

Notes from a Visit to Several Zapatista Communities: Toward Practices of Nomadic Identity and Hybridity

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Abstract Reflections on meeting members of the Zapatista movement and visiting two Zapatista autonomous zones in Chiapas, Mexico inform an American liberation psychologist's reflections on how to engage psychology students (and herself) in community and ecological fieldwork, community practice, and participatory research. The importance of community psychologists' exploration of their own subjectivity as they encounter communities outside their own is underlined, as is critical inquiry on the impact of our social locations on the communities with whom we partner. Zapatistas' conceptualization of autonomous zones where people can work together to create forms of shared leadership, decision-making through consensus, communal economics, empowerment of women, and liberatory arts and education inspire the creation of public homeplaces throughout the world.

Keywords Autonomous zones · Liberation psychology · Nomadic identity · Public homeplace · Zapatista movement

Historical Context In 1994, on the eve of the North American Free Trade Agreement's (NAFTA) going into effect and in the wake of the Mexican government's repeal of Article 27 of the Constitution that gave land rights to those living on and working the land, many indigenous

communities in Chiapas, the southern most part of Mexico, joined a brief armed resistance to draw attention to their plight. Five hundred years of colonization with its violent domination and repression, racism, economic injustice, and displacement from ancestral lands continue through international trade agreements that undermine local economies. "Ya Basta!" "Enough!," they cry in unison.¹

The Mexican government was surprised that both civil and international society was quick to support the indigenous communities, that had long lived under the specter of intense and pervasive discriminatory practices. The San Andreas Accords were negotiated, giving indigenous communities a realm of autonomy and rights that were long overdue. Unfortunately, the Mexican government has failed to honor these accords, gutting legislation dealing with indigenous issues.

After 10 years of working for the Mexican government to enact the San Andreas Accords, many of the indigenous communities in Chiapas decided to live according to the accords anyway, forming themselves into five autonomous zones called *caracoles*, snail shells. They have taken in their own hands the building of schools, health clinics, local and regional systems of representative government, and structures to develop equality for women. These autonomous zones do not overlap with Mexican governmental zones, and so stand apart.

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¹ "During the past decade [since the start of NAFTA], over a million Mexican campesinos lost their lands. US subsidies for corporate agriculture, free trade agreements (read NAFTA), and monopoly control of international markets are destroying the livelihoods of one-fifth of the Mexican population. Corporate subsidies and free trade allow US corporations to dump corn on the Mexican market at below the cost of production. Nearly 20 million Mexican campesinos depend on small plots of corn and/or coffee for survival. With rapidly declining family incomes, many have no alternative but to migrate to large cities, the northern border or the US in search of work." (Mexican Solidarity Network)

The Zapatista communities were clear that they were not seceding from Mexico, but creating a form of democratic government that was not corrupt, that made decisions through consensus, and that represented and responded to the needs of the indigenous communities. Unsuccessful in reforming the corruption of the Mexican government, the indigenous peoples of Chiapas creatively leapt ahead to enact in their daily and communal lives what they had requested permission from the government to do. The autonomous zones call themselves “rebel zones,” where transgression against unjust practices is affirmed. Giving up on reform, they turned to creation of free spaces. They invite us to create our own autonomous zones where we live.

Personal/Professional Context In the summer of 2003 I visited this region with a delegation hosted by Global Exchange, a United States human rights organization that has been studying the effects of transnational corporate globalization on indigenous communities. It supports people to build their knowledge of these effects through direct communication with communities suffering them the most, and whose creation of local alternatives often need global support. Its organizational aim is to transform the global economy from profit centered to people and environment centered.

