

COLONIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

Anthropologists have long been critics of sexism, colonialism, racism, inequality, and capitalist exploitation, especially in the sites and contexts in which they practice ethnographic research. And yet anthropology remains a colonial discipline, a reality that shapes its theories and methods and limits its possibilities for engaged political action. Exploring this reality and pointing the way toward alternatives are the aims of this chapter.

Anthropology emerged as a scientific discipline during the colonial era, when Europeans were consolidating their control over the non-Western territories that they had subjugated to their rule. The people of these territories became anthropology's objects of analysis, and anthropology became the discipline in the Western scientific academy dedicated to the study of non-Western peoples. Within the emerging social sciences, anthropology laid claim to the "primitive" world as its intellectual turf, occupying what has been called the "savage slot" in academia and ceding the study of the modern or "civilized" to other fields (Trouillot 1991). Critical to this project was the ethnographic method, including the techniques of participant-observation through long-term field research, which enabled anthropologists to access the insiders' perspectives on their own societies. Scholars debate anthropology's contributions to colonial rule, with some calling it the "handmaiden of colonialism," created merely to serve colonial interests, a charge that others reject (Lewis 2013). But whatever service they may have provided colonizers, anthropologists benefited more from colonialism than

the colonial powers did from anthropology. Colonial domination of non-European others made the world safe for anthropological fieldwork: With the natives violently “pacified” and their territories opened for exploration, anthropologists could readily move in to local indigenous communities and set up shop (Asad 1979, 91–92). The colonial power structure enabled Europeans to safely observe and participate in the lives of non-Europeans, to establish the long-term, intimate relations that became the basis for and the hallmark of ethnographic fieldwork.

Yet, rarely if ever did anthropologists of the colonial era mention the fact of colonialism or its possible impacts on the people they studied. Although they worked with people whose lives were lived under the shadow of colonial rule, their own practice made possible by that rule, anthropologists wrote as though they were studying a world apart, their objects living in original societies untouched by outside influence. As Talal Asad observed, this blindness to—or willful ignorance of—the colonial context was widespread and persisted well into the twentieth century: “It is not a matter of dispute that social anthropology emerged as a distinctive discipline at the beginning of the colonial era, that it became a flourishing academic profession towards its close, or that throughout this period its efforts were devoted to a description and analysis—carried out by Europeans, for a European audience—of non-European societies dominated by European power. And yet there is a strange reluctance on the part of most professional anthropologists to consider seriously the power structure within which their discipline has taken shape” (Asad 1973, 14–15).

Anthropologists have since become much more aware of their discipline’s colonial origins, and anthropology in general has become more critical and political. A so-called crisis of anthropology came in the 1970s, when the formal end of colonialism in most of the world shattered “the optimistic scientific disciplinary confidence” of the past (Stocking 2001, 320) and anthropologists’ claims to universal, generalizable knowledge about human culture became untenable. New concerns, new theories, and new methodologies began to take hold. Ethnographers began to denounce the conditions of inequality and disempowerment that many of their friends and collaborators in the field experienced, offering powerful critiques of the racist, sexist, capitalist formations that characterized their fieldsites. Feminist anthropology, meanwhile, gained greater influence as its long-standing concerns with gender, sexism, and sexuality, and of gendered and racialized power more generally, moved closer to the center of anthropological attention. Many anthropologists were influenced by postcolonial theory,

becoming critical of the effects of European colonialism—and of subsequent programs, including neoliberal capitalism—on the societies that they studied. Such concepts as “community,” “development,” even “culture” became explicit targets of critique as anthropological analysis became global, historical, and concerned with power at the most local of sites.¹ Anthropology had its postmodern turn, during which scholars interrogated the discipline’s claims to knowledge and found them wanting, calling into question the very possibility of scientific objectivity. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as part of what is sometimes referred to as the “writing culture” moment, anthropologists began to deconstruct ethnography’s authorial techniques and to experiment with new forms of ethnographic expression, often including their subjects’ voices in their texts and recognizing the anthropological self as an actor in the social world being depicted (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). Feminist anthropologists, their earlier efforts at literary experimentation neglected or derided, critiqued the writing culture project’s attempt to include “other voices” as a co-optation rather than a truly dialogical innovation (Abu-Lughod 1991; Behar and Gordon 1996; Visweswaran 1994).² More recently, collaborative, activist, and engaged forms of research emerged as efforts to make anthropology more productive for the peoples under study and more ethically sustainable for anthropologists themselves.

Yet, despite its concern with power, injustice, and inequality, including its critique of its own colonial past, dominant anthropology—like all academic disciplines—remains part of a larger colonial project. From a decolonial perspective, this is the case not merely because of anthropology’s emergence within the era of *colonialism* but because of its inherent *coloniality*. For contemporary scholars and students, it is less relevant to ask whether early anthropologists colluded with colonizers to facilitate colonial rule than it is to examine the inscription of coloniality in anthropology’s DNA. To understand this claim, in this chapter we explore the idea of coloniality and the role that science—including so-called soft sciences like anthropology—have played in maintaining it.

