

Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis

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Abstract

Though there is no standard model or practice for what decolonizing research methodology looks like, there are ongoing scholarly conversations about theoretical foundations, principal components, and practical applications. However, as qualitative researchers, we think it is important to provide tangible ways to incorporate decolonial learning into our research methodology and overall practice. In this paper, we draw on theories of decolonization and exemplars from the literature to propose four practices that can be used by qualitative researchers: (1) exercising critical reflexivity, (2) reciprocity and respect for self-determination, (3) embracing “Other(ed)” ways of knowing, and (4) embodying a transformative praxis. At this moment of our historical trajectory, it is a moral imperative to embrace decolonizing approaches when working with populations oppressed by colonial legacies.

Keywords

action research, community-based research, emancipatory research, ethical inquiry, par—participatory action research, methods in qualitative inquiry

For those who have been oppressed by colonization, research is a dirty word. The hyphenated form of this word strips away the naïve connotation that research is merely an innocent pursuit of knowledge. This pursuit has allowed for predatory, exploitative behavior toward Indigenous communities (Sinclair, 2003). Among the oppressive acts carried out in the name of research, have been the perpetuation of inaccurate stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, a focus on negative social issues, and adoption of a pathologizing lens (Bishop, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1998). Historically, bodies of scholarship have repeatedly dehumanized Indigenous peoples and their culture, perpetuating hatred and discrimination (Poupart et al., 2000). To this day, Indigenous communities have rejected engaging in supposedly neutral research, due to past experiences of exploitation and negative or inaccurate representation (Arvizu & Saravia-Shore, 2017; Ball & Janyst, 2008). In reference to this negative focus, one Indigenous leader stated: “We know we are dying, but tell me why we are living?” (Smith, 2012, p. 230).

Despite Western researchers’ history of claiming ownership of Indigenous knowledge and creations, and denying Indigenous peoples’ claims to self-determination, Indigenous activists and scholars are now turning spaces of marginalization into spaces from which resistance and hope flourish (Collin et al.,

2018; Smith, 2012). This resistance to ongoing colonial tactics and European imperialism has paved the path for pioneering academics—Black, Indigenous, and voices from the South—to call for the decolonization of research. Smith, in her seminal book on decolonizing methodologies, discusses decolonization as “a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels”; she points out that for researchers, “one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices” (Smith, 2012, p. 606). Decolonizing research means centering concerns and world views of non-Western individuals, and respectfully knowing and

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understanding theory and research from previously “Other(ed)” perspectives (Battiste, 2000; Datta, 2018; Smith, 2012).

The critical pedagogy of decolonization consists of transforming our colonized views and holding alternative knowledges. While decolonization theories related to Indigenous perspectives are at the forefront of this scholarship, the oppression of colonization has broad implications. Through shared solidarity in the struggle against colonial oppression, we envision a collaborative space where past and present learnings across oppressed populations can be used to transform qualitative research methodologies. This journey toward a broader narrative around decolonizing research requires respect, responsibility, and humility among us in the academy to ensure we do not minimize anyone’s struggle through inappropriate contextualization or comparison. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the imperative for anti-oppressive research and propose key practices for qualitative researchers, grounded in decolonial theories.

Whose Paradigm?

There is great debate surrounding decolonizing research paradigms and whether it is in fact possible to decolonize research when using pre-existing colonial, Eurocentric paradigms created by Western scholars (Chalmers, 2017; Kuokkonen, 2000). Held (2019) writes:

... academia has almost exclusively been focusing on Western paradigms and approaches to research... This manifestation of ontological oppression is a result of Western science being exported around the globe from Europe alongside imperialistic and colonial attitudes.

Comparably, in South America, there have been calls inviting an “ecology of knowledges,” recognizing epistemological diversity and redistributing power to non-Eurocentric forms of wisdom, particularly voices that have been historically and presently oppressed (Santos, 2015). Portuguese writer with origins in the West African Islands, Grada Kilomba (2008), engages in an exercise with her students to showcase the silencing of voices from the academy and the connection between power, racial authority, and scholarship; she asks, “What knowledge has been made part of academic agendas? And what knowledge has not? Whose knowledge is this? Who is acknowledged to have the knowledge? And who is not?” (p. 27). Decoloniality aims to open up distinct canons of knowledge with the motive of displacing Western thought as the only framework or possibility for knowledge (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Santos, 2015).