Going to Chiapas was part of my ongoing effort to understand the effects of transnational corporate globalization on increased migration from Mexico to the United States, and to study local efforts of sustainability in the face of it. During the past 16 years I have been part of creating a doctoral program in depth psychology with a focus on community psychology, liberation psychology, ecopsychology, and indigenous psychologies at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, California, USA. I coordinate students’ yearly community and ecological fieldwork immersions, and partake in my own. These immersions challenge the Euro-American-centrism in the theories and practices of depth psychologies, and help us understand the challenges that face us in creating psychologies of liberation that are more adequate to the construction and sustaining of more just, peaceful, and sustainable communities.

To Open a Crack in History

The Zapatistas’ spokesperson, dubbed Subcommandante Marcos (2002), says poetically: “‘That’s what we are,’ I said to myself, ‘fallen stars that barely scratch the sky of history with a scrawl....30 years ago, a few people scratched history, and knowing this, they began calling to many others so that, by dint of scribbling, scratching, and scrawling, they would end up rending the veil of history, so

that the light would finally be seen. That, and nothing else, is the struggle we are making. And so if you ask us what we want, we will unashamedly answer: ‘To open a crack in history’” (p. 212).

“To open a crack in history,” we must interrupt the steady trample of greed that ignores the integrity of communities who wish to dream into being communal, sustainable, just, and peaceful modes of co-existence. For psychologists working in communities toward these same ends, questions of subjectivity must be addressed. How are we to practice our subjectivity to rend the cloth of oppression? These are some of my thoughts from a visit to several of the autonomous Zapatista communities in Chiapas.

Oventik, Office of the Good Government, *Oficina de Buen Gobierno: Meeting at the Border*

We knock on the door of the *Oficina de Buen Gobierno* to ask for two things: can they arrange a meeting between our delegation and the health educators at the clinic, and can we have their permission to visit a nearby refugee camp. Thousands of displaced indigenous live in refugee camps, after being forcibly displaced by paramilitary violence that has included the use of napalm, burning of homes and fields, looting, kidnapping, torture, and killing of leaders and others.

The door opens a crack and a man in a black mask, a *passamontana*, peers out at us. Here the threshold is both literal and liminal, where as Homi Bhabha (1994) puts it, the “processes of symbolic interaction are thrown into relief” (p. 4). We must announce in Spanish who we are and what we want. Then the door opens and we enter a simple room where two other men in black ski masks sit. Their discussion of our request is carried on outside of our comprehension, in Tzotzil, one of the indigenous languages of this region. After ten minutes of discussion amongst themselves, a notebook is taken out where the permissions are slowly written and the stamp of the *Buen Gobierno de Oventik* is imprinted.

In America, black ski masks are sometimes used by criminals who wish to conceal their identity. While I know this is not the case, upon being greeted by a man whose face I cannot see my body registers some ill ease. No doubt this discomfort that provokes reflection is part of the rationale for putting on a wool ski mask in the heat of summer. In a brilliant stroke of representation, the Zapatistas have given a multivalent visible image to toxic messages that assault their psychic health. Since colonization the indigenous have felt invisible, faceless. What has been valued is their labor and the riches of the land underneath their communities. Exploited, displaced, murdered, they were and are treated as inferior and non-human.

The *passamontana* announces, “Here we are, your faceless ‘Others.’ Now you must knock at our door, ask **our** permission, wait on us, see how we deliberate dialogically rather than unilaterally decide matters. It is important that you, who are used to feeling at home and in charge in all others’ homes, as though you have the right to what you do and to what you take, it is important that you write to us and ask permission, knock on our door and ask, and experience that you are in relationship to others who have seized the fate of their communities. We are at the entrance to our *caracol*. You may visit us here with our permission. But you will come no further unless you are invited.”

