out to be the source of unexpected tension: “right in the beginning of the interview I felt that the student semblant changed a bit when I asked where she lived before moving to Canada” (May 28). As much as I try to find plausible explanations for having included this question (e.g., to be able to contextualize students’ narratives), a sincere examination of my intentions when developing the interview questions reveals another of my hidden expectations. When designing this research, my intention was to study only the experiences of Black African refugee students as I have a particular interest and affection for the African continent. As I approached the research proposal, however, I realized narrowing the criteria of inclusion in this way was not warranted in light of my research goals and because it would likely complicate the recruitment process. But although I decided I should be open to Black refugee students from other parts of the world (such as the Caribbean), I believe asking them where they were coming from was a strategy I (unconsciously) used to hopefully have my original expectations met—which was the case. But asking this question that apparently was more than anything an attempt to satisfy my personal research agenda, turned out to cause a momentaneous discomfort on participants and, as a consequence, on myself.

There seems to be a push from White researchers to focus only on the positive experiences of refugee students in Canada, reifying the White savior myth (Heron, 2007), as well as an “anti-confessional impulse” noted among Canadian refugee stories (Dawson, 2017). Although it is impossible for me to know whether students hid some of their negative experiences so as to please me (although some students shared several instances of racism they experienced), the previously noted hesitance and change in countenance observed in students when I asked where they lived before moving to Canada could have been associated with a feeling of vulnerability caused by my White curiosity for the “exotic Other” (Heron, 2007) and a totalizing desire to grasp the “essence” of the Other. Although I will never know whether students’ reaction was associated with my whiteness, my hospitality intention was inevitably shaped by such. For instance, I realized how acutely aware about the words I was using when speaking with them:

I noticed (both yesterday and today) that the students do not refer to themselves as refugees but as newcomers, and that made me hesitant every time I referred to them as refugees. I recognize and acknowledge that mentioning race (or saying that they are Black) also made me hesitant—as if I were offending. As a white person I feel that I have no right to make race something “talkable” as Black people do because I do not own Blackness as I own whiteness (as if whiteness was not a race). Regardless of how much I understand of white privilege and racism, articulating that and conducting a cross-racial interview (that is also focused on race) makes me feel that I am navigating a path that is both exciting and uncomfortable. After the student mentioned the principal’s [racist] attitude, I did not know how to respond, how to acknowledge that. I ended up saying I was sorry she was going through that and that I was glad she stood up for her rights. I was hesitant to engage in frustration or take it too lightly. I was extremely aware of my own reaction and extremely cautious and calculating my words and expressions. (May 28–4:45pm)

Despite being an advocate for anti-racism research/education and teaching about the importance of talking about race/racism, I also felt surprisingly uncomfortable when asking questions about race and then not knowing how to respond:

I noticed that after hearing the participant’s experiences of racism/discrimination, I wasn’t quite sure how to react. I was frustrated, of course, but did not know how much I should engage in that particular story or move on to the next question. I always try to remain as close to “neutral” as possible while also acknowledging the participant’s feelings. (August 28)

The tension I experienced for being a White researcher was also mixed with a great level of excitement when students acknowledged and spoke about their experiences with racism in their schools, which is what I expected to find from the outset of the study.

It’s amazing how despite my willingness to be open to what emerges, I approach the interviews with so many expectations. I was almost “happy” to hear about the racism experiences the student described in the interview yesterday, as if I had found gold, the treasure that I was looking for. (...) I have been thinking how my research is turning out to be a research about doing anti-oppressive research, cross-racial interviews. So many uncertainties are coming to the surface as I interview and reflect about them, so many wonderings and things to be discussed. (May 29–9am)

Such experience thus seems to corroborate what Heron (2007) argued: my desire to resist whiteness might have in fact reified and recentralized it.

## **Discussion**

Surely, one of the unexpected outcomes of this research was its meta nature. Keeping a research journal allowed me to debrief my thoughts, feelings, expectations, and frustrations, and it also helped me be more sensitive and attentive to those as I experienced them. Although a lot more could be analyzed and written based on my research journal, I will limit the present discussion to three major aspects: the ethical complexities involved in the pursuit of anti-oppressive research, the implications of being a (White) educational researcher-host, and the shortcoming and challenges around self-reflexivity and research hospitality.

