ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

A conceptual framework for decolonizing research in social science

*Cueponcaxochitl D. Moreno Sandoval**

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Abstract

Building on the seminal work of Linda T. Smith in decolonizing research methodologies, this paper introduces Ancestral Knowledge Systems (AKS) as a conceptual framework for social science research methodologies. We use autoethnography and critical self-reflection throughout the article to make visible the components of AKS. First, we lay out the context in which AKS was re-created after a doctoral course on decolonizing research methodologies. We unpack internalized colonization to address the need to go beyond identity politics and towards AKS thinking as an approach to promote a multiplicity of knowledge systems. Next, we discuss family epistemologies and collective memories as methods for reconnecting accountability systems to ancestral homeland(s). Finally, we discuss our visions for AKS across learning ecologies. The scholarly significance of our research is twofold: (1) it develops a framework for critical introspection and

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connectivity for decolonizing research, and (2) it promotes a multiplicity of knowledge systems in the academy.

Keywords

Indigenous methodologies, decolonizing research, Ancestral Knowledge Systems, internalized colonization, family epistemology, multiplicity of knowledge systems

If social science research produces knowledge, then we must ensure that knowledge-production methods represent a multiplicity of knowledge systems. We call for a paradigm shift that preempts canonical research methodologies as tightly knotted colonial practices based *only* on dominant Western Eurocentric views (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Smith, 1999, 2012; Zavala, 2013). These views influence the standards of academe and traditional social science research to privilege positivist paradigms across a tapestry of coercion (Tuck & McKensie, 2015). In particular, they influence traditional "research as a strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education" (Kuhn, 1996, p. 5). Positivist research methods, therefore, promote epistemicide by oppressing varying worldviews.

As researchers in the academy, we must challenge standards of academe to unwind tightly coerced systems of oppression and colonization by (a) systematically identifying research traditions of epistemicide, (b) critically reflecting on researchers' embodiments of how epistemicide is expressed in research, and (c) unwinding ways in which researchers have internalized colonization. Tuck and Yang (2012) define colonialism as "the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the 'domestic' borders of the imperial nation" (pp. 4–5). This involves particularized modes of control—land privatization, schooling, policing—to ensure the ascendancy of a nation and its European elite. We define decolonization by using the metaphor of unwinding tightly knitted knots as a *process* by which an Indigenous people or nation-state frees itself from the violence of colonialism that forcibly impact(ed) the health of the people, land, water, and air. In addition, decolonization processes liberate colonized groups from imposed structures that include political, economic, social, spiritual, agricultural, and epistemological approaches to living, learning, and dying. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999, 2012) contributions to decolonizing methodologies have facilitated new ways of thinking about research by, with, and for Indigenes (Smith, 2014). In this article, we use "Indigenous" in a contested space (Forbes, 1995) as a dynamic, fluid (Corntassal, 2003), and all-encompassing approach asserting that all peoples originate from (a) specific place(s) on earth. However, the forces of colonialism have affected Indigenous peoples to varying degrees. In addition, not everyone identifies as Indigenous. We respond to Smith's call to decolonize research methods by introducing Ancestral Knowledge Systems (AKS) as a conceptual framework to guide research that includes many epistemologies in the academy.

Developing a conceptual framework

Ravitch and Riggan (2012) assert that conceptual frameworks guide the research process by "linking all of the elements [together]: researcher disposition, interest and positionality; literature; and theory and methods," including data analysis and reporting (p. 6). In this section, we include a process of exploring AKS as a conceptual framework. We acknowledge Hoffman's (2013) "Conceptual Framework of Aboriginal Knowing" of ontologies, epistemologies, ethics,

and knowledges that contribute and align with AKS. As Indigenous scholars, it is our responsibility to share "our way of life" and to include our elders' wisdom in our academic research. Exploring the nuances of the stories of our elders as well as exploring AKS as scholars is a process that provides an insight into how AKS might guide a decolonizing approach to designing, conducting, and reporting social science research. Coupled with our choices for theoretical frames and methodological approaches, a personal embodiment of self-and-communal accountability is afforded by turning to AKS as a lens to guide our personal, professional, and academic journeys.

