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A Reflection on Political Research and Social Justice Organizing

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ABSTRACT: As an anthropologist in Guatemala in the late 1990s, my fieldwork among Afro-indigenous community leaders, activists and lay historians participating in democracy-building projects, NGOs, and community organizations during the Peace Process raised questions about the methods and ethics of research and advocacy in the context of political Terror. Now as a community organizer in San Diego with Latino immigrant and African-American communities in recent years, applying an engaged, reflexive anthropological perspective to US social justice organizing models and objectives sheds new light on the political ramifications of familiar practices, such as gathering testimonies, framing an interview, and cutting an actionable issue.

Key words: community organizing; Afro-American diaspora; engaged methodologies

> The central fact for me is, I think, that the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them, to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments and corporations, and whose *raison d'etre* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behaviour concerning freedom and justice from worldly power or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously. [Edward Said 1996:11-12]

Introduction

This article began as my contribution to a conversation about political activism and engaged anthropology among colleagues who were increasingly uneasy with the actions of an aggressively, pro-war administration in the U.S., and how the recent, future and ongoing effects of these neoimperialist aggressions would impact the contexts where anthropologists teach and conduct socially committed research, here and abroad. As I reflected on this fraught intersection and our tense historical moment, I began to consider whether my recent work as a social justice organizer in the U.S. had shifted my understanding of the roles, responsibilities and relationships that characterize politically-engaged,

ethnographic inquiry. Initially, I hoped that a thick description of the grassroots organizing models used by labour, faith-based and social justice organizations in the U.S. would shed light on recent discussions that seek to move the discipline toward a decolonizing anthropological praxis; however, I found that my own trajectory, shifting from engaged researcher to employed activist, reintroduced many of the epistemological, methodological and ethics-related questions and frustrations that I had interrogated so vigorously during my graduate training, fieldwork and ethnographic writing since the mid-1990s.

In what follows, I reflect on how the challenges I experienced as a conscientiously, engaged anthropologist in Guatemala articulate with those I encountered as a social justice organizer in San Diego, specifically employing the methods/processes for mobilizing collective action as I was trained by the PICO Institute. While some readers might contend or fear that this comparative approach aimed at producing constructive dialogue among activists and anthropologists who promote progressive social change dangerously decontextualizes the PICO model, I endeavour to situate carefully two sites of power/knowledge production in relation to both activist trajectories as well as to key counterhegemonic, disciplinary attempts to reconstruct methodologies and analysis as tools for social change. By making practice, power, research, and action the subjects of my analysis, I employ a postcolonial feminist critique, which interrogates the social location of the researcher, resists binary logics of praxis/theory, and locates the structural-material effects of ethnographic research within a broader field of power.

Insider and Outsider Dilemmas of an Apprentice Activist-Researcher

As a doctoral researcher in Guatemala in the late 1990s, my fieldwork among Garifuna—that is, Afro-indigenous, Black Carib—community leaders, activists and historians who were contributing to the democracy-building projects of the Guatemalan National Peace Process anticipated and raised some of the familiar qualms about the methods and ethics of conducting research in developing nations and among structurally peripheralized groups, especially in the context of political terror and violence, which seemed at the time of the so-called "Peace" to be escalating rather than subsiding. Initially, my research objective was to advance the understanding of how Garifuna people used their longterm, regional and transcommunal social networks and new legal right to a Garifuna-specific indigenous worldview, or *cosmovisión,* to refract their needs and concerns through the lenses crafted and imposed by distant architects—i.e., the United Nations proctoring the Peace Process and the putatively democratic governance apparatus, an alliance of the new government, the guerrilla, the military, and representatives of the three major Indigenous groups. This approach used participant observation and direct engagement with community scholars to critically reassess the usefulness of previous (often colonizing and empiricist) social scientific studies perennially focused on the "disappearance" and shallow (neoteric) roots of Garifuna culture, the persistence of the matrifocal family and religious traditions, the emphasis of Garifuna heritage on their indigenous linguistic background rather than their preponderantly African ancestry (which had been examined incessantly for more than fifty years), and, particularly salient during the Peace Process, the alleged lack of political participation among Garifuna communities in their home countries throughout Central America since the 19th century.