## **The Complexities of Research Ethics**

As I mentioned in my journal, studying about research ethics among Indigenous communities unveiled many of the misconceptions and shortcomings I was blind to in my desire to conduct anti-oppressive research. Aligned with the tenets of anti-oppressive research (Potts & Brown, 2005), community-based participatory research (CBPR) has become a widely adopted design in studies with Indigenous peoples when seeking “to equalize power differences within the research process; to build trust between the researchers and the community; and to foster a sense of ownership tied to generating momentum toward social change” (Tobias et al., 2013, p. 132). However, the literature shows that not only is “community engagement” a blurred concept but also how not every community engagement is necessarily good. For instance, Brunger and Wall (2016) observed that,

if done uncritically and in service to ethics guidelines rather than in service to ethical research, [community involvement] can itself cause harm by leading to community fatigue, undermining the community’s ability to be effectively involved in the research, and restricting the community’s ability to have oversight and control over research. (p. 1863)

Although I was not conducting CBPR *sensu stricto*, it is interesting to note that my initial plan of meeting with students three to five times in order to foster a stronger connection and have them participate in the meaning making of findings, albeit accepted by the university research ethics board (REB), actually proved not to be the best approach in the context we were living in. But as much as I wanted to be aligned with the principles of anti-oppressive research, I would be lying if I said I was not relieved to be meeting with participants only once. My desire to get the work done as efficiently as possible (spurred by the “publish or perish” mentality that drives western academia) was certainly quite pleased with the need to reduce my involvement with participants. However, that also led me to ponder many ethical issues. Was I now being a helicopter researcher, who collects data and then leaves the research site having participants as mere objects of study? Although I gave them the opportunity to participate in the meaning-making of findings via email, unsurprisingly none of them did—maybe given the fact that they had already received the gift card and had no further incentive to continue to be engaged in the process. How then could I ensure that their voices were being honored and that I was not merely using those to fulfil my research agenda? Questions like these continued to haunt me (to use Derrida’s terminology) as I proceeded with the data analysis, demonstrating that ethics is not merely about checking a REB box and receiving institutional approval—it is an ongoing responsibility towards the Other.

Similarly, from an Indigenous perspective, ethics is an ongoing conversation, not a punctual procedure (Bull et al., 2019). The multiple amendments I submitted to the university’s REB throughout this process evidence that the evolving nature of a research project is not only normal but also healthy when seeking to be responsive to participants’ realities—especially the unprecedented context and uncertainties created by the COVID-19 pandemic. This research thus led me to consider the extent to which the detailed and defined plan that has to be submitted to REBs prior to the beginning of a study may impinge on the pursuit of anti-oppressive research—for example, by needing to have all the interview questions ready beforehand and not being able to consult with potential participants (and their families) about what for them would be important to be studied. Research protocols, TCPS2 (Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for



Research Involving Humans), and even OCAP principles (First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession) may serve as guidelines, but they do not guarantee that a research study will be conducive to participants' well-being. In fact, the logic of most REBs, which require detailed and defined work plans before the research begins, go against the principles of the TCPS2, which encourage community involvement with the research development (Brunger & Wall, 2016; Moore et al., 2017).

Although I had anticipated some challenges when conducting this research, the layers of complexity I faced when trying to recruit Black refugee youth were profound. As much as I tried to be attentive to the language I used in the recruitment related documents, I soon realized that my academic writing might have hindered their potential involvement. Having to re-write the information letter and consent form was surprisingly a lot more challenging than it seemed, as I struggled to tailor my language to those who are not familiar with the academic/research jargon. Similarly, although I had already had to address that when submitting my ethics protocol, during the time I was trying to recruit students the question of whether I should have translators (or at least be open to conducting the interviews in French) started haunting me. My decision not to do so stemmed from my understanding it is impossible not to lose anything during a translation as well as the fact that English is the language I am most comfortable with. Today I see much clearer (or maybe now I have the courage to admit) how much of my decision was guided by my own comfort and convenience and not necessarily what would be best for participants or the research itself. Notwithstanding, I assume (based on their difficulties speaking English) that some of the participants I interviewed would likely have felt more comfortable if they could have spoken in their mother tongue—not even to mention the potential students who I was not able to connect with because my recruitment materials were inaccessible to them and/or their families (numbers that I will never know). This research thus showed how often decisions made by the researcher (such as the language and lexicon being used), which can be taken for granted when designing the study, can be deeply connected to the researcher's comfort zone and work to the detriment of participants themselves.