It is impossible in one small book to provide a comprehensive summary of the extensive, interdisciplinary scholarship on colonialism and postcolonialism, or the so-called decolonial turn.³ Nor can we delineate the variations within the colonial project stemming from the different national origins of the colonizers, the cultures of the colonized, or the specificities of the colonial encounter in different world regions. Nor is that necessary for our argument. The idea of “the colonial” here does more than reference the events of a particular historical period. Rather, we use “the colonial” and “coloniality”

to mark an entire structure of racialized and gendered power and social inequality within which ethnographic research has been, and continues to be, conducted; decolonizing is the process of undoing that inequality, of exposing and dismantling ethnography's deep coloniality. Thus, in what follows we describe a theoretical framework for remaking colonial anthropology, employing some of the insights gained from a reading of feminist theory, indigenous critique, and the decolonial turn, which we consider to be underutilized resources for decolonizing anthropology. (Throughout, the more technical aspects of the discussion can be found in the endnotes.) We then assess anthropology and its history, reviewing its colonial origins and the formation of its dominant variety in the twentieth century, exploring the coloniality inherent in traditional anthropological practice. This section is followed by a look at some alternative approaches—including feminist, collaborative, world, and activist anthropologies—that represent precedents for pushing back against colonial anthropology. Those approaches inspired our own project, which we discuss in more detail in the chapters that follow.

Anthropology, Coloniality, and the Politics of Knowing

DECOLONIAL FEMINIST THEORY

In the most general sense, the colonial era can be said to have begun with the voyage of Christopher Columbus to the “New World” in 1492. It lasted into the mid-twentieth century, by which time most colonized lands had become independent nations. But centuries of political, economic, and cultural rule by Europeans and U.S. Americans over the rest of the world's peoples left their mark on the way all people continue to live, act, and think. Decolonial theory represents an effort to examine and challenge the many ways in which colonial experience is embedded, not just in people's everyday lives, but in scholarly efforts to understand those lives and to write about them.

World history, for example, has traditionally been written from the perspective of the West, for a Western audience, focusing on Western accomplishments. Until relatively recently, when non-Western people appeared in these histories it was as savage others standing in the way of civilization's “progress” and the unfolding of the West's manifest destiny. Early social scientists, concerned with contemporary realities more than historical ones, produced similar stories, with non-Western people understood as evolutionary precursors to modern Europeans, living relics of the past who might, with proper guidance, someday attain the Europeans' level of civilization. Western

“Man” was taken for granted as representing the fundamentally human, and Western experience was equated with human experience, universal and all-encompassing (Wynter 2003).

By the mid- to late twentieth century—as the colonial era was finally ending in most of the world, with the formation of independent nations out of formerly colonized territories—the hegemony of the Western perspective was being questioned, significantly by non-Western scholars who rejected the universalist posture of Western historiography and science. The interdisciplinary field of postcolonial studies drew scholarly attention to the West’s construction of itself through its colonial encounters with non-Western others. For postcolonial scholars like Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha, the West (the “occidental”) and the non-West (the “oriental”) were not fundamental opposites but deeply intertwined and mutually constitutive (Said 1978).⁴ The world, in other words, is not merely the story of the modern West, nor history solely the product of Western expansion and its impacts (Bhabha 2014).⁵ Postcolonialists argued instead that the idea of “the West” itself was a product of colonial engagement with the colonized, as colonizers encountered difference and, in the process, invented themselves and imagined their own inherent superiority (Said 1978, 1993).⁶ Postcolonial scholars inserted other histories, other narratives into the historical record, calling on the experiences of the subjugated (the “subaltern”) to diversify and problematize the universalist narrative of the West.⁷ But these postcolonial insights came with a caveat: In the process of writing about the subaltern, Spivak warned, scholars must be cautious about “speaking for” them, introducing a concern with the politics of representation into the postcolonial conversation (Spivak 1988; see also Spivak 1999).⁸ Spivak and other feminist scholars criticized academics who pretended to give voice to the oppressed, seeming to allow the subaltern to speak for themselves while obscuring the power and privilege that permitted academics to author such accounts.

Decolonial theory shares some basic premises with postcolonial and subaltern studies, especially in its effort to see Western experience not as a universal project of Europe but as a particular one of engagement between Europe and the colonial world.⁹ But decolonial theorists reject postcolonial studies’ reliance on works of European philosophy, drawing instead from, and continuing the work of, non-Western, colonized writers and intellectuals.¹⁰ Decolonial theory reaches beyond the academy to valorize the knowledges of the colonized—ways of thinking that colonizers tried to suppress or destroy¹¹—and calls attention to the work of thinkers (indigenous and Black

people, among others) not ordinarily recognized as such within the Western canon.¹²

Most significant for our discussion is decolonial theory's distinction between *colonialism* and *coloniality*. Colonialism is a system of political, economic, and cultural domination in which one nation or people establishes sovereignty over another. Coloniality is what endures, long after the formal systems of colonial rule have disappeared.¹³ It includes structures of and ideas about race, gender, and sexuality characteristic of colonialism and is animated by its logics of rationality, heteronormative patriarchy,¹⁴ white supremacy, and Eurocentrism. For cultural theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres, coloniality refers to the enduring patterns and systems that emerged during the colonial era and that continue to define cultural meanings, economic organization, social relations, and knowledge production: "Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243).

