Decoloniality as Methodological Praxis

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Abstract

This paper examines decoloniality and ethnographic research using Maria Lugones' theoretical conceptualization of motion and stasis. In doing so, this supports developing a decolonial praxis-oriented toward culturally responsive research.
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As educators, we must reflect on and adjust our methodological practices to attain greater parity with marginalized communities. Examining our research methodologies allows us to rethink how educators address community marginalization. This examination would result in a reorientation of research to include study collaborators as co-producers of knowledge. Critical and collaborative ethnographic research becomes the tool to achieve rethinking practice. Applying Maria Lugones' theoretical framework of motion/stasis to ethnographic research supports developing a decolonial praxis.

For the remainder of this discussion, I will discuss decoloniality and how Maria Lugones' work supports developing a decolonial praxis within critical and collaborative ethnographic research. My aim in doing so is to address the following questions:

- How are Lugones' ideas relevant to ethnographic research concerning decoloniality?
- What specific decolonial moves does Lugones speaks to that support developing a decolonial ethnographic practice?

In framing this discussion within an adult education context, a secondary aim of this discussion is to show how educators can deeply engage with their practice to attain greater parity with race, gender, sexual orientation, and class. Educators can improve their research collaborators' experiences by embracing this methodological practice by challenging how knowledge is produced and working toward a culturally responsive research methodology.

Understanding decoloniality

In using decoloniality, I want to recognize that the term carries several epistemological orientations and intellectual projects. For this discussion, I use a synthesized version of decoloniality, which draws from several areas of scholarship. This would include Lugones (2010), Mignolo (2007, 2011), Mignolo & Tlostanova (2007), Perez (1999), Ríos-Rojas (2020), and Villenas (2006). While each is approaching decoloniality from different disciplinary epistemologies, they are each centered around the idea of pushing against Western ideas on knowledge production, power, and gender binaries. For this paper, I will work from a conception of decoloniality that decenters hegemonic knowledge production and challenges what types of knowledge are seen as legitimate. Additionally, I will use this working definition of decoloniality to analyze further how decolonial projects deconstruct gender binaries.

In approaching decoloniality and how it positions research, it provides a way to develop an ethical and collaborative ethnography. Decoloniality, while an ongoing process of decentering hegemonic power relations and knowledge, can also be an approach to constructing and conducting ethical research. Decoloniality asks us to not just reposition ourselves towards

working within a more inclusive construct. It also demands we create spaces for historically marginalized individuals such as QTBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, & People of Color) communities or within the research context, ensuring that those with whom we collaborate have a prominent seat at the table.

Decoloniality also asks us to disrupt and critically reflect on what identity truly means. Anzaldúa speaks to a decolonial turn when she notes that "for the politically correct stance we set color, class, and gender-separate us from those who would be kindred spirits. So, the walls grow higher, the gulfs between us wide, the silences more profound." (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 206). This is a recognition (and contradiction) in working through decoloniality. Even though there are shared affinities between and within marginalized groups, there are inherent challenges to disrupting normative ways of living, not without causing tension or conflict. Lugones (1998) is direct in offering insight in discussing how our movement in/through spaces and places, we situate ourselves in such a way that disrupts and challenges. She states that this includes "the adoption of several new attitudes as well as a different way of living: moving in and out of communities without thinking that these are places just to pass through as tourists." (p. 51). Lugones' ideas on motion/stasis help support and engage with our research collaborators. As we move in and out of a space or place, we are never entirely the same after the fact. Movement, in a decolonial context, allows researchers to enter into a context in which our positionality as researchers becomes a focal point through which we can deconstruct normative ideas around collaborator engagement. This type of engagement has broad implications for adult educators in thinking through how we can challenge ourselves and be challenged by others as we embrace a decolonial mindset.

