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Assuming Power in New Forms: Learning to Feel ‘With the Other’ in Decolonial Research

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I remain deeply interested in what research is, and how research as an idea has evolved in the west, what its meanings are, what people think they are doing when they say they are ‘doing research’ or when they are teaching others to do research (Appadurai, 2006, p. 169).

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On 3 June 2018, Guatemala's Chi'gag volcano¹, known more widely as *Volcán de Fuego* (Fire), erupted, resulting in devastating and tragic consequences for local individuals and communities. Due to Guatemala's endemic legacy of poverty, exclusion, and social violations, this disaster, like many previously, disproportionately impacted those already marginalised. There is no clear consensus regarding the effects of the disaster, but it is estimated that between 114 and 413 people died, 3200 were forced to move to temporary shelters, and a total of around 1.7 million were in some way impacted. Furthermore, around USD 214 million was lost through damage to infrastructure, trade and businesses (CONRED, 2018; CEPAL, 2018; Romano, 2019).

As demonstrated in the works of Few et al. (2021), Hallegatte et al. (2017), Zambrano and Gómez (2015), and Narváez et al. (2009), disasters primarily affect people and communities who have faced and continue to experience epistemic injustice. Researchers have identified the 'root causes of risk' and demonstrated that peoples' vulnerability to disaster is largely determined by social systems, unequal power relations and differential access to resources (Wisner et al., 2004). Countless models for calculating risk and potential economic losses exist, variables to measure vulnerability are used to inform policy and researchers continue to show that these disasters are not natural (e.g. Puttick et al., 2018; Wisner et al., 2015).

¹ In the Kaqchikel language, this is the name that was given to what we now know as the Volcán de Fuego (Volcano of Fire) in Guatemala.

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Despite important advances and contributions to policy and practice, calls have recently been made to rethink research agendas, methods, and resource allocation in Disaster Risk Studies to make it more equitable and to avoid reproducing the very injustices that the discipline is trying to overcome.² At the same time, appeals to decolonise Disaster Risk Studies have appeared in various special issues and publications (Armijos & Ramirez, 2021; Cadag, 2022; Marchezini et al., 2021; Yadav et al., 2022). Within these publications, however, there is little exploration of the interaction between emotions, knowledge production, and power relationships as an intrinsic part of the research process in a topic—Disaster Risk Studies—that is constituted by traumatic and complex events.

This chapter aims to contribute to the important endeavour of decolonising Disaster Risk Studies and, more broadly, Development Studies, by focusing on the researcher and how they (and therefore the knowledge they produce) change with and through the emotions embedded in the research process (Garcia Dauder & Ruiz Trejo, 2021). Through a series of individual narratives, we explore how the researchers' multiplicity of positionalities are transformed by the research process in its circular relationship with emotions that emerge and, in turn, inform it. In doing so, we recognise plural forms of knowledge production (Escobar, 2003) that transcend the realm of 'thinking' to acknowledge ethical, emotional and relational commitments in the research process (Cahill, 2007a). We argue that this is a step towards both admitting vulnerability and assuming power and knowledge in new forms, while also challenging dualisms often present in Western thinking (body/mind; reason/emotion; public/private; researcher/research object) and their associated hierarchies and hegemonies (Cahill, 2007a; Garcia Dauder & Ruiz Trejo, 2020).

In what follows, we explore individual and collective experiences that we had as researchers involved in the participatory action research project 'From volcanic disaster to psychosocial recovery: art, storytelling and knowledge exchange (2018–2021)'. The chapter is divided into three sections: first we introduce the project that brought the authors together and the activities we conducted. We then present nine personal reflections from the team focusing on how doing research on disaster risk has

² See, for instance, the RADIX Manifesto. Retrieved on February 1 2023, from: <https://www.radixonline.org/manifesto-accord>

individually and collectively transformed us. In presenting these personal thoughts, we take a feminist methodological approach and offer individual exercises of ‘deep reflexion’ (Rocheleau, 2015; Garcia Dauder & Ruiz Trejo, 2020). Through these narratives, we argue that decolonising research and challenging existing hierarchies of knowledge and power (e.g. Escobar, 2016; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Segato, 2015; Smith, 2012; Sultana, 2019) entails recognising the political, ethical and analytical role that emotions play in the research process (Jakimow, 2022; Garcia Dauder & Ruiz Trejo, 2020). We conclude with some implications of this awareness for decolonial research.

EXCHANGING EXPERIENCES OF DISASTER AND RECOVERY

The project ‘From volcanic disaster to psychosocial recovery’ connected people from Guatemala, Ecuador, and Colombia who had been marked by volcanic disasters and, using creativity and art, encouraged the exchange of knowledge and experiences as a form of promoting psychosocial recovery. Approaches used to design the project included the ethics of care (Gilligan, 2013), liberation psychology (Shapiro 2020), decolonial engagements with power and knowledge production (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Segato 2015), and storytelling as a form of personal and social recovery after a traumatic experience (Jackson, 2013). We used art and creative expression to open spaces of careful knowledge and emotional exchange between the survivors while also encouraging the imagining of possible post-disaster futures (Carruyo, 2016; Shapiro, 2020). What we did not envisage was the impact that this project would have on us, the ‘researchers’. It is precisely those experiences that this chapter examines.

