DECOLONIZING ETHNOGRAPHY

Undocumented Immigrants and New Directions in Social Science

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Para nuestro querido Evandro, Q.E.P.D.

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BROKEN POEM BY MGF

June 17, 2014

one of this day i will find the opportunity to become a president of usa.
opss back to real life, well life is toff in this country usa,
since i come to this country to leave the american dream
so far only leaving by nightmares, so they say going to be easier
don"t worry,
but they never say to do worry to learn english.
do worry to have a legal green card
do worry to pay high price for rent your own habitate
do worry etc.etc.etc . . .
so it is not easier i like to go back to my country wich is brazil . . .
but right now in brasil we have . . . poverty all over.
hospital has no good management people are dieng.
scholls fall a part,has no teacher ,money in people pocket only
for the rich ones.
i fell bad because right now am leaving in usa . . .
i hope one day everything get in place.

Preface

"Are you scared about Trump?" Carolina asked Mirian.

It was December 2016, and Donald Trump had recently been elected president of the United States. Carolina and Mirian were in a restaurant in downtown New Brunswick, NJ. They were warm inside the restaurant but it was raining heavily outside.

Mirian looked at Caro for a long time without replying. Then she asked, "Are *you* scared, *nena*?" Caro admitted that she was, and not just for herself but also for so many people she loves. "People like you," Carolina told Mirian. Mirian said that, to the contrary, she was not more afraid than she already had been. "I am here to stay. *Ahora nos toca organizarnos aún más porque la ilegalidad no es sólo un problema de nosotros los indocumentados*" [Now it's time to organize even more because illegality doesn't only affect us, the undocumented immigrants]. She smiled at Caro, who found comfort in Mirian's kind eyes.

Earlier that day Mirian had spoken to Carolina's Latino Studies class about her life as an undocumented woman organizer from Guatemala. She told the students about working long days, having a work accident, and becoming an ethnographer and activist in the immigrants' rights movement. She told them about her daughter who she has not seen in many years, about civil disobedience and being in jail, and about her work as a singer and songwriter. She sang one of her songs for the class, about the need for immigration reform, and told students about the relationship between art and activism.

It was important for Caro to bring Mirian to talk about her work in class that day, only a few weeks after the election, because the debate around immigration was at the core of Trump's presidential campaign. As poet Nicholas

Powers noted, "He won with a metaphor. He won with the image of a wall" (Powers 2016). Mirian's story, as well as her approach to activism, recognizes that this metaphorical wall excludes many of us—and not just those of us who are not U.S. citizens.

Much has happened in terms of immigration policy and political rhetoric around immigration since we officially closed our four-year ethnographic project in August, 2015. Despite the fact that the Obama administration's "deportation machine" was operating at full force during our research and remained unrivaled by the deportation efforts of any previous administration, it was not yet the era of Donald Trump and the open and state-sanctioned hateful rhetoric toward immigrants from the Global South and people of color in general. Under President Trump, the policy of the Obama administration that prioritized the deportation of immigrants with criminal records has been replaced by a "zero tolerance" policy in which everyone—especially nonwhite folks, from toddlers to naturalized citizens—is subject to incarceration and deportation.

This book is based on ethnographic research conducted in a New Jersey town between August 2011 and August 2015, when the policing and harassment of immigrants in the United States was relatively less intense than it would become under the Trump administration. As we go to press, the modified "Muslim Ban" has been upheld by the Supreme Court; immigrant families are being jailed by executive order; thousands of immigrant children have been separated from their families, and many of them remain detained or lost in the system despite a judicial order mandating immediate reunification; a new Denaturalization Task Force is targeting naturalized citizens for deportation; the administration is attempting to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that gives some protection to undocumented immigrants who came as minors . . . The list goes on and on.

Based on our findings, in these pages we stress the rights that undocumented immigrants have in this country. We advocate for undocumented people to engage with the justice system and to adopt direct action strategies in defense of their dignity and rights. And we contend that ethnography can be a tool for undocumented people in these struggles. Lucy and Mirian, the two undocumented authors of this book, continue to follow this program despite the increased risk for folks with their immigration status. In writing this book with Carolina and Daniel they are asserting their right to think freely, to speak publicly, and to exist in the United States. We recognize, however, that the stakes have changed since we researched and wrote our book as a call for action, at a time when a Trump presidency seemed im-

probable at best. In the current era of regular ICE raids in courtrooms across the country, it is becoming increasingly difficult for undocumented immigrants to engage with the justice system to defend their rights as workers and as people. The same can be said about direct action strategies that may result in people's arrest and subsequent deportation.

But people, both documented and undocumented, are also responding to the Trump administration's immigration policies in the massive way that we imagine in this book, and that we believe is necessary to bring about any immigration reform in this country. As Mirian suggested above, people are beginning to realize that the surging sexism, racism, and authoritarianism of the Trump regime harms all of us—citizens and noncitizens. For instance, "Abolish ICE" has become a mainstream idea, as protesters flood the streets and occupy buildings in outrage, especially after seeing and hearing footage of immigrant children being held in cages by immigration officials. In a context of increased policing and demonization of immigrants—particularly immigrants of color—but also of increased public awareness and engagement with the struggle for immigrants' rights, we believe our book to be a timely contribution to the movement for the recognition of the humanity of all people. As Lucy says, today, in the midst of the rise of White Nationalism as a policy of state in the United States, "we have to keep struggling against our oppression. Like in the times of Martin Luther King, when you had to risk something to get something. The history of decolonization continues."

