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What do we mean by decolonizing research strategies? Lessons from decolonizing, Indigenous research projects in New Zealand and Latin America

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Abstract

While Indigenous and Chicano scholars have articulated sound critiques of the colonizing agendas shaping what counts as legitimate research, their arguments for alternative methodologies are generally silent on the role grassroots research collectives play in forming a strategic response to colonialism in the present. Here, the author develops a positional review of existing bodies of work, in particular participatory action-research (PAR) projects, focusing on what can be learned from these experiments in community self-determination. Building from PAR projects in North America, the author argues for a renewed understanding of the primacy of grassroots structures in decolonizing, Indigenous research projects as they have taken form in New Zealand and Latin America. These lessons suggest that decolonizing research strategies are less about the struggle for method and more about the spaces that make decolonizing research possible. The review concludes with a discussion of the possibility in research undertaken by Chicano and Indigenous scholars, who find themselves as “outsiders-within” university spaces.

Keywords: *analytic review; decolonizing research; grassroots research; PAR*

Introduction

While we should acknowledge that there are multiple sites where the struggle against oppression and exploitation might be taken up, Indigenous peoples must set the agenda for change themselves, not simply react to an agenda that has been laid out for us by others. (Smith, 2000, p. 210)

In this paper, I develop a positional review of existing bodies of work, in particular participatory action-research (PAR) projects, with an orientation to what we can learn from these experiments in community self-determination, thus moving toward a renewed understanding of the primacy of grassroots structures in decolonizing, Indigenous research projects. Working from my own contradictory location as a Xicano¹ scholar-activist involved with grassroots organizations and as a functionary of a colonialist-capitalist State, I invoke a Raza standpoint that privileges the vantage point of colonized peoples from Latin America. I use the term Raza strategically, as a broader socio-cultural and political identity, which includes the standpoint of Indigenous and colonized Mestizo/Brown peoples from Latin America. Although this approach is not without inherent limitations - because of its positional framing and juxtaposition of what Tuck & Yang (2012) identify as the incommensurable social locations that Indigenous and Mestizo/Brown peoples occupy - introducing a subaltern, Raza standpoint affords new opportunities and openings. Such a standpoint pushes us as marginal, “insider-within” scholars to revisit fundamental questions about what it means to develop research projects by and for Indigenous and Raza communities within/against the colonizing discourses and practices of university spaces.

To note, “Raza” or “the community” are used as conceptual tools and political strategy throughout this analytic review. Like Pandey (2005), I want to emphasize the political dimension of community: “Community is, like class or nation, not so much a state of being as a political project,” (Pandey, 2005, p. 410). The Māori whanau or comunidades de base (base communities) in Latin America, offered as exemplars of decolonizing research strategies in this review, represent “decolonizing” spaces and organic structures “from below.” These forms of community have a dual character. They incorporate existing institutional structures, i.e. the family, the trade union, church, etc., with historically new collective structures. Yet, these grassroots structures not only represent radical collectives and decolonizing experiments in community self-determination, they are spaces of recovery, healing, and development. Nevertheless, organic structures like the Māori whanau and comunidades de base are contested, emergent, and struggled for on many fronts: internally as members reclaim identities, practices, and spaces, and externally as Indigenous and Raza communities struggle for survival

¹ By using the term Xicano I identify as a “Chicano,” yet reclaim my ancestral roots to the Indigenous peoples who have lived for thousands of years in what is now the central region of Mexico. As a colonized people, Chicano claims to Indigenous identity, culture, and land have been challenged by both settlers and Indigenous groups.

and recovery against the legacies of colonial domination carried out by repressive State institutions.