In the context of Indigenous scholarship, Held (2019) suggests that an essential requirement to prevent Western-centric knowledge production is for paradigms to be co-created jointly between Indigenous and Western researchers. By doing so, theoretical tools and knowledge within the academy are supplemented with Indigenous perspectives, and Indigenous peoples would be involved in defining and owning epistemologies

constituting these paradigms (Rigney, 1999; Saini, 2012). However, others point out risks in integrating knowledge systems, listing reasons such as: a) weakening non-Western epistemologies through over-generalization and inappropriate contextualization, b) assimilating Indigenous knowledge, and c) denying core differences in ways of knowing to find a shared common ground (Levac et al., 2018). Similarly, Santos (2001) signals the lack of cultural legitimacy as a contributory factor in undermining counter-hegemonic, non-Western, emancipatory knowledge production systems.

Reagan (2017) explains that the practice of epistemological ethnocentrism occurs often when integrating paradigms, given that the dominant paradigm steers the direction of discourse as it ultimately holds the power to legitimize what is counted as knowledge. To overcome this obstacle, Dei (2008) calls for the challenging task of “epistemological equity” (p. 8) in such knowledge synthesis processes, where different ontologies and epistemologies are brought into a conversation with the conscious awareness of colonially produced unequal power relations, as well as mindful sensitivity in navigating these complex issues of power and knowledge. On the other hand, since the academy evaluates knowledge based on Western standards of reliability and validity, non-Western paradigms will still have to be altered to fit the criteria of Western frameworks (Witt, 2007). In response to many of these concerns and resonating with the notion that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984, p. 2), another more radical view contends that novel paradigms should be reinvented to fully center and legitimize non-Western paradigms within academia, independent of Western influence (McGuire-Adams, 2020; Santos, 2001). This paradigm, in itself, would mark self-determination, where people would become “self-sustaining subjects” independent of values and perspectives of the West (Kuokkanen, 2000).

Garrouette (2003) boldly contends that “the reassertion and rebuilding of traditional knowledge from its roots, its fundamental principles” (p. 101), also coined as Radical Indigenism, needs to be reflected in an Indigenous research paradigm for it to be considered Indigenous (Hart, 2010). What is shared across Indigenous academics is the intention of not essentializing the experiences of Indigenous peoples and recognizing that Indigenous communities make up a global, heterogeneous group (Cunneen et al., 2017).

In positioning ourselves in this paper, the lead author locates as an Eelam Tamil settler from a refugee-immigrant household and Canadian citizen, and the second author as a white Canadian-born settler and scholar, committed to acknowledging and countering the epistemic oppression created by colonial legacies and knowledge systems. We view anti-colonial work as a professional responsibility within the academy and are dedicated to shifting our power and privilege in ways that achieve justice. We position ourselves within the transformative (critical) paradigm. While this paradigm is still a Western approach, it is value-driven, with core values rooted in social emancipation and solidarity with oppressed people, and therefore, has more potential than other Western paradigms to be

inclusive of other systems of knowledge, including non-Western epistemologies and ontologies (Cram & Mertens, 2015). As Hooks (1996) writes: “There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change, that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures” (p. 118). While we work within a critical paradigm, we also seek to push the limits of paradigmatic boundaries and imagine possibilities free from colonial roots.

As researchers committed to doing research with refugee populations through open dialog and critical inquiry, we find decolonizing research to be relevant and essential in producing progressive, inclusive research. Open dialog refers to our efforts to share power with participants, and to create spaces which are safe for mutual exchange and honest dialog, and critical inquiry points to the critical transformative paradigm that underpins our work. Both underpin the ethical stance we embrace in our approach research with refugee communities. A refugee is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, has fled outside the country of one’s nationality” (Weis, 1995, p. 6). In the year of 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recorded a statistic of 79.5 million individuals forced from their home, with an estimated 26 million categorized as refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). Despite the contentious nature of forced migration, there is a special interest in conducting research with refugee populations in order to inform policy, deepen understanding, and provide evidence for future best practices (Birman, 2005). The high displacements worldwide and the welcoming of refugees has stirred controversy, yet Indigenous activists stand by refugees, claiming that no one is illegal on stolen land (Monkman, 2017).

