DEBATES

Collaborative Research Methods

Research as Social Justice Work: Reflections on Doing Politically Engaged Scholarship

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Introduction

What is the purpose of research? Why and for whom do we do it? These simple questions often get lost in the world of academe where tenure, peer-review, and merit scores can take on a life of their own, overshadowing issues like making the world a more just and equitable place. Putting them on the table and looking at them without flinching represents a first, crucial step toward integrating research and social change agendas. Too often academics who collaborate with social justice struggles do "double duty," completing "real" scholarship, appropriate for publication in academic journals, alongside work that addresses social goals more directly—serving as expert witnesses in court, writing editorials in local or national newspapers, developing and maintaining web sites, preparing reports and position papers, conducting workshops and teach-ins, or even strategizing about direct action. As Rappaport (2007) notes, the product of collaborative research that serves social justice may not be written texts at all, but activities that occur as part of workshops or organizational meetings. The question of how to integrate academic research and activist pursuits also raises practical issues regarding what scholar-activism might look like and how we might teach such a methodology to our students.

Doing Activist Scholarship: Finding Tools for the Trade

I do not purport to offer a set of rules for activist scholarship. In my view this kind of research is fundamentally situational and perhaps impossible to discuss as detached from a particular context and set of political and social relations. Thus, adopting the tone of a "how to" manual would be inappropriate. The most effective way to conceptualize this type of research practice is not as a predetermined set of methods, but as a critical, continually evolving, grounded, political *strategy* that uses analytical, methodological and conceptual tools drawn from a variety of perspectives, experiences, and bodies of knowledge, and is constructed out of active political engagement with struggles "on the ground." (In Mendez and Wolf 2006 and Mendez 2007 I examine in greater depth the ways in which feminist methods could be rethought under conditions of globalization.)

Feminism has served as an important source of conceptual tools from which I have drawn in building my activist research practices, but I have also found my experiences as a teacher and as a parent to be extremely relevant. These three areas are clearly not the only sources of tools for activist-researchers; however, I offer my experiences as an example of how a researcher might go about devising a strategy of this kind.

Over the last three years, my research has taken the form of a community-based, collaborative project that seeks to explore and understand the different effects and experiences of transnational migration in Williamsburg, VA, a relatively new destination for migrants from Mexico and Central America. This research has involved my working in close partnership with a network of social service providers, students, healthcare workers, school administrators, and concerned citizens that support migrants. I have also engaged in numerous advocacy and support activities in my interactions and relationships with migrants and their families. "Research activities" for me have included a wide range of diverse undertakings such as facilitating a monthly parent support/resource group for migrant mothers, conducting workshops for community organizations, serving as a volunteer interpreter at the local low-income clinic and on the board of an adult literacy facility.

A feminist conceptualization of power not as a zero-sum game, but as multisited and "situated and contextualized within particular intersubjective relationships" (Bloom, 1998:35) sheds light on the complex ways in which power is embedded in research relationships. Feminists—and "Third World" and feminists of color in particular—have produced groundbreaking theorizations regarding the positionality of feminist researchers within relations of power that flavor and shape the research process (Bhavnani 2004:68; Ong 1995; Visweswaran 1994; Mohanty 1991).

Anyone attempting to engage in this kind of research practice is quickly confronted with the ways in which power operates within communities, organizations, and small groups. In research collaborations with political struggles, feminist approaches to power help us recognize it in its multiple forms, not just as an "external" force present in broad economic or institutional structures, but also as constituted within microlevel dynamics. An emphasis on process and on the means of struggle as equally important as and inextricably related to outcomes also represent significant insights for devising research that might be put to the service of social justice.

Another contribution that feminism(s) makes to the construction of politically engaged research strategies is the second-wave principle of the personal as political. As Patricia Richards also notes in her piece in this *Forum*, this kind of work is defined through social relationships and connections with collaborators. It requires a different way of relating to those being studied, not simply as "informants," but as "knowledgeable, empowered participants in the research process" (Hale forthcoming: 5). My current project on migration in Williamsburg has challenged me to rethink not only research methods and my own view of the nature of scholarship, but also of the transformative potential of particular organizational spaces and collaborations. I have been consistently surprised by those that have generated meaningful research findings about migration in Williamsburg, as well as effective strategies for creating mechanisms to improve the situation of migrants (see Mendez 2007). Unexpected collaborators have included undergraduate students, social service and public health outreach workers, journalists, local retirees, nurses, and even those in government offices (the Virginia Department of Health being a case in point).

My experiences have made me reflect critically on the dichotomy of social justice vs. social service and to reevaluate my vision of social change and how it occurs. I have found spaces within social service organizations—for example, the seemingly apolitical space of a parent resource group—to be a meaningful arena for social change to occur. Once again, feminism has served as an important guide as I have navigated the complicated collaborative spaces in which my research has taken place. Eschle suggests that different variants of feminism offer an alternative approach to the reformist/revolutionary dichotomy that leads us to see social change potential as

constructed through political practice in the "here and now" (Eschle 2001:96). It has also taught us the importance of expanding definitions of the political to include multiple spheres—the community, the consciousness of an individual woman, the home.