Our first research moment took place in June 2019, when four academics, two artists and three volcanic disaster survivors travelled from Ecuador, Colombia, and the UK to Guatemala. During an initial event, the *Escuchemos* (Let’s Listen) workshop, in which we got to know local community leaders and listened to their eruption and evacuation experiences³, we were able to propose our methodology for knowledge exchange. We subsequently worked with approximately 80 people affected by the eruption, drawn from two communities, Santa Rosa and

³ The *Escuchemos* workshop was funded and organised through a NERC (Natural Environment Research Council) Urgency grant NE/S011498/1.

15 de Octubre La Trinidad. In a circle beneath a giant Ceiba⁴ tree, we started with introductions to the wider community groups. Stories and experiences from Ecuador and Colombia were shared with those who had recently experienced disaster in Guatemala. We also walked along with the survivors in a procession and attended a ceremony commemorating a year since the eruption.

After sharing experiences of volcanic disaster and recovery under the Ceiba tree and in a classroom, everyone was invited to draw what they would like their communities to look like in the future (Carruyo, 2016; Shapiro, 2020). This approach pursues a form of cognitive justice by sharing experiences, through listening and finding commonalities and differences among those who had lived through the disasters and their distinct journeys of recovery. In this context, sharing stories is recognised as a fundamental human need, a way of restoring some sense of ‘humanity’ after extreme traumatic experiences (Jackson, 2013). The individual drawings were combined and used as a basis for murals painted in two bus stops in Santa Rosa and the community canteen in *La Dignidad* (The Dignity), a temporary shelter in Escuintla, Guatemala, where people from la Trinidad were living. Men and women, while painting the walls and telling more stories, understood their pain and their grief and felt that they were not totally alone as others in different parts of Latin America had experienced similar events. This is explored in more detail below, but the researchers and artists were challenged at every step, too, navigating between theoretical and epistemic frameworks, trying to understand and make sense of the strong emotions we ourselves were feeling as a result of the exchanges. While listening and painting, we continuously questioned the role we played in the survivors’ revisiting of their experience (Fig. 9.1).

“An older woman smiles while observing a painted mural in a bus stop. The mural portrays a flowery rural landscape, with happy families gathering around a volcano”.

In early 2020, the research team and leaders of the two participating communities prepared for a face-to-face meeting in Guatemala. Here, photographs and other artistic work from the activities in 2019 would

⁴ La Ceiba (*Ceiba pantandra*) or Kapok tree is the national tree of Guatemala. It is used as a gathering point for community meetings in many places.



Fig. 9.1 Bus stop, Santa Rosa, Guatemala. June 2018. Photo by Rosmarie Lerner

be exhibited in a public space to contribute to the dialogue with local and national authorities. The aim of the exhibition was to improve living conditions and help residents lead dignified lives after the disaster. The arrival of COVID-19 made this in-person gathering impossible. We experienced a taste of ‘research on demand’ (Segato, 2015) when participants from Guatemala, Ecuador, and Colombia asked the research team to find a way to continue this journey together. Those who, at another time, would be the ‘research subjects’ were driving the research process forward. In the spirit of decolonising knowledge production, and the defence of collective voices, we aspired to feel, smell and create, as we had done months before under the Ceiba tree in Guatemala. This represented an important methodological challenge. In response, we agreed to meet online and three new members joined the team to help facilitate knowledge and emotional exchange in virtual spaces across different countries.

We recognised that the power of healing through words and personal encounter as a form of resistance could not easily be replicated through our screens. It was thinking from the heart—feeling-thinking (*sentipensar*)—within the communities and territories where we worked that opened methodological paths for us (Fals Borda, 2009; Escobar, 2016). In this approach, ‘territories’ are a set of emotions, identities and thoughts that configure connected orders of meaning, rooted in places and cultural particularities. We approached the challenge and overcame some of the distance by combining the virtual meetings with an idea that has been around for centuries: a *kipi*, a traditional bag used by Indigenous women in the Andes to carry children or objects on their backs. The one we received in each one of our homes contained an essence (rosemary oil), accompanied by fabrics, threads, needles, phrases, colours, paper, pencil, and photographs, filled with creative possibilities. We travelled symbolically with them across the kilometres to Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, and the United Kingdom.

