Realizing the social mandate of work-integration social enterprises through an anti-racist feminist praxis and spatiality?

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ABSTRACT

Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) have emerged as an important labour market intermediary in the contemporary period, helping those who face multiple intersecting barriers to find work. Interpreter Services Toronto is one WISE that provides training for immigrant women living in Toronto, Canada. In this paper, we draw upon detailed open-ended interviews to explore the joint economic-social mandate of the organization, and its incorporation of an anti-racist feminist praxis. Interpreter Services Toronto develops skills and secures employment. It also creates a safe space for immigrant women, advancing an ethics of care that supports the social reproduction of immigrant women. While the organization is constrained by neoliberal imperatives, our objective in this paper is to explore the everyday experiences of people involved in this organization. We examine the tensions and contradictions the organization confronts, but also the subjectivities and coalitions they form, and the possibilities opened up by an alternative ethics and praxis.

1. Introduction

Immigrant women face numerous difficulties securing stable employment. This is a result of the multiple intersecting inequalities they face, including gender, familial and racial oppression, and the precarious nature of their working lives. In the context of Toronto - a city with highly polarized and unequal labour markets (Stapleton, 2019) - one labour market intermediary that has emerged to promote the inclusion of immigrant women is Interpreter Services Toronto (IST). Interpreter Services Toronto is an Employment Social Enterprise (ESE), or what is also known as a 'work integration social enterprise' (or WISE). The organization provides participants with training as a language interpreter, as well as developing business and life skills.

Drawing upon debates on the non-profit sector, labour market intermediaries and the social economy, this paper explores the challenges that this social enterprise confronts in realizing its hybrid economic and social mandate, challenges that have become more acute in an era of neoliberalism. We argue that to address the needs of marginalized populations, and to overcome problems identified in the literature, there is a need for non-profits and social enterprises, such as WISEs, to adopt an anti-racist feminist praxis and spatiality.

In this paper, we foreground how Interpreter Services Toronto adopts

an anti-racist feminist praxis. Interpreter Services Toronto emphasizes social supports, fostering an ethics of reflexivity, collectivity and care. The organization does this by fashioning a safe space (or what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) refers to as a 'safe house'). This safe space challenges harmful and exclusionary relations and supports the care and affirmation of self and others (Isoke, 2013, 2014, 2011; Kern and McLean, 2017; Hossein, 2019; Hooks, 2015; Mullings, 2021). It does this by forging wide-ranging partnerships at various scales (Larner, 2014; Rantisi and Leslie, 2021). In this way, we argue that Interpreter Services Toronto addresses some of the problems typically associated with WISEs (and the social economy more generally), namely their tendency to rely upon a unilinear 'service' model upholding white, masculinist and Eurocentric values and privileging technical over social and cultural factors.

Adopting an intersectional approach, the organization attempts to break down boundaries based on identity. Emerging in Black feminist thought in the 1970 s, 80 s and 90 s, intersectionality recognizes the way in which racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity and capitalism (among other forms of oppression) overlap and intermingle (Crenshaw, 1991; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Hooks, 1984, Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Davis, 1971; Moraga and Anzaldua, 2015). These forms of power are not separate or hierarchically ranked (Hill Collins, 2009). As Crenshaw (1991) reminds us, the effect of these different systems is

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not additive, but rather transformative. An anti-racist feminist praxis not only incorporates an intersectional approach which blurs the boundaries of identity, it also blurs the binaries of production and reproduction, theory and practice. We examine this spatial praxis in this paper.

In terms of methodology, the research incorporates an analysis of a number of documents associated with Interpreter Services Toronto, including the organization's website and annual reports. News articles and government reports related to WISEs and the social economy are also reviewed, along with online postings related to the organization and its programs. The research also draws upon semi-structured interviews conducted with individuals involved in Interpreter Services Toronto, including directors, managers, trainers and participants. Interviews were also conducted with key supporting actors in government and other institutions relevant to WISEs in Toronto. Interviews ranged between one and two hours in length and were conducted in 2019. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded according to theme.

Following a feminist methodological approach, the use of interviews privileges thick description and rich insights into participants' perspectives and everyday experiences over a broader, more generalized - and abstract - analysis (Kern and McLean, 2017). This is an approach which pays attention to what happens *within* a work integration social enterprise, analyzing the ways WISEs negotiate and resist neoliberal pressures (rather than simply reproducing them) (Kern and McLean, 2017: 417, see also Larner, 2014). Attentive to tension and contradiction, we do not claim to know the story of WISEs in advance (Kern and McLean, 2017). Instead, our aim in undertaking this study is to examine the practices of those involved in one organization, their efforts to fashion alternative subjectivities, values and ethics, and the possibilities embedded with these efforts (Kern and McLean, 2017; Larner, 2014). As Hudson (2021) reminds us, many parts of the social economy- especially female-dominated segments - contain "forgotten spaces" that are often overlooked in the literature and in policy-making circles, marginalizing their capacity for social transformation. In this paper, we provide a closer examination of one of these "forgotten spaces".

Drawing upon an intersectional feminist ethics and praxis, our research is not objective, but rather, is informed by our own complicated subject positions and situated knowledges (Kern and McLean, 2017; Haraway, 1988). All of us are *cis*-gender women, working for Canadian universities, although we are located differently with respect to many aspects of identity, including ethnic background and immigrant status. As one example, one of us is from a Palestinian immigrant family, and forged an immediate bond with participants from neighbouring regions. There is no doubt that our complex intersectional identities shaped the research process in numerous and unknown ways.

Organized into four main sections, the paper begins by exploring some of the difficulties that immigrant women face in the Canadian labour market. The second section examines how WISEs attempt to address these issues, and some of the challenges they face in the process. In the third section, we foreground the need for WISEs to adopt an antiracist, feminist praxis in order to confront these challenges. In the final section, we outline how Interpreter Services attempts to incorporate this anti-racist feminist praxis into its programs. We begin by mapping out an overview of the program, and then discuss the ways it develops new subjectivities and relationships. Particular attention is paid to the way in which IST attempts to cultivate the care of self and others and how its feminist approach involves an on-going renewal of its transformative praxis.

2. Immigrant women and the labour market

Immigrant women, especially racialized immigrant women, face multiple intersecting challenges in the Canadian labour market. They are over-represented in low paid and low-skilled jobs that are often highly precarious (Kalleberg, 2009; Strauss, 2018; Vosko, 2000). The jobs they find typically lack benefits and employment protections, and are thus associated with high levels of employment insecurity and

instability (Man, 2004; Hira-Friesen, 2018; Premji et al., 2014). Immigrant women also confront high levels of underemployment and unemployment when compared to Canadian-born women, and are frequently concentrated in informal employment (Man, 2004; Premji et al., 2014).

