

## Indigenous Voice Matters: Claiming our Space through Decolonising Research

I begin this paper with a short Kanuhelátukslá (thanksgiving), to respect the teachings received as a Ukwehuwé (First Nations person), of the Onyota' aka (Oneida) nation, a?nowal talót^ (Turtle Clan). I thank Shukwayatisu (Creation) for all that we have been given: all our relations, all human and other animal species, the air, the water, the plants, the medicines, the trees, the fire, the Sun, the Moon, the thunders, and especially our gentle Mother Earth. I don't intend any disrespect for forgetting to name any creation (in our language, in our ceremonies, the address is quite long, so here is just a very small personal version of it). Tane •to nyohtuhake ukwanikulā (our minds now stay as one).

During my doctoral studies, I read the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and found it both refreshing and validating that a scholar would write that, from an Indigenous colonised position, the “term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excess of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonised peoples.”<sup>1</sup> This is exactly how many members of my community, the Oneida Nation of The Thames in Canada, had expressed to me that they felt towards “Western” researchers and academics. Karen, a member of my community who participated in my research, explicitly told me, “Lina, you can’t forget that we have been researched to death, and has anything good come out of it for our people? I don’t think so. I am afraid that the one thing it has done is to make people think that we are screwed up, that our community has only problems.”<sup>2</sup> Many experiences and encounters throughout my university education have also taught me that knowledge and power are indeed interconnected, as Foucault conceptualised for us in his works. Knowledge, through discursive formations that become “regimes of truth,” has the function to (re)create power<sup>3</sup>. Hence, one has to maintain a critical eye upon existing research approaches practiced on Indigenous communities so as to ensure they do not do more harm to Indigenous communities.

Yet, as an Indigenous woman about to conduct my own doctoral research, I had many questions: “How can I negotiate the contradictions and complexities inherent in research?,” “How can I ensure that my own research project is conducted within an Indigenous cultural context?,” and “How can my work be part of a broader decolonising movement?” I now realise

that asking such questions is part of an Indigenous methodology. To reflect on the political element of social research can only help me to carry out my research in such a way as to be respectful to my community and for my research to be part of the overall decolonisation of our Indigenous nations and of academia.

This paper will address the issues presented by my questions by first examining the historical relationship between research on Indigenous peoples and colonialism. Next, I will review my methodologies, discuss my own position in the research process and set out how I attempted to deal with the power dynamics involved in research. I do so by examining issues of subjectivity, reflexivity and representation. I ultimately argue that a collaborative research methodology can be a part of a wider decolonisation of research methodologies.

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AS “OTHERS” IN RESEARCH: MISSING OUR OWN VOICES

For the most part, Western research has been part of an imperialist and colonialist agenda towards Indigenous peoples. Historically, social researchers, while achieving the status of authoritative voices of research about Indigenous peoples, have often disrespectfully represented our Indigenous cultural knowledge and disregarded our own established ethical protocols.<sup>4</sup> Such disrespect and/or misrepresentation occurs when researchers, in the name of the pursuit of knowledge, without consent take and dissect parts of dead human bodies, when such an act deviates from some Indigenous cultural norms that consider bodies sacred and not to be so misused. Another example consists in how “historical” accounts of Indigenous peoples have often been written by non-Indigenous researchers after only brief encounters with the communities and most often without integrating the oral histories of Indigenous peoples, discounting them as “biased” or as “fantasies.” This results in only a partial “history” being known and in Indigenous voices being dismissed, silenced – although these rich oral histories have survived within Indigenous communities because of the resistance and persistence of our ancestors.

Social research has constituted a major vehicle for representing Indigenous peoples as the “Other” and Western groups as the “Self.”<sup>5</sup> In such a representation, the Indigenous “Other” has been portrayed as an exotic figure, a representative of an inferior “dying” civilization. This is directly linked to colonialism because, for colonialism to be achieved and maintained, an active and conscious imagination of a future colonial nation had to be manufactured. This imagination included the necessity to imagine an “Other,” a being that was seen in contrast to the colonisers. Within this binary construction of the “Self” and the “Other,” the Western European “Self” was attributed with positive and progressive characteristics and the “Other” was constructed as a pre-modern and not totally human subject.<sup>6</sup> By attributing negative characteristics to Indigenous peoples, they have been pathologised and problematised, defining them either as genetically inferior or culturally deviant from the Western “Self.”<sup>7</sup> The consequences of producing knowledge in this way have been various. As one example, Indigenous women have been constructed as physically strong, yet also sexually promiscuous, dirty and morally loose. Consequently, this led to strict scrutiny by state institutions of their assumed “unfit” mothering roles, with tragic results such as the experiences of the residential schools in Canada, of the Sixties Scoop in Canada, or of the Stolen Generations case in Australia<sup>8</sup>.

