Ethnographic Horizons from Collaborative and Involved Experiences
Introduction to the Monograph *Collaborative and Involved Ethnographies*

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ABSTRACT

This special issue is meant to discuss the following issues: how can we collectively produce meaning? Whom should we research for/with? What should be the aims of our research? We are particularly interested in tackling the ways in which collaborative ethnographies are being constructed, from different perspectives, and how the multiple decisions affecting them are taken. With the aim of contextualizing the ethnographic experiences discussed in this volume, in this presentation we frame the historical emergence of collaborative ethnography and sum up the main contributions done by Anthropology. Then, we point out the main contents of the articles included in this issue, which is made up of six papers proceeding from ongoing researches, all of them collaborative, engaged and even activist in some cases, undertaken together with different actors in diverse scenarios. Our interlocutors have been Mexican women emigrated to New York, young Indigenous graduated at the Intercultural University of Veracruz, neighbors from marginalized neighborhoods in Lisbon, social movements and platforms for the right to housing in Spain. A great variety of contexts, perspectives and knowledge(s) emerge from this review: even though ethnography is central for all of them, it is accompanied by a plurality of knowledge(s) and practices — ranging from radio series to ethnomusicology — paving the way to diverse strategies of knowledge production — story telling, collective workshops, conversations. A set of core-issues is emerging overall, and we hope it may contribute to the discussion on the tensions, dilemmas and potentialities of collaborative and engaged ethnography.

KEY WORDS

Collaborative ethnography, knowledge production, political subjectivation.

HORIZONTES ETNOGRÁFICOS DESDE EXPERIENCIAS COLABORATIVAS E IMPLICADAS
INTRODUCCIÓN AL MONOGRÁFICO *ETNOGRAFÍAS COLABORATIVAS E IMPLICADAS*

RESUMEN

En este monográfico nos proponemos repensar y cuestionar: ¿cómo se puede construir sentido colectivamente? ¿Para qué, para quién y junto a quién investigamos? Pero sobre todo nos interesa indagar cómo, desde las diferentes experiencias existentes, se están construyendo investigaciones colaborativas e implicadas, y cómo se toman las múltiples decisiones que vertebran los procesos de investigación. Con el objetivo de contextualizar las prácticas etnográficas discutidas en el presente volumen, en esta contribución enmarcamos de manera resumida la emergencia histórica de las etnografías colaborativas e implicadas y reseñamos las principales contribuciones hechas desde la antropología social. El monográfico lo configuran seis contribuciones procedentes de experiencias de investigaciones en curso[3], colaborativas, implicadas y/o activistas en algunos de los casos, llevadas a cabo junto a diferentes actores en escenarios diversos. Nuestros/as interlocutores/as han sido mujeres mexicanas

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3. The texts were submitted for evaluation to the journal in 2018 and most of the investigations were ongoing but have already been completed at the time of publication of the issue (2020).

emigradas a la ciudad de Nueva York, jóvenes indígenas egresados/as de la Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural, vecinos/as de barrios marginalizados de Lisboa, movimientos sociales y plataformas por el derecho a la vivienda del Estado español. Además de los múltiples contextos, emerge una gran variedad de perspectivas y saberes implicados: aunque la práctica etnográfica sea central en todas las aportaciones, esta se conjuga felizmente con una pluralidad de saberes/haceres — desde la producción de radionovelas a la etnomusicología —, dando lugar a distintas estrategias de producción de conocimiento — narraciones comunitarias y *story telling*, talleres de reflexión colectiva, conversatorios, etcétera. En conjunto, emerge un núcleo de problemáticas que remite a las tensiones, encrucijadas y potencialidades de la etnografía colaborativa e implicada.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Etnografía colaborativa, producción de conocimiento, subjetivación política.