Activist scholarship also requires a good deal of humility and openness to new "ways of knowing" and unexpected collaborations. For this reason I cite my experiences as a teacher as relevant to my activist scholarship. This type of research demands what we ask of our students—a willingness to try on new perspectives and an openness to ideas from outside one's immediate experience. In mine, this kind of research requires a readiness to "show up" when invited—even to activities or events that seem outside one's area of scholarly interest or "expertise." It also involves actors who might not appear to be appropriate research partners. My work with undergraduate students who have interviewed migrants, developed and facilitated workshops and support group meetings, and organized student networks of volunteer advocates and interpreters for the public health clinic, have been especially significant in this regard. Like others (Stoecker 2001; Bell 1997), I have come to see "service learning," for all the problematic connotations and contradictions that the term brings with it, to be one possible, strategic site for activist scholarship to occur within the institutions of the academy.

Reflexivity and feminist standpoint theory also offer valuable insights. Though oft-criticized, feminist standpoint theory advocates adopting the perspective of the most vulnerable group and learning to see the issue under investigation through the eyes of its members (Harding 2005; Gen and Grown; Collins 1990). My alignment with Latino/a migrants in Williamsburg, built on advocacy, research and support activities,

such as acting as an interpreter as migrants seek to navigate the healthcare, social service and local school systems, connecting them with ESL resources, counseling services or legal assistance has generated a view of migration and the transformations occurring in Williamsburg that is based more squarely on the lived experiences of migrants. Holding a woman's hand as she undergoes her first pelvic examination or late-night phone conversations with a mother whose infant's fever will not subside has permitted me to develop a particular understanding of the challenges that migrants in Williamsburg face as they seek to better their lives—even if my relationships with them occur across difference and are positioned within particular inequalities of race, class, and immigration status.

Roles for the Scholar-Activist: Facing Contradictions with Strategic Duality

What are some possible roles for the scholar-activist? The word "interlocutor" is much in vogue in anthropological circles, though it is not widely used in my discipline. I see it as perhaps a fitting way to describe a potential role of the scholar-activist, whose position at "the cross-roads of intellectual endeavors within a community of academics and social change endeavors within a community of activists" means that he/she comes to the table with a rather unique set of skills and social connections (Naples 2004:223). This position of being both an insider and outsider in collaborations with community or social change organizations can mean that the scholar-activist puts his or her social and cultural capital to the service of the endeavors of the group. Academics may be more accustomed to assimilating and processing information as well as packaging it in a media-friendly way. Indeed, in my collaborations with social service organizations, I have often strategized over

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the phone with outreach workers who work directly with migrants and who sometimes feel that their perspective as direct-service providers goes unnoticed by those in decision-making positions. They have quite openly asked me to present their views at particular meetings at which decisions about organizational policies and practices were to be made. One woman put it to me quite simply, "Jennifer, this will mean something different coming from you. You can say these things. They'll listen to YOU."

And yet, this point brings with it a crucial cautionary note. Clearly social and cultural capital, and the access to resources that they might provide, are not sufficient to bring about structural social change. Using a position of privilege from within institutional positions of power also generates salient contradictions. At the same time that the collaborative, scholar-activist may use skills and privileges (many of them unearned) garnered from within the academy for the purpose of social change, he or she must both acknowledge and seek to challenge these structures of privilege. The scholar-activist thus finds him or herself adopting a difficult, but worthwhile position of "strategic duality" in which she uses her position within the institutions of the academy to contribute to social justice goals, while at the same time working to place at the center alternative voices and ways of knowing (Hale forthcoming: 10).

The example of my pre-meeting phone call with an outreach worker also highlights another challenge of collaborative, politically engaged research. To whom are we accountable? In this kind of research "the field" is hardly an isolated arena. It intersects with differing kinds of social relationships—all of which are cross-cut by power and difference. In such a context multiple levels of interconnected

accountability emerge, and being responsive to "the community" takes on complex meanings.

The experiences and views recounted here may raise more questions than directly answer how to "do" politically engaged research. I agree with others that it is perhaps in learning to ask the right questions and to build the right kind of relationships that we come closest to developing a research practice that serves social justice. And, as Hale (forthcoming 21) points out, we cannot look to the conventional academic reward system to know if we are "getting it right," but rather to the people with whom we collaborate. Though we cannot expect to know how to engage in scholar-activism as disconnected from grounded situations, we can draw from the work and conceptual tools provided by those who came before us and be open to dialogue and future imaginings that might allow us to unlock the counter-hegemonic potential of academic pursuits.

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Indígenas, Indigenistas, Tinterillos, and Marxists

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In May of 1929, a group of Indigenous workers from the Zumbahua hacienda in the central highland Ecuadorian province of León arrived at the offices of the Ministerio de Previsión Social y Trabajo in Quito with complaints of abuses that they were experiencing at the hands of the hacienda's bosses and mayordomos. Alberto Moncayo, the renter of the hacienda, claimed that he had made very favorable concessions to the peons, that accusations of beatings and abuse were false, and that the leaders who were in Quito were the only Indians unsatisfied with a proposed resolution to the conflict. If left alone, these "ignorant Indians" would not be causing these problems. Therefore, it must be outsiders who were manipulating the situation for their own gain.[1] Under pressure from the central government, provincial governor G. I. Iturralde arranged for the Indigenous workers and the hacienda's renter to agree on a series of reforms. "Now the situation is absolutely calm," the governor concluded. "I have discovered the *tinterillo*, the instigator of this situation, and he will be punished severely."[2]