While traditional ecological knowledge has informed our thinking, AKS go beyond ecological knowledge towards a process of inquiry that unearths Indigenous social constructions of observing, understanding, being, and participating in the world from an ancestral homeland, dynamically flowing from one generation to another. Just as important, AKS bring to consciousness how these knowledge systems and social constructions have intersected with power systems (e.g., colonialism) over time. Transmitted by collective memories (French, 2012), AKS disentangle colonizing practices in the research process by examining epistemicide in the academy. The coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) "via racial, sexual, spiritual, legal, political, economic, and social hierarchical orders imposed by European colonialism that pervades our . . . approaches to being" (Orelus, 2012, as cited in Moreno Sandoval, 2013, p. 94) impacts the academy and all participants in it in both overt and covert ways.

The authors developed the AKS framework to continue the previous work of scholars in unwinding—to a certain extent—the positivist and capitalist traditions of the academy (Tuck & McKensie, 2015, pp. 7–9). The framework was reconceptualized and embodied after a 16-week class at Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College entitled "Decolonizing Research Methods." While studying Indigenous research methodologies, we asked the question "How might an academic scholar engage in decolonizing research methods, and for what purpose?" As part of our course, we brought to the forefront cihuāmeh ("women" in Nahuatl/Mexicano) consciousness that nurtures an Indigenous epistemology (Anzaldúa, 1987; Martínez-Cruz, 2011; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981) while cultivating our cultural intuitions (Delgado Bernal, 1998). This process included an examination of our positionalities while exploring decolonial, emancipatory, feminist research, and action projects moving "from a self-consciousness to [a] *collective* consciousness" (Díaz-Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villarreal, & Campos, 2009, p. 760, emphasis in original). The framework blossomed from our collective critical reflections that continue to this day. After the course was completed, we continued our work together, inspired by having experienced a safe place that transcended the traditional academic classroom and nurtured our connections with our ancestors across time and place. No longer feeling fragmented, our personal, professional, and academic lives were made whole. We were affirmed by the possibilities of an academy that would allow for our authentic selves to be present in our research.

Utilizing an Indigenous pedagogy (Grande, 2004) during and after the course opened up the opportunity to achieve two things: a critical examination of literature on decolonizing methodologies and a simultaneous critical self-reflection about ourselves as cihuāmeh researchers that deeply recognized our AKS of Mexico. Reading, inquiry, and critical dialog led to the awakening, validating, and liberating of worldviews traditionally not valued by the academy, affirming that "many Indigenous peoples recognize that for their cultural knowledge to thrive it must live in many sites, including Western education and research" (Kovach, 2009, p. 12). Therefore, we share our narratives to challenge Western academia, to honor our voices, languages, places, knowledges, and values in research. bell hooks (1994) states that

> When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. . . . Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end. (p. 2)

We re-created AKS as a conceptual framework to decolonize research methods in social science. The authors' autoethnographic narratives reflect challenges confronting epistemicide within the academy. We recognized how colonial practices affected our own notions of internalized colonization, and how our critical consciousness helped to unwind these systems of coloniality to unearth our AKS. The following subsections describe the methods used to develop the AKS framework.

Critical reflection

As cihuāmeh researchers working to develop a critical consciousness about our engagement with the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987) of multiple cultural worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), we find ourselves participating in the dialectic (Villenas, 1996), a space of overlapping worlds in contradiction. On one hand, we recognize that a decolonizing framework goes beyond criticizing the ideological stances of the academy to pursuing the physical repatriation of land that is at the center of all decolonizing approaches. While we cannot claim that we are immediately addressing land issues per se, we put forth AKS as a conceptual framework that has far-reaching implications for the ways in which we assume relationships to each other, and to the land, and all other forms of life. By invoking AKS, we focus on a particular set of tools that nurture relationships to ancestral homelands. All AKS return to the earth in a myriad of ways. Our proposal for decolonizing research in the academy calls for a reawakening of those relationships and accountabilities to the earth and to each other as co-existing lives.