Conversely, Indigenous men have been constructed in other distinctive ways. Colonial discursive formations of Māori men, for example, constructed them as “noble, physically tough, staunch, and emotionless.”<sup>9</sup> Such discourses have both homogenised Māori men and restricted them to the “physical” domain of Aotearoa/New Zealand society, a sphere that ultimately does not share the same social and economic status as the “intellectual” one reserved for men of Pākehā descent (from the non-Indigenous European settlers). Similarly, in North America, Indigenous men have been constructed as either noble savages who have a spiritual connection with nature but also a static identity frozen to the pre-contact primitive period, or as ignoble savages who are violent (as seen in popular portrayals of warrior images in the media), emotionally cold, lazy and drunk. The unequal power relationship founded upon colonial constructions demonstrates how knowledge and power are tied together within a colonial context.

Edward Said termed such Western constructions of the Other “Orientalism”, where he was specifically referring to Western discourses of the area now known as the Middle East and Asia.<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall<sup>11</sup> takes Said’s analysis a step forward by applying the concept of Orientalism to a more general discourse that the West has constructed about the “Rest,” hence making it applicable to an analysis of Indigenous peoples. Within this discourse of the “West” and the “Rest,” as I have already discussed, Western societies became defined as developed, industrialised, modern, and progressive, while the “Rest” were defined in opposition to the West. This allowed for the notion of *difference* to exist, and difference to be here understood as *less than* the Western norm. Therefore, research about the “Rest” becomes part of a cultural archive, a building of knowledge of those societies constructed as both inferior and different from the West. Within this archive, only certain ways of knowing are viewed as valid epistemologies and normalised as universal truths, including the “truth” of the cultures of the “Rest” as interpreted and written by the West.<sup>12</sup>

Following a Foucauldian perspective, it must be noted that the formation of such a discourse is connected to unequal power relations; the West is the dominant group, with the ability and the resources to represent the world as it sees fit, and is able to write its version of the history between the “West and the Rest” through its own eyes and portray that version as the “truth.” Within the social sciences, then, “valid” theories of human existence and development have been based on Eurocentric epistemologies, such as the view that societies are moving in a linear fashion towards a *progressive, modern* continuum<sup>13</sup> and, in terms of epistemology, that there ought to be a separation between body (senses) and mind (reason). The privileging of such an epistemology disallows alternative ways of knowing the same valid space in social research. Instead, only a marginal space – if any at all – is given to Indigenous knowledges. Although there has been an increase in the numbers of Indigenous scholars doing research with/of their own communities, new and/or persistent challenges, contradictions, and complexities exist. For instance, within the academic institutions, we are still placed in marginalised spaces, or not afforded the same deserved credibility as other scholars. In addition, Indigenous knowledges are often pressured to be moulded into forms that mainstream Western thought can better accommodate; in the process they are in danger of becoming appropriated and “translated” into new forms of knowledge.

One example of this is the proliferating use of “cleansing smudges”<sup>14</sup> in universities, performed by individuals who do not have the proper knowledge and/or have not been given the responsibility to do so by their communities. I have been a witness to such events, and when once I humbly asked a non-Indigenous person if she had obtained the proper training and consent to perform such a spiritual act, I was told that I was “too essentialist,” that such spirituality is not exclusively owned by Indigenous peoples, and that I should see it as a progressive step that non-Indigenous peoples are “appreciating” Indigenous cultures. I could not perceive her actions as true appreciation, as it misplaced, misappropriated and misrepresented a sacred cultural form of knowledge. A specific challenge that Indigenous women/scholars face is that their research about Indigenous women’s experiences, voices and histories is assumed to easily fit into some Western feminist framework, even though many Indigenous women do not feel that feminist theories and movements can always or easily apply when analysing Indigenous women’s lives, especially without a deep engagement with colonialism.<sup>15</sup>

The connection between power and knowledge has not escaped some social researchers, some of whom are not Indigenous. Critical research, which often uses qualitative methods of inquiry, rejects, for example, the notion of a value-free science and is invested instead in both critiquing and, more importantly, transforming social relations<sup>16</sup>. Social research methodologies such as action-research, collaborative community-based research, feminist research, and critical ethnography<sup>17</sup> are guided by principles that move us away from the colonial legacy of social research. Researchers from those fields work towards sharing power with research participants, are allies in working towards emancipatory goals, value local (Indigenous in this case) knowledges, have long-term commitment to the communities they work with, and familiarise themselves with the ethics protocols of the communities. With the increasing presence of such researchers, perhaps the justifiable distrust Indigenous peoples have had towards social research will diminish.

