8 Standing with and speaking as faith

A feminist-indigenous approach to inquiry

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I inquire in concert with diverse thinkers and communities implicated in knowledge constituted at the intersections of technoscience and indigenous governance. I am part anthropologist of science and technology (technoscience), but with an ethical and methodological inheritance from a previous career as a tribal environmental planner. The intersectional knowledges that I help articulate involve communities of scientists—some of whom are indigenous, science educators, science policy experts, and Native American and other indigenous community members. (I am allergic to the term "informant.") I converse with thinkers who resist, monitor, regulate, collaborate in and sometimes reconfigure scientific research to serve indigenous communities. I engage with technoscience in the service of indigenous self-governance and livelihoods.

Reciprocity and jargon

Among social justice-minded researchers, there is an emphasis on reciprocity with research subjects and communities. This is evident in the 2014 special issue of *The Journal of Research Practice* subtitled "Giving Back in Field Research," in which an earlier version of this chapter first appeared. Feminist political ecologists Clare Gupta and Alice Bridget Kelly edited the volume. They wrote in the introduction:

> [During fieldwork in sub-Saharan Africa] both researchers faced the difficult question of "giving back" to the communities in which, and with whom, they worked—communities that were often far less privileged than the researchers were in terms of wealth, mobility, education, and access to health care. Returning from their field sites, both researchers felt a combination of guilt and frustration that they had not done enough or had not done things right.
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> (Gupta and Kelly 2014)

Likewise, indigenous researchers or "native anthropologists"—working as "insiders," although we acknowledge that insiderness is always complicated (Chipps 2004, Jacobs-Huey 2002, Innes 2009, Medicine 2001, Narayan 1993, Ohnuki-Tierney 1984, Simpson 2007, Todorova-Pirgova 1999)—sometimes

struggle with our academic privilege. While we sometimes foreground *reciprocity*, indigenous researchers are also likely to emphasize caring for our relations with home communities when we do research there. Sometimes those relationships can feel undermined by the protocols and foundational assumptions of academic research: informed consent forms, interview techniques, recording technologies, implicit hierarchies and presumed distance between researcher and researched, knower and known.

To lessen that divide, we desire to make complex ideas accessible. It is not uncommon to see discomfort with theoretical language, "jargon" as it is disparagingly called, which is portrayed as disingenuous. Shawn Wilson in *Research is Ceremony* (2008) writes:

> It may be necessary for me to use some pretty big and daunting words. I try hard not to use these words in everyday conversations, because I think that too many people use big language as a way of belittling others. However, some of the ideas I want you to understand require these words, as they are able to get across a lot of meaning.
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> (13)

I want to trouble—as I have elsewhere—this assertion that specialized academic terminology (social theory usually, with "hard" science terminology exempted) is elitist and meant to obscure (TallBear 2013, 121–122). This charge is also conditioned by a presumed separation and hierarchy between researcher and researched. It seems less objectionable when non-academics or indigenous or other marginalized researchers who feel historically objectified and disempowered by the dominant gaze critique complex theoretical language. But paradoxically, speakers of highly complex scientific languages, e.g., genome terminology, made intelligible as with any language only through years of study, sometimes share a defensive and even anti-intellectual streak regarding complex social-theoretical language. For example, I have witnessed scientific thinkers charge social theorists with being "silly, self-indulgent, and caught up in a diminutive subculture" when the person trained in genomics does not immediately understand say a philosopher of science. I counter that we need precise languages to talk about precise ideas that have derived from specific histories of work, from the development of theories and methods. Specialists of all persuasions wield dense specialty languages, from medical professionals to attorneys, electricians and hairdressers to information technology (IT) professionals. My allergy to thinking about "informants" extends to the concept of a "field" that is somehow out there, while the hallowed walls of the academy are "in here." This includes challenging the idea that specialty languages are necessarily indicative of hierarchy. I am especially concerned that indigenous studies scholars committed to indigenous self-determination and to maintaining relations with communities become adept at switching between academic specialty languages and the languages of home. We should acknowledge that different ideas can be robustly analyzed within different languages. We must find some level of comfort with imperfect translations.

As an indigenous thinker concerned with staying in relation, the notion of reciprocity or "giving back" is inadequate. I and other researchers do not, in simpler terms, exchange data for aid or service to the communities we study. Most indigenous researchers study topics that include indigenous people, cultures, practices, and/or lands. In thinking about the ethics of accountability in research (whose lives, lands and bodies are inquired into and what do they get out of it?), the goal of "giving back" to research subjects seems to target a key symptom of a major disease in knowledge production, but not the crippling disease itself. That is the binary between researcher and researched—between knowing inquirer and who or what are considered to be the resources or grounds for knowledge production. This is a fundamental condition of our academic body politic that has only recently been pathologized, and still not by everyone. 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, 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—thinking more expansively about what counts as risk (ontological harms?) and rightful benefit (institution building and community development?) in the course of building knowledge. It is also helpful to think about the research process as a relationship-building process—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. For the institutions that employ and fund us, we will articulate specific goals as guideposts. A researcher who "stands with" a community of subjects is willing to be altered, to revise her stakes in the knowledge to be produced.

