

I Introduction

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History of the Initiative

Latin American studies as an integral and fully recognized field of scholarly inquiry exists only for those accustomed to viewing the region from north of the US-Mexican border. Although never completely stable or uncontested, Latin American studies had its first heyday between the mid-1960s and late 1980s, at the height of the Cold War, when the region became the focus of intense geopolitical contention. This in turn lent an added urgency to the northern universities' mandate to give special priority to research, graduate student training, and undergraduate teaching on "Latin America." From a sociology of knowledge perspective, it is perhaps less important to distinguish the "progressive" or anti-establishment currents of this scholarship from those uncritically aligned with the imperial designs of the United States and its allies. Despite their profound differences in perspective and substance, those at both poles (and most shades of gray in between) shared key premises that constituted their subject of study. When serious challenges emerged in the 1990s, especially from quantitative comparativist scholars who cast doubt on the viability of Latin American studies—too particularistic, no theoretical promise, and so on—many of these area studies stalwarts set aside their differences in defense of their field.

While two decades later it is clear that Latin American studies has remained vibrant in the face of such challenges, in our view its resilience is due to innovation, rather than to a merely reactive defense of deeply

ingrained premises and institutional practices.¹ Roughly parallel to the dissent from comparativists working on a large scale, a completely distinct current of critique and reformulation came from the margins within US society and its academic institutions and from Latin America. While for a time, the combination of these multiple and diverse criticisms produced a general atmosphere of embattlement and concerns that the field would buckle under in the face of such widespread questioning, we now can see that such pessimism was unwarranted. Moreover, continued and renewed vibrancy has come at a time, especially since September 2001, when the geopolitical attention of the United States and its allies has turned sharply away from Latin America toward other parts of the world and when financial times for university-based scholarship have not been especially good. The principal reason for this achievement, we contend, is the strong inclination to innovate, to rethink ingrained premises and received wisdom, to move from critique to reformulation. In this case the old adage has proven to be accurate: change is a source of strength.

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) exemplifies this self-fortifying innovation and, given its prominence, LASA also has played a key role in producing the effects that we now observe more generally in the field. Three dimensions of critique and reformulation have been especially important, all of which directly engage the premises that constituted Latin American studies as a field in the previous era. The first of these premises is the “southward gaze”: the idea that Latin America has been constituted as a region, and therefore as a field of study, by scholars and practitioners situated in the North, such that research and teaching, however “progressive” or well intentioned, reinforces the power inequities associated with the broader geopolitical relations. The key innovation in this realm has been the gradual displacement of the “us”-studying-“them” framework with the principle of horizontal collaboration, whereby knowledge about Latin America is produced through power-sensitive dialogue among diversely positioned scholars, both in the North and in the South.

The second critique focuses on the elite and nation-state–centric frame of Latin American studies, which has highlighted certain topics and perspectives while rendering others largely invisible. The reformulation here (not just in Latin American studies but in the humanities and social sciences at large) has been toward increasing recognition of the multiple axes of inequity that cross cut Latin American societies and that tend to be naturalized if they are not subject to sustained analytical scrutiny.² Latin American studies has been revitalized, for example, by the increasing prominence of topics situated at the bottom, and at the margins of socio-economic hierarchies. In many

cases—the study of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples is one prime example—this also has involved a gradually increasing presence of intellectuals from these subaltern groups, which has added further vitality and innovation to the scholarship.

The third critique set its sights on the tenacious premises that underlie the scholarly keywords “objectivity” and, in some circles, “positivism.” The idea here is that the production of scholarly knowledge depends on a sharp separation between scholar and objects of study and on the preservation of a neutral or value-free space from which research and knowledge production activities are carried forward, unperturbed by political-ideological influence and unaffected by the pervasive power inequities in the world “outside” academia. This position has been challenged simultaneously from a number of quarters, including post-structural theorists, institutional sociologists, historians of science, and in a more commonsense vein, those academics who modestly acknowledge that practitioners of various sorts—activists, nongovernmental organization (NGO) staffers, government analysts, organic intellectuals, and the like—often have deeper and more accurate knowledge about their preferred research topic than they do.

The Otros Saberes Initiative, conceived as a LASA project in 2004, embodies and contributes to each of these three critical reformulations, especially the third. The central objective of the Initiative from its inception has been twofold: to promote collaborative research between civil society– and academy-based intellectuals focused on research topics of interest to both, giving priority to topics to which the civil society organizations in question assign special importance; and to increase the presence of civil society–based intellectuals at the LASA Congress and in LASA networks, so that they may benefit from the flow of scholarly exchange in these activities, as well as enrich LASA with their presence. Lengthy discussions with Milagros Pereyra-Rojas, Sonia Alvarez, Kevin Healy, Kimberly Theidon, Deborah Barry, and David Mhyre, among many others, as well as constructive deliberations in the LASA Executive Committee (EC), yielded a proposal, which the EC then endorsed and funded with a seed grant of twenty thousand dollars. In part due to the particular interests and commitments of the founders with indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, and in part due to these peoples’ strategic importance to the critical reformulations mentioned above, we decided to make them the focus of the first phase. The proposal struck a chord with three institutions that historically have been strong supporters of LASA—Ford Foundation, Open Society Institute, and the Inter-American Foundation—all of whom expressed particular enthusiasm for the conceptual innovation that the Otros Saberes Initiative embodied. With support from each of them

as well as from Harvard University,³ by the beginning of 2006 we had raised enough to fund the full array of proposed activities for six research teams.

The Call for Proposals for the first round of the Otros Saberes Initiative tapped an abundant vein of existing work that fit the program's requirements, and inspired many others to conceive and propose new research collaborations. The LASA Secretariat received an overwhelming 175 applications, from more than a dozen countries. The six-member Selection Committee, with a composition that mirrored the collaborative character of the Initiative, met in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at the campus of the School for Advanced Research, to choose the six most exciting and deserving proposals.⁴ The Initiative also provided for the recruitment of two "methodology consultants," with ample experience in collaborative research methods with indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. We were very fortunate that Professors Keisha-Kahn Y. Perry (Brown) and Joanne Rappaport (Georgetown) accepted our offer to serve in this role. Perry and Rappaport visited each team in the site where the research was underway to learn from and to document the collaborative methods being used and to offer advice when appropriate. The results of these rewarding and challenging visits and their aftermath are presented in the co-authored chapter that follows this introduction. One of the first products of these interactions was a change in the designation of their role within the Initiative; Perry and Rappaport became *investigadoras solidarias* (researchers in solidarity) rather than "methodology consultants," at the request of the research teams and in keeping with the collaborative principle of the Initiative. These methodological issues—how to do collaborative research, what tensions or obstacles emerge in the process, and how they are confronted—alongside the series of substantive findings that each team brought to the fore, formed the agenda for the two-day workshop that followed the LASA Congress in September 2007. After that workshop, the teams returned home with the mandate to revise their reports to incorporate feedback received at the Congress and to begin work on their final reports to be posted on the LASA website and the "academic articles" that form the six central chapters of this book.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter we set out to accomplish four objectives, unified by a central argument. First, we summarize the research findings, paying attention both to the specifics of each project and to the comparative insights gained from asking parallel questions in distinct locations. Especially important in this comparative reflection is the decision, both conceptual and political, to view indigenous and Afro-descendant issues through the same analytical lens. Second, we address the methodological counterpart to the substantive findings: summarizing the contributions of this book to ongoing discussions about how to conceive and implement

collaborative research methods. A more elaborated version of this discussion can be found in the next chapter, written by Perry and Rappaport. Next, we take on the thorny question of validation of the results: Do collaborative methods bring to the fore new and different ways of validating our research findings? If so, what implications follow? Fourth and finally, we review the impact of this research beyond the academy, considering contributions and influences that would not be readily recognized in the academic realm.