The Ceiba tree and the borrowed classroom turned to Google Meet and in 2020 and 2021 we were, once more, exchanging glances, ready to feel the comfort of seeing each other.⁵ Our methodology which at the start of the research process had been collective painting and discussing possible futures during face-to-face workshops, was transformed into online storytelling and artistic creative sessions. Thus, we could continue to support work on psychosocial recovery while also recognising the need for people to rebuild relationships with their territories where disaster had occurred. For months, during these online meetings, both the disaster survivors and the researchers and facilitators exchanged experiences mediated by the *kipi*’s shared symbols and materials. No matter where we were, we wove words and memories into strength. Based on the shared experiences of disaster and recovery, we carefully created an illustrated, written, and narrated story about recovery from volcanic disasters that represented the diverse histories that had been shared. The story responded to a fundamental wish from the project participants: to ensure

⁵ Eight virtual meetings were organised during 2020 and 2021 and attended by five community representatives of volcanic disaster survivors from Santa Rosa and 15 de Octubre la Trinidad in Guatemala, two from Nevado del Ruiz in Colombia and one from Tungurahua Ecuador. Nine researchers, artists and facilitators from Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador and the UK also participated in these meetings—the authors of this text. For more details please visit the webpage created to bring together the process. <https://www.tejiendorenacres.com>.

that subsequent generations know what had happened in all three locations.⁶ In addition to the illustrated story, a quilt was also created, for which all online participants contributed a fragment of their stories of recovery, of their own life, of our shared experiences, in the form of a painted or embroidered piece of cloth. These fabrics travelled from Colombia, Ecuador and the United Kingdom to Guatemala, where their stories were stitched together into a large quilt that will be exhibited in other communities affected by disasters in Guatemala.

A QUILT OF VOICES: THINKING-FEELING WITH THE OTHER

With the aim of learning how to feel and think in producing decolonial knowledge (Fals Borda, 2009), and to write this chapter as an exercise of deep reflection, the team members asked themselves: what were we doing, thinking, and feeling when we were weaving and painting alongside the disaster survivors? What did building collective stories mean for us? How can we participate and reflect, as outsiders, with those who have experienced disasters firsthand? What intellectual and emotional spaces are we ‘allowed’ to inhabit in this kind of research process?

Here, we present responses to these questions from nine members of the team: researchers, artists, activists, colleagues from Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and the United Kingdom. Through these narratives, we share a polysemic weaving of voices and images, bringing the feeling-thinking research journey to life. These reflections are shared as individual honest and open texts, a considered depart from the traditional hierarchies of knowledge production through the acceptance and pursuit of emotional bonds. We interrogate how knowledge is produced and explore how ‘new forms of solidarities and collectivities’ (Sultana, 2021, p. 158) that result from emotion and sharing of experiences between researchers and participants are built into the research process itself. We therefore pursue the assumption of power (and vulnerability) in new ways and through emotion (Cahill, 2007a) and in a personal narrative form.

⁶ The story is available in print and online, on the project webpage. www.tejiendorena.ceres.com. The printed version of the story has been distributed to the participants and their communities in Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador and UK.

The following section will be subdivided in several parts. Each represents one of our voices, and together it becomes our collective experience and voice.

William

I am William and I write as the son of a labourer father and a housewife mother. A heterosexual man, with all the privileges and suffering that it brings. I am *Mestizo* (mixed-race with Spanish and Indigenous descent), or at least that's what the Spanish Empire called us. An academic for those who only speak in the language that we were colonised with. I write from the field of psychology, which is my profession. Sustainable development and the environment are my fields of expertise. The culture and knowledge of Latin America are the current steppingstones of my doctoral research and training.

Vamos pueblo, carajo! El pueblo no se rinde carajo! (Let's go people, damnit! The people will never give up, damnit!). Those were the two slogans, among others, unfathomable and unquantifiable like the dreams of a dignified life, which accompanied the social movements that progressed in Colombia during 2021. Decolonial research, as a subversive praxis, is possible, when subjects establish and cultivate knowledge, as well as think from the heart and feel with the head. It is from here that we resonate, harmonise, and dissociate for this project. The journey started by recognising the eternal presence of feelings, sealed by the injustice of pain and grief lingering from the events in Armero (1985), Tungurahua (1999-2016) and Volcan de Fuego (2018). Here, neutrality and objectivity, both dogmas of positivism, fall into the void that follows them. I cannot be neutral when facing injustice, when facing pain; it is impossible to be objective while their expression and shaping emerge through intersubjectivity.

It was in the fertile land of Guatemala that bodies, souls, and footsteps were gathered. The individual voice came to be the collective voice of Colombia, Guatemala, Ecuador, and the United Kingdom. It came through shared pain and, before the exhausted persons who did not want to be shaped only by the tragedy, it blossomed through knowledge, feelings, and transformative thoughts. There I was, beneath the shade of the Ceiba tree, clumsy in my actions, with this little bit of humanity, facing men and women who, with great strength, transformed uncertainty in coming together into a creative aesthetic for healing and recovery. I saw

them, I felt them, I smelled them, I touched them, I listened to them. I could not help but challenge, once more, albeit with new elements involved, the poverty prevailing in research methods. There I was nestled, positioned, stating from the perspective of 'us'.