Leroy Little Bear describes the encounter of Aboriginal philosophies and positivist research as "jagged worldviews colliding" (as cited in Brant Castellano, 2000, p. 103) and shows how colonization creates an internal struggle of competing values. Whether we currently identify as the colonizer or the colonized, we are never completely one or the other (Rendón, 2009; Villenas, 1996). We are part of a process that both constructs new understandings and deconstructs existing standards. Neither the colonizing nor the decolonizing paradigm is without contradictions. Díaz's narrative shows how she builds on critical reflection and family epistemologies to guide her understanding about her position in the academy.

Marisol Juárez Díaz: Building a home

> My parents built our first home out of adobe on an abandoned lot behind a liquor store. As a child, I watched my parents make mud bricks for three years until they finished our home. Bearing witness to my parents' agency and fuerza [strength], those years were formative in my development as an academic and activist.
>
> When I entered law school, I was unfamiliar with what to expect. No one close to me had pursued that journey and I felt I should be grateful for my admission. However, the foundations of thought and philosophies of law school were problematic because they were predicated on a biased structure of oppression and power. My gender and skin color made me see and think differently, and my comments and thoughts were deemed inferior and insignificant.
>
> The breaking down of the colonized worldview created by the colonizer began there. Today, I stand on a new foundation and have a choice as I begin my research career. We are

> all implicated in systems of inequality and can choose how to respond to those divides. I choose to use AKS as a tool to facilitate my growth and to explain the layers of colonization as I build my space to feel at home.

In the 16-week course we discussed how our families' epistemologies were our first teachers and how we have sought to bring those epistemologies into the academy, even when we have received messages in the academy that tell us otherwise. This process of revitalizing our family epistemologies, especially ones closest to earthways, required a deep level of critical reflection about how we existed in various cultural worlds. To live within these borderlands as cihuāmeh aligns with Xicana Sacred Space (XSS), a model with "a decolonizing goal: to raise profound consciousness, to embrace hybridities in ways of being, to reclaim Indigenous sources of knowledge, to validate [Xicanas'] epistemologies and methods, and to unite forces against oppression and androcentrism" (Díaz-Soto et al., 2009, p. 759). Similarly, Rendón (2009) outlines an epistemology incorporating wholeness and harmony, rooted in ancient wisdom. AKS incorporate what Rendón (2009) calls integrative learning, which "recognizes connections among diverse ways of knowing but also emphasizes the relationship between mind, body, [liver, heart] and spirit, and the connection between the outer life of . . . professional responsibility and the inner life of personal development . . . and purpose" (p. 134).

Unwinding internalized colonization

Colonialism influences the pervasive social conditioning that we receive, be it personal, professional, or academic. Furthermore, *not knowing* that our preconceptions may be impacted by systems of oppression can lead to dissonance. The coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) affects all people subtly and overtly. Therefore, it behooves all to examine the politics of identity that has kept academics and activists alike from addressing the core issues of impact and excellence in the academy (Grande, 2004).

Central to AKS is language. In all but one of our cases, the ancestral native languages of our families have been killed off by colonial practices in schools, chipping away our ancestral integrity. Families struggle to maintain their ancestral languages because of colonialist policies and dominant-language discourses. The following vignette describes how language ideologies have contributed to language loss within a family and how through AKS, Lagunas is revitalizing her language in her personal and academic worlds.

Rosalva Mojica Lagunas: "Nu latult ya nu yulu"—My language is my heart

> My parents' mother tongue is Mexicano, also known as Nahuatl. My parents believed that they needed to abandon their ancestral language and shift to Spanish for their children to have better opportunities. This choice was influenced by factors such as the discourse of power and status. I learned English in school and Spanish at home but was never taught Mexicano.
>
> The language ideologies that denigrated my AKS may not have been directly spoken to us, but they were unconsciously rooted in our heads. It is a continuous battle to defend my dissertation topic of Indigenous language revitalization. Many people ask me, "Why do you want to learn a language that you can't use?" I answer, "It is part of me—part of my ancestors, mi familia [my family], knowledges and stories spring from it." Reclaiming my identity through decolonizing my mind, spirit, and body has helped me continue my work in Coatepec, where my family is from. It has allowed me to understand where we come from, our knowledges, their knowledges, and to listen with a deeper understanding. This process has helped me become a better

researcher. I realized that the work I do does not belong to me, but it is a collaboration of stories in which my people's voices are heard. AKS as a conceptual framework steers me to question my positionality and to critically reflect on my culture and my place in the world as a researcher and a cihuātl, woman.