Finally, the praxis of decolonization is not without contradictions. As Tuck & Yang (2012) have argued, the term “decolonization” is a special word, often conflated with anti-colonial projects and struggles that re-inscribe the logics of settler colonialism, in particular the re-occupation of Indigenous lands. In delineating the internal, organic community structures constitutive of decolonizing research projects in Latin America and New Zealand, I am mindful of these contradictions. Anti-colonial projects, for example, do not necessarily align with Indigenous interests and the reclamation of Indigenous lands and culture. On the contrary, struggles to reclaim knowledge and resources by Mestizo/Brown communities often perpetuate settler colonialism: “Even the ability to be a minority citizen in the settler nation means an option to become a brown settler” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 18). Yet, from the vantage point of Chicanos, who are *both* Indigenous and Mestizo/Brown, both colonized and colonizer, “decolonization” acquires a particular contradictory meaning and set of radical openings. For the purposes of this study I define “decolonization” as anti-colonial struggle that grows out of grassroots spaces. Thus, in developing this review I argue that a fundamental lesson from decolonizing projects is the following: *where* the research grows from and who funds it matters as much as if not more than the kinds of research methods/strategies used or the theoretical frameworks that inform such work.

The struggle to decolonize our research

“Third World” subversions of the goals of Western/Modern research projects

The entire research endeavor must be participatory in nature in order to produce qualitatively different research that is based on community-identified problems and needs. (Mora and Diaz, 2004, p. 24)

Mora and Diaz’s (2004) argument for participatory forms of research as a resolution to the often contradictory goals between the university and the community, the hierarchical relation of power that privileges academic over local, Indigenous knowledges, and the production of knowledge that has very little practical value to Indigenous and Raza communities, opens the possibility for a radical break from traditional social science research approaches. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is part of the broader legacy of activist scholarship and action-research, and can be traced to anti-colonial movements in the developing third-world, in Africa and Latin America (Fals-Borda, 2006, Kindon et al., 2007). In this vein, Fals-Borda and other Latin American scholar-activists worked within an explicit anti-colonial framework in their development and study of PAR projects. By challenging the ideology of social science as politically neutral, Latin American scholars did more than challenge instrumental and scientific discourses: Their encounters with U.S.-based projects and those they carried out in their own countries as functionaries of repressive governments revealed their complicit role within North American

imperialist domination of Latin America. Thus, as early as 1970, the transformation from mainstream, colonizing social science to a transformative, anti-colonial project was outlined in *Ciencia Propia y Colonialismo Intelectual*. In this seminal text, Fals-Borda (1970) argues for an anti-colonial research agenda aimed at the liberation of Latin America from colonial dependence and a fundamental transformation of internal colonialism within Latin American countries. Explicitly challenging positivist and objectivist research traditions, Fals-Borda's political analysis of the goals of Western/Modern social science projects was expressive of a growing, critical tradition of Latin American social thought.

Fifteen years later in *Conocimiento y Poder Popular*, Fals-Borda identifies two fundamental characteristics that grow out of his participation and study of "popular" action-research by Indigenous, agrarian communities in Mexico, Nicaragua, and Colombia: their collective and spontaneous character (Fals-Borda, 1985, p. 81). Extending beyond discussions of transformative research methods, these originating projects, rooted in Indigenous struggles, brought about a search for new ways of thinking about social research that ruptured the intellectual colonialism and "imitation" of Western traditions and methods (Fals-Borda and Mora-Osejo, 2003). Reflecting on his contribution to PAR, Fals-Borda reiterates this principle of self-determination: "It is preferable for us to seek our own explanations for building an alternative paradigm, by studying our Indigenous or founding regional groups and emphasizing their values of human solidarity" (Fals-Borda, 2006). More recent accounts of PAR in Latin America reveal the untold story of the political consequences that marginal and "insider-within" Indigenous and Raza academics face in their support of PAR projects rooted in local community struggles. Flores-Kastanis, Montoya-Vargas, and Suárez (2009) situate the development of PAR projects in Latin America within the history of Indigenous struggle and political work at the grassroots level. They argue that while PAR has experienced diffusion in conferences and academic settings in North America, during the 1970s and 1980s, Latin American strands of PAR have, because of their political goals, assumed "a clandestine form" (p. 454).