At the outset, however, my Garifuna interlocutors raised their own, community-specific concerns about outsider anthropologists, especially those from the U.S., conducting field research that contributed little to and often impeded their everyday lives and ongoing political struggles, and they proscribed research activities for me that would meet their needs. In a related vein, they also expressed a growing fear that, beyond a handful of over-utilized professionals, they were inadequately prepared to take advantage of new democratic and development opportunities. For nearly two years, then, at the invitation of Garifuna political leaders, activists and organizers, I attended almost daily Peace Process meetings officiated by government officials, NGO workers and representatives of the U.N. or participated in other social, cultural and political gatherings organized by

Garifuna community groups, with my notes serving to inform those who were not able to attend. Various Garifuna community leaders also suggested that I should visit several learned elders, which I did weekly, to record a Garifuna community history that proclaimed their worldview as the basis for their survival of a civil war that spanned a period of four decades as well as for their resistance to the systematic, structural and racial marginalization of their community over two centuries. These combined activities gave me a sense that my research was respectfully conceived and community-driven, but I frequently encountered the need to clarify my role and my aims. Specifically, I emphasized that I was a student apprenticing in both research and political work, attempting to make my modest institutional and intellectual resources available to the community.

As I describe and situate more extensively in the dissertation (2003), I began to inhabit the role of an apprentice—that is, working in the company of experts and elders to learn about and identify community need; using anthropology to support community efforts; and planning to be transformed by this experience of living among people who were actively seeking to change the historical, cultural and structural conditions that had caused a protracted genocidal civil war and produced a deeply stratified society riddled with poverty, illiteracy, and disease to which they were exceedingly vulnerable. Thus, as my relationships with community members deepened, I sought an anthropological role that placed in the foreground my own trajectory as a young woman of working class, mixed cultural background, African-descended and Native American, whose research interests in community organizing and political practice echoed but, more importantly, could build on my commitments and capacities as an anti-colonial, feminist and social justice activist-researcher. I found that I was seeking more than merely rapport; rather I was working toward research as an intellectual collaboration based on political solidarity with Garifuna community organizers.

Among the various conditions that made my social location relevant and complex, I observed that being a relatively young, female researcher, who was often misrecognized by outsiders as a Garifuna participant or representative, offered both advantages and obstacles for me and the people with whom I was conducting my research, especially as community leaders began to use strategically my credentials, expertise and institutional relationships to advance the aims of their organizations and projects. Some fieldwork situations seemed straightforward, even easy, such as using my tutorial in Garifuna language to assist in the funding and development of the first draft of a national bilingual curriculum; however other situations were more nuanced. For instance, midway through my research when I received a Fulbright grant to support my research, I was truly grateful for the funding and other substantial forms of support offered by the program; however I also felt compelled to express my ambivalence about participating in a program that was conceived, largely, to project the "nice face of US imperialism" in the world. Garifuna leaders, however, welcomed and used my connections to the embassy, especially the cultural program assistance provided by the US Information Agency, to amplify their presence through more, positive representations of themselves in the capital. Similarly in another instance, Garifuna leaders strongly encouraged me to participate alongside government ministers and entrepreneurs from several countries in a meeting to advance the development of the Bay of Honduras region as a site of cultural tourism from which Garifuna representatives were expressly excluded, and when my turn to speak arrived, I was told that time had run out so I should simply introduce myself. Noting that I was the youngest, only non-white and female person in the room, I took the opportunity to leverage my citizenship and status as a US Fulbright scholar, stating that my research addressed the crucial significance of the Garifuna to the settling and economic development of the Caribbean lowlands since colonial times, which in that instant became the subject of a chapter in the dissertation I was soon to write.

Again, readers might apprehend the reflexive stance I employ in this essay as a naive reintroduction of advocacy anthropology or as C.R. Menzies describes the latter, anthropology "on behalf," as a remedy to colonial/colonizing research paradigms that long produced knowledge about oppressed