On December 30, 1930, Cayambe's *Jefe Político* in northern Ecuador sent a telegram to the Ministro de Gobierno noting that Indigenous workers on the Pesillo and Moyurco haciendas had revolted. Augusto Egas, the director of the *Junta Central de Asistencia Pública* program that administered these haciendas, denounced the presence of Bolshevik instigators, whom he believed were imposing communist ideologies and manipulating the Indians into attacking the haciendas.[3] Claiming that the

Indians had been "exploited by false apostles," elites created a scenario with a chain of command through which instructions flowed from Marxists in Quito to local non-Indigenous communist leaders in Cayambe to Virgilio Lechón and other local Indigenous leaders at Pesillo and finally to the peons on the hacienda:[4] this was a Bolshevik attempt to disrupt the social order of the country and create *una revolución comunista indígena*.[5]

On September 14, 1943, a group of urban intellectuals founded the Instituto Indigenista Ecuatoriano (IIE) as the Ecuadorian branch of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano. IIE director sociologist Pío Jaramillo Alvarado labored energetically to disseminate the indigenist ideal: "to liberate the Indian from the slavery in which he lives."[6] Their 1964 *Declaración Indigenista de Quito* states that the "integration of indigenous groups into the economic, social, and cultural life of their nations is an essential factor for development."[7] The presence of a small Indigenous delegation that observed the drafting of this document shocked the white organizers. "The interest which those aboriginal delegates demonstrated for the items discussed," the *indigenistas* reported, "was a true revelation."[8]

Tinterillos, Marxists, and *indigenistas* approached Indigenous struggles in fundamentally different ways, engaging different issues and seeking to achieve different ends. The *tinterillos* were opportunistic and exploitative intermediaries from neighboring towns who because of their Spanish-language and education skills, were able to draft legal petitions and provide other similar services.[9] Unlike *tinterillos*, *indigenistas* usually lived and worked in urban areas at a distance from Indigenous communities with which they had little if any contact. Almost exclusively the domain

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of white intellectuals, *indigenistas* paternalistically pontificated on solutions to rural poverty, solutions which often involved assimilating Indians into a homogenous Mestizo culture.

Although contemporary elites denounced Marxist activists in Indigenous communities as abusive *tinterillos* who exploited their marginalization to stir up social conflict, and subsequent scholars spurned them as *indigenistas* who paternalistically attempted to assimilate ethnic populations into western notions of class struggle, in reality their relations with Indigenous communities were much more complicated. Like *indigenistas*, they were from distant urban centers, but like *tinterillos* they had direct and occasionally intimate knowledge of Indigenous communities. Like *tinterillos*, they helped Indigenous peoples bridge the wide gap between rural communities and central political structures, but, like *indigenistas*, they brought an ideological agenda to these interactions, rather than merely seeking personal profit. Indigenous and leftist struggles became intertwined in ways that had never happened and could not happen with either *tinterillos* or *indigenistas*. Because of the nature of their contacts, Marxists gained a degree of legitimacy in Indigenous eyes that *tinterillos* or *indigenistas* never were able to accomplish. In their interactions with each other, the Indians and Marxists began to influence each others' ideologies, with the Indians becoming communists and the Marxists acquiring a deep respect and understanding for multi-cultural societies. Their initial motivations for interacting could be seen in turn as mutually exploitative and mutually beneficial, but in the end the two groups had dramatic impacts on each other.[10]

Indians and the Internet

Today no respectable social movement would be caught dead without email and a web page.[11] At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the problems Indigenous activists encounter in accessing the Internet are often similar to those that limited their predecessors' access to state institutions in the first part of the twentieth century. The range of interactions of Indians and intermediaries are similar in both periods.

Language continues to be one of the main problems facing Indigenous communities. In the early twentieth century, mediators were needed to bridge the linguistic gap between the mono-lingual Kichwa world and that of the dominant Spanish culture. Today, many Internet resources and tools are difficult to access without English-language skills. Indigenous activists often rely on European or North American academics to translate their documents for a global audience.

In addition to language, there are also technological barriers. In the early twentieth century, Indigenous activists needed legal assistance to present demands to the government. Present-day cyber activists require technological assistance with coding HTML, acquiring web space on a server, and registering a domain name. It is not an issue of conceptualizing or articulating a struggle, but the mechanics of framing and presenting issues in a way that reach an external audience. Although it is by no means impossible for a social movement to do this alone, the process is greatly facilitated with external assistance. For this reason, Indigenous activists tend either to put off building their own pages, or pass it off to third parties.[12]

Internet communications also involve issues of cost, which raise similar parallels with earlier activists who also had limited access to funds to travel to Quito or purchase the legal paper on which petitions were drafted before being presented to the government. These costs can present barriers for activists wishing to inform the world of their demands.

Achieving direct Indigenous control and autonomy over these means of communication is a critical goal. Learning to build a web page can be a very empowering experience that allows activists to speak directly to the world without the interference of intermediaries. At least for the foreseeable future, however, it appears that outsiders will continue to play a role in this process while Indigenous activists acquire the necessary skills to design and maintain their own websites. In the meantime, this should not be seen as a limitation, but, rather, as an opportunity to build a stronger movement that draws on the skills and knowledge of outsiders, while at the same time leading to a heightened level of political consciousness.