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Introduction

In 1991, Faye Harrison and her colleagues published a slim volume of essays calling for the decolonization of anthropology.[1] With postmodernist, feminist, and political-economic approaches dominating the discussion of what might constitute a critical anthropology for the twenty-first century, the scholars of "the decolonizing generation" (Allen and Jobson 2016) put forward a different agenda. Perceiving a crisis in both the discipline and the world at large, Harrison and her colleagues looked beyond the Western intellectual canon for their inspiration while envisioning ways in which anthropology might become an instrument for advocacy and progressive social change. They posed questions that addressed anthropology's colonial past and its continued relevance to contemporary anthropological practice.[2] "Can an authentic anthropology emerge from the critical intellectual traditions and counter-hegemonic struggles of Third World peoples?" Harrison asked. And, "How can anthropological knowledge advance the interests of the world's majority during this period of ongoing crisis and uncertainty?" (Harrison 1991b, 1–2).

In the twenty-first century, these questions remain unanswered, their urgency undiminished. The world today continues to present profound challenges that frame anthropological practice: savage inequalities of income and opportunity, sustained by an unbridled capitalism; intractable racism, sexism, xeno- and homophobia, woven into the very fabric of our social institutions; senseless and seemingly endless war; an ever-expanding prison-industrial complex; political corruption and police brutality. Add to this a pervasive feeling of insecurity—a precariousness born of the rapid concentration of wealth in the 1 percent, planetary climate change, and a permanent War on Something (terror? opioids? immigrants? Take your pick)—and you have our society circa the 2020s.

How has anthropology responded to this reality?

The discipline's trajectory has been long and convoluted. Born in the colonial era as part of the broader Enlightenment project of discovering the unknown, early anthropologists studied the peoples of the lands then colonized by Europe and the United States. For much of its history, anthropology—like the other social sciences and related fields—understood itself to *be* a science, basing its conclusions on supposedly objective research and dispassionate analysis while ignoring the obvious political realities in which its work was embedded. In the 1960s and 1970s, some anthropologists—including women, people of color, and anthropologists from the Global South—began to criticize the objectivist stance, questioning the possibility of objectivity itself and shifting the field away from a concern with grand questions of human development toward more focused, problem-driven studies (Pels 1997, 2014). They also called into question anthropology's colonial legacy, drawing attention to the field's origins in and, at times, collaboration with the project of colonial rule (Asad 1973; Stocking 1993). Anthropology—"a child of Western imperialism" (Gough 1968, 12; see also Forte 2014, 2016)—became historicized and often critical, aiming not merely to understand society but to denounce its inequities and cruelties.

These critiques led to significant and enduring changes in the discipline. Anthropologists today are more attuned to the roles of power, history, and political economy in shaping cultural realities and to the relationships between large-scale, often global problems and the local worlds of the people and institutions they study. Feminist anthropology has been influential in making gender-based formations and inequalities central to the study of cultures and societies worldwide and in challenging the power imbalances that exist within all forms of social life, academia included. Feminist and postmodern anthropologies have also inculcated an awareness in anthropologists of their own roles in producing the knowledge they write about, including attention to the author's racialized and gendered "positionality" and the power relations that underlie the ethnographic process itself.[3] Applied or "practicing" anthropologists, meanwhile, look to use ethnographic knowledge to make change in the world, taking the discipline's methods and findings and putting them to work in an effort to improve the lives of others.[4]

Nevertheless, mainstream anthropology—what some critics (Restrepo and Escobar 2005, 100) have called "dominant" anthropology—has yet to engage fully with the decolonial challenge. Despite years of critique and the many changes in its theory and method, anthropology, like other social sciences, remains plagued by what we identify here as the *coloniality* at the

heart of the anthropological project (see chapter 1). In its theory, dominant anthropology remains Eurocentric, even as many individual anthropologists in their work struggle against Eurocentrism and its consequences. In its methodology, dominant anthropology continues to endorse a model of scholarship in which the lives of cultural others constitute the legitimate objects of scholarly inquiry and to practice forms of research that distribute power upward, from those being studied to those doing the studying. We call this entire configuration *colonial anthropology.* This strain of anthropology has dominated the discipline, in both its academic and applied forms, from its founding to the present day.[5] Anthropology's unwillingness or inability to come to terms with its coloniality limits its possibilities as a field of both academic and applied research. And, we contend, unless anthropologists fully reckon with its implications, the discipline will become steadily more irrelevant, unable to engage meaningfully with the problems that confront us in a world shaped by coloniality. In this book, we argue that a new kind of mainstream anthropology can emerge from an engagement with decolonial theory and methodology, an engagement that characterized the project described in the chapters that follow.[6]

At the same time, however, this characterization is not meant to be monolithic—colonial anthropology may be dominant, but it is not all-encompassing. If anthropology remains colonial, it is a coloniality that, like other regimes of power, is fractured and fraught with contradiction, containing spaces that afford the possibility of transformation. Within the dominant paradigm, many scholars—uncomfortable with the inequities of colonial anthropology and the discipline's academic/applied rupture—have developed approaches that challenge the field's disconnection from the world while maintaining its intellectual insights and critical edge. These approaches appear under different labels, each with its own characteristic adjective, though they sometimes overlap and compete. The "action" anthropology of Sol Tax, for example, was an early attempt to bridge the academic/applied rift while challenging the power of the researcher, goals shared and developed by those who do "Participatory Action Research" (e.g., Fals Borda 2001; Reason and Bradbury 2008; Smith 2015). Others have similarly developed "collaborative" or "participatory" research methods to involve local people in the work of ethnography and to advance their particular concerns (e.g., Hale and Stephen 2014; Hemment 2007; Lassiter 2008; Reiter and Oslender 2014). "Engaged," "activist," and "militant" anthropologists have called for a more explicitly political approach to research design and method that makes common cause with the struggles of those with whom ethnographers

