Preface: Activist Research in the Chiapas Conflict

I CONDUCTED THE RESEARCH for this book over a period of nine years, from 1995 to 2004. I have defined my approach to this work as "activist research," though this term may suggest a preconceived and programmatic approach that it did not actually entail. In fact, my activist research included several different types of political-academic engagements over the course of my time in Chiapas, as well as an evolving understanding of the benefits and complications of an activist commitment in the research process. I took an activist approach for several interrelated reasons: my own long-standing commitment to activism for social justice, the circumstances on the ground in Chiapas, and the need to address the variety of ethical and practical concerns of anthropology as a discipline and in relation to the production of knowledge more generally. It is my belief that activist research does more than allow anthropologists to be "good progressives." Critically engaged activist research can also potentially contribute to the transformation of the discipline itself because it entails an overt positioning of the researcher vis-à-vis the research subjects, integrates those subjects into the research process, and recognizes and validates ways of knowing and theorizing social processes other than academic ones. In doing so, activist research allows us to address (though not resolve) the politics of knowledge production and may provide insights that could not be generated through traditional research. I have given myself the luxury of the space of this preface for a consideration of these assertions through my own research process, not to provide an ideal example of activist research, but rather to offer material for further discussion and debate.

Why Activist Research? Anthropology and the Politics of Knowledge Production

I came to the discipline of anthropology as an activist, certain that further academic study interested me only to the extent that it made for better understandings of "the political" and thus for better possibilities for social change. I had found an ideal program: my cohort in Socio-Cultural Anthropology at UC Davis was made up of activists of a variety of stripes, and the training we received included a continual regrounding of theoretical debates in the political realities of social struggle, just as it continually complicated our notions of social struggle and social change through complex and challenging theorization. Yet I came to anthropology largely unfamiliar with the discipline and its debates: my academic background was in international relations and area studies. It was as I learned more about these debates and developed a commitment to anthropological practice that the decolonization of the discipline became intimately bound up with my other political goals.

In the early 1990s, anthropology was grappling with several decades of internal and external critiques of anthropological theories and methodologies that had caused the discipline to question and redefine some of its most basic precepts. These critiques were launched from various quarters: not only from our postcolonial research "subjects,"[1] but also from feminist, postmodern, critical race, and postcolonial theorists, who charged that anthropologists' ostensibly neutral ethnographic descriptions often reproduced discourses that served to naturalize social inequalities. Critical analyses pointed to the historical collusion of the social sciences, and in particular the discipline of anthropology, with colonial power, by producing representations that supported colonialist logics and rationalities (Asad 1973; Gough 1968; Said 1978). Such critiques came not only in the realm of high theory but also from postcolonial research subjects themselves, who were increasingly vocal and contestatory in their engagements with anthropologists.[2]

In the same period, scientific epistemology came under fire from a variety of perspectives, including feminist, postmodern, and poststructuralist theorists (Baudrillard 1988; Foucault 1972; Haraway 1989; Harding 1986; Kuhn 1962). The notion of anthropology as a social "science" was challenged and the validity of claims to a knowable truth regarding human cultures was seriously undermined (Berreman 1981). Critical analyses in these fields made clear that anthropologists'

own cultural and political perspectives shape our ethnographic descriptions, belying our supposed objectivity. Feminists demonstrated that anthropological studies had androcentric and eurocentric biases and assumptions and that dominant conceptions and practices of knowledge attribution, acquisition, and justification systematically disadvantaged women and other subordinated groups (E. Anderson 2006). Feminists made patently clear that our representations of others were products of our own social positioning, our own "situatedness" in relation to those people and cultural dynamics we chose to represent (Haraway 1988; hooks 1995; Minh-ha 1989; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002 [1989]).

