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Author

Datta, Ranjan

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Decolonizing Methodologies: A Transformation from Science- Oriented Researcher to Relational/ Participant-Oriented Researcher

Ranjan Datta

As studies show, the terms *research* and *researcher* present challenges for many Indigenous communities because rather than recognizing Indigenous worldviews or ways of viewing life and the world around them, researchers trained only in Western scientific methods employ them from a colonial perspective that Indigenous peoples experience as a form of violence, exploitation, and discrimination towards their land, culture, and knowledge.¹ Indeed, this Western training has been implicated in the “worst excesses of colonialism.”² This is not to say that researchers deliberately set out to cause harm through their Western style of science research. However, as Braun and colleagues have written, Western researchers have been trained in positivist and post-positivist paradigms “which [are] heavily influenced by the research methods of the natural sciences dating back to the turn of the 20th century.” They argue that both positivist and post-positivist paradigms are based on the idea that there is a single truth to be discovered and that scientific knowledge is far more valuable than subjective or experiential knowledge.³ In contrast, Indigenous forms of research constitute resistance to centuries of colonial domination and have the capacity to transform, bringing new ways of being and knowing to the academy and enabling research in ways that often challenge Western models of research that have been taken for granted.

RANJAN DATTA is currently the Banting Postdoctoral Fellow in the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Regina, Canada. Among his research interests are decolonization, Indigenous land and water rights, environmental sustainability, social and environmental justice, environmental sociology, antiracist theory and practice, community-based research, and cross-cultural research methodology and methods.

Transformation through decolonization to an Indigenous style of research not only deepens participants' understanding of the impacts of the Western and colonial research process but also helps researchers to reclaim the meaning of research from and within the participant community's needs and knowledge. This transforming process can be viewed as empowerment for both researcher and participants. Transformative research is able to challenge Western research by unmasking the assumptions of colonial research but also has the potential to open up new ways of thinking about and doing research. In the following article, I first explain my personal transformation from a Western science-oriented researcher to a relational/participant-oriented researcher and how I developed my understanding of the processes of decolonization in order to build a meaningful transformation. I then discuss the participants' perspective as a basis for transforming both research and researcher. Finally, with the hope that researcher and participant knowledge and empathy will no longer be ignored, neglected, or misapplied, I provide some implications of the transformation so that as researchers, we can envision a new way of understanding our position in our research and our responsibilities towards our participants' community.

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH?

Transformative processes through decolonization are lifelong decolonizing acts.⁴ Transformative research is able to challenge Western research by unmasking the assumptions of colonial research but also has the potential to open up new ways of thinking about and doing research. Against a backdrop of research as colonization, transformational research insists that Indigenous research be undertaken for and with Indigenous communities.⁵ It is a way of valuing, honoring, respecting, and renewing Indigenous knowledge as scientific knowledge.⁶ It challenges not only our Western ways of knowing but also helps to reclaim alternative ways of knowing.

In transformative research, the researcher and participants form relationships.⁷ The relationships make the researcher accountable to the participants' community as well as the researcher. The relationship in a transformative process recognizes that an "idea cannot be taken out of this relational context and still maintain its shape."⁸ Transformative forms of research are a continuous process of respecting, honoring, and valuing participants' community knowledge and including researcher reflections.⁹ Transformation through decolonization to an Indigenous style of research not only deepens participants' understanding of the impacts of the Western and colonial research process but also helps researchers to reclaim the meaning of research from and within the participant community's needs and knowledge.¹⁰ This transforming process can be viewed as empowerment for both researcher and participants.

Being transformative as a researcher, however, is not necessarily a straightforward task. It is a lifelong unlearning and relearning process that includes liberating oneself from the Western form of research, unlearning a Western science-oriented research training, and giving importance to the participants' community needs, relationships, and their voice. In that Western science-oriented research training ignored, neglected, and/or misapplied my empathy and my participants' community voice, it was a significant challenge for my research participants' community and myself as a researcher.

CHALLENGES IN WESTERN SCIENCE-ORIENTED RESEARCH TRAINING

My story begins with my desire to major in sociology because I wanted to know how society works in order to understand it and transform it. I wanted to learn how to approach social issues critically, from the dynamics and common characteristics of small groups to complex private and public bureaucracies. I wanted to develop my skills in identifying and understanding the underlying patterns in human behavior and our relationships with one another, a capacity which C. W. Mills (1976) calls the “sociological imagination,” as valuable preparation for personal and professional participation in a changing and complex world.¹¹ I fell in love in no time, especially with the power of sociology to debunk the system of oppression—the power I had always longed for as a minority person in Bangladesh and an immigrant in Canada. As a minority community researcher in Bangladesh, I wanted to protect our minority Indigenous identity, culture, tradition, land rights, and traditional education.