peoples for the sake of the powerful (2001). Rather I agree with Menzies, that research is always, already political, and as I discuss at length in the section comparing social justice organizing and engaged ethnographic inquiry, I concur with him, that the final stage consisting of writing, analysis, revision and distribution is the most important for ensuring that the product of one's research is respectfully engaged (2001:22). My attempts to engage my interlocutors in the design and execution of my research plan were manifold; nonetheless, I found that politically engaged work requires a concerted transgression of hegemonic research norms that extend well beyond the field project. For instance, when I was preparing to leave Livingston, Guatemala in late 1998, I organized a community conference where I would present my initial research findings and receive comments from the community at large as well as a panel of leaders, elders and scholars. I received feedback that intimated the high hopes that my friends, allies and acquaintances had for me. Specifically, they stated that I should more than merely publish their stories, which they thought would benefit me and to a lesser degree help to advance some of their more politically-expedient critiques of anthropological research, but rather they hoped that I would mature as a scholar-activist and perhaps continue to work for their community by forming a development NGO that strengthened their ties to the United States and other transnational entities. While I had a well-rehearsed, postcolonial analysis of development (cf. Escobar 1995) as well as a feminist critique of the NGOization of Latin American social movements (cf. Alvarez 1998), I understood this as a call to action on a deep level that would require more than composing a document that acknowledged the concerns expressed by my Garifuna interlocutors.

My readings, conversations and work alongside other anti-colonial activists and academics in Guatemala and in the US encouraged me to carefully choose subjects that reproduce neither hegemonic categories of difference nor the hierarchies of domination they obscure. More specifically, my feminist training charged me to see my subjective, embodied experience as part of my research (cf., Zavella 1997); and considering the multiplicity of selves (Abu-Lughod 1990; 1991) that arises in the shifting contexts where I conduct action-research, I take up the challenge of post-structural anthropology to understand the texts I produce as constitutive of real, material effects, including producing knowledge to be shared across activist trajectories and interest groups. When, for instance, I shifted my focus, as Mohanty (1997) suggests, from reproducing a category such as "people in struggle" or "women organizers" to advancing a transhistorical understanding of the "work" of organizing that recognizes how common social change goals and activist trajectories can create linkages with other social change "workers," I began to propose that my research might produce transgressive, (perhaps) decolonizing analysis to undermine the intractable insider/outsider dynamics that have required the perennial reinvention, recapturing and retrofitting of anthropology, cultural critique and social analysis (Hymes 1969; Marcus and Fisher 1986; Rosaldo 1989). My hope, as an anthropologist trained in the 1990s, is that new interventions can make use of these key reflexive moments in the discipline to genuinely shift paradigms of praxis in relation to new conceptual frameworks, such as intersectionality, transcommunality, and transnational feminisms, and shared domains of knowledge production and activism.

The Personal is Political: Activist Trajectories and Professional Organizing

During the early 2000s when U.S. progressives were considering how to respond to the fact that despite our protests the far-right effectively had taken control of the federal administration, legislative and executive branches alike, to launch a worldwide, ideological and material war in the name of democracy and freedom both in our "homeland" and everywhere beyond, I finished the long process of writing the dissertation. Frankly, I felt personally accomplished, yet politically disconnected from the United States and the people in Guatemala, whose interests I had hoped to support with my newly minted PhD. To my professional chagrin, I also realized that I was experiencing what many previous anthropologists have lived: the literal and relational distancing of the researcher from the subjects with whom they conduct research.

I began to consider seriously again the suggestion made by Garifuna elders that marginalized communities needed more professionals who are prepared to run organizations, participate in civil society, and government, and I examined how the relatively privileged educational experience that had (literally) saved me from my impoverished roots, had done little to prepare me to be a powerful political actor on my own behalf, much less in solidarity with the people in Guatemala from whom I had received so much.

Thus I found appealing the opportunity to work directly with communities on the U.S.-Mexico border, where I thought my citizenship conferred decidedly "insider" rights and responsibilities that would facilitate my understanding of political power and contextualize my role as an anthropologist within a broader consciousness of historical trajectories of activisms in the United States. Consequently, in San Diego, I took a job as the development director (writing grants and fundraising) for a non-profit organization that focused on using Internet and other technologies to support progressive community building, networking and activism across the 11 villages that make up a sprawling, metropolitan, and largely stratified and segregated city. In this work with its focus on progressive interconnectivity, I found that a host of organizations sought to represent low-income Latino immigrant and African-American peoples in the region, but few actually engaged them in the process. Within a year of moving to San Diego, I was offered a job as a bilingual community organizer with the San Diego Organizing Project (SDOP), a faith-based community organization serving 45,000 families in the region, which had established a strong track record of recruiting and training community leaders and building alliances with progressive organizations, elected officials and working-class constituencies. As a member of what previously had been called the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (now more succinctly the PICO National Network), representing one million families in 150 cities and 17 states, SDOP worked on social justice issues at the local, regional and national level as part of "one of the largest community-based efforts in the United States." After 35 evaluative interviews with the community leaders for whom I would work as an organizer, I was hired to mobilize five congregations to address social justice issues, including housing, employment, development, immigration rights, education, neighborhood safety, healthcare and environmental quality.