Some of the barriers immigrant women encounter relate to the organization of the labour market itself, including language barriers and gender and racial discrimination (Man, 2004; Hira-Friesen, 2018; Premji et al., 2014). There is also a devaluing of immigrant women's education and credentials, leading to a process of deskilling (Bauder, 2003; Man, 2004; Pratt 1999). Limited social networks and a lack of information about available services present further challenges, as does the immigration process itself (Premji et al., 2014: 130). Many women come to Canada with partners, and as dependents, it is often assumed that they are not entering the labour market (Man, 2004: 138-140).

Immigrant women also confront an array of social barriers, including in some cases, the lack of a supportive partner, intimate partner violence and social isolation (Premji et al., 2014: 130). Like other women, they frequently have greater household and caring responsibilities and the shortage of affordable childcare services limits their opportunities for securing paid employment (Man, 2004: 141; Martin, 2014; Premji et al., 2014: 131). The shift to neoliberal forms of governance - and associated cutbacks to the welfare state and social services - compounds these difficulties (Premji et al., 2014: 136; Man, 2004: 137; Martin, 2014; MacLeavy, 2011).

In light of cutbacks in state services, many immigrant women seek out alternative institutions of support to secure resources and suitable types of employment (Man, 2004: 145; Martin, 2014). In the next section, we foreground one type of organization supporting immigrant women - the 'work integration social enterprise' (or WISE). We highlight the role that WISEs play, but also some of their limitations.

3. Work-integration social enterprises (WISEs) and the challenges of balancing hybrid economic /social rationales

In the contemporary period, WISEs (also referred to as 'employment social enterprises' or ESEs) have emerged as an important labour market intermediary (Benner, 2003). As part of the social economy, WISEs are generally non-profit organizations with both an economic and social mission. They provide training to participants through a paid work experience. Some of the money needed to fund these training programs is derived through the sale of goods and services that the trainees produce, but many WISEs receive additional sources of funding, particularly from the government, since the cost of providing training and related social services often exceeds the income generated from the business (Dolbel, 2009; Cooney, 2011).

WISEs are typically oriented toward marginalized populations, such as immigrant women, people of colour, youth, the disabled and the homeless (Nyssens, 2006). Training programs are fairly comprehensive (often at least 12 weeks) when compared to other employment and workfare schemes (Amin et al., 1999; Nyssens, 2006; O'Connor and Meinhard, 2014). WISEs emphasize the production of both hard and soft skills, and they also provide a variety of social supports to help integrate participants, including housing assistance, language instruction and counseling, as well as education on labour and civil rights (Alberio and Tremblay, 2014; Cooney, 2011; Dolbel, 2009; O'Connor and Meinhard, 2014).

WISEs provide a safe space where marginalized communities can develop social networks and capital, linking them to one another, as well as to employers and community organizations. Such a space enables participants to share goals, reflect on their exclusion and support one another (Hossein, 2019: 212; see also Martin, 2014). To this end, they are often closely embedded in the communities in which they are located, actively seeking to contribute to these communities through a collective praxis (Amin et al., 1999; Nyssens, 2006; O'Connor and Meinhard, 2014). This emphasis reflects the origins of many WISEs,

which lie in community and citizen movements or religious institutions working to combat local poverty and unemployment (DeFourny and Nyssens, 2008; Dolbel, 2009; O'Connor and Meinhard, 2014).

Within the Toronto context, the exact number of WISEs is not well documented, in part because they are a relatively recent institutional form (O'Connor and Meinhard, 2014), but current estimates suggest that there are over 70 in the Greater Toronto Metropolitan area (TEF 20 https://www.torontoenterprisefund.ca/about-tef/what-is-an -employment-social-enterprise). Most tend to be small, and thus overall, they employ a small percentage of Toronto's labour force. However, WISEs constitute an expanding field because they target those who are most disadvantaged in the city's increasingly polarized labour market, where roughly 40 % percent of working-age adults - with women and racialized populations disproportionately represented - are precariously employed (Lewchuk et al., 2018; see also Stapleton, 2019, Zizys, 2011; interviews). They are becoming increasingly significant players in labour market intermediation as they provide decent work opportunities and help to build local community ties (Longaphy and Heese-Boutin, 2019).

As in other contexts, in Toronto, many WISEs originate in activist and community mobilization, but since the 1990 s, many have been increasingly subject to neoliberal mandates and rationalities (Nyssens, 2006), owing to two corresponding trends. First, as the government has stepped back from the direct provision of social services (including workforce development), these services are increasingly downloaded onto organizations such as WISEs. Here, WISEs in particular, and non-profits more broadly, are increasingly responsible for providing support to "persons who are in the throes of abandonment, rather than responsib[le] for persons progressing toward full incorporation into the body politic" (Gilmore, 2017: 45). Under increasing pressure to provide services on tight budgets, WISEs become more dependent on state funding and, consequently, more accountable to government (rather than the community). In turn, WISEs are obliged to focus on meeting short-term or project-based objectives set out by regulatory funding bodies - such as getting participants into the labour market (and off government support) as quickly as possible - rather than attending to core organizational operations and more client-informed service provision (Dolbel, 2009; Gilmore, 2017; Nyssens, 2006; Theodore and Peck, 1999). This process of institutionalization poses challenges for WISEs in balancing their hybrid economic and social missions.

Second, to support their programming, many WISEs have also expanded the business aspect of their operations, placing them in more direct competition with private sector firms in the same sector – businesses that do not face the same limitations in terms of social mandates, employee turnover or a limited skill base (Alberio and Tremblay, 2014; Cooney, 2011). As the 'enterprise' component of the WISE has expanded, there is a further risk that the social component – essential for effective integration – will be compromised and that WISEs will prioritize the 'work ready' participants that are also favoured by government (over those who are most disadvantaged) (Cooney, 2011).

The increased neoliberalization and market-oriented focus of many WISEs has, by extension, led to a top-down instrumental orientation, driven by goal-oriented metrics and a 'professionalization' of expertise. This orientation is premised upon non-profit organizations providing 'services' to marginalized populations, and it parallels a paternalistic model of charity, by assuming a one-way relationship between providers and participants (Quarter et al., 2017). As Gilmore (2017) outlines in her critique of the United States 'non-profit industrial complex', this process is far from new. The non-profit industrial complex refers to an intricate network of relationships and economic dependencies created by the retraction of state supports under the banner of neoliberal efficiencies (Gilmore, 2017). The stripping back of state support, combined with the rising professionalization of the non-profit sector and the imposition of rigid funding rubrics and structural mechanisms, restricts and silos non-profits in their efforts to assist those abandoned by the state (Gilmore, 2017). As many critics observe, the unilinear model that emerges out of

these conditions does not address these broader issues, nor does it work to engage or empower participants at the grassroots level (Iverson and James, 2014a). In fact, it can serve as a way to manage and control dissent and can encourage non-profits to model themselves on corporate organizational structures rather than challenging them (Smith, 2017: 3). What is lost are the important ways in which organizational programming might benefit from participants' input and expertise (Iverson and James, 2014a). Resultantly, many non-profits in general, and WISEs in particular, are left with little choice but to employ an individualistic approach, emphasizing technical rather than cultural forms of engagement. This more technical approach involves meeting measurable goals (for example through the provision of high quality training or numbers of participants in jobs) (Butin in Iverson and James, 2014b: 19).

