

Chapter 5

The Promises and Conundrums of Decolonized Collaboration

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The title of this edited volume hints appropriately at the temporal dimension of the discussion on engaged anthropology and indigenous studies. This dimension is the point of departure of my discussion on the implications of practicing a form of anthropology that has opted for politically engaged methodologies in the production of anthropological knowledge about indigenous societies. My goals are threefold: firstly, to underline the situated nature of such debate by revisiting the most salient moments that have led to the affirmation of ethical and political engagement in anthropological practice (Haraway 1988). Secondly, to suggest ways in which engaged anthropology and indigenous studies can contribute to larger debates about epistemology and methodology as they develop in the discipline. Lastly, to consider the issue of decolonization and suggest two major implications for the decolonization of an anthropological practice premised on collaboration with indigenous actors, scholars and communities. My reflections are based on my eight years fieldwork experience in Ecuador during which I worked with different indigenous and non-profits organizations, and on my present experience both as a member of the anthropological academic community in the USA and as a researcher who continues to engage with collaborative research projects with indigenous organizations. While my experience in Ecuador made me keenly aware of the complexity of indigenous studies in contemporary transnational and national contexts and the challenges these pose to the conducting of anthropological research, my academic experience in the US urged me to revisit older debates on objectivity, subjectivity and positionality in the social sciences to affirm the validity of what for me in Ecuador had already become a legitimate methodology and practice, that is an anthropological practice that we broadly identified as ‘engaged’ or *comprometida*.¹

1 I analyze this debate extensively in the (2007) article ‘Building Engagement: Ethnography and Indigenous Communities Today,’ in *Transforming Anthropology*, vol 15 (2), 97–110, 2007, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. This chapter contains some excerpts from this article.

Historical Overview

The temporal dimension of the debate poses the questions of why and under what circumstance discussions on engagement became relevant in anthropology. As early as the 1940s Margaret Mead underscored the professional responsibility of the discipline in matters of public interest and advocated a visible role of anthropologists (Mead 1943). Yet, the critique to anthropology's colonialist roots started at the end of the 1960s when many anthropologists from both developed and developing countries advocated for a more politically aware anthropology that questioned power relations and took a stand in favor of the oppressed. These were the years immediately following anti-colonial struggles, in which leftwing parties and ideologies in different parts of the world were questioning power relations and economic exploitation both at national and transnational level. At this time Marxist-inspired intellectuals such as Günter Frank elaborated the dependency theory which saw in development and aid a new form of colonialism informing postcolonial geopolitics. Researchers in developing countries back then, including anthropologists, felt compelled to advocate the decolonization of anthropology (see Stavenhagen 1971). In the United States, *Current Anthropology* published a special issue in 1968 in which Berreman, Gjessing and Gough argued for a more politically grounded and engaged anthropology, one that would challenge the myth of a value-free social science, that would destroy the 'sacred Ivory Tower of a science for a science's sake' (Berreman, Gjessing and Gough 1968: 394). Important contributions to the debate on power differentials in anthropological practice and its consequences for the production of knowledge also came from feminist scholarship, which criticized gender bias in the social sciences and its epistemological flaws. By emphasizing the role of 'Man the Hunter,' for example, male-biased analyses of forager societies downplayed the important role that women had in the productive sphere (Slocum 1975: 49).

The push towards such critical reflection came also from disenfranchised groups and from indigenous activists. In Latin America for example, the participation of indigenous people became pivotal in advocating a more egalitarian and horizontal relationship between researcher-researched. In the Declaration of Barbados of January 1971, indigenous actors, progressive members of the Catholic Church, and some social scientists denounced the participation of anthropologists in structures of oppression and domination (IWGIA 1971). The emergence of engagement in anthropology responded to the demand of indigenous activists and other social actors who were urging for a clear positioning of every researcher. All such critiques came to question the construction of 'otherness' as anthropological knowledge and methodologies had defined it.