By working toward decoloniality, critical and collaborative ethnographic research provides further context to achieve this. Research grounded in critical ethnography addresses the relationship between constraints on human action and active agency by individuals and groups (Castagno, 2012). Historically, traditional ethnography has been entrenched in marginalizing communities where research is conducted. Critical ethnography allows researchers to reflect on the power dynamics prevalent in ethnographic fieldwork. Recognizing power relations in the researcher-collaborator dynamic, ethnographers can work toward a more inclusive and socially just positionality. Collaborative ethnography, on the other hand, asks researchers "to regard their study participants not as objects, but as fully equal subjects capable of becoming their own ethnographers" (Alonso Bejarano et al., 2019, p.8) and as co-producers of knowledge. Creating a space for the co-production of knowledge enables study collaborators to have full agency in how data is constructed and used in the written report. Collaborative ethnographic research is inherently decolonial. Not only does it deconstruct the traditional researcher-collaborator dynamic, but it configures how and what knowledge is created and what is considered legislated knowledge. Orienting our methodologies through critical and collaborative ethnography serves as a roadmap for developing an equal and equitable research practice.

Applying Maria Lugones to Ethnography

Maria Lugones was an Argentine feminist scholar whose work addressed forms of resistance against multiple oppressions, most notably within her work on decolonial feminism. For this discussion, I will be using Lugones' conceptualization of motion, stasis, and resistance to interlocked oppression (1998). It is worth briefly discussing here how Lugones conceptualizes motion and stasis. Mobility, she states, "can be used as a metaphor for resistance *to* oppression or

as a metaphor *for* oppression" (p. 49). Movement as both oppressive and resistant should not be seen as a dichotomy. Instead, it is viewed as a way of "shifting back and forth" (p. 49) between space and place that makes examining oppression worthwhile. In this regard, we can think of both types of motion as enacting resistance in and through space and space, which can serve as strategies for survival that do not explicitly address forms of oppression. Stasis, like motion, offers a similar view on the resistance-oppression metaphor.

On the one hand, stasis as resistance could be seen as standing in opposition to something. On the other, stasis could be stagnation. Given this, Lugones work offers a way to work within decolonial frameworks to examine how knowledge is produced and challenged and deepen our understanding of our positionality in challenging traditional ethnographic research.

By traveling in and through another's world, there is a greater possibility to glimpse ourselves concerning someone else. There is an exchange between researcher and collaborator, which over time leads to increased identification with and desire to be with another versus the desire to be distant and unknowing. Maria Lugones states that "One walks from place of identity to place of identity, one's own and others'. One builds stakes in each place and complicates and challenges each place and is challenged by it and its inhabitants" (1998, 51). Situating this within the ethnographic context, we can see how this shapes our understanding of positionality. A researcher's positioning in relation to their collaborators is crucial to the development of an ethnographic study. It ensures that a socially just project is conducted and, first and foremost, ensures a researcher is fully acknowledging their own assumptions, beliefs, and biases within their research.

By moving in/through a community, Lugones is offering a decolonial moment here. In discussing the movement in/through space and place, we situate ourselves in a way that disrupts and challenges. She states that this includes "the adoption of several new attitudes as well as a different way of living: moving in and out of communities without thinking that these are places just to pass through as tourists." (1998, 51). Lugones' ideas of motion/stasis are helpful in imagining how individuals and spaces are never the same after engaging with or passing through them. Motion offers us the ability to move through engagements as an overt act of resistance by inserting oneself into an environment for the sake of disruption or a subtle articulation of language that changes one's perception. The same can be said of stasis. We can enact an oppositional stance to a hegemonic space by standing still.

Furthermore, we can look at how this applies to how researchers immerse themselves within the community they choose to engage. As this is a significant component of formulating an ethnographic study, either in the traditional sense or through critical and collaborative ethnography, some type of long-term engagement with collaborators is crucial. Castagno (2012) states that "the ethnographer seeks a deeper immersion in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important. With immersion, the field researcher sees from the inside how people lead their lives…and how they do so" (p. 384). Although access to individuals and communities rests on gatekeepers' support, what is important to note is the researcher's positionality in relation to their collaborators and the impact that could have on an ethnography and especially within historically marginalized populations. Lugones' ideas on motion and stasis become a helpful frame in thinking through potential effects felt on those in the community. Additionally, this also allows us to examine how an ethnographer's engagement with that community, in some part, changes both researcher and community.