Any educator engaging on a research project with underage students know that they will need to go through additional layers of consent and approval in order to conduct their study. Yet, a major source of despair for me during the recruitment was the need to obtain parental consent from students who expressed willingness to participate. This process became surprisingly more burdensome than I had expected given that most students had very poor access to the internet and digital literacy skills, let alone the opportunity to have those printed for parents. Oftentimes, it was necessary to exchange emails with community center coordinators who would then forward the consent to students, have them share it with their parents, send it back to the community center coordinator who would then forward it to me so that only then we could schedule the interview. But, as aforementioned, in many occasions I “lost” participants along the way (even one who actually met with me on Zoom) because of the lack of parental consent—they would stop corresponding with me once I mentioned that we needed their parents'/guardians' consent despite the fact that I gave them many options of how that could be obtained (not necessarily having to print the file).

Furthermore, when I began this research, I expected that participants would be interested in taking part for the sake of the research, for the opportunity to voice their struggles and hopefully improve their schooling experiences. The watershed moment that made me provide participants with compensation was reading that “agreeing to participate in one of the projects must clearly and directly benefit each research participant” (Ball & Janyst, 2008, p. 38), and not just “indirect

benefits.” But as Lee (2019) noted, even what constitutes an appropriate gift is something that the researcher must not take for granted. Indeed, after I had decided to give students a \$10 Tim Hortons gift card, one community center coordinator who was helping me connect with students asked if I could increase the amount—apparently previous researchers contacting their institution had offered \$25. That made me quite dismayed. Not only did I have to be realistic in terms of what I could afford, but I also got very frustrated with the idea that people would start participating in research projects based on how much money they could earn out of it. I held firm to the amount I could provide as I deemed it an appropriate sum for a teenager who would be talking for 45 minutes from their own homes. However, it is interesting to observe that after each interview I conducted, I wished I had given them more than \$10—especially when they expressed immense joy when I mentioned I going to send them a gift card (something they knew beforehand, but they still reacted with tremendous gratitude).

Despite all my research experience and teaching about research methods, it was only during the process of conducting this research that I noticed many shortcomings of the study I was leading. Conducting research with a relatively strict timeline and limited funds, can lead one to rush to get through and not be able to provide the adequate compensation for participants’ involvement, thus impinging on the pursuit of hospitable, anti-oppressive research. But such experience also raises the concern that highly funded researchers may be creating a culture in which people start seeing research opportunities merely as a source of financial gain. For instance, I have witnessed some research projects that provided participants with a \$25 gift card for taking a 15-minute survey online. When I started trying to recruit participants through social media (using a poster that mentioned the \$10 gift card), I received a couple of emails from people who asked for “the link to take the survey.” When I responded back clarifying that it was not a survey but an interview, the person never wrote back. This tenuous and complex matter certainly does not have a clear-cut answer, but hence the importance of REBs to ensure compensation given is appropriate at least in terms of the length and depth of participant involvement.

### **The Educational Researcher’s (White) Positionality**

Despite the “natural” challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, my feelings of powerlessness and despair throughout the research process were mostly associated with the need to rely on other people to help me connect with students. As soon as I started recruiting students, I realized how the paucity of information I had about them (usually just their first name) made me greatly uncomfortable. In my previous research experiences, I would be contacting potential participants directly, knowing their names, email address, title, etc. In this study, however, students “arrived to me” without my having any prior knowledge about them besides the fact that they would be Black, refugees, and students. Knowing beforehand that they were Black, though, then became another source of discomfort.