Our argument, in summary, is that the research funded by the first round of the Otros Saberes Initiative has made a series of critical contributions to the interdisciplinary fields of indigenous and African Diaspora studies, and to the interdisciplinary methodological discussion of collaborative research. The results of this research did achieve a direct political impact as well, helping the civil society organizations to advance specific goals, whether empowerment through cultural/identity affirmation, documentation of rights claims, or confronting internal organizational challenges. However, for the purposes of this book and of the ongoing discussion about the Otros Saberes Initiative within LASA, we have chosen to frame the principal contributions in scholarly terms: new knowledge about the character of indigenous and Afro-descendant struggles for empowerment; new theoretical insights about race, gender, identity, and political activism; and a pointed series of interventions in the discussion about the practice of collaborative research. The future of the Otros Saberes Initiative depends on the reception and appreciation of these contributions among various sectors of the Americas-wide academic community, not because the political contributions of the work are unimportant or insignificant, but because if Otros Saberes is to persist within LASA, the scholarly contributions must carry the day. In a different forum, devoted to the crucial political challenges of indigenous and Afro-descendant movements in the Americas, we hope and expect that this collaborative research can also receive careful scrutiny and critical evaluation.

Findings

The six research projects that form the core of Otros Saberes bring together a diverse group of Afro-descendant and indigenous collaborations with academics that resulted not only in rich findings from each individual project, but also in many interesting points of comparison. Here we first explain the key analytical questions and findings of each project and then discuss their comparative insights. The focus of each research project is driven by a strategic priority in the life of the community, organization, or social movement concerned.

Specific Findings

The Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB, Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations), Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF), and University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) research team focused on the key resources that the FIOB has for developing gender and generational equity in its leadership, as well as obstacles to these efforts. The FIOB is a transnational indigenous organization founded in 1992 that has three regional areas of focus: the state of California in the United States, the states of Alta and Baja California in northern Mexico, and Oaxaca in southern Mexico. The organization primarily includes indigenous individuals, communities, and organizations who identify ethnically as Zapotec, Triqui, Mixteco, Mixe, and P'uhrépecha, as well as some who identify now as Mexican American, Chicano, and mestizo and share a common recognition of their indigenous roots. With offices in three Mexican cities and several more in the state of California, FIOB began as an organization led primarily by Mixtec and Zapotec men but has become a much broader organization, with women now a majority in its base membership. The organization has also seen a slow diversification of its regional and transnational leadership to include women and youth. For their *Otros Saberes* research project, the FIOB research team carried out a series of workshops, interviews, and focus groups to understand the obstacles to better supporting and developing women and youth as a part of their leadership structure.

The research team found two types of leadership within the structure of the organization. They called the first “political leadership,” which refers to the charismatic leader who is often a public spokesperson and who knows how to function not only in the movement but also more broadly, relating to political parties, elected officials, and those in other social movements and organizations. The second type is “communitarian leadership,” exhibited by those who have a high level of knowledge about local issues, have strong networks of people at the local level, and can mobilize these networks for a wide range of purposes. Although it is often assumed that these types of leadership are gendered—with men serving as political leaders and women serving as communitarian leaders—the research team found that there are women who are political leaders and some men, particularly in Juxtlahuaca, Oaxaca, who are communitarian leaders. The central challenge for the organization is to integrate these two types of leadership and train young people, women, and men in both types.

Apart from identifying different models of leadership, the research team also uncovered convincing evidence of how ethnic and gender discrimination that operates outside of the organization and in the daily lives of men and

women affects the internal life of FIOB. External expectations that require women to spend a great deal of time preparing meals, taking care of children, running their households, and engaging in a wide range of “caring” work limit the time, energy, and mobility that women have to invest in the organization, particularly in a leadership capacity outside of their local communities. The fact that fewer women than men do travel to other communities and participate in non-local activities also limits their opportunities to learn how to function in wider political forums, to speak publicly outside of their community, and to feel confident in communicating with a wide range of people. One of the resources that the research team found that women had as communitarian leaders was that they tended to introduce a wider range of topics and questions into organizational discussions. This contrasted with higher-up charismatic male political leaders who often are accustomed to speaking only with other leaders and may not “hear” topics that are not introduced through the higher-level leadership.

The founding generation of FIOB’s leadership is primarily men above the age of forty, some of whom are actively working to bring in youth and women to a wide range of leadership venues. The research team found that the FIOB was most successful in bringing in youth to the organization—particularly those born in the United States—through cultural activities such as soccer tournaments and through the annual folk festival of music, food, and dances known as the Guelaguetza. Regional differences, even among people from the same ethnic group, can also be important factors in the particulars of gender and generational inequality in the organization. In sum, the team found that gender roles and expectations outside of the organization had a major impact, much greater than on men, on how women could participate within the organization.

The Proceso de Comunidades Negras (the Black Communities Process, PCN) and Universidad del Valle, Cali (University of the Valley, Cali), of Colombia focused their research on the ongoing challenge of making the Afro-descendant presence in Colombia visible, counted, and influential in public policy. The PCN is a national Afro-Colombian political organization that includes 120 cultural groups, community councils, and urban and rural collectives who together seek to gain rights for black communities. When their struggle began in the mid-1990s, the PCN focused much of their effort on demarcating and titling ancestral Afro-Colombian lands. This priority was in response to a change in the Colombian Constitution and the Ley 70 that granted indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant peoples the right to establish collective ownership of traditional Pacific coastal territories. As a result of intense organizing efforts, the PCN and their allies were able to title five million hectares of land as the collective territories of black communities.

As a follow-up to their land-titling work, the PCN made a strategic decision to push the National Department of Statistics (DANE) in Colombia to greatly improve their system for categorizing and counting Afro-Colombians in the 2005 census. The Otros Saberes research team led by PCN carried out an analysis of the 2005 census count of Afro-Colombians as one of three foci of their investigation.⁵

The PCN research team found that past Colombian censuses during both the colonial and republic periods laid the foundation for the invisibility of Colombia's Afro-descendant population. The first census of 1758 in Colombia was created to diminish ethnic specificity and to begin to promote the idea of universal subjects who later became citizens. By the time that Colombia became an independent nation in 1819, blackness had been almost completely erased from official records. From 1905 to 1995, there were ten censuses conducted and only two used terms related to blacks. This had a significant effect on how people responded to the census categories of *Negro* (black) and *Afrodescendiente* (Afro-descendant) in the twentieth century and beyond.

The PCN's research on how the 2005 census was structured, which terms were included, and how it was administered revealed that although the state had made more concerted efforts to implement the self-identification principle to include more Afro-descendant categories and to include more people, there was a serious undercount that effectively eliminated from 8 to 10 percent of the Afro-Colombian population. In 2004, the PCN and other groups carried out workshops in which they solicited a wide range of terms of self-identification used by Afro-Colombians including *Trigueño*, *Moreno*, *Mulato*, *Zambo*, *Afrocolombiano*, *Afrodescendiente*, *Raizal*, *Palenquero*, *Negro*, *Indígena*, *Gitano* (*Rom o Li*), and *Blanco*. Originally the DANE excluded the category of *Trigueño* on the census form, but ultimately it yielded to pressure from the PCN and others and included it in the 2005 census.