Further, this was not simply a question of whether we could or could not accurately know and describe our research subjects: our subjective representations had concrete and at times powerful effects on those we represented in our work. Analyses of anthropology's complicity with colonial and postcolonial administrations revealed the ways objectivism had been used to obscure the political uses of the knowledge anthropologists produce. This included both unintentional reproduction of discourses of power and overt political engagements, such as spying for government agencies under the guise of fieldwork (Horowitz 1967; Price 2000; Wolf and Jorgeson 1970).

These multiple critiques and the discipline's introspection were severe enough to be termed "the crisis of representation" (Clifford and Marcus 1986), and this "crisis" led to serious rethinking of the anthropological project in ways that would address the critiques and yet salvage anthropology's unique contribution to human knowledge. This was not an easy task, particularly for those who wished to make anthropology useful and relevant beyond the academe. While the critiques of positivist objectivity and the politics of representation were important for the discipline of anthropology, they also had disturbing relativist underbellies. That is, if all knowledge claims are suspect and no one can know what's "really true," then all truth claims could be understood as equally true and valid or, alternatively, all simply reducible to underlying relations of power (C. R. Hale 1999). As an activist and an anthropologist, I struggled for epistemological footing on terrain where the most "radical" theorists were busily deconstructing metanarratives and challenging capital "T" truth claims— undertakings I fully agreed with yet found terribly demobilizing. I sought a path forward through the detritus left behind by deconstruction that was not dangerously full of U-turns veering back toward positivist objectivity and unreflexive empiricism.

Anthropology Beyond the "Crisis"

Most anthropologists have recognized and accepted the basic constructivist insight about the politically situated nature of all knowledge production, including how research agendas are set, what questions are defined as legitimate, and what counts as theoretically valid knowledge production. For many, reflexively "situating oneself" in relation to the research subjects and the work has become an indispensable part of anthropological practice, vital to recognizing and addressing the politics of knowledge production.

For a smaller group of anthropologists, reflexivity did not go far enough in addressing the question of power dynamics in research and knowledge production. A variety of approaches have been taken over the years that entail some form of political commitment on the part of the anthropologist to the people with whom one works. Particularly in Latin America, advocacy models such as the organization Cultural Survival, founded in 1972 by Harvard anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis, envisioned anthropologists' role as one of representing, defending, and supporting the members of disenfranchised groups who were unable to promote their own interests (see Maybury-Lewis 1990; Lutz 2005). The cultural survival model of advocacy engagement has remained small but strong within anthropology, despite some critiques of paternalism and a relatively limited geographic focus on South American Indians. In a different vein, "participatory action research" redefined research relationships by striving for horizontal interactions in which research problems were defined by co-researchers (academics and people involved in the processes under study), who engaged in cycles of mutual reflection and redefinition of problems and goals based on a Freirean pedagogical model (Fals Borda 1979; Fals Borda and Rahman 1991; Greenwood and Levin 1998). Some scholars emphasized the need to decolonize the relationship between researcher and research subject (C. R. Hale 2007; Harrison 1991; Mutua and Swadener 2004; L. T. Smith 1999); others specifically called for a form of anthropology that was committed to some form of human liberation (Gordon 1991; Harrison 1991; Scheper-Hughes 1995).

Influenced by these currents, I came to the research project in Chiapas with dual aspirations that went beyond an academic interest in understanding the dynamics of neoliberal globalization, the discourse of human rights, and indigenous resistance in Chiapas. I was also interested in participating in that struggle and allowing my own insights to emerge from engagement. Finally, I

sought, at a minimum, to engage in an anthropological research practice that addressed the politics of knowledge production.

For me, this approach entailed making explicit my own positionality as both researcher and activist, as well as the views that I hold (e.g., that universal human rights exist), even while recognizing the socially constructed and historically contingent nature of such claims. It required finding the places where my own politics overlapped with those of certain actors in Chiapas and attempting to build an activist research project in that space of overlap. Finally, it involved working to make the political decisions involved in knowledge production in collaboration with the people who were the subjects of this research. Over the course of years my approach was constantly evolving as I grappled with the rapidly shifting situation on the ground in Chiapas, my own personal circumstances, and the continual rethinking of the work that this approach entailed.