Acknowledgments

    For more than a decade, a group of social researchers currently assigned to different university contexts — Granada (Spain), Coimbra and Aveiro (Portugal), Veracruz (Mexico), Maynooth (Ireland) and New York (United States) — have been reflecting on the whats and whys of collaborative ethnographic research and on the how, who and for whom knowledge is generally produced. Assuming the growing relevance of collaborative dimensions when redefining contemporary ethnographic practices, in this monograph we propose to rethink and question: how can we think and build meaning collectively? For what, for whom and with whom do we research?, but above all we are interested in tracking and thinking about concrete procedures, specific decisions: how, from the different existing experiences, collaborative research is being built, and how the multiple decisions that support and go through the entire research process are agreed. The need for this operation arises from some detected *absences* (Santos de Sousa, 2010) after the review of books, articles, proceedings, and participation in congresses, etc., where it is evident that there is still

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4. As well as to Rocío García Soto, whose article was ultimately unable to get into the issue.

little published material that shares with us and explains in detail the crossroads and details of collaborative ethnography (Arribas Lozano, 2014; Dietz and Álvarez Veinguer, 2014) and the specific processes of *co-research* or *co-labor* (Leyva, 2010).

If we carry out a brief and summarized historical "inquiry" with the aim of contextualizing the emergence of collaborative and involved ethnographies, we observe that the first "lines of flight" in hegemonic anthropologies[5] were generated as a result of the processes of decolonization in the Americas, Africa and Asia, the rise of civil and social rights movements of numerous indigenous groups, and the independence and nationalist movements of the former colonies (Ribeiro and Escobar, 2009: 33). From these experiences, other ways of constructing knowledge — with other protagonists and other objectives — were taking expression in some contexts of social anthropology. In Latin America, between the 50s and 70s of the twentieth century, three important scenarios went through and substantially conditioned anthropological work: dependency theory, liberation theology and philosophy, and popular pedagogy (Krotz, 2017: 46-47), which marked the emergence of the "anthropology of the South" (Krotz, 1997 and 2017)[6]. A critical anthropology that was resonating strongly, especially in Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina (Guber, 2010; Leyva and Speed, 2008; Vasco Uribe, 2002), as well as in other places in Latin America. At the end of the 1960s in Colombia, La Rosca was born, a group of social scientists (with Orlando Fals Borda and Víctor Daniel Bonilla, among others) who proposed a social science at the service of the Colombian popular sectors, and which can be considered the origin of Participatory-Action-Research (PAR), and later of militant research (Vasco Uribe, 2002)[7]. Action research has spent decades betting on participatory practices that try to overcome unidirectional scenarios in interpretation and work to incorporate popular knowledge, with the aim of building a methodology that is capable of producing knowledge from below (Fals Borda, 1986; Freire, 1970; Stavenhagen, 1971; Villasante, 2007). Little by

5. By hegemonic anthropologies we understand: "*the set of discursive formations and institutional practices associated with the normalization of academic anthropology carried out mainly in the United States, the United Kingdom and France*" (Ribeiro and Escobar 2009: 32-33).
6. The category "South" should not be understood as a geographical reference; it is a positionality in relation to the hegemonic centers of knowledge production.
7. In the 1960s, the proposal of "committed sociology" was born (Fals Borda, 2009). Fals Borda (2008) insists that in the 1970s, the PAR identified three strategic tensions in their work: 1) between theory and practice; 2) between the subject and the object of research; 3) which is deduced from participation as a philosophy of life and the search for valid knowledge for social change. These tensions have been very present in the debates about PAR from its origins to the present. For the Spanish context, it is recommended to see all the work of sociologist Tomas Rodríguez Villasante (2006) and the Red Cimas: http://www.redcimas.org/