This 'us' invited me to think of those unknown people whose voices no longer wander this plane, simply due to their not being part of a social class protected by money. They walked early into the arms of death simply for being proletariats, inexhaustibly seeking air to endure, day by day, the fires smothered by the men who imposed inequality as a form of social interaction, those who held the mountain accountable for the death caused. These were the people who I was deprived of knowing. So, there I was, clumsy in my actions, surrounded with this little bit of humanity, baring my soul, ready to heal myself, to heal us.

The pandemic became our companion for these furtive steps. The shadow of *La Ceiba* became distant, those initial aromas were no longer there. We needed to prepare ourselves to meet in different ways. The weaving, painting, and new aromas, mediated, paradoxically, through Zoom blossomed in our spaces. And there, once more, with my minute breath and the forthcoming scourges of love, I found myself. We all found ourselves. We put together a team through the notion of the authentic soul, while we accounted for deaths in Colombia... *el pueblo no se rinde carajo!* And in our team, we also did not give up. What was I doing by smelling, painting, and weaving in this project? Healing myself, healing all of us together, sharing tears and laughter as the base of a fountain of knowledge.

As knowledge was formed, we also formed ourselves. Every voice was one of support. The language we used made us reflect philosophically, in that beautiful way that caresses the soul. We painted, to reflect what was said when the words were silent. The aromas and textures opened up a return to Nature, since it was she that was first felt. Hummingbird wings allowed us to soar through the mountains, the loops, and the crags. We were careful to not cause ourselves harm, and to not live with harm as a categorical imperative. Time flowed for those eternal gatherings which, in reality, lasted just an hour.

Carolina

I am Carolina, a Guatemalan woman who was marked by the Chi'gag volcano eruption. A communication expert by profession, I write from

my best kept memories of this journey. I want to tell my story as though it were a *güipil*.⁷ It is not only a piece of clothing which is representative of our Mayan identity, but also a garment preserving colours, threads, stories, fights, reawakening, and knowledge which have all been passed down from generation to generation. In them, we can uncover the sky, the dawn, the sunset, both death and healing, spirituality, ethereality, the sun, maize, nature herself, as I have discovered them myself on this journey with people who are so far, yet so close all at once.

My path in this *güipil* began by remembering the stories which had been embroidered into me and into the volcanoes, beneath the earth, sharing the same land. It all reconnected me to a recent past, full of life experience. Through the *güipil*, all of my senses came alive, but it was my hands, together with the hands of the others, the protagonists of my story, which made me go back, made me resist, and made me appreciate it all. I never used to embroider, and yet, here, I embroidered.

I spent many years believing that the needle and thread were not my friends, that they didn't belong to me, nor me to them, but how wrong I was! It was an experience that was as unexpected as it was necessary. In that moment, I felt myself thinking about how I wanted to share the experiences that had marked me over the last few years, from that grey day in June 2018, and it took me back to Chi'gag, and continues to take me back there. I wanted to share what I had seen, what I had been told, what I had felt when I was told, as well as what I had felt when seeing the injustices happening all around me. I started to give shape to my weaving. Each stitch was a story, a smile, a tear. I found it so freeing, and it was only afterwards that I realised that I wasn't just telling someone else's stories, but I was also telling mine. In each stitch, I felt the hands of my grandmother, who was excellent at embroiderer. I felt her eyes seeing what mine saw, and I honoured her. I honoured my mother too, who, with her delicate hands, had weaved four lives.

And this is how it was every afternoon. I connected with my core, with what was deep down inside me. I listened to what came from within, and I began to heal. I was not only weaving a past, but also a present that saw a free future, full of lights and beautiful moments lingering on a patch

⁷ A traditional embroidered blouse wore by Indigenous women in Guatemala. Each community has a different style of embroidery and can be identified by their style and use of colours.

from a quilt that was created in the east, the south, and in the centre of the cosmos. How refreshing.

With everyone sitting beneath the shade of the Ceiba tree, we created moments which were then transformed into new ideas, into new words. Time stopped while we heard the fluttering wings of butterflies newly born from their cocoons. Not a day went by when this fluttering didn't leave us with a smile on our faces, a knot in our throats, or simply a beautiful memory to hold onto. We learned to take our time, to surprise ourselves by smelling the inviting aroma of the rosemary, touching a lemon leaf, listening to the call of the condor. We grew from within ourselves, and we healed together.

Yes, we had lived with the bellow of the volcano under different suns, but we moved together under one *güipil*, which recounted the tales of fights, awakenings, and teachings through its fabric. And here I am, embroidering once more, creating a new patch for this quilt of memories.

Lina

I am Lina, a woman, daughter, mother, wife, and friend who found, through the fields of psychology, research, and disaster risk, an opportunity to understand what is human, and to rescue it from the depths of what is not.

