



Concrete Ways to Decolonize Research

Hugo Asselin*

Chaire de recherche du Canada en foresterie autochtone et École d'études autochtones, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue
Hugo.Asselin@uqat.ca

Suzy Basile

Chaire de recherche du Canada en foresterie autochtone et École d'études autochtones, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue
Suzy.Basile@uqat.ca

*Author for correspondence

Almost 20 years after Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's call to decolonize research (Smith, 1999), significant progress has been made into drafting ethics principles to guide research with Indigenous people (e.g., CIHR et al., 2014). However, transforming principles into actual practices is easier said than done. It is increasingly recognized that “knowing the key guiding principles for research with Indigenous peoples is not always enough and [principles need to be] translated into day-to-day research practices” (Morton Ninomiya and Pollock, 2017, p. 29).

This themed issue presents studies on various topics conducted in different geographical and cultural settings and suggesting concrete ways to decolonize research. The call for papers was issued following the 3rd Seminar on the ethics of research with Aboriginal people held at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-

Témiscamingue in late 2014¹. Two previous editions of the seminar (in 2009 and 2011) had invited participants² to share experiences of good and bad research practices, summarized in Asselin and Basile (2012). The 3rd seminar took a step further in focusing on concrete ways to decolonize research. In what follows, we discuss research decolonization and summarize the key messages from the keynote speakers of the 3rd seminar, some of which have contributed papers to this themed issue. Additional contributions widened the geographical scope considered (Canada, Mexico, Peru) in addition to providing more examples of concrete ways to decolonize research.

Decolonizing research “decentres the focus from the aims of the [non-Indigenous] researcher to the agenda of the [Indigenous] people” (Prior, 2007, p. 165) notably by adopting Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and methodologies (Wilson, 2001; McGregor, 2018; Rix et al., 2018). As pointed out by Anishinaabeg and Cree scholars Kathy Absolon and Cam Willet (2005, p. 210), decolonization is a way for Indigenous people to “make sense of [their own] reality” instead of having non-Indigenous researchers defining it. As “you cannot be the doctor if you are the disease” (Daes, 2000, p. 4), some might consider that decolonizing research necessitates to exclude non-Indigenous researchers altogether. However, Hawaiian scholar Renee Pualani Louis (2007, p. 134) has a more nuanced view: “I don’t believe Indigenous methodologies privilege Indigenous researchers because of their Indigeneity. [...] Creating methodologies that only apply to Indigenous researchers provides fodder for more essentialist arguments”. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2007) indeed believes that the indigenist paradigm is not restricted to Indigenous researchers, whereas the western paradigm is not restricted to non-Indigenous researchers. Renee Pualani Louis (2007, p. 134) calls for research agendas that are “sympathetic, respectful, and ethical from an Indigenous perspective”. Along that line, Hodge and Lester (2006, p. 49) suggest “Linking community-driven agendas to appropriate and responsive research”.

Privileging a “two-eyed seeing framework” (Martin, 2012), Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews can be seen as complementary, and researchers from both vantage points considered as allies (Aveling, 2013; Sylvestre et al., 2018; Vásquez-Fernández et al., 2018). That being said, Irlbacher-Fox (2014, p. 151) explains that, for non-Indigenous researchers, “being an ally is not a self- or permanent designation. Rather, it is context-specific, and is initiated and conferred by Indigenous peoples”. Moreover, as rightfully pointed out by Kwakwaka’wakw

¹ Information about the 3rd Seminar on the ethics of research with Aboriginal people, including PowerPoint presentations, is available at the following address:
<http://uqat.ca/ethiqueautochtone/?lang=en&menu=accueil>

² Participants to the seminars included members of Indigenous communities and organizations, university professors and students, and representatives of various organizations, including NGOs and governments.

scholar Sarah Hunt (2014, p. 31): “We must be cautious that ‘Indigenous’ does not come to signify engagement with ‘the other’ without an actual shift in disciplinary ontologies and epistemologies”. Indeed, Rix et al. (2018, p. 7) underscore that research must be conducted “in a way that fully captures and honors the voices and perspectives of Indigenous peoples but, more importantly, emanates from an Indigenous ontological and epistemological basis”. Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and coauthor Wayne Yang (2012, p. 35) warn that decolonization is not about “rescuing a settler future [but rather] is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity”.