Within Canada, something that could encourage a more trusting relationship between social researchers and Indigenous communities is the recent establishment by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of specific guidelines for doing research with Aboriginal peoples, as a response to the criticisms expressed by Indigenous communities of past research practices. Recognising that Aboriginal peoples have specific rights and interests that must be met by researchers, the Council expects researchers to conduct accurate and informed research about Aboriginal peoples; that their research not cause further stigmatisation; that cultural property no longer be expropriated for the sole sake of research; that they respect the cultures and traditions of the Aboriginal groups they work with; that they establish partnerships with the community by involving them as much as possible in the research process; and that they make preliminary and final reports available to the community for review and comments<sup>18</sup>. These are principles that I believe can improve the relationship between social researchers and Indigenous peoples. However, this is a new development and there are still some persistent challenges that some Indigenous scholars have already addressed.

One concern that has been raised is about obtaining consent from the appropriate community representative, when the community and the appropriate body to give consent are not clearly defined. Indigenous communities are quite diverse and dynamic, and this could cause

confusion and tension in how to proceed to obtain consent. My community, as with others of the Six Nations League, is made up of those who follow the traditional governing body of the Longhouse and those who are part of the Band Council government. As Martin-Hill<sup>19</sup> points out, a researcher wanting to do research that is critical of the Band Council or investigating a community issue that the Band Council is wary about, would encounter some resistance to her/his research, given that the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council often regards the council to be the representative of an Indigenous nation, just as the Canadian state does. This could involve a very important and necessary piece of research, but if the researcher is restricted to one definition of community and/or community representative/leader, it would most likely be stopped. Hence, one needs to become very familiar with the dynamics of the community, and to be honest about how community is defined. Depending on one's own position and/or the nature and scope of the proposed research, there ought to be fluidity on how community members and leaders are defined and where to go to obtain consent and collaboration. In addition, through the whole process, the researcher needs to be transparent about which communities and community representatives he/she is working with.

## ASSERTING OUR OWN INDIGENOUS VOICES IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

For many Indigenous peoples, there is an emotional component of knowledge that cannot be separated from other forms of knowledge. Knowledge is derived from, and connected to, both the external and the inner world.<sup>20</sup> Our knowledge must be acquired through establishing good and right relations. Establishing such relations “requires a balancing of all our capabilities as human beings to know the world around us.”<sup>21</sup> Knowing the world requires that we connect to the inner world, to an emotional level of understanding, so as to become consciously aware of our personal connection to the topic and to the participants in our research, and thus clearly present to others our emotions about the ongoing knowledge we acquire. Indigenous methodologies are holistic in nature and include the concept of “relational accountability,”<sup>22</sup> referring to the recognition that we depend on everything and everyone around us and that “all parts of our research are related, from inspiration to expiration, and that the researcher is not just responsible for nurturing and maintaining this relationship but also accountable to ‘all your relations’.”<sup>23</sup> As Kovach<sup>24</sup> points out, we must speak from the heart, recognise that experience is a valid basis of knowledge, incorporate Indigenous methods such as storytelling into our work, and constantly have the interest of our collective community at heart when doing our research.

Throughout my dissertation research I tried to follow such Indigenous practices. I positioned myself as a member of the community that I was researching, I tried to maintain a healthy connection with all my relations and with the inner world, and I incorporated traditional stories into my writing. This type of research is referred to as a decolonising methodology<sup>25</sup>, meaning that researchers “research back” – a process whereby the researcher firstly acknowledges that Indigenous peoples have been constructed and represented in negative ways and that power and knowledge are interconnected. In doing so, Indigenous researchers provide an analysis of colonialism in their work and, most importantly, their academic work may become part of the larger struggle for self-determination.<sup>26</sup>

I use the term “Indigenous researcher” here to mean an individual of Indigenous descent who is connected with her/his land and community, and is familiarising (I herein stress the fluidity of it) her or himself with the culture, oral stories and teachings. Within the role of an academic researcher, this individual attempts to integrate his/her Indigeneity into the work she/he does and, in the process, is committed to working towards the decolonising embetterment of her/his community; follows Indigenous principles in the research process and in her/his relationships with all relations; aims to increase Indigenous ways of knowing in the academy; and, as an agent of change, struggles to make the academy more responsive and responsible towards Indigenous peoples.