Traditional learning, culture, language, community meaning of research are my life experience and have impacted who I am and what I can do as a researcher and community member. I learned from our Indigenous culture that a researcher is not outside of the community, but that our Indigenous elders and knowledge holders have been successful researchers in the community who have contributed much valuable knowledge to our community and beyond. While I do not argue that all sociology researchers receive the same research training, after completing my undergraduate and master’s degree programs I realized that I had been trained only in Western, science-oriented research. Because my honors education in sociology did not talk about the participant community’s needs and knowledge or my empathy and situation as a researcher, I had not gained the expected skills.¹²

The research methodology training in my undergraduate and graduate programs in sociology and criminology included different courses embedded within Western science-oriented research training such as introductory research, research methods construction, research data analysis, and advanced research methods. I learned various concepts that support sociology’s claims to be scientific: hypothesis formulation, variables, units of analysis, control, sample, population, reliability, validity, generalizability, confound, and spuriousness. I believed in the legitimacy of the social sciences—and, more precisely, the need for such legitimacy. In a subsequent field methods course, I briefly learned about research paradigms, distinct approaches to the meanings and processes of knowledge-making. We covered positivism, functionalism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and feminism.¹³

As a sociology researcher at universities in the United States and Bangladesh, I tried to be as objective as possible in my research, but I felt my Western science-oriented research training negatively affected my empathy as a researcher and separated me from my community. Various course instructors suggested that I could identify my position as a researcher between structuralism and poststructuralism. However, most times I was not able to differentiate between these two “isms.” Not only were my responsibilities as a researcher unclear, but I was unable to find answers for many of my questions, such as “where are the participants’ voices?” or, more to the point, “how

can we center participant needs and voices in our research?" As a community-based participatory researcher, I realized that my sociological understanding and research were problematic when an elder who was one of my research participants asked me, "Where is my story? What are my/our benefits from your research?" I was not trained to address these questions and/or to incorporate participants in my research.

Being objective was also a challenge as a researcher. I learned in my strictly Western-based training as a sociological researcher that I should neither support my participants' voices nor challenge existing oppressions.¹⁴ I was taught that I needed to play as neutral a role as possible in our research so that we could prove it was scientific. We were trained to find *the* causal relationship between social realities and social structure, but not how to identify community everyday practice as part of scientific knowledge. I was taught how to see different forms of racism in our everyday practices, such as discrimination in the playground, classroom, streets, jobs, and so on, but told not to respond to these issues. I know that some sociological research training contributes to increasing critical thinking skills, which lead students to understanding the complex relationships in our everyday interactions. However, in our contemporary sociology methods course, I was taught that as sociologists our role is as a third person who can only be an observer and cannot, or shouldn't, play an active role.¹⁵ As observers in our research, we can see the problems but not make any changes. If we do challenge the existing structure and/or issues, we may lose our objectivity or the reliability of our research.

We were taught that as sociologists we should see social problems and social conflicts as a *cybernetic* process. This means social facts and realities cannot be changed or challenged: we must only observe. My sociology research training helped me to understand social structure, social interactions, social conflict, social problems, and so on; however, in the name of research objectivity, I was taught to be silent on social injustice issues such as discrimination and displacement of Indigenous and minority communities, inequality, and social, cultural, and ecological oppression. I used to feel that our sociological research training was all about understanding and seeing everyday social problems without challenging our positionality as researcher.¹⁶ Like other students I was told to find a balance between seeing the problems, identifying the problems, and not responding to the problems. We should not express sympathy or pain or give support to our participants, or to ourselves as researchers. For instance, when I showed my statistical research results and explained my successes to the elders of the participants' community, they often asked me what I brought them from my research. Most times, I did not have specific answers for my research participants.

If my Western sociological research training could not provide me with the desired research skills, I did like the concepts of qualitative methods and grounded theory,¹⁷ and I still believed in social research even more firmly. In both Bangladesh and the United States, we were taught that if we could find predictability, objectivity, and reliability in our culture, social interactions, and social values research, we would get high scores and/or our research would be appreciated by researchers with a Western mindset. Yet I often asked myself why sociology needed predictability like

post-positivistic sciences such as math and economics. What are sociologists going to accomplish by working from predictability?