Reinventing Qualitative Research Practice

Though there is no standard model or practice for what decolonizing research methodology looks like, there are ongoing scholarly conversations about theoretical foundations, principal components, and practical applications. In this paper, we examine decolonizing theoretical perspectives and explore methodological applications to qualitative research. Since the lead researcher’s own research interests revolve around refugee studies, specific examples from this field will be used to explore the aforementioned. Theories of decolonization carry undeniable potential to disrupt taken for granted assumptions and perspectives that order the world, and indeed the project of decolonization has been referred to by Fanon as “a program of complete disorder” (Fanon, 1963, p. 36). Tuck and Yang (2012) assert that decolonization is not a complementary perspective, but an unsettling one; they point out that it is not merely a strategy of inclusion or an “and” but instead an “elsewhere” for knowledge production and the imagination. Decolonization is not a methodical checklist nor a defined endpoint; it is a life-long process that actively works to dismantle

and re-create within & outside of the academy (Zavala, 2013). In this paper, we draw on theories of decolonization and exemplars from the literature to propose four practices that can be used by qualitative researchers: (1) exercising critical reflexivity, (2) reciprocity and respect for self-determination, (3) embracing “Other(ed)” ways of knowing, and (4) embodying a transformative praxis.

Exercising Critical Reflexivity

There is an inherent power imbalance between researchers and refugee populations in research studies. Refugee status can be precarious; individuals are subject to different legal rights and opportunities than individuals born in that same country, and there is a legitimate fear of one’s refugee status being revoked at any given time (Clark-Kazak, 2017). As displaced people, refugees regularly find themselves in powerless, dependent positions in their relationships with service providers, sponsors, and authority figures as a whole (Clark-Kazak, 2017). The varying power relations within this sociopolitical context, including between researchers and refugees, poses a core ethical concern in research studies with refugee populations. In the context of refugee camps, these concerns can be exacerbated, as one researcher observes: “When I go into a horrendous camp situation as a white researcher, the people are so desperate for any form of assistance they would agree to anything just on the off-chance that I might be able to assist” (Pittaway et al., 2010, p. 234). Similar notions are heard in Indigenous communities and many Indigenous scholars refuse to use the term “post-colonialism” in their research, reflecting that colonialism is far from being a finished business (Churchill, 2012; Smith, 2012). Invisible power dynamics are embedded within research frameworks, which are particularly apparent in studies involving vulnerable populations; if not checked appropriately, researchers possess an unequal power to define, label, and alienate oppressed populations (Datta, 2018). The decolonization of research is therefore important in breaking hierarchical barriers between researchers and participants, which can be achieved by being critically reflexive and enabling reciprocity within relationships.

Exercising critical reflexivity is a key approach to decolonizing research. Critical reflexivity is powerful for examining researchers’ epistemological assumptions, their situatedness with respect to the research, and crucial in addressing power dynamics in research. Epistemological assumptions frame the way one views the world, how one organizes oneself in it, what questions one poses, as well as what answers one looks for. Engaging in critical reflexivity extends beyond “confessions of privilege” (Lockard, 2016, p. 2). Oversimplified confessions can be loopholes absolving researchers from a duty to continuously ensure their research is supporting resistance to colonization in tangible ways, as opposed to reinforcing or reproducing colonial legacies. Through conversations with Elders from Indigenous communities, many decolonizing academic researchers have reframed their positionality from discoverers of community knowledge to learners (Datta, 2018). One

refugee researcher's field notes explain how such a shift in thinking allowed her to reframe interview questions, so that they were appropriately directed toward an expert, rather than a victim or witness (Taha, 2018). She pointed to reflexivity as a productive tool in realizing that her interview questions were a direct product of her colonized and Western-centric environment (Taha, 2018); her reworded questions represent a stride toward progress, actively rebalancing power relations by recognizing community members as knowledge holders. Additionally, reflexivity primes us to recognize that we often view answers as a desired knowledge production "outcome" and end-goal of research, and that important knowledge can arise by dwelling with the questions. Barreiros and Moreira (2020) argue that raising questions and prompting deep introspection are just as significant as finding answers due to their ability to break down colonized "knowns" into decolonized "unknowns."

Reciprocity and Respect for Self-Determination

When discussing relationships in a refugee study, Mackenzie et al. (2007) point out that a recurring theme is self-determination, which brings issues around consent and autonomous decision-making to the fore. They contend that consent should be an iterative cyclical process rather than a single event to promote participants' capacity for self-determination. This idea alters the perception of consent to a process of ongoing negotiation, where consent is continuously being asked for and granted at all stages of the research process. Conflicts around publication and dissemination of findings are another source of divide between researchers and study participants, creating further complications among researcher-participant relationships (Hawkins, 2015). Decolonizing research methodology tackles the root issue of the aforementioned conflicts, utilizing the principle of reciprocity to drive collaboration from the conception of a study to the end, and to establish collective ownership over the entire research process, the data analysis, and its dissemination (Datta, 2018). Aligned with this, refugee advocacy organizations support refugees' right to self-determination in research studies, insisting on shared decision-making powers in order to place the well-being of refugees over research objectives (Clark-Kazak, 2017).