Sociologist Aníbal Quijano observes that coloniality "is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed. It doesn't exhaust, obviously, the conditions or the modes of exploitation and domination between peoples. But it hasn't ceased to be, for 500 years, their main framework" (Quijano 2007, 170; see also Quijano 2001). Or, as Ranajit Guha puts it, "The colonial experience has outlived decolonization and continues to be related significantly to the concerns of our time" (Guha 2001, 41–42).

Examples of coloniality in contemporary society abound. To mention but one, take the prevalence of white Western standards of female beauty—lightness of skin, straightness of hair, thinness of nose, and so on—in many places, both within and outside the West (Bryant 2013; Svitak 2014). Non-Western women purchase skin lighteners, hair straighteners, and other cosmetics in an effort to approximate the Eurocentric ideal, while global popular culture valorizes that ideal through entertainment, advertising, beauty pageants, and the like (Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje 1995; Goldstein 2000). The persistence of these beauty standards—established in colonial times and existing well beyond the end of colonialism in most of the world—demonstrates the coloniality of beauty today. Importantly, however, conformity with Western ideals is not universal: Women in many societies (including Western women of color) have challenged white Western standards, valorizing the

beauty of non-Western and nonwhite features, often through organized movements, education and ad campaigns, and documentary films (Feminist Africa 2016; Sefa-Boakye 2015; Steele 2016). This fact points to another element of coloniality: It is not uniform and all encompassing, but often fragmented and contains spaces for resistance (see figure 1.1).

Decolonial theory takes seriously the role of race in the colonial project. The concept of race was critical to the founding and maintenance of all colonial institutions, beliefs, and behaviors. Racist assumptions about the natural superiority of the European over the non-European served to organize the entire colonial framework of rule, what Quijano calls the “colonial matrix of power.”¹⁵ Colonized peoples were defined within the racist colonial matrix as savages, “the ultimate locus of inferiority,” reduced to the category of natural objects and so inherently governable by the civilized.¹⁶ As Boaventura de Sousa Santos et al. observe, the non-Western person was “constituted as an intrinsically disqualified being, a collection of characteristics that were markers of inferiority towards the power and knowledge of the West and, thus, available for use and appropriation by the latter” (Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2007, xxxv). Being inherently inferior to the European forms of knowledge and belief, non-Western forms could be replaced—by force, if necessary—with colonial understandings. This was a critical dimension of colonialism that complemented its exploitive, extractive side with a “civilizing mission” intended to uplift the non-European through education, religion, and reform. Christianity, European language, Western styles of dress, of sexual modesty, of personal deportment—all of these and more were presumed to be superior to the local varieties and so would replace them. “Race” located native inferiority in the body of the colonized, destining nonwhites to servitude and abuse. Intellectual ability was also supposed to coincide with race: Colonizers viewed themselves as capable of rational thought, colonized peoples as only able to respond to base urges and emotions.¹⁷ Those unable to think for themselves, consequently, were considered disposable—rapeable, killable fodder for colonial armies and factories and farms (Mbembe 2003).

Feminist decolonial theorists further complicated these insights by applying them to considerations of gender, sex, and sexuality. If race was introduced in the colonial context as a way to identify the colonized as radically different from the colonizer, gender was an equally important system for drawing such distinctions, both between colonizer and colonized and within those groups as well. Feminist decolonial scholar María Lugones calls this the “modern/colonial gender system” (Lugones 2007). In contrast to the



FIGURE 1.1. Members of Casa Hometown march in support of immigrants' rights; May 1, 2013. Illustration by Peter Quach.

Christian civilizing mission, which had as its ostensible aim the conversion of savage others into modern Christians, the modern/colonial gender system had a different if unspoken mission: to further dehumanize the colonized. As with race, Lugones says, gender operated in the colonial context to establish contrasts between Europeans and natives. Within the European gender system, “woman” is characterized by her passivity, domesticity, and sexual purity; she is responsible for the reproduction of race and capital and the maintenance of the bourgeois family (see Stoler 1989a, 1989b.). In this role she is subordinate to “man,” who in turn is strong, heterosexual, and Christian, fit for public life and political rule. Within the ruling class, the gendering of white women subordinates them to patriarchal authority, within the home and in public life, both domains also prescribing a normative heterosexuality.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Europeans judged the colonized to be more beast than human, their bodily behaviors “promiscuous, grotesquely sexual, and sinful” (Lugones 2010, 743). As with race, colonizers viewed the colonized as violating European gender norms, thus requiring their subordination and control. Colonized men, for example, were regarded as sexual predators, a menace especially to white women by virtue of their out-of-control sexuality. As such, colonizers viewed dark-skinned men as needing strict policing, humiliation, and monitoring by white colonial men to keep them in line.¹⁹ In these analyses, Lugones and other feminist decolonial scholars call attention to the intersectionality of race and gender, their coconstitution and mutual perpetuation (McClintock 1995; see also Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Crenshaw 1989; Etienne and Leacock 1980; Lugones 2012; Minh-ha 1989; Mohanty 1988). Many anthropologists have provided contemporary and historical examples that illustrate the theories described here, including the ways in which the colonial matrix of power contained resources that the colonized could use to challenge their subordination. For example, Sally Engle Merry’s work on the colonization of Hawaii provides an excellent illustration of the ways in which race and gender were key factors in the restructuring of Hawaiian culture, politics, and economy, accomplished through changes in the legal system implemented by U.S. colonizers.²⁰