The meeting area in the *caracol* of Oventik, named *Caracol en Resistencia Y Rebeldía por la Humanidad* (*Caracol* in Resistance and Rebellion for Humanity), is a sharply delimited place, bordered by fence, hillside, and stream. We are told never to leave this area unless invited to do so. When at the edge, if we meet an indigenous person, we must ask “*Permiso?*” to go any further. Surrounded by lush mountainsides, I yearned to go for a walk beyond the demarcated borders, but it was against all rules and it would have been taken as an impertinent intrusion. When the plight of the indigenous was first launched into the awareness of civil and international society by the Zapatistas, hordes of visitors from abroad descended upon these communities. While their support was welcomed, their intrusion had to be negotiated. This negotiation slowly gave rise to the physical structures within the *caracoles* that are used to house visitors. The areas where visitors meet designated members of the community are surrounded by the actual communities, but precisely separated from them, so that visitors do not intrude on their daily life. To come up to and stop at the border of the *caracol* as an Anglo is to meet in yourself the history of invasion and intrusion of which my “white” Euro-American ancestors have been a part. In Paulo Freire’s words, from the beginning of our communication with the Zapatistas, the possibility of cultural invasion has been brought to the fore, making more likely the possibility of cultural synthesis.

In cultural invasion, the actors draw the thematic content of their action from their own values and ideology; their starting point is their own world, from which they enter the world of those they invade. In cultural synthesis, the actors who come from “another world” to the world of the people do so not as invaders. They do not come to *teach* or *transmit* anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people’s world. (Freire 1989, p. 181)

By taking charge of the entrance to the *caracoles*, the Zapatistas are not waiting for the intentions of the visitor to unfold; rather they are tutoring their visitors on how to interact in ways that are mindful of historical inequities and

present and continuing needs for respect of their own integrity.

The *passamontanas* also have a practical function of providing some security through anonymity. How can you tell who Marcos, their *subcommandante*, is, if he is in a group of similarly masked men? The security of the aggrieved is assisted by the masks, in a place where active opposition to the unjust and brutal practices of the government risks one’s very life. When a community is trying to stop the movement of tanks on to their land, those who nonviolently surround the tanks, men and women, can make use of their facelessness for security, turning 500 years of brutal colonization on its head.

There is an ethics to meeting at the border that emerges from this awakened history. The structure of how the *caracol* greets its visitors is part of the image of the “snail shell” (*caracol*) to which they have appealed. While there is a flexible door-like structure at the mouth of the shell where exchange can happen, the interior of the snail’s shell protects the intimate goings-on of the community. They have learned from the intrusions of missionaries, anthropologists, and others that the interior life of the community must be protected so its ongoing cultural life can be supported. Meetings at the border should not proceed naively as if the present can be detached from the cries of history. “History wakes” (Paz, in Kelley 2002, p. 157) at the border if any exchange is to become a true meeting, and if our way of conducting our identity can emerge from an unconscious repetition of colonial injustice, practicing instead the respect the Zapatistas so intensely desire.



The delimited sites of the *caracoles* are akin to what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls “interstitial spaces,” “third spaces,” “in-between spaces” which he defines as “provid[ing] the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity,

and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (p. 1). In the *caracol* of Oventik, “whites” and people of color, economically privileged and economically exploited, Euro-American and indigenous do not appear as binary opposites but as interlocking and overlapping pieces of a common puzzle where the psychic contour of one is reflected in the shape of the other, where firm lines become blurry, yielding to a yeasty hybridity. Teenage girls walk hand-in-hand wearing brightly colored traditional Mayan woven and embroidered clothing, while we hear The Beatles singing out from one of the high school’s dormitories. Indigenous Mayan boys play spirited basketball in t-shirts emblazoned with American logos, while next to them a Jewish New Yorker teaches Brazilian *capoiera* to a group of American teenagers. Inside a group of French dentists discuss their struggle to introduce fair trade coffee into France. This hybridity exists in the midst of continuing struggles for women’s equality, dire healthcare concerns, plummeting agricultural revenues, and strangulation of the communities from their region by Mexican military and paramilitary forces.

The Mirror at Morelia: “What Struggles are You Part of?”