The emphasis on the measurable - and the more general audit culture with which it is associated - is ascendant in neoliberalism. This translates into the privileging of objectives that can be readily quantified, which become the 'visible' and valued elements that determine the organization's programming priorities. Other elements that are not easily calculable or divisible, such as social objectives (e.g., community-building, individual empowerment, or providing comfort to those they are assisting), are hidden and devalued in such an accounting regime, even if they are central to ensuring more radical, care-centered interventions (see also Martin, 2014). Also hidden are the uneven power relationships that underlie and mold the discourses and practices that "governments increasingly engage as they move to encourage and evaluate the sector's development potential" (Daya, 2014: 121). As Smith (2017: 10) argues, such an approach leads to a "social movement culture that is non-collaborative, narrowly focused, and competitive".

Intersecting with the emphasis on a technical, unilinear and individualistic model of service provision is the fact that many of the values that inform the theory and practice of the social economy are predominantly white, masculinist, Eurocentric and heteronormative, and, in the case of non-profits, in particular, these values are tied to colonial and racist histories (Quarter et al., 2017: 10; Rodriguez, 2017). A key problem is that "the staffing and donors engaged in the voluntary sector are mainly white, and those on the receiving end are mainly persons of colour" (Hossein, 2019: 215). Regardless of staffing, there is often an absence of engagement with critical race theories, Black feminist thought, or anti-colonial histories and knowledge in conceptualizing the social economy (Hossein, 2019, 2018). This is problematic, because it means that social economy theories are limited in their ability to grasp the problems that women and people of colour confront (Hossein, 2019). It is also an issue, Rodriguez (2017) argues, because it impedes the creation of more expansive and critical strategies aimed at addressing (and disrupting) the institutionalization of relations of dominance and white supremacism. As a result, many social enterprises adopt pedagogical interventions that mirror and reproduce inequalities along the lines of race, class, gender and sexuality (Hossein, 2018).

The cross-cutting of neoliberal rationalities and a pervasive whiteness and masculinity constrains the ability of WISEs to realize social and cultural objectives and to maintain a focus on social reproduction and care. More generally, these rationalities limit the potential of WISEs to contest the dominant order, or as Hossein (2019: 212) puts it, "upset things". To identify and address the injustices confronted by marginalized groups, WISEs need to draw upon a more radical and transformative praxis. Anti-racist feminism provides one such model (Isoke, 2011). Centering the everyday lived experiences of women, it exposes the highly uneven ways that neoliberal logics operate on the ground in particular spaces. In so doing, this form of analysis problematizes rigid binaries - including those based on identity, but also those between production and reproduction, theory and practice.

4. Toward an anti-racist feminist transformative praxis

The first aspect of an anti-racist feminism relevant to the social economy is its attempt to erode binaries based on identity. As noted

earlier, intersectionality is a concept that derives from Black feminist thought and recognizes that one always stands at the crossroads of different identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2009; Valentine, 2007). As scholars such as Brown (1997) contend, different aspects of identity cannot be separated, but rather, are mutually constitutive. The experience of race, for example, changes the experience of gender, making it impossible to extract race from gender (Brown, 1997). It is therefore essential to adopt an approach which recognizes intersectionality as a process (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013), as well as considering the multiple interlocking forms of oppression that an individual confronts, and the ways in which these intersections are time and space specific (Valentine, 2007; Mollett and Faria, 2018). An anti-racist feminism foregrounds the way in which dominant institutional spaces (including those focused on education and training) are oriented around not only patriarchal values, but also class-based elitism and ideologies of whiteness (Verjee and Butterwick, 2014). Accordingly, there is a need to interrogate institutions and spaces, such as labour market intermediaries, "a process that begins with recognition that we are each implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another. That is, we come to know and perform ourselves in ways that reproduce social hierarchies" (Razack, 1998: 10).

The second dimension of an anti-racist feminism relevant to the social economy is its dismantling of the boundaries between production and reproduction. From the industrial era on, social reproduction became the unpaid work of women (particularly women of colour), while men were increasingly responsible for productive labour (remunerated with a wage). As Fraser (2016: 102) details, this social and geographic separation provided an institutional basis for women's subordination. Obscuring the value and importance of social reproduction, paradoxically, capitalism made

> their official economies dependent on the very same processes of social reproduction whose value they disavow. This peculiar relation of separation- cum- dependence- cum- disavowal is an inherent source of instability: on the one hand, capitalist economic production is not self-sustaining, but relies on social reproduction; on the other, its drive to unlimited accumulation threatens to destabilize the very reproductive processes and capacities that capital—and the rest of us—need (Fraser, 2016: 103).

To address this disavowal, feminism puts social reproduction at the center of its analysis, connecting it to production and revaluing it (Morrow and Parker, 2020; see also Mullings, 2021). Feminism replaces a conception of an independent individual participating in the labour market with that of solidarity and mutuality between individuals (Worth, 2016), articulating a call for a more comprehensive portrait of "life's work" (Mitchell, Marsden and Katz, 2004). Calls for this more comprehensive portrait are articulated within communities resisting slavery, colonialism and dispossession. As Mullings (2021) points out, provision grounds, practices of marronage and contemporary social enterprises in the Global South share in common an emphasis on social reproduction and an overturning of the separation between production and reproduction. An anti-racist, anti-colonial feminism demands that we value 'life' over 'work', understanding how life and its affective dimensions relate to our decisions about work (Worth, 2016: 604; see also Mullings, 2021). An anti-racist feminism draws attention to the need to attend not only to the productive role of immigrant women, but to their social reproduction as well. This approach expands the boundaries of what counts as work and, in doing so, creates new ways to think about the experiences of workers and their agency (Mullings, 2021).

