

REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY: DILEMMAS IN A RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE BACKGROUND YOUTH

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Abstract

In this presentation I will share some reflections on how I have dealt with methodology design in the early stages of my PhD candidature leading up to data collection. I will particularly focus on the dilemmas that I have encountered so far as I search for a methodology that would allow me to ethically report on the educational experiences of refugee-background youth while positioning my research within decolonial thinking. This process becomes even more complex when I take into consideration the contradictions between my theoretical underpinnings and the constraints of 'academic' standards and PhD expectations. A decolonial paradigm criticises the hegemony of Eurocentric principles in academia and contests concepts of universal reason and scientific rationality. Standard qualitative methodologies and thesis formats are part of this system of knowledge production that is seen as oppressive and shortsighted by decolonial thinkers. By choosing to work within this critical epistemology I placed myself in an in-between space where I question what has been established as academic tradition at the same time that I attempt to complete a PhD that fulfills the institutional requirements of a Western university.

Another goal of this presentation is to generate a discussion with the audience about their views/experiences on methodology and how (if possible at all) new scholars can break away from 'standard' PhD methodologies/thesis writing, while working within the contexts of Australian universities.

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Introduction

This is a PhD research project about educational journeys: the stories of EAL (English as an Additional Language) refugee-background youth who have successfully completed their secondary studies in Australia. I decided to focus on narratives of academic accomplishment in order to produce counter-stories in a research field that has had a tendency to equate students of refugee-background with trauma and pathologies. By focusing on narratives of educational success I hope to disrupt some of the dominant academic discourse that labels and homogenise students of refugee-background in a manner that encourage stereotyping and deficit attitudes. Thus, a key goal of this project is to listen to individual stories as means to engage with the complexity and uniqueness of each of the contributors' educational journeys. Another fundamental objective is to focus on their personal narratives and reflections about their own situations as key sources of knowledge that will contribute to this study. Thus, the youth involved in the project are not only sharing their personal stories about their educational experiences but also knowledge about how they interpret their specific situations within the broader context of Australia and the contemporary world.

Given that the voices and knowledge of youth of refugee-background regarding their schooling experiences in Australia are at the centre to this study, I started searching for theoretical underpinnings that would disrupt notions of what counts as valid knowledge in academia. I also needed a theoretical frame that would provide the language and tools for thinking about their stories holistically in a way that individual experiences are connected and intersect with their broader contexts. I then selected decolonial thinking because its central point of critique involves a contestation of the hegemony of Eurocentric principles in academia and concepts of universal reason and scientific knowledge (Quijano, 2007). In addition, decolonial thinking facilitates a critical examination of the underlying historical, political, economic and social conditions that served as context for the participants' forced migration and their subsequent settlement experiences including their educational journeys. It is important to note that other schools of thought such as standpoint feminism, post-structuralism and post-modernism also question issues of universality and neutrality in research. However, after considering working with all of these options I decided to go with decolonial thinking because its wisdom spoke to me in a stronger way. I will expand on the point of personal preference when I discuss my positionality in the next section.

After understanding what my research goals were and engaging with the epistemology that would frame the research, I had then to deal with the numerous methodological dilemmas that were inherently part of what I proposed for this study. These are some of the interrogations that I have sought to answer so far during the early stages of this PhD project:

- What kind of methodology would allow me to focus on personal stories and reflections as key source of knowledge?

- What kind of methodology would allow me to consider how larger social and institutional structures have framed the contributors' experiences?
- How can I as the researcher be ethical and make justice to the stories that these young people have agreed to share with me?
- How to present their voices in academic writing without controlling it?
- How can I avoid maintaining dominant academic discourse and use this project to disrupt it?
- How to align methodology with decolonial thinking?
- How to methodologically/theoretically position this study within a decolonial paradigm while completing a PhD at a colonial institution?