As I continue to do work with my Indigenous community in Mexico, AKS has guided my interview techniques, how I listen, and how I understand and connect with my participants, my family. It has been a gift to work with my ancestral community, where I am challenged to unwind my internal colonization. This journey has contributed to my personal and professional life, allowed me to celebrate such ancestral knowledges as language, opened language revitalization discussions in Coatepec, and contributed to the larger field of language policies in education.

Lagunas shares how her AKS have been foundational in her personal, professional, and academic engagement. Guided by her AKS she is determined to create her research agenda on revitalizing her native language. Cueponcaxochitl had joined her in Mexicano/Nahuatl classes at her home, around the kitchen table with her parents, for 52 weeks at the time of writing. Revitalizing AKS involves relationship building and a larger purpose that includes a dignified way of living and learning. As researchers in the academy, we are committed to centering our AKS as a guide to the ways in which we design and conduct research.

Using AKS to guide research methodology

We guided our investigation of the methods discussed in this paper with the central question: How might an academic scholar engage in decolonizing research methods, and for what purpose? We looked at XSS (Díaz-Soto et al., 2009) as one model that creates a collective third space as a decolonizing mirror that validates alternative epistemologies and incorporates spirituality and cultural intuition. In addition, we drew from Rendón (2009), who outlines an ancient epistemology that incorporates a wholeness and harmony rooted in ancient wisdom, and from Hoffman's (2013) conceptual framework of developing relationships between Aboriginal knowledges and our work in the academy. The frameworks shaped the autoethnographies (Burdell & Swadener, 1999; Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012) and critical reflection (Carter, 2004; Milner, 2007) that we have included as an examination of our positionalities and standpoints.

Decolonizing one's mind involves sharing one's knowledges in the academy to nurture Indigenous epistemologies. To do this requires challenging the dominant discourse through critical reflection on the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) created through methods of colonization. This process reveals the tensions involved in examining our identification with internalized images, or symbols, of power and status. Learning how colonial practices affect our personal, professional, and academic practices is a process. AKS are not end points but require persistent engagement, always seeking a balance between loss and revitalization. Supporting one another through sharing and listening to our stories, or testimonios (testimonies) (Pérez-Huber, 2009), we peeled away layers of consciousness in our families and across generations, revitalizing our AKS.

Applying AKS in the academy

AKS are not simply categorized in neat packages, but are expressed through socially constructed political, economic, physical, and social dimensions that function within cultural borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1999) and intersect with time and space. Through both physical and spiritual relationships, AKS acknowledge the importance of

land, location, and context. AKS are expansive and too numerous to completely survey in this paper; we therefore focus on a small strand of AKS that overlap with our narratives and can be followed from ancient times and family agricultural practices to current contexts and future planning. What is unique about AKS as a conceptual framework for decolonizing research in the academy is its unfolding of the assertion that all peoples are connected to (an) ancestral homeland(s). What do Indigenous research methodologies of accountability and reciprocity look like for a researcher that is not Indigenous to the place in which he or she conducts research? For an Indigenous researcher? Without definitive responses, the AKS conceptual framework asks both perceived sides of the complex binary (Indigenous/non-Indigenous, colonized/colonizer, insider/outsider, Native/non-Native) the following questions: As a researcher, what is your relationship to your ancestral homeland(s)? What does your positionality to your ancestral homeland reveal about your relationship to the participants in your study, writ large? How might the coloniality of power affect the relationship you have with your inquiry and the participants in the study?

Patricia Hill Collins (1989) and Levins Morales (1998) note that colonialism resulted in cultural groups sharing experiences of oppression while similarities in experiences of "material conditions" have fostered shared cultural values that permeate the "family structure . . . culture and community life" in various geographies (Collins, 1989, p. 755). Critical reflection on the cultural practices that fed our upbringing and social conditioning spawned our inquiry of unearthing our AKS as a decolonizing practice, and then served as a springboard for how we entered research practice. Sometimes this process includes tensions and contradictions. These provide a fertile space to explore how they came to be while bringing to light their intersections with power structures.