For all its utility, decolonial theory has been limited by its focus mainly on the humanities. Postcolonial and decolonial theory has emerged largely from the work of cultural studies scholars, including historians, literary theorists, and philosophers, most of whom rely on texts as the basis of their analyses. This approach has led to many valuable insights, some of which have been discussed previously. But one may wonder about the adequacy of an exclusively text-based field to achieve the goals that decolonial theorists

have set for themselves. Anthropologists and other social researchers may be skeptical as to how, for example, reflections on the seventeenth-century writings of the Andean chronicler Guaman Poma (Mignolo 2011b) serve to achieve the decolonial goal of “halt[ing] the practices of domination and exclusion in the world-system” (Dussel 1998, 19).²¹ Anthropologists should be intrigued by the decolonial effort to think “from a subaltern perspective,” from the viewpoint of those historically marginalized and subordinated (Mignolo 2002; see also Anzaldúa 1987). But at what point does the desire to think from the perspective of subalternity become another act of ventriloquism, the same kind of privileged representation to which feminist scholars have alerted us?²² Without sustained dialogue with and full engagement in the lived reality of those labeled *subaltern*, can scholars presume to understand their perspectives, much less to think or speak from them? This is perhaps what Bolivian intellectual and activist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has in mind when she critiques the decolonial project as another form of colonialism, incapable of unsettling long-standing forms of political and social inequality: “Without altering anything of the relations of force in the ‘palaces’ of empire, the cultural studies departments of North American universities have adopted the ideas of subaltern studies and launched debates in Latin America, thus creating a jargon, a conceptual apparatus, and forms of reference and counterreference that have isolated academic treatises from any obligation to or dialogue with insurgent social forces” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012, 98).

Decolonial theory has sometimes aggregated subaltern people in a way that neglects diversity among oppressed peoples and erases differences between geographical locations. This is the case in decolonial observations about Latin America, where “the subaltern” tend to be lumped together as a single entity, culturally and historically homogenized. Decolonial theory pushes us to attend to the interactions of race, place, class, and gender as discursive categories that shape past and present social relations in the region; yet, as Kiran Asher observes, “Latin American people and places are assumed as categories of analysis rather than parsed” (Asher 2013, 839), the great diversity in the region ignored in favor of homogenizing claims about subaltern consciousness, practice, and thought. Ultimately, this approach can universalize a particular experience, repeating the mistake of the universalizing Western perspective it explicitly rejects. It can also reproduce an ideology of indigenism, the attribution of a cultural purity and originality to an imagined indigenous or subaltern subject (Simpson 2014).

Perhaps for these deficiencies, decolonial theory has not found much of a foothold in the social sciences. But the need for decolonization of the social sciences remains, and despite its limitations, decolonial theory offers some powerful tools for taking apart and reassembling contemporary anthropology.

MODERN SCIENCE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC COLONIALITY

Within the colonial matrix of power, modern science served as the instrument by which Europeans advanced their comprehension of the world.²³ As Europe extended its tentacles of economic exploitation and political and cultural domination, science was the tool by which the world could be made knowable to the European mind and white, male supremacy rendered as natural and inevitable. Modern science was established on the same universalist framework as colonialism, in which the European was the only fully human being and hence the only possible subject capable of exercising agency and possessing knowledge; all others, being inferior by nature to the European, could only be the objects of “his” knowledge. Scientific knowledge served a variety of functions for the European, helping him to know, understand, and therefore govern and control the world that surrounded him (see Haraway 1991). A range of technoscientific fields—including philology, ecology, telecommunications, and medicine, among others—served not only to advance European domination of colonized others; science and technology were staged to elicit admiration from the colonized and so to affirm the appropriateness of colonial rule. “As part of the civilising mission,” notes Suman Seth, “science played two contradictory roles in colonial discourse, at once making clear to the ‘natives’ the kind of knowledge that they lacked (which omission justified colonialism itself), and holding out the hope that such knowledge could be theirs.”²⁴ Such a promise, of course, could never be realized, due to what Europeans believed to be the inherent mental deficiencies of the colonized. Quijano notes that under colonialism, the knower/known, subject/object relationship obstructed the possibility of communication and shared knowledge production between Western and non-Western peoples (Quijano 2007). Collaboration, in other words, was impossible in the colonial context. The basic paradigm of Western science recognized the Westerner as subject and the non-Westerner only as object, capable of being known but never knowing in her own right.