After the 2005 census was carried out, the results revealed that 10.5 percent of Colombians identified as *Negro* (or a related term), as opposed to the 1.5 percent count generated by the 1993 census. Although the figure of 10.5 percent was higher, PCN activists felt that it still represented a very significant undercount in comparison with other statistics such as the figure of 26 percent cited in the 1998 National Plan for the Development of the Afro-Colombian Population. This figure was the result of estimates made by Afro-Colombian organizations based on their knowledge of the Afro-descendant population in the municipalities where they worked, not a statistical survey. The PCN team then carried out their own research on who had actually been asked the ethnic self-identification question on the 2005 census where they could self-identify as black. The research team administered their own questionnaire to 1,429 households in 2006 in the cities with the highest

levels of Afro-Colombian population—Bogota, Medellin, Cali, Cartagena, and Barranquilla. Overall they found that 42 percent of the people surveyed in these cities were not asked the ethnic self-identification question by census takers. The reasons given for non-use of this question varied: some census takers apparently decided for themselves what people's ethnicities were and simply filled in the information; in other cases, they simply refused to ask the self-identification question at all. After analyzing the results of their survey of the undercount, PCN researchers estimated that about 18 to 20 percent of the national population is Afro-Colombian. This would rank Colombia as number two after Brazil as the country with the largest Afro-descendant population in Latin America.

Both the official 2005 census and the PCN's own survey revealed that the Afro-Colombian population has become increasingly urbanized. This process has been greatly accelerated by the war in Colombia, which has as its epicenters the Pacific Coast of Colombia and Buenaventura, two of the principal locations of Afro-Colombians. Driven out by the combined pressure of paramilitaries, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC) guerillas, drug traffickers, and the Colombian army, many formerly rural Afro-Colombian communities have become urbanized, leaving behind their territories for others who arrive to stake claims. It is crucial for the PCN to document the increasing urban Afro-Colombian population as it fights for the rights of Afro-Colombians outside of their rural locations and raises a national awareness of the poverty, hunger, and lack of social services that afflict black people in Colombia's cities.

Puerto Rican Testimonials: An Oral History Project in the East of Puerto Rico (University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez) and community leaders from the western towns of Aguadilla and Hormigueros brought together a group of academics, students, and community leaders to use oral history and testimony to document the multiple dimensions of Afro–Puerto Rican identity and to contest the Puerto Rican myth of racial democracy. The research team worked in a national context where Afro-descendant Puerto Ricans are assumed either to be a part of the past and linked to colonialism or to exist in the present in extremely stereotyped and folklorized forms that focus only on music, dance, and food. The researchers hoped to break blackness out of the representational cages of colonialism and folklore to demonstrate the historical continuity and presence of Afro-descendants in culture, politics, and other venues of Puerto Rican life. A second goal was to show how Afro–Puerto Rican identity was developed, how different elements of it moved around the island, and how it was affected by the different locations it was and is practiced in.

By interviewing dozens of community members in two distinct locations—Aguadilla, where black identity is clearly articulated, and Hormigueros,

where blackness was believed to be confined to the population that worked in a sugar refinery—researchers sought to document the diverse and conflicting experiences of Afro-descendants in Puerto Rico. Their oral histories revealed three major ruptures of the national narratives of blackness in Puerto Rico. First, they found that most of their narrators who provided testimonies assumed the role of *negro* (black) in the interviews. The way that *negro* was represented came from a wide range of non-white categories such as *prieto*, *negrito*, *de color*, and *trigueño*—similar to some of the terms found by the PCN in Colombia. Although researchers thought most interviewees would not identify as black, almost all did in some way.

Secondly, the researchers found that the method of open-ended oral histories permitted those giving testimonials to engage in a critical reinterpretation and negotiation about the meanings of being Puerto Rican. It also allowed many people to reflect on the lived experience of discrimination, marginality, self-negation, self-affirmation, and whitening that was a part of their understanding of blackness. The dialogue promoted in the interviews allowed for a critical discussion of what racial identities in Puerto Rico mean today, what they meant in the past, and how they have changed through time. A third rupture in national narratives that occurred in the project was that the oral histories revealed the complexities, conflicts, and continuous strategies that contemporary Afro-Puerto Ricans develop to confront the ideology of racial democracy within the Puerto Rican national identity. Using oral histories as a method permitted the researchers to see how these strategies work at the local level.

Mujeres de la Tercera Edad Manos Unidos en el Valle del Chota, las comunidades de Comuna Río Santiago Cayapas en Esmeraldas y el Fondo Documental Afro-Andino de la Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (Women Elders with United Hands of the Valley of Chota, the communities of Comuna Río Santiago Cayapas in Esmeraldas, and the Afro-Andino Documentary Fund of the Andean University Simón Bolívar), came together to generate knowledge and systems of organizing knowledge that stem from what people know, learn, and teach through their daily lives. Such knowledge, they found, is bound up in understandings of territory, religion, *cosmovisión* (world-view), conceptions of nature, and social experience. By taking a holistic and horizontal approach to cultural knowledge—questioning the sharp distinction between experts and practitioners—researchers found, for example, that knowledge such as specific prayers and the invocation of saints and virgins for curing purposes which might be excluded in academically based studies of medicine are central to Afro-descendant systems of knowledge about health. Through a focus on knowledge linked through symbolism to territory, plants, and *cosmovisión*, this research team identified two primary areas of knowledge that are the focus of their analysis.

First, using birth as an entryway for understanding life, the research team focused part of its effort on documenting the art of midwifery. This form of knowledge is learned with practice from being a mother, an aunt, a grandmother, or a midwife and involves multiple techniques including massages, baths, prayers, and symbolic systems. The midwives locate the mother, the child, and the particular circumstances of each birth in a symbolic system, which in turn becomes the focus of their diagnostic analysis. The midwife and others assisting the birth also work to ensure that the proper conditions accompany the birth. For example, there cannot be a drinking glass turned upside down, a bucket face down, or a door or a window closed, as all must be open at the time of the birth. A particularly important part of midwifery is the art of cutting and curing the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord can be cured with a variety of elements that are related to the kind of person that the baby will become. There is transference of the traits of a particular plant to the child, instilling vigor and force and reinforcing personality traits such as courage or timidity. Most of these practices are deeply gendered. There are particular plants used for curing baby girls' umbilical cords and others for boys. The substance used for girls will promote knowledge of plants and of curing, for example.

A second focus of the research team was specific curative practices related to *mal de ojo* (evil eye), *mal aire* (bad air/spirit), and *espanto* (fright). These diseases are all cured with prayers, medicinal plants, and holy water. Medical/religious practices such as these are taught by oral transmission and observation, by watching elders, and through firsthand experiences with diseases. Researchers concluded that like birth, illnesses are points of negotiation, of learning about forces outside of and inside of the body, of understanding what the spaces of entry and exit are into and out of the human world.

Because the type of knowledge documented in this project emerges through everyday life, is bound up with elders as knowledge authorities, and is woven into the horizontal aspects of human relationships, the team relied on a methodology that could first identify some of the most important moments of connection between the human and natural world. The project team then proceeded to map out this knowledge. Using the concept of social mapping, the research team first worked with participants to draw their territories and within them to outline the different kinds of knowledge that exist, the spaces for their production, the specific material and relational elements they contain, and the persons who reproduce them. Elders, adults, and children shared experiences, and from those discussions maps were drawn. For example, maps were drawn of different kinds of medicinal plants, where they grow, their characteristics as hot and cold, and how they can be used. Medicinal recipes were also shared and remembered. After the maps were

drawn, people talked about them and then walked together to the points on the map. In situ, in particular locations of rivers, gardens, houses, cemeteries, the maps were remembered, discussed, and shared. In this process, intergenerational learning took place that not only documented but transmitted knowledge. The research teams then recorded the information in pamphlets, photographs, video, and audio to share widely in the communities. By producing knowledge in a model that situates elders as knowledge experts, draws widely on many people's understanding, and then shares the knowledge in collective, intergenerational contexts, the research team believes that this process can begin to decolonize knowledge about Afro-descendant peoples and validate this knowledge within their communities.