Therefore, it is essential to trust in the process of revitalizing AKS as a practical and dignifying approach to inquiry and action. In Cueponcaxochitl's case, some of the tensions she experienced in the academy were also reflected in her family.

Cueponcaxochitl D. Moreno Sandoval: Challenging colonialism in personal and academic places

> Compared to my brother and sister, I was born morenita—meaning dark-skinned—and over time, especially during my undergraduate years, I deepened my sense of self, nurturing my Xicana Indigenous identity. This process led me to question the role of the church in our upbringing. My questioning of the church did not sit well with my family and for many years there was a lot of tension. Yet, time has given us the opportunity to experience some healing.
>
> The process of courageous inquiry has led me to become a better researcher in that I have learned to negotiate deeply held perspectives while introducing my own. Academia pushed me to think critically about taken-for-granted epistemological instantiations and bravely assert my voice.

We all went through a process of critical reflection, naming the tensions through which the coloniality of power has affected research processes through epistemicide. We also asked how epistemicide might have affected our perceptions about the academy and our positions in it. We noticed how, together and individually, we unwound internalized colonization as researchers in the academy. It is increasingly apparent that scholars of color bring what Trueba (2002) calls "a new cultural capital" to our work by including what Nieto (2006) describes as "the master[y] of different languages, the ability to cross racial and ethnic boundaries, and a general resilience associated with the ability to endure hardships and overcome obstacles" (p. 24). These contributions will contribute to "a new cultural capital, not a handicap" (p. 24).

In resisting the assimilationist model of denying our Indigenous family epistemologies, each of the four of us deepened our connection to our Indigenous family's knowledge *with greater tenacity* so as to not lose ourselves in the process of conducting research in the academy.

Academia often denies the value of our personal experiences (Collins, 1989; Hoffman, 2013; Kovach 2009), disparages their rigor, or measures our Indigenous worldviews within the standards of positivist approaches to knowing. Turning to our AKS requires challenging the dominant discourse that the coloniality of power expresses through critical reflection on our positionalities in conducting research. This includes an examination of our researcher identities (both societal and personal) and how these identities intersect with structures of power. Transparency concerning our position in the world, as it relates to the field of study, ourselves, our research participants, and readers involves realizing how our experiences (and conditioning) shaped our biases, how these biases shaped our identities, and how these perceptions are only one way of seeing the world. Figure 1 demonstrates one part of the AKS framework, that is, a critical reflection exercise that examines how our experiences relate to systems of power, and how power has intersected with our worldviews and identities. Critical reflection demonstrates the tension of using a critical consciousness to examine our assumptions about how our participation in the academy intersects with the present-day colonialism in the coloniality of power across formal and informal places of learning, and produces knowledge. The understanding of our AKS then deepens with the courage to challenge assumptions, reclaim ancestral knowledges as inquiry, and reclaim ancestral worldviews. Practicing critical reflection to unwind systems of power and revitalize AKS is a dignified way of *becoming* in the academy.

Each of us is Indigenous somewhere, and in many cases, we are Indigenous to more than one geography. Recognizing their cultural heritages and re-embodying our AKS enables researchers to facilitate the re-production of