Here's a little something from my past... Aged just 10 years old, on Tuesday 13 November 1985, I heard a call coming from inside my house: 'What's happening? Why are people making such a racket? What could it be?' My mum leaned out of the window and asked the neighbours: 'what happened?' 'It's all red, it seems like the Nevado is red!', they responded. 'Armero? That's where Aunt Lilia lives!' she said. My grandfather, a man so close to my heart, who loved the beautiful custom of eating fruits, a man who smelled of coffee and the countryside, arrived with his weaponry (a sack, a machete, and rubber boots) and his grey hairs, and declared: 'I'm going to find my sister!'

My mother, through her tears, bid him goodbye.

There came a knock at the door. My grandfather had returned, bringing nothing with him but sorrows and the bitter tales of pain and rupture, accounts of orphans, mud, thefts, and the fear of being left buried.

One year later, it was decided that we should consider Aunt Lilia to have passed away. Once again, my mother cried, but with more pain.

Time passed... Years later, I volunteered with the Red Cross as a psychology student. Here is where the story started, the one that has led you here to read these words today.

And now, many years later... I never could have imagined that today, once again, I would be seen, remembered, and asked questions as a granddaughter, a daughter, a niece, a cousin, and a researcher. I give to the world of writing the understanding of those feelings, thoughts, and dreams that I have held onto since my childhood.

What would have become of me, that 10-year-old full of feelings, thoughts, and dreams, in that moment, not understanding what had happened, hearing things like ‘the Nevado del Ruiz has exploded! Armero is gone! My aunt has disappeared!’. If I had weaved alongside and together with others, from the thoughts and dreams of men, women, families, and scientists, perhaps I would have better understood what it means to lose someone and not be able to say goodbye, and to appreciate and remember places as they were in my memory, without being able to visit them again.

Today, to the world of writing, I give the thimble, the needle, the brush, the colouring pencil, the fabric, and the thread, so that they convey and weave alongside the words and new scientific discoveries. I went to the heart of each library, shelf, or link, so that I could understand without the need to be ‘scientific’, but simply by being the colour, the brush, the canvas, the needle, and thread.

Through weaving together, we created real spaces in virtual environments, from my home and their homes, where every word, every stitch, and every brushstroke took me from country to country, imagining places, close to volcanoes, in Ecuador, Guatemala, and Colombia. I wove while journeying with my soul, while listening to it and beholding phrases, paintings, songs, aromas, *Las Ceibas*, and other marvels. These conjured up my own story, the story for which I fight day after day as a teacher, a researcher, and a dreamer, fighting for there to be no repetition of these disasters. There, where imagination is valued, that imagination which creates worthwhile realities filled with dignity, so that others might start to weave while baring their soul. I fight to join together the pieces of history with threads of hope, like a political demand to carry new dreams, through which we can create reality.

I was weaving, and my soul discovered through this research that we were and we continue to be one community, which has produced its own blanket for those cold moments, for those moments of uncertainty, of creation, and of dreaming.

Luis David

I am Luis David, a native of Kumanday,⁸ son of a migrant from the recession and a disappeared person from the violence, dedicated to the meticulous work of building a collective social fabric.

Stop and think.

A dream shows us separated. It is both sad and untrue. We are together, all connected. The dream resembles life and death. Perchance, are the functionaries who sit behind their screens and write in a dead language understood by nobody really living? Do they know that their words are of life and death? Or we could say that the women, men, and children who speak in our story are all dead, recounting to us their memories of resistance. They teach us in school that rocks are lifeless, and that the mountains are just a part of the landscape where people live their lives and build cities and roads...and the fire and the rock laugh when they surprise the people who, perched on shoulders, are terrified of their sighs and yawns.

Stop and start.

It is enough to create a circle to tear down the illusion. It is enough to look into each other's eyes and recognize each other as equals. It is enough to take the time to listen to the oldest stories. That fire which touches the very core of your chest, the very same that lives in Kumanday, in Volcán de Fuego, in Tungurahua... in everything and in everyone. We are one together, and we will continue to be one together. There is nothing which is remotely capable of changing that. There is no science which can do that. For this reason, thinking of art as a medium is to fall into the trap, to look from on high, hanging from the rope, everything at a distance, asking ourselves the right questions: where are we looking from? What are we feeling? How can we reflect and write?

We enter earnestly into the mud, and we submerge ourselves. It is simple and straightforward. Weaving allows us to return to the collective consciousness. We continue weaving, writing a text in parts, and ultimately, that's what we did. All of us did it together, because we carry on together. We ask permission, we give thanks. We are worthy messengers, pollinators of the message.

⁸ Kumanday was the name given to the volcano Nevado del Ruiz in Colombia by the Quimbaya people.

I remember Oti showing us a kidney bean. This same bean had been with her, moving with her since she was young, travelling with her when she needed to leave. It returned with her, expecting a land where it could be sown. I learned that day that the seed is her memory, it is her fuel. Her thinking is aligned with it. What is this bean, really, that joins us on our journey? What is it that binds it to our thinking in the background?

Stop and start.