The crisis of PAR in the Global North

In their introduction to the *Handbook of Action Research*, editors Reason and Bradbury (2008) comment that action-research has varied origins, uses a wide range of methods, and takes place in a multitude of settings - from institutions, universities, classrooms, to grass-roots community organizations, and NGOs - across different regions of the developing and developed world. Although these action-research projects are distinctively local, sprouting out of contradictory social spaces, Reason and Bradbury (2008) have identified the emergence of a worldview that grows out and against the "foundations of the empirical-positivist worldview that has been the foundation of Western inquiry since the Enlightenment" (p. 5).

The emergent worldview has been described as systemic, holistic, relational, feminine, experiential, but its defining characteristic is that it is participatory...A participatory worldview places human persons and communities as part of their

world - both human and more-than-human - embodied in their world, co-creating their world. (p. 8 – 9)

A critical reframing of Reason and Bradbury's reconstruction of an emerging "participatory" world-view leads us to a reassessment of the geographies of power working in and through participatory action-research projects. Hence, from a "geopolitics of knowledge" framework (Mignolo, 2003) radical breaks and ruptures from Western/Modernist social science need to be seen as structurally determined and moving in unequal directions, mostly from the Global North to the Global South, from the "developed" to the "underdeveloped" regions of the world, and from university to community. Fals-Borda (2006) observes, "the 1990s brought a greater Northern presence, with major studies by university colleagues" (p. 355). Kindon et al. (2007) remark that in the current international development context, "[PAR's] commodification within schemes and research...remain 'top down' and extractive" (p. 2). In North America and Britain, "participation has too often been dislocated from a radical politics oriented towards securing citizenship rights and informing underlying processes of social change" (p. 2).

A social science by and for Indigenous peoples?

When Indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, and people participate on different terms. (Smith, 1999, p. 193)

Implicit in participatory approaches to research is the potential for transforming not just the process of knowledge production and the hierarchical relations that exist between university and community, between researchers and researched, but an expansion of the goals of traditional social research. Nevertheless, some scholars (Cook & Kothari, 2001; Fine, Tuck, & Zeller-Berkman, 2008; Rocheleau, 1994) critical of their experience with participatory research undertaken by non-government organizations or Western development programs in "underdeveloped" parts of the world, have questioned the very concept of participation and what it means for generating knowledge that serves colonized, Indigenous communities. Rocheleau (1994) suggests that social scientists and communities, in attempting to move past this impasse, "stretch their imagination" to rethink both research and participation. A residual contradiction, she argues, remains even in participatory approaches to research:

For some professional scientists, "participatory research" implies that "we" allow "them" (rural people) to participate in "our" research. For community organizers or rural communities it may mean that "they" allow outsiders (us) to take part in local land use experiments and their interpretation. (p. 5)

Rocheleau proposes a collaborative research model that brings together knowledge generated by distinct communities, i.e. university researchers, NGOs, rural farmers, students,

etc., in meeting local, national, and international needs. Within this model, “each institution could spin on its own internal axis, yet contribute to a broader, shared circulation of participatory research for sustainable development,” (p. 17). In sum, concerns with methods and participation need to be framed within the broader context in which the research gets carried out and the institutional interests that participants represent. As Rocheleau reminds us, “The quality of participation, by itself, does not guarantee that local participants represent all the diverse groups that have a stake in the results” (p. 7).

Taking these questions seriously in our struggle to decolonize our research, a discussion of participation should develop alongside an articulation of the goals of research. Reclaiming the process of knowledge production, achieved through the transformation of the relationship between researchers and researched, which has become the driving force behind the burgeoning field of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (see Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Ginwright, 2008; Morrell, 2008), is but one historical moment in the process of developing a transformative research agenda by and for Indigenous and Raza communities. Returning to the origins of participatory action-research in Africa and Latin America, we are reminded of the broader project of struggle in which action-research is carried forward. In her critique of YPAR, Grande (2008) comments that, from the vantage point of Indigenous communities, issues of survival and struggle take precedent over issues of knowledge production. For Grande and other Indigenous scholars (see Bull, 2004; Lester-Irabinna, 1999; Simpson, 2001), the question of research methodologies is framed within the broader question of anti-colonial struggle. In contrast to decolonizing research projects, which I delineate in the next section, PAR researchers’ emphasis on participation and knowledge production has led to a de-emphasis of fundamental questions, such as the long term goals of research and the spaces that make them possible (especially given their intimate relation with the State).