Though sharing research findings is noted as a great source of healing and therapeutic power for oppressed communities (Archibald, 2008), decolonizing methodology emphasizes that reciprocity is not limited to "reporting back" to the community (Smith, 2012). Reciprocity plays a pivotal role in the relationship between researcher and participant. Beyond trust and mutual respect, there is an anti-colonial understanding and accountability to the research participants, which presents itself through seeking guidance and reiterative feedback (Taha, 2018). The altruistic goals of "giving voice" and "empowering communities" are looked down upon in decolonizing research, since it wrongfully implies that communities are unable to achieve on their own what researchers are able to provide (Bishop, 1998). To conduct collaborative research grounded

in decolonial values, respect for self-determination and reciprocity calls upon the act of listening as a symbol for healing wounds of colonialism and as demonstration of resistance (Barreiros & Moreira, 2020). Listening allows for open dialog between researcher and participant. Traditionally, the one who speaks is the one who is listened to and the one who listens is the one who is silenced; yet Cahill (2007) argues that for listening to take on the power of a decolonizing methodological weapon, it must go beyond its usual biological definition and incorporate an emotional, trusting relationship between people. Delpit (1988) calls for researchers to listen affectively, which not only calls for eyes and ears to be opened, but also hearts and minds. Listening affectively implies accountability, as well as a commitment to growth and space for becoming (McDermott, 2013). It is active, not passive. As McDermott (2013) explains, "if affect is attended to, we may be better prepared to be transformed; we may be better aware of the in-processness of transformation" (p. 224). Respect for self-determination and reciprocity can also play a vital piece in approaching research from a humanistic stance. Overwhelming ethical challenges, such as blurred boundaries around duty of care, are prevalent in refugee research, however respect for self-determination, and efforts toward reciprocity, may help mitigate what Fine (1994) refers to as "a contradiction-filled, colonizing discourse of the Other."

Embracing Other(ed) Ways of Knowing

Partaking in research with refugee or Indigenous populations can mean working with people from different cultures, different lived experiences, and different norms. This presents a unique difficulty, one that researchers may not be prepared to appropriately handle. Dating back to 1974, the Tapp Report was developed to aid in this matter, offering guidelines for ethical conduct of cross-cultural research (Tapp et al., 1974). The underlying basis of the Tapp Report is that cross-cultural research can be conducted ethically "only when done in collaboration and partnership with members of the cultural communities being studied" (Tapp et al., 1974, p. 233). This report contends that it is inadequate for researchers to merely be culturally sensitive and to have knowledge about the population being studied but rather that meaningful inclusion of community members' knowledge is required.

Unlearning and re-imagining how we construct, produce, and value knowledge is integral to decolonizing research. As early as 1950, Césaire wrote about the historical violence and exploitation of colonizing approaches to research, stating: "goitrous academics were tools of capitalism and supporters of plundering colonialism, all of them responsible, all hateful, all henceforth answerable for the violence of revolutionary action" (Césaire, 1950, pp. 54–55). Academics were involved in nation-building projects, through race logic and white supremacy, and [perhaps unwittingly] advanced the agenda on anti-Black chattel slavery and the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Césaire argued that through the process of formulated "thingification" in their research, academics reinforced beliefs

that the colonized were nothing more than an object or an animal; and thus, the colonizers are justified in treating them as such (Césaire, 1950). Memmi (1965) too described thingification as a facilitator and ontological driver to upholding colonial power by forcing the colonized to believe false narratives about themselves. As Steve Biko said, “The greatest weapon in the hand of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (Wilson, 2011, p. 152). These perspectives are embedded within decolonial theoretical work, and call for researchers to go beyond simply capturing and recognizing views belonging to the “Other”—a term originating from literature around Orientalism (Said, 1979). To counter dominant narratives of the past through a decolonizing approach, the onus is on the researcher to expand their epistemological thinking to include theoretical explanations and methodological approaches that embrace Other(ed) ways of knowing (Taha, 2018). Smith (2012) reminds researchers to critique and consider how their worldview may subscribe to the dominant discourse of the Other; the gaze of a researcher is often implicitly shaped by imperial and colonial ideologies of Western research.