little, an emancipatory and non-departmental anthropology unfolded, a radical anthropological praxis linked to the liberation struggles of and for the development of "indigenous" anthropologies (Ribeiro and Escobar, 2009: 33). All these proposals, together with the changes that were taking place within the Eurocentric academia[8] from the so-called *reflexive turn* of the 80s in the social sciences, meant — among other issues — to destabilize the subject/object relationship, contributing to the deconstruction of the entire theoretical apparatus of modernity, supported by a harmonized binarity. Let us not forget, as in many places it has been pointed out, that the modern-colonial project has been based on a dichotomized conception and (re)presentation that has operated in terms of pairs, always opposed and confronted: individual/society, body/mind, objective/subjective, theory/praxis, inside/outside, man/woman, reason/emotions, us/others, modernity/tradition, civilized/barbarian, etc. One of the consensuses that exist within the work of numerous feminists (see among others: Amos and Parmar, 1984; Bhavnani and Coulson, 1986; Gregorio Gil, 2006; hooks, 1984; Hull, Bell-Scott and Smith, 1982; Landes, 1979; Lewis, 1973; Minii-Ha, 1987; Mohanty Talpade, 2008; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001), the postcolonial perspective (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1998), the decolonial one (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007; Lander, 2000; Mignolo, 2003) and decolonial feminism (Curiel, 2009; Espinosa Miñoso, 2014; Lugones, 2010; Ochoa Muñoz, 2019), is the shared criticism of the essentialist conceptions (dichotomous hierarchies) that have sustained the Eurocentric and androcentric narratives of the western scientistic project. Emerging within the different perspectives, numerous debates — both theoretical and empirical experiences — about the possible ways of doing and experiencing social research.

For Ribeiro and Escobar (2009), the most important transformations of social anthropology in the 20th century were due to changes in the position of the subject, which was traditionally called the "object of study," because it began to think and investigate in terms subjects-subjects relationships[9]. In the last three decades, Latin America has been working

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8. Far from considering it as a form of ethnocentrism among others, we understand Eurocentrism as a perspective of hegemonic knowledge of the modern colonial world system, based on two myths: "*one, the idea-image of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that starts from a state of nature and culminates in Europe. And two, to give meaning to the differences between Europe and non-Europe as differences of nature (racial) and not of a history of power*" (Quijano, 2000: 127). When we talk about Eurocentric academia, therefore, we refer to the epistemological coordinates from which it is spoken and not necessarily to a geographical positionality.

9. In 1971, the third point of the Barbados declaration stated, in the section on the responsibility of the anthropological discipline: "*The Anthropology that is required today in*

from an anthropology linked to and committed to indigenous, Afro-descendant, peasant and workers' movements, although generally these contributions have received little attention and were scarcely acknowledged in the undergraduate and graduate studies of most of the universities dedicated to hegemonic anthropology. Whereas in the context of the Euro-centered university and from postmodernist approaches, the utmost attention during the so-called *reflexive turn* of the 80s (about which great academic debates have taken place), as well as the decentering of ethnographic authority have been formulated almost exclusively in relation to writing (Vasco Uribe, 2002). In other words, an exercise of self-reflexivity was used where the researcher thought about themselves in the research process in relation to the ethnographic text, but a collective process of listening and knowledge production was not activated among all the people involved in the research and alongside the movements and collectives "about" which knowledge was produced. In a way, the most critical anthropologists committed to collaboration only in metaphorical terms (Lassiter, 2005: 160) and the main academic production was articulated around the crisis of the anthropologist as an author (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992). However, as Leyva and Speed (2008) emphasize, there have also been works from Anglo-American anthropology in favor of a pro-liberation anthropology, among which we highlight Gordon (1991), Greenwood and Levin (1998), Leyva and Speed (2008: 37), Scheper-Hughes (1995), or the work of Hymes (1974) and Scholte (1974). In the last decade, in the United States, the works committed to collaborative ethnography by Hale (2008 and 2011), Hale and Stephen (2013), Lassiter (2005), Marcus (2007) and Rappaport (2007), almost all of which have been linked to the Latin American context for years, stand out. In 2008, the first English-language issue of the journal "Collaborative Anthropology" was published, of which 9 issues have been published to date (one per year), devoting attention to collaboration from an analytical and descriptive point of view that addresses collaboration between researchers and research participants or interlocutors (https://muse.jhu.edu/journal/471).

As Kelty (2009) points out, there are two possible ways of conceiving collaboration: for some people, it takes place mainly "between researchers," when it comes to sharing reflection and writing (Kennedy, 1995; Wyatt, Gale, Gannon and Davies, 2010); for others, on the other hand, it is a practice that affects the entire process (Moreno-Black and

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Latin America is not one that takes indigenous populations as mere objects of study, but that which it sees them as colonized peoples and commits itself to their liberation struggle" (AA.VV., 1971: 4).