Collaborative Research

What is the role of academics in an Indigenous struggle? Depending on how they are negotiated, these relations can be mutually beneficial, mutually exploitative, or a combination of both. Academics become involved in the struggles of other peoples for a variety of reasons, with some being more honorable than others. Often, the most annoying of practices—usually not particularly dangerous and occasionally helpful—are those operating in an *indigenista* mode, and involve well-meaning liberals paternalistically pontificating at length on someone else's poverty without having any extended or direct experience of that person's reality. Websites in this mode abound on the Internet, reflecting the indignation against social injustices that

drove Jorge Icaza's novel *Huasipungo*. While often providing good sources of information or a broader socio-economic context for a political struggle, they do little to give voice to the instigators of social movements.

Much more dangerous, but, also fortunately, much less common, are websites run by cyber *tinterillos*. Operated for the (probably psychological more than material) benefit of the web editor rather than of a social movement, these can compromise or misrepresent Indigenous voices in order to advance agendas that at times can be foreign or even run counter to subaltern interests.[13]

Respectful relationships in which people interact as equals, even while understanding their differences, is often the best model to follow. The initiative and guiding force for these endeavors must come out of Indigenous communities; otherwise, they are bound to fail. This does not negate the important and often invaluable role of outsiders. As with Marxists working with Indigenous activists in Cayambe in the 1930s, it can lead to fascinating and intellectually rewarding exchanges that are also mutually beneficial. Indigenous activists gain access to platforms and audiences that would otherwise be difficult to realize. Academics, Leftists and the public in general gain access to voices and perspectives that otherwise would be difficult to hear given distance and language barriers.

It is, of course, simplistic to boil down motivations into only one of these three categories of *indigenistas*, *tinterillos*, and Marxists. Given the complex nature of human behaviors, a person's actions can easily cross these lines. But as academics analyze their roles in supporting Indigenous struggles, they should strive to move away from acting as *tinterillos* or *indigenistas*, and work toward the goal of assuming more of

the collaborative attitude of the 1930s Marxists.

Endnotes

[1] J. Alberto Moncayo, "Remitido," *El Día*, May 22, 1929, 1.

[2] Letter from G. I. Iturralde P., Gobernador de León, to Director de la Junta de Asistencia Pública, June 30, 1929, Oficio no. 150, *Comunicaciones Recibidas,* Enero-Junio 1929, Archivo Nacional de Medicina del Museo Nacional de Medicina "Dr. Eduardo Estrella," Fondo Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, Quito, Ecuador, 338-39.

[3] Letter from Augusto Egas to Sr. Ministro de Gobierno, January 7, 1931, in *Libro de Comunicaciones Oficiales de la Dirección de la Junta Central de Asistencia Pública,* 1931, JCAP, 6.

[4] "Los indios de las haciendas de Cayambe han tornado a sus diarias ocupaciones en el campo," *El Comercio*, February 5, 1931, 1.

[5] Letter from Augusto Egas, Segundo D. Rojas V., and Ernesto Robalino to Ministerio de Gobierno y Asistencia Pública, April 30, 1931, in *Comunicaciones Recibidas,* Enero-Junio 1931, JCAP, 900.

[6] Pío Jaramillo Alvarado, *El indio ecuatoriano*, vol. 2, 6th ed. (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1983 [1922]), 264.

[7] Inter-American Conference on Indian Life, *V Congreso Indigenista Interamericano*, vol. 5, Acta final (Quito: Tall. Graf. Nacionales, 1965), 11.

[8] Inter-American Conference on Indian Life, *V Congreso Indigenista Interamericano,* vol. 3, *Artesanía, defensa de la salud, seguro social y poblaciones selváticas* (Quito: Tall. Graf. Nacionales, 1965), facing page 32.

[9] Beate R. Salz, "The Human Element in Industrialization: A Hypothetical Case Study of Ecuadorean Indians," *American Anthropologist*, Memoir No. 85 57:6, Part 2 (December 1955): 133.

[10] Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

[11] Issues that social movements encounter in using computer technology are discussed in Osvaldo León, Sally Burch, and Eduardo Tamayo, *Social Movements on the Net* (Quito: Agencia Latino Americana de Información, 2001); also published in Spanish as *Movimientos sociales en la red*.

[12] This theme is also discussed in León, *Social Movements on the Net*, 152f.

[13] Larry J. Zimmerman, Karen P. Zimmerman, and Leonard R. Bruguier, "Cyberspace Smoke Signals: New Technologies and Native American Ethnicity," in *Indigenous Cultures in an Interconnected World*, ed. Claire Smith and Graeme Ward (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 69-86. ∎

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**A Feminist Sociologist's Reflections
on Collaborative Research**

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For most sociologists, collaboration involves creating knowledge not with research subjects, but with other scholars. Unlike other disciplines, such as anthropology and history, sociology continues to be strongly influenced by the positivist tradition. In addition, much of the collaborative work in the discipline focuses on grant-getting for the collection and analysis of quantitative survey data. Indeed, the majority of academic sociologists do quantitative work, and much of the data they analyze comes from research subjects they will never meet, much less collaborate with. Many also continue to apply the natural science model to social research, emphasizing the importance of being "value-free," a detached observer of social facts.

Although some qualitative sociologists criticize the positivist model and engage in collaborative research, as a graduate student it was mainly through my experiences in inter-disciplinary women's and Latin American studies that I was exposed to the idea of collaborating with research subjects. Feminist methodology and epistemology in particular encouraged me to question the domain assumptions of quantitative research methodologies and to rethink the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Feminist methodologies insist on reflexivity, emphasize the role of subjectivity in research, and draw attention to the ways that power is reinscribed through the research process.