For example, faculty and students in my master's program in sociology were busy finding the evidence and the objectivity to build scientific connections between research and social life studies. In my understanding, the scientific tendencies of sociology and criminology were not derived from qualitative or quantitative research methods; rather, to seek only the logistic causal relationships between means and goals is connected to Western greed to predict social reality and/or measure social successes as part of controlling social reality and human action and interaction. Indigenous scholars therefore argue that Western forms of research only look into researchers' interests, which can lead to study participants' stigmatization, disempowerment, and loss of control over their knowledge.¹⁸ As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith has written, "research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary."¹⁹

I was always uncomfortable with the strictly Western-oriented research training in my Bachelor's and Master's Sociology programs in the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), Bangladesh, and Monmouth University in the USA. I wanted to make a positive impact in participant communities, but as a sociologist I did not get the expected training on how to make a positive impact through our research, nor did I learn how to make the connection between research and practice. Thus, developing research questions was another important challenge. During graduate research in sociology and criminology, my research questions and objectives were mostly guided by a particular hypothesis and objectives, an expected theoretical framework, or a hypothetical research proposal so that my research outcomes could draw an expected theoretical conclusion and/or lead to logical, predictable, and close-to-scientific goals and objectives. I found that if my research framework led to predictable results, it was appreciated, graded highly, and identified as one of the best research papers in the department. However, my participants' needs, their practices and culture, my empathy as a researcher, all became secondary; I was neither able to give anything to my participants nor was I happy with what I did as a researcher. I used to feel that I was using my people/participants' knowledge for my academic degree but not doing enough for them. I remember one of the knowledge holders' comments during my graduate research:

Why are you asking me to join your research? Every year I face many researchers like you from various governments, universities, and companies. In the name of development, researchers take our knowledge and leave. When the research is done, we do not know anything about what knowledge they have taken from us and why. We do not get anything from it. Now the word *research* represents danger to us. I think it is a different form of oppression.

This is a legitimate concern and I was not well prepared to answer and/or address participants' concerns.²⁰ Most times, my answers to these comments have been incomplete and partial and I often felt guilty. I struggled with colonization with sociological training. I felt my disciplinary training was incomplete insofar as I did not make a sincere attempt to form a new relationship with my research that matters to me and to my participants.

However, while I was conducting my field research for my master's degree,²¹ one of the elders explained to me how to redefine the meaning of research and why:

If you want my involvement in your research, you need to change its meaning so that we can get benefit from it. Research should be advocacy for us rather than only accomplishing your academic needs. Your academic research does not carry any meaning to us if we cannot read, understand, and use it. We need more advocacy-based research alongside your academic research. Your academic research only talks about your needs; it does not give us anything.

The elder's suggestions helped me to dream about new forms of research training. I also found similarities in a variety of Indigenous scholarship²² indicating that our roles as researchers need significant transformation and further, that we also need to reclaim the full range of antiracist and participant-oriented research visions. Although I did not receive participant-oriented research training during my undergraduate and graduate studies, since then my relationship with social research has evolved, taking a particular path as I learned and grew as a person.

PROCESSES OF DECOLONIZATION

Situating these difficulties in the context of Western research training helps to clarify why, particularly in Indigenous communities in many parts of the world, challenges and threats to Western research occur.²³ I learned from my Indigenous community and Indigenous literature the importance of research which is "actively recognizing, centring, validating, and honoring Indigenous rights, values, epistemologies or world-views, knowledge, language, and the stories of the people of the Land."²⁴ Such research requires the use of participatory and transformative research methods and partnership with Indigenous elders, families, and communities. My processes of decolonization began during my PhD research training as I came to understand a researcher's political stand and participation in community and justice activities. The underlying assumptions of conventional sociological scientific research training are completely different from the concept of decolonizing from a relational, sharing, respectful, and borderless perspective.²⁵ Transformative forms of research can lead to an increase in research support and activities aimed at finding ways to more safely and effectively manage the research in order to positively impact Indigenous people and their communities.²⁶