A third and related tenet of feminism relevant for the social economy is its emphasis on eradicating the division between theory and practice (Iverson and James, 2014b: 21). From its origins in the early twentieth century, feminism has always been "foremost about action. It is inextricably linked to social change, advocacy and activism" (Iverson and James, 2014b: 21). Feminism entails a crossing of physical and social boundaries of all kinds, in order to mobilize "more complex ways of

thinking and being" (Iverson and James, 2014a: 5). In an effort to break down the boundaries between theory and practice (i.e. praxis), feminism adopts a relational approach to agency, based on ongoing observation and engagement with others, allowing individuals to "hone their knowledge and skill, creating an environment of constant renewal of praxis" (Ollis in Iverson and James, 2014a: 216). There is an emphasis on mentorship and role models, and creating spaces that emphasize relationships of respect and reciprocity based on close personal ties with the communities being engaged (Iverson and James, 2014a: 5). Such an approach challenges the one-way relationship characteristic of many WISEs, highlighting the need to think of the self as social and interdependent (Worth, 2016: 603).

Consciousness-raising is central to a feminist praxis. Emerging in the 1960 s and 70 s as a way to raise awareness and to translate awareness into action, participants share their experiences in a small group format; the goal is to uncover a common basis of oppression and to work toward change. Consciousness-raising prioritizes the creation of new vocabularies and identities or 'practices of the self' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 72). Adopting a collective rather than an individualistic approach, it facilitates "an understanding of the self as an agent of change" (Iverson and James, 2014b: 15; Firth and Robinson, 2016), giving rise to new political subjects (Larner, 2014). As Gibson-Graham (2006: 77) argue, "feminism provides a model for cultivating new forms of subjectivity that refuse slavery and victimhood, that realize that changing the self provides a way toward changing the world, and that similarly, transforming the world also provides a means of transforming the self'.

The emphasis on consciousness-raising necessitates reflexivity, requiring one to constantly examine one's assumptions, exploring how this might impact one's actions (Iverson and James, 2014a: 6; see also Butin, 2010). This compels one to also take note of whose voices are being heard, and whose are being silenced (Butin, 2003: 1682). Such an approach valorizes a collective process of knowledge production, whereby different voices are integrated, without privileging any one voice (Firth and Robinson, 2016; Larner, 2014). It encourages one to think of community engagement from an anti-foundational perspective that draws attention to the power imbalances at work in the discursive and institutional contexts in which community engagement takes place (Butin, 2010; Iverson and James, 2014b). This necessitates the adoption of a cultural rather than a technical approach, prompting service providers to reflect on how they relate to the communities they are working with (Butin, 2010).

Incorporating an anti-racist feminist praxis and spatiality is critical to realizing the hybrid mandate of WISEs. It foregrounds the need to understand multiple intersecting oppressions, and to move beyond 'service' functions to promote more interactive and relational forms of instruction. Such an approach is oriented to creating a safe space for interaction between instructors and participants, among participants, and between participants and those they are serving. While there are challenges trying to implement radical and progressive projects in social enterprises in an era of neoliberalism, in the next section, we foreground one WISE attempting to incorporate such an anti-racist feminist praxis.

5. Centering an anti-racist feminist praxis: The case of Interpreter Services Toronto.

5.1. Overview of the program.

As a work integration social enterprise, Interpreter Services Toronto (IST) has three main objectives. The first is to provide professional training in language interpretation for marginalized immigrant and refugee women, many of whom are low-income or on social assistance. The second aim is to build the capacity of local communities through meaningful employment and the third goal is to provide access to fair wages and good working conditions for interpreters (Interviews). IST is part of the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, a non-profit legal clinic which serves women experiencing domestic violence, sexual

assault and human trafficking (Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, 2020).

Coming from a variety of different countries, language backgrounds, and family circumstances, some participants are highly educated, but have encountered difficulties having their skills recognized in Canada. Working as an interpreter allows them to earn a modest income and gain Canadian experience as they wait to get licensed. Others have little previous education or experience in the labour market and are seeking to enter the labour market for the first time (Interviews). Approximately 80 percent of the women in the training program are unemployed when they enter the program, while 20 percent are working at least part-time (Interviews). Regardless of education or previous work experience, being newly landed in Canada, the majority of women are precarious. As a staff member of the organization puts it, the organization serves "women who… come from a background where they are in desperate need of … work" (Interview).

Participants describe an array of intersecting challenges integrating into the labour market:

> it wasn't easy [when I first came to Canada]. Believe me, sometimes I tried to wipe it from my memory, because I had five years just to get my application as a refugee accepted… I did many jobs. …I don't remember them all. I was working in a university as a counselor for students before I came to Canada, and here I have to start from below zero. To fix my refugee status, I work day and night. I work in the factory during the day, and then at a restaurant two to three nights as a waitress (Interview, participant).

Women confront not only economic barriers, but discrimination linked to race, gender, nationality and sexuality. As another participant describes,

> another barrier was being trans. I was already taking my hormone replacement therapy when I came to Canada, but it was still pretty early for me… On top of being in a new country and trying to get my bearings and being homeless, there were basically numerous barriers. So, when I found out that Barbara Schlifer hires women and they have no qualms hiring a trans woman, who is going through her transition, I just jumped on that immediately (Interview).

Women grapple with a variety of other issues:

> a lot of these women have some form of trauma in their lives, whether it's intimate partner trauma or childhood [trauma]… The integration process itself is traumatic, but you've also got this other trauma hanging in the background…A number of the women are single moms… trying to manage being there for their kids, as well as coming to class every day, getting their homework done. Some of them are also still dealing with the legal system and child custody issues and criminal issues and dads acting up…while they're trying to figure out how to support their families… Most don't have a good support system. They've got no family around, or they've been estranged from their family because they've decided to dissolve their relationship with their partner and there's not a lot of understanding of them doing that. They're struggling with children's behavior as a result of the breakup of the family. Some of them have children who have special needs. So, all of that, and still trying to integrate and find your way (Interview, trainer).

To support itself, the organization relies on a mix of government support, non-governmental agency funding, and fee-for-service income (Interviews). A grant from the provincial Ministry of Children and Community Social Services supports the services that IS offers (Interviews). The main source of funding for their training program comes from the Toronto Enterprise Fund, a non-governmental organization that emerges from a funding partnership between United Way and the three levels of government and that supports the "start-up, sustainability, and scaling of employment social enterprises" through a host of programs, workshops and grants (Toronto Enterprise Fund, 2020).

In 2019, IST interpreters filled 8,213 interpretation assignments (Interview). Clients included Access Alliance (Toronto) and Across Languages (London). The organization serves hospitals and medical centers, clients in legal, social work, and educational sectors (e.g., the Toronto District Schoolboard), as well as private clients (Interviews). IS offers interpretation services in a variety of languages, including Arabic, Persian, Spanish, Polish, Guajarati, Punjabi, Hindi, Arabic, Greek, German, Russian, Cantonese and Mandarin (Interviews). In addition to interpretation, IS offers translation and American sign language services. Through IS, clients can book one-on-one in-person interpretation services, interpretation for groups, and telephone and video interpretation services.