Of course, critical sociologists have made similar interventions, noting that the detached observer, so idealized within the discipline, often quite directly sustains elite and state interests. For example, Sjoberg, et al. (1991: 46) draw attention to the fact that social survey data is often funded and used by commercial, academic, and governmental organizations, which do not necessarily have the interests of research subjects at heart. Sjoberg and his colleagues are concerned with the limitations the natural science model imposes on sociological inquiry. They insist that "we should not confuse—as many sociologists do—valid social knowledge with the data generated by the administrative apparatus of modern industrial social orders" (p. 69). While I agree with Sjoberg, et al. on the need for collective reflection on the quality of the data we, as sociologists, produce, feminist methodologists call for an additional step by emphasizing the importance of action-oriented research (Fonow and Cook 1991; Reinharz 1992).

But what does it mean to do action-oriented, feminist research? Certainly there are plenty of examples of feminists who have not paid sufficient attention to their own methodological critiques. Feminist researchers have sought to expose the ways that unequal power relations and symbolic violence damage women, but at the same time unreflexively exercise power by allowing their own voices to supercede those of their subjects. Stacey (1988) cautions that, because of the close emotional ties that characterize good ethnographic work, the risk of abandonment, exploitation, and betrayal is often greater in feminist ethnography than in traditional positivist inquiry. Hill Collins (1998) stresses that some white feminist scholars who research the experience of women of color in the United States have commodified difference and suffering to further their own careers. Cross-cultural feminist researchers have

likewise tended to approach their subjects from a Westocentric perspective, as if they were going to save the poor women they research from "death by culture," as Narayan (1997) terms the tendency to view third world women as victims of "primitive" traditions and practices, rather than historical agents in their own right.

These cautions have understandably paralyzed many feminist researchers, some of whom decide to "study up" as a means of avoiding exercising domination through research, or stop doing field research all together, opting for cultural critique instead. (Many scholars who sympathize with postmodernism have faced similar paralysis.) But others challenge us to get beyond the fear and guilty feelings generated by these dynamics. As Ong (1995:354) puts it, "The most critical point is not that we reap material and social benefits from their stories, but that we help to disseminate their views and that we do so without betraying their political interests as narrators of their own lives." Still, is this just another call to "giving voice" to our research subjects? Lal (1996) points out the need to break down the binaries between self and other in order to avoid reinscribing inequality or essentializing differences. She emphasizes that the "construction of subjugation, nativity, and insiderness, as privileged epistemic standpoints from which to counter the universalism of Western theory, are all premised on maintaining the same borderlines between Us and Them, Self and Other, and Subject and Object that (we) wish to question in the first place" (p. 198).

Some of us have chosen collaborative research as perhaps one means to address these challenges and heed the call for action-oriented research. But how does this happen in practice? Using examples from my own research and that of others, I wish to address some of the continuing dilemmas.

Certainly an initial consideration involves power. Who has the right, or the access, to decide to collaborate? I was reminded of this during a 2001 roundtable discussion of my work on the representation of Mapuche women in state gender policy in Chile (see Richards 2004). The event was made possible by Teresa Valdés, my mentor at Flacso-Chile, and took place in the national office of the National Women's Service (SERNAM). It was attended by "femocrats" from SERNAM and other government agencies, representatives from feminist NGOs, and members of rural and urban Mapuche women's organizations, many of whom I had interviewed for my study. After the discussion concluded, I talked to one of the urban Mapuche women I had invited to attend. She observed, "You know, Patricia, if you were not here, we would never have had this meeting." She was not simply praising me. Rather, she was pointing out that this instance reinscribed some of the very inequalities the women had criticized in my interviews with them: Mapuche women get access to the femocrats at SERNAM only because the *gringa* researcher is presenting her project, which is based, incidentally, on 18 months of fieldwork, not a lifetime of experience. Researchers who want to collaborate, she indicated, need to be attentive to the ways their collaborative efforts may perpetuate injustice.

Diane Nelson addresses how *gringos,* researchers and otherwise, frequently get away with not taking responsibility for the ways we are complicit in oppression in Latin America. She explains (1999:62):

> I want to be very clear that solidarity is in part about enjoyment and about forms of self-fashioning that may not be very self-reflexive. As gringos, we rely on heroes and villains. We feel more content with ourselves when we are positioned as moral subjects against the voracious and

unjust power structure and as the vehicles of justice for the victims whose side we take. Gayatri Spivak's shorthand for such positions vis-à-vis these self-consolidating others, "white men saving brown women from brown men," is taken from the British intervention in *sati* (widow burning) that served as a justification for colonialism. We need to rigorously explore the ways our interventions as "white people saving brown people from slightly less-brown people" may maintain colonialist style relations, may blind us to difference among these people, and are integral to consolidating a subject position as gringa.

But nor is Nelson willing to abandon activism. She insists as well upon "strategies of writing that flow from a self-consciousness of, and political resistance to, the privilege that makes that benevolence possible" (p.70).

Feminist sociologists and others also need to address continued resistance to "other knowledges" within our disciplines. Casas-Cortés (2005) addresses this in her recent *LASA Forum* essay, calling for "barricadas cognitivas" within academia, which would question the canon and open up space for other forms of knowledge, recognizing them and treating their producers as subjects capable of theory and intellectual thought. This is a huge challenge in highly bureaucratic disciplines, where even being honest about positionality and struggles in the field is likely to raise suspicion about the validity of the authors' work in the eyes of reviewers and colleagues (McCorkel and Myers 2003). Moreover, in many departments, publications in a second language do not even count toward tenure! I was once warned by a sociologist mentor to not allow my respondents to "do my theory" for me. Certainly attitudes such as these have to be combated directly if we are

to approach a scenario in which "other knowledges" are legitimated, collaborative research is considered a valid methodological approach, and activist scholars are not scorned for their lack of objectivity and rigor.