My own commitment to ongoing struggle for social justice shaped my engagement with anthropology and the kinds of questions I was interested in researching. Indeed, the fact that I was in Chiapas was because of the recently launched indigenous uprising and the high-profile social struggle there. As a mixed-descent Native American (Chickasaw, Choctaw, and European) and an active citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, I hold a strong personal commitment to seeking justice for Indian peoples. Yet, I was born and raised in Los Angeles, not in an indigenous cultural context. I do not speak a Native language and because of my phenotype I am not readily identified by others as Indian. While my family history is intimately linked to the history of oppression of Indian peoples, I have not suffered personal discrimination or racism as a Native American.

My already complex identity was further complicated in Mexico. Here, my positionality shifted to that of "gringa," a modification of my identity that invokes the power relationships inherent in north-south border crossings and denotes phenotypic and cultural difference as well as a series of gender stereotypes (see A. Adams 1997; Nelson 1999). Furthermore, until very recently in Mexico, everyone from government officials to leftist intellectuals to indigenous communities themselves understood indigenous identity to be based on language and dress. Hence the comment I heard more than once during my work in Chiapas that someone "used to be indigenous" but no longer was, because upon leaving the community that person had lost his or her indigenous language and stopped wearing traditional dress. (This particular historical construction of indigenousness is analyzed further in Chapter 4.) Whether or not I had chosen to identify myself to the indigenous people I worked with as

Native American (in general, I did not), they would have found it difficult, if not impossible, to identify me as such. Furthermore, an attempt to align with them politically on this basis, even if it had been possible, would have served to occlude the power dynamics inherent in our alliance.

For these reasons, I approached my activist work and research in Chiapas as "solidarity" work in Mohanty's (2003) sense, entailing:

> [M]utuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis of relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. (2003:10)

More than simple alliance with others in a universalizing way ("we are all workers/women/indigenous people"), it is a politics in which we recognize difference and different forms of oppression, yet form our politics around common, overlapping goals.

This form of political alliance is distinct from the "solidarity" of a previous era, in which I worked alongside many other *solidario/as* in Nicaragua supporting the Sandinista revolution and in San Francisco in support of the leftist struggle in El Salvador. The solidarity work of the 1980s was geared to opposing U.S. imperialism by supporting movements or governments that challenged it. However, all too often it entailed a paternalistic element of "helping" others in their struggles and left unexamined the relations of power inherent in this kind of political action. Nelson (1999) analyzes the problematic nature of gringa solidarity in Latin America, which she argues is often comfortably unreflexive about "forms of self-fashioning" that construct the *solidarias* as "good gringas" in the field of action of pure "good guys" and "bad guys," and the manner in which such relations of solidarity have "complicity in the on-going production of relations of oppression."

Mohanty's formulation is directed toward a feminist solidarity, and thus is centrally concerned with overcoming the problematic solidarity of "sisterhood" in which diversity and difference were erased (Anzaldúa 1987, 1990; Lorde 1984; Mohanty 1988; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002 [1989]). This can also be usefully applied to leftist solidarity of a former era in which it was assumed that we were all part of one struggle and that focusing on or emphasizing difference only weakened that struggle. This conceptualization of effective resistance conveniently erased the particular forms of oppression suffered by different social actors and thus the distinct relations of power between them

(potentially reproducing those relations in the process). Feminists of color and intersectionality theory have provided clear analyses of the manner in which distinct social actors experience different and often multiple intersecting and interlocking forms of oppression (Collins 1991; Crenshaw 1991; Sudbury 1998). Mohanty's use of solidarity assumes that these multiple experiences of oppression exist, but Mohanty argues that there is possibility of alliance across them, at points of overlap, without erasing that difference. Such a solidarity must be tied, Mohanty argues, to a decolonization of feminist theory and practice, to undermine the structures of power that work to reproduce hierarchies of power in solidarity relationships.