A study by Braun and colleagues suggests that "we recommend that more research be conducted to advance understanding of indigenous elders. The major question raised by this study is, "how should this research be conducted, and who should conduct it?"²⁷ Therefore, there is no one best method to access that knowledge. Informed by a number of Indigenous scholars,²⁸ I understand knowledge as embodied and relational and I thus argue that in decolonization there is no objective reality, but rather multiple realities. Always dependent on social contexts, decolonizing research is personal as well as political, implicated in desires, intentions, purposes, agenda, benefits, and power.²⁹ Many Indigenous scholars have suggested alternative epistemologies to the system of authentic scientific knowledge.³⁰ In *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*,

Shawn Wilson has articulated an Indigenous research paradigm that is based upon the ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology of an Indigenous worldview, a cosmology entirely different from the Western one. He argues that relationality is central to this paradigm and the researcher must uphold relational accountability. I have also learned much from Wilson's concept of knowledge, in which knowledge does not belong to individuals, but is relational, interdependent, constantly produced, shared, and reproduced through the web of relationships.³¹

Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization

Although the School of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Saskatchewan was the home department for my doctoral program, my research methods courses were offered by my adviser's department, Educational Foundations. My decolonization started at the university when I was able to collaborate with nationally and internationally known Indigenous scholars with diverse research interests who relied on me for research or teaching assistance, such as Marie Battiste, Verna St. Denis, Alex Wilson, and Margaret Kovach. I not only learned antiracist, postcolonial, Indigenous methodologies and methods, but why and how to build relationships with research participants. I was also introduced to their contributions to the social phenomena of Indigeneity, Indigenous education, experiential learning, cross-cultural learning and management, social and environmental justice. While working as a research assistant to a creative scholar committed to Two-Spirit rights, social justice, and social well-being, I was trained in socioecological, antiracist justice theories and practices and had an opportunity to reconfigure the meanings of research and researcher from partnerships perspective (i.e., research and participants).

My decolonization ceremony began with my first decolonizing methodology course, Cross-Cultural Research Methodologies, and I was very fortunate that the instructor was Alex Wilson (Neyonawak Inniwak from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation), who was also a member of my PhD committee. With Dr. Wilson, I learned for the first time that all research is political and how to think and do research politically according to participants' needs and choices. I also learned that if we do not take the political position of our participants, our research may not only support the existing system, but may also fail to bring about any positive change for participants and even harm them. I had been exposed to the discussion of research ethics, but I had never even thought of the option, or the responsibility, *not* to do research. This resonated with me immediately because my own struggle to decolonize myself had just begun around that time. Knowing Indigenous faculty and their academic contribution to decolonization as well as opportunities to guest lecture helped me to dream, think, act, and reclaim four directions of research processes: decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization. It also entailed four major conditions: survival, recovery, development, and self-determination.

Political Stand and Decolonization

Researchers' political stands are significant to their research.³² In refusing to accept a neutral and value-free objective position for researchers, Howard Becker argues that

because researcher empathy is essential, the question for transformative researchers is not whether to take sides, but rather which side to choose.³³ According to Becker, a researcher's neutral position in Western research does not bring any positive change for those groups for whom they are working; rather, it naturally supports the existing uneven power relationships between subordinate groups and the existing structure. In his view, since subordinate groups do not have a voice in this "hierarchy of credibility" and lack the power to change existing structure, researchers' empathy should go to the subordinate groups. He further suggests that to break up the existing hierarchy of credibility researchers should take a political position and be proud of "bias" (i.e., our political stand) if it is on behalf of our participants, and that we should speak up for subordinate groups and the need to be political in our research.

Like Becker, I feel that Western scientific research training and an academic degree in sociology not only overruled my feelings, empathy, and voice as a researcher, but also separated me from my research participants' community. As more researchers and students become interested in transformative research, those researchers who take a political stand will help to build relationships with community, and research will be more effective for both researchers and the participants' community.

Community, Social Justice Activities, and Decolonization

As my involvement with various Indigenous communities' social and environmental justice activities and movements enriched my understanding of decolonization, my understanding of research environments expanded and began to shift from the scientific to cross-cultural, antiracist, and critical eco-justice education. Cross-cultural learning processes were helpful in understanding the meanings of "otherness" in research, as well as the colonizing of the mind which normalizes the whole process.³⁴ As I understood that "othering" is a process of unequal power dynamics between participants and researcher, between the hegemonic and the subjugated object, I began to question the very existence of research and of academia.