We also visited the *caracol* of Morelia, a site of torture, assassination, and oppression by paramilitary forces in 1994. We arrived in early afternoon, hoping for a conversation with the *Oficina de Buen Gobierno* (The Office of the Good Government) at 3 pm. We had written in advance and been granted permission for a visit. The members were busy installing water tanks, and we were asked to wait. While we waited I read a description of the community terrorization that had taken place right near where we were heating our beans. From Ross’ *The War Against Oblivion* (2000):

Early on January 7th [1994], dozens of armored vehicles rolled into this tranquil Tzeltal coffee-growing community and 400 soldiers charged from hovel to hovel, dragging the men out and herding them onto the basketball court at the center of the settlement, the military’s customary m.o. in Indian communities suspected of subversion.

Morelia was seen as a pocket of resistance due to their efforts to charter their land as an *ejido*, a village organized as a communal agricultural production unit.

Other than the attention focused upon the impoverished outpost on the morning of January 7th, 1994, the abandonment of Morelia by its

government has been spectacular. The *ejido* had a basketball court but no baskets, a government clinic building but no doctor, a powerful thirst but no potable water, a full schoolhouse with one teacher three days a month, a priest who attended to the *ejido* every four months.

All morning long, the men were forced to lie face down on the ground, their noses driven down into the concrete. “Today is the day we turn Morelia into an orphanage,” the soldiers barked. Their interrogators wanted to know about a doctor, a non-Indian, who sometimes visited the *ejido*. Three men were singled out, forced into the deserted hermitage of Jesus Christ of Good Hope, a square weatherbeaten building fronting the basketball courts. For four hours, their companeros listened to the screams of Sebastián Santiz López, 60, Severino Santiz, 47, and Ermelindo Santiz Gómez, 39. Severino’s head was repeatedly dunked into the filled baptismal font. Electric cables were attached to the men’s testicles and they were burnt. “The soldiers brought them out bathed in blood,” said one witness. “All we could do is listen to their lamentations...”

(Ross 2000, p. 28–30)

Thirty more men were kidnapped, as the community’s stores of food were sacked. Two weeks later, after brutal and dehumanizing treatment, all were returned to Morelia except the initial three men, whose bones were later found.



When I went for a walk to look at the murals painted on the side of many of the simple wooden buildings, there on the spot near the torture, was a mural commemorating the martyrs of Morelia. Author Toni Morrison (1989) speaks of art as “the fully realized presence of a haunting” of history. Indeed, this mural, which everyone passes many times a day keeps the haunting of history actively informing the present. History is awake.

We were asked to craft questions for the members of the Good Government to read and discuss in advance of their meeting with us. Sometime the next morning, we would be able to hear their answers. We were thrown back upon ourselves to work as a group to understand what our deeper questions actually were. In an uncomfortable four hour session we worked to articulate our curiosity into respectful and knowledgeable questions. When our meeting took place the next morning with eight members of the governing council, it was clear that they had discussed each question in as much detail as we had. Each question was assigned to a spokesperson who delivered a considered answer. At the end, one of us asked if they had any questions for us. Only one emerged. Instead of reflecting curious, and perhaps frivolous, interest in our day-to-day lives, it was a challenging question: “In what struggles are you involved in your home communities?” It was as though they were saying: “We have taken a lot of time to explain to you the struggles we are engaged in here; the struggles that will be occupying us and our children for the rest of our lifetimes. We ask you to reflect on how our struggles here are connected to the policies of your government and the practices of you and your people. How are **you** engaging these issues?”

We did not get a request to help in the fields, to teach English or computer skills, to assist with the cooking. Instead we were given a floor to sleep on, latrines and makeshift shower, ample beans and rice, language classes, classes on Zapatismo. Then a mirror was lifted so we could see ourselves through the lens of a single question: “What struggle do you partake in, or will you partake in, having now understood more about how your situation effects ours?” The inference was that as Americans the site of our struggle must be in the belly of the beast, for it is in the beast’s greedy extension that hungrily consumes them, their land, their culture and languages. They are thinking systemically to see how they are effected by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, NAFTA, the pseudo-conservation agencies on whose boards representatives from the pharmaceutical companies sit as they make the appropriation of the Montanes Azules rainforest look like ecological safeguarding, and the School of the Americas who has trained the trainers of many of the paramilitary forces. They pointed our attention back home to the United States as though to say, “These are the forces you must wrestle with.” There were moments when I felt that being asked to help harvest corn or teach English would be a great relief.