I sought, in pursuing activist research in Chiapas, the areas of coincidence between my own feminist, antiracist, and anticapitalist politics and those of indigenous people waging a social struggle that forefronted many of these same goals. In general terms, the areas where they coincided were easy to identify. In concrete practical terms, they were often much more difficult. Several of the chapters in this book reflect the terrain of overlap on which my research was carried out. But this was never an uncomplicated terrain, as Chapter 4 in particular reflects. Throughout, the stark differences in power and privilege between me and the indigenous people I worked with reminded me continually of the need to pursue decolonizing practice in anthropology.

Decolonizing Anthropology

What constitutes decolonizing practice? Undoubtedly, there are many approaches one might take. For me, activist research provides a vehicle for addressing some of the most important issues. One is the overt recognition of and continued reflection about the differential power relations that exist in the research relationship. Reflexivity about the researcher's race, class, gender, and political and economic situatedness in relation to those she works with, along with attempts to take into account how these affect her research and analysis, is vital to addressing this issue. Ideally, such reflexivity implies a continual interrogation of the relations of power inherent in research relationships. Activist research builds on and extends this decolonizing move. In fact, Charles R. Hale (2007) argues that formulating explicitly activist research alliances, making our political commitments explicit up front, and maintaining the social dynamics of the research process open to an ongoing dialogue with the research subjects are simply taking "positioning" to its logical conclusion. Critical analysis that is informed by an explicit politics has to grapple with those politics overtly, rather

than cede to the tendency to downplay their role. Critical analysis is continually drawn back to political grounding, whereas political strategy is continually challenged and potentially strengthened by the insights of critical analysis.

The second aspect of a decolonized anthropology involves a distinct kind of relationship with those research "subjects" / political allies, one in which they are not the "*materia prima*"[3] of the research but rather are theorists of their own social processes whose knowledge differs from but is equally valid and valued as anthropological knowledge and theorizing. A collaborative engagement with research subjects, based on an explicit political alliance and shared goals, can contribute to a distinct kind of research relationship in which knowledge production is in some way shared.

This is important not only because some anthropologists wish to approach their subjects differently. Most anthropologists, certainly those who work with previously colonized peoples, confront the fact that their research subjects are neither interested in being researched for abstract purposes nor "saved" by well-intentioned gringos or any other academics, for that matter. My experience in Chiapas has been that indigenous people expect you to situate yourself—they want to know who you are, why you are there, and what you bring with you in terms of political disposition, what you plan to get out of your relationship with them, and how your work will serve their overall goals. Perhaps obviously, positioning yourself is not a strategic question of how to get access to the people and information you want but rather one of the professional ethics involved. Anthropologists today must answer ethical questions not only for themselves or in response to abstract questions on human subject review forms; such questions will in many cases be raised vigorously by the people involved in our studies.

The Rocky Road of Activist Work in Chiapas

In Chiapas in the mid-1990s, the open conflict and highly polarized political landscape made it impossible to work as a neutral researcher without defining myself in some way. My "research subjects," the people in the communities and organizations with whom I worked, would not have allowed it. And in the conflicted communities of Chiapas, it quickly became obvious that their position was, "If you aren't with us, you're against us." Without aligning yourself politically, it would thus be nearly impossible to get anyone to talk to you, being, as it were, the enemy.

Whether or not I had chosen to position myself as an activist, I would have

been positioned politically by others. I had a project about human rights, in a conflicted area where rights are hotly contested and regularly violated. In the popular political imaginary, there was a generalized and definitive alignment of "human rights" with Zapatista support. All one needed to know was that you were "from human rights" (which actually involved a complex chain of relationships among the communities, the Catholic diocese of San Cristóbal, the Fray Bartolomé human rights center, NGOs, and individual activists that is analyzed in later chapters) in order to define you as "on the side of the Zapatistas." There was no "neutral observer" stance available; human rights, and hence I, were located in a very particular place within the complex configurations of power and struggle.