Many contemporary faith-based social justice organizations claim, as SDOP/PICO does in its training manual, that "churches are among the few organizations that can span the whole range of public and private relationship," and that "faith-based organizing is a means of reestablishing a public voice for people" (PICO Manual N.d.). Admittedly, as I considered what organizing work among religious groups would entail, it was easy for me to cast churches based in the US as hegemonic ideological institutions steeped in a colonial legacy, while the Afro-Catholic mutual aid societies with whom I had worked in Guatemala were easier to situate as libratory groups that had successfully transgressed the repression and genocidal pograms of the counterinsurgency during the civil war. Furthermore, when a prominent San Diego organizer explained that the organizational motto, "never do for people, what they can do for themselves," implies "teaching people to *do* community development," I contemplated how applicable postcolonial critiques of development frameworks would be for me as an organizer. Therefore, as I fought to resist a cozy armchair approach that would pit well-positioned theory against action on the ground, I was forced to confront the fact that my kneejerk fears arose from my relative ignorance of US faith-based organizing history. Thus, my employment offered an opportunity for me to investigate the "work" of organizing in a new social, historical context, to interrogate my own "will to activism" in relation to social change trajectories "at home," and to examine how organizing models much like rather than in conflict with anthropological frameworks, address similar concerns about research, engagement, analysis, action and power.

In an interview in 2007, a PICO national director explained that the PICO model applies "social network theory," which means that they focus on developing community leaders to raise concerns that can be addressed through the political process in "multiple arenas." He described how they are

currently testing their capacity at the national level, by posing the following question: "can a non-hierarchal, grassroots, network movement impact national policy?" While this question seemed mostly rhetorical at the time, I would venture an affirmative answer. Contemporary social movements in the US draw on a deep, historical legacy of successful grassroots political mobilization from previous movements here and abroad, and, clearly, the PICO organizing model builds on a particularly rich intersection of activist trajectories. Thus, by citing such influences as Liberation Theology in Latin America and the work of such figures as Paolo Freire, Deborah Meier (1995), as well as Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, US organizations invoke a body of transnational organizing thought that acknowledges the interconnection and multidirectional flows among these movements and trajectories.

As an organizer for two years, which involved direct relationship-building with the community leaders from the five churches I was employed to support as well as four years of conducting formal and informal ethnographic interviews among participants engaged in activism across a range of non-profit groups, unions and NGOs focused on organizing or civic voluntarism, I found that the most prominent, local and national groups historicizing a specific framework or "model" for mobilizing collective action among faith-based communities explicitly cited the influence of civil rights church groups, trade unionism and the lifework of Saul Alinsky (especially 1971). This trajectory, of course, draws the connection of church-based movements to explicitly class-based struggle. Alinsky's criminology research in the late 1930s among youth in the "Back-of-the-Yards" area of Chicago led him, first, to transgress his received role as a silent observer, and secondly to develop a model for creating what he called "an organization of organizations" that would engage working class communities in the political process (see Skocpol 2000; Whitman 2006). The entity he created eventually became the IAF, a strong, secular national network that today mobilizes grassroots collective action in similar ways to PICO in the United States. While various political analysts suggest that in the context of a decline of (participation in) the public sphere, especially since the 1980s, these organizations, like other neopopulist schemes, have "run up against the limits of their own localist parochialism and inertia" (Boggs 1997:759), others seek to ground historically an argument that these efforts continue to build powerful social change forces by equipping an engaged citizenry to make use of new solidarities and activism at state and national levels of governance (Wood 2007).