Return to the everlasting collective. Spread the word instead of taking it. Lend your voice instead of snatching it away. Bridge the gap and cross it, if not for reassurance or to feel a part of something, then to be in the collective, when we can, and from where we can. Here, in the gathering. There, in the meeting. Beyond, in the quilt, in the photo, in the text ...

Daniela

This narrative intends to place me, Daniela, as a subject that is crossed by the realities that we live in Latin America. However, what could a white, heterosexual and academic woman say about the injustices that these people have experienced? About the evolution of their displaced, uprooted and survived lives? Not much at first. With this thought I found the project for which I am writing these paragraphs, but this time I place myself from the perspective of an investigated researcher and I highlight my experience in meeting those with whom I find meaning.

The issue that brought us together in the first instance was disaster risk management. The tragic disaster of Armero, on 13 November 1985 in Colombia; the Volcan de Fuego eruption on 3 June 2018 in Guatemala, and the volcanic activity taking place in Tungurahua, Ecuador, between 1999 and 2016. These events have been key moments in our lives. They help us to redefine our relationships with volcanoes.

My mission was to establish fluent and effective communication with those people who live, survive, resist, and go about their daily life at the edge of and in relation with volcanoes far and wide in Latin America. Within the framework of this experience, I was able to establish relationships with people from Guatemala, Ecuador, and Colombia, from a place of caring, intending no harm. In this way, I was able to get involved in their lives, in their day-to-day activities. Some people shared more than others, but they all let me into their homes, their worlds, their happiness and sadness, their grief, and their hope.

It was because of this project that I told the stories that lingered deep within my family, those which we had never spoken of before. The feeling of togetherness fostered through conversation brought them back into existence. Once upon a time, a large part of my family had come from the department of Caldas in Colombia, including before I was born and those events that followed with the eruption of Kumanday. Through this revelation, I could weave our experiences into my small piece of fabric. Before my patch was even complete, these stories were already united. They had joined together long ago beneath the earth. They had flowed from emotions surging through the veins of the mountains. They had brought forth unthinkable hopes into the fertile lands of the present.

My interest began from an intellectual perspective, one of solidarity and of mutual support. It ended up being sensitive, emotional; contemplative sometimes, and simply about listening other times. Unexpectedly, I was able to recognize myself as part of that community that continues to live at the foot and sheltered in the heat of the waters of the volcanoes. I began this path in a dialogue with and about volcanoes and we ended up together weaving, reborn side by side in landscapes to which we already belonged.

Eliza

I am Eliza and write this as a female, an academic, a volcanologist from the UK who has lived and worked in Latin America, and who is venturing into interdisciplinary territories.

My piece for the collective quilt was developed from a place of grief that I was experiencing in my own life at the time. It therefore felt natural that I could try and represent the grief I witnessed and felt in the survivors of the 2018 Fuego eruption through that place in me.

I approached the work in a style inspired by the art of Violeta Parra, the Chilean folk singer, composer, painter, poet and social activist who cofounded the *Nueva Cancion* (New Song) political movement. Violeta was an expert creator of *arpilleras*, embroidered cloth stories using simple stitching, often used to process the maker's current reality. Violeta described her pieces as 'songs that were painted'.

Hearing the accounts of the *Fuego* disaster from people who fled the pyroclastic flows, who fought for their lives with their children in their hands at the very visceral boundary of life and death, the people that arrived to help who faced unspeakable scenes, family members who

survived, but survived tormented: It changed me. An outpouring of trauma so raw, there was no space for normal social filters or boundaries. My emotional centre of gravity, and my interests and purpose as a researcher, shifted irreversibly through those experiences. The ash that lay in deceptively delicate layers that only moments before had mercilessly grappled with the rights of a community to survive. In these places Nature reigns.

But pyroclastic flows disgust me now. How shall I explain that to the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)⁹?

We are privileged to work in a globalised context, in person or online, our worlds are wide, ample and enriching. We develop connectivity and solidarity with individuals geographically far removed. I lived an intense experience of the Fuego eruption crisis working remotely, but alongside volcanology colleagues at the National Institute for Seismology, Vulcanology, Meteorology and Hydrology of Guatemala (INSIVUMEH). Through subsequent research projects that experience continued and has been extended, now through sharing with this group online and around a collective creative activity. We meet, share, make and discuss. The topics evolve, we grow a shared history together. We share of ourselves as people, our experiences of the eruption and recovery. Our coming together forms a space where people bring their stories. This way of working is a giver of moments.

In interdisciplinary work, the lack of walls, the permission to wonder, mingle, exchange and learn, is freeing. More than that though, the permission to be present and represent yourself as an individual in your work with more integrity, rather than using a lens that represents only part of you while filtering out other parts, brings to me a sense of release. In this kind of work, you are the value system, versus you have developed a valued instrument. In the academic work culture, it can be easy to feel instrumentalised, only valued for the skill set or specific knowledge you bring. When we form spaces and ways of working where people are the value system where along with diverse skill sets and knowledge, each one brings life experiences, perspectives, and emotional responses, and new understanding arises in those spaces, that is something that is more whole and horizontal.