Yet once the decision is made to engage in collaborative research, the feminist sociologist realizes that this type of research is not exempt from ethical quandaries of its own. My current project focuses on how different social actors, including large-scale farmers, local elites, the media, municipal bureaucrats, and Mapuche leaders, react to neoliberal-multicultural discourse and policies, sometimes re-imagining forms of belonging and other times reinscribing difference and inequality. Although perhaps not a research topic typically associated with feminist inquiry, I have strived to carry out this project according to feminist methodological principles: being reflexive, action-oriented, and bringing my research back, among other things. I decided on the topic after consulting with Mapuche friends and colleagues, who felt the results of such a study might be useful to Mapuche organizations and researchers, who would likely be refused access by some of those actors. And yet, in doing this research, I am frequently confronted by Mapuche who want me to interview particular actors with whom they are in conflict and, of course, then wish to know what they said in the interview. My commitments as a supporter of the Mapuche struggle and my responsibilities to my research subjects, regardless of their political orientation, come into conflict at these moments.

Then there is also the issue of with whom to collaborate in a complicated field. It may be obvious to say so, but not everyone in a given movement likes each other. A researcher's need for transparency and honest relations with all parties becomes paramount. Furthermore, the notion of

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getting beyond benevolence, I believe, is key. For many of us, and here I include myself, the notion of collaboration has not gone much beyond bringing our research back for critique or doing favors (helping write grant proposals, translating documents, paying for trips to conferences, arranging invitations to publicize indigenous struggles at U.S. universities) for our respondents and their organizations. Clearly, collaboration implies more than this: a relationship between equals, all of whom have something indispensable to offer to the intellectual-activist enterprise. Nevertheless, the extreme economic disparities that structure our relationships mean that this equality is often difficult to approach in practice.

Finally, collaborative research of this sort also requires humility. Even among the most sincere of us, there is a need for U.S. scholar-activists to admit we have something to learn from our friends and colleagues in the Global South, to see ourselves as part of a transnational world, as complicit, as Nelson reminds us, with an ugly past and present vis-à-vis the rest of the world. We need to get beyond paternalism, and find ways to do effective activist research in Latin America, but we need to realize that being part of a transnational world means that we have activism to do at home, too. My friends in Wallmapu (the entire Mapuche territory, on both sides of the Chile-Argentina border) and elsewhere have been much more successful in generating relevant social movement activism than I and my friends and colleagues have in Georgia. As the 1st U.S. Social Forum is set to take place in Atlanta in June of 2007, we would do well to seek the advice and knowledge of our partners in the Global South, as we seek to generate new ways of doing politics in our own backyard.

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Research Collaboration from a Geographer's Perspective

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What do we mean when we speak of research collaboration? There can be many sorts of research collaboration, including interdisciplinary collaboration, collaboration among researchers in different parts of the world, and joint endeavors between university-based scholars and researchers in other venues, or between scholars and policy or activist organizations. All of these visions of collaboration have generated debate within Geography over the years.

Within Geography, discussions about the politics and practices of research collaboration have often formed part of broader debates on the discipline's "relevance" in the wider world. These debates go back at least as far as the late 1960s and early 1970s, when critics of the abstract geometries of the spatial science school sought to replace the positivist paradigm with a more normative approach. Early attempts at forging an "applied Geography" to tackle social problems developed into a more sweeping critique of existing institutions and the emergence of "radical Geography" in the United States. The first initiatives of the "radical Geography" movement, such as the "Detroit Expeditions" projects, sought to link the intellectual resources of the university with marginalized urban communities, spurring a wave of publications on issues such as U.S. urban social conditions as well as "Third World" development.

Critics such as David Harvey soon lambasted these projects as ad hoc efforts to create a "dossier" on poverty (see Staeheli and Mitchell 2005 for some of this

background). The task of the radical geographer would be to construct an alternative framework of analysis using the tools of historical materialism. The early efforts to forge socially aware research collaborations rooted in particular places were subsumed to a large extent by what Walker (2005:3) describes as the "dense, arcane, frustrating (but valuable) language of "high Marx" (cf. Robbins 2004:68).

By the 1980s and 1990s, the engagement of human geographers not only with Marxism, but also with other currents of critical social and cultural theory produced rich contributions to development studies, political ecology, grounded studies of globalization, and many other areas. Such "collaborations" went in many directions, as other branches of social science and the humanities "discovered" critical human geography. Feminist geographers made vital contributions to the critique of research practices and praxis. (It would be impossible for me to cite here all the feminist geographers who have made important contributions; for a recent discussion, see Sharp 2005.)

Currently, there is renewed debate within Geography over the question of "relevance," including the thorny issues of research collaborations (Pain 2004; Murphy et al 2005; Staeheli and Mitchell 2005; Ward 2005; Walker 2006). As Staeheli and Mitchell note, the question is not whether Geography is relevant (it clearly is), but rather, to whom is it relevant, and for what end? In some respects these questions seem to bring us back full circle to the doubts and critiques of years gone by. Perhaps the power structures in which we operate have not changed all that much if we need to ask ourselves (perennially, it seems) such elementally existential questions. Yet, it would be silly to dismiss all the important work that has gone on in recent decades.