In this vein, a brief though not shallow, recent history of organizing in the United States recognizes the Civil Rights Movement in large part as a church-based movement, producing new political phenomena, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which served as an umbrella organization of affiliates from various sectors. An array of social science studies explores the intersections of religion with other arenas of public life that point back to the political realm. For instance, examinations of the role of women in changing and politicizing the Black Church (Higgenbotham 1993; 1996) should be linked to the role of these same women in forging national feminist alliances and founding powerful organizations such as NOW, which continues to be construed as a solely white/second wave feminist group (Braude 2004). Other studies show how contemporaneous developments such as Vatican II and the Civil Rights Movement brought about changes in the US that made the Catholic Church a site of social change mobilization, resonating with grassroots social action such as Liberation Theology throughout Latin America. Thus, one might broaden the historical lens for church-based organizing to reexamine such occurrences as the election of the first Catholic US president in relation to the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; to Robert Kennedy's support of the UFW in 1966; and to the emergence of Dr. King's "Poor People's Campaign," but more importantly, we might use these intersections of political and religious life to identify emerging transcommunal, social protest/social change frameworks. In the early 1970s, PICO, formerly the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing, began with secular, neighbourhood organizing in Oakland and recognizing the strength of church-based groups quickly evolved a faith-based model to engage a relatively diverse

sampling of faith communities in the political process, especially Catholic, Protestant and Unitarian Universalist churches, Reform synagogues, and more recently, mosques, and secular non-profits (cf., Wood 2002).

While the 1980s and 1990s are often characterized as being a time of declining political participation; polarizing suburban/conurbanization; disorganized urban dissent (e.g., the 1992 Los Angeles riots); and disempowerment, the charge that this form of organizing is simply issue-based and local, overlooks the sustained energy and powerful relationships that specific victories during this period symbolize. For instance, when SDOP responded to the needs of its own membership, which included undocumented immigrants vulnerable to INS threats and upper middle class families whose grown children could not afford to stay in the region, they seized a political opportunity and commissioned a policy study that demonstrated how city ordinances regarding rents, rental agreements and evictions, in combination with the high cost of housing for workers and families adversely were affecting all sectors. In 2002, the City Council declared a housing state of emergency thus opening the door to many more housing-related gains for SDOP and galvanizing a transcommunal, cross-class alliance including empowered community members, city officials and coalitions across various sectors.

While my focus here is neither how religion serves as an undercurrent in political life, nor simply grassroots organizing among churches, a structural-historical perspective of organizing in the US acknowledges that churches and other faith-based communities have been instrumental in challenging the broader society to confront the contradictions of democratic ideals with the social and economic realities lived by workers, the poor, and people of colour expressly by invoking social justice values. As I prepare to look closely at the organizing model used by PICO and emulated by a host of other US organizations, large and small, I raise for discussion the challenge, which organizing frameworks offer to engaged ethnographic practices: Specifically, organizing frameworks require reciprocal relations of accountability from all participants in a process, which connects empathetic listening to direct action supported by research. My argument is that the best critiques of anthropology as a social science discipline similarly point up the possibility of producing ethnographic inquiry that reflects the needs of the communities with whom we research, suggest specific courses of action that we can take in solidarity with activists; and require accountable relationships throughout a process that does not end with research. Specific points of convergence with engaged anthropology, then, include the emphasis of organizing on the concerns of the people with whom we work, a definition of power that attends to the structural constraints on human behavior, or, phrased differently, a critique of power that seeks to advance and redistribute knowledge about the rules of the political, social and cultural systems in which people can act on their own behalf, both individually and collectively. In what follows, I propose that we can read and work across these domains of power/knowledge production.

Here I turn to a close look at the organizing model and key principles, glossed as "the PICO process," and I relate the latter to the steps for conducting respectful research that engages the radical critique of Western social science as thoughtfully elaborated by Charles Menzies in his work as a Native anthropologist among Indigenous peoples (2001; see also 2004). These closing arguments, then, seek to demonstrate how the primary aims in organizing (the surfacing of issues to be addressed through collective action) overlap with the objectives (and, consequently, values) of engaged research, which is to create knowledge that serves the community.