There is a real menace for the decolonization concept to be emptied of its substance and instrumentalized by settler researchers and institutions. This was exemplified in 2015 when the First Nations Information Governance Centre granted registered trademark status to the OCAP® principles of ownership, control, access and possession of research data, to protect and ensure their integrity “after it was discovered that researchers, academics, and others were misrepresenting and distorting [their] original intent”³. This is not surprising, considering the preeminence of what Yellowknife Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014, p. 3) calls “recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to ‘reconcile’ Indigenous assertions of nationhood with settler-state sovereignty [...] via some form of renewed legal and political relationship”. Glen Coulthard (2014, p.3) goes on to argue that “instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of *reciprocity* or *mutual* recognition, the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend”. This led Cree scholar Michelle Daigle (2016, p. 266) to ask “What knowledge and laws are lost when memory fades of local knowledge and practices? [...] What then becomes our responsibility in renewing this land-based knowledge and practices from our own ontological understandings of self-determination? Finally, how does the specific process of cultural resurgence [...] help us understand that living self-determination depends on Indigenous peoples renewing relationships with kin beyond the boundaries of the territories that have been designated for them and recognized by the state?”. In her contribution to a collective paper (Naylor et al., 2018, p.3), Daigle posits that researchers have “to think how their work and everyday practices – scholarly or otherwise – actively dismantle colonial structures and relations of power, while building (re)newed ones that are accountable to the Indigenous political and legal authorities”.

During the 3rd Seminar on the ethics of research with Aboriginal people, Blackfoot researcher Bonnie Healy explained to the participants how the OCAP®

³ OCAP® is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC). More information is available at <http://fnigc.ca/OCAP>.

principles (Schnarch, 2004) were applied to the Regional Health Survey conducted by the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre. Inspired by Cree scholar Willie Ermine (2007), she insisted that research should be done within an ethical space at the convergence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews. Also building on the concept of ethical space, Marc Stevenson suggested that environmental managers should move from managing resources to managing relationships. He warned Indigenous people of the pitfalls of accepting non-Indigenous language, concepts, and methods to express their understanding of the natural world and their relationships to it. This echoes the call from Indigenous movements demanding more action on the intersections of environmentalism and Indigenous rights (Tuck et al., 2014).

One way of making sure research is conducted within the proper ethical space is to co-construct methodology. In this themed issue, Atikamekw scholar Suzy Basile and coauthors (2018) explain how they designed a consent form together with Atikamekw women, so that it addresses their concerns about trust, transparency, and community involvement. Quechua-descendant scholar Andrea Milagros Vásquez-Fernández and coauthors (2018) present an indigenist methodology grounded in intercultural collaboration, where control is shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous research partners and where the co-created knowledge is continuously validated. During the seminar, Paula Bush presented participants with a thorough introduction to community-based participatory research (Macaulay et al., 2011). Building on the engaged acclimatization principle (Grimwood et al., 2012), Caroline Desbiens and Irène Hirt explained how they conducted participatory research with the Pekuakamiulnuatsh to explore how their use of the Péribonka river watershed was disrupted by hydro-power development. Élise Dubuc and collaborators presented projects on the reappropriation of Aboriginal heritage by Anishnaabeg and Innu communities to explain to the seminar participants how moving from research alliance to partnership was a step in the right direction. Researcher of mixed Inuit descent Julie Bull explained why and how to build authentic research relationships (Bull, 2010), while Murielle Nagy mentioned that agreements need to be signed before research onset to protect the rights of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous research partners (Nagy, 2011). In this themed issue, Louise Lachapelle and coauthors (2018) recount their experience of collaborative research evaluation, while Janet Elizabeth Jull and coauthors (2018) present a collaborative framework for community-research partnership. Such a framework is welcomed, as so-called collaborative or participatory research as been criticized for sometimes being infused with colonial discourse, reproducing binaries of researcher and research subject (de Leeuw et al., 2012).