I make clear in my work that, as an Oneida woman scholar, I have a personal and political investment in deconstructing master narratives of colonialism that have portrayed Indigenous nations as less progressive, intellectual and egalitarian than Western ones. As an Indigenous woman, my academic life is never separated from my everyday personal and political lives. My research methods are very much grounded in everyday life experiences and shaped by the connections I have with people, either through clan membership, nationhood, “sisterhood,” or broader Indigenous networks.

In my dissertation, I offered an alternative vision of nation and national identity and connected these with gender issues. Ultimately, I hope that my work will offer an opportunity for women’s voices in my community to be heard more during our progress on the path towards self-determination. I also want to ensure that these voices will be included in spaces outside of my community, such as in academia and other mainstream spaces. My research reveals that freedom from the destructive forces derived from colonialism entails a movement towards self-determination and a reestablishment of our own Indigenous ways of being and governing. I argue so because of the experiential knowledge gathered from myself and others in my community.

Much of the knowledge that I have obtained about my topic did not derive exclusively from conventional fieldwork, but also from informal, ongoing life-learning experiences acquired from my connections to my community – for example, from attending various traditional ceremonies and healing circles, and from listening to stories about our culture, about our history, and about matters of importance to our nation, told to me by my mothers, my aunties, and elders. When I decided that I wanted to examine the nature of Indigenous nationhood, to learn about our traditional ways of governing, the roles that women held in them and how, through colonialism, those things had changed and how our nation is trying to revitalise them, I talked to my family members and my Clan Mother to get some guidance on how to proceed, whom to contact and how I could learn about appropriate research protocols.

In the end, my “fieldwork” methods included narratives with twenty women, participation in ceremonies, oral histories, incorporation of teachings from traditional creation stories and a review of literature. The narratives were created through conversations I had with the twenty women, wherein together we framed themes for discussion rather than having pre-set questions formulated exclusively by me. It was admitted (both by me and by the participants who expressed their views on this subject to me), that our relationship was not totally equal. The participants and I recognised that, as the academic researcher, I would have responsibility for reviewing the literature, transcribing and doing the initial interpretation of

our conversations, and organising and writing the thesis. After the initial interpretation of the content of the narratives, though, I made sure to have a follow-up discussion with them about my interpretations, and at times we had a deeper conversation about a theme that we felt needed further discussion or clarity. I showed them my final draft to ensure that they were in agreement with how the narratives were analysed and integrated within the whole work.

The broad spectrum of the methodologies that I incorporated in my research is in agreement with what is often recognised as Indigenous ways of transmitting knowledge. Indigenous ways of knowing, like dreams or ceremonies, do not necessarily conform to Western academic standards but, as an Indigenous person, I know that often it is exactly through “contextually based, rooted in place and time, spiritual practices”<sup>27</sup> that I can come to a specific understanding of the themes and issues that we are analysing. Being an Indigenous person who is connected with her community has provided me with the privilege to be able to see, hear, feel, and understand through such spiritually enriching experiences that are intrinsically part of most Indigenous cultures. As explained earlier, “Indigenous researcher” is herein defined as someone who is strongly rooted in the land, the people and the culture of her nation and whose one role as a researcher is to integrate that rootedness into her work and to be an agent of change in the various sites she occupies. This status as an Indigenous researcher ultimately leads to a particular analysis of the information that is shared with the participants – one that others who are not so connected may not be able to replicate.

Indigenous methodologies follow culturally-specific guidelines. One major guideline is respect for people.<sup>28</sup> The importance of this was mentioned to me by the women who participated in my own dissertation research, and involves both an individual and a collective level of respect. The first dimension means that I must adhere to a respectful relationship when interacting individually with each participant. For example, I had to respect each woman’s wish not to have her name disclosed, and her wish to review my transcript and early drafts of my research. Of course, this is also a practice that is expected by most researchers, as my previous discussion of the principles of conduct established by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council pointed out. However, there are some culturally-specific ways of respecting that are often subtle, unspoken, yet embedded in many of the North American Indigenous traditions, that could be missed by a non-Indigenous researcher – such as the practice of offering tobacco or other medicine (strawberries during specific times, especially by and/or to a woman, as strawberries are considered women’s medicine), non-interference when elders speak, offers of food (and being required to accept food offered to you, especially during cultural and spiritual ceremonies), and non-direct eye contact when someone is speaking that could be misinterpreted as disinterest.