The PICO Process: "Power Is a Product of Relationships"

While the PICO organizing model can be simplified to five irreducible steps, paid organizers and community members, who are willing to commit to leadership roles for any length of time, receive rigorous local, state and national training on how to develop a shared understanding of the process within the local organizing committee (a.k.a. an "LOC"). Among the tools organizers and leaders accrue are various trainings that break down the model even further, and they practice employing nearly fifty

"principles" that illustrate various aspects of the logic behind the process. When for instance, one says that "organizing is about people, and people are about issues," she reminds herself and others that the work of surfacing issues to be acted upon should never come before an interest in the person. A second principle further elucidates this PICO orientation: "power is a product of relationships." Thus, building the organization is necessary to mobilize the LOC to take collective action, but the strength of collective action lies in people acting out of their own self-interest, which over time broadens to encompass the concerns they share with others. A third principle that synopsizes the entire process is "push on a problem you get issues; push on an issue, you get values." In addition to locating the need to push people to see that injustice contradicts both faith values and democratic values, this statement implies the thrust of the organizing: when people have the opportunity to express their problems and are heard by someone who shares these concerns, they build relationships with other members of the LOC, and sometimes they are ready to take the next steps, which are defining the issue and mobilizing collective action.

When organizers summarize the PICO process, they often use the following flowchart:

1-1's — Research — Action — Reflection — 1-1's

Despite its apparent simplicity, the process of moving an entire congregation to action and beyond can be a long one. Aptly, then, the first and the last step in the PICO process is to listen, using the "one-to-one interview" (hereafter rendered in the organization's nomenclature, "1-1"). By focusing on the PICO process and the methods of anthropology, this article avoids using the personal content of individual 1-1's conducted with community members. Instead I focus on the significance of the interview in the production of power/knowledge. Specifically, I use interviews with organizing directors, the PICO training manual (see references), my training notes from 2003 to 2005, and published literature to draw out the overlap and potential interplay between approaches. Similar to the process for mobilizing social action, Menzies outlines four basic steps for a methodological approach to "respectful research relations" drawn from his experience as a consultant commissioned by First Nations as well as in the capacity of independent researcher (2001:21). In brief, these include initiating dialogue, refining the research plan, conducting the research, and finally, writing, analysis, revision and distribution (22). In his analysis, the primary principle of engaged anthropological approaches should be to resist expanding "the knowledge and power of the dominant society at the expense of the colonized and the excluded," and he underscores the importance of remaining in contact with the community in the following way: "Whenever possible, meetings should be held to discuss and analyze research results.… The ultimate aim is to democratize access to specialized research skills and research as much as possible so that research can by conducted in the community and by the community and/or complement the research already underway in the community" (22). This approach of using direct communication and equipping the people with whom we work to conduct research articulates with the commitments of organizers and leaders to use 1-1's throughout the process and the explicit aim of organizing to recruit, support and train community leaders as they develop their own capacities as empowered agents of social change.

1-1's: Listening, Talking and Testifying

1-1's are seen as the "foundation" of people-centered organizing, because they are used in every stage of the process to sharpen or regain focus and to build relationships. Specifically, 1-1's are structured half-hour interviews with individual church members who have expressed interest in addressing a specific issue or want to learn more about organizing in their community. Conducted as house-visits or meetings at a local coffee shop by organizers, and sometimes by members of the local organizing committee who are participating in a "listening campaign," 1-1's are vital to the PICO process because they give people an opportunity to express their dreams, hopes, and concerns about where they live; to be heard by someone who cares; and to be introduced to the aims and accountabilities of organizing. Organizing seeks to more than merely elicit a personalized description of a problem; rather as part of the process, the interview

begins to ask people to see how their problems impact the entire community and offers the opportunity to take responsibility to make systemic change as part of a collective. Thus, these interviews begin the process by identifying problems that can be framed as issues to be acted upon, and initiating the relationships that establish power for the organization—that is, those between the organizer and the individual, between the individual and the organizing committee, and between the LOC and the broader society.