In this paper I will attempt to answer these questions as means to develop the methodology that I propose for this study. In order to offer some context I will start by sharing my positioning and how it influences my choices of topic, epistemology and ultimately methodology. I will then provide an overview of decolonial thinking, its relevance to the current study, and an analysis of what it means for a PhD project. The second section of the paper consists of the methodological choices that I have made in response to the questions proposed above.

My positioning

Who we are and from where we speak is highly relevant for the intellectual projects we are likely to pursue...[they] influence the research questions we deem to be interesting, the projects we judge to be important, the scholars we choose to read and to cite, and the metaphors we use to describe the phenomena we observe (Moya, 2011, pp. 79, 81)

Likewise, neutrality and objectivity in research is not an option because we always speak from a particular location within global structures (Anzaldúa, 2009; hooks, 2010; Mignolo, 2009). Nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies of the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system (Grosfoguel, 2008, p. 2). Therefore, it is vital for me to find the place from where I am speaking and how it influences my assumptions and motivations to undertake this project that engages with the educational experiences of students of refugee-background in Australia.

When reflecting upon my positioning I realise that I dwell in a peculiar location: A Brazilian migrant woman in Australia writing about the educational experiences of refugee-background youth. I assume an ambivalent habitat of constantly being an insider-outsider, Western-non-Western, white-coloured, local-foreigner. My identity(ies) has/have been highly shaped by two different but similar patriarchal 'postcolonial' contexts of Brazil and Australia. Regarding my ethnicity, that is somewhat uncertain as well. I don't know if I am coloured or white. My heritage is extremely mixed: Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Indigenous Brazilian. In Brazil I grew up being told that I was

white. However, in Australia most people say that I am coloured. Such contextual basis for 'Whiteness' as an identity marker provides evidence to the relativity of concepts of ethnicity.

What I can say for sure is that this ambivalent position has had a strong impact on me and it has certainly influenced my epistemological preferences. My inclinations have also been deeply influenced by a sense of social justice and political awareness inherited from my family. When experimenting with different schools of thought I felt uncomfortable working within positivistic epistemologies because they failed to offer convincing explanations about my subjectivity as well as to provide me with the tools and language to think and to speak in the world. Also, the more I learned about Eurocentric theories, the more I felt excluded and distant from what it meant to do research and produce knowledge. I needed alternatives and I found many of the explanations, language, and thinking tools I was looking for within decolonial thinking.

My personal experiences and history have also had a major role on the choice of topic for this project. Firstly, migrating and being 'foreigner' have made me constantly ponder about different experiences of migration and diversity. Many questions kept appearing in my mind from the time I started travelling, fourteen years ago. Some of the recurrent questions have been: Why are some people welcome while others are stopped from entering nations such as Australia? Why did I have the privilege to gain access without major troubles? More and more questions continued to emerge and they became more acute as I entered the field of EAL education. Through my experience as a teacher working at an exclusive private college in Brisbane and volunteering as a tutor to new arrival refugees and asylum seekers, the contrast of migration and educational experiences became more evident.

I am thus motivated by a desire to engage in dialogue with diverse ways of experiencing and thinking about education and migration. I am also driven by a longing to answer some of the questions that have travelled with me. Finally, it is vital to make clear that my intention in this study is not to take the position of a researcher who wants to give voice to the 'voiceless'. This is not where I stand at all. I am rather attempting to listen, to exchange knowledge and to engage in conversation with a group of young people who have unique stories to share.

Decolonial thinking

'Decolonial thinking', 'decoloniality' or the 'decolonial turn' do not refer to a single theory but to a "family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as a fundamental problem in the contemporary world (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 2). Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism and continues to deeply influence knowledge production, subjectivity, the economy, relations of authority, and sexuality well beyond contexts of colonial administrations (Grosfoguel, 2008). Coloniality aligns with deeply embedded mind-frames, among the 'West' (and the 'non-West') of taken for granted ideas of humanity; concepts of cultural

‘superiority/inferiority’; justifications of ‘worthiness’ based on race; and the concept of ‘non-Western’ cultures as ‘primitive’ (Mohanty, 2003; Quijano, 2007).