Scholarship that called for the decolonization of research and the strategic use of research as a tool of decolonization resonated with me as I searched for answers to the question, "What might a decolonization of research entail?" To learn about the processes of decolonization in my PhD graduate and research work played a significant role in my own decolonization and inspired me to become involved in many community justice activities beyond the university. I have actively participated in social well-being and justice movements such as Idle No More and First Nations land rights and have also engaged with Saskatoon Community Radio (CFCR 90.5), Saskatchewan Climate Change, Saskatoon Food Bank, and Friendship Inn. Because I am, by necessity, a vehement critic of injustice, I expect to continue asking, "How do these theories, perspectives, and methodologies inform your participant-based research? How does your work aim to transform the structural basis of unequal relations of power?" and apply them to community service for the rest of my life.

Reclaiming Research Methodology and Methods

Course activities can have a significant impact on processes of reclaiming. For example, one of the assignments in the Cross-Cultural Research Methodologies course was to observe and build a relationship with moon. Because of my previous research training, this three-month assignment was a difficult task for me, but it helped me to reconnect to our Indigenous community's stories and education. In my first couple of moon observations, I was not able to find any relationship with moon. For instance, a reflection from the first two weeks expresses frustration: "I am trying to find out what is in the moon. Whenever I am trying to look into moon deeply something comes into my mind from my previous ideas: either what I knew or what I had heard about moon, mostly scientific stories. I tried and tried, but my previous ideas interfered subconsciously." However, after eight weeks of observing, I had different observations and relationships with moon:

Moon focuses only towards me. We [Moon and I] are becoming connected slowly. Maybe Moon can hear my breath now. Our relationship reminds me how I grew up, where my origin is, and my feelings. I am feeling that I am connected and I am not far from my mother land. It's connecting me with my spirituality, i.e. morning *puja* [prayer], evening *puja*, and *Prasad* [holy food].

There were significant differences between my first and last moon observations. The first time I did not even know what to look at and how to look for the moon and I did not find it, but gradually I felt my accountabilities towards the relationship the moon and I share. I learned that as an immigrant in a foreign land, I am more connected with motherland, moon, and sun than ever; I felt that, "Even if I do not have any friends, moon is with me." Moon observation processes not only helped me to understand my responsibilities as an observer, but also created my sense of belonging. There were no similarities between my imaginative moon and the scientific meanings of moon. For me, moon is truth, real, and my family member. Moon does not change and it advises us not to change ourselves too, that we are connected with land, moon, sun, and so on.

My moon observation, other critical research methods courses, and my relationships with my participants helped to transform me into a participant-oriented researcher. For me, moon was not as others saw it and did not have an essential identity; rather, moon was my partner and in my imagination. I was able to talk to the moon. I can feel my relationship with the moon regardless of my surroundings, the moon's visibility, and invisibility. I learned how to respect moon the way moon is. I felt that I did not need to add any scientific meaning to my observation. During my moon

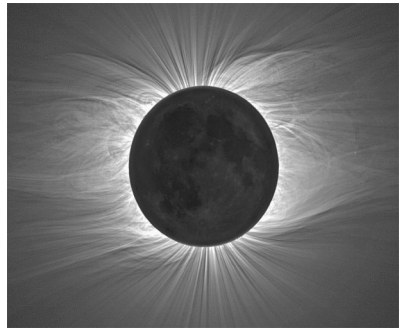


FIGURE 1. *This image expresses my imaginative relationships with moon that developed after three months' observation.*

observation, I developed the following insights which helped to reclaim my research understandings:

- ♦ What are moon's identities in terms of different places and times?
- ♦ Who has a right to define moon's identities? What are the individual, community, and structural interests behind these definitions?
- ♦ Why and how should respectful relationships be understood?
- ♦ How and why are our moon worldviews shaped differently among individuals?
- ♦ Why and how is my relationship important regarding who I am and what I am doing?
- ♦ Why should we care about our relationships?
- ♦ What does my moon worldview mean to me? How are our relationships important for our everyday actions, interactions, and thinking?

My moon observations also helped me to not only unlearn my previous research methodologies and methods, but also how to reclaim the steps in my research observation activities. In addition to study of research methods, field work in Bangladesh significantly impacted my processes for reclaiming research methodology and methods. I used these questions as research techniques during my doctoral research on Indigenous perspectives on land-water management and sustainability of the Laitu Khyeng Indigenous community in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Like moon, my participants and their relationships were always with me. In my research I felt that I was part of participant relationships. There was no otherness, rather our realities and our everyday relationships.