work.[7] Feminist, Black, indigenous, and queer anthropologists have issued similar calls, locating activism and engagement as centerpieces of their intellectual and liberation work.[8] Many anthropologists have endorsed a "public" scholarship that includes everything from direct action to cultural critique;[9] "world" and "native" anthropologists have challenged hegemonic modes of understanding and pushed to open the field to non-Western theorists and perspectives (e.g., Jones 1988; Lins Ribeiro 2014; Lins Ribeiro and Escobar 2006; Restrepo and Escobar 2005). Similarly, anthropologists interested in what has been termed the "ontological turn" have asked how indigenous ideas can converse with Western philosophy and have called for an anthropology that works for the "permanent decolonization of thought" (e.g., Viveiros de Castro 2009, 13). Each of these anthropologies represents an important challenge to the colonial variety; each represents a response to Harrison's call for anthropologists to "accept the challenge of working to free the study of humankind from the prevailing forces of global inequality and dehumanization and to locate it firmly in the complex struggle for genuine transformation" (Harrison 1991b, 10; see Berreman 1968). Many of these approaches have inspired the project described in this book.

But powerful counterforces are at work in the academy. Those of us looking to go beyond the limits of the dominant paradigm soon encounter resistance from the centuries-old investment in the colonial-academic project. The academy is structured to defend the colonial approach to scholarship and to privilege those who collaborate to maintain it. These values are reinforced by the culture of audit and accountability now rampant in the neoliberal university (Overing 2006; Shore and Wright 1999; Strathern 2000). Graduate training programs and career ladders reward academic publication, grant-getting, and, to a lesser extent, classroom teaching, all of it quantified and ranked within a disciplinary hierarchy in which such work is the only value worth pursuing. Conservative voices discourage us from questioning our own authority and exploring too far outside the academy, contributing to the lingering sense of powerlessness that we believe many younger anthropologists feel. Those of us who wish to use our work to advance a cause or address a different public often find ourselves without the time or resources to do so, our advisors and colleagues encouraging us to keep our focus on academic work—which, they insist, is "what we do best." Women, scholars of color, queer and indigenous people, and native anthropologists interested in nontraditional scholarship face additional hurdles in the white public space of dominant anthropology (Brodkin, Morgen, and Hutchinson 2011), our very identities seeming to underscore the lack of

detachment or "rigor" that skeptics find in anti-colonial research. The embodied experiences of field researchers, particularly of women and scholars of color, are deemed inappropriate for the polite conversation of the academy (Berry et al. 2017). Other forms of engagement are sometimes thought to cheapen one's academic profile, to reflect badly on one's professional ambition, or to interfere with one's ability to produce "objective" scholarship. In our experience, students in particular express doubts about the field's willingness to allow them to combine their academic and activist goals, and they question their decision to pursue anthropology in the first place. They express confusion when confronted with the diversity of counter-dominant movements and fail to recognize themselves among the adjectives. "Am I an 'engaged' anthropologist?" they wonder. "I don't see myself as an 'activist.'" "What the hell is a 'public' anthropologist?" And so on.

For instance, not long ago Daniel and Carolina were invited to speak about their immigration research to a graduate seminar at a prestigious university, in an anthropology department not known for a particular interest in academic engagement or activism. The conversation quickly turned to political and ethical issues and the possibility of using anthropological knowledge to advance the causes one cares about. Many students in the seminar expressed concerns about this, but one student in particular stood out. In her first year of graduate school, she was planning to conduct dissertation fieldwork in the town where she had grown up and so felt deeply obligated to use her research to assist her informants—in her case, these included her family and friends—in their local travails. This student was struggling to find a way to do this, to find the relevance of her inquiries to the lives of the people she studies. She was also deeply anxious about the possible professional and social consequences of her work: that her university might not accept her research as proper anthropology; that she might not ever be able to get an academic job because her work might be seen as insufficiently conceptual or abstract; or, alternatively, that her friends at home might ostracize her for making abstractions out of their suffering. And she was worried that, for all these reasons, anthropology might not be the right discipline for her.

Centering Alternative Anthropologies

This book has multiple audiences and agendas, one of which is to explore the rights of undocumented immigrants in the United States. But it also addresses academics, ethnographers, and social scientists, including students and professionals like those described above, who seek to do more with

anthropology than just interpret the lives of others, building their careers by fueling the academic machine. It is meant for those who—despite the long history of critically engaged anthropology and the many achievements of those who have come before—continue to doubt their abilities and seek permission to pursue their goals. We believe that these anthropologists are dissatisfied with colonial anthropology's position vis-à-vis the contemporary world and its problems, in which the suffering of others is a subject of intellectual analysis but not typically of informed action.[10] They are not content within the narrow confines of academia and its normative limits on what counts as legitimate scholarly work, but the usual forms of applied anthropology leave them hungry for theory and political engagement. These scholars are troubled by the dominant anthropology, in which they recognize the power imbalances that exist between themselves and the people who are the objects of their research (and between themselves and their professional mentors; see chapter 3). Many social scientists today continue to enjoy the intellectual work of academia yet are searching for ways to engage the world without retracing the colonial footsteps of their ancestors. Their fieldwork brings them into close relationships with individuals and communities caught in dire struggles for dignity and survival in a world of brutal and enduring injustices, and they are outraged by the situations they encounter.[11] Some researchers—including Black, Latinx,[12] LGBTQ, working-class, and indigenous scholars—come from communities with intimate experience of these struggles and find the academicization of suffering intolerable. Many scholars are uncomfortable with cultural analysis or "critique" amid profound social violence.[13] The questions of the decolonizing generation remain relevant to this impulse: Many scholars are still asking Harrison's question, "How can anthropological knowledge advance the interests of the world's majority during this period of ongoing crisis and uncertainty?" (Harrison 1991b, 1–2).