It was clear to me from my first days in Chiapas that I would need to define my position as a researcher and an activist, integrate this into my project, and keep it front and center throughout my research period. Beyond the practical question of whether we must ally with our research subjects in order to get the work done, and the ethical question of whether we *should*, there is also the question of what it means for anthropological practice if we don't. For those concerned with decolonizing the research relationship, an activist engagement provides a way for mutual goals to be made explicit and defined in dialogue between researcher and research subject. This does not mean that it will be an equal dialogue; relations defined in larger fields of power still determine this relationship. However, it necessitates the acknowledgment of and dialogue about those power relations in the definition of a shared project.

Shortly after beginning work in Chiapas, I took a position as the director of the San Cristóbal office of Global Exchange, a U.S.-based NGO that at the time was conducting mainly human rights observation and accompaniment work in Chiapas. My goals in doing this were several. First, I needed to ground myself in the day-to-day realities of human rights work in Chiapas. Second, this work allowed me to situate myself; I defined myself through that job as working to support indigenous rights and human rights, although I recognized that this automatically situated me as a Zapatista supporter in the eyes of many, if not most, people on all sides of the conflict (an interpretation that was not, in fact, erroneous). Third, it gave me something concrete to offer communities: my presence as an observer, or that of the volunteers from my organization, and a channel through which to get information about their human rights situations out to a larger "global" community. This was my first approach to activist research: having something to offer to the communities I was researching and simultaneously

carrying out research on the same or related issues. It provided me a way to situate myself, to become immersed in the issues, and to give something back to the communities of study. I worked at Global Exchange for a year and a half, leaving shortly before the birth of my daughter in February of 1998.

Several months later, I began working as an advisor to the *Red de Defensores Comunitarios por los Derechos Humanos* (Community Human Rights Defenders' Network), which I will simply call the *Red*. This organization prepares representatives of indigenous communities in conflicted areas of the state to conduct legal defense of the rights of the people in their regions. Although it was not my original intention, the *Red* itself eventually became one of my field research sites, its *defensores* (the participants in the *Red*) becoming my research subjects. Initially, I thought of my work with the *Red* in a similar way to my work with Global Exchange—an involved way to engage my research subjects and provide them something in return for what they gave to me. But over time, I began to learn so much about the very processes I was trying to get at—the relationships among indigenous communities, this nonlocal discourse, and the legal structures of the state—that I realized the *Red* was becoming not just *one* of my sites of study but the primary one. From the *defensores* I learned why they and their regions were interested in human rights, how they understood them, what they saw as important in relation to human rights issues, what they hoped to gain from becoming human rights defenders. I saw, in action, the *defensores* become the vehicles, or bearers, of the external discourse of human rights to their communities as well as the vehicles of its redeployment. Through the *Red* I also developed an activist engagement in the community of Nicolás Ruiz, another principal site of research. Here, the mechanics of direct dialogue with community members around overlapping political goals led to insights about community identity and cultural change that I cannot be sure I would have gained in a more traditional research interaction.[4]

There was a difference between the activist research I did with Global Exchange and that with the *Red* because my work with the *Red* and my interactions with the *defensores* shaped my own vision of how I should approach the problem and what was interesting about it. My work with the *Red* also motivated me to attempt to do research and writing that are beneficial and empowering to the *defensores* and to their communities, based on their own vision of their goals and aspirations. In other words, this involved not just simultaneously doing research and activism on the same issues, but letting an engaged

dialogue with research subjects help guide the project. One result of such an engagement is that the process and the end product of knowledge production are part of the "activism."

While activist research had its practical, ethical, and epistemological benefits, it also had its difficulties and quandaries. One practical issue for conducting research that was absolutely unavoidable in Chiapas was that of being positioned as a human rights activist and hence a Zapatista. If indigenous communities made this association and defined people this way, it is not hard to imagine that the federal and state governments and their respective security forces did so too. Once defined and associated with a human rights project, in some senses I became an actor in the conflict. This had the logical outcome of hindering my ability to conduct certain kinds of research, closing certain doors to me permanently, and putting my research project in constant risk of immediate termination.

