



## Concrete Ways to Decolonize Research

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

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



Témiscamingue in late 2014<sup>1</sup>. Two previous editions of the seminar (in 2009 and 2011) had invited participants<sup>2</sup> to share experiences of good and bad research practices, summarized in Asselin and Basile (2012). The 3<sup>rd</sup> seminar took a step further in focusing on concrete ways to decolonize research. In what follows, we discuss research decolonization and summarize the key messages from the keynote speakers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> seminar, some of which have contributed papers to this themed issue. Additional contributions widened the geographical scope considered (Canada, Mexico, Peru) in addition to providing more examples of concrete ways to decolonize research.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

issue, Anishinaabeg scholar Deborah McGregor (2018, p. 19) mentions that: “We [Indigenous researchers] remain committed to our culture, traditions and our language, actively contributing to the growing body of [Indigenous knowledge] while recognizing that we face new challenges and must respond in ways that are relevant to present circumstances, including reconciling difficult relationships with others who benefit from the persistence of colonial research and practices”.

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

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

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