In recounting our work with undocumented people in New Jersey, we describe a theory and a method for those looking not only to join scholarship with social engagement and political activism but to challenge the coloniality of anthropology itself. Inspired by earlier generations' efforts to decolonize anthropology and building on the many advances made by colleagues practicing activist, feminist, world, and collaborative anthropologies (among others), this book builds on and extends previous counter-dominant approaches to explore the possibility of remaking the problematic ideologies and relationships that underlie ethnographic practice more generally. To do so, the book draws on the literature of the "decolonial turn," a

move within ethnic, area, and cultural studies that recognizes the colonial nature of Western thought and scholarly inquiry and attempts to transcend it.[14] In that vein, we argue that anthropology's enduring *coloniality* (a concept we explore more fully in chapter 1) limits its possibilities and potential, inflicts harm on the very people it seeks to understand, and alienates a generation of students hoping to use the tools of anthropology to impact the world. Countering this requires scholars once again to take seriously calls to *decolonize* ethnographic research—to reexamine its history, reinvent its present, and reimagine its future.

Central to our discussion is the methodological reassessment that decolonizing requires. The colonial within anthropology is perhaps most evident in the practice of ethnographic field research, long the discipline's most distinctive feature. Of course, some anthropologists "study up," focusing their attention on powerful people and institutions; others work in settings and among groups to which this observation may not apply (Nader 1972). But by and large, anthropology is known for studying the poor, the marginalized, the indigenous, the powerless. To collect its data, ethnography relies on the disparities of power, position, and access inherent in the fieldwork relationship, disparities that reflect the logics and structures of earlier colonial formations. Colonial anthropology is made possible by the historical relations that have subjected the many to the domination of the few, positioning some within the academy to be able to study and know and intervene in the lives of those located without. Whether understood as disinterested and value-neutral or as attentive to identity, position, and power, research—the techniques by which authoritative knowledge is produced—as traditionally conducted in the academy remains a situated practice, grounded in ways of thinking and doing characteristic of the West, unreflexively infused with Western power, and perpetually reinscribing Western forms of knowledge, representation, and authority (see Smith 2012). Colonial anthropology deploys the tools of ethnography to know the lifeworlds of others without contributing to those worlds or allowing their inhabitants to become full actors in or beneficiaries of the research process. The colonial strain of ethnographic research is extractive. It cracks open the oysters of other people's lives and harvests the rich goo within. It brings this material back to the university, the factory wherein it deploys further tools—what it calls "theory," sets of ideas that are nearly always the products of Western thought—to process raw materials from abroad and render them suitable for Western consumption. In the academic-capitalist machine, the university department remains the place of absolute privilege to which most—even most

Ph.D.-carrying anthropologists—are denied access. The power to know is restricted to those who are fortunate enough to speak and write from that place of dominance.[15]

To decolonize anthropology (or, for that matter, any of the social sciences) is to decenter the academic project as it has been historically understood, recentering it on committed social praxis—"the instrumentalization of liberating intellectual production" (Gordon 1991, 156)—in its various forms. This requires more than just "giving back" to those whom anthropologists have studied,[16] more than "engagement" in some general sense.[17] It requires ethnographers to recognize the privilege their colonial heritage bestows and to dismantle the subject/object dichotomy on which all modern science is founded. It asks them to take seriously "'lateralist' approaches to theory" (Boyer and Howe 2015; see also Maurer 2005), what is sometimes called "theory from below" or "theory from the south" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012a), to understand and prioritize local conceptions of local realities, rather than just running those realities through the interpretive machinery of elite European social theory. It requires anthropologists to write in different ways to address multiple publics—not only the usual scholarly readership or even wider audiences of educated readers, but publics that include anthropological subjects themselves. It asks ethnographic researchers to acknowledge the privilege and power that come with assuming the Western academic's authoritative stance and to adopt a posture of humility and solidarity in recognizing injustices and taking part in combating them. In doing so, it frees scholars and researchers from convention, allowing them to open themselves to the possibility of learning *from* others, rather than merely learning *about* them (Jones and Jenkins 2008).

A decolonial methodology takes a different point of departure to arrive at a different set of endpoints. It is anti-objectivist, not in the classic sense of objectivity in which the anthropologist is exhorted to remain aloof from her object of study in order to understand the truth of an ethnographic reality. Rather, the decolonial approach is anti-objectivist—or, in another sense, anti-objectificationist—in that it asks ethnographers to regard their study populations not as objects, but as fully equal subjects capable of becoming their own ethnographers. Instead of being the ones who know, in other words, anthropologists can allow their historical objects to take control of the research process and to benefit from the power that knowledge confers. This means putting the instruments of ethnographic research in the hands of local people so that they may produce knowledge about themselves, for themselves.[18]

Anthropologists, we are suggesting, can use the very tools of the discipline not merely to study and represent those whom a previous generation called "the Other," or even to advocate on their behalf, but to join with those in struggle so that they may become scholars of their own lives and communities. Ethnographic research, its instruments and methods, can be used not only by professional scholars to study subordinated peoples. Ethnography can be a tool of self-knowledge for the marginalized, and by enabling them to better understand and articulate their condition, it can contribute to popular struggles for liberation. Coincidentally, such an approach can lead to better, richer ethnographic data, emerging from the engaged and embodied participation of local collaborators in the research process (Juris 2007). To the extent that this approach inverts the relations of power and privilege that have always characterized ethnographic work, it can begin to quiet the ghosts of anthropology's coloniality and make ethnography an instrument of subaltern self-empowerment.