While interpretation services were a part of a package of services offered by the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic beginning in 1987, the emphasis on training women in interpretation as part of a wider employment social enterprise began in 2009 (Interviews). This training program emerged in response to both the needs of women experiencing intimate partner violence who are seeking services at Barbra Schlifer, and the needs of immigrant and refugee women living in the shelter system, who are seeking skills, certification and financial independence. In this way, the IST program critically serves two overlapping underserved populations.

The recruitment of prospective language interpreters is carried out through a combination of outreach at community centres and user agencies, shelters serving immigrants and women, agency referrals, online marketing, workshops and conference networking, as well as the distribution of flyers to partner community agencies. Recruitment is also done in the building in which Interpreter Services is housed, as there are a number of other organizations working with immigrants there (Interviews). All participants must have completed a high school diploma in order to apply. They submit a resume, complete an interview, and take a language test consisting of conversational translation and translation from reading (Interviews).

IST provides the most comprehensive interpreter training program outside of college-based interpretation programs in Ontario (Interviews). Training sessions take place once per year and are approximately 154 hours, spread out over three months (on Fridays and Saturdays to accommodate the trainees' schedules) (Interviews). Attendance at all sessions is required and trainees are required to take two tests: one mid-way through the training and one at the end (Interviews).

The training program is divided into four parts. The first component comprises core competencies. Participants receive instruction on the role of the interpreter, standards of practice, ethical principles, and medical and legal terminology, as well as the structure of the medical and legal systems in Ontario (Interviews). IST trainers emphasize the importance of learning how to maintain ethics and accuracy in difficult situations. During this initial phase, participants also practice role-playing with a trained senior interpreter. Here, trainees have the opportunity to practice the constituent tasks of interpreting, including active listening, memory retention, note-taking, mental transposition and vocabulary development. This is often done in a collective setting and is complemented by visits to spaces and institutions related to domestic violence, where the applied challenges of the work are highlighted. Drawing upon a feminist and experiential learning pedagogy, there is an emphasis on combining theory and practice: "We do theory, application, theory, application. So, it's not heavy theory based. But we do a lot of practice exercises, roleplay simulations. So, they get to try out some of the different techniques" (Interview, trainer). Participants likewise receive training in video conferencing, telephone interpreting and on-site translation (Interviews).

The second part of the training focuses on domestic violence. This component includes visits to Domestic Violence Courts (to observe a court in session), meetings with crown lawyers and the police, and visits to the Women's College Hospital Sexual Assault Care Centre, Partner Assault Response Program and the Parole and Probation Office

(Interviews). This section emphasizes skills such as maintaining confidentiality and impartiality and increases interpreters' awareness of the content of their work, which relates to sexual violence.

The third part of the program develops life and business skills needed to become an independent contractor, including how to manage a business and be an employee, covering time management, filing taxes, registering for a sales tax number and accessing online platforms (Interviews). Other 'soft skills' included in this segment are professional presentation, punctuality, conflict resolution, assertiveness, teamwork and customer service.

In the final modules of the program, trainees are given anti-oppression training, particularly around racism and transgender issues. Participants receive additional instruction on domestic violence, incorporating "an acute appreciation" of the importance of intersectionality and cultural differences (Interview, staff). The aim is to provide a context for the provision of services to diverse women. And after successfully completing the program, IS offers additional training opportunities to graduates up to one year after graduation. These specialized training sessions include workshops on medical and legal terminology and working with individuals with disabilities (Interviews).

Once the women graduate from the program, they are added to the IS roster, where they serve as freelance interpreters. By retaining a bank of interpreters, IST is able to match clients and interpreters, providing professional interpretation services from a steady supply of skilled workers. Through IST, certified interpreters earn between $26 and $31 per hour for in-person interpretation (Interviews). Though approximately 75 % of interpreters end up working with the Barbara Schlifer Clinic or sister organizations, there is no guarantee of how many contracts an interpreter will receive each month (Interviews). As a result, IS helps to connect participants with external work.

In the next section, we take a closer look at how an anti-racist, feminist praxis of care is integrated into the program. We examine how the training program contributes to the development of new subjectivities, fostering pedagogical spaces that promote the care of self and others, while maintaining an ongoing reflexivity and renewal to address its limitations and advocate for broader structural changes.

5.2. Towards the development of new subjectivities and relations

Recognizing that changing the self is key to changing the world (Gibson-Graham, 2006), a key goal of IST is to develop a sense of confidence among participants:

> a big thing with this particular group is helping them develop a professional presentation. Some of these women have never worked before. Others are quite educated, but … experience has just kind of knocked the stuffing out of them… When you come to Canada as an immigrant, you lose some of that assertiveness and self-confidence and self-esteem that you have…and that does something to you and you kind of give that up, right? (Interview, staff).

One way to enhance participants' sense of self is through the provision of skills. Upon completion of the program, participants receive a certificate that recognizes their competency in interpreter work. This certification confers legitimacy upon their qualifications:

> you move to a new country, and it's hard to navigate the system, and although you may be able to speak English really well, it's not easy, right? But once you have your certificate, I think it empowers you… You get another qualification to be able to do something, and then immediately you get a job… You [have] Canadian experience… I definitely think that the certification has a lot of different advantages (Interview, trainer).

Participants affirm the importance of this accreditation in building new identities:

it feels good to be appreciated… Having a certificate means that we can go to different agencies and say, "Hey, I finished the official interpreter training and here's my certificate. I work with Barbara Schlifer." So, it basically proves my abilities and my competency as an interpreter- either as an interpreter or if I wanted to do something else… language -related… The recognition that we actually went to the training and we did pass the exam and we graduated from that. That's a nice reminder (Interview).

This altered sense of self can enhance agency, a feeling of being able to change one's circumstances, as well as those of others:

> it's been a huge confidence booster. It's still pretty stressful to actually go there and do my job, but knowing that I can help …other people who are going through similar things that I have gone through, just makes me feel better about myself (Interview, participant).