Homchampa, 2008: 92), involving both the researchers and the people investigated — sometimes to the point of blurring said differentiation. In this monograph, we focus on the second option, referring to ethnographic experiences that, as far as possible, try to activate co-research dynamics and that, in different ways depending on the context, are traversed by processes of co-reflection, co-production, co-analysis, and in some cases of co-writing and co-authorship. The starting point is the recognition of the centrality of all the actors involved in the research, which implies the deployment of different strategies that are capable of involving all the people with whom we work in the process, considering the objective of avoiding silencing, paternalism and exoticism. We decided then that the potential of collaborative ethnography unfolds when it comes to questioning the historical narrative about the great milestones of fieldwork, as well as the consolidated imaginaries about it (Faubion and Marcus, 2009). Furthermore, this even leads us to question the very notions of "field" (Clifford, 1999), "participant observation" (Rappaport, 2008) and to call into question the use of expressions such as "informants" (Fortun, 2009; Leyva, 2010; Vasco Uribe, 2002), "return of results" (Arribas Lozano, 2014), or "collection of information" (Ibáñez, 1985; Vasco Uribe, 2002), inviting us to rework the foundations of ethnographic writing (Rappaport, 2007). As Faubion and Marcus (2009) state, it is necessary to incorporate the transformations that have been undergoing in fieldwork, including those works that have proposed collaboration as a normative principle of ethnography (Faubion and Marcus, 2009: 28) both on the methodological level and in the teaching of anthropology.

There is no doubt that a certain level of collaboration is inherent in ethnographic work (CRESC, 2013; Lassiter, 2005: 16): in different measures, all ethnography relies on the collaboration-participation of the ethnographic subjects, with their daily experiences and representations, as has been shown by the works of numerous anthropologists throughout the globe. But from our perspective, the challenge of how we understand collaborative and involved ethnography does not simply refer to recognizing as subjects those who had previously been (re)presented in terms of object, but consists of methodologically activating that recognition by constructing meanings collectively and in different ways throughout the ethnographic process. Therefore, although it seems that we are "trapped in collaboration" (Reddy, 2008: 76), we consider it necessary to advance in the systematization of the collaborative process throughout all its phases, both in the "fieldwork" and in the writing of the ethnographic account, as claimed by Lassiter (2005), Rappaport (2008) and Campbell and Lassiter (2010), as well as in other forms and research practices that

seek to transcend the centrality of fieldwork and ethnographic narrative. In other words, we are particularly interested in going beyond the "programmatic" and "normative" phase to delve into the most concrete and everyday aspects of collaborative practice, addressing in their specificity the difficulties, tensions, crossroads, successes and failures.

Nowadays, we find more and more works interested in collaborative ethnography; however, there is relatively little material that delves into the methodological, technical, and empirical details of the research, sharing in detail the procedures and concrete decisions made at each moment. In the context of the Spanish State, there are practically no monographic publications in this regard, and only in 2016 has a series of very brief articles in the section called "Emerging Topics" (Estalella and Sánchez Criado, 2016) been published in the *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares*. It is for all the above reasons that the main objective of this issue is to reactivate and contribute to the debates on collaborative and involved ethnography. The research presented here is part of the project "Emerging processes and agencies of the common: praxis of collaborative social research and new forms of political subjectivation[10]." The first text, written by those of us who coordinate this monograph, has a theoretical-methodological nature. We first discuss the main consequences of the implantation of the neoliberal University for research practice and, later, we conceptualize collaborative ethnography as an attempt to decolonize the hegemonic research paradigms and practice a drift towards other ways of doing-knowing-feeling. We address four of its potentialities: the questioning of methodological individualism in favor of the common; the accompaniment to processes of political subjectivation; the relevance accorded to care and emotions and the deployment of methodological pluriverses.

The article by Gunther Dietz and Laura Selene Mateos Cortés (Universidad Veracruzana) articulates the reflection based on a long-term empirical experience (about ten years), the "Intersaberes" project. The authors describe in detail how they have combined the principles of "activist anthropology" with "doubly reflexive ethnography" in their research with different educational actors, students, and young indigenous graduates from the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI). In the non-extractive turn operated by them, not only has the epistemological authority between the different participating actors been remixed, but useful

"results" have been produced for the reconfiguration of the educational curriculum and the creation of new professional intercultural figures.