Yet, unresolved contradictions surface when trying to move beyond local instantiations of PAR. Fine, Tuck, and Zeller-Berkman (2008) highlight the pitfalls in scaling up PAR projects beyond local efforts. In their attempt to merge their efforts with other PAR researchers in the United States and in other world regions, they observed that “local projects coagulated toward a vague sense of the global, images of audience and purpose blurred...The question of obligation to whom, accountability for what, and being grounded where grew more diffuse” (p. 171). Thus, they emphasize the need for structuring “mechanisms of participation” so that the work remains “accountable to place” (p. 172). But how, exactly, do we structure these “mechanisms of participation”? How do these modes of participation ensure that the interests of historically marginalized peoples are represented, especially when they are carried out within colonizing spaces, such as universities and public school bureaucracies? I turn now to a discussion of how participatory research collectives have flourished in the context of Māori and Latin American decolonizing, Indigenous projects, and what this means for developing a Raza Research Methodology (RRM) that can respond to global crises locally and in the interests of Indigenous and Raza communities.

Lessons from Kaupapa Māori research and participatory action-research in Latin America

Māori Whanau as decolonizing organic structures

Indigenous and Raza scholars have much to learn from the decolonizing research projects discussed in this section, as a way of resolving one of the fundamental dilemmas of participatory or community-based research: how can they represent Indigenous and Raza communities, given their ascribed roles as functionaries of the colonialist-capitalist State? Faced with centuries of colonial or Pakeha (settler) rule in Aotearoa (New Zealand), this very issue has been debated among Māori communities in general and among Māori scholars in particular. Māori scholars, by virtue of their integration into the academy, are positioned as outsiders-within, “who, in their communities, work partially as insiders, and are often employed for this purpose, and partially as outsiders, because of their Western education or because they may work across clan, tribe...boundaries” (Smith, 1999, p. 5). Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her concluding chapter of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, introduces the concept of whanau, a “supervisory and organizational structure for handling research” (p. 185), as a way of resolving outsider-insider research dilemmas. The integration of outsider-researchers or researchers who are not members of a particular Indigenous community is mediated by this complex, organic structure.

It is argued that the whanau in pre-colonial times was the core social unit, rather than the individual. It is also argued that the whanau remains a persistent way of living in and organizing the social world. In terms of research, the whanau is one of several Māori concepts, or tikanga, that have become part of a methodology, a way of organizing a research group, a way of incorporating ethical procedures that report back to the community, a way of “giving voice” to the different sections of Māori communities, and a way of debating ideas and issues that have an impact on the research project. (p. 187)

Bishop (1998) outlines in more detail the cultural dynamics and processes that are involved within these organic structures. In some contexts, Māori communities have developed a whanau around research, what Bishop terms a “whanau of interest” (p. 205). These research whanau function in many ways like the broader whanau (extended family), with distribution of roles, collective decision-making, rituals that build community, rites of passage, carrying with them the cultural practices and knowledges that have led to the survival of Māori communities. Interestingly, research whanau are bound by broader sets of principles than those explicitly defined in community action-research projects. The familial and the ethical, rather than epistemological relations define the relation between participants; and the goal of community self-determination is privileged over the methods and techniques of research (see Bishop, 1998). Thus, research agendas and participation may involve non-Māori or Pakeha (settlers) yet their involvement is mediated and determined by these community structures—not by Pakeha. Bishop (1998) notes that many times, those leading the investigation within research whanau are not

researchers but community elders. Finally, Bishop (1998) argues for the urgency and centrality of whanau in constituting and defining Indigenous research projects:

For Māori researchers to stand aside from involvement in such sociopolitical organization is to stand aside from one's identity. This would signal the ultimate victory of colonization. For non-Māori researchers, denial of membership of the research whanau of interest is, similarly, to deny them a means of identification and hence full participation within the projects. Further, for non-Māori researchers to stand aside from participation in these terms is to promote colonization. (p. 214)

In their struggle to reclaim Māori histories and land in New Zealand, the last three decades have led to the fertilization of Māori-led projects around education, cultural knowledge, and land claims (Harmsworth, 2002; Smith, 2003). In his review of Māori projects, Harmsworth (2002) identifies four strategies in the research undertaken by Māori whanau or iwi (tribes), as well as strategically positioned scholars. The trajectories of such work undertaken within State-sponsored as well as community-based projects include:

1. Strategic planning based on Māori realities and resources;
2. documenting and using cultural knowledge in developing research in health, education, and other sectors;
3. the use of information systems grounded in Māori forms of communication;
4. and the use of Māori concepts and knowledge in assessing environmental change.

Comunidades de base as decolonizing organic structures

In his involvement with PAR projects in Latin America, Orlando Fals-Borda describes a parallel organic structure to the Māori whanau, namely *comunidades de base*. In his work with agricultural Indigenous communities in Mexico, Nicaragua, and Colombia, Fals-Borda (1987) reflects on the characteristics of research undertaken by Indigenous and Raza communities. He characterizes PAR as an “experiential methodology for life and labor” which involves “the acquisition of serious and reliable knowledge upon which to construct power for the poor and exploited social groups and their authentic organizations” (p. 330). Fals-Borda's use of “authentic” in describing PAR projects mediated by *comunidades de base* indexes “bottom-up” forms of participation, organic structures defined by a particular relation to grassroots communities: the structures are not mediated by the colonial-capitalist State, meaning that these organizations emerge in civil society and are directed by the community itself, sometimes directly opposed to the State. Thus, the concept of *comunidades de base* is co-extensive with the English translation, “grassroots” organization, except that grassroots in the United States and other colonial contexts may include hybrid forms that are community-driven yet rooted in the colonial-capitalist State, the most common being NGOs and non-profit organizations, which in the United States are accountable to state and federal governments through tax regulation and are generally limited by the interests that fund them.

Elsewhere, we get a clearer articulation of the kinds of *comunidades de base* that have sprouted throughout Latin America since the 1960s; these are “cooperatives, labor unions, art and cultural centers, education and health brigades,” (Fals-Borda, 1985, p. 17). Like the Māori *whanau*, *comunidades de base* can be characterized as radical collectives or bottom-up structures that originate with subaltern social groups, oftentimes setup with safeguarding mechanisms from State intervention:

People’s power is expressed by control mechanisms, sometimes external, sometimes internal to base organizations, that ensure social transformation and check leaders in ways—that we are naming a popular political counter- balance or counter-power—which expresses itself in its most complex form in the base movement articulated in the regions. (Fals-Borda, 1985, p. 15)

However, unlike the *whanau*, these organic structures are not modeled after ethnic or familial structures. *Comunidades de base* have assumed different forms in Latin America, from neighborhood committees, labor unions, women’s groups, religious centers, to more advanced structures such as revolutionary parties. During the early 1980s, for instance, the Nicaraguan community of El Regadio, composed of approximately 130 Raza agricultural worker families, undertook a series of PAR projects aimed at improving agricultural production and education of their community (Fals-Borda, 1985). The advent of these PAR projects came in the aftermath of collective struggle by Raza communities throughout all of Nicaragua, which in 1978 had culminated in the formation of the *Movimiento Pueblo Unido*. As a strategy for addressing agricultural and education problems in the region, in 1982, members of El Regadio formed the *Comisión de Coordinación Temporal de Investigación* (Temporary Coordinating Commission of Research), which became the space and medium for the development of research projects. The first phase included focus group interviews with key community members and working sessions that served to identify and historicize agriculture and education problems. The second phase, which materialized through popular assemblies and gatherings around the issue identified during the first research phase, led to the formation of community-led archival and survey research that would allow the *Comisión* to analyze the situation more amply. Research findings were used to both analyze agricultural production in El Regadio and to assess and improve popular education projects, that were already underway as part of a growing socialist movement in Nicaragua.