Marcos has said that as he moves over the mountains he carries a single pink, high heel pump. In the wake of this struggle being catapulted into international notoriety, tons of donated goods arrived in the mountains, some of it the discarded luxury that bore no signs of empathic engagement

with their situation: a single pink slipper separated from its mate comes to a region where many are without any shoes to navigate thick mud and to protect against the mountain chill. The pink slipper comes as a cast off offering that underlines the serious slippage between two incommensurable worlds.

When history wakes, meetings at borders disappoint romantic yearnings for union. Disenfranchised workers, migrants, and exiles know the border situation between the so-called First and Third Worlds. As Homi Bhabha puts it, “it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking” (quoted in Sandoval 2000 p. 1). They have learned English, how to arrange the accoutrements of the upper class as they clean, how to take care of the flower gardens of those who have no need for a vegetable garden. They are asked to risk their lives quietly crossing the border, do work for others, and return with small savings. Many have acquired the double consciousness of which DuBois writes, seeing themselves through the eyes of those they labor for, and some have attained the cosmopolitan status once thought the possession of the materially privileged (Bhabha 2004).

But what is the ethics of the border situation when the relatively privileged willingly depart from the center? The educators at the *caracoles* were pointing us back toward the center, not to reside in its comforts, its repression of history, its sense of the future as a site for personal and corporate acquisition. They pointed us back toward it so that we could engage, interpret, and struggle with it while holding these indigenous people in our thoughts and heart. Indeed, the educators greeted us the first day at the language school, saying that we had entered an anti-neoliberal zone, a rebel space, where the heart would be opened, where we must learn to embrace our own rebelliousness in order to “make a world in which love is possible” (Freire 1989, p. 24). The pedagogy for rebellion is one which welcomes generative questions, creating spaces for mutual inquiry that can help us on our paths to more critical, complex, systemic understandings.

The (post)colonial situation sends anthropologists back home, underlining that in lieu of speaking for “the marginalized,” one needs to carefully listen to how they are speaking for themselves and what it is they are saying. A beautiful example of this is evidenced in the Chiapas Media Project. Media experts came to Chiapas not to make documentaries *about* the indigenous movement, but to make filmmaking equipment and know how available to as many communities as possible. In this process of sharing the means of getting communities’ stories and histories to a wider public, the colonial gaze is inverted. Now when there are Mexican military incursions into the indigenous communities, it is not only army soldiers who video community members from their tanks, but Zapatistas who

film the intrusion and craft it into documentaries and news reports that are made available to the international community through the internet.



Antonio Gramsci wrote that when he and his Latin American colleagues went to Spain during the Revolution, they found they had left home to better understand themselves. To leave the center, to meet at the border, is necessary to becoming archaeologists of the site of our own social formation (JanMohamed 1993, p. 113). Such border crossing allows us to return to the center, seeing it anew, as itself a potential border site where revolt and creativity become possible.

Hospitality and the Un-Homely

The Zapatista movement results from what has been called the first postmodern revolution. It imagines autonomous zones being created throughout the world, forming an archipelago of communities striving for justice, democracy, equality, and peace, as well as a network for solidarity and potential collaboration. While not negating national identity, these zones re-imagine identity by expressing “multiple layers of compatible identification,” a larger, deterritorializing identification that reflects transnational exchanges, a national level, a regional one that that allows for the strengthening of participatory democracy, and in many places a local cultural one where indigenous languages are safeguarded (Kearney 1998, p. 12).²

² In speaking of the Irish dilemma, the philosopher, Richard Kearney (1998), writes, “There is no such thing as primordial nationality. Every nation is a hybrid construct, an ‘imagined community’ that can be re-imagined again in alternative versions. The challenge is to embrace this process of hybridization from which we derive and to which we are committed willy-nilly” (p. 13).