These mind-frames have been exacerbated by the propagation of a European manner of classifying people according to ‘races’ and dividing the world into nation-states and continents during the colonial era (Quijano, 2000). Quijano went further to argue that as Western Europeans consolidated themselves as the centre of capitalism during the colonial expansion, they possessed hegemonic control over the world’s market, means of production and workforce. With their control over capital, Europeans were able to impose their domination all over the world while incorporating the ‘colonised’ into its own ‘world view’.

Although binary division of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, ‘barbarian’ versus ‘civilised’ had been present before throughout history, what makes the ‘colonial’ mind-frame unique and powerful is its global dissemination through so called ‘scientific’ Western knowledge. This was possible through the creation of a number of academic disciplines in the ‘colonial era’ as for example anthropology, sociology and biology (Connell, 2007). In this manner, the ‘non-West’ becomes the source of data and the ‘Western’ academy the centre of production of knowledge and theory about its ‘Others’ (Mignolo, 2011) The study of the non-European and in many ways the data created from these discipline were used to ‘scientifically’ justify European ‘superiority’ and the non-European’s ‘primitiveness’. In this manner academic research has been a fundamental element in the establishment of a ‘colonial’ mind-frame. Backed by economic, political and technological dominance, Western academy has had the power to produce and disseminate academic knowledge globally as neutral, authoritative and scientific. It has had the ability to decide what can be considered truth and who can legitimate it. Such mind-frames remain today with taken-for-granted concepts of European thought and reason as the ideal and global human system of knowledge. Ultimately, this mindset is still widespread today and has an immense influence on the current state of global and local affairs.

At the core of decolonial thinking lies a strong stance on affirming other ways of being and producing knowledge in the world. Its central critique is grounded on a deep scepticism towards forms of thinking that present themselves as neutral and universal. Decolonial scholars call for decolonising knowledge by *shifting the geography of reason* which means opening space for academic thinking and theorising that goes beyond Eurocentric notions of knowledge production and validity (Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Moya, 2011). Mignolo (2009) argues that one way to shift the geography of reason and decolonise knowledge is to practice *epistemic disobedience*. By *epistemic disobedience* he means to de-link from the Western epistemological assumption of a neutral and detached observational position through which the world is interpreted. In his words:

All knowledges are situated and every knowledge is constructed...The question is: who, when, why is constructing knowledges? Why did eurocentered epistemology conceal its own geo-historical and bio-graphical locations and succeed in creating the idea of universal knowledge as if the knowing subjects were also universal? This illusion is pervasive today

in the social sciences, the humanities, the natural sciences...epistemic disobedience means to delink from the illusion of the zero point epistemology (p.160).

He goes further to propose that through *epistemic disobedience* decolonial thinking can open space to the epistemic affirmation of people who have been historically silenced and excluded from knowledge production. According to him, in order to do so there is the need to focus not simply on what is considered knowledge in academia but also to question who is considered the knower.

It is important to mention at this point to avoid confusion that decolonial thinking does not aim at creating binary divisions between the 'West' and 'non-West' or the 'Global North' and 'Global South'. It does not aim at developing stereotyped and simplistic analysis of 'the West/non-West' either as if 'they' were single homogeneous entities. Decolonial scholars such as Grosfuguel, Quijano and Mignolo stress the entangled complexity of global power structures and warn us about the dangers of 'black and white' one-dimensional readings of struggles and inequalities. Most importantly, what decolonial thinking does is to acknowledge the partiality and non-universality of Western thinking. It is about bringing to the forefront other ways of being, knowing and producing academic knowledge rather than a vehicle to perpetuate binary thinking.