This debate is to be understood as politically and ethically situated within a specific historical and cultural context. With the collapse of the Soviet Union epitomized by the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the consequent demise of communism and socialist ideologies, the discipline turned to what has been defined as the post-modern critique to reason and empirical truth. In the US, seminal

works such as *Writing Culture* critiqued anthropological texts by deconstructing modernist anthropological discourse of truth. Instead, the authors of *Writing Culture* advocated a more experimental, reflexive and subjective methodology debunking the illusion of objectivity in anthropological knowledge. In the field of indigenous studies, this climate of disciplinary critique led to anthropological inquiries that aimed at giving a voice to those who had been represented by decades of anthropological ventriloquism. Curricular reforms in US academics became paramount to incorporate testimonial narratives based on indigenous voices as important tools of inquiry (Huizer and Mannheim 1979, Morin and Saladind' Anglure 1997, Muratorio 1991, Pratt 2001).²

The case of Rigoberta Menchú, the impact of her testimonial narrative in the peace process of Guatemalan civil war, and the controversy that generated in the US, stand as an illustrative example of this process.³ The visibility of these political actors within academic settings, together with the advocacy role assumed by many anthropologists in defense of indigenous groups afflicted by political violence and violation of human rights, was pivotal in creating a space for discussing the decolonization of anthropology and indigenous studies. The collaboration between indigenous actors and anthropologists also helped in fostering the process of both formation and visibility of many indigenous intellectuals in different academic and non-academic settings.

The situated nature of the discussion on engagement and indigenous studies opens the door for highly controversial debates in anthropology. The most exemplary recent controversy around this form of anthropological practice took place in US academia at the end of the century when the journalist Patrick Tierney (2000) published an exposé of American anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon who worked with the Yanomamo group in the Amazon basin between Venezuela and Brazil. Tierney accused Chagnon of unethical conduct in the field by violating cultural taboos, introducing weapons, instigating intra-ethnic conflicts, collaborating with a biologist conducting medical research without Yanomamo's informed consent, and even of espionage. Although Tierney's accusations referred to research conducted between the 1960s and the 1980s; they generated a fierce controversy within the anthropological community of the US and Latin America. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) put together a task force to investigate the allegations and published a report that concluded that Chagnon had indeed violated the ethical codes of the discipline (see AAA 2003, Borofski

2 Also known as 'culture wars,' such reforms in different academic setting in the US were promoted by progressive scholars who sought to question the study of 'high culture,' which contemplated the study of Western classic literature, by adopting first person testimonial accounts that reflected the life of disenfranchised and excluded people from the new world. See Huizer and Mannheim (1979) and Pratt in Arias (2001).

3 The politics of the 'culture wars' unleashed a controversy around the testimonial affirmation by indigenous activist Rigoberta Menchú and the accusations formulated against her by anthropologist David Stoll. For more insight into this case see Arias (2001).

2005). Members of the AAA working in US academia found themselves revisiting debates from the 1960s about the need to decolonialize the discipline. They found themselves divided along the lines of the objectivity/subjectivity debate. Gross and Plattner (2002), who at the time occupied high positions in research agencies that allocated funds for research projects in the social sciences, advocated so-called detached scholarship over fieldwork and scholarship featuring collaborative relationship between anthropologists and their field subjects. At the core of their argument was the contention that the engagement of the anthropologist with the study community and its members defined as laypersons, can undermine the integrity of research and transform anthropological inquiry into social work, which is supposedly a less scientific undertaking (Gross and Plattner 2002).⁴ In 2003 a group of AAA members organized a referendum that asked all AAA members to vote to rescind the Task Force final report allegedly biased against Chagnon. Those who supported the referendum defended that the AAA had no business sanctioning the conduct of an anthropologist as its code of ethics had to be understood as a reference open to reinterpretation. Two-thirds of the voters supported the rescission of the AAA's acceptance of the report (see Gregor and Gross 2004, Lassiter 2005), reconfirming a profound division among US anthropologists regarding political and ethical concerns and their impacts on knowledge production.

This brief historical overview of critiques of positivism in the discipline shows that anthropology, as all other social sciences (and scientific disciplines generally), is not a value-free and detached way of producing knowledge. Ethnography and writing are not simply methods of collecting data but active processes of knowledge production that are situated politically, ethically, and intellectually. In indigenous studies, the increasing participation of indigenous peoples as political actors in national and transnational debates concerning neo-liberalism, market reforms, and other interactions with nation-states and financial institutions means, among other things, that they are not uninformed subjects detached from larger ethical, political, economic, and cultural concerns. Contemporary indigenous movements demand self-determination and protection from incursions upon their sacred and communal lands, as national and multinational economic interests seek access to commodities such as oil, rubber, metals, minerals, and gems in indigenous territories. These contexts call into question the viability of a detached researcher who enters the field site and conducts research regardless of the political implications of such factors. When working with contemporary indigenous communities, anthropologists often find it necessary and inevitable to position themselves in regards of such issues and to reframe their relationship with indigenous actors. I argue that detachment in such contexts cast doubts on the kind of ethnographic knowledge that ethnographers who pretend not to define their positionality in the field can produce (see Calabró and Theodossopoulos in this volume).