"Giving back," however, sounds akin to standing on two sides of a boundary that parties view as pretty much set. We good-intentioned liberals in the broader imperialistic academy negotiate treaties—with individual subjects and sometimes with collectives—across that boundary. We do this in good faith and we figure out ways to do service or help build capacity in the communities in which we work. Over the past decade I have been trying to figure incrementally how to articulate research questions, conceive of subject populations, and approach knowledge production from shared conceptual ground. I want to circumvent dualistic relationships—even if they are not easily read as hierarchical—that more typically characterize academic research and which the concept of *reciprocity* implies. I offer some insights that have helped me articulate shared conceptual ground and shared stakes with those with whom I build knowledge.

I often study non-indigenous people (i.e., bioscientists), but I do this in the service of indigenous self-determination. I advocate that indigenous peoples engage explicitly with technoscience in order to make sure it serves their/our interests rather than undermining us. The ethic of maintaining relations is one I feel compelled to carry into my work with *non*-indigenous communities too—those bioscientists, genetic genealogists and other scientific thinkers whose work has important implications for indigenous lives. First with indigenous communities

and thinkers and later with scientific communities and thinkers I seek out and try to articulate overlapping respective intellectual, ethical and institution-building projects. I articulate shared goals and desires while staying engaged in critical conversation and knowledge production.

Indigenous and feminist standpoint and care for the subject

My preoccupation with democratizing academic knowledge production began 40 years ago when I encountered Vine Deloria, Jr.'s (1969) ideas about the role of anthropology in the colonial project, but simultaneously the promise of intellectualism in helping us to resist colonialism. My mother, LeeAnn TallBear, exposed me to Deloria's thinking before I could read, when she was an undergraduate student at Northern State College in Aberdeen, South Dakota in the politically turbulent early 1970s. She demonstrated every day for her four children that change and hope for our people involves constituting our own narratives from our own lives and histories. She always had alternative history books in the house and shared with us oral historical narratives of our Dakota people to counteract the dominant colonial histories we received in public schools.

About a dozen years ago, I encountered feminist theorists Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding who challenge standard notions of objectivity that conflate it with neutrality. Rather, they advocate *situated knowledges* (Haraway 1991) from the "standpoint" of women, traditional cultures and other marginalized subjects. This means that hypotheses, research questions, methods and valued outputs—including historical accounts, sociological analyses and textual interpretations—must begin from the lives, experiences and interpretations of marginalized subjects (Harding 1991, 2008). If we promiscuously account for standpoints, objectivity will be strengthened. Their language made quick sense to me precisely because Deloria and TallBear had paved the intellectual path.

I am also indebted to feminists who analyze and critique in a manner that "cares for the subject" (Schuurman and Pratt 2002). They write of the intellectual and ethical benefits of being invested in the knowledges and technologies one critiques, and the shortcomings of critique for critique's sake. Haraway provided me with a conceptual and pragmatic framework that helps guide me in how to engage critically in high-stakes problems as both an intellectual and an invested moral agent. She does not simply study, but lives in dog worlds. She engages in everyday technical conversations. She and her companion dogs do agility sports together. She cares for, challenges, critiques and is generous with her human and nonhuman companions. She inhabits that material and virtual world. "Fieldwork" would be a misnomer. Likewise, I do not simply study indigenous communities. I inhabit them, both locally and globally, within and without the academy. I am family, friend and/or colleague to a stunningly diverse set of indigenous actors. I participate daily in their—our—conversations related to indigenous governance, science, technology, economies and cultures. I work for indigenous flourishing. I also critique toward that end. I have been figuring out how to do this work since I was five years old, and also in a previous career as a planner. Haraway and Harding

gave additional intellectual language beyond what Vine Deloria, Jr. and my mother gave me to describe my approach and ethos.

Standing with and speaking as faith

The writing of another feminist intellectual has recently offered me additional conceptual language for enacting the ethical orientation I have come to refer to as "standing with" in inquiry. Neferti Tadiar's articulation of *sampalataya*, Tagalog for "act of faith," helps address the outsider/insider angst that results from attending too much to a non-feminist *politics of objectivity* and too little to the politics of research for change within communities (Tadiar 2002). Tadiar explains *sampalataya* as referring in part to being "already caught up in the claims that others act out," which is different from speaking on behalf of (Tadiar 2002, 736). Rather, one speaks as an individual "in concert with," not silenced by one's inability to fully represent one's people. I read this to be a sort of co-constitution of one's own claims and the claims and acts of the people(s) who one speaks in concert with. *Sampalataya* involves speaking as faith—as furthering a people's claims while refusing to be excised from that people by an imperialistic, naive notion of perfect representation.

Sampalataya guides me in inquiry from out of my commitments to, and experiences among, my fellow Native Americans and other indigenous people. It helps me articulate experiences among certain bioscientists whose projects I decide to care for. I transfer an ethic of standing with other indigenous people—to inquire in concert with their intellectual projects in the service of indigenous sovereignty—to now to inquire in concert with (indigenous) bioscientists in the service of shared causes. That is, I work with them in ways that support their success in scientific endeavors, and simultaneously the development of their critical lenses that may help democratize science from within. Initially, I viewed this as "studying across," a term I adapt from Berkeley anthropologist Laura Nader's groundbreaking call for anthropologists to "study up."