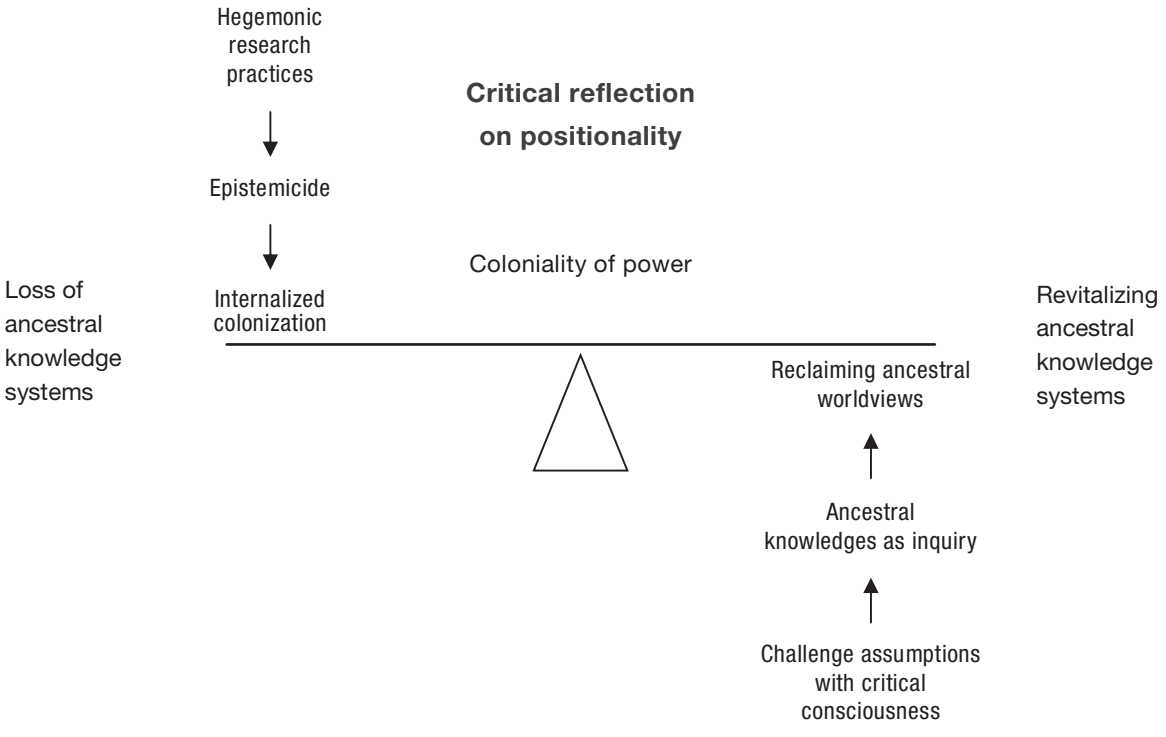


FIGURE 1 Using critical reflection to reclaim our ancestral knowledge systems

multiple knowledge systems in the academy. In the following subsections, we discuss physical and conceptual dynamics useful in building a conceptual framework that is grounded in culturally and linguistically diverse researchers' lived experiences (Collins, 1989; Kovach 2009) and scholarly literature. These physical and conceptual dynamics are tools for social scientists of all ancestral backgrounds who seek to decolonize research in the academy. The conceptual framework, theoretical underpinnings, and methodology of the research design shape the research questions, which reflect the researchers' worldviews on the given topic. Worldviews are shaped by such factors as language, family epistemologies, positionalities, the recognition that knowledge is relational, collective memories and action, and sustainability practices that reveal the coloniality of power as a level of analysis for making decisions during research processes.

Family epistemologies and positionalities

While the authors were trained in United States universities, our principal knowledge-keepers are our parents, who understood the epistemologies of agricultural societies and carry family stories with embedded knowledge that has thrived despite the coloniality of power. Acknowledging ourselves as first-generation scholars in the academy, we use our cultural intuitions (Delgado Bernal, 1998) to make our AKS and their intersections with scholarly literature meaningful. Francisca González (2001) speaks of braiding "different ways of knowing, [for] the formulation of holistic educational policies and practices" (p. 641). By adopting AKS, we do not pretend to decolonize research by *only* using or opposing European epistemologies. Our academic writing style represents knowledges created over multiple times and places. We thus value multiple knowledge systems and shift worldviews (Rendón, 2009) as subversive acts in social science (Kuhn, 1996). To decolonize research, one must not consider traditional research processes alone, but also the context of the research, and the conditions in which this context builds equity (Zavala, 2013). By doing so, we intend to facilitate a more expansive worldview for researchers and the researched alike, honoring AKS irrespective of origin.

Family epistemologies, stories that reflect sociohistorical complexities of intricate systems of knowing, can detail the complexities of knowledge production over time. Bounded by time and place, our knowledges are based in earthways from which we develop our wisdom and cultural intuitions. This strengthens our collective agency with which we critically challenge colonizing practices that would violate our spirit of dignity and respect for all forms of life. For example, each of our families brings agricultural knowledges to our ways of understanding the world. These knowledge systems have been passed on through the generations from older agriculturalist societies; they were transmitted through metaphors, careful observations, and understanding about our place in the world.