4 On the objective–subjective debate in anthropology, see *Current Anthropology* 36, 1995, particularly the contribution by D'Andrade and Schepher-Hughes. See also Fabian (2001), Hymes (1972), Roscoe (1995), Salzman (2002) and Sutton (1991).

Critical Reflections and Contributions

Having reaffirmed the situated nature of debates on engagement, I reflect on the specificities of this form on anthropological inquiry in order to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Rather than political propaganda, diverse forms of engagement and collaboration have produced ‘excellent’ scholarship in anthropology, including the work of anthropologists engaged in activist research and of those who identify themselves as minority members.⁵ Feminist, Afro-descent, Latino, queer studies scholars, indigenous scholars, anthropologists from so-called developing countries and activist anthropologists have produced seminal work for the understanding of social processes where gender, race, class tensions, and geopolitics are tightly intertwined and often overlapping.⁶ In indigenous studies engaged anthropology, rather than treating indigenous cultures and societies as discrete and exotic objects of anthropological scrutiny, follows a different line of inquiry. Collaborative and engaged practices and methodologies have the potential of decolonizing anthropology by questioning colonialist tropes such as other and otherness, insider and outsider, first world and third world. They focus rather on the conditions and contexts in which indigeneity becomes either a justification for violating territorial or human rights in the name of national and global progress, or for resisting such abuses. My point of departure is the definition of collaboration, or collaborative moment, understood as an epistemological, methodological *and* a political one.

‘We’ are not alone. In their critiques of the supposedly objective truth of modernist anthropology, feminist, anticolonialist and interpretative scholarship have come to explode the fiction of ‘the scientist of culture who works alone’ (Lapovsky Kennedy 1995: 26). Various authors addressed this aspect of knowledge production in anthropology by questioning the possibility of accomplishments built on the works of ‘lone strangers’ (Gottlieb 1995, Rosaldo 1989, Salzman 1994). Such narrative reproduced the mythology of the male adventurer figure and the role he has played in the formation, accumulation, and development of scientific knowledge and spread of ideas in and from the West to the rest of the world. I am thinking of figures such as for example geographer Alexander von Humboldt, whose writings can be considered as a form of proto-anthropology of the South American Andes. These epic accounts extol the journey of adventurous men who defied the unknown for the sake of scientific knowledge, but offer little, if anything about all those who accompanied them on their excursions. In anthropology this ‘heroic’ tradition was continued by equating the ‘lone ethnographer’ to the scientist

5 I respond here to the discussion on ‘excellence’ in anthropology in Gross and Plattner (2002).

6 For example, see Abu-Lughod (1991, 1987), Alonso (1995), Aretxaga (1997), Gordon (1998), Gordon, Gurdian and Hale (2003), Hale (2008a, 1997), Jacob-Huey (2002), Limón (1991), Mascia-Lees and Sharpe (2000), Rahier (1999), Rappaport (1990), Torres (1995) and Trix and Sankar (1998).

who faces any hardship in order to prove and test his theories (Rosaldo 1989: 30, 31, Sontag 1966). The figure of the 'lone ethnographer' obscures the inherently interactive process of knowledge production.

Different proposals of collaboration and cooperation in research practice and writing emerged from these critiques. Ever since the 1960s collaboration in different academic settings has highlighted its interdisciplinary (as well as interdepartmental and inter institutional) mode of dialogue and conversation that anthropologists entertain across disciplines with scientists, historians, sociologists, philosophers, cultural studies scholars, students (just to mention a few) in order to elaborate new perspectives on the fast changing cultural and social landscapes.⁷ More recently George Marcus has argued that the emergence of new scientific theories about life, genetics, and the environment has made this form of disciplinary crosspollination (not just fieldwork) even more relevant and distinctive for anthropological research (2009, 4–6).