Lugones offers critical insight on how to work toward a decolonial praxis and culturally responsive research methodology. By engaging further with our positionality, researchers can

examine how their previously held beliefs influence how research is conducted. Lugones motion/stasis provides one frame for examining this. Motion through communities, or what Lugones refers to as world traveling, we open ourselves up to a loving perception and being playful (2003). Love and playfulness are not about desire or sexual intimacy but speak to an effective way of doing work which allows for making mistakes and openness to being wrong sometimes. For this to occur, however, depends mainly on the length of time spent within the community and with individuals with whom a researcher is collaborating. This is not to say that entering a research relationship, especially where ethnographic work has been more extractive than collaborative, will be smooth and not without its challenges.

Historically, ethnographic research has produced work that only "reinforced the image of the colonial subject" (Riemer, 2012, p. 184). A complete discussion of ethnography's colonial history is beyond the scope of this discussion. What is important to note is that ethnographic research has created a practice where the researcher is viewed as the disembodied, all-seeing practitioner. Developing a decolonial research practice requires recognizing ethnography's relationship in reproducing a social relationship that marginalizes collaborators. Lugones offers a way of thinking through this relationship by renegotiating our positionality and moving toward a decolonial praxis.

Decolonial Ethnography

While ethnographic research generally provides a complex, contextually specific description of a culture-sharing group, I feel it stops short in fully addressing unequal power relations, structural analysis, and giving agency to those being observed. In using Lugones to frame a decolonial research practice, critical and collaborative approaches to ethnography become attainable. Both approaches, and critical ethnography specifically, "explicitly assumes that various cultures and groups of people are positioned unequally within society and have varied access to power and resources" (Castagno, 2012, p. 375). Critical ethnography is not something that is taken in stride, acknowledging what your responsibilities are not only to the research but to the participants. It, as Schram (2003) states, "demands an acknowledgment of responsibility to talk about your identity as a researcher, [and] why you question what you do" (p. 98). Additionally, the decolonial perspective "asks ethnographers to regard their study participants not as objects, but as fully equal subjects capable of becoming their own ethnographers (Alonso Bejarano, López Juárez, Mijangos García, & Goldstein, 2019, p. 8). Ethnography is not the detached, objective method historically represented in the text but a collaborative effort between participants and the researcher.

Both critical and collaborative ethnographies provide a roadmap to understanding the complexity of research within a historically marginalized community and serve two purposes. They allow researchers to be critically reflective on the research they aim to conduct and to serve as a frame for positionality in decentering constructed knowledge. As frameworks to inform research, critical and collaborative ethnographies provide helpful theoretical tools to challenge normative structures in and outside of the research. As Castagno (2012) states, "critical ethnography highlights both the ways societal structures and institutions shape experience and the ability of people to respond and thus shape experience" (p. 373). Attending to social structures and the agency of individuals or groups of individuals, critical ethnography shows how choices are made within the context of resistance and structural oppressions. Castagno (2102) goes on to explain how illuminating structures entail demonstrating how economic, political,

social, and cultural institutions operate contextually and limit individuals' options. On the other hand, illuminating agency emphasizes how individuals are not fully limited and how our behaviors are not always dictated by the systems in which we exist. (p. 377). Thus, the focus on resistance to hegemonic structures becomes a central goal of critical and collaborative ethnography, where agency is given to individuals and groups, where even resistance to oppressive structures becomes the focal point. However, as Castagno further discusses, this also confines their possibilities for action (p. 378). Given this, amplifying either structural oppressions or the agency of individuals does not fully map the reality of participants. Instead, it helps us further understand the complexities of lived experiences and allows researchers to work toward a culturally responsive research practice.

Final Thoughts

Approaching decoloniality and how it positions the researcher provides a way to develop an ethical and collaborative ethnography. Decoloniality, while an ongoing process of decentering hegemonic power relations and knowledge, can also be an approach to constructing and conducting culturally responsive research. Decoloniality asks us to reposition ourselves towards working within an inclusive construct and demands we create spaces for historically marginalized communities or within the research context, ensuring that those with whom we collaborate have a prominent seat at the table. Educators can elevate their research collaborators' lived experiences and work toward a socially just agenda by embracing these methodological practices.

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