The aim of Western science thus became, as Santos puts it, “knowledge-as-regulation”: Scientific knowledge accumulated to establish a mastery of

the world, following a trajectory from ignorance, which is understood as a form of disorder, to knowledge, understood as order (Santos 1995, 25). But science, then and now, does more than know the unknown—it also works to delegitimize other, nonscientific forms of knowledge. Only modern/colonial science can be a legitimate means of knowing; non-Western systems of knowledge and belief are discredited in the scientific model, dismissed as unsystematic, irrational, and false. Modern science produces a “monoculture of knowledge,” in which science serves as the sole measure of truth (Santos 2006, 17). Other forms of knowing that do not fit the scientific monoculture are rendered nonexistent in a process that Santos calls “epistemicide”: “Non-existence is produced,” he says, “whenever a certain entity is disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible or irreversibly discardable” (Santos 2006, 15–16). This sense of nonexistence, of invisibility, is also fundamental to the colonial racial hierarchy, at one time a scientifically valid system of human classification; though no longer considered scientifically true, race nevertheless continues to operate as part of Western coloniality, erasing that which does not fit its criteria of worthiness. “What is invisible about the person of color,” Maldonado-Torres says, referencing African American novelist Ralph Ellison, “is its very humanity” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 257).

This basic relationship has changed little from the colonial era to the present and to this day characterizes social science research in the colonial mode. The formative logic of the colonial ethnographic research relationship prescribes a stance of dominance and subordination between those doing the research and those who are its objects. It is grounded in the notion, rarely reflected upon, that “scientists have the ‘right’ (and ability) to intellectually know, interpret, and represent others” (Cannella and Manuelito 2008, 49). In its early days, anthropological research entailed rendering all that was different and other about the non-European knowable to the West; occupying the space of rationality and superiority, the anthropological participant-observer became the knowing subject par excellence. Ethnographic research was—and still is—based on a unidirectional subject/object knowledge transfer, in which information flows from (knowable) object to (knowing) subject, with the latter able to represent that information to others of its kind.²⁵ The power in such a relationship lies with the one who knows, a neat reflection of the coloniality within which such relations are constituted. This imbalance is reproduced in the research process, in which the one who knows also calls the shots. In the dominant variety of ethnographic research, the researcher decides what questions are to be investigated and what is important and unimportant in the data she collects. The

researcher chooses the methods to be used and decides when to use them. The researcher analyzes the data using theory, ideas drawn from the scholarly canon, which in dominant anthropology is remarkably narrow and Eurocentric. The research complete, the researcher decides what to write about the data collected, how to write it, and for whom.²⁶

The objects of anthropological research, meanwhile, have little role to play in this process beyond being providers of “unprocessed data” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012b, 114). Dominant anthropological research is extractive because it effectively mines local terrain for rich nuggets of raw data, which it then exports and refines (Goldstein 2012; Lins Ribeiro 2014). In both the colonial and postcolonial contexts, the parallels between extractive research and other industrial processes are evident and easily recognized as a form of capitalist production in the transnational mode. As Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff put it, non-European peoples “are treated less as sources of refined knowledge than as reservoirs of raw fact: of the minutiae from which Euromodernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths. Just as it has long capitalized on non-Western ‘raw materials’ by ostensibly adding value and refinement to them” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012b, 114). In dominant anthropological research, the objects of research play no role in defining the research questions and experience little to no benefit as a result of it. In the end, the foreign researcher can build a career from this work and enjoy a comfortable middle-class Western lifestyle, while those who provide the raw materials for research remain in the conditions in which the anthropologist first encountered them.

Similar ideologies and practices can be found in other forms of social research—for example, in applied research guided by a humanitarian logic.²⁷ This kind of research aims to “help” formerly colonized peoples, enabling them to “develop” or rescuing them from the chains of “cultural tradition.” Even though these researchers today are often “well-meaning, hardworking, middle-class missionaries, liberals, modernists, and believers in science, equality and progress,” quite distinct from the “rapacious bandit-kings” of the colonial era (Nandy 1989, xi), contemporary humanitarianism bears the coloniality of the European civilizing mission. Humanitarian researchers may be attached to NGOs or foreign governments, whose research aims are modernist, developmentalist, or religious, undertaken with the intent of saving the benighted native. They may be university-based academics, whose goals are more nebulous but whose work is somehow seen as contributing in a general way to “humankind.” Even activist and engaged scholars, if they are not careful, can slip into the mode of “helping” those with whom

they collaborate, a condescension that serves the ego of the bourgeois subject more than it does the ostensible objects of assistance.