In the field of indigenous studies, however, collaboration or the collaborative moment is understood as both epistemological and highly political since it is premised on the imperative of decolonizing anthropology. In addition to being epistemologically inevitable, as argued above, the collaborative relationship anthropologists establish with indigenous intellectuals and activists pushes the boundaries of knowledge production to other milieus beyond academia. Actors from indigenous forums and organizations, NGOs and other settings are not just interlocutors but initiators of research endeavors whose goals and agendas often differ from research projects crafted within academic settings. The feedback process and the sharing of outcomes produced in such endeavors are reversed: the knowledge and the forms it takes (whether a book, a video, a report, a conference paper, etc.) are tested in non-academic settings and then introduced to academia to fulfill many times the career goals and academic requirements of participating anthropologists. These forms of collaborations are unique in foregrounding the political goals that the anthropological knowledge is intended to accomplish (train activists, inform policies and political demands, foster change in communities, facilitate networking, etc.). The richness of such anthropological engagement lays, among other things, in the production of different types of texts each of which follows a specific set of criteria that operate in different scales (localized, national, transnational) and sites (community, organizations, state institutions, streets, academia). Each of these texts has its own internal coherence, logic and audience but it also is a piece in a multi-textual form of inquiry and hermeneutics. I am thinking here of a collaborative research effort with indigenous communities and organizations that can lead to the elaboration of different products (for example a

7 In the US Marcus (2009) has reformulated collaboration as an epistemological and methodological dimension that followed the reflexive turn in US anthropological debates. In the US academic debates of the collaboration of anthropologists and cultural studies scholars, among others, led to the post-modern critique epitomized by *Writing Culture*.

video, a bilingual text, and an academic paper) all of which offer a very different and yet interrelated perspective on the same research topic.

During my first fieldwork in Ecuador I did research in collaboration with a grassroots indigenous organization, the Inca Atahualpa in the parish of Tixán, in the Chimborazo province. The work we did together for two years produced a small bilingual text that was supposed to be used in local schools on the history of the Inca Atahualpa, several videos on local indigenous traditions made by one of the Inca's leaders, proposals for a development project to NGOs, and more recently my scholarly book (see Cervone 2012) and several articles that were published in Ecuador and in the US. Each of these products followed different parameters, were meant to reach different types of audiences, presented a different perspective on the political process it represented, and fulfilled different goals. Each of them therefore presented a different point of view and a different vision of the political process experienced by the Quichuas of Tixán, offering a good sample of the multi-sided nature of their experience.

The collaboration between engaged anthropology and indigenous studies can produce a multi-textual hermeneutics, where the multi-textuality is a way of interpreting and representing the complex and multifaceted aspects of a given situation. It also represents and embodies the different and at times contradictory positioning of the actors involved as an inherent element of the collaborative process itself.⁸ The complexity that can be revealed by the intertwining of different texts can provide the ethnographic 'grounding' that Deepa Reddy sees as important to make sense of a field of inquiry that is otherwise disjointed and disconnected (Reddy 2009: 95). More reflection is needed on the intertwining of such multi-textual forms of knowledge production and their contributions to the debate on epistemology, ethics and methodology in anthropology. I argue that such multi-textuality can address the complexity of the 'global' world, understood as a process of cultural, physical, socio-economic and political intertwining in which the mapping of inequality is simultaneously ever present and shifting (Inda and Rosaldo 2007).

However, collaborative methodologies have their own challenges and potential weaknesses (Lamphere 2003, Heckler and Langton in this volume). The political nature of such collaboration can present possible ethical, methodological and epistemological dilemmas. In his study of racial ambivalence among Ladinos in Guatemala, Charles Hale (2008b) reveals the challenges that he faced as an activist anthropologist allied with the Mayan indigenous movement when embarking on fieldwork practice with the supposed dominants, the Ladinos. For

8 A controversial case of indigenous justice during my fieldwork in Tixán is good example of this complexity. In that case corporal punishment was made redundant due to local organizations competing for political legitimacy, and that generated a passionate debate among indigenous activists and their supporters on the potential contradictions of such local 'ancestral' practices and the principles stated by human rights conventions that the indigenous movements refer to in their struggles (see chapter 5 in Cervone 2012).

his study of racial politics, Hale conducted fieldwork with Ladinos occupying a wide political spectrum with respect to Mayan activism, ranging from racial prejudice to a declared commitment to cultural equality. Hale suggests that his overt positioning as a Maya supporter and the omission from his analysis of those voices who did not give permission to be disclosed were enough to safeguard both his ethical and activist stand. Yet, even if anonymous, the unwilling voices of Ladinos are represented in Hale's account, revealing that political commitment in circumstances like those he describes may clash with professional ethics. Different ethical standards seem to be at play when research is carried out with those who retain power and privileges in society. The proposal of Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1971) to decolonize anthropology by doing research on the 'powerful' appears more complex than expected.