The relevance of decolonial thinking to the current research

From the section above it becomes evident that decolonial thinking is suitable for a project that aims at shifting notions of knowledge production in academia and wishes to disrupt dominant taken-for-granted discourses. However, one might question how this epistemology is suitable to frame the contextual elements that shape the personal educational experiences of refugee-background youth in Australia. I argue that decolonial thinking provides me with a critical language and a variety of analytical tools that will allow me to read the macro and micro conditions that framed the personal narratives in this study. By macro I mean the broad contexts in which the narratives take place, such as the state of world affairs, contemporary Australia and the Australian educational system. By micro I mean the individual subjectivities as they relate to their immediate contexts as for example place, family, and relationships. It is important to note that macro and micro elements are not isolated from each other but are in constant interaction.

For instance, concerning macro conditions, through a decolonial analysis of world affairs it is possible to place forced migration as a consequence of processes and inequalities directly related to the legacies of colonisation. More precisely, through a decolonial reading I can draw a direct line between the explosion of conflicts and disasters that continue to force people out of their countries of origin to the development of modern nation-state and its continuing struggles for power. In addition, a decolonial analysis offers a useful frame to read contemporary Australia as it has been strongly shaped by the complexities and ambiguities of its unique history as a white European settler colony

geographically situated in the Asia-Pacific. Finally, decolonial thinking is suitable to educational research because it allows scholars to investigate and critique the common patterns generated from the implementation of educational systems based on European humanist models in different parts of the world. Through this perspective it is possible to historically analyse and challenge the biases, logics, beliefs and theories that underlie educational systems in countries where colonial encounters have occurred. Regarding the micro aspects, decolonial writers such as Anzaldúa, Lugones, and Moya provide me with concepts and analytical tools to interpret subjectivities, more specifically how people negotiate multiple worlds every day and what kind of strategies they use to deal with the contradictions that are generated from these constant multiple encounters.

Decolonial research and PhD requirements

By positioning the current study within decolonial thinking, I place standard qualitative methodologies and thesis formats as part of an oppressive system of knowledge production that values some ways of knowing over others. Therefore, problematizing them and attempting to ‘decolonise’ methodology should be one of my fundamental research goals. However, this positioning generates strong dilemmas because by approaching a PhD from a decolonial paradigm I question what has been established as academic tradition at the same time that I attempt to complete a qualification that fulfills the institutional requirements of a Western university.

To clarify, I decided to further investigate the criteria to complete a PhD at the University of Queensland. To fulfill the requirements I must produce a thesis that demonstrates:

- the outcome of a sustained program of supervised research that has produced original findings, and constitutes a coherent and cogent argument communicating the significant aspects of research and writing undertaken while enrolled
- and the ability to make a substantive and independent contribution to knowledge in the discipline or field of study in an original and scholarly way (University of Queensland, 2015, p. 21).

From these criteria I conclude that all of its elements are open to interpretation and judgment by the people examining the thesis. What does a contribution to knowledge mean? What does a coherent and cogent argument look like? These judgments would be strongly influenced by what one considers valid academic knowledge and writing style. Thus, the idea of what a contribution to knowledge consists of would probably be rather different to a scholar speaking from a decolonial perspective or to someone coming from a positivistic Eurocentric position.

What I take from this reflection is that it is possible to push the boundaries and question what has been established as tradition within the context of a PhD. This means to take a risk and it could ultimately mean that your thesis might not be deemed ‘valid’. However, what is the alternative? To simply accept what has been established even if one does not agree with it in order to tick the boxes

and receive a degree? That would be probably a more comfortable choice but it is not a place that I wish to be in.

It is also important to point out that within a PhD environment students have the opportunity to explore and problematize what is considered knowledge if they have the desire to do so. We might meet resistance from some supervisors, other academics and colleagues. However, this is a time in which we can push what is possible and that could potentially influence shifts in paradigms in the future. Yes, the university and the way research has been conducted historically have contributed to the colonisation of ‘minds’ and the silencing of diverse ways of knowing the world. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that critical epistemologies have mostly developed within these institutions. They grew from thinkers who wanted to contribute to transformations of taken for granted notions of knowing, theorising, and being. Therefore, even though we can feel limited and constraint when producing a PhD, it is important to consider the transformative potential that it possesses. It represents the potential of leaving a mark of resistance and epistemic disobedience in the academic world.