Social researchers may have some understanding of the colonial history of the people and places they study, but they are often unable or unwilling to perceive the coloniality that structures their own relationship to their fields, their employers, and their research objects. This coloniality in turn frames ethnographic writing, which masks the modernizing masculine liberalism that persists in the humanist research project. This represents another potential pitfall for engaged and other anti-colonial anthropologists, who embrace critique without actually destabilizing their own privilege. The ethnographies produced under these conditions can embody what Mary Louise Pratt calls *anti-conquest*: “The strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony. . . . The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call the ‘seeing man,’ an admittedly unfriendly label for the white male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess” (Pratt 1992, 9; see also Coronil 1996; Restrepo and Escobar 2005).

No wonder, then, that for many non-Western people, especially indigenous people, “research” is an imperial tool, part of an unbroken chain of domination extending from colonial times to the present (Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997; Deloria 1969). Just as they have long resisted colonial domination, formerly and currently colonized peoples may resist the research process and its coloniality, which they recognize all too clearly as racist and extractive. Of central importance here is Western science’s dismissal of all ideas that do not conform with its logic, a stance that is profoundly alienating to those cast as the objects of the scientific gaze.²⁸ Linda Tuhiwai Smith does not use the concept of coloniality, but her critique of what she calls “research through imperial eyes” contains a similar recognition; research, Smith says, is:

an approach which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings. It is an approach to indigenous peoples which still conveys a sense of innate superiority and an overabundance of desire to bring progress into the lives of indigenous peoples—spiritually, intellectually, socially and economically. It is research which from indigenous perspectives “steals” knowledge

from others and then uses it to benefit the people who “stole” it. Some indigenous and minority group researchers would call this approach simply racist. (Smith 2012, 58)

For Smith and other indigenous researchers, racism is manifest in the research process when they are made to serve as the objects of discovery for knowing white outsiders (Restrepo and Escobar 2005). Being the objects of research is insulting to their history and dignity as a people and denies them agency in the study of their own lives. “The objects of research,” Smith says, “do not have a voice and do not contribute to research or science. . . . An object has no life force, no humanity, no spirit of its own, so therefore ‘it’ cannot make an active contribution” (Smith 2012, 64).

Although her critiques are made of research in general, for Smith and other indigenous writers anthropology remains “representative of all that is truly bad about research” (Smith 2012, 11). Despite the good will of many contemporary anthropologists,²⁹ they remain “the academics popularly perceived by the indigenous world as the epitome of all that is bad with academics” (Smith 2012, 70). This is not a new observation, unfortunately: Smith’s writing echoes that of other native scholars who have long regarded anthropology as the worst kind of hypocritical, self-interested exploitation.³⁰

ALTERNATIVE ANTHROPOLOGIES

Also true, however, is the fact that many ethnographic research subjects, indigenous and otherwise, are aware of the power of research to represent the “truth” of people’s lives, and they desire a hand in shaping it. Earlier, we described how coloniality can be seen to contain spaces for its own dismantling, and so it is with colonial anthropology. Increasingly, the objects of anthropological research are talking back, demanding a role in and control over research about them and their societies and a say in deciding the uses to which it will be put. Indigenous approaches to research, advanced by Smith and other indigenous scholars, try to counter the coloniality of the research relationship; as Kim TallBear puts it:

If what we want is democratic knowledge production that serves not only those who inquire and their institutions, but also those who are inquired upon (and appeals to “knowledge for the good of all” do not cut it), we must soften that boundary erected long ago between those who know versus those from whom the raw materials of knowledge production are extracted. Part of doing this is broadening the conceptual field. . . . It is also helpful to think creatively about the research

process as a relationship-building process, as a professional networking process with colleagues (not “subjects”), as an opportunity for conversation and sharing of knowledge, not simply data gathering. Research must then be conceived in less linear ways without necessarily knowable goals at the outset. (TallBear 2014, 2; see also West 2016)

Against the colonial approach to research outlined in the previous section, concerned anthropologists have themselves developed new approaches and techniques for making the research relationship a mutually productive one. In doing so, anthropologists have not only introduced new fieldwork methodologies, but have also expanded the discipline beyond its traditional concerns. For a long time and in a variety of ways, scholars have pushed back against anthropological coloniality, complicating the picture of a discipline entirely collusive with the colonial project. The research we discuss in the next few chapters was influenced by these nondominant approaches, and this book is an argument for their broader application in the wider discipline.

In terms of influence, feminist anthropology represents the most longstanding and the most thorough challenge to dominant anthropology. Since the very beginnings of the discipline, some women anthropologists have employed different approaches to research and writing that challenged the normative scientific style and have often been denigrated for doing so, their work dismissed as unserious or nonobjective (Stocking 2001; see Hurston 1935, 1937; Mead 1928). Feminist scholars have argued for the inclusion of women, their concerns, and labors within the scope of ethnography, contending that anthropological understanding of the world is incomplete without attention to women and gendered forms of social ordering (e.g., Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Weiner 1976; Wolf 1972). In doing so, feminist anthropologists have made questions of power, inequality, and difference legitimate topics of scrutiny, while challenging the objectivist stance of dominant anthropology. Persuasively, they have argued for an approach that acknowledges the “positionality” of the researcher, her gendered and identity-based location vis-à-vis the people and subjects she studies.³¹ Feminist anthropologists have called out the implicit male bias of the field, forcing a reconsideration not only of what anthropologists study but how they go about their practices of fieldwork, analysis, and writing. Nevertheless, white, Western feminist anthropologists have also been criticized for failing to recognize their own positionality and for maintaining hierarchical relationships with their (nonwhite) research subjects (Abu-Lughod 1990; Behar

1996; Visweswaran 1988). For many, especially feminist anthropologists of color, these questions remain unresolved in the discipline, even for those practicing more explicitly activist forms of research (Berry et al. 2017).