The second dimension involves a communal responsibility: I must respectfully follow the community’s established code of ethics and protocols, and ensure no harm is inflicted on the community due to my research activities. Doing no further harm to the community is an important principle that any researcher with integrity should follow, especially when working with Indigenous peoples, because of the stigmatisation and other harmful effects that past researchers have inflicted upon them. During my research, the importance of respect for the community’s ethics became evident during one of the interactions with my Clan Mother who provided much of the teachings of our clan structures and women’s responsibilities to me.

In an earlier draft of my dissertation, I had written the name of the Peacemaker who was mainly responsible for forming the Haudenosaunee (known as the Six Nations) League, of which my nation, Oneida, is a member. During a discussion, my Clan Mother reminded me of our community's tradition not to publicly write or spell out the name of the Peacemaker. I had been told of that tradition from other elders, but had forgotten to follow it while writing my first draft. I am thankful that I was reminded of it, because I feel I would have otherwise unintentionally done harm to my community and my action would have been interpreted as an act of disrespect.

Some of the women shared with me some complaints they had about how many Western academics had not demonstrated proper respect, and they reminded me to:

make sure you show respect to the women you are interviewing. You have to be careful that you always respect us, respect our ways...You should show special respect to the Grandmothers, because you know that they know more about all this stuff you want to find out than you do...for example, when there are some traditions that can't be shared with others, because we consider them sacred, you can't disrespect our ways and go ahead and tell everyone all the sacred ways...Also have respect for all the Creator's beings...when you write about people you disagree with, write with respect, they are children of the Creator too – be gentle. (Lori)

To show respect does not, however, mean that you don't disagree or critique. A few fellow graduate students and others not familiar with Indigenous cultural ways have expressed to me their concerns about how I, as an academic, can keep a critical eye on the "data" if I must "show respect." But Indigenous ways of gathering knowledge contain a coexistence of critique and respect. Indigenous epistemology and methodology demand that the relationship between the researcher and the participants be built on sincere and heartfelt dialogue, so that good and right relations can be nurtured. This means that for a fully honest and respectful relationship to happen, different points of view, positions, experiences and interpretations should be shared. There are culturally appropriate ways through which one has a responsibility to share his/her story with the other, and for each party to be open to hear each other's story. As a researcher, I need to have a "compassionate mind in methodology."<sup>29</sup> I have to develop a method of listening and acquiring knowledge through sharing my own stories with the participants, while listening carefully and with an open mind to their stories. Together we can (re)tell the story, after each of us has had a chance to (re)consider our own position.

Another component of Indigenous methodology is the "seen face"<sup>30</sup>, meaning that the researcher is/becomes familiar with the community he/she is researching. For my research, I chose informal face-to-face collaborative narratives as one method to achieve this. Additionally, I participated in many social, cultural and traditional ceremonies and political activities in my community, some of which became direct sources of knowledge for my research. Although some non-Indigenous researchers could engage in some of these activities through a "participatory ethnography," others are restricted to members of the Oneida and/or Six Nations League. Despite the fact that I had lived a few hours away from the community during my eight years of graduate work, I tried to attend many traditional ceremonies, pow-wows and other gatherings. To a number of the participants in my research, I was a close acquaintance;



to others, they “knew [me] by face. I know I have seen you at places” (Debbie). This familiarity was for the most part welcomed by the participants, as they felt that “you are not just using us to get your degree or something. You know what I am talking about when I talk about the way ceremonies are done, because you have been there yourself.”(Debbie) Remarks such as these point out the importance of familiarity and connections for Indigenous peoples. I, the researcher, and the participants shared a form of bonding that extended well beyond the duration of the “interview.” Through our interactions, some participants and I felt at “home” with each other, shared some common stories about life as Oneida members and had the same passion in our desire to restore a healthy nation.

As an insider to the Indigenous community, I am aware that there are types of knowledge that are often shared among ourselves in specific contexts that some members feel protective of and are reluctant to share with outsiders. Therefore, it is important that, together with the research participants and with the permission of the proper keepers of our culture (in my case, I often checked with my Clan Mother), decisions are made about what it is appropriate to share or not with “others.” Of course, this familiarity becomes even more important in some urban spaces where there are few familiar faces with whom an Indigenous person can share this sense of belonging.