Comunidad Indígena Miskitu de Tuara y la Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense (URACCAN) (Indigenous Miskitu Community of Tuara and the University of Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast) worked together to map, claim, and facilitate the restoration of the territory of the Miskitu Indian community of Tuara in the Atlantic coastal region of Nicaragua, which was first formed between 1913 and 1920. A Tuara community leader marked out and mapped Tuara territory in 1958 together with the leader of one of many boundary communities. He turned in this information and received a title from the National Agrarian Institute in 1958. This process was carried out without the approval of many other neighboring communities, which produced a complex situation in 2006 when Tuara community members decided to reclaim and remap their 1950s territory.

After the Sandinistas took power in Nicaragua in 1979, they initially demonstrated sympathy toward Miskitu and other indigenous land claims that were cancelled in the 1960s. A 1981 document from the Nicaraguan Institute for Natural Resources and the Environment (IRENA, Instituto Nicaragüense de Recursos Naturales y del Ambiente) notes that Tuara occupied 1,500 hectares, an area that overlaps with the lands of another community. In 1987, Law 28 of the Autonomy of Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the Atlantic Coast defined the rights and obligations of the regional autonomous governments of the coastal peoples who inhabit the Autonomous Region of the North Atlantic (RAAN). In 2003, the passing of the Law of the Communal Property Regimen of the Lands of Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and of the Coco, Bocay, Indio, and Maíz Rivers (Law 445) formalized and provided political impetus for communities like Tuara to map, measure, and title their territories. In 2005, community members of Tuara together with URACCAN representatives discussed the possibility of mapping and titling Tuara lands. The community of Tuara chose community representatives and discussed

the project in a meeting presided over by community authorities, religious leaders, elders, and teachers. They then carried out a series of workshops that revealed, among other things, that many people had no knowledge of the actual physical location or perimeter of Tuara territory. The combined research team of community representatives and URACCAN investigators designed a project that included exploring social and environmental relations, historical and legal history, and a cartographic and demographic analysis that would develop information and a collective conceptual basis for defining the territory traditionally occupied by Tuara.

Using a process of ethnomapping, the research team took a wide range of information from oral histories, focus groups, historical documents, and socio-economic and demographic data, and generated five kinds of maps. The first described the customs of Tuara in relation to land and its incorporation into their cosmovisión. The second is a map of specific land areas claimed. The third is a map of zones of common use for hunting, fishing, and gathering shared with other communities. The fourth map documents the overlaps of Tuara traditional territory with those of other communities. The fifth and last map locates the presence of mestizo immigrants and others without titles in the areas claimed by Tuara.

The mapping project reveals key differences in the way that Nicaragua national law conceives of territories versus how they have actually been constructed and lived in by the Miskitu of Tuara and other indigenous groups. The land titles call for the resolution of conflicts with the state, with third parties, and with neighboring communities. Traditionally, and even currently, the people of Tuara do not operate with the notion of an “exclusive” territory. Rather, there are overlapping realms of territory used for hunting, fishing, gathering, and other areas of resources shared with other communities. For Tuara community members, territory is not exclusive, but shared in different ways with adjacent communities, in ways that vary over time.

Núcleo de História Indígena e do Indigenismo de la Universidade de São Paulo (Nucleus of Indigenous History and Indigenism at the University of São Paulo, NHII–USP), Programa Wajãpi del Instituto de Pesquisa e Formação em Educação Indígena (Wajãpi program of the Institute for Research and Training in Indigenous Education, PW–IEPE), and Conselho das Aldeias Wajãpi (the Counsel of Wajãpi Communities, Apina) engaged in a project that trained a generation of young Wajãpi researchers to document the diversity of local histories and knowledges, develop Wajãpi models of knowledge production, and compare these to Western epistemologies found in diverse disciplines from anthropology to biology. Wajãpi community leaders have been motivated for some time to validate their own cultural knowledge and traditional practices as they have watched Wajãpi youth value non-indigenous

practices and knowledges more than those of the Wajãpi. The project that the research team conceptualized for *Otros Saberes* builds on an ongoing Wajãpi movement to create their curriculum in Wajãpi schools so that each youth can know and value the diversity of what might loosely be called “Wajãpi culture” (a term defined below) and be able to know how it is linked to their territory. The Wajãpi have a legally titled territorial base of 607,000 hectares with forty-nine hamlets settled within it. Although gaining territorial recognition is important, like many indigenous groups in Brazil, the Wajãpi are still considered *tutelados*, or wards of the state. This subordinate status has continued many people’s view of indigenous peoples as “needing to be cared for” and makes it difficult for young indigenous people to achieve respect and political and cultural affirmation—both from non-indigenous peoples and for themselves.

Building on a past project begun in 1998 to train indigenous teachers, this *Otros Saberes* research involves ten bilingual teachers, twenty teachers in training, twenty young indigenous researchers in training, and fifty other students. Some project participants, such as the indigenous bilingual teachers, are interested in comparing the knowledge of whites about Indians and the knowledge that Indians have about themselves that whites do not have. In addition to actually conducting a graphic and oral inventory of a wide range of Wajãpi knowledge and information, project participants also interrogated different forms of knowledge transmission, such as oral versus written, and explored the differences between anthropological investigations, linguistics, biology, evangelical missionary research, government officials’ investigations, and Wajãpi forms of knowing.

A group of young Wajãpi researchers is developing ethnographic registers, systematizing their observations and visual and oral information gathering, and comparing, revising, and synthesizing that information. The Wajãpi see the educators from the NGOs and anthropologists as facilitators for this project.

Each member of the Wajãpi research team has chosen a particular area of knowledge to inventory. The researchers each explored specific routes to the knowledge area they seek including dreaming, being a shaman or curer (*pajê*), listening, reading, and paying attention to signs that indicate good and bad spirits. The areas of knowledge are wide ranging and include knowledge of natural reserves, ways of classifying plants and animals, knowledge about controlling pests, manioc research, research on different kinds of trees and fruits, and knowledge of which wood is durable and useful in housing construction. Other projects explore themes in social relations such as polygamous marriages, ways of responding to fathers-in-law, ways of speaking beautifully, and Wajãpi theories about the world. Many of the individual

research projects have focused on curing and medicinal knowledge, such as recipes to cure snake bites, tooth pain, stomach pain, machete cuts, and spider and scorpion bites and medicine that protects people from the owners of the forest, such as the jaguar, and the owner of the water, the water boa. Other research is related to how girls turn into women, first menstruation, body painting, and signs indicating the arrival of the ancestors, such as through the ways that toucans sing and insect flight patterns.