TRANSFORMING RESEARCH AND RESEARCHER

Transforming both research and researcher is essential in community-based research, and the transformation helps in reclaiming the participants' voice.³⁵ My PhD research journey was a significant process of reclaiming, a ceremonial journey. This reclaiming and reimagining of research methods empowered me and created a sense of belonging in each step of my PhD research. In carrying out this collective research, I did not think at all about what I was doing for "others"; I always felt my research was speaking for my rights. Taking place within the participant relationships, my research was a relational ceremony with a participant's love, responsibilities, and solidarities. This transformed my understanding of how participant-oriented research as relationality is practiced: sharing information, honoring, respecting, and situating.

Relationality

As a doctoral researcher, I was an outsider as a non-Indigenous person within an Indigenous community and an insider as a minority person in Bangladesh; thus, my long relationships with my participants broke the boundaries between outsider and insider. As an outsider, my first task was to honor and value Indigenous spirituality, reciprocity, and relational accountabilities in the community.³⁶ My respect for my participants' community helped me to build trust within the community. I had fifteen years of professional and personal relationships with my participants'

community. Together we participated in and led a number of social and ecological justice movements, such as land rights, Indigenous identity rights, and forest rights. We celebrated a number of ceremonies involving land and moon together. These celebrations helped me in many ways, including building relationships with participants, knowing my position in the research, knowing my responsibilities for participants, and understanding the importance of participants' practices for protecting their land and water rights.

During my PhD research journey, my orientation transformed from "I" to "we." For example, I did not immediately set out to interview in my participants' community. Rather, I spent much time with the community and built reciprocal relationships so that I could understand their culture, traditions, spirituality, and practice. Further, during my doctoral research community elders and knowledge holders supported my effort to move from my position as a solo researcher to become "we"—collective researchers. In accordance with their suggestions, four co-researcher participants from the community joined this research for my PhD program and together, we identified our research questions according to the community's needs. We prioritized the stories of our elders and knowledge holders rather than academic inquiry and participants engaged throughout the research process, adding their inputs through sharing stories, transcripts, concept mapping, and data analysis. We collectively wrote our research reports. Many themes were identified and discussed according to our participants' shared stories and needs. In addition, so that participants could see and understand how our research themes were determined in our research reports, we rejected NVivo (16) coding processes for our participants' stories in favor of creating concept maps.³⁷

Sharing and Dissemination

During my PhD research training I learned that historically, knowledge was situated and practiced within communities.³⁸ I learned from my PhD research that the participants' community owns its knowledge and should have decision-making power whether to share that knowledge. The community educates researchers by sharing their knowledge and we were given opportunities to learn from the community's pre-existing knowledge of land-water sustainability; the community shared its knowledge and educated us. My co-researchers not only engaged in the research process, but also wrote journals about their learning experiences from talking to elders and knowledge holders, which were then published as four books—a first in their community. We also coauthored two peer-reviewed international journal articles and presented papers in various national and international seminars, conferences, and other forums.³⁹

We asked the community, as the owner of research knowledge, how they wanted to disseminate the research results. Participants continuously shared their research results with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Bangladeshi state ministries, and multinational agencies, as they wanted to provide their sustainable knowledge to mainstream people and multinational donors' agencies that have been providing funds to the government.

Honoring and Respecting

Building respectful relationships with the participants' community was another focal point of my collective research. As researchers, one of our responsibilities was to respect, honor, and prioritize Indigenous knowledge in our research. "Who I am" was an important part of building respectful relationships with the participant community. As I have detailed elsewhere,⁴⁰ I was born and grew up in a minority community and was displaced several times from our land. I lost my close relatives to the Islamic majority in my homeland. As a minority person, since childhood, I have had to resist different forms of exploitation and discrimination against us. We had to live in our ancestors' land as secondary citizens. Displacement, racism, and oppression were part of our everyday life.