Given the diversity of adjectives from which to choose, we describe our research in this book as a form of activist anthropology, though it has much in common with other approaches mentioned previously as well. Ultimately, we hope to see the emergence of new counter-dominant anthropologies that incorporate and embrace the lessons of activist, engaged, feminist, indigenous, collaborative, decolonial, world, and other critical predecessors. When these alternative anthropologies move from the fringes to the center of the canon, the fruits of the discipline will be available to the many, not only to the privileged few. Anthropology will offer a toolset that the oppressed can themselves adopt for their own political and intellectual projects. It will be a discipline that can fully respond to the challenge of using ethnographic knowledge to advance the interests of the world's majority in these times of relentless crisis, uncertainty, and peril.

Decolonizing Research on Undocumented Immigrants

The importance of decolonizing anthropology should be apparent to ethnographers working with undocumented people in the United States. The situation of the undocumented—the consequences that illegalization, exploitation, and violence enact on their bodies, families, and lives—is clear and compelling. Under these circumstances, merely researching and writing academically about undocumented people seems profoundly immoral. To do so is to participate in the same abusive systems that produce migrant vulnerability in the first place. Like the machines that disfigure migrant bodies on

the farm and in the factory—like the machine of global capitalism that consumes human labor to generate wealth for privileged others—ethnographic research about immigrants can be a machine, the lives and experiences of its objects serving as raw material to fuel the academic engine. In our New Jersey fieldwork, we—like many other researchers of undocumented lives[19]—felt compelled to work with local people to fight back against the predicaments in which they were enmeshed. We didn't simply want to extract data, but to use what we learned to throw a monkey wrench into the workings of both the U.S. deportation regime and the academic-capitalist machinery of scientific research.

To that end, in August of 2011 Carolina and Daniel—the academics on the research team—began a project in activist anthropology that aimed to join the work of ethnography to the struggle for undocumented workers' rights. The project was to study how the "securitization of immigration" in the United States was impacting undocumented people living in one small New Jersey town. Two years later, Lucy and Mirian joined as research assistants. In time, we came to focus more specifically on the effects of immigrant securitization on undocumented workers, as these were manifest through such workplace abuses as wage theft and work accidents. We also worked as activists, collaborating with two local community organizations advocating for the rights of the undocumented. The details of the project are discussed in chapter 3.

None of us anticipated that our collaboration would require us to take a new perspective on ethnographic research, one that we are here calling "decolonial." Over the course of two years after joining the project, Lucy and Mirian evolved from research assistants to collaborators to full-fledged ethnographers while continuing to work as activists for immigrant rights and immigration reform. In the process, they took the work of ethnography and activism—two linked yet parallel elements in the project's original conception—and fully integrated them, such that the ethnographic research became indistinguishable from the activism. As they conducted research about work accidents and wage theft, Mirian and Lucy not only learned about and collected data on these problems. They also used the research encounter to inform injured workers of their rights, to deliver services directly to them, to exhort them to become active in demanding benefits under the law, and to recruit them to join a local immigrant rights organization. At the same time, the knowledge they gained through research made them more effective activists. Through interviewing and participant observation, Lucy and Mirian developed broader and deeper perspectives

on workplace abuses than what they knew from their own experiences or from talking in isolated and unsystematic ways with victims of abuse. These efforts contributed to an expanded understanding for all of us on the research team. Armed with data to support our claims, we could argue more forcefully for the rights of undocumented workers while empowering those workers to take up their own defense.

We describe this research as decolonial for several reasons. For one, it was Mirian and Lucy who took control of the research process and made ethnography into something more than an academic exercise. Already activists for immigrant rights, Lucy and Mirian found in ethnography a powerful tool to enhance their ongoing activism and to create new spaces in which they could work to activate others. They also experienced powerful personal changes as they became more comfortable in their role as activist anthropologists, gaining increased confidence and a greater sense of efficacy in their own lives. Similarly, Carolina and Daniel also grew as scholar/activists: Through their engagement with Lucy, Mirian, and the undocumented community of Hometown, they encountered their own assumptions about field research, theorizing, and collaboration and attempted to grapple with them. The data the project generated were rich and carefully documented, a much more robust source for academic analysis and writing than ordinary fieldwork methods would have provided. Perhaps most importantly, the project demonstrated the utility of ethnography as a tool for self-empowerment, public advocacy, and personal transformation, both for professional scholars and in the lives and communities of those historically identified as anthropology's Others.