A xenophobia campaign against foreigners in Chiapas was waged by the Mexican government beginning in the spring of 1997, with the detention and expulsion by the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (INM) of ten European activists who provided human rights accompaniment to participants in a two-day march from the Northern Zone to the capital Tuxtla Gutiérrez to demand the release of indigenous Zapatista political prisoners.[5] Surveillance of foreigners and cancellation of tourist cards of foreigners found in the conflict zones continued throughout the year and accelerated intensely in early 1998, following the massacre at Acteal.[6] Between 1997 and 2000, dozens of people were summarily expelled, including anthropologists and people associated with Global Exchange. As I lay in bed recovering from a cesarean birth, people stopped by telling stories of immigration agents roaming the city of San Cristóbal on mopeds, stopping anyone who looked foreign and demanding their papers. Global Exchange became a prime target of the governmental policy of targeting foreign human rights workers, and editorials placed by the government in local newspapers accused the organization of everything from making money off the conflict to intervening in the politics of the country. Needless to say, the immigration question made doing research exceptionally difficult because of the threat of summary expulsion from the country. Once marked as a human rights worker (i.e., Zapatista), I could no longer travel freely to indigenous communities, interview any government or military sources, or have an open affiliation with any research institute.[7]

Multi-sited Ethnography

The complications of militarization, paramilitarization, and immigration re-strictions as rigorous as they were arbitrary—especially the roadblocks set up by all three groups on roads throughout the state, and particularly in the Zapatista base areas—affected my choice of field sites and eventually the whole shape of my research project. At the outset, I had intended to do a community study, examining how the globalized discourse of human rights and the heavily imposed norms of the state were playing out in a local setting. I changed communities several times over the course of as many years, as the conflict spread from region to region, and militarization, then paramilitarization, then immigration control covered broader and broader swaths of the state. This was frustrating and disheartening as I tried to conduct coherent research, and on more than one occasion I despaired of ever being able to carry out my project. Yet, I found that one positive aspect of this ever-shifting field was that it gave me a strong sense of the diversity of understandings at the local level, from region to region, community to community, and even within communities. This book is not, then, an ethnography of a community, or a region, or a state. It is multi-sited, following the discourse of human rights through various terrains (Marcus 1995) and more importantly through the spaces of dialogue between them.

As various observers have noted, globalization has altered both what cultural anthropologists are concerned with and how they go about studying it (Kearney 1995; Marcus 1995). As anthropologists have trained their analytic lens on processes such as transnational capitalism, migration, diaspora, media, science and technology, and traveling forms of cultural production such as art and music, there has been a concurrent move away from traditional single-site ethnography and toward multi-sited research. Studies of deterritorialized subjects and subjectivities have proliferated, impelling anthropologists to seek "new paths of connection" and to express them on a "differently configured spatial canvas" (Marcus 1995:98). Various conceptualizations have been elaborated, from Appadurai's (1990) abstracted "scapes" to Marcus's schematic "follow the people, thing, or metaphor" (1995). The research for this book involved multiple, overlapping sites of observation, and participation, allowing me to cross-cut the inherent dichotomy of the global and local and to get at processes constituted in multiple and fractal terrains.

One principal "site" of this study, as I have said, was the *Red de Defensores Comunitarios por los Derechos Humanos*. The community of Nicolás Ruiz was

another. This community from the Central Region of the state (about three hours south of San Cristóbal, most of it on a dirt road) had the advantage of not being located on the other side of a military or immigration checkpoint. An extremely conflicted community, it does have its own state police encampment, but it was possible to enter the community without passing through the camp. Intracommunity conflict, tied to the larger conflict and counterinsurgency in the state, left a death toll of over one hundred people between 1996 and 2000 and earned the municipality the dubious title "Tierra Sin Ley" (Gurguha 2000). The office of the *Presidencia Municipal*, *Bienes Comunales*, and the people of Nicolás Ruiz were extremely open and greatly facilitated my research there.