Not flaunting one’s own knowledge is another principle within an Indigenous methodology. I didn’t consider myself an “expert” merely because I was a member of the Oneida Nation or because I had a high level of post-secondary education. I do believe that my experiences and my insider position in the research allowed me to have some tacit knowledge of the topics and issues that “outsiders” may not have. A participant supported my belief by stating that “I know that you understand what I am speaking about. For example, you know what it is like to have experienced those racist looks...You have been to a lot of our ceremonies where you know how important women’s places are there. I know you can believe me when I say those things, because you have seen it yourself.”(Lori) These comments highlight how familiarity and commonality can become characteristics of the relationship between the researcher and the participants when the researcher is perceived to be an insider. Obviously, for Lori, and arguably also for other participants in my research, our common experiences and shared knowledge of cultural traditions gave them a sense that their lived experiences were validated and accepted by the listener. However, I was mostly a learner during my research process.

This learner position was felt by me throughout my conversations with the twenty women participants and during the many traditional ceremonies where teachings about our culture and governance occurred. My learner identity became evident during my discussions with my Clan Mother, who is a lot more knowledgeable than I about the history of our people. Hence, I agree with Hokowhitu<sup>31</sup> that the research done by many Indigenous people might differ from that of others in that we are both the researcher and the researched. This specific position meant, for example, that during the years of “researching” through the historical experiences of Oneida women, I was often left with many deep emotions: I wasn’t reading about other peoples’ history, but my own, and that of my own ancestors. The experiences which the participants disclosed to me touched my heart very deeply. I had similar experiences to the participants and therefore I relived the pain during our conversations; their anger and hope about their community’s ongoing struggles were also felt deep inside of me, since it is also *my* community.

Although a more mainstream research approach would perceive the attachment that I have with the community as a source of bias that could potentially “contaminate” my research, in contrast, an Indigenous research methodology sees this subjectivity as a strength in a more holistic and genuine research process, one that shapes a truly collaborative relationship.

## MY COLLABORATIVE NARRATIVE APPROACH

My conversations with the research participants were constructed in such a way that they can be termed “collaborative narratives”,<sup>32</sup> wherein meaning is mutually constructed between all parties and there is a joint reflection on shared experiences between the researcher and the other participants. This type of approach is very suitable for Indigenous research, because it permits Indigenous participants to be equal participants in the initiation, representation, legitimization, accountability and benefits of research.<sup>33</sup> In my particular case, however, I initiated all the research-related processes, although some of the participants did initiate contact with me after they had heard about my ongoing research. The initial contact with most of the participants was done informally during pow-wows, ceremonies or while chatting in somebody’s kitchen or family room.

Although I likely benefited from the research mostly because I was able to complete my doctoral degree, I believe that there are some potential benefits my research can bring to my community. My work, for instance, could increase knowledge of my community’s issues of colonialism and of the efforts to rebuild a self-determined nation. This knowledge can only help to build a better relationship between Oneida people and other groups in Canada, as the latter can become better informed of the historical context of Oneida’s contemporary demands for self-determination. Also, the experiences shared by the women involved in my research highlight the multiplicity and complexity of Indigenous identity politics in North America. Their voices need to be heard and attended to while various Indigenous communities across Turtle Island/Canada move towards forming a decolonised nation. These women reported that a decolonising nationalist movement can bring back women’s powerful positions in their nation only if such a movement is inclusive of the different voices and experiences of colonialism and “Native-ness,” and issues of gender are fully incorporated into the evolving Oneida’s nationalist discourse.

I agreed to give a copy of the finished work to any of the participants who wished to have it. I also intend to write a smaller version that emphasises the narratives and the history of our nation. I feel that these two parts are the ones that are of more interest to most members of the community and could be useful to better understand the complex lives of Oneida women, to teach the young of our history with the use of both mainstream textual sources and oral histories and, finally, to use the historical analysis of colonialism for political strategies by the community within the state and mainstream Canadian society. In addition, as an Indigenous academic who is eager to help in decolonising the academy, I plan to use my research in my courses to provide students with the necessary Indigenous knowledge that they often miss.

Within a collaborative narrative methodology, negotiation occurs between the parties to the research throughout the whole research process. For example, in my case, we agreed

that research was to be conducted in a way that was respectful to and reflective of an Indigenous framework, and therefore there had to be consensus about the research process. Construction of meaning through the research, then, was conducted through a joint effort, which allowed for power sharing to occur. I consciously made efforts to devolve power and give opportunities to the participants to be active agents and share control as to how their words were interpreted, written, and what the meaning of their daily life activities were. Together, we constructed meaning, and this meaning-making followed a spiral process whereby we revisited our interpretations until we were satisfied that an agreed-upon interpretation of experiences was achieved.

