7 Decolonial Methods

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Synopsis

This chapter approaches methods and guidelines for decolonial geographic research through a lens of conducting ethical, respectful research with Indigenous communities in both human and physical geography, and across the quantitative-qualitative spectrum. Using a historical and contemporary discussion of the entanglement of the discipline of Geography with colonial and imperial structures, along with an overview of potential steps that researchers should bear in mind when engaging with Indigenous communities in research endeavors, this chapter works to answer the key questions: What comprises decolonial research? How can researchers in Geography work towards accomplishing it in a way that is attentive to the needs of communities they work with and within, while meeting their own research objectives? Special attention is paid to the unique needs of students and early career scholars.

7.1 Introduction

Over the past generations, the engagement of the discipline of Geography with Indigenous peoples has deepened and increased in various directions, including in the realm of research. The impact of contemporary research areas in Geography[1], including analyses of climate change, human-environment interactions, and geospatial work has extended to include work on Indigenous and Indigenous-related topics. Alongside this increased engagement with Indigenous peoples is a growing aspiration towards 'decolonizing' Geography, both via increasing visibility of Indigenous viewpoints and perspectives (Herman 2008; Coombes et. al 2014) and through a reckoning of what it means to do ethical and respectful work with Indigenous communities, which is just one of many contexts in which one might practice decolonial research methodologies.

Understanding the contours around decolonial research and how to do it effectively, particularly with Indigenous communities, requires the need to consider community safety and to work against a long, troubling history of Geography's engagement with Indigenous communities, and marginalized communities more generally. But there is also a strong personal benefit to pursuing a 'decolonial' research methodology – it increases the researcher's attention to politics of care and to the possibility of constructing knowledge that comes via reciprocity and co-production, rather than extractive, colonial logics.

This chapter is a foray into potential avenues through which to pursue decolonial research, through the lens of ethical and respectful research with Indigenous communities. Picking up on the considerable scholarship that has been done in this regard by geographers such as Sarah Radcliffe (2022), I want to build upon these developments by providing an intervention based out of my own research practice for two reasons. First, the increased engagement with Indigenous communities within Geography is a motivating factor for choosing this avenue through which to convey decolonial research methods. The second motivation is my own positionality and relationship to the subject. I am an Anishinaabe man who lives and teaches Indigenous geographies in Canada, a settler state which is undergoing its own dialogue and political processes surrounding reconciliation and the possibilities of decolonizing structures that have been harmful to Indigenous peoples for generations. My words come from my own experiences working with Indigenous communities and co-producing knowledge with them, and I have experience with Indigenous structures within broader organizations of Geography: I have served in a number of leadership roles within the American Association of Geographers' Indigenous Peoples' Specialty Group (AAG-IPSG), and at the time of writing this chapter, am co-Chair of the Indigenous Peoples' Working Group of the Canadian Association of Geographers (IPWG-CAG). But besides my professional experience, this chapter is also born out of my own personal viewpoints, and how they have evolved and shifted through my own engagement with Indigenous peoples and with exploring alternatives to extractive modes of knowledge production.

In this, I think there is utility for geographers who are working towards possibilities in decolonial research in a variety of geographic contexts, not just with Indigenous peoples, but marginalized communities globally and close to home, and even with the ways that we position ourselves within this work. De Leeuw and Hunt point out that geographers engaged in decolonial efforts

> […] seek to understand the spatialization of settler colonial power in the hopes of undoing at least some of its resiliency. In many cases, by documenting the way settler colonial power ascends to unquestioned normalcy and recirculates as natural and given, the decolonizing project becomes one of suggesting counter realities or alternative ways of knowing and being. This is especially the case when those alternative ways are put forth by Indigenous peoples […] (2018: 6).

Although my own positionality and subjectivity come from being an Indigenous person within a settler state, Indigeneity and Indigenous perspectives are global in nature, and thinking about decolonial methods through an Indigenous lens can also interface with other critical approaches, such as anti-racist, feminist, and queer geographical research approaches. While each approach has its own unique and specific contexts

that will guide research, working to *deconstruct hegemonic structures of power and replace them with new structures based in equity and justice* are efforts that all of these approaches have in common, methodologically, but geographically as well – these are approaches that can (should) be used anywhere in the world. In an era when Geography contends with its own debates around ethics in research and how to make them more just (Arceño et al., 2021; Radcliffe, 2022) it is important for researchers at all stages of their careers to understand how to work towards a potential decolonial future of the field.