Another tension inherent in engaged anthropology relates to the actual collaboration in the field and the challenges posed by the motivations of the researchers that emerge in their manifest positionality. In the debate on reflexivity in anthropology some anthropologists have addressed the risk of falling into narcissist and ethnocentric self-referentiality and navel-gazing (Fabian 2001, Friedman 1994, Salzman 2002, Sangren 1988). In engaged anthropological practice, the challenge is to avoid the projection of the researcher's ideals and hopes onto the political processes under analysis. In other words, general principles assuming of anti-colonialism and anti-oppression can be a risky basis for cooperation if they lead the anthropologists and their research partners falsely to assume that they share the same understanding of the path to be followed in the pursuit of justice. Regarding indigenous movements in the Latin America, how should we understand their struggle for self-determination in multicultural societies? Collaborative studies of such struggles highlight complex and often contradictory understandings of change, democracy, and even of human rights (Cervone 2012, De La Peña 2002, Gow and Rappaport 2002, Hale 1994, Rappaport 2005).

In this context, what happens when such possible discrepancies and tensions make collaboration in the field difficult or even conflictive? In other words, what happens when collaboration shows its multifaceted and rhizomic nature, when it becomes 'too weak a word to describe the entanglements that are by now thoroughly commonplace in cultural anthropology: entanglements of complicity, responsibility, mutual orientation, suspicion and paranoia, commitment and intimate involvement, credit and authority, and the production of reliable knowledge for partially articulated goals set by organizations, institutions, universities, corporations, and governments' (Kelty 2009: 205)? Paraphrasing Kelty: is collaboration a 'too feel-good or too friendly term for the commitment, fights and compromises' that all the actors involved in these relationships experience in the pursuit of their goals (ibid.)? In relation to indigenous studies I believe engagement as a form of anthropological inquiry focuses on the complexity of global forms of discrimination and offers the opportunity of reversing power relationship in anthropological practice. In other words, engagement is an anthropological approach that is adequate to 'the problems of our time' by

revealing the multiplicity of actors, forces and dimensions (local, national, and transnational) that figure in the definition of ethnic identities and influence the identification of indigenous cultures (Wolf in Berreman 1968: 395). Yet, like other forms of anthropological inquiry, engaged anthropology has no formulaic answers to provide to its dilemmas other than nurturing self-critique and being suspicious of any sense of accomplishment and ‘feel-goodness.’

Finally, a perhaps more abstract question about anthropological epistemology. If we agree, as I think many of us do, on the possibility of anthropology in the plural, to what extent is it possible to produce an alternative anthropological knowledge that is not linked to the theoretical debates and purposes that historically have oriented this discipline? For example how can we approach the study of identity whatever our ethnic and cultural background, without referring, either to affirm or to refute, theoretical debates around that topic (essentialism, instrumentalism, constructivism and post-constructivism)? Even when engagement in debates with indigenous scholars and activists challenges such theoretical approaches, it does not challenge one of the major epistemological premises that historically has defined the discipline. One such premise posits that anthropology involves cultural translation, initially needed to supposedly render intelligible to colonial regimes what was not intelligible about their subjects. The relationships of power implicated in such relations have changed but the basic premise of translating and making intelligible often remains. Whether to control, or to correct a misinterpretation, or to denounce an injustice, anthropology works an act of translation and of interpretation that occurs within the parameters of a Euro-centered theoretical and epistemological narrative. Are there, then, only different possible anthropological translations rather than different anthropologies? What would anthropology be without an act of translation? If translation is anthropology’s straight jacket, how can we decolonize such translations?

Decolonizing Methodologies: An Open Field

In the wake of Said’s *Orientalism* the analyses of socio-cultural imaginaries, which accompanied the many remapping of geopolitical power structures, have identified the major sources of inequalities in early modern expansions of colonial and imperial regimes, and more recently in the global expansions of late capitalism. Although constantly challenged and redefined, such inequalities and their sources endure and are even reinforced by contemporary global processes (Harvey 2005). Scholars such Walter D. Mignolo (2000), and Anibal Quijano (2000) have analysed such questions by focusing on the historical process from which the idea of the West emerged to produce and perpetuate what they define as the ‘coloniality of power’; that is, a conceptual and territorial system of inequality informing relationships between people, places and ideas. Such a system is what still sustains, according to the authors, the expansion of the global capitalist economy albeit with significant emerging shifts in geopolitics. In the realm of indigenous studies the debate about

the need to decolonize anthropological knowledge has focused on what Trouillot calls the 'savage slot' which defines the inferiors' slot, subsequently redefined and reproduced in different historical and socio-political contexts.