I want to share with you how illuminating this research method was for me. There was a case where a participant (Lisa), after reading my first draft of the analysis of our first taped conversation, disagreed with how I had interpreted her views on feminism. I had thought that she disliked feminist movements and did not see them as being relevant to an Indigenous worldview and experience. Lisa corrected me and stated that she didn't dislike feminism but only thought that, since most feminists seemed to be exclusively concerned with European women's issues, feminism couldn't as easily apply to Indigenous women's reality. Rather than following a neat, conventional linear progressive direction in the research, my methodology reflected a spiral process. A spiral method is characterised by its continuously revisiting, reexamining, and refining of ideas and theoretical assumptions, due to the ongoing process of collaboration between the participants. This spiral method allowed for us to revisit our conversation, to reexamine our positions and refine our ideas, thereby resulting in a collaborative meaning-making process. During this spiral process, we weaved new stories.<sup>34</sup> Together, the twenty women and I acknowledged our participatory connectedness and denied the distance that some other conventional and/or positivistic research methodologies are characterised by.

This connectedness was also evident in other aspects of my research process. I participated in many activities and traditional ceremonies where I acquired knowledge of traditional ways of governing and of contentious issues within the self-determination movement. Within these activities I witnessed the active roles that women had and continue to have in our nation. This experiential knowledge enriched and complemented the knowledge gained from interacting with the twenty participants and from reviewing the existing literature on my topic. While accompanying some of the women on a trip to a political gathering in our traditional Oneida territory, which is located in what is now known as New York State, I felt connected to a place far away from where we live, but to which all Oneidas are affiliated because of our spiritual connection to that land and all our relations there. No interviews could have shown me how important traditional territory is to Oneida people. The tears in our eyes, our smiles when an eagle flew above, and the warm words spoken by the elders while standing on that land are precious and valid ways of Indigenous knowing. Later on, when some of the women and I spoke of those events, we weaved meaning into our Oneida history by recollecting and interpreting that experience and connecting it to some of the themes that had arisen throughout our conversations.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although historically, social research has not always been a friend to Indigenous peoples – often more an imperial gaze distorting views of Indigenous societies – we are now embarking on a new path, wherein Indigenous peoples are reclaiming our own voices in research (as researchers and researched) and demanding that our perspectives of the history between the “West” and the “Rest” be given equal status in the existing literature. We are (re)establishing our ways of doing research and (re)presenting knowledge, with the self-determination of our Indigenous nations as the primary goal. In the process, Indigenous peoples will move beyond being considered as “objects” of study under a Western gaze, to become active participants and producers of our own knowledge. In doing so, Indigenous communities all over the world are increasingly developing spaces where the mind, spirit, body and heart of our peoples can be decolonised. Some non-Indigenous researchers have joined this new path in their own ways by forming more respectful and collaborative relationships with the Indigenous communities that they have been working with and learning and/or using elements of Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies.

At the end of November 2005 I was fortunate to attend and present a paper at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, hosted by Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. The event was attended by over ten thousand delegates from all corners of the world, and almost all of these individuals were Indigenous. The theme of the conference was “Te Toi Roa – Indigenous Excellence,” and it accurately reflected what I witnessed that week. It was a space where our collective experiences were celebrated, where we shared our values, stories, energies, all in the spirit of Indigenous cultures. From the beginning, we were welcomed in a traditional Māori ceremony at the Turangawaewae Marae or meeting house at Ngaruawahia and felt at home among the Indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand, truly becoming part of a large Indigenous whānau (family). At the end of this hui (gathering), we learned of interesting and innovative ideas about empowering the various Indigenous communities that exist on Mother Earth: from stories of emerging leadership that are serving to better our communities, to examples of existing research that truly decolonises, to stories by educators of the revitalisation of Indigenous knowledges both inside and outside academia. I left the conference with so much pride in our Indigeneity, realising that Indigenous cultures are still strong and positive, despite centuries of attack by colonialism, and that we are leaving a legacy for our future generation to move forward on the path of decolonisation.

I want to end this paper with some powerful words spoken at that conference by a Hawaiian scholar, Dr Manulani Aluli Meyer. They might not be her exact words, since I am repeating them here as I remember them, as they touched my heart. “It’s time. Time to recognise the legitimacy of our own interpretation of the world...our Indigenous knowledge is a spiritual act; we are earth and our ways of knowing are embedded in it. Mahalo to our Māori cousins for hosting this event! May you return to your homelands refreshed and uplifted.” I did, indeed. I hope that my own words in this paper will also serve to uplift your spirits and help you believe that our Indigenous knowledges are rich and need to be nurtured, so that all of us – Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike – can take care of all our relations on Mother Earth and build decolonised relationships with one another.