Research Is the Bridge

According to PICO, "research is the bridge that takes us across problems to issues," and as the process flowchart illustrates research traverses the expanse from listening to action. Expressed more evocatively by a lead organizer in San Diego, cutting an actionable issue is "like slicing a loaf of bread." Whereas a problem, such as poverty, is general, vague, often overwhelming and indigestible, an issue, on the other hand is specific, identifying who is affected, who is responsible, who can do something, and which discrete steps can bring about change. PICO research then is a collective process, where LOC members meet with each other and think together about how to personalize and polarize problems into issues. Personalizing a problem is crucial, because problems are specific to real people, thus building the power to make change requires relationships among specific persons. Polarizing the issue, on the other hand, clarifies what should be done—for instance, noticing that city allocations pay for sidewalks in La Jolla, and not in the barrio frames the problem as a "winnable" issue, invoking fairness and justice. At this stage, members of the LOC may also meet with officials who may be aware of these issues, know about some of the challenges, and share a common policy agenda. Again, 1-1's within the LOC are vital to this step in the process, because they identify the relationships to be drawn upon during the action; that is, the resulting action connects the person who experiences the problem to others with similar experience and to the public officials who are responsible and have the authority to make change.

Action: Pushing the Issues

In PICO-speak, "an issue is a problem we can act upon," so all of the steps of organizing channel problems and pursue action. Actions, or public events, usually occur at the LOC's home church and typically involve publicly confronting public officials with the power to make change, "pinning them" to acknowledging their responsibility, and asking them to commit to taking a concrete step to create change. Here, 1-1's are instrumental to the identification of people who are willing to speak out and to their preparation of testimonies that powerfully illustrate the issue and effectively describe an attainable policy change. When sharing their testimonies, LOC members simultaneously demonstrate to members of the church that their voices (and numbers) matter and to public officials that a valuable constituency both demands change and supports them in addressing community problems. Thus, in the long term, actions "get results" in terms of the policy change and services that low-income communities need, but in the shorter term, actions create situations where community members demonstrate discipline (as is implied in the word "organization"), and exercise and build power. To repeat in PICO language: "power is a product of relationships," so actions forge and strengthen relationships in the LOC, between the LOC and the broader community, and between the community and public officials.

Conclusion: Are Organizing Models Consistent with Methodologies for Engaged Anthropology?

Of course, the PICO process (or model) has many facets that I leave unexplored here, but as the flowchart demonstrated, the process returns to its beginning and represents a cycle, recognizing that issues and interests shift, but people and relationships among them endure. Ideally, the process never ends. Abbreviating the key principle for momentary emphasis to "organizing is about people," one might observe that anthropology is also about people, and that engaged anthropology, too, considers the concerns of people with whom we conduct research to be

of critical importance. I have argued that if the purpose of research in organizing is to understand "what could be versus the reality of what is," and "what we can do to change it," then the aims of engaged anthropological research might be understood similarly. What does engaged anthropology as such call us to do or be? Who is activist research for? What contribution does it make? If anthropologists concur with organizers that power is indeed a product of relationships, which ethnographic methods or practices support the relationships that demand, support and facilitate positive social change?

In the PICO model, the structured interview is not a one-on-one, but a "one to one," establishing that "relationships are reciprocal," *quid pro quo*. The interview, then, offers more than merely a method for gathering information and a process for handling testimonies; rather it channels the information through three main exchanges, listening, empathy, and challenge. All of these interactions interpellate both speaker and listener into a two-way relationship. I suggest that decolonized, ethnographic inquiry offers similar opportunities. The challenge from an organizing perspective is when the questions move from listening and actively hearing to confronting rationalizations and contradictions: Why do you think this problem exists; why don't people get involved; and what have you done or not; and why? These questions suggest that there might be a solution, that responsibility rests somewhere specific, and that all parties could work together to act. The PICO model proposes that "challenge involves risk" and "creates tension." The challenge to the anthropologist who is called to action, then, is: are you ready to be in relationship, to be with people where they are at, and to walk them on their journey? And if not, why?

I have attempted to address this last question by reflecting on and interrogating my own role and practice as an apprentice, anthropologist, and organizer in Guatemala and the U.S. In this reflection on the interplay between organizing models and respectful approaches to engaged anthropology, I have attempted to contextualize ongoing disciplinary attempts to decolonize social science paradigms alongside and within shared activist trajectories and to examine how the desires and intentions of researchers seeking to contribute to social change might shift to situate researchers in solidarity (a powerful relationship) with activists and organizers by simultaneously employing respectful, engaged methodological approaches, socially and historically-contextualizing our shared trajectories, and acknowledging values as potentially more useful than an ideology that leaves the anthropologist as an ineffectual, objective outsider.

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