This subjectivity is not only individual, but collective, cultivated through the establishment of shared bonds and spaces (Iverson and James, 2014a). These shared spaces of solidarity are critical to creating spaces of becoming, where subjectivities can be reworked and where dominant discourses and economies can be challenged (Farias, 2021). To facilitate connections between participants, IS organizes social gatherings (such as potlucks), often held in the center. These events give trainees and interpreters an opportunity to share experiences and knowledge in an informal setting, creating practices of commoning (Morrow and Parker, 2020; McLean, 2021). Both staff and participants attest to the benefits of these relationships:

> I think without exception, they [the participants] really form a bond. They actually continue to connect with each other after the training, which I think is really great because interpreting is a lonely place. They're not allowed to share what's going on [in their work] with anyone else. So, debriefing for them is limited. They can't say exactly what happened in an assignment. They can talk about the impact on them, so having that community of people who understand their experience is really important (Interview, trainer).

The importance of this sense of community is corroborated by participants:

> I was a fresh immigrant, a refugee claimant, and I was literally still in the shelter while I was going through the training. It was a little difficult for me to bond with people because I was very guarded back then. And people later told me that I seemed really inapproachable because I was always tense…Near the end of the training and after finishing it, it's a lot easier for me to interact with my fellow trainees, especially (as) very often I'll bump into them… when I go to a shelter … It's always nice to see familiar faces (Interview).

One trainer speaks to the transformation participants go through:

> the impact that the training has had on them, both in terms of the content, but I think more in terms of the interaction with other people… People talk about things like, it's changed their lives, or they've learned so much and who they are at the end of the training is so different and you can actually see it, right. It's a very different person at the end of the training (Interview).

The creation of new subjectivities is enabled by the creation of new spaces for the care of self and others.

5.3. Fostering spaces for the care of self

Adopting a feminist pedagogy, IST centers the diverse life experiences and positionalities of participants. As noted, many of the trainees are immigrant women and women of colour. Their exclusion from the labour market stems from multiple, interlocking sources of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). According to one trainer:

I think the other thing about doing the training is just always being aware of who is in the room, the different experiences, because many women have experiences with violence in their intimate relationships, but many of them are coming from conflict areas… Their refugee experience, their displacement experience may involve some kind of violation as well and that really impacts people's memory, their cognition (Interview, trainer).

Part of the effort to cultivate a safe and supportive space - that recognizes difference -.

includes reflecting on the nature of instruction and developing a learning environment that recognizes all the challenges trainees may be grappling with:

once you understand that women in the course potentially have that kind of trauma in their background, …everything that you do as an instructor should be about supporting that person… I think about it every time I mark a test. I think about how I write a comment, what the comment is saying to that person and how it's being understood by that individual. And, I think it's something that I, as an instructor, really, pay attention to. The construction of the course is a building-block approach, so that everything that you learn supports the next thing that you're learning…Not only does it give people structure, but I think it's the most effective thing in terms of people's learning. I think the experiential part of the training is really important. So, it's never just a full day of lecture…We will demonstrate how to do it, and then you'll try it. So, there is that cushion of support. It is never just saying to someone, "try that" … I think we try to pattern it, but we also try to talk to people very intentionally about when you're working in small groups, and you're giving feedback, this is the process for doing it. …Right at the beginning, we set those guidelines … How do we create an environment where you feel good about coming, where you feel supported? And that you feel it's okay to say when it's too much for you (Interview, trainer).

Staff are attentive to both the delivery and content of the training and to accommodating students who are having challenges:

sometimes it's tiring and overwhelming for me to have to think about everything that they're dealing with. I can't imagine what it is for them. And so, in terms of people getting their homework done, you want to have a standard so that it doesn't look like this is just a fly-by-night training…My bottom line is, as long as you're communicating with me, then I know that you're committed, and we can work around it (Interview, trainer).

IS also fosters a space that is understanding of the unique challenges associated with the work of being an interpreter. As a graduate of the training program recalls, there is a lot of trauma associated with interpreting work:

we're specifically supposed to work with victims of domestic violence, which let's face it, it's mostly women. I was actually really afraid of that. I remember I actually had to say no to my first interpreting job, because I was freshly out of training, and they needed someone to interpret for a victim of sexual assault. And I didn't feel ready for that. I prefer to just say no, so they could get someone who has more experience. Because I wasn't sure if I could handle that emotionally. Just the stress of my first assignment on top of dealing with something that's as brutal (Interview, participant)

The organization provides a safe and caring space to work through these issues: "she (IST staff) said to me, 'Ok, come…I am here. Just tell me what happened and let it out'. So, I did… I said, 'It hurts to hear it [details about a particular case]'" (Interview, participant). Another participant describes the importance of this support, which comes from sharing one's experiences and emotions not only with staff, but with fellow trainees:

we can ask for the debriefing sessions and actually, I went through one yesterday… which are very helpful… [In these sessions we] talk about what's difficult. If it's a particular assignment, we can talk about … how to keep a lid on our emotions when we have our own stuff to deal with (Interview, participant).

While many social enterprises have minimal resources to address issues related to trauma and are not attentive to racist and xenophobic border policies (McLean, 2021), an acknowledgement of trauma lies at the center of the work that IST and Barbra Schlifer do. Mentorship between staff and participants as well as among participants themselves constitutes a form of feminist care and solidarity-making across difference. Consistent with a feminist praxis that unites production and reproduction, IST strives to cultivate an attentive, 'women-centered' space so that participants can develop the resources needed to integrate into this work. Here IST engages in an "ethic of care," a type of hidden labour which, Martin (2014: 30) argues, is chronically "undervalued and ignored by those with power (funders, employers, and government)," but at the same time, is central to cultivating a sense of "shared struggle…and emotional strength" which could then "be mobilized in future struggles over the rights of immigrants.".

To help mitigate the trauma brought on by the nature of their work and the way it may intersect with personal struggles, trainees are also taught methods of self-care, including yoga and aromatherapy:

they stressed the importance of emotional self-care, making sure we don't take it personally what's being said, practicing mindfulness, … meditation … It would also help because it was a pretty informal setting, so …we could laugh every now and then, despite the topic being serious. So we could de-stress and diffuse what we're talking about (Interview, participant).

As another participant argues,

we're constantly encouraged to take care of ourselves so we can actually deal with that afterwards, like all the unpleasantness that we're exposed to when we interpret, and we need to really take care of ourselves, our stress levels. Make sure that we practice emotional and physical first aid, so we can actually be there for the people who need us (Interview, participant).

In an effort to ensure care of the self, IS also offers counselling services through Barbra Schlifer and has plans to extend the fourth part of their training program by making self-care, support and debriefings available to interpreters after they complete their training. The connection that IS has to the Schlifer Clinic enables IST trainers and staff to support their trainees in a way that extends beyond interpreter training to address issues associated with separation and divorce, intimate partner violence, and post-traumatic stress brought about by migration and living in conflict zones. In the future, the enterprise plans to partner with another organization, Sistering, which serves at-risk and precariously housed women and trans people and can provide a monthly, drop-in session at Interpreter Services for trainees (https://sistering.org). All of these linkages help support the individual. In the next section, we explore how IST incorporates the care of others and develops new spaces of engagement by drawing on its diverse networks and resources.