This chapter proceeds as follows – I briefly address the engagement of Geography with broader structures of power and the implication of these engagements with Indigenous peoples. I then delve into decolonial geography as an emergent and powerful method in its own right beyond a pushback against colonial logics. Next, I offer my own potential frameworks through which to think about a decolonial research method, via my recommendations for doing ethical work with Indigenous communities. Finally, I conclude by thinking about the broader implications of doing 'decolonial work' – what do they mean? What sorts of futures does it point towards? What further work needs to be done to help bring it about?

7.2 Understanding Colonial Geographical Research

Geography has long had a close relationship with structures of power, empire, and colonization (Godlewska and Smith, 1994). This colonization not only occupied physical space, but also moved to occupy discursive space in the way that people understood space and place(s). Western/European modes of geographic knowledge, similarly to other knowledge produced in the colonial *metropole* was viewed as the sole, 'objective' truth. European explorers and others who engaged with geospatial concepts felt empowered to make absolute statements about spaces, and about those who lived in and engaged with given spaces; their words were viewed as those of 'experts'.

For example, David Chang (2016) writes about the ways in which Captain James Cook and other British explorers who engaged with Kānaka Maoli (Indigenous Hawai'ians) carried with them a sense of spatial superiority – the British argued that their arrival on the Hawai'ian Islands marked the introduction of Kānaka to the broader world, and that Hawai'ians were only made visible because of their 'discovery' by the British; they were illegible to the world before that moment. The implications of these historical moments are clear – Indigenous knowledge, and more broadly, non-Western knowledge is pushed to the peripheries and made less visible, or invisible in favor of Western, or as Max Liboiron (2021) describes it, *dominant* science and knowledge production. This form of developing knowledge was both extractive and othering – it disregarded the pieces of Indigenous knowledge that it could not co-opt and use for its own means.

This extractive, othering form of knowledge production and its interactions with Geography occur in the present day as well. In the past decade, there has been an upswelling of debate in Geography regarding research with Indigenous communities and the importance of transparency and ethics in such work. This has in no small part been spurred by the controversial *Mexico Indigena* project by researchers at the University of Kansas, who carried out participatory mapping projects with Indigenous communities in Mexico while being less than transparent about sourcing some of their

funding from the United States' military and in return transmitting the mapped data obtained from the communities back to the United States for use in counter-insurgency training/planning (Wainwright, 2013; Bryan and Wood, 2015). This is a well-known example that has received a great deal of attention in Geography, but there are also many smaller acts, performed through the lack of ethical consideration, or outright malice, that have also harmed Indigenous groups and broken any sense of trust established by more ethical researchers.

Both historical and contemporary developments have spurred larger conversations about how to do respectful work with Indigenous and other marginalized communities, as well as the responsibilities that geographers have towards making sure we are properly trained on how to carry out this ethical and respectful work (Louis, 2007; Louis and Grossman, 2009; Arceño et. al, 2021) But, what does this look like in the context of creating and practicing decolonial methods?

7.3 Scholarship in Decolonial Methods

There has been considerable effort by geographers to develop and enact a decolonial research agenda and research methodology, both in terms of defining what exactly constitutes decolonial research and the specifics of its practice. Sarah Radcliffe (2022) provides a critical two-pronged approach towards the coloniality of Geography as a structure that decolonial geographies push back against. One prong focuses on the actual physical, spatial, and discursive ways in which coloniality exists within lowercase g geography – she uses the British city of Bristol as an example, as a *place* where colonialism and the spatial patterns that it influences (trade, migration) coalesce and articulate themselves in various ways. One striking example that Radcliffe uses is an embattled statue of a colonial era trader that was installed a century and a half after his death to commemorate Bristol's past as a colonial hub (only challenged spatially by a statue of a Black protestor nearby) (Radcliffe, 2022).

Secondly, Radcliffe takes aim at the colonial nature of capital-G Geography—she notes that in a period from roughly 2005–2015, only 4.4% of Geography PhDs awarded in the United Kingdom, and 8% of PhDs awarded in the United States were earned by graduates of color. These numbers are not surprising to me – I was one of a small group of non-White PhD students in my graduate program and was the first Native American to earn a PhD from my department.