At first glance my city in California, Santa Barbara, seems poor in such autonomous zones, quietly performing its own variety of ethnic and economic apartheid, with those of Mexican descent in some neighborhoods, schools, and clinics, and Anglos in others. The indigenous Chiapans are our teachers regarding having the courage and imagination to try to create in the present “a world in which all worlds fit,” where some worlds are not cast aside as discardable, or merely exploitable. Coming back home it is clear that my city is not yet a place where all worlds fit. It encompasses tacit and overt exclusionary practices that must be seen through, confronted, and transformed.

Meetings at the border allow us to encounter our psychic and literal homes as “unhomely” in Homi Bhabha’s sense, where the ordinary domesticity of our lives breaks open to reveal the discomforting history they contain. Here the fixed and stable subject, bolstered by ownership and the accoutrements of individualism, gives way to a more nomadic self, described by Braidotti (1994, 2002) and Deleuze and Guattari (1986). In this figuration of the self, identity is a process, not a product. It is a practice marked by its gestures toward others, and attention to its own sites of formation (Watkins 2005). The nomad practices what Foucault has called “counter-memory,” “a memory that is activated against the stream” of forgetting injustice (Braidotti 1994, p. 25). The nomad works to develop peripheral consciousness. Turning sustained attention to the margins, it is not as easy to forget injustice. “The nomad is determined to destroy the state-form and the city form with which it collides” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 113). The nomad resists assimilation into dominant ways of representing the self, enacting “a rebellion of subjugated knowledges” (Braidotti 2002, p.7).

In my home community, while indigenous Mexicans who have come north are busily assimilating English language and American ways, Anglos like myself are becoming more aware that we are living on what was once Mexican soil and learning the tragic history of American cycles of exploitation and deportation of Mexicans displaced by poverty. Spanish words name our streets, holidays, and foods. Mexican rituals, art, and spirituality help shape our sensibilities. In the light of this osmotic sharing, our lack of hospitality casts a long shadow on our sunny town.

What are some of the implications of these thoughts for how we can learn and teach psychologies that have the possibility of aiding the creation of just and peaceful relations between nations, communities, and people? In the last 15 years we have struggled to create a doctoral program that steps aside from a North American individualistically oriented clinical paradigm, and have sought to illuminate the interdependence between psychological (intrapsychic),

familial, community, intercommunity, and ecological well-being. Our placement in an institute dedicated to depth psychology has contributed to crafting a critical community psychology focus that includes attention to intrapsychic dynamics, shadow processes, and the important role of imagination in individual and community life. Grounding our work in psychologies of liberation (Martín-Baró 1994; Watkins and Shulman 2008; Montero and Sonn 2009), we have turned a critical eye toward the culturally embedded assumptions of Euro-American depth psychologies, while attempting to discern the theories and practices that could be useful in community-based work. Looking to community work in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, we have found models for liberatory transformation such as the one presented in this paper from the Zapatista movement. Reversing community psychology practices that focus on meeting needs and deficits, an approach that often leads to cultural invasion, we are practicing an appreciative inquiry approach that searches for the seeds and developed root systems of peaceful, sustainable, and just communities. Fieldworkers can become apprentices to groups and communities that have struggled to establish or sustain resilient practices of shared leadership, critical consciousness development, prophetic imagination, and ecological stewardship. We can mirror back the value of what we have been invited to witness, while imagining how we might carry some of its seeds to our home communities and institutions. When in dialogue with indigenous communities, this respect and honoring acknowledges the ruinous destruction of colonial practices, and seeks to create a mode of relationship that has been too long in coming.