Another important decolonial finding to come from this research—one discussed in more detail in chapter 4—is that ethnographic subjects can themselves be the source of theory, rather than merely the objects on which theory acts. In this project, we observed the emergence of an *undocumented activist's theory of undocumentation*—what might be called an "emic" or native understanding of what it means to be undocumented and an activist in the twenty-first-century United States. We call it "undocumented activist theory," for short. It is a theory of the nature of undocumentation, what it means, its causes and appropriate responses to it, as developed by undocumented activists themselves. It is a theory that stands in contrast to those of academics, who emphasize structural explanations that represent undocumented immigrants as the suffering subjects of immigration policy and the objects of critical scholarly analysis (Robbins 2013). Undocumented activist theory recognizes these structural problems but identifies the lack of unity among

the undocumented as a factor contributing to their inability to demand the rights that are their due as workers and human beings. Such a theory constitutes a set of ideas that demand to be taken seriously as theory, not dismissed as a misreading or a folk notion. Nor is it static: In chapter 4 we track the ways in which undocumented activist theory developed and changed as Lucy and Mirian joined their activism with ethnography and learned more about themselves and their community. Undocumented activist theory is the product of those who create it: people who lack the requisite passport into the lofty academic realms from which authorized theory flows, but who are deeply engaged in resisting injustice and fostering reform and who are struggling to make sense of their experience. By daring to theorize, the undocumented people in this book challenge the global division of knowing that we criticize as an expression of colonial power. Taking undocumented activist theory seriously is another decolonial move that this project—and this book—undertakes.

Arjun Appadurai has called research a *right.* The right to research is "the right to the tools through which any citizen can systematically increase the stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens" (Appadurai 2006, 168). This is a powerful insight, though it is limited by Appadurai's insistence on citizenship. As our New Jersey fieldwork demonstrates, research is a valuable tool for noncitizens as well, including the most marginalized and illegalized people in society.[20] In recognizing ethnographic research as an instrument of self-discovery, community advocacy, and collective struggle, we find that as ethnographers we already possess unique resources to contribute to the causes we care about. What we learned from our New Jersey project is that ethnography—the skills it provides, the methods it employs, the stance it requires, and the knowledge it produces—can be a powerful instrument in political activism and a productive force for positive social change. By offering the tools of research to our friends in the field, we become *their* collaborators as they work to demand their rights and to denounce injustice more effectively, and in doing so we can contribute to their struggles for social and political reform.

This book is coauthored by four people from different backgrounds and perspectives, an unlikely team of activist-researchers who embarked on an ethnographic project to learn what they could about undocumented workers

and, in the process, learned something about ethnography itself. Daniel was the project's principal investigator, a designation bestowed by the National Science Foundation, which funded the majority of the research. Carolina (aka "Caro"), at the time a graduate student in Women's and Gender Studies under Daniel's supervision, had never previously studied anthropology or practiced ethnographic research. Lucy and Mirian were residents of the place we call "Hometown," in central New Jersey. Undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala, respectively, Lucy and Mirian had never heard of anthropology or ethnography before the start of field research.

At the beginning, Daniel was the teacher, Carolina the student, and Mirian and Lucy the employees or research assistants. But over the two years in which we worked together, Mirian and Lucy also became the teachers, demonstrating the true potential of a decolonized methodology for both scholarly learning and political praxis. They seized the opportunity to do ethnographic research, making it into a critical tool in their struggle for immigrant rights and recognition. Mirian and Lucy turned our ethnographic work into a vehicle for their activism and the knowledge we produced an instrument for more effective advocacy. The results were transformative. By the end of our project, ethnography had changed them and they had changed ethnography.

The question of authorship is a complicated one for a decolonized anthropology. Typically ethnographers, like many if not all researchers, work collaboratively in the field, albeit within established hierarchies of authority. But anthropology is unlike many other sciences in its insistence on the single-authored ethnography—lab-based sciences, for example, typically assign authorship to all the various contributors to a project.[21] This is probably a relic of the discipline's colonial past, in which the intrepid "Lone Ethnographer" set out by "himself" to document the unknown (Rosaldo 1989). So, even today, when the time comes for writing up the research the scholar assumes sole authorship of the final product. This is part of the extractive nature of the traditional research enterprise, in which "writing" equates only with the act of inscription, rather than with the whole range of activities that preceded that act and made it possible. A decolonized anthropology must recognize the contributions of those collaborators in the field who were integrally involved in data collection and with formulating the ideas that are put down in writing. At the same time, however, the act of inscription should not be underestimated. Sitting down and writing a book is an immensely difficult task, requiring strict dedication of time and energy to bring the project to fruition. Scholars must share authorship with their fieldwork

collaborators, but they also deserve recognition for the effort they invest in producing the text out of the fieldwork experience. Determining authorship is thus a task not without contradictions. It requires us to make tough, politicized choices.

This book is coauthored by four people with different backgrounds, all of whom participated in the field research and activism on which this book is based. Daniel coordinated and managed the project and its many components and participated in the research and activism that comprised the project's daily work. In writing, he sat down daily at the keyboard to craft the majority of this text. Carolina, whose work analyzes the relationship between decolonial feminist theory and the production of immigrant "illegality" in the United States, also wrote several sections of the book and provided edits and comments for the other sections, which we later discussed and incorporated. She also did the archival research that informs our description of Hometown and selected and translated many of the fieldnotes included in this book. Mirian and Lucy, in addition to coproducing much of the data on which the book is based, were active in discussing the themes of the book and the stories it tells; they reviewed the chapters, making comments and suggestions that were incorporated into the final draft. Carolina, Mirian, Lucy, and Daniel together wrote chapter 5, which includes a play that dramatizes Mirian's work accident and the lessons learned from it.

Determining authorship also raises the question of pseudonyms. Anyone writing about the undocumented has to take care in disguising people's identities, for obvious reasons. But does it make sense to give authorial credit to someone identified by a false name? Yes and no. On the one hand, undocumented people are very familiar with pseudonyms and often use them in their own lives. Many workers acquire fake identities in order to work, borrowing or buying the Social Security numbers of others so that they can be hired "legally" (see, e.g., Horton 2015). Other people use false names to hide from the police, an abusive ex-partner, a creditor, or a criminal gang. Some of these names can be quite creative. One of the *jornaleros* (day laborers) in Hometown calls himself "James Bond"; another has adopted the sobriquet "Vicente Fernandez," in honor of the famous Mexican *corrido* singer, and laughs because *gringos* don't get the joke. A good friend named "José" once pulled Daniel aside before a meeting to say that most people in town know him as "Tony," and so Daniel shouldn't be surprised if he heard him addressed that way. Another friend, whom some people called "Carmelita" and others "Juana," one day admitted to Caro that her real name was Magda. And so on.