Here, Radcliffe sets the stage for a solution – we as a discipline are surrounded by both vestiges of colonialism *and* its ongoing reproduction, both in the spaces in which we study and work, and in the very intellectual spaces we move within. She points towards decolonial work that has been done in Geography (the discipline) and in geography (places) to effectively resist these processes. Radcliffe explicitly states as much in her writings, positioning decolonial work in Geography as work that actively brings marginalized and othered voices to the fore to build a framework of reciprocity and the dismantling of colonial structures. Efforts both within *institutions* (such as decolonial student movements across Global North and South) as well as the ways in which we can remap and therefore rewrite the narratives of *place* (such as The Mapping Indigenous LA project that engages with Indigenous histories of Los Angeles; https://mila.ss.ucla.edu) are examples Radcliffe uses to show how research in geography can be decolonial.

Indigenous and other scholars of color have picked up similar threads in equally powerful and transformative ways. Daigle and Ramirez (2019) position decoloniality in Geography as something that necessarily escapes an easy definition – due to its very nature in dismantling and reshaping, it is something that is constantly in flux, being constructed, articulated, and then reconstructed and rearticulated as it goes along. Building on the work of Simpson (2017), they describe decolonial geographies as a constellation, or an assemblage of different articulations of resistance and resurgence (Daigle and Ramirez, 2019). This points towards decolonial geographies, and by extension, decolonial geographic research as something that is transformative, in constant motion, that challenges our conceptions of long-standing geographic research methodologies, as Coombes et al. (2014) assert. So, how do we (and you as the reader) bring this transformation into our work – what might it look like? In what follows, I provide one potential avenue.

7.4 A 'Recipe' for Decolonial Geographical Research

Let me begin by saying that talking about 'decolonial' research methodologies in terms of a recipe might be a bit … unsettling to some readers (no pun intended). Decolonial approaches are not commonly taught in research methods classes, which is why I have chosen this way to describe how one might construct such a methodology for their own geographic work. A recipe is a common and accessible framework through which to describe this sort of thing – we all follow recipes all the time, whether it is as simple as making a sandwich, or as complicated as making a four-course dinner – it consists of detailed steps towards an end point. In the case of a recipe for food, it results in a delicious meal. In the case of a research 'recipe', it builds a respectful, ethical relationship with communities.

Further, using a 'recipe' approach purposefully emphasizes the building up, creative, and generative practices of making something new, which is in direct contrast to the breaking apart, fragmentation, and destruction inherent in colonial structures and practices. That is, by focusing on building fresh understandings that are rooted in relations of trust and respect, we can counteract (though not necessarily compensate for) the ruinous processes of colonialism. This ontological shift can be liberating for scholars and the communities they work with.

Another reason that I chose a 'recipe' as a framework is that we follow a recipe whether we are expressly conscious of it or not. Even in the cases that we 'throw' something together for a meal, we are still following a recipe, even it if is a bit unstructured. It becomes an automatic thing: with our most familiar recipes, we take the detailed steps with confidence, without hesitation. We can think about doing decolonial research in the same way: we understand the necessary steps and are able to go forward with confidence in practice. While I caution that decolonial research should never be done without thought or attention (much like you'd never turn your back on a baking pie for too long), I do feel that one can be thoughtful and intentional about the necessary steps to a point where the actions become deeply ingrained.

A few other words of caution before we proceed – not all recipes are the same. Obviously, there are different ways of making a specific food item – let's take *miini-baashkiminasigani-biitoosijigani-bakwezhigan* (the word for blueberry pie in my nation's language), for example. How I might bake a blueberry pie (likely very poorly)

would be different than say, how my mother-in-law would. Ultimately, your 'recipe' for decolonial geographic research will be unique to you, your project, the communities that you are working with, and the circumstances and conditions that tie all of these things together.

Therefore, I intend the following directions to be general pieces of guidance for you to think about as you begin your own research, based off my own experience in doing Indigenous geographical work. Hopefully many of the pieces of advice that I share are useful to you, but there may be things that you may not need—there also may be additional considerations that may not be covered here. By sharing my own experiences, I hope that you will feel more comfortable engaging in truly generative work with Indigenous communities. My choice of Indigenous research methodologies is crafted from my own work and experiences, bringing my own positionality and subjectivity into the work that I do, but I am confident that these steps can be easily portable and applicable to many different contexts that fall within 'decolonial' research methods.