5.4. Fostering the pedagogical spaces to promote awareness and care of 'others'

As highlighted above, a distinct feature of anti-racist feminist approaches is the attention to the 'everyday' in ways that trouble abstract and binary constructions of identity or lived experience. A core part of the training program is to create a context in which trainees are exposed to the everyday realities of the clients whom they serve and the work that they will perform; the goal of creating these spaces of engagement is to help raise awareness by disrupting established views, fostering

greater connection and identification (Isoke, 2011; Williams, 2020). Rather than articulating stories that celebrate diversity (McLean, 2021), IST is not afraid to have difficult conversations and to address power relationships among participants. One of the ways that this is done is through in-house anti-oppression workshops that center the voices of marginalized groups. Many of the staff and trainers at IS are themselves immigrants and/or women of colour who lead the workshops. They are sensitive to increasing the diversity in instruction, and also invite guest speakers from inside the broader Schlifer organization - and beyond- in order to enhance awareness of intersecting inequalities:

> [anti-oppression training is] really done in a very practical way… We also have on-site persons who identify as 'different' come and sit within the training and talk about their own experiences. So, we've had somebody from the LGTBQ community, somebody from the transgender community that … answer people's questions (Interview, staff).

Trainees appreciate this diversity in instruction:

> we [trainees] are from different backgrounds…but we are all here in Canada now. Some are new, newer than me… with different ethnicity, different cultures, different language… I've met so many amazing people. I'm learning so many things, and learning gives me a lot of joy… I'm constantly going to different sites. And that I love, because I get immersed in different experiences. I think, deep down, I'm looking for different experiences to enrich my life (Interview).

This exposure to different voices is essential. As a trainer argues, "We are seeing a lot of trans individuals coming into the country because of it being unsafe where they are. So, the …training is very inclusive. It's not just based on race, but just looking at all of the diversity, and … for a lot of people this is really new for them" (Interview, trainer).

The IST training facilitates a feminist pedagogy oriented toward an unsettling of perspectives (Iverson and James, 2014a). As one staff member notes, many of the participants are not only oppressed themselves, but come with biases that may affect their ability to provide inclusive services, so the training emphasizes.

> things like refusing to treat a person or provide service to them just because of a lifestyle decision or a sexuality or whatever. That is not okay…They [trainees] need to get past just their own values around that to be able to even get to the point where they're accepting and inclusive in that way (Interview, staff).

IS deploys a disruptive pedagogy (Iverson and James, 2014a), fostering diverse connections that shake up participants' preconceived ideas:

> one thing that I really appreciate was that during the anti-oppression training, we were reminded that sure in most cases, it's the woman's the victim and there's some men being the perpetrator, but it's not always the case. Like same sex relationships also have domestic violence…I actually had one client that was the male who was the victim. So that was sobering and very interesting. So being prepared for that. And also, intersectionality, how …people can have disabilities obviously. So, it's not just like one thing that defines them. They can be queer… There might be racism… Some people might be gender non-conforming like me. And I think me being there was also really educating for other participants, because some of them had never really had contact with a trans person in person. And one person especially kept misgendering me a lot, which I wasn't very happy with, but they came around eventually. And I don't put that against them because it takes some time to get used to that, to wrap your head around the whole concept (Interview, participant).

Alongside the anti-oppression workshops, site visits also facilitate a crossing of geographic and social boundaries and a blurring of theory and practice (Iverson and James, 2014a). Interpreters end up navigating a variety of spaces when performing their work, bringing them into contact with many people and institutions. Developing an appreciation for the spatiality, temporality and power dynamics in these sites is key:

> we call it community interpreting. If you think about all of the different agencies, organizations and settings that interpreters could end up in the community…A big focus is to understand all of the different services that a woman who is experiencing violence may access. It's health. It's employment. It's like everything, right? They really are interpreters who need to have an understanding of a variety of different settings and terminologies and systems (Interview, trainer).

By engaging a multitude of spaces, participants navigate processes that unfold within these spaces, and appreciate learning about the structure, details and procedures of sexual assault trials:

> there were a few times where we were taken to places where we might interpret, for example, the Superior Court of Justice and that was actually really helpful because I have to go there every now and then to interpret. So, being familiar with the building and knowing the layout has been really helpful…We went to see how a court case looks… And while we were out there, we had the employees of the courts telling us what to expect (Interview, participant).

The program thus attempts to familiarize participants with a range of relevant spaces, vocabularies and experiences, so as to develop a more reflexive and relational approach to their work. This aids in the creation of new spaces that challenge geographies of violence and affirm the lives and struggles of immigrant women (Isoke, 2011). By promoting the crossing of both social and spatial boundaries, IST's pedagogy aims to improve interpreters' understanding and care for others and their ability to help clients achieve justice in the legal or medical systems. Constructing new spaces of engagement, IST aids in orienting participants towards 'action', which encompasses, but can exceed their interpreter work. Its approach is key to the formation of an oppositional spatial praxis that can resist the intersectional impact of racism, violence against women, poverty and homo /transphobia (Isoke, 2011, 2014).

5.5. On-going renewal in order to maintain a transformative praxis

As noted above, Interpreter Services' program draws upon a transformative anti-racist feminist praxis that is attentive to the needs of participants and the clients they serve, and overall, the program is received positively by the trainees. Nonetheless, some concerns are raised by participants. One issue concerns the challenges that they confront due to conflicts between home and work. Despite the program's attention to self-care and to participants' personal circumstances, there are still some gaps in supports that hinder participants' ability to complete the program. In the past, for example, IST offered on-site childcare on Saturdays for mothers in the training program (Interviews). Such a service helps to break down barriers for women trying to manage reproductive responsibilities with needing to attend class and complete assignments. As one trainer argues, cutbacks in funding in a neoliberal era diminish the ability of the organization to meet these needs:

> when we first started doing this training, we had money and could offer on-site childcare, so women could bring their kids and sometimes Schlifer is able to get some funding through the Women's Foundation for that. But that's not something that we could do ongoing. We also used to be able to have two instructors, so that one of us was always kind of surveilling and could deal with some of these other issues. And I find that now that we're cut back to one instructor, that it's really impacted the ability to provide that level of support and connection (Interview).

IST is aware of the impact this has on participants and is attempting to secure additional sources of funding to address this issue, but must navigate the uncertain terrain of neoliberal retrenchment.