While it would not be inconsistent, then, to credit an undocumented author using a pseudonym, it also defeats the purpose of acknowledging that individual's contribution to the book. In the end, that is why Lucy and Mirian elected to identify themselves by their real names. They are proud of the work they did on the project and want to be credited for their role in producing this book. They want to be able to give copies to their children and to friends in town and back home, to show that they have done something important and unexpected in coauthoring a book in the United States. They balance this pride, of course, with a certain trepidation in revealing themselves fully before the public and the law, especially in this moment of intensified hatred and policing of immigrants in the United States (see the preface). The four of us had extensive discussions about this prior to publication. Daniel and Caro thought it better to use only Mirian and Lucy's first names in listing authorship, but Mirian and Lucy felt differently. As Mirian put it, in an email to Caro on November 10, 2017: "I want my last names to be used [in the book]: because in the first place I am not afraid to have them appear there and also because for me it is very important that my children and my grandchildren and great-grandchildren see it, so it serves as an example for them." Lucy said something similar, in an email of November 15, 2017: "I have decided to use my [real] name, because it is time to come out of the shadows. Now is the time for a change, and besides that, I do it to inspire many other people to arm ourselves with courage [*armarnos de valor*]." The strength of these women and their commitment to the values of dignity, defiance, and social activism (discussed later in this book) are clear from their words. Though Caro and Daniel remained concerned about the decision to publish real names, they deferred to Lucy and Mirian. However, as a group we agreed not to use photographs that would put real faces together with real names. Instead, we commissioned drawings from the artist Peter Quach, another longtime friend and collaborator, which appear throughout the book to illustrate its various themes. Where necessary, some personal details have been altered to provide protection from possible legal repercussions.

The chapters of the book tell the story of the research process while introducing readers to the problem of work-related injuries and abuses and how they impact the lives of undocumented workers. Chapter 1 explores the meaning of coloniality, begun in this introduction, in more detail. In particular, it considers the implications of what has been called the "decolonial turn" for anthropological research and how this and related ideas can help anthropologists to move away from their historically produced coloniality

and toward a new perspective on theory and method. In chapter 2, we offer an account of the personal and professional histories of the four coauthors of this book, describing our journeys toward decolonizing ethnographic research, to provide readers with the perspectives we each brought to the project and how the ethnographic research intersected with our own activist goals. Then, in chapter 3, we turn to a discussion of the research problem and setting—the vulnerabilities facing undocumented workers in Hometown, NJ—and how our research team came together to confront these issues. The decolonial methodology and approach to undocumented theory that emerged in the course of the research process is explored in chapter 4. At the end of the research, the four of us authored and performed a one-act play about work accidents, which we understood to be part of our ongoing efforts to make our research public and productive for local residents, including the people who served as participants in the research. This play appears as part of chapter 5. Originally written in Spanish, we present the text of the play here in both Spanish and English (with a translation by Carolina). In the conclusion, we return to the question of what it means to decolonize anthropology and why we believe it is so critical for the future of ethnographic research.

One conclusion that might be drawn from the anti-colonial critiques made in this book is that anthropology is on its deathbed, or should be—indeed, others both within and outside of anthropology have made this very claim (e.g., Mafeje 2001; Magubane and Faris 1985). We disagree among ourselves as to whether or not anthropology as a discipline can ultimately enact a decolonial social science (see the conclusion), but we all agree that the decolonial turn can signal a new beginning for ethnographers everywhere. Though the book contains a strong critique of anthropology as traditionally practiced, it is, in the end, a hopeful expression of all that ethnographic research can and should be as we move forward into the future.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. See the contributors to Harrison 1991a.

2. The critiques of an earlier generation of anthropologists analyzing the discipline's colonial roots were inspirational to the decolonizing anthropologists; see, e.g., Asad 1973; Gough 1968, 1990; Huizer and Mannheim 1979; Hymes 1972; Lewis 1973.

3. The scholars associated with the "writing culture" movement in anthropology were influential here; see, e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986.

4. The bibliography on applied anthropology is much too large to summarize in a endnote. For a history, see Singer 2008. For a discussion of applied and more recent forms of engaged anthropology, see Rylko-Bauer, Singer, and van Willigen 2006.

5. Academic and applied anthropology present themselves as fundamentally antagonistic. Applied anthropology can appear anti-intellectual or atheoretical, disdainful of the work of scholars who don't attempt to apply their findings to the real world. For its part, academic anthropology often dismisses the value of its applied variant, contemptuous of its desire to take ideas out of the ivory tower. Such conflicts suggest that the goals of academic and applied anthropologists are irreconcilable. But neither approach examines their shared coloniality or the privilege that enables them to conduct their research as they do. See Escobar 1991, 1995; Fluehr-Lobban 2003; Stilltoe 2007; Willis 1974.