We have created a specialization in critical community psychology, liberation psychology, indigenous psychology, and ecopsychology (www.pacifica.edu/Depth_Psychology_Combined.aspx). We seek to nurture nomadic identity in our students through the provision of a public homeplace which encourages experiences of what Homi Bhabha calls “the unhomely,” and practices of field immersion where students carefully attend to their own meetings at borders with others. Students are helped to inquire into their own cultural location, to investigate its history and shadows, its ways of conducting selfhood and encountering “otherness.” At the same time students are asked in their community and ecological fieldwork and research to immerse themselves in a community context around an issue that draws their passionate interest, to apprentice themselves to the community group and to the questions that arise there, and to “let go of predetermined destinations,” so that learning can occur at the borders where meetings become possible (Braidotti 2002, p. 5). As Braidotti describes it, one is to both be in transit and responsible for one’s historical location. By transit she

does not mean the literal act of traveling, but the subversion of set conventions.

The ethics of such fieldwork requires that one be invited to the group or community one is interested in, that one be clear about one’s questions, that one be transparent regarding one’s intentions and hopes, that one be open to being questioned and to having one’s ways of being and thinking challenged. The encounter, if successful, should nourish one’s own ability to be in resistance to forces that move us away from an interdependent enhancement of mutual well-being. It should also contribute to our imagination of the possible. In the spirit of psychic decolonization, fieldworkers need to inquire into how the history of the groups they and their ancestors have been members of have intersected with the history of the group they are working with. Their research is conducted with the purpose of gaining greater clarity on how their mode of relations to others can be constitutive of cultural synthesis, not cultural invasion.

Engaging a liberatory approach to pedagogy, the philosophy and practice of dialogue are emphasized in the classroom, fieldwork, and participatory inquiry. We help students learn to nurture the expression of marginalized experiences through the use of liberatory arts, including Boal’s theater of the oppressed, mural arts, community dreamwork, and utopic imagining.

In this cultural and ecological work there is a practice of psychic de-colonization and nomadic subjectivity that requires a more rigorous approach to the ethics of inquiry (see Watkins and Shulman 2008). It is a practice of encounter where we go beyond what we have anticipated, enabling us to look back and be aware of ourselves in a different manner. As Seshadri-Crooks puts it, it is “a radical desire for the dissolution of one’s subjective certainty” (Seshadri-Crooks, in Oliver 2002, p. 75). We have aimed to avoid the missionary work of a colonial ego, giving the beliefs of our particular cultures wrapped in leftover material goods or local practices falsely universalized. We have also warned against the voyeurism of the colonial gaze, bringing back artifacts and descriptions of rituals made quaint or exotic by those still clinging to the center. We have encouraged the close examination of one’s own site of spawning subjectivity, believing that such critical consciousness of what has been taken as center, is one way of dissolving the oppressive grasp of taken-for-granted and unexamined “truths,” of decolonizing the imagination. Stepping aside from the clinical encounter and its relentless pathologizing and individualizing of human misery, we have sought instead to locate the psychosocial conditions and collective traumas that give rise to much of human misery (Kleinman 1988), and to formulate participatory action responses to them that are informed by depth psychological understanding.



From this work a methodology for nourishing nomadic consciousness is being worked out. We work toward a more “self-conscious flexibility of identity” (Sandoval 2000, p. xii), where generative meetings at borders and boundaries within oneself, between self and other, one community and another, and between ourselves and the natural and built environments can be conducted. Dislodged from single unambiguous identifications, an odyssey can evolve that awakens history and allows us to witness the multiplicity of voices and experiences around us and within us. A listing of fieldwork sites, examples of students’ fieldwork, and an approach to the ethics of fieldwork can be found at http://www.pacifica.edu/community_ecological_fieldwork_research.aspx.

The hope: To lend the weight of our own practices of nomadic subjectivity to widen the cracks in history where multiple worlds can live with each other with greater justice, peace, and beauty.

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