Although research shows that participants respond differently depending on the interviewer’s race (Hill, 2002; Rhodes, 1994; Samples et al., 2014) and that is not necessarily good or bad, the potential surprise and discomfort they might have experienced when seeing me on their screen became an issue I kept wondering about as I moved forward. Despite all the information provided in the recruitment documents, nowhere did I state that I was White. Students would receive a great amount of data about the research project but who was the person conducting it? Besides my name and institutional affiliation, no further information about me was declared. Despite all my advocacy and studies on race/racism before conducting the interviews and despite all the focus

of my research on anti-racism, why did I fail to provide students with the information that I was White? By assuming that my whiteness would not be perceived as a threat, today I realize how much I have reinforced whiteness through research despite my intention to do exactly the opposite—another evidence that good intentions are not always enough. Just like the teacher-student power imbalance must be taken into consideration by educators when planning their practices, so does the educational researcher-participant—especially in the case of White researchers interviewing underage, visible minority students. Interestingly, as I was getting ready to conduct the first interview, I made sure to mention to students the country I had come from. I felt that informing students about my origins would not only made them more interested in me (as people are typically excited when I mention where I come from) but also more comfortable sharing their negative experiences here (as I would not be a Canadian judging them).

As someone who has a very controlling, independent, and proactive personality, having to depend on strangers' buy-in was both a source of great frustration and gratitude. In a similar vein, no sooner had I started hearing from potential participants than I realized how much it bothered me to be having to read emails written with inaccurate grammar—an experience that was magnified when conducting the interviews and later going through the transcripts. My perfectionism and whiteness were being struck together with the underlying assumption I held that I owned the data I collected. As much as I thought of myself as someone knowledgeable about race/racism prior to the beginning of the study, I found myself reinforcing whiteness and my White privileges on many occasions. For example, hearing participants thank me for the opportunity to share their experiences and for taking the time to conduct this research inflated my (White) ego, as noted by the enthusiasm with which I registered those instances in the research journal. I also particularly remember how uncomfortable I felt when I heard about students' experiences with racism because I was not sure how to react, how to respond, how to express the perfect balance between acknowledging their pain and maintaining a “neutral” researcher position.

Furthermore, as much as I sought to be a hospitable researcher, I did not anticipate the discomfort of being a researcher-host. Having students “arrive to me” without my knowing exactly when and without having any prior knowledge about them (as would be expected in genuine hospitality) besides the fact that they would be Black refugee students made me feel haunted by the arrival of the guest. Experiencing to some degree the unpredictable and unconditional nature of hospitality was extremely uncomfortable and oftentimes made me feel a hostage to the unknown Other. However, it was only after analyzing the data that I realized that, in fact, I was a hostage not to the Other but to my own self: my expectations, experiences, and whiteness.

### **Self-Reflexivity and the Im-Possibility of Hospitality**

We now come full circle and the question that arises is, if the recentralization of whiteness is such a common pitfall of anti-racism practices, is self-reflexivity worthwhile in the pursuit of anti-oppressive research? Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), for instance, observed that even in critical race theory or critical whiteness studies “the bodies and works by scholars of color are frequently replaced by bodies and works of white scholars” (p. 83). But is it possible to foster anti-racism practices in a way that does not stop at the point of reinforcing whiteness?

Indeed, I believe that those who engage on cross-racial research should neither abstain from self-reflexivity nor conceive it as a panacea. What is called for is that reflexivity of discomfort discussed by Pillow (2003), one that is not led by the hope of “transcending structural power

inequalities” but by a careful analysis of “the interplay between individual and collective subjectivities” (D’Arcangelis, 2018, p. 342).

Furthermore, I argue that such discomfort must not be limited to the interviewing moment itself but must go from the research design until how (or whether) one chooses to disseminate such knowledge. What questions should be asked? Who is ultimately benefiting from such study? To what extent is the researcher’s agenda detrimental to the well-being and interests of the research subjects? Likewise, if I nearly shudder when I read the field notes I have written, I can only imagine how many readers will frown upon me when reading such entries. Yet, I believe that one’s commitment to anti-racism through self-reflexivity will only exceed performativity when we embrace the need to unsettle the boundaries of the self, the walls surrounding our egos, and make ourselves vulnerable to critique. Concealing one’s ghosts will be of no service to those who are oppressed nor to those who remain blind to their own role as oppressor.