Methodological choices

As a response to the dilemmas that I faced when taking into consideration the issues discussed in the previous sections and the questions posed in the introduction I came up with a number of methodological choices for the current study. Before presenting them it is important to mention some other key factors that influenced these choices. Firstly, I carefully pondered on how I could ethically speak about members of a group to which I do not belong to without reinforcing stereotypes and ‘Othering’. I have also considered the effects of power relations between the researcher and participants which are never unidirectional and equal. In addition, I have spent quite a long time debating on how I can avoid traditional ways of presenting and analysing data and through that facilitate a space for dialogue and collaboration between researcher and contributors.

With all of this in mind, I decided to engage in *epistemic disobedience* through the use of Critical Personal Narrative (CPN) as a methodology and method inspired by the Latin American narrative genre *Testimonio*. There is no exact translation in English but *testimonio* is commonly referred to as *testimonial narrative*. This genre was first used to express the experiences and struggles of oppressed peoples in Latin American in the second half of the 20th century (Beverley, 2012). *Testimonio* is one of the genres within CPN and it is broadly defined as a type of oral story which connects experience to the contexts in which they take place (Pohlman, 2011). The key difference between CPN using *testimonio* and other narrative methodologies is that “it involves the participant in a critical reflection of their personal experience within particular socio-political realities” (Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012, p. 364). This genre is similar to critical race counter-stories in that it recognises the power in telling one’s story that is rooted in traditions of Indigenous storytelling

(Beverley, 2004). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008) Critical Personal Narrative (CPN) is a key methodology within decolonial thinking because it serves to disrupt dominant discourses and transgress positivistic paradigms in academia. Another important feature of a CPN methodology which aligns with decolonial thinking is that contributors play a crucial role in the research knowledge making process. Their lived experiences and knowledge are valued as they work collaboratively with the researcher in co-constructing knowledge about their experiences.

After intensive reflections and considering a number of methodological options I came to the conclusion that CPN through *testimonios* would work well to marry the focus of this study with my epistemological underpinnings. The narrators, being young people of refugee-background, are members of groups who have been historically marginalised, silenced and excluded from official knowledge making processes. Placing their told experiences and reflections centre stage as sources of knowledge was the way I encountered to attempt to *decolonise* methodology. Stone-Mediatore (2003, p. 150) explains that:

Telling their own stories enables them (the narrator) to claim epistemic authority as well as to counter the objectified, dehumanised representations of them circulated by others... Narratives that probe ways to articulate and situate unspoken tensions in everyday life can transform experience, helping those of us who have been reduced to victim to claim agency.

The reflection on the importance of personal narratives as a methodology brings me to the point of subjectivities. The following question springs to mind: How would the stories told and the subjectivity that the young people chose to express be different if they were my friends; if I were also from a refugee-background; if we shared the same language? My answer is: they would probably be different. Are the ways participants portrayed themselves to me less true than the way they would portray themselves in other contexts? I believe not. I would like to depart from the premises of multiple subjectivities as proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 2009, 1990). People have multiple selves within the self and are not limited to a single identity. We use different facets of who we are depending of the context or situation at hand. In the case of this study, the young people within an interview context; sharing their stories with a stranger; knowing that other people would read their narratives; made a decision to portray themselves in a certain way. I do not see any problems with that as far as I make clear to the readers that I am not claiming that the stories in this study are representations of truth. That would be missing the point completely. What is truth anyway? Does it even exist? The objective of this research is not to make claims of truth. It is about sharing knowledge about lived experience. Thus, the stories and reflections in this study represent the manner in which these young people decided to express their ways of knowing the world within a research context. The point I am trying to make is not the question of whether or not to accept people's stories at face value. I am coming from the principle that while there are many external factors that shape perspectives and

how they are told, stories are nevertheless ways that researchers and readers can engage with diverse manners of describing phenomena (Stone-Mediatore, 2003).