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- 1 L T Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), 1.
- 2 All names of participants used in this paper are pseudonyms as decided and chosen by them.
- 3 M Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).
- 4 R Bishop, *Collaborative Research Stories: Whakawhanaungatanga* (Palmerston North, NZ: The Dunmore Press, 1996); S Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. S Hall and B Gieben (Cambridge: Polity Press and The Open University, 1992); J S Youngblood Henderson, "Postcolonial Ledger Drawing: Legal Reform," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. M Battiste (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000); M Kovach, "Emerging from the Margins: Indigenous Methodologies," in *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*, ed. L Brown and S Strega (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005); R L Louis, "Can You Hear us Now? Voices from the Margins: Using Indigenous Methodologies in Geographic Research," *Geographical Research*, 45:2 (2007), 130-139; E Said, *Orientalism* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; K H Thaman, "Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledges and Wisdom in Higher Education," *The Contemporary Pacific*, 16:2 (2004), 259-84.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Louis, "Can You Hear us Now?"
- 8 *Until Our Hearts Are On the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppressions, Resistance and Rebirth*, ed. D M Lavell-Harvard and J Corbiere Lavell (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2006).
- 9 B Hokowhitu, "Tackling Māori Masculinity: A Colonial Genealogy of Savagery and Sport," *The Contemporary Pacific*, 16:2 (2004), 259-84.
- 10 Said, *Orientalism*.
- 11 Hall, "The West and the Rest."
- 12 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; J Archibald, *Coyote Learns to Make a Storybasket: The Place of First Nations Stories in Education*, unpub. PhD diss. (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University, 1997); Kovach, "Emerging from the Margins."
- 13 Kovach, "Emerging from the Margins."
- 14 A "cleansing smudge" is a practice wherein a mix of Indigenous medicines like sage and sweet grass are burned in a smudge pot and the pot is passed around the people who cleanse their mind, heart, spirit and body by slowly, with their hands open, throwing the smoke generated by the medicines over their face, head, and (for some) the whole body. This practice is done in order to start any discussion, meeting or event with a clean and open mind, bringing in positive energy and cleansing oneself of any bad energy.

- 15 For a further discussion of the relationship between Indigenous women and feminisms, I refer readers to my dissertation which has an extensive review of the subject: M Sunseri, *Theorizing Nationalisms: Intersections of Gender, Nation, Culture and Colonialism in the Case of Oneida's Decolonizing Nationalist Movement*, unpub. diss. (Toronto: York University, 2005), in particular chapters 1 and 6. See also A Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000).
- 16 Brown and Strega, *Research as Resistance*.
- 17 C K Banks and J M Mangan, *The Company of Neighbours: Revitalizing Community Through Action-research* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); B Berg, *Qualitative Methods for the Social Sciences*, 6th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2007); M M Fonow and J A Cook, *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); B Harrison, *Collaborative Programs in Indigenous Communities: From Fieldwork to Practice* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2001); P Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1991); K Strand, *Community-based Research and Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).
- 18 See [www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/section6.cfm#6](http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/section6.cfm#6) as last accessed on 20 October 2007.
- 19 D Martin-Hill, "What is Community for the Purpose of Research?," keynote address presented at the Canadian Indigenous and Native Studies Association Annual Meeting at the 76th Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Saskatoon, 2007.
- 20 K Hodgson-Smith, *Seeking Good and Right Relations: Aboriginal Student Perspectives on the Pedagogy of Joe Duquette High School*, unpub. MA diss. (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1997).
- 21 Ibid., 38.
- 22 Louis, "Can You Hear us Now?;" M Stewart-Harawira, "Cultural Studies, Indigenous Knowledge, and Pedagogies of Hope," *Policy Futures in Education*, 3 (2005), 153-63.
- 23 Louis, "Can You Hear us Now?"
- 24 Kovach, "Emerging from the Margins."
- 25 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
- 26 Ibid., 7.
- 27 Louis, "Can You Hear us Now?"
- 28 Ibid., 120.
- 29 Hodgson-Smith, *Seeking Good and Right Relations*, 48.
- 30 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
- 31 B Hokowhitu, *Te Mana Māori – Te Tatari i Nga Korero Parau*, unpub. PhD diss. (Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago, 2002).
- 32 Bishop, *Collaborative Research Stories*.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid., 232.

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