Another counter-dominant approach can be found in collaborative ethnography. Developed in response to the “irrelevance of many academically positioned interpretations” to the people being studied and the power imbalance inherent in the traditional researcher/researched relationships, collaborative ethnography aims to include local consultants in every phase of the research process, from inception through publication (Lassiter 2005, 11). Anthropologist Luke Eric Lassiter has documented the history of collaboration in anthropology, tracing it to the very origins of the discipline. Lassiter makes an important statement about ethnographic methodology in his assertion that collaboration is fundamentally about morality: Ethnography, he argues, cannot be purely extractive, nor can anthropologists assume for themselves the authority to speak for others while erasing the role others play in the production of ethnographic knowledge (a problem whose origins can be found in the work of such early luminaries as Malinowski and Boas).³² Instead, Lassiter argues, “Doing a more deliberate and explicit collaborative ethnography revolves first and foremost around an ethical and moral responsibility to consultants—who are engaged not as ‘informants,’ but as co-intellectuals and collaborators who help to shape our ethnographic understandings, our ethnographic texts, and our larger responsibility to others as researchers, citizens [*sic*], and activists. Constructed in this way, collaborative ethnography is first and foremost an ethical and moral enterprise, and subsequently a political one; it is not an enterprise in search of knowledge alone” (Lassiter 2005, 179).

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), or Participatory Action Research (PAR), has been less influential in anthropology than in other disciplines, but these approaches contain many elements that are relevant to decolonizing anthropology. Building in part on the earlier work in “action anthropology” of Sol Tax and drawing on non-Western theorists like Paulo Freire and Pablo González Casanova, PAR rejects the idea of science as the objective production of universal truth, disconnected from any social reality. Instead, PAR advocates argue for the need to recognize researcher bias and bring a “moral conscience” to scientific research (Fals Borda 2001, 29). According to Orlando Fals Borda, this requires researchers to “decolonize ourselves”; though he doesn’t use the concept of coloniality, Fals Borda argues that we need “to discover the reactionary traits and ideas implanted in our minds and behaviors mostly by the learning process” (Fals Borda

2001, 29). Fals Borda and other PAR scholars envision a role for social scientists as crusaders for economic development and social justice in their field-sites. But more importantly for us—and like both collaborative and world anthropologists—Fals Borda argues for dissolving the boundaries between the academy and the world, authorizing research subjects themselves to be part of the knowledge-production process. And, like Appadurai’s “right to research” (mentioned in the Introduction) (Appadurai 2006), Fals Borda states, “The common people deserve to know more about their own life conditions in order to defend their interests, than do other social classes who monopolize knowledge, resources, techniques and power; in fact we should pay attention to knowledge production just as much as the usual insistence on technical production, thus tilting the scales toward justice for the underprivileged” (Appadurai 2006; see also Fals Borda 1979).

From a “world anthropologies” perspective, all Western theory and research take for granted a Eurocentric epistemology—that is, a mode of thinking specific to and representative of the West (Escobar 2007). Within this mode—constituting what Arturo Escobar and his colleagues have called “dominant anthropologies”—all that is different from the West is rendered knowable to the West through the lens of Western social science, and only those situated within Western academic institutions are capable of producing this knowledge. This results in a marginalizing of all ideas and perspectives generated outside the West and has led to a vast inequality between U.S. and European academic institutions and those of the non-Western world. A world-anthropologies approach tries to change this situation by thinking about social reality from outside the Western paradigm, from the perspective of those on the fringes of modern life and capitalist prosperity. It calls attention to the work of non-Western thinkers and writers by encouraging international dialogue and publications. Most importantly to our analysis is world anthropologies’ goal of decertifying expert knowledge, or “decolonizing expertise” (Restrepo and Escobar 2005, 114). Restrepo and Escobar have declared world anthropologies to be an “un-academic project,” aiming to dissolve the boundaries between the academy and the rest of the world. By doing so, anthropologists can recognize the validity of other, non-Western, nonacademic forms of knowledge and realize that anthropology’s “subjects can be knowledge-producers in their own right.”³³

Many of these themes have found their way into activist anthropology, which Shannon Speed defines as “the overt commitment to an engagement with our research subjects that is directed toward some form of shared political goals” (Speed 2008, 215). This definition is deliberately broad, allowing

plenty of room to accommodate a variety of approaches, including those mentioned earlier. Activist anthropologists practice collaboration, including their fieldwork “subjects” in the planning, conduct, and publication of the research. Activist anthropology tries to engage multiple audiences, both within and outside the academy, believing that political and scholarly activity joined together can be mutually productive for both researcher and researched (Hale 2008). As we discussed in the book’s Introduction, activist anthropology represents the thematic subdiscipline with which we most identify and provided the framework for developing and, at least initially, executing our research project on immigration in central New Jersey.