⁹ NERC (Natural Environment Research Council is part of the UKRI (United Kingdom Research and Innovation), the institution that funded this project.

Pablo

I am Pablo and I am passionate about journeys, both real and imagined. In my rucksack, I carry colouring pencils, brushes, and paper with which I portray my existential journeys, both individual and as part of a community. Below are some watercolour paintings I created in response to the conversations we had during the online meetings between 2020 and 2021. The quotes below are words by disaster survivors from Guatemala (Fig. 9.2).

“A painting depicting a mountainous landscape made from women sleeping peacefully. Grass grows from their bodies. Above them, a colourful group of people and animals in an embrace look up to the horizon, where a flying hummingbird delivers a leaf to a pigeon”.



Fig. 9.2 Hope grows with the memory of those absent, by Pablo Sanaguano

“It carries the voice of the silence, the living heart, and the hearts of those who are no longer living. It carries the hope of not repeating the errors which were made in the past. It brings harmony and union, the voice of those who had no voice, who could not say what happened”. Roberto. (Fig. 9.3)

“A colourful painting depicts a mountain as if made of women, a hummingbird and plants. On top of this mountain, a group of people dance in celebration”.

“Strength, because we realised in those conversations that we were not the only ones who had gone through these terrible, ugly experiences. It was something very difficult. Many of us in those moments had lost loved ones, family, and friends, and we had to draw strength from where we had none. To know people who had also gone the same gave us the strength to carry on in this dismal situation, but we have, and the fact that we are alive and breathing is a great opportunity in life”. (Norma) (Fig. 9.4)



Fig. 9.3 Intercultural celebration, by Pablo Sanaguano

“Three multicoloured women embrace against the night sky. Their legs seem to blend with the earth.”

“I touch the textures, the veins; like veins in a lung, the volcanoes also have veins which come together. These veins have brought us all together in one way or another. At La Trinidad, I didn’t lose family members, but many men who loved the countryside lost their lives when they went to see how their crops and fields had been destroyed and lost... They died of heart ache. The middle line is the line of time, the union, and the Strength, despite the distances between... Thanks to you, I have learned a lot. Strength must be there. And if there is union, we can.” (Alicia) (Fig. 9.5)



Fig. 9.4 Multicolour Embrace, by Pablo Sanaguano



Fig. 9.5 Harmony between Peoples

“Two people of different colours embrace. Their bodies blend with the depths of the earth, which is painted as mud with multicoloured seeds”.

“We will be moved by trembling winds ... But when the fruits fall from the trees, there are some seeds which remain scattered and there are hummingbirds who gather and carry the seeds. The seeds once again grow in us, and we will do the work of the hummingbirds, to carry the seeds to others. When they see the quilt, others will see our work and the fruit which has already started to grow. We will cherish this seed, and we will make it grow”. (Jairo)

Jaime

I am Jaime, I write as a man and an academic, from my homeland, a mountain fold dominated by the great Kumanday volcano.

‘Friends: a change in route must be decided upon. The long night in which we have submerged ourselves, we need to shake it off and leave it behind. The new day which is already beginning must find us firm, alert, and resolved’. With these words, Frantz Fanon (1983, p. 193) in the epilogue to *The Wretched of Earth*, a work brimming with intellectual burning and historical detention, declared the need to no longer imitate the cultural models imposed during colonial times, whose effects linger in the minds of the colonised peoples. It was not enough to end the relationships exploited by colonial domination, that which established these forms of misuse of people and their bodies, and which governed the production both of truth and knowledge creation.

The long night spread beyond the power that the colonial system exercised over the territories, and the darkness of this night engulfed the abodes of language, encompassed the symbols, put imagination in place. It was slowly building an impregnable epistemological fortress, one which required the colonials’ emerging knowledge to fulfil principles of validation and criteria of legitimacy. These principles ignored the possibility of thinking from other places of enunciation, other perspectives. Little by little, colonialism transformed into coloniality, and political submission became intellectual resignation. But at the end of the century, the words of Fanon were heard, and the image of a new day was seen, one which pointed from the emancipated heart to the people who had previously submitted, with its deepened aurora. It found us prepared to try paths which we had abandoned or never taken. Shaken by the long night, we received the dawn like a poet receives the gift of words and the condor the gift of the wind. There we were, traversing through language with questions which wove the language of the land with the feelings of the community. Unlike the colonisers, we were not exploiting the experience as a device through which to govern the legitimacy of knowledge. Thus we depart from the illusion of achieving aseptic objectivity and axiological neutrality.