For some participants, the lack of childcare is only part of the

problem. Many in the program struggle with the challenging nature of IST's pedagogy, which is designed to unsettle established values (Iverson and James, 2014a). The curriculum can be personally overwhelming for participants who have never thought about intersectionality. In some cases, participants would appreciate more structure and greater preparation for the different components of the program. As one participant recalls, "another thing is with [the] training… I wish we were shown what would be in them, so I wouldn't be as intimidated. I mean, at the end of the day, it is on me and my anxiety, but I still wish I was shown what to expect with that, more than we were at least" (Interview). In an effort to address this issue, IS is working to provide a more detailed road map explaining what will be covered in the curriculum.

While some participants find the anti-oppression training to be challenging, others suggest that it does not go far enough, arguing that there should be greater emphasis on it and that it should be better integrated throughout the program rather than tacked on in a separate unit at the end. As one participant suggests "I feel like the anti-oppression training… more could have been done with that. It was at the very end of the training… so as much as I appreciated it being there, it felt more like an afterthought" (Interview). IST is mindful and reflexive in relation to such concerns expressed by participants. There is a constant renewal of praxis in relation to the response they receive (Olis in Iverson and James, 2014a). Changes are made on a regular basis in response to feedback and criticism. As one trainer argues,

> making it a place where it's okay to talk to the instructor about what is going on or say to the instructor when something isn't working. We get feedback every week, from people about what the experience is like, what they feel like… I think that those are really important pieces of the training… It is an environment that is about increasing someone's capacity in many aspects of their life (Interview).

In this way, IS incorporates participants -not as passive recipients of services- but as active collaborators in the construction of the program.

IS also works to alter the terrain in which they operate, addressing larger structural issues related to neoliberal funding mandates and systemic violence against women. A large part of their ongoing renewal is supported through the links that IST forges with other organizations at various scales. As Gilmore (2017) argues, these coalitions are critical to escaping dependency and accommodation (see also Isoke, 2013). These ties help the organization - not only in the provision of pedagogical and social supports for their training program - but also in advocating for broader structural changes. They can help an organization shift from social service work to social change work, which addresses the root causes of inequality and maintains connection to broader community social justice struggles (Kivel, 2017). As one example, IS works with the Toronto Enterprise Fund (TEF), which provides a space for knowledge and resource exchange among WISEs. Building networks across organizations opens up possibilities for lobbying and scaling up, which can be challenging when WISEs work independently (Nyssens, 2006; Rantisi and Leslie, 2021). These connections are also critical to maintaining the social objectives of the organization, dedicated to ensuring care and upholding the social reproduction of the individual.

Interpreter Services also develops networks with a variety of other feminist and anti-racist organizations. One connection is with their umbrella organization, Barbra Schlifer. This clinic is well-respected for supporting women experiencing violence and for their advocacy work at local, provincial, national and international scales. This allows the organization to move beyond simply training women, to press for broader changes in the policy landscape. This body of work, and the positive reputation that it has cultivated, helps IST establish their own legitimacy as a social enterprise. While IST secures their own funding and manages their enterprise independently of the clinic, the relationship they share and the pro bono work which is done by the staff of the Barbra Schlifer clinic for IST, from outreach to training to emergency financial support, is invaluable to IS' ability to realize its social mandate.

Interpreter Services has also formed partnerships with other community organizations to support its anti-oppression praxis. It belongs to Ontario Association of Interval and Transitional Houses (OAITH), an organization which "works towards ending all forms of gender-based violence and oppression through advocacy, education, research and training" (OAITH, 2020). Along with sixty-four member organizations, including shelters, sexual assault centers, and related Violence Against Women agencies, IST works with OAITH to lobby governments for funding to tackle violence against women.

While IST faces many challenges common to other WISEs, which compromise its ability to balance its economic and social objectives, the unique nature of the organization helps to mitigate some of these challenges. Its reflexive approach- which involves participants and other organizations as active partners- helps maintain its transformative praxis.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we argue that Interpreter Services Toronto training program is unique when compared with other WISEs. Led by a distinctly women-centered, anti-oppression approach to training, which focuses on building participants' self-esteem, as well their position in relation to the larger social issues, IST provides trainees with valuable skills, certification and access to ongoing employment opportunities. Integrating women through work that benefits individuals, but also the community, the organization eschews an individualistic approach to agency, deploying a praxis that privileges collectivity (Iverson and James, 2014b: 15). IST plays a key role in forging valuable spaces of engagement, linking participants to one another, to clients and places of employment. This is an approach that can also connect individuals with advocacy and community organizations that range from those providing immediate care to those seeking to challenge underlying conditions to create more interactive and relational (beyond the individual) forms of learning (Iverson and Jones, 2014b: 15; Larner, 2014).

The benefits of such connections extend beyond the immediate goal of securing work to providing a safe space for confidence building, learning and life-long development. Unlike many other social enterprises subject to racist, Eurocentric and heteronormative dynamics, Interpreter Services Toronto employs a praxis and spatiality that centers care – at both the individual and collective levels- and exposes trainees to injustices and broader social issues in ways that disrupt assumptions and promote reflexive awareness among trainees. This anti-racist feminist praxis provides a model for thinking through different types of community engagement, and for bringing into being new forms of non-market transaction premised on mutual aid, collectivity and care (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Larner, 2014; Hossein, 2019; Morrow and Parker, 2020; McLean, 2021; Williams, 2020). In such a praxis, emphasis is placed on transforming the world through the production of new skills, knowledges and ways of thinking that can facilitate "the accretion and interaction of small changes in place" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 77).

To sustain the social dimensions of the program, however, IST is in need of greater support from both the public sector and beyond. Echoing some of the arguments of Mazzei and Steiner (2021), IST would benefit from access to more robust networks and consistent, sufficient governmental funding. Without such measures in place, like other WISEs, IST continues to confront multiple, overlapping challenges related to neoliberalization, precarious funding and market competition. These challenges compromise its ability to provide a sustained anti-racist, feminist praxis. Yet, as illustrated above, the benefits of such a praxis are more than immediate and more than individualized, underscoring how further public support could contribute to more transformative forms of workforce and societal development.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted our ability to undertake more extensive research in the form of more interviews and observation or to obtain the perspectives of more support organizations or employers who have hired IST-trained interpreters that could allow for a more comprehensive portrait of the program. However, our analysis

establishes a foundation for further examination of the impacts of a feminist, anti-racist praxis on the nature of inclusion and empowerment of program participants. Further research could track the long-term implications of IST's praxis for participants in regards to paid work and social reproduction supports, as well as a more in-depth analysis of the training tools employed to identify those that are most effective to realizing the transformative potential of WISEs as sites of collectivity and care.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Deborah Leslie: Supervision, Writing – review & editing. **Norma Rantisi:** Supervision, Writing – review & editing. **Shannon Black:** Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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