Christiane Guay said in her presentation at the seminar that recognition of the complementarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews is fundamental to the establishment of a dialogue central to participatory research. Bringing together the two worldviews is no easy task, however. In this themed

issue, Anishinaabeg scholar Deborah McGregor (2018, p. 828) mentions that: “We [Indigenous researchers] remain committed to our culture, traditions and our language, actively contributing to the growing body of [Indigenous knowledge] while recognizing that we face new challenges and must respond in ways that are relevant to present circumstances, including reconciling difficult relationships with others who benefit from the persistence of colonial research and practices”.

To be sure, universities have a role to play in nurturing the ethical space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews. In her presentation at the seminar, Nathalie Kermaal drew attention to the role of Indigenous studies programs in universities to foster the decolonization of knowledge and, ultimately, research. In this themed issue, she shows how universities in Alberta tackle this challenge (Kermaal, 2018). Adopting a critical stance, Evodia Silva Rivera and coauthors (2018) identified four challenges facing scholars’ attempts to decolonizing research: (1) the hegemony of a hierarchical, patriarchal and unsustainable worldview; (2) the tendency to interventionism displayed by some non-Indigenous researchers; (3) the predominance of theory over action within academia; and (4) the socio-ecological crisis that creates inequalities within and between generations. In their paper, Paul Sylvestre and coauthors (2018) also mention the challenge of negotiating conflicting responsibilities towards community partners and rigid institutional structures.

While publications abound on principles of research ethics, Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant Castellano is right to insist that “We have to start sounding the trumpet for things that are working” (Gentelet et al., 2018). This themed issue of ACME is a step in that direction. Not the first, and hopefully not the last.

References cited

- Absolon, Kathy and Cam Willett. 2005. Putting ourselves forward: Location in aboriginal research. In: Leslie Brown and Susan Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars’ Press, pp. 97-126.
- Asselin, Hugo and Suzy Basile. 2012. Éthique de la recherche avec les Peuples autochtones: qu’en pensent les principaux intéressés? *Éthique publique* 14, 333-345.
- Aveling, Nado. 2013. ‘Don’t talk about what you don’t know’: on (not) conducting research with/in Indigenous contexts. *Critical Studies in Education* 54, 203-214.
- Basile, Suzy, Hugo Asselin and Thibault Martin. 2018. Co-construction of a data collection tool: A case study with Atikamekw women. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 840-860.

- Bull, Julie R. 2010. Research with Aboriginal peoples: Authentic relationships as a precursor to ethical research. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics* 5, 13-22.
- CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC. 2014. *Tri-council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans*. Ottawa: Canadian Institutes of Health Research, National Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- Coulthard, Glen Sean. 2014. *Red skin, white masks. Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Daes, Erica-Irene. 2000. Prologue: The experience of colonization around the world. In: Marie Battiste (Ed.) *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision*. Vancouver: UBC Press, pp. 3-8.
- Daigle, Michelle. 2016. Awawanenitakik: The spatial politics of recognition and relational geographies of Indigenous self-determination. *Canadian Geographer* 60, 259-269.
- de Leeuw, Sarah, Emilie Cameron and Margo Greenwood. 2012. Participatory and community-based research, Indigenous geographies, and the spaces of friendship: A critical engagement. *Canadian Geographer* 56, 180-194.
- Ermine, Willie. 2007. The ethical space of engagement. *Indigenous Law Journal* 6, 193-203.
- Gentelet, Karine, Suzy Basile and Hugo Asselin. 2018. "We have to start sounding the trumpet for things that are working": An interview with Dr. Marlene Brant Castellano on concrete ways to decolonize research. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 832-839.
- Grimwood, Bryan. S., Nancy. C. Doubleday, Gita. J. Ljubicic, Shawn. G. Donaldson and Sylvie Blangy 2012. Engaged acclimatization: Towards responsible community-based participatory research in Nunavut. *Canadian Geographer* 56, 211-230.
- Hodge, Paul and John Lester. 2006. Indigenous research: Whose priority? Journeys and possibilities of cross-cultural research in geography. *Geographical Research* 44, 41-51.
- Hunt, Sarah. 2014. Ontologies of Indigeneity: the politics of embodying a concept. *Cultural Geographies* 21, 27-32.
- Irlbacher-Fox, Stephanie. 2014. Traditional knowledge, co-existence and co-resistance. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, 145-158.
- Jull, Janet, Audrey Giles, Yvonne Boyer, Dawn Stacey and Minwaashin Lodge. 2018. Development of a collaborative research framework: An example of a study conducted by and with a First Nations, Inuit and Métis women's