Some of my data are from other parts of the state, particularly the conflicted Northern Zone, with which I came into direct contact as director of Global Exchange, and later through the *Red de Defensores*. I also observed a great deal while residing in San Cristóbal, particularly dynamics within the human rights "community" and among the elite residents of San Cristóbal (*Coletos*). All of this was participant observation and contributes to my data and shapes my analysis.

For obvious reasons, it was difficult to "follow the discourse" onto the terrain of the state. I had originally intended to interview state officials from the (then governmental, now quasi-independent) National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), the attorney general's office (PGR), members of the judiciary, and party leaders and members of Congress from both official and opposition political parties, to elicit information regarding shifting state discourses regarding human rights; various "state" perceptions of international human rights work; the particular forms which the mobilization of rights claims has taken in Chiapas; and overt state responses to the reconfigurations in power relations being brought about by new forms of global-local interaction.

Unfortunately, showing up to interview them ("Hello, I'm a foreigner who's writing about human rights in Chiapas") would at that time have been—possibly quite literally—turning myself in to the authorities for expulsion. I was able to interview a representative of the state human rights commission (the CEDH) on one occasion and had informal discussions with people who worked at the CNDH. I was also able to engage in a year of legal studies at the *Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas* in San Cristóbal as part of a two-year, cross-disciplinary training and research fellowship I received from the SSRC-MacArthur Program in International Peace and Security in a Changing World.

This allowed me to gain knowledge of the Mexican legal system with regard to human rights. But more importantly, it provided me an understanding of state legal discourse regarding these rights. This allowed me to situate the interaction of globalized discourses and local actors in the framework of the discourse and legal regimes of the nation-state and to explore their dialogic interaction and mutual constitution. I also carefully followed the prolific and ever-shifting public discourse of state officials regarding human rights.

Transforming the Discipline

Of course, there are many tensions and contradictions inherent in activist research that are more complex than practical issues of this kind. What to do when research collaborators' perspective on what should be included in the analysis differs from one's own, whether our "interventions" in local processes alter them in harmful ways, and whether (or when) activist research serves to alleviate researchers' guilt about the power imbalances inherent in research relationships without resolving them are all questions each researcher must deliberate in his or her own research situation. I have written about some of these issues elsewhere (Speed 2006a). Nevertheless, despite the contradictions and dilemmas posed by activist research, it offers better possibilities for addressing the problematic nature of anthropological knowledge production than do the alternatives of continuing to rely on a nonexistent objectivity or a retrenchment in the realm of the theoretical and the textual, allowing cultural critique to stand alone as anthropology's contribution and avoiding the messier engagement with increasingly vocal and critical research subjects.

Above, I suggested that there are dual forces at work in the decolonization of the discipline: one from the researcher and one from the research subjects. I want to suggest in closing that the researchers' engaging in a politics of reflexivity, while vitally important rendering visible the power dynamics at work in anthropological research, is nevertheless not enough to move the discipline beyond the neocolonial framework it is bound by. A critical engagement with our research subjects, which makes them part of the process of knowledge production itself, is a vital component of a decolonized anthropology. The tension between political commitment and critical reflection will always exist to one extent or another. Activist research has the benefit of bringing that tension to the fore, maintaining it under scrutiny as part of the project, and thus potentially transforming it into a productive tension.

A Final Note About Names

The trust invested in me by people in the communities because of my role as activist also meant that I was given a good deal of information potentially dangerous to them should I publish it. I have tried to be careful in my writing. I have omitted any information I feel would place the people whom I worked with in danger, now or at some potential future political juncture. Following conventional anthropological practice, I have given pseudonyms to the people who spoke with me, with the exception of some public figures and those individuals who specifically requested that I use their real name. Pseudonyms always appear in quotation marks, for example, "Juan." These pseudonyms stand throughout the text to remind us that the discourse we are following is grounded in very real dynamics for the people the names represent.