What about hospitality? The tensions of conducting cross-racial educational research soon became evident to me, but what effect did it have on students themselves? Although I assume that their overall research experience was positive (based on their smiles, thanking me for the interview, and based on the known psychological benefits of articulating one’s experiences [e.g., Frank, 2002; Murray, 2003]), it is only the guest who can claim to have been welcomed (Derrida, 1999). I was thus left wondering whether my attempt to conduct hospitable research had actually been fulfilled. I am then reminded that the pursuit of hospitality, or simply the ethical intention, as Britzman (1998) put it, does not mean it will necessarily be achieved. This is particularly more evident when seeking to welcome racialized students in a White space (see Bryzzheva, 2018). My own inhospitality was often revealed through the cracks of my intentional pursuit of hospitable research. But if it is in the impossibility of hospitality that its possibility lies, as Derrida (2000a, 2007) articulated, this remains a worthwhile and much needed goal.

## **Conclusion**

Whether in the K–12 setting or in higher education, as classrooms in Canada become increasingly more racially diverse, educational researchers will likely engage more and more often in cross-racial research. Although every research project should arguably be conducted through anti-oppressive and hospitable methods, this research has demonstrated that such pursuit can be increasingly more challenging when conducting cross-racial research. To be sure, through the analysis of my research journal, this article evidenced several ethical challenges I encountered when seeking to honor participants’ voices, resisting trying to see just what I was expecting to find, recognizing my biases, and trying to understand what I should do with the ones I detected. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly exacerbated the challenges I faced throughout this study, forcing me to take different routes. However, it is possible to see how such roadblocks in fact served to unveil several of my ingrained beliefs and expectations which might have gone unnoticed otherwise.

Albeit I may never be able to measure the extent to which this research contributed to the well-being of those I interviewed or whether they felt welcomed by me, this research journal unveiled many of the ambivalences and complexities of being a White educational researcher conducting cross-racial interviews, in a foreign land, in the middle of a pandemic, with participants who were, in turn, also new to the land. Conducting (or at least trying to conduct) anti-oppressive, hospitable research requires the discomfort of not having things necessarily done the way we would like to. Educational researchers should not approach a study with their design, methods, and questions

set in stone, but rather be sensitive and tactful to participants' realities and uniqueness and embrace the "messiness" of research which often requires change and letting go of our own agenda. It is imperative for the anti-oppressive researcher to engage in a constant, active, and sincere process of self-reflexivity in order to notice and address the many ways in which one's personality, biases, and agenda can impinge on participants' well-being and skew findings. Furthermore, it is necessary for the educational researcher to recognize that the willingness to pursue anti-oppressive and anti-racism research will likely be accompanied by the realization that whiteness (with all the privileges that come with it) is a lot more entrenched and harder to deconstruct than our "good intentions" may portray or try to convince us. After all, as Heron (2007) emphasized, as White people "we are crucially invested in *not* seeing ourselves in these terms because of our need to remain innocent in order to protect our own moral selves, and in order to continue to *make our selves*" (p. 151).

Furthermore, any educational researcher who genuinely wants to pursue anti-oppressive, hospitable research must be aware that this commitment is not something that can be checked off from a REB protocol and it requires much more than merely acknowledging one's privileges in a section of an academic publication. Western research methods are embedded in whiteness, and it is impossible to neutrally approach a study. Every researcher carries one's own biases, assumptions, and ingrained beliefs in every part of the study, thus requiring an ongoing critical examination of one's positionality, tactfulness to the voice of the Other, and willingness to move away from one's comfort zone. Being an anti-oppressive educational researcher requires vulnerability to let go of control and humility to recognize the inhospitality that one's pursuit of hospitality will likely yield. Are we willing to embrace such discomfort?

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