In Latin America, the process of politicization of ethnic identity and the anti-discrimination struggle of indigenous movements has led to a shift in anthropological research interests and methodologies (Rappaport 1994, 17). Since the early 1990s, studies of indigeneity have highlighted the historical and political nature of ethnic identity formation among indigenous people.⁹ Urban and Sherzer (1991) paved the way for new studies of indigeneity, which focus on the complex and ever-changing nature of a political process that involves both indigenous actors and nation states. Contemporary studies of indigenous peoples examine how they engage with economic policies and social changes at the national and transnational levels to negotiate their position of subordination vis-à-vis states and nonindigenous groups.¹⁰

This shift, which is not restricted to Latin America, represents a response to the epistemological necessity I mentioned above. It also reflects the collaborative turn in as much as it underscores the presence and participation of previously silenced voices in the production of anthropological knowledge. Increasing numbers of indigenous scholars have been concerned with producing their own interpretations about their societies by focusing on the revitalization of values and cultural systems which had been denigrated and misrepresented by decades of colonial and postcolonial governance (see CONAIE 1996, Harry 2009, LaDuke 1999, 2005, Smith 2012 to name a few). The fields of education and pedagogy, and more recently the field of environmental justice, have been the major arenas in which the voice of indigenous scholars and activists has become louder and more assertive. One pioneer text in this respect is Lynda Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* which has paved the way for many indigenous scholars and anthropologists to start thinking about their own learning processes and breaking with pedagogical criteria imposed by the dominant non-native societies. The decolonizing impact of such interventions is twofold: on the one hand it led to the recognition in academia of the presence of indigenous scholars and to the acknowledgement of the validity and vitality of their scholarship.¹¹ On the other hand, it has provided indigenous communities and organizations with new tools to elaborate their own alternative models of education, as well as negotiate their active participation in the design and implementation of policies and research.

9 Abercrombie (1991a, 1991b), Barre (1983), Botasso-Gnerre (1989), Cervone (2012), Maria Elena García (2005), Gustafson (2009), Mattiace (2003), Pallares (2002), Postero (2007), Rappaport (1994, 2005), Sawyer (2004) and Warren (1998), among others.

10 Colloredo-Mansfeld (1999), Kearney (1996), Lagos (1994), Meisch (2002), Nash (2001), Orlove (2002), Weismantel (1988) and Warren and Jackson (2003).

11 However, the decolonization of anthropology and academia is to be understood as a work in progress since, as Karen Brodtkin, Sandra Morgen and Janis Hutchinson (2011) argue in the case of the US, academia remains mostly a 'white public space.'

The collaborative moment offers great opportunities today for experimentation with new teaching methodologies, exposing students in different academic settings to new perspectives and points of view concerning contemporary indigenous societies. In the context from which this book emerged, a group of anthropologists and indigenous scholars elaborated a proposal for a collaborative and co-taught course on Indigenous Agency and Innovations to be offered in different institutions, according to which various scholars and activists would offer a lecture to be recorded and delivered via podcast or via live conference call. I taught the course in the fall of 2010 even though the proposed methodology did not work out the way it was originally planned.¹² I had some institutional support and a small grant to fund three guest speakers to talk on topics that ranged from biocolonialism, to food security and education in different indigenous communities.

For many of the students it was the first time they had met and listened to an indigenous speaker and scholar. Their direct voice as activists who struggle against encroachment on their lands, exclusion and racism in their everyday life had a profound impact on students' capacity to relate to those issues. Their interventions generated interesting debates on what it means to be Native American and indigenous today. The rejection of genetic sampling in indigenous territory presented by Native American activist Debra Harry, for example, sparked a lively discussion on cultural diversity, race and power relations in contexts in which Native Americans and other indigenous groups have been treated as second class citizens ever since the formation of modern nations-states. The direct, personal and human experience of the speakers made their struggle come alive in the classroom, with mixed reactions from the students. Some, when pushed out of their comfort zone, could not accept that their own model of life and value system were not the same one embraced by the speakers, and objected to the validity of their claims as being exclusionary or even going against the interest of humanity at large. If genetic sampling can foster medical research, some of them argued, why are Native Americans hindering that process? Some others had a sort of epiphany and clearly grasped the eminently political nature of indigenous claims, whether they touched upon genetic sampling or food security.