In collecting such a wide range of information from different locations, the Wajāpi researchers came to the conclusion that there is no unified “Wajāpi culture.” The very concept of “culture” is something that the researchers debated, and rather than a list of objects, histories, and institutions, they came up with a very different definition. Through their research they came to define culture as “an assemblage of skills, to do, explain, think, say, and represent.” The researchers have come through the process of recording and comparing different versions of the knowledges related to their theme without trying to generalize. In the collective process of exchanging and comparing the knowledges they have collected, the researchers worked against overly synthesizing their findings to produce a definitive version of knowledge about a specific theme. Instead they sought to pull out native categories and classifications that could accommodate difference. The research practice itself is also reinscribing the importance of traditional community agents, such as men and women treated as *jovijagwera* or elders whom young people are re-learning to respect as the knowledge experts in their hamlets. Another important result of the research process has been the fortifying of intergenerational relationships as young Wajāpi researchers and their projects have created new forums for dialogue between young and old.

Comparative Findings

Viewed together, these projects offer important crosscutting findings related to four analytic themes with both theoretical and strategic implications.

Visibility. Establishing presence and visibility is basic to staking any type of claim or demanding specific rights related to land and territory occupation, legal demarcation, recognition and legitimating of language, culture, ethnicity, and other “ethnic” rights. “Being seen” or becoming “visible” was at least one of the impetuses for a majority of these projects. Often visibility was an initial goal for all of these projects in terms of national discourses of race and ethnicity that have denied Afro-descendant or indigenous identities, whitened such identities through national projects of racial blending via concepts such as *mestizaje*, or promulgated ideologies of racial democracy as in Brazil and Puerto Rico. Complicating, challenging, and pushing back on

these ideologies has been one underlying purpose of many of the projects. The oral histories carried out in Aguadilla and Hormigueros resulted in making Afro–Puerto Ricans visible and also in validating the complexities and differences found among the experiences and understandings of Afro–Puerto Ricans. In Colombia, the PCN’s project of interrogating the mechanics of how Afro-Colombians are counted in the national census and which terms are included in such a count resulted in a very different concrete number, which increased the statistical visibility of Afro-Colombians from 1993 to 2005 by almost 9 percent. The PCN’s additional work pointing out how even the 2005 census count underestimated the Afro-Colombian population by 8 to 10 percent is an additional statistic of visibility that the PCN is using for public policy and services which consider the needs of the large number of Afro-Colombians driven from their territories by violence and living in poverty in Colombia’s cities. In the case of both of these projects, the result of increased visibility for Afro-descendants also renders more complex ideas about nationalism, Colombianness, and Puerto Rican–ness.

A second form of working for strategic visibility can be seen in the FIOB project where women and young people are pushing on leaders to recognize more than one model of leadership and to “see” how the inter-linked hierarchies of gender and ethnicity in larger Mexico impact the treatment of women within the organization and can limit their potential participation. That struggle for visibility is to re-educate the entire organization about how women and youth can be invisible in the leadership structure and aims to share knowledge and create spaces of collective learning where gender and generational issues are seen, discussed, and acted upon strategically within the organization. Within the Wajãpi project, a different struggle for the strategic visibility of generational difference has been manifested through young Wajãpi investigators helping to make visible the knowledge and contributions of elders to a younger generation and in the process recentering and making visible very specific areas of Wajãpi knowledge that are only known within the indigenous world. This is a project of internal visibility—making things Wajãpi visible within Wajãpi communities.

Mapping Territoriality. Staking material claims such as land rights often involves geographic mapping and boundary marking, as demonstrated in the cases of Tuara, the PCN of Colombia, the Afro-descendant communities in Esmeraldas and La Chota, Ecuador, and the Wajãpi of Brazil. In each of these cases, the term “mapping” has a much wider significance than geographic mapping and boundary marking. The social mapping of ethnic relations, local knowledges of the environment, historical mapping of the paths of the ancestors, and the mapping of *cosmovisiones* that link natural and human relations are often important precursors to and accompaniments to geographic mapping.

Social mapping that employs locally based epistemologies and knowledges as the basis for collecting information is a shared methodology that also has produced theoretical continuities between several of the cases here.

Locally situated knowledges that are not broken apart into disciplinary divisions, such as the biology of plant life, the zoology of animal life, the anthropology of human relations, and the cosmology of religion, can be mapped as an integrated whole that forms part of the territorial spaces that people live in and, in the case of the PCN and the Tuara, seeks to reclaim and physically demarcate as well. The concept of territory as articulated by the PCN, the Nicaraguan indigenous community of Tuara, the Afro-descendant communities of Esmeraldas and La Chota, and the Wajāpi research team is a theoretical and strategic concept that avoids dichotomies between human relations and nature, between religion and environment, and between the material, spiritual, and symbolic worlds. “Mapping” a territory thus goes far beyond a one-dimensional geographical demarcation and documentation to suggest a multidimensional understanding of integrated layers of knowledge that work together within a geographic space identified collectively by a group of people as being their space for living.

Coloniality and Decolonizing Epistemologies. Colonial racial and ethnic hierarchies that get reproduced in discourses of nationalism are often imported into academic “knowledge” and models about Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples. An important part of decolonizing knowledge has to do with documenting historically and currently the variations and distinctions found among Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples through time and looking at local representations of difference in relation to national myths of racial democracy or unified national racial and ethnic identities as discussed above in relation to the project of visibility. Once local and regional histories are *gathered*, the second step in decolonizing dominant models is to ensure the dissemination of locally based knowledges back to their communities of origin, as well as to the academy and other institutions that have helped to create official policy and discourses about Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples.

All of the Otros Saberes projects have taken steps in the decolonization of knowledge through recentering indigenous and Afro-descendant systems of knowledge, epistemologies, models of leadership, and understandings of the world. The work that the Wajāpi researchers are doing, by creating inventories of Wajāpi knowledges around specific themes and the specific ways of learning and teaching (dreaming, listening, visions, watching, and so forth) and the models used to do so, does not stop with validating specifically Wajāpi ways of knowing. This project takes these findings and compares them to non-indigenous knowledge about indigenous people as well

as the models used for classifying that information. It is in this comparison of different ways of organizing information that the Wajāpi are carrying the project of decolonizing knowledge to a deeper level. A critical engagement with modern disciplines and forms of knowledge production by introducing the alternative possibilities that are seen through Wajāpi knowledge systems offers a way into what some have called “border thinking” (Mignolo 2000) or transmodernity (Dussel 1995; Escobar 2004; Grosfoguel 2008). As pointed out by the Afro-descendant research team from Ecuador, part of the object of decolonizing knowledge is to “contaminate closed forms of hegemonic knowledge production so that they can be in dialogue with other knowledge forms and systems.” Situated knowledges that document the specifics and variations of knowledge found at the local level, even from family to family, are important initiatives for departing from a universal, overly rational position. If it is possible to establish a dialogue between the Western academic epistemic tradition and indigenous and Afro-descendant systems of knowledge, then it needs to involve a two-way exchange and interrogation of all of the models involved—a process undertaken by the Wajāpi researchers and most likely others engaged in *Otros Saberes* projects.

Personal Discovery, New Identities, Leadership Development. The process of carrying out collaborative research on themes that are intimately linked to the personal histories and experiences of the researchers can result in processes of personal and social transformation and inspiration. Deeply interrogating national and regional histories and listening to a wide range of experiences and ideas about race, ethnicity, and local forms of knowledge and understanding both affirm and challenge the identities of indigenous and Afro-descendant researchers. This process can also result in the consolidation of shared political identities and the strengthening of shared political projects. In the process of collecting information generated from questions that are strategic to the future of particular communities, organizations, or movements, individual researchers often come to see themselves in a different light—perhaps reaffirming or awakening facets of their ethnic or racial identity; and they gain new personal and shared motivation to change the conditions that led to the invisibility of black and indigenous peoples. In cases where research has uncovered and highlighted differences between families, gender, and generations, such experiences can also generate new leaders or strengthen existing leaders as they learn more from their research about how larger structural conditions, histories, and complex links between racial, ethnic, gender, and generational power differences function in the world around them as well as within their organizations and communities.