The PAR experiments undertaken by the community of El Cerrito, Colombia also highlight a different strategy than the one undertaken by the community of El Regadio (Fals-Borda, 1985). Where coordination structure was formed to undertake research in El Regadio, in El Cerrito the community assembly became the mechanism for moving PAR projects forward. A community of 120 Indigenous, Mestizo/Brown and mixed race/Black families who depend primarily on agricultural production, the people of El Cerrito were, like many Indigenous communities throughout Latin America, uprooted from their lands. Despite the 1966 agrarian reform in Colombia that designated 1,600 hectares of land to the community of El Cerrito, regional politicians and wealthy herders had appropriated their lands. In 1971, a community-led

strategy to reclaim the land began to take shape. Over a period of at least 10 years, popular assemblies or gatherings were used to mobilize both research and political resources. While the community documented their claims to local land via archival and oral history methods, a popular education campaign was underway that used radio and other media sources to educate neighboring communities about their struggle.

The primacy of grassroots collectives in decolonizing research

The following is a visual representation of pedagogy, research, and organizing as leading activity, with community structures as the “base” or space that encircles these practices. It is important to note that most PAR projects in the North have pedagogical and educational goals in mind; when research is developed it is intimately tied to pedagogy/education (in the proposed framework of this paper, pedagogy is the leading activity of such projects). Seldom do community-organizing goals drive these projects. In part this is due to the dialectic and intimate relation between the spaces that make research possible and the practices they prioritize. It is rare, for instance, to see participatory projects growing from or tied to university settings as interconnected with grassroots organizing goals. Regardless of how participatory or inclusive these projects may be, whether this involves colonized youth undertaking the research as in the case of YPAR, researcher goals, careers, and funding sources ultimately drive how the knowledge generated from these projects is used.

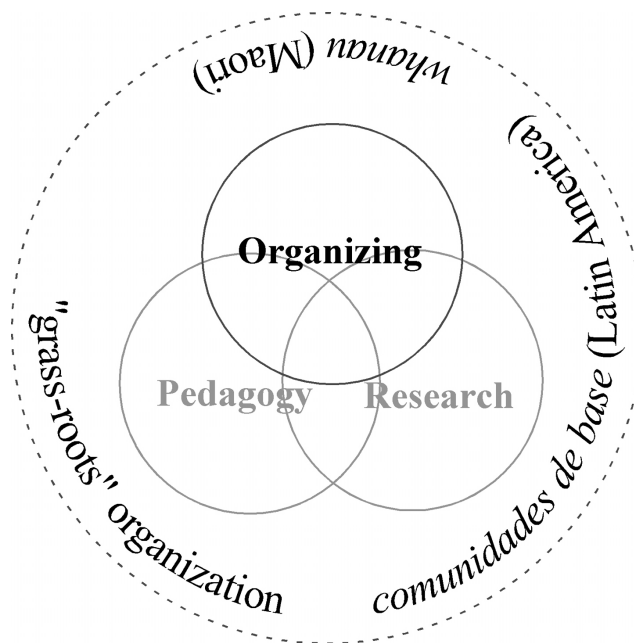


Figure 1. Community Organizing as Leading Activity, Organization As Enabling Space

While the model in Figure 1 highlights spatial dimensions of decolonizing research projects, I argue that there are two aspects that distinguish whanau and comunidades de base

from the structures that give birth to state-sponsored (i.e. research funded by the State) and organic institutional research (i.e. research that grows out of institutional structures and programs). First, organizing is itself the leading activity in these decolonizing projects. Fals-Borda (1985) lists organization as the “first lesson” in carrying out participatory action-research projects. In the Māori context, Bishop (1998) emphasizes that Kaupapa Māori research has, as a primary element, not the methods and methodology (the theory framing and informing the methods), but the community itself. Thus, the whanau are the “primary” spaces that will carry out decolonizing research by and for Māori. Pedagogy and research are secondary practices in the sense that when research and education are undertaken, these are developed within the broader goal of community self-determination. Second, pedagogy, research, and community organizing are practices that grow out of the constitution of autonomous, base organizations. We see this dynamic, for instance, in El Regadio, Nicaragua, where committees and commissions were constituted so as to develop popular education campaigns. These education campaigns grew out of the collaborative efforts of people, community organizers, and support from strategically positioned government officials.