The picture that emerges from this brief review is one of complexity and complication. Anthropologists, though sometimes demonized as “the epitome of all that is bad with academics,” have become increasingly conscious of the inequities embedded in the dominant mode of research practice and have been active in trying to create new ways of doing their work. In doing so, feminist, indigenous, world, collaborative, and activist anthropologists have all strived, in varied and not always effective ways, to remake the research relationship in the field, while also making their work beneficial to their research subjects. Their methodologies and philosophies offer guidance for how the decolonization of anthropology might proceed.

Conclusion: The Way Forward

Westerners will never (except in make-believe) be able to act the role of savages opposite those whom they once dominated. For when we Westerners cast them in this role they existed for us only as objects—whether for scientific study or political and economic domination. —CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS, “Today’s Crisis in Anthropology,” *UNESCO Courier* 11 (1961): 12–17

To say that anthropology is a colonial discipline is more than saying that it contains “vestiges” of the colonial past or enjoys a vague colonial “legacy” owing to the history of its formation and development. Bland assertions of colonialism’s “lingering” pervasiveness, of colonialism as an abstraction unlocalizable in practices and structures, are insufficient. Such language lacks the precision required to identify the specific ways in which the colonial is present in the contemporary, to recognize how it manifests in daily life and in the work of anthropology and other social sciences. Talk of a “colonial legacy,” as Ann Stoler has noted, “makes no distinctions between what holds and what lies dormant, between residue and recomposition, between a weak and a tenacious trace. Such rubrics instill overconfidence in the knowledge

that colonial history matters—far more than it animates an analytic vocabulary for deciphering how it does so” (Stoler 2008, 196). Railing against colonial legacies, in other words, may make liberal academics feel better about themselves for being historically grounded and politically astute without requiring them to actually admit how colonialism colors their own research and writing. As scholars and human beings, we must do more than merely “critique” the injustices that surround us and our work; as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012, 100) puts it, “There can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing practice” (see also Sandoval 2000).

To recognize and move beyond colonial anthropology, then, we must do more than just acknowledge the discipline’s colonial origins. We must, in fact, design new theories and methods—take an entirely different intellectual stance—to transcend what we have identified here as anthropology’s basic coloniality. Thinking in decolonial terms upsets the colonial balance by inverting and subverting the power relations fundamental to ethnographic research and writing. It entails new orientations to anthropological theory, requires new forms of anthropological practice, and opens up new possibilities for academic careers. Efforts to decolonize anthropology can reinvigorate some older debates within the discipline and chart new courses for those wishing to break with outmoded ways of seeing and acting, to push the edges of what anthropology can be and do. Decolonizing is a way to address the problems we identify in this book’s Introduction, to reconcile the apparent contradiction between academic and applied work and to challenge dominant anthropology’s stance on what counts as “real” ethnographic research.

Thinking from a place of decoloniality—that is, from a place outside the academy, outside the West, from the global periphery—is something anthropologists are quite good at. It requires what Walter Dignolo (borrowing from the poet, thinker, and activist Gloria Anzaldúa) has called a kind of “border thinking”—that is, thinking from the perspective of those pushed to the fringes of capitalist prosperity and the modern world.³⁴ Enrique Dussel calls this “trans-modernity” (Dussel 2002), a project for looking at and thinking about the world “from its underside, from the perspective of the excluded other. Trans-modernity is a future-oriented project that seeks the liberation of all humanity.”³⁵ To think decolonially is to “bring to the foreground the planetary dimension of human history silenced by discourses centering on modernity, postmodernity, and Western civilization” (Dignolo 2002, 61–62). It is to suggest the possibility of social transformation among the world’s formerly colonized peoples as well as a shift in the priorities of

academic labor. Decolonized scholarship, in Catherine Walsh's words, is "an intellectual production not aimed at individual accomplishment or limited to the confines of the academy, but rather at the *shared* need to confront the colonial-racist structures, systems, and institutions of society through a collective praxis" (Walsh 2007, 232; emphasis added). As the word *shared* suggests, decolonized work requires the involvement of all parties in the research process, a breaking down of the boundaries between academia and the world, and a full recognition of anthropology's so-called research subjects as thinkers and researchers in their own right.

Decolonizing anthropology, then, requires a shift in orientation and technique, the adoption of new perspectives on both theory and method, with the goal of enabling subalterns—those enduring objects of anthropological study—to decolonize knowledge practices as they become powerful actors in their own liberation. The following chapters explore our efforts to do just that.