6. Our depiction of academic anthropology as "colonial," though polemical, should not be understood as ironic. For one thing, some would point out, anthropology cannot be described as a particularly powerful discipline, either in the academy or outside it. Within the social sciences—perhaps the most marginalized of the major academic subdivisions—anthropology is among the most marginalized of disciplines. Compared with other disciplinary scholars, anthropologists have relatively little voice in the larger world of politics and policy making, a fact that anthropologists lament (e.g., Okongwu and Menchner 2000). And anthropologists have been among colonialism's most articulate critics, denouncing imperialism and its impacts on the world's history and its many societies and cultures. But (we would counter) anthropology as a whole

has yet to confront the colonial dimensions of its own practice and privilege and continues to profit implicitly from what many of its practitioners explicitly renounce.

7. Particularly influential for us have been Charles Hale (2008); Jeffrey Juris (2008, 2012); Jeffrey Juris and Alex Khasnabish (2013); Stuart Kirsch (2002, 2010, 2014); Shannon Speed (2006, 2007, 2008); and Angela Stuesse (2016). For a history of "activist anthropology," see Stuesse (2015). Useful sources include both writing about activists and activism as well as writing from an activist perspective, sometimes in the same text. Examples of some of these approaches include Goldstein 2016; Graeber 2009; Howe 2013; Juris and Khasnabish 2013; Lyon-Callo 2008; Razsa 2015; Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006; Scheper-Hughes 1995.

8. For just a few examples from a broad set of fields, see Allen and Jobson 2016; Cox 2015; Craven and Davis 2013; Dave 2012; Harrison 1991b; Hunt and Holmes 2015; Morgensen 2011; Perry 2013; Pierre 2012; Smith 2012. On indigenous and critical methodologies, see Brown and Strega 2005; Chilisa 2011; Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 2008; Kovach 2009. Indigenous writing on settler colonialism and its impacts represents another important field of scholarship that has had limited uptake by anthropologists; see, e.g., Coulthard (2014) and the articles in Simpson and Smith (2014).

9. "Public anthropology" is a particularly slippery term, referring to a wide range of ethnographic work. The series in Public Anthropology at the University of California Press and the recurring column in *American Anthropologist* exemplify the breadth of this field and what it can encompass. For more direct inquiries into the nature, prospects, and consequences of public scholarship, see Beck and Maida 2015; Borofsky 2011; Burawoy 2005; Fassin 2013; Gans 2010; Lamphere 2003; Osterweil 2013; Scheper-Hughes 2009.

10. Joel Robbins (2013) calls this the construction of anthropology's "suffering subject." For a native perspective, see Tuck and Yang (2014).

11. The ethnographic method has been widely employed beyond the discipline of anthropology. Scholars from a range of fields—including sociology, geography, political science, public health, and so on—incorporate ethnography into their research design and wrestle with problems of interpretation and representation in their writing. This discussion, then, has relevance for many researchers outside anthropology.

12. We use the term *Latinx* to refer to people of all genders who live in the United States and are from, or descended from those, Latin America. On the term *Latinx*, see Scharrón-Del Río and Aja 2015.

13. "Cultural critique" can be part of a broader "engaged anthropology," as Low and Merry (2010), among others, have made clear; for a critique of critique, see Hale (2006). And for those who "study up," focusing their ethnographic attention on the socially and economically privileged, critique can be a productive form of engagement (Nader 1972). The scenario we describe here is intended for the many anthropologists who work with the disadvantaged and marginalized—the historical objects of anthropological inquiry.

14. Maldonado-Torres 2006. Theory in the decolonial turn shares much with postcolonial theory, even as it diverges from that work in significant ways. This is explored in more detail in chapter 1.

15. Having learned something from the postmodernists, this dominant anthropology might reflect on its own positionality to comment on the role of the anthropological self in the data-collection process. But that is as far as it goes. See Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986.

16. For an exploration of the many complexities of reciprocity and "giving back" in field research, see TallBear (2014) and the other essays in a special issue of the *Journal of Research Practice* (10 [2]).

17. The diversity of what counts as "engagement" can be seen in the list of books in "engaged ethnography," on a website maintained by Angela Stuesse and her students: *Engaged Ethnography*, http://engagedethnography.weebly.com/ethnography-list.html, accessed January 16, 2018.

18. Scholars in the field of education have been especially generative in developing activist methods for decolonizing what they call "qualitative inquiry" (e.g., Paris and Winn 2014).

19. Although they may not discuss their individual activism in their published writings, many if not most anthropologists of immigration take on some kind of activist or engaged work in the course of their research. For explicit discussion of this, see Gomberg-Muñoz 2016; Holmes 2013; Stuesse 2010, 2015.

20. As we write, undocumented student activists are engaged in a range of projects and protests for immigrant rights, again demonstrating the potential of research and activism to create social change for and by noncitizens.

21. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

1. COLONIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

1. The influence of Michel Foucault was fundamental to this move; see Foucault 1977, 1978.

2. Abu-Lughod 1991; Behar and Gordon 1996; Visweswaran 1994.

3. Maldonado-Torres 2008, 2011. For some of the greatest hits in postcolonial studies, see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2006). A useful introduction to the study of colonialism and postcolonialism is Loomba (2015). For a synthesis of work in decolonial studies, see Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui (2008).

4. Said 1978.

5. Bhambra 2014.

6. Said 1978, 1993.

7. Bhabha 1994, 199. Members of the "subaltern studies group" made significant contributions to this project in their attempts to excavate and examine what Ranajit Guha called "the politics of the people" or the "subaltern classes" (Guha 1982, 4, 8; see also Chakrabarty 2000; Chatterjee 1993). Guha himself, for example, authored historical accounts of peasant uprisings against British colonial rule in India, specifying the peasants' own perspectives on and explanations of their political activity—at the time a radical break from the norms of conventional historiography (Guha 1999).

8. Spivak 1988; see also Spivak 1999.