The examples of El Regadio and El Cerrito, in which communities undertake PAR projects, exemplify this general strategy to build capacity and organize. The research undertaken by the members of El Regadio emerges out of an already organized community that had formed popular education collectives and advanced political organizations prior to undertaking the research. In El Cerrito, community assemblies facilitated the reclamation of land process by undertaking research in conjunction with a popular education campaign: the popular assembly mediated both practices and priority was given to community building and organizing. In these, and other documented examples of grassroots PAR projects in Latin America, we see how “the political organization and the actions organized by the popular sectors are, in the end, both a strategy and an objective of the participatory project - be this research or education” (Gianotten & de Wit, 1991, p. 67).

Repositioning the aforementioned discussion on the primacy of grassroots collectives, it is important to tease out the nuances in our working definition of *decolonizing* research methodologies. Not all PAR projects are decolonizing projects - while projects may be undertaken by Indigenous and Raza scholars or are framed as an anti-colonial strategy by these scholars, it is the collective spaces (and the dialectic to communities) rather than individuals that make decolonizing research possible. I conclude this paper with the question of decolonization as possibility for Indigenous and Chicana/o scholars. No doubt, *decolonizing* research exists at the interstices between political ideology (the ideas that shape any given praxis), space/place (the spaces that give life to such projects), and community (the people that carry out such work), each a dimension of decolonization as an expression of community self-determination.

Decolonizing our research within the Euroversity

As a political strategy, state-sponsored (i.e. state-funded) or organic institutional research (i.e. research that grows out of state institutions, including non-government organizations), has played a crucial, if not central, role in carrying out socially just oriented projects. However, because these projects are funded by the State or have materialized within State institutions, they are inevitably interlocked in the set of historical contradictions between the colonial-capitalist State and the interests of Indigenous, colonized peoples (see Fanon, 1963; Gramsci, 1971; Mills, 1997). Zimmer et al. (1993) make a poignant observation about the role that social science more generally has played in imperialist nations like the United States: “Science is inevitably political, and in the context of contemporary U.S. corporate capitalism...it contributes greatly to the exploitation and oppression of most of the people in this country and abroad” (p. 440). Thus, a primary contradiction appears between State interests or the reproduction of State institutions and the interests of subaltern groups the research program is supposed to serve. A secondary contradiction materializes at the representational level when the discourses of Western/Modern research that seek to shed light on the experiences and conditions affecting historically marginalized communities often end up silencing the voices of the researched. Recent debates in the social sciences have focused on the “crisis of representation” and the discursive fields that reproduce axes of difference and power in our society. Given the historical legacies of colonialism and the economic conditions that encircle the lives of Raza communities, this crisis in representation is positioned as secondary. By secondary, I do not wish to minimize the symbolic and epistemic violence that we find in the Othering logic of Western discourses and practices. “Secondary” is seen in a dialectical, historical sense, as a space that emerges vis-à-vis a prior contradiction: that between the economic and political interests of the State and Indigenous and Raza communities.

In sum, attempts at resolving these contradictions have led to the diffusion of qualitative research methods and interpretive strategies that privilege the perspective of the individuals and communities being studied. Moreover, within social theory this has led to the reinsertion of power at the center of any analysis of culture and society. With respect to research methodologies, we have seen the development of approaches that honor the perspectives, voices, and interests of the communities being studied. This kind of research is encapsulated by the transformative, participatory role communities assume when they take ownership of the research process; the “objects” of study become the “subjects” of the entire research process, thus changing the paradigm of traditional research methodologies. More recently, the discussion of method has shifted to a discussion of methodology and political strategy, evident in the burgeoning literature on decolonizing methodologies.