Recipe

Step 1: 2 parts research methodology

To do any research project you need to construct a methodology. Fortunately, the basic parts of an Indigenous research methodology are the same as any other. The key parts of a good research methodology (see also Ch. 1) are shown in Box 7.1.

Box 7.1 Building your research methodology

- Identify the research problem – what is the issue or topic that drives you to do your research project?
- Define your research question/questions – what are the questions that guide your work? How do the answers to this question connect to your research problem? What sorts of data or evidence do you need to help you answer your research problem, and by extension, research questions?
- Scope out appropriate methods – how exactly do you plan to go about this work? In geography, we typically follow three types of methodological work – qualitative work, quantitative work, or more commonly, a mixture of both, or 'mixed methods' – what works best for your project? Specific examples of these sorts of methods include geospatial analysis, interviews, oral histories, archival analysis, mapping (see related chapters in this volume) – what are the methods that will best help you to answer the questions that you have for your work?
- Identify the broader impacts – what do you hope to accomplish with your work? What will your work contribute academically or societally?
- Sketch a list of potential products/projects – will there be anything that comes out of your work: books, chapters, papers, presentations, posters, theses/dissertations, 'grey' literature such as op-eds, media articles, etc.?
- Choose your location – in a discipline such as Geography, space and place are extremely important, and this is especially true in determining where you will do your work. Why do you want to do work in a specific place/places? What specifically about that place/those places makes them important to your work?

(*Continued*)

- Consider possible research participants – whether you are interested in more human-focused work or examining an element of the physical environment, identifying a place's communities or groups is very important. You will want to have an idea very early in constructing your methodology of the people who you will be working and communicating with for any place-based projects, recognizing too that there may be factions or sub-groups who disagree with each other.
- Determine your timeframe – how long will it take you to do this work? What is the timeline for each step of your research? Is there a possibility of work or relationships lasting beyond the scope of data collection?

When doing work with Indigenous communities, there are also extra steps that you will want to take and be mindful of when constructing your methodology, due to the history of harms done in Indigenous communities, both in research more generally, and in Indigenous-focused work. There exists a wide variety of scholarship written by Indigenous scholars on how to be mindful of this history and how to overcome it when doing Indigenous focused work, including Linda Tuhiwai Smith's acclaimed book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999); a series of papers written by the American Association of Geographers' Indigenous Peoples' Specialty Group (IPSG-AAG, 2010); and others (e.g. Louis and Grossman, 2009) on key considerations and questions to take into account when doing work with Indigenous communities. In particular, the 2010 IPSG-AAG papers urge geographers to actively involve Indigenous communities in the earliest steps of constructing the methodology, as communities may have insights into the feasibility of certain aspects of the work that is proposed. Additionally, such an approach allows the community to guide the work being done, allowing active input and creating possibilities for the work to be generative and beneficial to community members (IPSG-AAG, 2010).

Step 2: 3 measures of Positionality and critical reflexivity

Positionality is very important to keep in mind when working towards a decolonial methodology. Positionality is a fluid, relational dimension of our identities that depends on where we are and whom we are with, and is imbued with deep-seated power structures in relation to the communities and groups that we are working with. For example, if you are a non-Indigenous person working in an Indigenous community, what sorts of roles and identities you take on in this work is a question that even Indigenous researchers ourselves must ask, including in our home communities, because our identities involve many subject positions shaped by intersecting dimensions of power. A consideration of positionality raises the question: Are you an insider or an outsider? And, if you are an insider, what unique challenges might arise from this (Rose, 1997; Chavez, 2008; Nagar, 2014; Whitson, 2017)? How might these relations and positions shift when you are moving through space or interacting with different individuals? Being aware of your positionality – particularly in dimensions where you may be constructed as having more power – is a foundation of achieving a respectful co-production of knowledge.

Respectful co-production of knowledge also depends on researchers' practice of critical reflexivity, defined here as thinking critically about our own social, economic,

and cultural positions, as well as what kinds of privileges and power those may confer upon us. For example, when I enter an Indigenous community, I must remember that even though I am Indigenous myself, I carry with me the backing of colonial structures, such as my institution and funding agencies – this can shape my relationships with Indigenous communities in many ways, both visibly and otherwise. Although my own perspectives and worldview might be Indigenous, they are likely not the same as the community I am visiting – there may be ideas and points of view I carry that are not shared by the community. Maintaining critical self-reflection requires frequently assessing your own actions, roles, assumptions, and attitudes and holding them up for rigorous scrutiny.