Putting Critical Personal Narrative (CPN) into practice

Recruitment

Firstly, it is important to mention that the current study focuses on 10 young people of EAL refugee-background who have completed their secondary schooling in South East Queensland, Australia within the past five years. They come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and are representative of both genders. I decided to work with a small number of people due to the volume of material that CPN will generate. Secondly, the young people who decided to participate in this project (six so far) came to that decision out of their agency and desire to share their stories. The recruitment occurred through an information flyer that was distributed through social media, school/university networks and community groups. The youth who decided to take part received the flyer and contacted me expressing their interest in participating. We then initiated communication via email and set up an initial meeting face to face at a place of their choice. At this initial meeting I introduced myself, shared my motivations to undertake this project and explained the study in more detail. I also went through the information sheet and made sure they understood all the content. During the conversation I asked why they wished to participate and asked their opinion about my ideas for the study's design. On average I spent about 30 minutes chatting to each of the young people during our first meeting. I asked them to think about what we had talked and then decide if they wanted to participate or not. We agreed that if they decided to go ahead with it they would contact me. And that is what happened. All of the young people who met me in person decided to go ahead with the interviews. Only after this whole process we organised a date and time for the first interview. This recruitment process has been time consuming and at times I thought that I would reach mid-candidature without any participants. However, I feel satisfied that the people who are part of this project shared their stories because they wanted to and not because they felt pressured to do so.

Interviews

As mentioned, the central source of knowledge in this study is the young people's stories and reflections about their own experiences. In order to engage with their stories I decided to use a series of conversational-style semi-structured interviews as a method. The series consisted of three interviews as proposed by Seidman (1998). The first interview was a general one that focused on the life history of the person. The second interview was more specific focusing on the concrete aspects of their experiences that relate to their educational journeys. The third interview was about reflecting on the person's understandings of their experience. This final interview was vital to the collaborative

nature of this project. Engaging in conversation allowed us to theorise about the young people's lived experiences and come up with some possible explanations to their situations.

Supporting data

In order to complement the stories, I am collecting data from the internet and mass media related to the broader contexts in which the narratives took place. The idea is to use this information as a backdrop to the stories. If we imagine the study as a landscape painting, the supporting data represent the background scenery that surrounds the main elements of the painting. The supporting data will focus on information about the status and representation of refugee and asylum seekers in Australia; about educational policy related to EAL students; and about the current political and social situation in Australia and the world.

Presentation & Interpretation

A CPN methodology allows both the researcher and contributors to systematically construct critical knowledge from experiences by reflecting upon the stories and the intersection between individual perspectives and the contexts in which they take place (Fox, 2008). The CPN methodology that I propose for this study aims to enable the young people through the reflective interview (third interview) to theorise and construct knowledge about their own lived experiences. This approach aligns with decolonial methodologies because it includes the contributors in the analytical process which means that they are not seen as objects of inquiry but as speaking subjects who participate in "producing knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 15).

With the above proposition in mind I developed a data analysis procedure based on the analytical method employed by Pérez Huber (2009) in her research where she used *testimonio* as a methodology to explore the experiences of Chicana college students in the US. The first step is the preliminary analysis. This consists of transcribing the first two interviews for each person, taking notes and identifying important themes and questions that I used as starting points for the final reflective interview. The second stage of analysis is the collaborative process that takes place in the third interview. At the time of writing this article I was in the process of completing the third interview with five people. As explained in the previous section, in the third interview the contributors reflected and theorised about their situations while engaging in conversation with me. We used the questions and themes that emerged from the two previous interviews as a starting point for the reflections. As we conversed, the young people came up with possible explanations for their educational experiences, more specifically about internal and external factors that contributed to their academic success. They shared views on reasons why so many other youth of refugee-background do not share similar academic achievements in Australia. They also connected their stories of migration and education to broader cultural and political contexts of Australia, their country of origin and the world in general.