Just a few examples might include the collaborations between feminist geographers and GIS specialists to create "critical cartographies," (such as Mei-Po Kwan's work), geographers working in research teams with global climate scientists (such as Diana Liverman), geographers who choose to publish their research in more publicly accessible venues (such as Wendy Wolford and Angus Wright's book on Brazil's landless movement published by Food First), to scholars such as Gillian Hart whose research speaks to specific and pressing social and political debates post-apartheid South Africa. Of course, there are also myriad forms of research collaboration that the written trail doesn't capture.

I would like to twist Staelehi and Mitchell's questions a bit: the issue, it seems, is not whether research collaboration happens (it clearly does), but between whom does it happen, under what terms, and to what end? In terms of my own experience, despite an excellent exposure to many of the above debates within critical human geography, as well as to feminist research epistemologies and methodologies, I can't really say that my background in Geography "trained" me for research collaboration. To the extent that my research is collaborative (and I'm not convinced that it is, as noted below), this comes more out of my personal background and motivation, as I suspect it does for many people. But it is an experience that is also highly constrained by the context in which I work (a university where I am untenured!). As an aside: I found it interesting and slightly alarming that the junior faculty respondents in Staelehi and Mitchell's study of the politics of relevance chose to remain anonymous….

The genesis and heart of my interest in research collaboration really came from the several years I lived in Guatemala before graduate school. In the late 1980s, I worked

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as a researcher at the Association for the Advancement of the Social Sciences (AVANCSO), an institute formed by young Guatemalan scholars in the early wake of Guatemala's counterinsurgency war. Along with several other North Americans (including Paula Worby and Diane Nelson, whose writings on being a *gringa* researcher in Guatemala are discussed by Patricia Richards in this volume), my very presence as a foreigner in Guatemala at this time constituted a sort of research collaboration, even as it inscribed the inequities of U.S.-Guatemalan relations. It was a dangerous time for Guatemalan scholars to be conducting fieldwork, especially in the rural areas that were still heavily militarized. It was thought that the presence of U.S. citizens in the research team would provide a measure of protection, an assumption that turned out to be false, as we found out with the 1990 assassination of our research team leader, anthropologist Myrna Mack.

Despite the murder of its co-founder, AVANCSO continues to create a vital intellectual space in Guatemala, with a commitment to in-depth fieldwork and collaboration with popular sector organizations. Of course, some of the same pitfalls that are written about at length in U.S. academic journals are also present there: doubts over how to meld theory with "useful" research, as well as the time-consuming and often excruciating process of finding common ground and building trust with diverse social organizations.

The training I received at AVANCSO shaped my trajectory as a researcher. I chose to do dissertation research on the politics of labor restructuring in Guatemala's Pacific coast plantation zone largely because I thought that I might again deploy my "foreigner" status to gain access to interviews and areas that were perhaps still sensitive for national researchers. I maintained a commitment to

publish as much of my research as I could in Spanish. I took time off from my dissertation research in the late 1990s to work with the Guatemalan Truth Commission.

Currently, as a faculty member in a Latin American Studies center, my situation is perhaps unusual in that part of my job description entails building "collaborative" relationships with institutions in the region. So I do receive some "credit" for having long-standing ties to Guatemala. As part of our institutional outreach, for example, the University of Arizona has begun a partnership with the Center for Mesoamerican Research (CIRMA) in Antigua, Guatemala, to offer an undergraduate study abroad program, through which CIRMA hopes to generate revenue to support its extensive research library.

In other ways, however, my situation is typical of an untenured Assistant Professor. My college does not want to recognize research published in a language other than English. Even with motive and opportunity, I have not engaged in what I would call more substantive research collaboration, i.e., generating research questions in tandem with research subjects or with social organizations in Guatemala. I will go on the record admitting that the reason is fear, fear that the process would take too long, or that the very delicate relationships that one has to forge to sustain such a project might fall apart before a publication could be produced. Indeed, although it seems counterintuitive to me, by publishing in Spanish and in diverse venues, I wonder if I have gone quite far out on a limb already.

I wonder, too, what research collaboration can mean in a context where the academic reward system remains pretty much unchanged, despite nearly four decades of

critical reflection and calls for "relevant" research. Is "research collaboration" shorthand for "find research opportunities for our graduate students?" Who determines the issues around which collaboration may be built?

Most of the academic articles that deal with the ethical issues of research collaboration, or the question of relevance in general, end by bemoaning the seemingly intractable scenario of university tenure and promotion decisions. While not denying that reality, maybe there are ways to move forward just a little bit. If we look at the example of some of the most important funding agencies, such as the Social Science Research Council and the National Science Foundation, we can see a trend toward encouraging international research networks. We could push, through our own research practices, to make those networks as dynamic and equitable as possible. We (meaning you, the already tenured) could also push our university committees to recognize that the fruits of this international collaboration might sometimes be journal articles in English, and other times a monograph in Spanish or Portuguese, or even some other, less tangible, product.