Step 3: Engage with research oversight processes

There will almost always be some form of research oversight in an Indigenous (or other marginalized) community in the context in which you work – institutional and research review boards, ethics boards, tribal councils, community councils, community members asking you what you're doing, and so on. Much of this is due to a larger, unfortunate legacy of harms done to marginalized groups, particularly Indigenous communities and communities of color, in the name of academic research and knowledge production. As a result, communities have begun developing robust mechanisms of oversight in order to protect their members from harm (Simpson, 2017 Buffalo et al., 2019).

This represents a first line of evaluation and defense for communities. Another common line of defense or oversight process is a bit longer standing and less institutionalized – asking questions. People will want to know what your plans are and why it is that you are seeking out their involvement and participation. Why are you coming to their community? Why should they trust you or commit their time and energy to work with you? How might their community benefit from the research? What checks are in place to prevent exploitation or abuse of community knowledge? Be prepared for this – think about the types of questions you foresee communities having. Having a solid research problem and methods will be useful here, particularly when being asked about potential benefits or potential harms.

Some modes of research oversight are rather straightforward, such as answering people's questions or speaking directly to participants, while others may involve speaking to a community or tribal council, or filling out formal applications, which can include submitting consent forms and other documentation – this is of course in coordination with the ethics process you will likely be going through at your primary institution. It is prudent to budget for this in your research timeframe – your deadlines are not necessarily a priority for community leaders protecting their members and knowledge.

Step 4: Consent/assent as an ongoing process

Obtaining informed consent is indispensable in the research process; it means everyone you are working with is fully aware of what your project involves, of potential risks or benefits, how you will be using information they share, what level of anonymity/confidentiality they can expect from you, and what their rights are. Generally, if someone has not explicitly said 'yes' to consenting or participating in a project, you should

treat it as if they have said 'no' (though see useful consideration of the use of deception in ethnography in Marzano, 2007).

Furthermore, consent (and assent if you are working with youth – see Ch. 3 on research ethics) is never a one-time thing. People have the right to change their minds, and they may do so at any time, for any reason. Just because a participant signs a consent form does not mean they cannot withdraw consent or change the terms of their participation at any point.

That brings me to the consent form – you will likely have developed a consent form by this point – as most institutional ethics boards and many community oversight boards/groups will ask for them as part of your ethics review. Consent documents can take many different forms and have different information based on the specific needs of your project. However, one thing that will be common across all geographical and methodological contexts is that you will want to make sure that your consent form is as accessible as possible. This means making the language plain and easy to understand, providing multiple language options if that is relevant to your community's population, and avoiding overly technical jargon or terms that can be easily misunderstood.

Lastly, because consent is an ongoing process, it is a good idea to occasionally check in and make sure that your research participants still consent and understand what is going on with the project. This does not necessarily have to mean reconsenting them but can look like just checking in and answering any questions that they might have. There is the possibility that you may be mandated to do this, but even if you aren't, it is a good practice to stay in touch anyways.

Step 5: Knowledge co-production and support/Data stewardship and repatriation

Geographers have embraced community based, participatory research in recent decades (see Ch. 39, Breitbart, 2016, Kindon, 2021), finding that co-producing knowledge with communities aligns well with many of the critical theoretical frameworks of feminist, anti-racist, queer, and other stances. However, I want to start by problematizing the use of the method from a decolonial position. Coombes et al. (2014) challenge long-standing assumptions about participatory research models, in particular criticizing the tendency of the power dynamics in such relationships to solely rest with the person with the most advanced academic degree, which often is the researchers themselves. A sterile, uncritical, or tokenistic application of 'participatory' research can mask the lack of transparency for participants, and can overstate the benefits to their community. Recall the *Mexico Indigena* project, mentioned above. It was framed as a community participatory project, where Indigenous community members helped to map their own territories (Bryan and Wood, 2017). However, the lead researchers were not forthright about the ultimate use of the data or their funding sources.