Researchers participating in the Afro-descendant oral history project in Puerto Rico departed from the usual course of focusing on the “findings” and

instead found themselves being transformed by the process of engaging in research. Students who did not identify as Afro-descendant found their self-identities remade and moved in new directions as they collected and processed oral histories. Rather than learning from professors, they came to see themselves as being taught by those who shared their complex memories and experiences about race, marginality, and the contradictory messages about blackness in Puerto Rico. Young Wajāpi researchers began constructing not only a general definition of culture, but also of specific past and current variations of Wajāpi culture and of themselves within it as identified with the new subject position of “researcher”—not a traditional category in their communities.

Within the FIOB research project, understandings of how gender and generational inequalities outside of the organization affected the experiences of women and youth in the organization also resulted in recognition of a range of leadership styles. Local communitarian leaders who were seldom at the top of the organization were recognized as making significant contributions in terms of the range of topics they introduced as well as for the effectiveness of their network-based power of convocation. These insights could potentially transform how leadership is understood and generate a broader understanding and appreciation of different leadership styles that could complement one another.

Contributions of Collaborative Methods

The minimal entry-level criterion for selection of the six funded Otros Saberes projects sounds deceptively simple: that the question or problem under consideration be determined *primarily* by the civil society organization. This criterion in reality becomes charged and complex for two reasons. First, in conventional research methods the definition of the research topic—and, by extension, the determination that the topic in question is worthy of study—has been the exclusive prerogative of scholars and their research communities. To displace the responsibility for this opening task from the community of scholars to an organization or movement with explicit political objectives is to devolve power and control from the academy to civil society protagonists. The second complexity follows: although this criterion does require academy-based participants in the collaborative research team to devolve a substantial quota of power and control, they do not (or at least, in our view, should not) submit completely to the research agenda that their civil society counterparts establish. Instead, this determination should emerge from a horizontal dialogue between differently positioned participants, each with something crucial to contribute, leading to substantial overlap, but rarely complete convergence, between the two. The tensions inherent to this

differential positioning, and to the co-existence of two overlapping but distinct sets of research goals, should be cause not for despair or regret but rather for transparent reflection and analysis.

Once this basic principle of “dialogic” determination of the research topic is achieved, subsequent phases of the process follow directly as extensions of that same principle. Civil society– and academy-based intellectuals work together on each facet of the research, from data collection, to interpretation of the results, to elaboration of the final products, to dissemination of these results in diverse settings and venues. Collaboration in each of these phases of the research does not mean, however, that responsibilities fall symmetrically on all those involved. To offer one example from the dissemination phase: civil society intellectuals are apt to play a more central role in the presentation of research findings in the realm of politics and public policy, whereas the academy-based participants generally took the lead in drafting the chapters that appear in this book. The operative principles of collaboration are not symmetry, but rather transparency, horizontal dialogue, and differential division of labor, in recognition of the distinctive strengths and potential contributions of each. As in the initial determination of the research topic, the expectation is not that work in these subsequent phases would ever be tension-free, but rather that the tensions, once identified and engaged, would be constructive.

A central objective of the Otros Saberes Initiative was to subject this “ideal” model of collaborative research to critical scrutiny, drawing on the experiences of the six teams. As Perry and Rappaport argue at length in the following chapter, the six research experiences certainly did have their share of tensions, as the general proposition suggests would be the case. Hierarchies between academy and civil society intellectuals did not melt away with the entry-level commitment to collaboration; in each of the teams, most explicitly in the PCN (Colombia) and Manos Unidas (Ecuador) experiences, these tensions became the focus of discussion.⁶ Especially when the topic involved turning the lens inward, toward the organization itself, the research process brought tensions to the fore. The case of FIOB is illustrative: a study of gender inequities and gender empowerment within the organization could be expected to generate a certain amount of debate and even dissent from those who hold disproportionate gendered power; at the same time, it speaks very well for the FIOB that it was able to endorse this critical dialogue, which surely will be ongoing. A third general source of tension came from the explicitly political goals of the topic in relation to the more broadly conceived research agenda. The best example here is the URACCAN-Tuara research project: on the one hand, the indigenous and Afro-descendant land rights law (known as Law 445) stipulates specific research procedures to be followed if the results

are to be useful in the appeal for legal recognition of community lands; on the other hand, the topic has many important dimensions that reach beyond these constrained parameters (including critical reflection on the parameters themselves). Beyond the need to mediate these two distinct mandates of collaborative research, in every case the political nature of the research goals and process introduced complexities that the teams had to navigate: How do we mobilize social science research in support of indigenous and Afro-descendant empowerment while preventing political pressures—at times immediate and intense—from disfiguring or derailing the research process?

Although there is no simple or single way forward in the face of these challenges, we do contend that when researchers engage them directly and reflexively the result is a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the topic at hand. To some degree, this assertion can be substantiated by scrutiny of its corollary: research that does not reflect on its own political conditions and context is apt to lack this sophistication. In part this corollary has become conventional wisdom in anthropology in response to impetus from general challenges to ethnographic authority (Clifford 1988), feminist theory (Behar and Gordon 1995), critical race theory (Collins 2000), and various strands of post-structuralism. In part, however, the argument goes further, focusing on how conventional research *methods* have political implications that often go overlooked, even among those who pay attention to positionality, ethnographic authority, politics of knowledge, and the like. To subject the decision on the research topic to a horizontal dialogue with protagonists, for example, generates a flow of insight that would be very difficult to achieve by other means: What research problems do *they* consider to be important and why? What knowledge do they have about the topic under consideration, and what remains unknown? This methodological dimension—creating the conditions for protagonists to assert their knowledge, analysis, and political judgment at each stage of the process—in turn forms the centerpiece of the *Otros Saberes* innovation.

The fruits of this innovation are immediately evident at the level of descriptive understanding and strategic analysis. In the first instance, these advantages accrue from the simple principles of access and motivation. Given that *Otros Saberes* team members form part of the communities that are subjects of study, and given that the civil society organizations played a major role in determining the topics, access to the research subjects is generally not a problem, and motivation to participate tends to be high. While present in all six projects, these advantages were especially strong in the Afro–Puerto Rican and Afro-Ecuadorean topics. Basic questions of racial identity in the former and key elements of Afro-Ecuadorean cosmovisión in the latter could possibly have been tapped by “outside” researchers. But the confidence that

the Afro–Puerto Ricans evidently felt in talking about how they were affected personally by ideologies of *blanqueamiento* (whitening), for example, was certainly enhanced by the fact that the researchers themselves were Afro–Puerto Ricans who placed themselves in the same story that they were asking others to recount. An even stronger version of this argument applies in the case of political strategies of the organizations under consideration. It is simply inconceivable that the FIOB would have agreed to an internal analysis of gender relations or that Tuara community leaders would have shared the charged and confidential details of their community land rights claims had the research team not incorporated members from those very organizations with clear lines of accountability established from the outset.