This experience confirmed my belief that such collaborative pedagogical modalities, made possible by new technologies, can represent another step towards a decolonized anthropological pedagogy and academia.

Decolonization from Within

Decolonizing is a complex inner process that involves political engagement on several fronts. Many decolonizing efforts and practices focus on the relationship

12 Difficulty in the synchronizing of academic calendars and resources made the co-teaching particularly challenging. Yet, I believe this type of proposals should be revisited and implemented as viable forms of collaborative methodologies.

between indigenous peoples vis-à-vis the state and the non-indigenous citizens as a way to support anti-discriminatory policies and struggles. I argue that equal attention needs to be put on the perverse modalities with which racism, discrimination, and exclusion still affects (and in some cases alter) relationships and interactions *within* indigenous societies (Harrison 1997). Intellectuals such as Frank Fanon (2005, 2008) and W.B. De Bois (1994), among others, have cogently highlighted the pernicious and devastating impacts of racism on those who have been targeted as inferior. The effects of decades, and centuries, of humiliation and violence have led to a process of internalization of such annihilating ideas and practices, which perpetuated discrimination internally. The outcomes of these internal forms of violence vary according to the specificity of the contexts in which they take place. I turn to the case of violence against indigenous women in Ecuador, on which I have worked for many years, as an example that calls for the need of what I define decolonization from within.

Debates on violence against indigenous women in their own communities have started to emerge in Ecuador in the late 1990s. Ever since then many indigenous women have organized to fight against such forms of violence but they face insurmountable barriers in their quest for equality and a life free of violence within their own communities. Their struggle soon turned into a highly controversial issue within indigenous communities and organizations (Cervone 1998). The acknowledgement of those negative and problematic practices is seen as dangerous for the integrity of a movement that has made of the politicization of ethnic identity a powerful tool to fight against discrimination. How can anthropology contribute to social change in such a case, and participate in the decolonization of decades, even centuries, of racist violent practices that permeate relationships of power within indigenous communities?

These questions motivated a group of feminist researchers and indigenous women activists to combine their work and interests on issues of gender equality in a comparative and collaborative research project on indigenous women's rights and indigenous justice in Latin America.¹³ This collaboration of anthropologists and indigenous women's activists aims to shade a new light on the root-causes of gender violence within indigenous communities. As a member of that group I examine my participation in the research project to discuss the potential of collaborative methodologies to foster a process of internal decolonizing practice.

Recent scholarship on gender violence in the Ecuadorian Andes highlights the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in contemporary discourses on indigenous justice and gender equality.¹⁴ Studies examine the inadequacies that indigenous justice systems present when faced with cases of domestic violence and abuses against women. Such forms of violence are attributed to the sexism of indigenous males and to the condition of triple discrimination that women experience for being poor, women and indigenous. Although such critical insights are important

13 The project is run by CIESAS, Mexico and coordinated by Rachel Sieder.

14 See Picq (2012), Pequeño (2009).

contributions to the analysis of gender violence in indigenous communities, existing scholarship on racialized societies as well as the complex political context in which such issues are debated require a more nuanced interpretation. My collaboration with my research partner and indigenous activist Cristina Cucurí was pivotal in exploring the problem from a different perspective.¹⁵ Cristina and I decided to delve more into the root-causes of such violence by building on a question that Cristina's experience as an activist brought to the table: Why do indigenous men treat their women so badly? We both decided that it was paramount to our research to also collect the point of view of men.

In a series of interviews and life histories with Quichua indigenous women and men from the highland province of Chimborazo we stumbled upon the legacy of patterns of violence and abuse that had become part of people's memory and daily life. Many people we interviewed (elderly and younger women and men) connected the different forms of violence that women, and to certain degrees children, suffer in their families and communities to patterns of abuse and rejection against indigenous people that are still common in Ecuadorian society. Those patterns are locally entangled with a history of power relations dating back to the beginning of the 1900s when indigenous people in the highlands were living in a state of de facto slavery under powerful landowners. In that context violence, rape and corporal punishment functioned as mechanisms to impose obedience and control and to reproduce racialized hierarchies both locally and nationally. The modernization of the agrarian structure of the country that came with the agrarian reforms since the 1960s and the economic policies that affected the rural economy ever since then did not eliminate patterns of exclusion and prejudice against indigenous citizens (see Becker 2008, Bretón 2012, Cervone 2012,). Many men we interviewed denounced the different forms of discrimination they still faced in their everyday life in schools, or every time they had to apply for a loan, entered a public office, or selling their produce in the market place. How to make sense of the voices we had collected in our interviews and the macro context of policies, politics and changes that had seen the affirmation of the indigenous movement and its anti-discrimination struggle while still reproducing practices of racial exclusion and prejudice?