Does this mean that participatory research is inherently suspect? Absolutely not. Rather, it is important to understand that communities possess their own knowledge and have the right to participate in all aspects of how that knowledge is used in research projects. Any data or information that you obtain from communities belongs to the communities themselves. It also means that they have an active stake in the work that you are doing. This may take the form of them desiring to help co-produce any products that may come out of the project, even co-author the publications (e.g. Sangtin Writers with Richa Nagar, 2006). Geographers such as Sarah Elwood (2008),

Sarah Smith (2011), and Sarah de Leeuw et al. (2012) and others point towards the ways in which active collaboration with research participants can strengthen the work being done, and allow community voices to come to the fore. Engaging community members in actively participating in data collection/creation can also be a valuable act of reciprocity.

Collaborative and participatory research means that the community ultimately owns their own words, their own data, and their own knowledge: it is not yours to keep permanently. At the very start of your research, you will need to think about how to ultimately return data and the products that will come out of your research; indeed, you should be engaging in honest, transparent conversations with community members about project outcomes as the research evolves. In some cases, communities will ask that any data, maps, recordings, transcripts, or other information collected from community members/research participants be returned at the end of a research project. Many communities request the right to review any products that come out of the project, such as theses, dissertations, articles, book chapters, research presentations or anything else that publicly represents the research. While these things may appear onerous or add extra steps of protocol and complexity to one's research project, these practices are born out of a long history of data being taken out of communities ('extracted'), used in ways the communities may not have intended, and never returned (Whitener, 2010; Harding et. al, 2012; Henderson, 2018; Buffalo et. al, 2019; Tsosie et. al, 2019). If you are to effect a decolonial research methodology, this is one of the most important aspects to remember and abide by.

Step 6: Necessary Utensils – how to support decolonial research in Geography?

If we are to upend colonial and extractive structures and history in Geography, support is essential. Fortunately, national and international professional organizations in Geography such as the American Association of Geographers (AAG), the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) in the U.K., and the International Geographical Union (IGU/UGI), as well as Geography departments around the world, have increasingly taken on questions of ethics in our work as geographers. In its new Code of Ethics (2021), for example, the AAG responds to the controversy over transparency of funding sources:

> Geographers should reject funding from any sponsor that compromises the principles of ethical research. The conditions under which data can be used, and restrictions on the use of data after the end of a research project, should be clarified prior to accepting funds. Ethical quandaries are particularly likely to be encountered when seeking funding from military, intelligence, security, and policing agencies as well as private corporations to support research or to undertake government- or corporate-sponsored projects. Geographers should be open and candid, avoiding undertaking any task that requires us to compromise our professional and ethical responsibilities (AAG, 2021).

Other language in the revised AAG ethics statement relates to being aware of the potentials of harm when working with racialized and marginalized groups, as well as being mindful of relationships with both humans and the non-human world (AAG, 2021).

The RGS-IBG states in part its ethics policy (2022):

> The Society requires the research it funds to be conducted in an ethical manner. The following considerations should therefore apply to all research supported by the Society, whether through financial support, or implicit support through presentation at the Society, Research Group conferences, or other Society events or publication in Society journals:
>
> - accurate reporting of findings, and a commitment to enabling others to replicate results where possible.
> - fair dealing in respect of other researchers and their intellectual property.
> - honesty to research staff and students about the purpose, methods and intended and possible use of the research and any risks involved.
> - confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and anonymity of respondents (unless otherwise agreed with research subjects and respondents).
> - independence and impartiality of researchers to the subject of the research.
> - maintaining the highest ethical standards in all settings.

The School of Geography at the University of Otago in Aotearoa states (2022): 'The School of Geography has the responsibility to ensure that the rights and well-being of all human participants involved in teaching and research activities are protected. To this end, all studies and related research activities are subject to approval by the appropriate ethical committee.'

So, institutions and structures in Geography *are* thinking about ethics, making it easier to provide structures for education and training on how to do ethical research in Geography (see Ch. 3 and Arceno et. al, 2021). However, mere training is insufficient. Support also needs to extend to pursuing research methods and ways of knowledge that may not fit into 'dominant' academic ways of doing work – what might it look like, for example, for a research product to *not* be released to wider circulation, especially if it focuses on sensitive topics? As Elizabeth Gagen (2021) points out, harms don't just occur in interactions with living human beings – they can also happen through objects and images such as photographs, recordings, documents, and artefacts that may contain sensitive or protected knowledge. Thus, doing decolonial research may mean crafting an arrangement in which the results of research flow back to the community rather than to the researcher or into academic publications.