One approach to recognizing other ways of knowing is by utilizing cultural insiders or cultural brokers to promote understanding of alternative perspectives; this has become increasingly common among researchers working across cultures. In advancing a decolonizing perspective, researchers may find it helpful to include individuals who have insight and familiarity with a particular group’s culture through membership in that same group (Trimble & Fisher, 2005). This does not infer that individuals with the same cultural background necessarily possess identical lived experiences or identical ways of knowing the world. The European Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2016), through established guidelines, reminds researchers to avoid ethnocentricity in migrant research. This organization requires a detailed strategy document describing the relevance of one’s research to the communities involved, accompanied by evidence through consultation with the community itself or a cultural insider. Though a step in the right direction, advocates of decolonizing methodology further urge researchers to be attentive to the overarching theoretical framework and research process and remain prepared to make informed changes when Western theories or methods are deemed inappropriate (Datta, 2018).

Battiste (2000) further argues that decolonizing research means centring the community’s voices and epistemological perspectives throughout the research process. For Mazzocchi (2006), this implies that researchers commit to challenging the belief that Western methods and ways of knowing are the only approach to knowledge generation. Rather than turning a blind eye to traditional knowledge from other cultures, decolonizing researchers aim to respectfully understand and integrate theory from Other(ed) perspectives, while also critically examining the underlying assumptions that inform their Western research framework (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Smith (2012) contends that for too long

non-Western ways of knowing have been abandoned and viewed as “lesser than”: “Having been immersed in the Western academy which claims theory as thoroughly Western, which has constructed all the rules by which the Indigenous world has been theorized, Indigenous voices have been overwhelmingly silenced” (p. 802). “Braiding Indigenous Science and Western Science” is a powerful metaphor used to symbolize and acknowledge that different ways of knowing can coexist; in this metaphor, each strand remains a separate entity, however all strands come together to form a whole (Snively & Williams, 2016).

In one study involving Somali refugee youth, the researcher recognized the bias in her Western way of thinking during the member-checking process (Abdi, 2019). After reading the researcher’s data analysis, the youth expressed that their identity was inaccurately portrayed through the post-structural lens. This theoretical perspective negated an important component of the youth’s understanding of self, as the youth viewed self as rooted in collective identity (Abdi, 2019). The conceptualization of one’s identity and self as a member of a community versus an independent entity is not novel. Identity work in relation to community is mirrored in past decolonizing research narratives, and even has a special place in Kaupapa Maori culture-specific methodology with the term “whanau,” meaning extended family (Drawson et al., 2017). Originating from pre-colonial times, this term represented the core social unit and to this day, remains a way of living, explaining identity, and organizing the world (Love, 2002). Embracing Other(ed) forms of knowledge and collaboratively working with communities can help us work toward ethical, meaningful research based on solidarity.

Respecting participants’ cultural protocols is an important consideration for researchers striving to openly embrace and integrate Other(ed) ways of knowing. Researchers trained in the Western academy tend to favor the academic research protocol, paying no heed to participants’ practice, culture, and values (Lavallée, 2009). A safe, culturally competent ethical protocol is integral in maintaining a respectful and compassion environment in which research can take place. Restructuring Western ethics is a prerequisite for carrying out decolonizing research methodology. There is a need to shift the Western ethical standards that are directed to individual integrity into one of collective responsibility, with a focus on respectful and genuine relationships. For instance, one Maori community sets out guidelines for researchers: “respect for and protection of the rights, interests and sensitivities of the people being studied” (Smith, 2012, p. 2582). Some research ethics boards have created checklists to help novice researchers build trusting relationships with oppressed communities. However, I warn reducing people to checklists as a way of respecting or understanding difference, as this is profoundly othering, over-simplistic, and undermines the uniqueness of every community. Alternatively, I suggest taking the time to discuss ethical standards from the community’s perspective; after all, exercising compassion, maintaining respectful

relationships, and demonstrating humanity is at the core of cultural competence.