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The Comparative Politics of *Compañerismo* and Collaboration

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During a typically cold morning in La Paz, Bolivia, I was conducting an interview with a government official for my doctoral dissertation on indigenous social movements. Familiar with meeting with visiting researchers, the official asked me by way of introduction: *"¿Qué eres?"* I understood the question to be not a heavy existential one, but one about my professional background. I told him that I was a political scientist, to which he replied instantly and quite appropriately: *"Nadie es perfecto."* Indeed. As a social scientist *en ciernes*, my first months conducting fieldwork in the Andes were daily lessons about how much I didn't know about conducting fieldwork in the Andes. While fieldwork has long been seen as a disciplinary rite of passage for practitioners of comparative political science (more so than other subfields of the discipline), being "in the field" is something rarely taught in seminars but most often gleaned from private conversations with wise advisors, insightful friends, and learned very much on-the-job. In this space, I would like to reflect on two moments of fieldwork education, both of which were also lessons about the importance and challenges of collaboration.

Years ago, before I left for "the field," I had the good fortune to meet with a political scientist who had just written an important book on indigenous politics in Chiapas. I had shared my dissertation proposal with him and he generously shared his thoughts on the theoretical debates and research questions I had written about. Over coffee, I asked for his advice on the more nuts-and-bolts elements of working in the field.

Among the things he told me, the one *consejo* that stayed with me as I entered the field was the following one: be a *compañero*. Reflecting on this over the next months and years, I have come to understand this to mean that our social scientific research is social before (or just as) it is scientific. It is an intervention in people's lives and worlds that needs to be justified first and foremost to those people who make it possible. Research, in this view, is not simply another extractive industry that comes to Latin America but rather can (or, better, should) contribute something to communities, causes, and contexts we study. While this kind of politically engaged research is not without its problems (for instance, "distasteful" movements often go understudied and one may find it uncomfortable at times to speak inconvenient truths to the relatively powerless), it was a model of scholarship that I found appealing.

With this in mind, I worked with indigenous organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Ecuador and Bolivia and following the lead of other researchers I knew, worked out agreements in which I would provide some service in exchange for a certain amount of scholarly access to documents and interviews. I saw this as both a short-term and long-term kind of commitment. While in the field, I provided assistance with tasks that the organizations found important. While this included many small kinds of tasks, like logistical help during meetings, providing translation services, and presenting my preliminary research findings to the organizations, perhaps the best example of one kind of contribution was the creation of web pages for various organizations, done in collaboration with historian Marc Becker and NativeWeb. After the completion of fieldwork, I kept in touch with many of the people I worked with and involved some of

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them in later projects that included an international conference at Princeton University in which indigenous activists, development professionals, and social scientists together debated and discussed the achievement and challenges of the new millennium of indigenous politics (Lucero ed, 2003). For the kinds of research questions that I am interested in—ones about the transnational interventions of indigenous people in debates over development and democracy—my potential collaborators included people from indigenous organizations, NGOs, development agencies, and the academy.

Yet, could I truly be a *compañero* to all these different kinds of actors? Or perhaps more to the point, could I be a *compañero* to any of them? In my last week of doctoral field research in Ecuador, at the invitation of the director of the Ecuadorian research center with which I was affiliated, I delivered a talk reporting some of the findings of my research on indigenous representation. I asked that invitations be sent to the various indigenous organizations with which I had worked and I was glad (and nervous) when many indigenous leaders attended my talk. In the talk, I often referred to these indigenous leaders (and others) as "*compañeros*." I did this perhaps with the old advice in mind, but also because this word was ubiquitous among many Ecuadorian indigenous leaders. While the term is almost certainly borrowed from the Left, among many indigenous activists, *compañerokuna* is a Kichwa word used for Kichwa causes. I could not help but feel a certain sense of satisfaction when indigenous leaders would refer to me as a *compañero* and thought that it was not out of place for me to also return the gesture. The day after my talk, as the non-indigenous Ecuadorian director of the research center and I spoke over coffee, he provided me with some excellent critiques of my work but also told

me that, in future talks, I should not refer to them as "*compañeros* as only they can use that term among themselves." Had I missed a Barthian identity frontier? Had I forgotten Goffman's insights about insiders and outsiders? Had I mistaken a provisional and contextual acceptance for a deeper form of solidarity? Had I presumed too much? In graduate student fashion, I began to dwell on these and other insecurities and was convinced that I had made a mistake, but hopefully an instructive one.

In my most recent trip to the Andes, this time to Peru, I asked a prominent American social scientist and director of an influential NGO whether he found it difficult to establish horizontal relationships with the indigenous people with whom he worked. My assumption was that the person from the North was always already situated in a position of superiority vis-à-vis the person from the South that he has come to help. While he agreed that there were problems with these kinds of hierarchies, he told me that "this hierarchy is in the indigenous person's head before it was in mine." This was offered not as an apology but rather as part of an explanation of the ways that colonialism continues to set the table at which we seek to sit together.

During the same trip, I approached a Peruvian indigenous organization with an idea for a collaborative project that we might submit to LASA's *Otros Saberes* initiative. My idea was, using Nader's familiar if problematic expression, to "study up" and explore the motivations, assumptions, and discourses of Northern NGOs who come to work with indigenous organizations. While the indigenous organization's leaders were interested and continue to be very supportive of my own research agenda, they told me that they had already collaborated on a proposal for the competition with a Peruvian Quechua

anthropologist and felt that is would be inappropriate to submit an additional project. This was not only reasonable but also, I thought, a positive sign of the changing times. When indigenous organizations are able to work with indigenous social scientists and turn down the invitations from those of us that come from the "North" perhaps we are able to be *compañero*s in more meaningful ways that depend less on the good intentions of visiting social scientists but more on the growing capacities and capabilities of indigenous and popular actors.

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