Deepening an understanding of ourselves as Indigenous peoples of a place or places, and learning how our stories intersect with power positions, enables us to enter the research process with clearer vision. Sharing our positionalities with research participants may facilitate communication between research participants and researchers. Muhammad et al. (2015) suggest that positionality influences community-based participatory research.

The more researchers' positionalities engage in critical reflection, both outside and within the cloak of colonialism, the more researchers can approach inquiry with greater awareness about structures of power and their engagement with the others involved (research participants and readers). About considering cultural variations, Rosaldo (1994) affirms that the

> point . . . is not to discard classic norms but to displace them [from the center,] so that

> they become only one among a number of viable forms of social description rather than the one and only mode of writing about other cultures. (p. 54)

While there is "no single recipe for representing other cultures" (p. 61), we affirm that unraveling our processes of internalized colonization and revealing, when hidden, our AKS can enrich our understanding of the constructs and the people we work with, and provoke questions about educational practice with the purpose of self-determination and equity in the academy. Also, our positionalities are defined as a socially situated context. Our encounters with communities of practice "suggest . . . that we [researchers] should be open to asking not only how our descriptions of others would read if applied to ourselves but how we can learn from other people's descriptions of ourselves" while considering a contested space in which we "help [to] make apparent how cultural interpretations are both occasioned by and enter arenas of ideological conflict" (p. 67).

Therefore, researchers must acknowledge their own positionalities and admit that their social conditioning, personal experiences, and intentions for research motivate their inquiries. Studies claiming objectivity may predicate colonial practices and establish a hegemonic ideology of difference. *All research is political*. The first step towards revealing research's socially embedded nature is critically examining how one's positionalities intersect with power and privilege, and how that process of reflection can reveal biases and, ultimately, facilitate academia's adoption of many knowledge systems. Montelongo identifies how collective stories of her family epistemologies, passed on through generations, reveal her positionality as a researcher in the academy.

Lydia T. Montelongo: Challenging the academy

> My ancestors came from Mexico's border states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Michoacán. They found work with the railroads and then as farm workers. Schooling was interrupted through school board policies to release children from school during heavy picking seasons.
>
> I recall traveling throughout the state looking for work and living in labor camps. While political structures appropriated our labor through policies that kept us out of school, they strengthened my family's resolve to challenge structures that would prevent their children's education. Absent of a "formal" education, my maternal ancestors taught me earthways.
>
> My great-great-grandmother was a midwife who assisted the birth of my grandmother under a tree near where we later picked fruit. My mother began her labor to birth me while picking cotton. Women were hard workers who respected the cycles of life. The earth provided our sustenance when we did not have money. I learned the seasons through seeding and harvesting crops. Women in my family taught me about medicinal herbs. I retained that knowledge and wisdom they shared through stories about nature's provisions, passed to me as one of the eldest.
>
> Now I share those stories with my younger relatives. I was encouraged to seek formal education to end the cycle of poverty, so I chose a career in higher education. I value the sharing of stories as a method that generations of my family used to convey their experiences. The use of dichos [popular sayings], and listening to corridos [Mexican folk songs] that told our stories in song, were integral to our work in the fields.

> I was named after a woman, Lydia, who came from the same state in Mexico as my family. She was famous for singing ballads about the political struggles and poverty of the field workers. This stays with me. As her namesake, and to continue my family's method of sharing collective stories, my work as a researcher uses qualitative methods to decolonize research.

In this excerpt, Montelongo describes how she has made sense of her family epistemologies as a doctoral student, and how she incorporates her AKS in the academy. Her experiences resonated with the rest of us as we learned how to be a part of transformational resistance (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001) to a structure that did not intend for us to survive. Our resistance impels us to give honor to our AKS and theorize and conduct research around issues that are important for the liberation of *all people*.