Embodying a Transformative Praxis

The metaphor of the margin has grown to be powerful as a means to analyze and understand oppression, inequality, disadvantage, and power (Drame et al., 2011; Vatansever, 2020). Many researchers actively choose to work in the margins; they choose to commit to social justice and to work alongside communities occupying the margins of society (Smith, 2012). For those who undertake emancipatory research, the purpose of doing research with oppressed communities stems from an intent to bring to light historically silenced voices and present their experiences in authentic ways. Simply put, researchers want to “get the story right, tell the story well” (Smith, 2012, p. 226). Researchers immersed in decolonizing theoretical perspectives do not limit themselves as scholars but take on the activist role as well. Scholar-activists seek to embody practices of decolonization not only in research, but as an overarching life praxis (Fortier, 2017).

While this paper focuses on the methodological applications of decolonial theories, Zavala (2013) argues that lessons learned from research projects suggest decolonizing research is “less about the struggle for method and more about the spaces that make decolonizing research possible” (p. 55). Reclaiming research starts with decolonizing spaces where research happens such as the academy. Kovach (2010) claims that the goal of creating a decolonizing academy implicates everyone; all researches have a responsibility to open up space for decolonizing lenses. This burden of responsibility should not only lie on the shoulders of researchers working with oppressed communities. Ironically, researchers involved in collaborative community-based research find themselves located in the margins within their institutions. For example, researchers working for actionable change within communities are not able to have the same hours of work put aside for quality academic publications, as these hours contribute toward doing community work (Smith, 2012). Regardless, research rankings are frequently measured by peer-reviewed publications rather than other metrics such as one’s contribution to society. Those committed to decolonization are motivated to “step outside the academic industrial complex” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 238); the pursuit of a scholar-activist role may result in sacrifices to normative academic career trajectories.

At the same time, now more than ever, universities are decorating their academic spaces with the verb “decolonize.” There is a danger here of appropriating the word for the purpose of participating in academic dialogs. In line with this interpretation, Fanon (1963) writes: “Let us admit it, the settler knows perfectly well that no phraseology can be a substitute for reality” (p. 45). What would be beneficial is to listen to those who have experienced colonial oppression and ask for their input around strategies to rebuild an anti-colonial academia. What needs to change in academia? What does academia need to

unlearn? As Rodriguez (2017) contends “the politics of decolonization are not the same as the act of decolonizing” (p. 1).

Having positioned this work within the critical paradigm, it is fitting to adopt Freire’s insights around the praxis necessary for transformation and emancipation. For Freire (1996): “Discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis” (p. 133). By contextualizing this within a research environment, the impetus for scholar-activists becomes visible. A transformative praxis involves reflexivity, community-engaged research, reciprocity, and action. As Freire (1996) states “if true commitment to the people, involving the transformation of the reality by which they are oppressed, requires a theory of transforming action, this theory cannot fail to assign the people a fundamental role in the transformation process” (p. 126).

In the embodiment of a transformative praxis, Freire (1996) proposes three main dimensions: theory, values, and practice. Theory requires engagement with questions that the community one works with seeks to explore; values entail determining what the community values, and the value of the research to the community; while practice refers to the capabilities, services researchers may offer particular communities. Ultimately, “if research hasn’t changed you as a person, then you haven’t done it correctly” (Wilson, 2008).

Conclusion

It is vital for qualitative researchers, particularly those working with populations oppressed by colonial legacies, to critically examine and apply decolonizing methodological practices to their research. Drawing on decolonizing theoretical perspectives, we have proposed four approaches to inform research practice in this direction: (1) exercising critical reflexivity, (2) enabling reciprocity and respect for self-determination, (3) embracing “Other(ed)” ways of knowing, and (4) embodying a transformative praxis. At this moment of our historical trajectory, it is a moral imperative to embrace decolonizing approaches when working with colonized groups on what some have described as “stolen land.” No one from the academy, even if they are members of non-white communities, is automatically exempt from perpetuating privileged, Western-centric, colonial ideas. As Angela Davis has famously said, “In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist.” Aligned with this perspective, researchers must consciously take part in reflexive engagement of their assumptions and interpretations, in the quest to work from an anti-colonial perspective. We reiterate that as qualitative researchers, committing to the use of decolonizing methodologies in our work should be combined with solidarity with oppressed populations in their everyday struggle against colonial forces. Future work that continues to explore and resist the epistemic legacy of colonization, and insidious forms of epistemic oppression, as well as possibilities for developing more liberatory methods, and the nuances of enacting decolonizing methodologies are recommended. Yet, as Sium et al. (2012)

contend, what it means to decolonize as a settler and researcher is constantly evolving, and must inherently be “unsettled.”

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