Next, Ángel Lara (State University of New York) takes us to New York, placing us in a research together with Mexican migrant women, or, rather — as Aída would define them — "*with big words… great women, warriors.*" Women who, precisely, wonder about the meaning of their condition and the appropriate ways to name it. In this case, the practice of co-research and co-analysis has been deployed through group construction of stories, which has led to a community narrative expressed through a narrative fiction — a radio soap opera. The author highlights the potential of *storytelling*, both in creative terms and when promoting the construction of common sense, highlighting its ability to unleash "*a loving production of knowledge and wisdom that places care and the fabric of an emotional bond at the center of its group construction.*"

The contribution of Alberto Arribas Lozano (Maynooth University) refers us to the Spanish social movements of recent years: specifically, to the network of Social Rights Offices (ODS in Spanish). The ODS constitute in themselves an "epistemic community" that carries out militant research processes and has a particular interest in generating spaces for self-reflection on its own practices. Focusing on two main issues — power relations within research and researcher autonomy — Arribas contributes to questioning certain existing myths about collaborative research, such as the romantic idea of militant purity — which, paradoxically, would end up relegating the activists themselves in the position of inert victims, the object of academic representations without any capacity for action — or the assumption that collaboration necessarily implies that everyone does the same — without the possibility of articulating multiple action plans, authorship, knowledge, and so on.

The text by Ana Flávia Miguel, Dario Ranocchiari and Susana Sardo (INET-md, University of Aveiro and University of Granada) recounts the experience of Skopeofonia, a "shared research" in ethnomusicology carried out together with musicians of Cape Verdean origin residing in the Cova da Moura neighborhood, in the Lisbon belt. They illustrate the ecology of knowledge by which, on the one hand, academic researchers have stripped themselves of their *expertise* to train in local knowledge, and on the other, non-academic subjects have wanted to reappropriate some University knowledge. The text discusses both the potentialities of the project — for example, the self-empowerment processes that have been generated from their epistemic companions, residents of a neighborhood traditionally constructed as "marginal" — as well as the institutional

limits placed on the collaborative research practices — one of which, is the impossibility of renewing successful projects in the longer term.

Lastly, the contribution of Ariana S. Cota and Antonia Olmos Alcaraz (University of Granada) is based on collaborative research alongside the "Stop Evictions-15M Granada" collective (in which the coordinators of this monograph also participate). The authors address the dialogues between knowledge that, at times, have ended up relegating the "research team" itself to a "non-expert" place, as well as reviewing the various listening devices deployed to collectively determine the issues to be addressed together with the movement — talks, discussion groups, workshops for political training, and a transmedia proposal. They share their uncertainties in the process and relate the companionship dynamics that take place within the collective, valuing the knowledge, doings, and powers of the activists. Hence the relevance accorded to the term "sisters," used in this context as a fictitious kinship name.

The six articles address various contexts, showing a great variety of perspectives and knowledge involved. Likewise, a plurality of strategies adopted for the collective production of knowledge emerges. In some cases, the debate focuses on methodological procedures, while in others the new knowledge that has been generated as a "result" of the collaborative process is also addressed. But, despite this variety, we repeatedly observe the emergence of some common axes of reflection, as well as we envision a clear commitment — in some cases epistemological, and in others also political — next to the people with whom we have walked — hence we speak of *involved* ethnographies as well as collaborative ones. Although we do not claim to have addressed everything — an impossible task — we do think that this issue can provide useful elements for methodological discussion, delving into the more detailed reflection on crossroads, doubts, dilemmas, potentialities, limits, tensions… and, why not, the joys, that the practice of collaborative and involved ethnography/ethnographies involve(s). A whole pluriverse of possibilities that invite us to inhabit research in a different way and point toward multiple different forms to try to reactivate imagination and creativity in current ethnographic processes, betting on an open and explicit involvement with the groups of people, collectives, and movements with whom we research.

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