Relational knowledge and collective memories

By studying ourselves, and reconnecting to our places in the world, we can more intimately connect to others, grounded in the understanding that our first responsibility is to our earth families, homes, and communities. Knowledge is relational, and it does not stand alone. Chrystos's (1983) perception rings true for us: "we walk in the history of our people" (p. 57). Once we have a reliable understanding of who we are through a thorough critical reflection on our AKS as a process, we can expand to interrelating with others and experience interconnectedness in complex ways. In remembering the ancient, we can imagine and create something new (Martínez, 1998). This approach reinforces the notion that knowledge is not "made up," but rather transmitted over time and recycled and reapplied in a specific context (French, 2012).

Nurturing of AKS re-creates increased consciousness and collective action. Our stories and the stories of others with whom we connect are part of a strategy for change. We use the terms *re-cycling*, *re-creating*, *re-membering*, and *re-searching* to show that this knowledge is not akin to the manner in which Western paradigms envision ownership and property. Knowledge perceptions of some AKS run counter to Western notions of intellectual property; knowledge cannot be owned or sold. AKS do not belong to one people. They are transferred from one body to the next, over generations and words, contestations, stories, sciences, foods, trades, arts, and labor practices that, together, contribute to a worldview that understands the nature of the world and its relationships. AKS are shared within a community of practice made up of families, neighborhoods, body languages, schooling participants, and others that are all interrelated.

In "challenging the academy" and valuing "what my parents taught me," the authors draw from AKS as researchers whose intersectional experiences ultimately shape how they will continue their research. One of the most powerful steps in naming epistemicide and working towards decolonizing the mind is "coming to know the past" by sharing testimonies (Smith, 2012). By doing so, we challenge the restrictive ways that the academy produces knowledge and thereby humanize research (Paris & Winn, 2014). This process holds us accountable, as researchers, to critical reflection on our experiences and practice.

Discussions and conclusions

Towards the decolonizing of research methodologies, we have introduced a conceptual framework, AKS, for designing and guiding research that promotes many knowledge systems in the academy. Building on seminal decolonial scholarship, we see close examination and disentangling through critical self-reflection and the unwinding of internalized colonization as a central process in designing and conducting research. This process created a safe place

where we discussed research methods to recognize and acknowledge our ancestors in the academy. AKS facilitate the conceptualizing of a world where many worlds fit. As such, we continue to strive to dignify our research process in the academy.

When highlighting AKS, one can easily succumb to romanticizing or emphasizing the past, so much so that today's issues become irrelevant. We do not intend to position AKS as static notions of the past. In addition, Tuck and Yang (2012) caution us about using decolonization as a metaphor because it moves us away from the settler-slave connotation of the term. We use it cautiously. While Tuck and Yang argue that using decolonization as a metaphor "makes possible a set of evasions, or 'settler moves to innocence', that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" (p. 1), we recognize that our actions towards decolonizing research methods include the deep acknowledgment of the historical constructions of research practices that we unwind in inquiry and action. Within our inquiry on AKS, we include a close examination of the coloniality of power as it relates to settler colonialism in material and non-material ways.

Our autoethnographies and reflections about our research processes push the boundaries of what is considered research in the academy, a place that historically denies the epistemological contributions to knowledge of non-dominant communities. Lie and O'Leary (1990) suggest that institutional strategies, which include well-presented and documented arguments, and a mechanism for supporting women's progress, are the most successful ways to assist women in "achieving their rightful place within the academy" (pp. 238–239). As the least represented in the academy, we assert that as cihuāmeh, we propose that researchers have the possibility to turn to AKS as a way to be meaningfully inclusive of multiple perspectives of knowledge production. By revealing the ways in which the coloniality of power has intersected with knowledge production, we uncover layers of contradiction and tensions that must be analyzed in the research process. We turn to AKS as a tool for decolonizing inquiry in the academy and hope that other researchers are inspired to turn to their familial epistemologies as a humanizing approach to conducting research in the academy.

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Glossary

cihuātl/cihuāmeh	Nahuatl for woman/women
corridos	Mexican folk songs
dichos	popular sayings
fuerza	strength
mi familia	my family
Nahua	Indigenous people of Mexico and El Salvador
Nahuatl	Uto-Aztecan language often referred to as Mexicano; widely spoken in Mexico
testimonios	testimonies
Xicana	Nahuatl word used by women (usually living in the United States) to self-identify with their Native roots in Mexico; pronounced shee-cana

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