7.5 Cook Time: Timeframes for Doing a Research Project

In the process of making our figurative blueberry pie, it will take time for the pie to bake. Putting together and following a decolonial research methodology with Indigenous communities is something that will require time and plenty of attention. It is not something to be rushed through, or there is a risk of harming communities. Thinking about the timeframe in which your work will take place is extremely

important and should ideally begin when conceptualizing your planned research. It can happen before or during the development of your methodology – how long do you foresee this work taking? At an early stage, you may not have concrete timeframes, but it is good to at least make some estimates of how long work might take, especially if there are some elements that might take longer such as mapping, remote sensing, interviews, etc. I cannot overstate enough that talking to communities and getting their input early and often is indispensable. You cannot do Indigenous/decolonial research without talking to communities and potential research participants: excluding them from early decisions about the research plan will perpetuate harms, and create the very top-down dynamic we are trying to avoid. It is never too early to make contact and open lines of communication to allow the maximum time possible to connect with communities, engaged with research oversight processes, and begin to build research relationships. For suggestions on *how* to connect with communities, see Box 7.2.

Box 7.2 Suggestions for connecting with communities

- Draw from your existing networks – friends, family, peers, instructors, teachers
- Learn as much as you can about the community of interest and identify leaders or well-connected members (though see Ch. 12 for cautions about 'gate-keepers')
- Volunteer with community organizations, schools, or mutual aid groups to begin your relationship based on service
- Spread the word via social media about your project and that you are looking for contacts to participate
- Reach out to service or cultural organizations that support or interact with the community (again, be cautious of power relations here)

For example, in my dissertation research, I began reaching out to communities months before I did any fieldwork. I did so by e-mailing, phone calling, and visiting community leaders, local boards and agencies related to research oversight in person. The time available to a researcher to do these things will obviously be different based on where they are at – undergraduate and graduate students may be more pressed for time than faculty, for example. Based on research oversight conversations with your institution and your communities of interest, you should have an idea for how long the work will take; frank communication about delays or changes to the timeframe will also be important here.

Be mindful of the timeframe *beyond* the planned data collection or direct research work as well. It can be easy to assume that once the last piece of data has been collected, the last map is created, or the last interview is finished, and the final products are created, that you have reached the end of the project, but, in fact, it does not mean the end of your active accountability to the community. Simply leaving and dropping all engagement with a community is harmful and is in the vein of 'parachute' researchers who drop in to engage in research that is clearly extractive. On-going ethics review and data repatriation and stewardship may mean that you are in active communication with communities for some time to come, even long after the active part of your project is complete.

There are also other relationships that may come about from your work. In my own work, I've accepted and embraced the fact that I will be connected to the individuals and communities that I have been in conversation and collaboration with – some of these people have not only been my collaborators, but also have become my friends as well. If these types of relationships arise out of your own work, embrace and respect them, as they will likely be born from mutual respect and reciprocal relations (IPSG-AAG, 2010).

This can present a challenge to junior scholars, particularly students, who are on very compressed time schedules vis-à-vis funding and requirements of their programs. These pressures cannot be totally done away with, but they can be managed and alleviated. My recommendation here, besides being diligent about setting to work on building relationships early on, is to work with your advisors and mentors to determine an appropriate scale and scope of the work. It may not be feasible to work with multiple communities in a project, for example, but you might pick one or two and focus on building relationships with them. You can add other communities later, or you may find that the time and care needed to work with one community can yield a generative relationship that can last a long time and yield surprising outcomes.

7.6 Concluding Thoughts: What Does 'Decolonial Research' Even Mean?

What sorts of futures does 'decolonial research' point towards? What further work needs to be done to help bring them about? I posit that decolonial research points toward a future where colonial forms of knowledge are de-emphasized in favour of the knowledge held by marginalized and colonized people in a given place, and where these diverse knowledges are validated as having equal, if not more standing than forms of knowledge built upon colonialism and extraction. In order to bring decolonial research about, I argue that it will take a fundamental reshaping of how we view those diverse knowledges and their ability to stand on their own without qualification and validation by dominant structures in academia. Consider again Chang's (2016) engagement with the contact between British explorers and Kānaka Maoli in the 1770s. While the British felt that their geospatial awareness and engagement of the world was superior to Kānaka, Chang argues the exact opposite:

> Spurred by this same belief that the world was a wide- open place to seek and understand, Native Hawaiians engaged in an intense process of global exploration in the century after foreigners appeared in Hawai'i in 1778. Some sailed to distant lands, as Pele had done. Others explored the world without leaving home, by engaging with foreign people; poring over, translating, and writing books about far- off countries; and in many other ways embracing world exploration. But why did Kānaka turn to exploring the globe so quickly and enthusiastically? In part, they did this because the Hawaiian exploration of the world did not truly begin with Cook's arrival. (Chang, 2016: 2)

Chang pokes a hole in the idea that 'Western' conceptions of geography held sway – the Kānaka didn't need it, they had their own, and used it to great effect. By bringing

Indigenous knowledge to the forefront, Chang moves us towards a definition of decolonial methods.