Several years after Vine Deloria, Jr. lambasted anthropology for its colonialism, Nader admonished anthropologists to study "the colonizers rather than the colonized, the culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless, the culture of affluence rather than the culture of poverty" (Nader 1972, 284 and 289). I took this to heart in my study of biological and other physical scientists and their extractive practices of Native American bones, blood, saliva and hair. Instead of studying indigenous "perspectives" on genetics, which federal agencies love to fund, I decided to return the gaze—to study scientists. The bulk of my research has been to study the histories and politics of genetic research practices as they impact indigenous bodies, representations and governance.

However, methodologically and ethically, I found that studying up was not easier than the traditional act of "studying down." My book, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (TallBear 2013), is critical of the colonial practices that have made the concept of Native American DNA possible. While the science is fascinating, I had little positive

investment in the particular intellectual projects of the non-indigenous human genome diversity researchers whose work I studied. I could not adequately "care" for them as my subjects, which felt like bad feminist practice (Schuurman and Pratt 2002). I was in a bind. In addition to enacting an oppositional politics of returning the gaze, I had chosen to study scientists in order to avoid the social challenges of doing anthropology at home. In studying up, I found another sort of discomfort. I could not disown that feminist ethical imperative to study a community in whose projects I can be invested. I had to find a way to study bioscientists (whose work has profound implications for indigenous peoples) in a way in which I could stand more within their community.

Taking ethics as the starting point, I began to interview and do participant observation with other Native American PhDs—that is, biological scientists. I am interested in their potential roles in the democratization of science and in the development of indigenous science policy. Emphasizing participant observation, I find myself moving, in Tadiar's language, toward faithful knowledges—toward co-constituting knowledge in concert with the acts and claims of those who I inquire among. I have become invested in the careers of the young indigenous with whom I work—in their development as good scientists in a world historically dominated by White men. Indeed, because I care for them, I have come to engage more productively in their fields. I serve as an ethics advisor for the annual Summer Internship for Native Americans in Genomics (SING) for Native American students and community members who want to learn genetics. I help teach them about the politicized history of the field and explain the links between collaborative research and indigenous regulation and sovereignty. Young scientists teach me how someone coming from indigenous communities and landscapes becomes passionate about bio-science. They help facilitate my growing curiosity and knowledge about the science. It is an act of faith in the groundbreaking work that they will do as indigenous scientists that I continue to network with and professionally mentor SING graduates as they become professional scientists, social scientists, or go back to positions in their communities where they will help review and regulate scientific research in their communities. We quickly become colleagues.

Accordingly, I also write and speak in venues that are not obviously fitting for a social scientist's career advancement. I frequent bio-scientific venues and I try to write and speak accessibly. I do this to encourage their more democratic vision of what the bio-sciences can be. The more I network, the more I am a useful resource for indigenous scientists. I work in small ways to enact the change that I and other critics envision for the sciences. I attended and blogged a critical but supportive review of an annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Native Americans and Chicanos in Science (SACNAS).[1] SACNAS's biannual news magazine editor quickly asked me to serve on the editorial board as an advisor on Native American issues. I blog to prompt conversation. In this case, I cultivated an opportunity to help shape scientific ethics and policy content in the organization's regular publication. I served on the editorial board because I was asked to serve. It is a sign of recognition that I was a valuable resource in the

community. It is also a case of the organization deciding how I should "give back." The board also enabled me to help collaboratively build discourse about what constitutes more democratic scientific research and education. I expect that change will come more profoundly from inside bio-scientific fields rather than from critical social science and humanities analyses alone. I could not do this work if I held fast to the misguided ship of distanced objectivity with my research subjects. I work with bioscientists in ways that demonstrate feminist and indigenous concepts of objectivity in action. In the meantime, my blogs—posted to my website, *Indigeneity and Technoscience*—often serve as rough drafts of academic pieces. They highlight my expertise in a unique multidisciplinary world that I help create by naming it.

Some may find my insights and methods insufficiently replicable, although I see them as pragmatic. Not all researchers will be situated as I am—a second-career academic with training as a community planner, and an indigenous ("insider"?) scholar who circulates regionally, nationally and internationally. I find it doable to combine theory with practice for institutional change. Perhaps a take-home point that will appeal to a wider array of readers is that feminist objectivity—that is, inquiring not at a distance, but based on the lives and knowledge priorities of subjects, reinforced by an indigenous ethic of staying in relation—helps open up one's mind to working in non-standard ways. It may take you to new and surprising places.

Note

1 "SACNAS: Beyond 'diversity and inclusion,' making science more multicultural and democratic," Indigeneity & Technoscience Blog, November 10, 2011, www.kimtallbear.com/homeblog/sacnas-beyond-diversity-and-inclusion-making-science-more-multicultural-and-democratic.

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