During my strictly Western science-oriented research training, I had to situate myself in a society where certain types of knowledge matter and minority knowledge is "other" or "insignificant." Such a scientific knowledge pattern is ostentatiously produced and forcibly disseminated by academic institutions, mass media, government entities, corporations, and nonprofit organizations, and is seen as the most legitimate, authentic, expert, apolitical, objective, and trustworthy kind of knowledge. This scientific approach has created a hierarchy of knowledge, subjugating other types of knowledge that do not have monetary value, such as cultural/community knowledge and experiential knowledge. This is part of the reason why "the subaltern" cannot speak.⁴¹

Transformative research is able to challenge the "colonial and neo-colonial discourses that inscribe "otherness."⁴² A participatory mode of knowing privileges subjectivity, personal knowledge, and the specialized knowledge of oppressed groups. It uses concrete experience as a criterion for meaning and truth. It encourages a participatory mode of consciousness that locates the researcher within spaces in the group. The researcher is led by the members of the community and does not presume to be a leader or to have power that cannot be relinquished.⁴³ Conducting research was not only an academic pursuit for me. It was a collective movement, a struggle for justice.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

So far, I have described how my relationship with research has evolved and how I came to understand research as oppression. I have also examined the ontological and epistemological journey between the hegemonic scientific paradigm and my decolonizing paradigm. I believe that decolonizing represents an opportunity to not only challenge Western research that undermines participants' knowledge, practice, and culture but also to empower both researcher and participants.⁴⁴ As Wilson articulates in his Indigenous research paradigm, I must decolonize and reclaim the ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology of my research through my transformative research journey.

With my transformative experience, I learned that there are no good or bad research methods, only research strategies. In order to reclaim research practices, devising less harmful methods is far from sufficient. We should not look for what is

“Right or wrong; validity; statistically significant; worthy or unworthy: value judgments lose their meaning.”⁴⁵ Instead, we need to find out “What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship—that is, being accountable to your relations.”⁴⁶ From various critical research methodologies and methods courses, I learned that decolonization is a process of healing, resisting, reclaiming, thriving, protecting, learning, unlearning, imagining, remembering, connecting, sharing, and loving.⁴⁷ With the guidance of my PhD research training and research and the many important people who added new lives to my stories, I learned that as a researcher my empathy, relationships, and participants are a worthwhile part of my research life. I learned that I neither have to be apologetic about my biases, nor to iron them out. I have learned that research must be a relationship-building process for self-determination and social justice; otherwise, it should not be conducted. I learned from the Indigenous communities that research has always been part of their everyday lives. Therefore, researchers must reclaim what the community means by research and own it.

A decolonization of research—to be precise, my decolonization of research—entails a paradigm shift, an entirely different relationship to research rooted in an entirely different worldview. It is historically and geographically specific, and I do not claim that my decolonizing paradigm can be applied universally to all other decolonization efforts, although others may find some elements relevant.

As I have argued, transforming to a participant-oriented and/or relational researcher empowers both participants and researchers. It may also benefit future research practice in several ways. For example, grounded in emotional and cognitive resonance, the transforming processes have the potential to increase understanding of the interconnectivity between researcher and participants across sociocultural differences and “motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building.”⁴⁸ Additionally, a participant-oriented or relational research framework could enable researchers to explore self in the presence of others to gain a collective understanding of their shared experiences. Critical probing of one another is a vital step in the collaborative process.⁴⁹

My decolonizing helped me to recognize that, “while you [we] may be conducting research with a select group of individuals, they are members of a greater community and it is important to honour and recognize that community.” I remind myself that there will be times in the research relationship when I am the student who is seeking objectivity, but also times when I am looking to build relationships. Both becoming and sharing are reciprocal. Along this journey, it is vitally important that I form authentic relationships with the people with whom I work. I have learned that because knowledge is relational, decolonization is not a checklist; it must be constantly communicated, negotiated, and agreed upon with honest and sincere hearts. Like Margaret Kovach, I believe in “the relationship begins with decolonizing one’s mind and heart . . . This means exploring one’s own beliefs and values about knowledge and how it shapes practices. It is about examining whiteness. It is about examining power. It is ongoing.”⁵⁰ It does not involve the infamous Institutional Review Board, nor does it embrace any predetermined, yet abstract research ethics. Instead, I believe that

research is, and must be, a relationship-building process that must uphold relational accountability. If anyone involved in the process is not interested in cultivating solidarity for self-determination and social justice, the research should not be conducted.

Like Shawn Wilson, I believe that research must be democratized and deprofessionalized so that the expertise, skills, resources, practices, and products of research are in the hands of the people at the margins. Participant-oriented research may swing back to a more conventional scientific inquiry in reaction to the ever-increasing production of self-introspection that lacks methodological transparency and rigor. Ideally, then, the scientific-style academic industrial complex must be dismantled, reimaged, reconstructed, and reclaimed as part of decolonization.