It's worth returning to the question of just how do we define decolonial geography, or decolonial research? I argue that it is the active deconstruction of western, hegemonic ways of knowing about space and place, and opening them up to multitudes, or as Ramirez and Daigle (2019) put it, *constellations of knowledge* that shape the way we view the world around us. In doing this, we make possible liberatory, radical resurgent politics of land (Simpson, 2017). Tuck and Yang (2012) point out that decolonization is not merely a metaphor. Radcliffe (2022) similarly cautions that decolonization is not just simply labelling something, it is an active effort to change structures, to move from a colonial way of being and knowing towards one that rejects these things and not only embraces diverse ways of knowing and being, but centers colonized voices and places them at the forefront of change, whether it is societal, or academic.

This should not be confused with a politics of recognition where Indigenous, Black, Latine, queer, disabled and other forms of Geography become a spectacle to be consumed – Daigle (2019) explicitly critiques this and instead points towards the responsibility of Indigenous knowledge in particular to disrupt colonial knowledge and political structures. The British explorers in 1778 Hawai'i were not prepared to deal with knowledge systems that decentered their own – my hope is in the twenty-first century, geographers are in a better position to emerge from encounters with knowledge systems other than their own. But these encounters can be disquieting.

Indeed, the act of critically engaging with our own selves in research, of *actually* decolonizing, of breaking down colonial ways of knowing and being that we have been taught in academia is not meant to be warm and fuzzy – it is, as Howitt (2020) describes it, unsettling. There may be a point in working towards a decolonial research methodology where you may feel uncomfortable as it is revealed to you the ways that you have benefited from the accrual of colonial practices, especially in contexts where communities may be asking a lot of you or may be taking on a larger role in oversight or knowledge co-production. I have found that this is the moment where many people may falter in their pursuit – we are trained as academics, as researchers to be guided by a desire to improve our field, and to make the world a better place. Being confronted and challenged when we are coming from a professed benevolent place is not the easiest process to endure. Even I, an Indigenous researcher, have contended with this – community members pointedly pushed back against aspects of my own work and methods that they found to be 'colonial'. It was a very humbling experience for me. However, I argue that this was a *necessary* experience for me to go through, and one that can be generative for anyone in similar contexts, because through unsettling our own preconceived notions of what our work is and what our discipline is, we create the groundwork necessary to build something better.

What I have described here is just one potential path towards decolonial methods. My hope is that people all over the world read this chapter – this will mean that people are doing different projects, with different outcomes, with different communities, in different geographies. You will need to be mindful of local contexts. Maybe your methodology isn't represented by baking a blueberry pie. Maybe it's an apple pie. Maybe it's a shepherd's pie. Maybe it's a dumpling. The point is, it will take steps to create, and this will happen through hard work, cooperation, and keeping an open mind toward what can come from your work – and with any luck, you may help foster a generative process that can lead to truly decolonial futures in our discipline.

Note

1 In keeping with Radcliffe's distinction (discussed below), I use Geography to indicate the academic discipline and geography to indicate the broader meanings of place, space, and environment.

Further Reading

- **Daigleand Ramírez** (2019): A piece that traces the intellectual and grounded traditions and trends that underlie decolonial geographies in a variety of contexts, especially in regard to how decolonial geographies has been reclaimed by colonized peoples.
- **de Leeuw et al.**. (2012): This piece places community participatory based work in conversation with Indigenous geographies, highlighting the generative outcomes that can arise from such conversations and engagements.
- **Radcliffe** (2022): Radcliffe focuses on the definition of what decolonial geographies has looked like and can look like, especially through the reshaping and remaking of geographic space, both in real time/real space as well as within the very field of geography itself.

Note: Full details of the above can be found in the references list below.

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