Pérez Huber (2009) explained that through this reflective process the students connected their experiences with that of others and reflected upon how “larger social and institutional structures have shaped those experiences” (p.647). This collaborative analytical process can be seen as a tool for decolonizing research because it “problematizes the santicity of theorising spaces” (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008) and makes it possible to theorise from everyday lives and bodies of people. It serves to “de-academize theory and (to connect) the community to the academy” (Anzaldua, 1990, p. xxvi).

The third stage of analysis consists of an exploration of recurrent/significant themes surfaced from the stories and reflections. It is important to note that another way that I found to decolonise methodology is to let the individual stories and respective reflections speak for themselves in this study. I plan to include each story with its correspondent reflection in the final paper as a source of knowledge rather than as raw data to be analysed. I will borrow concepts and wisdom from a variety of decolonial thinkers to discuss and theorise about the key identified areas throughout the previous analytical stages. For example, an important theme across all the stories so far has been the fundamental connection that participants make between their spiritual faith and their academic accomplishments. I will then use this theme as a point for further discussion and reflection.

Some of the key concepts that I plan to use in the third stage of analysis are listed on the table below. These concepts will also be used in the analysis of the supporting data. It should be noted that this list is interim and will likely change/be added to as I start to engage deeper with the stories and reflections. In addition, not all authors included on this table would associate with decolonial thinking. I included them because I felt the need to expand my readings in areas where I could not find relevant material produced by decolonial scholars.

Key concepts for analysis:

Concepts:	Thinkers:
Colonial matrix of power; coloniality of power; global coloniality; entanglement of power	Quijano, Mignolo, Grosfoguel
Coloniality of knowledge; geopolitics of knowledge; body-politics of knowledge; knowledge as partial and situated	Dussel, Fanon, Anzaldua, Mignolo, Moya
Oppressive versus potentially liberating role of schooling in society; Power knowledge dynamics in education	hooks; Freire; Rizvi
Otherness in settler colonial societies and schools	Minh-ha, Anzaldua, hooks
Subjectivity: situated, fluid, hybrid, multiple	Anzaldua; Chicana Feminists

Subjectivity: dynamics of resistance, active subjectivity	Lugones
Naturalisation of oppression, exclusion based on ‘Otherness’ and deficit discourses	Mignolo, Anzaldua, Chicana Feminists
Refugees and settler societies; Refugees as a <i>postcolonial</i> phenomenon	Minh-ha, Sajed, Marfleet
Mind, body, and spirit as valuable sources of knowledge for analysis	Anzaldua; Chicana feminists

Ongoing Considerations: Ethical dilemmas

Ethics within coloniality is characterised by either silencing the subject of research or by rendering him/her/them as fully transparent or knowable. The ethics of opacity highlight, both the impossibility of knowing a subject entirely, and the undesirability of attempting or pretending to do so (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). Even though a CPN methodology that aims to comply with ‘ethics of opacity’ can represent a move towards a more inclusive academia that values multiple ways of being and knowing, it also inherently creates a number of ongoing dilemmas. They include who speaks on behalf of whom; who has the right to tell the story; how the participants will be represented in the study; how the stories will be interpreted; issues with ideological positioning; and power inequalities between researchers and participants (Fox, 2008). I attempted to ameliorate these issues with the methodological choices described in the previous section. However, I am aware that I am not able to completely fix them. For instance, power inequalities remain between researcher and contributors. In the end of the day, even though I attempted to work collaboratively with the young people who took part in the study, I am the one who has the final say on what section of their stories get included in the thesis; I decide which themes are chosen to be part of the discussion chapters; I selected what questions were asked in the interviews. Dilemmas remain and I do not believe that they can be completely eliminated in a research context. As long as there is someone who is a researcher and someone who is a ‘participant’, power imbalances as well as ethical complications continue to exist.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have attempted to share some reflections and articulate on how I have dealt with methodology design in the early stages of my PhD candidature. It is important to note that at the time of writing this article I was in the midst of the interviewing process so the choices I have presented here are not definite. Changes are occurring as we speak. Elements are changing every day as I reflect, as I engage in conversation, as I attempt to decide what paths to follow.

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