Therefore, my lifelong transformation as researcher involves an ongoing unlearning and relearning journey. I am not worried about challenges to my research training and ways of being. My ongoing transformative journey helps me to take responsibilities for the participants and to rethinking whose stories are being privileged and whose stories are being marginalized in any representations of the other.

NOTES

1. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008); Ranjan Datta, "Decolonizing both Researcher and Research and its Effectiveness in Indigenous Research," *Research Ethics* (2017): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1747016117733296>; Ranjan Datta, Nyojy U. Khyang, Hla Kray Prue Khyang, Hla Aung Prue Khyang, Mathui Ching Khyang, Jebunnessa Chapola, "Participatory Action Research and Researcher's Responsibilities: An Experience with an Indigenous Community," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 18, no. 6 (2014): 581–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2014.927492>. "Western science-oriented training" is the term I use to identify the challenges in my research training analyzed in this essay.

2. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 2.

3. Kathryn L. Braun, Colette V. Browne, Lana Sue Ka'opua, Bum Yung Kim, and Noreen Mokuau, "Research on Indigenous Elders: From Positivistic to Decolonizing Methodologies," *The Gerontologist* 54, no. 1 (2014): 117, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnt067>.

4. Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*.

5. Datta, "Decolonizing both Research and Researcher."

6. Datta, et al., "Participatory Action Research and Researcher's Responsibilities."

7. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.

8. *Ibid.*, 8.

9. *Ibid.*, 9.

10. I use the term *decolonization* not only to challenge the authentic source of knowledge, but also to reclaim participants' voice, needs, and knowledge as significant part of the research. Marie Battiste, "Decolonizing University Research: Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Indigenous Populations," in *Justice Pending: Indigenous Peoples and Other Good Causes: Essays in Honour of Erica-Irene Daes*, ed. Gudmundur Alfredsson and Maria Stavropoulou (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2002), 33; Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.

11. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 13.

12. Howard Becker, "Whose Side are We On?" *Social Problems* 14, no. 3 (1967): 234–47; Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.
13. Kristin Esterberg, *Qualitative Methods in Social Research* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002).
14. Ibid.
15. Becker, "Whose Side are We On?"
16. Ibid.; Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
17. Barney G. Glaser and L. Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).
18. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*; Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research," in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2008), 1–44; Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (University of Toronto Press, 2010).
19. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 1.
20. Datta, et al., "Participatory Action Research and Researcher's Responsibilities."
21. With one of the Indigenous communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh.
22. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*; George Dei, "Critical Perspectives on Indigenous Research," *Socialist Studies* 9, no. 1 (2013): 27–38, <https://doi.org/10.18740/S47G64>.
23. Datta, et al., "Participatory Action Research and Researcher's Responsibilities"; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*.
24. Datta, "Decolonizing both Research and Researcher."
25. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*; Marie Battiste, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, Ltd., 2013); Marie Battiste, "Research Ethics for Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: Institutional and Researcher Responsibilities," in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, ed. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Berkeley: Sage, 2013), 497–509; Becker, "Whose Side Are We On?"
26. Ibid.; Dei, "Critical Perspectives on Indigenous Research"; Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.
27. Braun, et al., "Research on Indigenous Elders," 124.
28. Denzin and Lincoln, "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research"; Dei, "Critical Perspectives on Indigenous Research."
29. Datta, "Decolonizing both Research and Researcher"; Datta, et al., "Participatory Action Research and Researcher's Responsibilities."
30. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.
31. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.
32. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
33. Becker, "Whose Side are We On?," 244.
34. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.
35. Dei, "Critical Perspectives on Indigenous Research"; Datta, et al., "Participatory Action Research and Researcher's Responsibilities."
36. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.
37. An account of our collective research journey and our research team's collective responsibilities is provided in [AU: please cite publication]
38. Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
39. Datta, et al., "Participatory Action Research and Researcher's Responsibilities."
40. Ibid.
41. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271– 313.

42. Ibid.
43. Russel Bishop, "Freeing Ourselves from Neo-Colonial Domination in Research: A Maori Approach to Creating Knowledge," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11 (1998), 199–219.
44. Battiste, *Decolonizing Education*; Battiste, "Research Ethics for Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage."
45. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 77.
46. Ibid.
47. Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*; Battiste, *Decolonizing Education*; Battiste, "Research Ethics for Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage."
48. Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast, 2008), 52.
49. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*; Datta, et al., "Participatory Action Research and Researcher's Responsibilities."
50. Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 169.