Teresa

I am Teresa and write this account as a woman, from a privileged position of an academic in the field of Development, a bilingual person with access to different realities, stories, ways of thinking and living in both Latin America and the United Kingdom. I am the person who had the opportunity to bring together all these people to exchange diverse forms of knowledge. The aim was to understand what disaster risk means from the voices and experiences of people living in those 'at risk' places. This patchwork text elaborates on a small part of my experience in this long process of transformation, where I present myself and deliver in my stitches and weaving, part of a story of change.

In front of me, I had a piece of fabric, threads, and a needle which had arrived inside the *kipi*. It was a free space, where I could create and share what I had felt, heard, and learned over months of virtual meetings. In the evenings, over several weeks I embroidered what I was feeling. I decided to embroider *La Ceiba* tree which had accompanied us from the very beginning, at the temporary shelter La Dignidad in Guatemala where, under the shadow of this imposing wise tree, we had met each other for the first time. Stitch by stitch, I remembered the stories shared in those face-to-face and virtual gatherings, what I had felt, what had made me cry.

Every stitch reminded me why I do what I do, why sharing stories and creating networks can be transformative, why feeling keeps me going. The first brown stitch gave shape to the weaving. This stitch, which would become the tree trunk, was the symbol of the methodologies, the structure for the meetings, those precious moments of exchange. Then, little by little, leaves appeared on the fabric, each one made up of three stitches in different shades of green. As the leaves on the fabric grew, so too did the branches, upholding what we learned and the exchanges we had shared.

After several weeks of embroidering, the branches were leafy, the trunk strong. In one of the virtual meetings, I was able to show what I had created up until that point. That exchange gave me the strength to carry on, to continue weaving late into the night, to break with the traditional academic structures of analysis and interpretation, to learn to share what I felt, and not only what I think when I do 'research'.

The final stitches became roots as the tree continued growing downward. The network was large; it joined with other trees, it traversed

subterranean paths of imagination. Those stitches in fabric are now the roots of a tree that has ‘stuck’ well. They are the roots that sustain my practice, they are the leaves that give meaning to my journey. It is the tree that taught me that there is no ‘us’ and ‘them’ in decolonial research. I am no longer afraid of saying ‘we’, because we are the trunk; we are the leaves; we are the branches; we are woven; we are knowledge that feels. We are La Ceiba tree.

MULTIPLICITY OF POSITIONALITIES

In this patchwork text, we shared what it means, in practice and in intimacy, to produce knowledge through methodologies and approaches that break with the traditional ‘research subject’—‘researcher’ relationship (Smith, 2012; Brown and Strega, 2015; Shapiro, 2020). We ventured into a way of doing research that questions ‘assumed’ power relationships and recognises how we come to ‘know’ and how we create new forms of knowledge through emotion (Fals Borda, 2009; Shapiro, 2020; Cahill, 2007b). We did it to question traditional forms of knowledge production and hegemonic research paradigms (Cahill, 2007b).

We have shown what it meant for us to take that path from our places of enunciation, multiply situated subjectivities with specific histories and motivations which have ultimately become collectively political (Cahill, 2007b). While recognising these multiple positionalities, we also show that in creating—making, painting, and weaving—we were returning to a collective consciousness. We became part of each other’s stories, breaking down imposed and accepted structures of power and knowledge that separated us—the ‘researcher’ and the research ‘subject’.

In recognising the role of emotion in the process, we also acknowledged vulnerabilities from our own positionalities, offering a window into how power hierarchies can be inverted through the most basic of human capacities, sharing stories and emotion (Jackson, 2013). In doing so, we actively respond to calls to decolonise knowledge production (e.g. Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Segato, 2015) and change our position from *studying* the so-called ‘other’, to the practice of *thinking with* and *feeling from and with* the other (Garcia Dauder & Ruiz Trejo, 2021; Cahill, 2007a, 2007b).

This chapter was written by asking ourselves: What were we doing, thinking, and feeling when we were weaving, or painting? What did building collective stories mean for us? How can we participate and

reflect, as outsiders, with those who have experienced disasters firsthand? What intellectual and emotional spaces are we ‘allowed’ to inhabit in the research process? We wrote it as an exercise of personal and collective reflection and suggest as a conclusion that decolonising research requires changes in the way in which knowledge is produced from ‘the outside’ in academia. Knowledge needs to feel.

Around a Ceiba tree the rites of the word—stories from the different volcanoes in Latin America—found the right place to listen to the collective feeling. Painting a mural, the rites of memory found a favourable space to create possible and plural futures. Around metaphors that took flight and pierced the distances, experiences were interwoven and the ancestral rites of the guardian peoples of volcanoes were awakened. None of it seemed to meet the archetypes of scientific research, and perhaps no already established methodology could bring these paths together under a single epithet. We discovered that the assumptions which underlie the illusion of a separation between research subjects and the researches, ‘objectivity’, crack at the slightest touch of the languages of art and the recognition of emotion (Shapiro, 2020, Jakimow, 2022). They crumble before the sincere willingness to listen to the knowledge of the ‘other’ and vanish when voices circulate between bodies who forget their inherited positions of power and recognize themselves happening in the same present.

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