- community and its research partners. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 671-686.
- Kermoal, Nathalie. 2018. Le rôle des universités canadiennes dans la décolonisation des savoirs : le cas de l'Alberta. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 651-670.
- Lachapelle, Louise, Claudia Maltais Thériault and Shan dak Puana. 2018. À l'écoute de Mishtameku. Éthique collaborative et évaluation de la recherche en milieu autochtone : Réflexion sur une expérience terrain. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 687-719.
- Louis, Renee Pualani. 2007. Can you hear us now? Voices from the margin: Using Indigenous methodologies in geographic research. *Geographical Research* 45, 120-139.
- Macaulay, Ann C., Erin Sirett and Paula L. Bush. 2011. Community-based participatory research. *Oxford Bibliographies*. Oxford University Press.
- Martin, Debbie H. 2012. Two-eyed seeing: A framework for understanding Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to Indigenous health research. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research* 44, 20-42.
- McGregor, Deborah. 2018. From 'decolonized' to reconciliation research in Canada: Drawing from Indigenous research paradigms. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 810-831.
- Morton Ninomiya, Melody E. and Nathaniel J. Pollock. 2017. Reconciling community-based Indigenous research and academic practices: Knowing principles is not always enough. *Social Science & Medicine* 172, 28-36.
- Nagy, Murielle. 2011. Access to data and reports after completion of a research project. *Études/Inuit/Studies* 35, 201-221.
- Naylor, Lindsay, Michelle Daigle, Sofia Zaragocin, Margaret Marietta Ramírez and Mary Gilmartin. 2018. Interventions: Bringing the decolonial to political geography. *Political Geography* (in press).
- Prior, Deborah. 2007. Decolonising research: a shift toward reconciliation. *Nursing Inquiry* 14, 162-168.
- Rix, Elizabeth F., Shawn Wilson, Norm Sheehan and Nicole Tujague. 2018. Indigenist and decolonizing research methodology. In: Pranee Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences*. Singapore: Springer, pp. 1-15.
- Schnarch, Brian. 2004. Ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) or self-determination applied to research: A critical analysis of contemporary First Nations research and some options for First Nations communities. *Journal of Aboriginal Health* 1, 80-95.

- Silva Rivera, Evodia, Gerardo Alatorre Frenk, Helio García Campos and Juliana Merçon. 2018. Aprendizajes y desafíos para una investigación colaborativa descolonizadora en materia de sustentabilidad: experiencias mexicanas con las bases. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 780-809.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.
- Sylvestre, Paul, Heather Castleden, Debbie Martin and Mary McNally. 2018. "Thank you very much... You can leave our community now.": Geographies of responsibility, relational ethics, acts of refusal, and the conflicting requirements of academic localities in Indigenous research. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 750-779.
- Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, 1-40.
- Tuck, Eve, Marcia McKenzie and Kate McCoy. 2014. Land education: Indigenous, post-colonial, and decolonizing perspectives on place and environmental education research. *Environmental Education Research* 20, 1-23.
- Vásquez-Fernández, Andrea M., Reem Hajjar, María I. Shuñaqui Sangama, Raúl Sebastián Lizardo and Miriam Pérez Pinedo. 2018. Co-creating and decolonizing a methodology using indigenist approaches: Alliance with the Asheninka and Yine-Yami peoples of the Peruvian Amazon. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 720-749.
- Wilson, Shawn. 2001. What is an Indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25, 175-179.
- Wilson, Shawn. 2007. What is an Indigenist research paradigm? *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 30, 193-195.