Nevertheless, a fundamental lesson emerges vis-à-vis a redrawing of what makes these *decolonizing* projects: the spaces and communities that give life to these projects take precedent over question of method and strategy. The practices of research, education, and community organizing not only take form within a particular social space; they are spatial (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989). The institutions, organizations, collectives, or settings that make these practices

possible matter. I recall here the efforts by Michelle Fine et al. (2008) working on the Global Rights Project which brought together youth researchers from various parts of the world with the goal of creating a document that would inform and shape the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. This was Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) on an international scale. Fine et al. (2008) reflect upon this project and highlight the challenges in “scaling up” local YPAR on a “global” scale: “Questions of obligation to whom, accountability for what, and being grounded where grew more diffuse. As local projects coagulated toward a vague sense of the global, images of audience and purpose blurred” (p. 170). They later remark that, “We caution that it is necessary that those of us who desire to leap between local participatory and global analyses build, self-consciously and transparently, mechanisms of participation, so that our work remains situated...and accountable to place” (p. 172). Raising a fundamental question, “Who creates the organization and who funds it?”, I wonder what interests drove the supporting universities and United Nations in making the Global Rights Project possible.

Their reflections are honest, critical assessments of the efficacy of their own contributions to PAR. Although they make the argument for place-based, participatory projects, maintaining accountability to the communities that undertake such work teeters on a thin line when attempts are made to expand into regional, national, and international efforts. Reflecting on my own involvement and research with grassroots organizations undertaking political campaigns at a local level with Raza communities in Southern California (see Zavala, 2010), what is often missing is clarity about what is meant by “self-determination.” I have come to believe that decolonizing research strategies entail a decolonization of the grassroots collectives and spaces themselves. While “community self-determination” is not devoid of contradiction, it should not be seen with uncompromising romanticism. Community self-determination is a process that, in the most radical of ways – such as amongst the Māori in New Zealand, peasants in Colombia, and autonomous organizations in settler societies – is already being undertaken as part of communities’ survival, recovery, and developmental processes.

So, what are we as individuals working within institutions and as members of Indigenous and Raza communities to do? The development and diffusion of organic, popular scholarship that responds to the pressing advance of coloniality (Quijano, 2000) and the subjugation of colonized peoples throughout the world, necessitates a traversal, a fundamental shift in how we, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, allies, and activists, see our work and its fruition within grassroots spaces. Shawn Ginwright (2008) reflects on his work with Oakland youth and concludes: “Emancipatory research will also require us to move beyond our universities and professional associations to build new infrastructure that can facilitate the free exchange of ideas, tools, and people needed for the greater democratization of knowledge” (p. 21). This very point is echoed by James and Gordon (2008): “Our work with marginalized communities as a destination point for our intellectual and political selves requires that we connect to radical collectives embedded in communities struggling for social justice” (p. 369). This is not simply a call for the creation of university-community “partnerships,” nor a call for engaging in tourist forms of activist-scholarship, much less a redeployment of more academic conferences - we

already have plenty of conferences that, in Bowl's (2008) words are "collective in the most limited sense...[while] their ability to challenge embedded power structures and transform their own or others' well-worn exclusionary practices are limited" (p. 193). What *is* asked for here is for Indigenous and Raza scholars to become students of the formation of grassroots organizations that are generating alternative, collective education and research projects.

In becoming both participants and students of grassroots research collectives, we enter spaces of struggle and solidarity in the deepest sense possible, generating historically new accounts and practices that can respond locally to colonialism, thus generating spaces of recovery and healing that become the fertile soil for seeds of inquiry and research that are inherently political, ethical, and accountable to the communities that make research possible. And it is thus how we begin to reclaim our research: by first decolonizing the spaces that make research possible, our identities are also transformed - and for Chicano scholars, we continue the legacy to reclaim our Indigenous roots through Raza struggle, a struggle we have been waging since 1492.

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