However important these more pragmatic advantages of access and motivation, they are surpassed by other advantages in the realm of theoretical innovation and epistemological challenge. Theoretical innovation emerges from collaborative research methods because of the special proximity between political struggle and data gathering, or more broadly, the production of knowledge. The PCN's struggle around issues of recognition, census categories, and racial inequality is an excellent case in point. Prevailing definitions of blackness in Colombia (like many places in Latin America) resulted in systematic underestimation of the numbers of Afro-Colombians, which in turn, undermined their claims for rights and made it difficult to demonstrate the relationship between racial hierarchy and social inequality. This political struggle placed PCN at the crux of a conceptual problem: What is the relationship between racial subject formation (whereby racial hierarchies are constituted and justified) and the collective racial self-making (whereby racially subordinated peoples name themselves, claim rights, and seek to achieve them)? Given their own political struggles against invisibility, PCN intellectuals were well-positioned to criticize facile notions of racial self-making, which ignore the pervasive influence of subject formation, and to argue that Afro-Colombians' collective assertion had to emerge from the categories that these subject formation processes put in place. The concrete achievement of this struggle—an impressive increase in the recognized numbers of Afro-Colombians—also reinforced the conceptual finding, which understands collective racial assertion as emerging from and grappling with the very hegemonic categories that it contests.

Finally, and more important still, is the close connection between collaborative research and epistemological challenge. The name of the Initiative—*Otros Saberes*—is a direct allusion to this contribution. The assertion is that intellectuals who are directly engaged in struggles for collective empowerment, especially when the collective in question embodies cultural difference, have the potential to produce knowledge in forms that do not fit within standard, Western knowledge categories. It is crucial here to avoid both

idealization and overreach. All of the advantages mentioned in the previous two paragraphs accrue *within* a basically Western social science framework and are of great importance for precisely that reason. Moreover, for some time in indigenous studies, and more recently in Afro-descendant studies as well, there has been a tendency to press *cosmovisión* into service as an all-encompassing filter that converts every utterance and practice into quintessential expressions of contestation of the West through an idiom of radical cultural difference. We prefer a much more restricted and rigorous notion of epistemological challenge, grounded in two basic questions: How does direct defiance of the subject-object dichotomy change the way that we study our research topic? When indigenous and Afro-descendant researchers replace Western premises embedded in the research process with their own, what new forms of knowledge on the topic result?

All six projects, in different ways, produced results that meet the first criterion. With actors themselves serving as intellectual leaders of the research processes, the subject-object dichotomy so prominent in conventional research assumes a much less central role, even if it does not (and could not) completely fade away. This is especially the case when the topic is identity formation, such as in the PCN and Afro–Puerto Rico research projects, and the researchers themselves are involved in reflexive and transformative processes along these same lines. It would not be at all surprising to find, for example, that the predominance of self-identification as black is much greater in the *Otros Saberes* Initiative than other researchers have found. This, in turn, could well be attributed to the generative conditions that the research process itself produced. Full scrutiny of the second criteria is beyond the scope of this introduction because it involves complex and multifaceted processes that are still underway and therefore cannot be reported on in detail in each team’s research findings. We found preliminary expressions of this epistemological contribution in each of the studies, perhaps most strikingly in that of the *Wajãpi*, in which collaborative research led to a vigorous critique of inherited anthropological notions of culture replaced by an understanding that is ostensibly more practical—“an assemblage of skills, to do, explain, think, say, and represent”—but could actually call into question the very roots of Western traditions of anthropological representation. This is the great promise of collaborative research across boundaries of cultural difference: to challenge the slippage between “representation” as portrayal and representation as “speaking for.”

Knowledge Validation Processes in *Otros Saberes*

Whereas traditional academic knowledge is validated through peer reviews that consist of academically credentialed experts certifying the research

results of other academically credentialed experts, the validation of the specific knowledges and models for knowing associated with the Otros Saberes research projects occurred in hybrid ways. Part of the distinctiveness of the knowledge validation processes is related to the rootedness of the knowledge forms research teams documented in daily living. Although modernist models of education rely on experts who acquire their knowledge through studying texts and engaging in scientific experimentation, knowledge produced through daily life is organized, taught, and learned through meaningful daily social relations that are basic to the human condition. Medicinal knowledge; understandings of place, territory, and the creatures (human and non-human) and plants that inhabit it; material knowledge of hunting, fishing, farming, gathering, house-building, and other essential tasks; knowledge of how to move through the stages of life from birth to death; religious and ritual understandings—all of these knowledge forms are experienced, learned, and taught by doing, listening, observation of elders, and active solicitation in inter-generational contexts. The ways in which this knowledge is generated also affects how it is validated.

In the projects described here, validation is partially achieved through vetting, discussion, and feedback from the communities and organizations involved. This form of validation may be closer to what many are familiar with in terms of political validation of knowledge rather than academic validation. While several projects acknowledge the expertise of elders as sources of information that others may not have, elders are not seen as the sole “experts” or “peer reviewers” for the information generated by the research. In the case of the Wajāpi researchers, the team of indigenous researchers exchanged, shared, and discussed their findings not only with one another but also with indigenous teachers, students, and community members. An important measure for this research team in validating their findings was to be self-critical of any results that tended to produce highly synthesized and homogenous versions of “culture” related to any specific theme. Variation of results was encouraged and validated.

Within the FIOB research project, validation of the information generated by the project was carried out by internal discussions of the research team where important differences were noted between the one male member and the three female members. Rather than agree upon one version of what they found, the team agreed to publish multiple interpretations of their findings. In addition, academic and activist researchers acknowledged that they had different political stakes and ways of identifying with the FIOB that affected the research, their approach to it, and ultimately the way it was validated. By negotiating a process whereby differential interpretations could co-exist, the researchers could be unified in their validation of what they found but have

their differences represented. Through a different process than the Wajāpi researchers, the FIOB researchers found that allowing variation in the results was an important part of the validation process.

In the case of the PCN, the results of the project—like the initial objectives—were constantly related to the overall strategic and political objectives of the organization. Important parts of the validation process included discussions of the applicability of the results to the strategic political agenda of the organization—ability to affect national development and policy discussions about Afro-descendant communities in Colombia and to maintain and protect the territories of Afro-Colombian communities. In the case of the Tuara research, validation came in part through the results that the maps and information generated. That is, Tuara community members affirmed the maps generated by the project as accurate representations of their claims. This constitutes an important form of validation, even if the specific requirements for legal recognition of Tuara territory boundaries in relation to other communities make it unlikely that the land claims will ultimately be recognized in their current form. In the cases of the Afro-descendant oral history project in Puerto Rico and the birthing and medicinal knowledges documented in the Afro-descendant communities of Esmeraldas and La Chota in Ecuador, the validation processes are largely found in community discussions and forums where the research results were shared, processed, and then reproduced to be distributed to a wider circle of people. In all of the cases, the agreed upon forms of reproduction and dissemination of the knowledge generated constituted another form of validation through agreement on the content of videos, audio recordings, books, folders, public displays, or other forms of presentation.

Dissemination and Political Impact

As stated earlier in this introduction, we believe that discussions of the political impact of the Otros Saberes research projects are best held in venues other than academic publications like this one. This is *not* because we do not view these topics as important; to the contrary, they are crucial, indeed in the long run probably the most compelling rationale to support and carry out this kind of research. This is also *not* because we endorse the traditional dichotomy between scholarship and politics; to the contrary, a founding premise of the Otros Saberes Initiative is, precisely, that scholarly work is inherently political, in institutional and practical terms, and that there is an urgent need to challenge and broaden the traditional political underpinnings of Latin American studies. Rather, the reason for limiting the discussion of political impact in this volume is that an academic book does not provide the

conditions for discernment of these matters. The authors of this introduction are located in academic positions, far from settings where the research took place, drawing mainly on the written documents that the research produced. Discernment of political impact would require us (or someone) to be in those places, following these complex and multifaceted political processes, and then making some kind of judgment about what difference the research made in each case. The protagonists themselves must constantly make these judgments, and in accordance with the results, they either continue to participate in collaborative research or not. Meanwhile, our principal job in this volume is to make the case and the space for this kind of research within scholarly institutions such as LASA.