By combining scholarship and the political experience of my research partner we worked to interpret such complexities in a way that could be theoretically sound and politically meaningful. Fanon's theories on the internalization of racism prove especially helpful to understand our case. We argued that the violence women experience today cannot be understood just by foregrounding sexist practices but needs to be connected to the history and continuity of racist practices and prejudice.

15 Cristina Cucurí is Quichua from Chimborazo and the president and co-founder of the REDCH, Network of Indigenous Women's Organizations of Chimborazo. She also participated in the national elections for congress in 2009 with the Pachakutik party. The REDCH political struggle for women's rights was pivotal in having indigenous women's right to political participation recognized in the new constitution of 2008.

The recurrence of physical and psychological violence, of discrimination and even of sexual abuse that emerged in our interviews attests that violence has made its way within indigenous societies as a legitimate way to sanction obedience and exert control into marital relationships and children's upbringing.

We also agreed with the other studies on the paradox of the recent multicultural turn. While the constitutional recognition of indigenous cultural diversity reinforces the perception of cohesion and harmony as positive values of indigenous cultures, such perception makes the fight against inner forms of violence and exclusion more difficult to sustain.¹⁶ According to Cristina, understanding violence against women in a broader framework of racist violence can also help to incorporate women's political agenda within a larger and more overarching anti-racist struggle undertaken by the indigenous movement.

It is important for decolonizing methodologies and pedagogies, therefore, to reflect on the complex implications of racism and discrimination, and on the process of internalization on many levels both external (often undetected in non-indigenous advocacy) as well as internal to indigenous societies. In Ecuador this has proved to be a very difficult task due to the level of politicization of the indigenous movement over the decades. Leadership within the movement by indigenous men is the result of a national political culture that has delegitimized and rendered invisible female political participation. This leadership pattern makes it very difficult for women to implement anti-violence agendas in their own communities and to have indigenous authorities participate to control it.¹⁷ Engendered patterns of indigenous power and leadership end up reproducing the same patterns of discrimination and exclusion imposed by the dominant white society. An anti-racist framework can offer a window of opportunity that could lead to new forms of justice within indigenous communities aiming to eradicate any form of violence. It is, Cristina says, a challenging path but not an impossible one.

In such contexts, collaborative research is more complex and multifaceted than anticipated, rendering the positioning of the researcher more problematic. Internal contradictions add another layer of complexity to the researchers' support of indigenous movements' anti-discrimination struggles. How do we, scholars and activists alike, account for the controversial knowledge that we believe can help social change? How do we account for the personal safety of our research partners who are involved in such complex realms? Again, I believe that anthropology can contribute by challenging assumptions of 'feel-goodness' in collaborative methodologies on the one hand, and by producing critical knowledge that is skeptical of easy rendering of political engagements and solidarity.

16 The new Ecuadorian constitution of 2008 sanctions the right to cultural and ethnic diversity of indigenous peoples and their right to self-determination.

17 Some cases of domestic violence involve male leaders. See case in Picq (2012).

Concluding Remarks

Engagement, like any other form of anthropological practice, is not an unproblematic, universally valid, or flawless form of inquiry. It is imperative that debates about the future of collaboration are fostered and supported together with the constant search for new epistemologies and methodologies. Several points for discussion arise from the examination of the validity and limitations of the collaborative moment. For instance, the situated nature of this moment: How might such engagement and forms of collaboration evolve and change once indigenous actors, such as the Quichuas in Ecuador, become involved in new forms of governance and politics in their own countries? How would the redefinition of their position in society impact on collaboration, cooperation, and positionality? What kinds of ethical, methodological and epistemological concerns should be considered when the agendas and interests of different indigenous actors and activists diverge? Like other social science disciplines, anthropology faces new challenges posed by the increasing complexity inherent in globalized societies, where distinctions between powerless and powerful are often blurred and where systems of stratification combine class, ethnicity, race, gender, and geography in varying and multifaceted ways. How do all these old and new social identities and structures impact on questions of positionality, epistemology, and ethics? The anthropological profession today faces such open-ended questions. They are best addressed by taking into consideration the different perspectives, experiences, and points of views of the many voices involved in the collaborative moment as well as the multitextual nature (that I highlighted earlier) of the knowledge produced in collaboration.

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