This being said, it is possible to note in very general terms some of the political effects of the research and its dissemination. Each of the six projects generated research products with goals of direct political usefulness in mind; indeed these goals were front-and-center in the research from the start. These products varied widely, from educational materials (written, radio, video), to discrete tools (e.g., maps, censuses), to broader analytical insights with specific strategic usefulness. It would be difficult, and in some cases nonsensical, to try to determine the impact of these products, because in each case they form part of broader, multifaceted flows of intellectual activity and political work. Yet as the contents of these chapters attest, the presence of academy-based researchers in the teams, the institutional backing of LASA, and the opportunity for interaction and enrichment that the LASA Congress provided, all contributed to the deepening and amplification of the outcomes. These are intangibles, of course, but nonetheless very important.

Some more tangible results can also be noted. In response to findings of the *Otros Saberes* research, for example, the FIOB is forming leadership schools for women that will take into account regional variations in gender roles. The curriculum of the leadership schools will work from the specific context in which ethnic, gender, and generational inequalities are played out in different geographical locations where the organization functions. The schools will train women and youth in local specifics as well as in the skills defined as a part of extra-local political leadership. The change in Colombian census categories, which the PCN *Otros Saberes* research helped to achieve, is also an especially noteworthy example of direct political impact. It would require additional research to tease apart the impact of the research, per se, in relation to straightforward political critique and mobilization. But clearly, both the content of the research results and the legitimacy that comes from the involvement of university-based scholars clearly did make a difference.

Finally, the most important political impact of these six research projects lies—to return to the intangible—in the generation of ideas that empower.

One need only reflect, one last time, on the central topics of the six to appreciate this point: contesting the “controlling idea” of racial democracy in Puerto Rico and affirming Afro–Puerto Rican identity; challenging the invisibility of Afro-Colombians in the national census; documenting specific expressions of Afro-Ecuadoran culture and identity; establishing the basis for a Miskitu Indian community’s claims to territorial rights; probing gender and generational hierarchies inside an indigenous organization; creating the base for autonomous education and intellectual empowerment within indigenous communities. These are all crucial aspirations for indigenous and Afro-descendant movements in contemporary times, and although the objective is certainly much too large to be adequately addressed through a single project, it should be a source of great satisfaction for LASA to have supported research that is grappling with such difficult and weighty topics. We trust that you will agree, after reading the chapters, that the activist-intellectual lead authors are already at the forefront of efforts to bring about collective conceptual and political empowerment. We hope that the publication of this volume will help make these efforts more widely known and contribute to their efficacy.

Challenges That Lie Ahead

The six *Otros Saberes* projects highlighted here represent a two-year process of: (1) collaborative agenda setting and proposal writing between indigenous and Afro-descendant activists, community members, and academic researchers; (2) months of collecting information on agreed-upon themes and topics through social mapping, focus groups, interviews, archival research, photographing, video-taping, audio-taping of events and exchanges, and open-ended discussions and observation; (3) exchange and processing of information not only within the research teams but also within wider communities and organizations; (4) creation of products such as videos, audiotapes, folders, displays, reports, books, written oral histories, and photographs; and (5) distribution of these products and other results among the participating organizations, as well as in interested communities and in wider academic, political, and policy circles. The process of producing *Otros Saberes* has involved specific strategic, political, and cultural efforts on the part of the organizations and communities involved as well as producing theoretical insights that transcend the specific contexts in which the information was generated.

Research projects that stem from specific political and cultural commitments tend to produce results that question academic conventions, both in content and in form. Rather than producing one unified set of findings, most projects tended to document variation in findings according to particular

themes. Large areas of knowledge inquiry such as: spiritual/medicinal curing; the study of territories and their systems of knowledge; the rewriting of nationalist ideologies of homogeneity to include the specificities of indigenous cultures and forms of blackness in their variation and complexity; the study of paths to knowledge that include dreaming, shamanism, the reading of signs from animals and plants, listening, watching, and practicing versus texts; theories of different forms of political leadership; and the ways that gender and generational inequality influence social movement structures—all of these findings suggest that it is possible to work between the tension of politically motivated research and broader theoretical inquiry. The subsequent challenge comes in seeing how these two goals can be put into practice in the educational, political, and policy settings. How do we move the specifics of a wider notion of health and curing into the educational curriculum for a wide range of children? How do we establish an integrated model of territory that includes human, plant, natural, and spiritual relations in development policy at regional, national, and international levels? How do we assure that what some have called the relational ontologies of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples, such as those illustrated here, avoid the dualisms of nature/culture, individual/community, material/spiritual and are taken seriously as part of state and transnational discussions on sustainability (Escobar 2009:5)? How do we broaden our cultural and political definitions of “expertise” to include knowledge producers who are credentialed by their communities and organizations and not only by universities? As many of the projects have suggested, to begin down the road of decolonizing knowledge we have to return to the questions of who identifies the research questions, who collects information and how, who receives it, how it is used, and who is invited to come to the table to “apply” and “implement” the knowledge gained. Both the specific kinds of information generated by the *Otros Saberes* projects and the epistemological models that emerged through the mechanism of collaborative research suggest that these projects have much to offer. What remains to be seen is if there is a sufficient juxtaposition of significant political forces at local, regional, national, and global levels to provide an opening for *Otros Saberes* to come to the table.

Notes

1. This argument is borrowed liberally from “Re-visioning Latin American Studies” by Sonia Alvarez, Arturo Arias, and Charles R. Hale (2011).
2. While the class dimension of this problem received attention early on in many realms of Latin American studies, gender came much later, whereas the realms of race, sexuality, and perhaps spatiality are still intellectual battlegrounds.
3. Harvard University’s Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies pledged \$20,000 to support the post-Congress workshop, which originally was planned to be held in Boston. When

the LASA EC decided to relocate the Congress to Montreal, in response to discriminatory practices of US government visa policies, Harvard graciously agreed to honor their commitment in support of the workshop.

4. The academy-based committee members were: Alcida Rita Ramos (Universidade de Brasília, Brazil), Eduardo Restrepo (Universidad Javeriana, Colombia), Lynn Stephen (University of Oregon, United States), and Eva Thorne (Brandeis University, United States); the civil society-based members were Miriam Miranda (OFRANEH, Honduras), and Candace Craig (Jamaica). Charles Hale served as non-voting coordinator of the selection meeting.

5. The other two areas of focus were (1) to continue evaluating the specific areas of knowledge and strategies the PCN had developed for constructing and defending Afro-Colombian territories and the counterweights to these strategies such as national development projects, neoliberal markets, and drug trafficking; and (2) the specific community-based organizational processes at a collective and individual level that have been used to guarantee the permanence of territory and have aided people in overcoming the social and psychological impact of ongoing violence and conflict. These are not reported on here.

6. The contextual variable of how and to what extent the participants choose to make these tensions public is of course crucial here. As project coordinators, we made a special point of encouraging reportage on these deliberations, on the grounds that they are constructive and illuminating. We recognize, of course, that reportage of this sort can be delicate and at times it is best kept out of public realm; although we strongly encourage disclosure, we respect the organizations' discernment on the details.