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Abstract. This essay reflects on the consent process during fieldwork that is currently in progress for my doctoral dissertation. Drawing on over six months of participant observation, archival research, and interviews in an indigenous village in Oaxaca, Mexico, I describe how I re-confirm consent with village authorities, collectives, and individual participants throughout the research process. I frame this reflection of my ongoing research methods in literature on feminist and decolonial methodologies, noting how a continuous consent process contributes to new possibilities for researcher accountability, co-production of knowledge, and disrupting power relations.

Centering Consent in Fieldwork

I write from an indigenous village in the mountains of northeastern Oaxaca, Mexico where I am conducting ethnographic research on women's obligations and rights, migration and the household economy. In this essay, I offer reflections on how I am putting the collective consent of the village and the individual consent of women at the center of fieldwork (Basile, Asselin, and Martin 2017).

Consent is not a legal language, a script, checking boxes on a form, or a signature. Consent is a negotiation of uneven power dynamics. In this case, I am a doctoral candidate at a US university and the participants are members of an indigenous community in Mexico. The university system is a part of an ongoing colonial-capitalist education project (Meyerhoff 2019). The indigenous community where I work survived attempts at conquest by other indigenous peoples and Spanish colonization. They currently struggle against the expropriation of their lands by various megaprojects that are ongoing in southern Mexico (Aparicio 2011). The harm that the US university system caused to indigenous struggles for autonomy in Oaxaca is exemplified by the Bowman Expedition¹. Centering consent at every step of the methods may disrupt the colonial power relations of research. I call the consent process that I use *re-confirming consent* because it is constant dialogue, transparency, and collaboration.

I began the consent process in meetings with village authorities. Most of Oaxaca's municipalities are governed by indigenous customary laws that are rooted in traditional collective practice. The authorities are nominated and elected by the village to serve for 1-3 years. I was accompanied in the meetings by a professor from the US and a colleague who is from the village - both have strong ties with the community. First my colleague spoke about my character, and how he believed I would make a respectful and collaborative research project. Then, the professor spoke about my qualifications and training. I closed the presentation part of the meetings by reading a description of my research project. I answered questions about how I would compensate my hosts for food and lodging, and I was granted permission to stay.

The meeting with authorities was one step in the consent process, but was hardly sufficient. First, while the authorities are nominated by the collective, engaging the broader collective of village citizens is fundamental (Robles, n.d.). Second, I was the only woman present in the meetings². In order to engage the collective and individual consent of women in the village, I spent six months doing participant observation that included space for discussing the research project. I began by volunteering to work with women as they prepared food for community functions (groups of women do this almost daily for groups that range from 20 students to the entire village). As we plucked chickens, made tortillas and tamales, and washed dishes, I explained my research project. I was asked pointed questions about my project,

¹ Called the México Indígena project in Oaxaca and coordinated by geographers Peter Herlihy, Jerome Dobson, and Miguel Aguilar Robledo, the Bowman Expedition was a series of research projects co-funded by the Foreign Military Studies Office and the American Geographical Society in the early 2000s. Indigenous communities in Oaxaca were not informed of the military's role in the project. For more, see *Political Geography*, Volume 29, Issue 8, particularly the articles by Joe Bryan and Melquiades Cruz.

² See Barrera Bassols 2006 and Curiel et al. 2015 for more on women holding political office at the municipal and village level in Oaxaca.

education, research funding, family, religious beliefs, and political ideas. At the same time, I attended collective meetings of village citizens, where authorities explained my presence and asked for consent from the collective. Then, individual women began to invite me to their homes. For the first visit, I arrived with a local research assistant, a woman who is from the village. The three of us chatted about the project. I listened to women talk about their families and responsibilities. Visits often ended with me requesting to spend more time with them and their family and them extending an invitation for me to visit again. During subsequent visits, we cooked, did laundry, looked after children, went to their fields to harvest, hauled firewood, and drank coffee.

After six months, I have visited 50 individual women in their homes multiple times. Giving women examples of how I am thinking about their work and life was one way I re-confirm their consent to participate. I listen to their reactions to my ideas and adjust my research accordingly. I began interviews this month and am re-confirming consent in new ways. Interviews are prefaced with conversations about what will be asked, how the answers will be interpreted, where the findings will be published, how this will benefit me, and how this might benefit them and the village. I will meet with the authorities this week to review the interview questions. We will discuss how the data generated from the interviews might serve the collective, while preserving the integrity of individual women's voices.

Re-confirming consent is an important part of collaborative methods that are inroads for co-production of knowledge (Rose 1997; Haraway 1991; Kobayashi 1994; Caretta 2015). It requires time for co-construction of research methods, reflection, further collaboration, and re-doing plans. Consent has the potential to disrupt the power relations of colonial knowledge production because it provides participants and the researcher with the option to refuse to participate (Coddington 2017; Smith 2012; Simpson 2014; Tuck and Yang 2014). Through re-confirming consent, I increasingly hold myself accountable to the people that I work with. This is crucial between researchers and communities that have been historically exploited and continue to be targeted as sights of plunder by the university. While many factors limit how we put feminist and decolonial methods into practice (Benson and Nagar 2006), it is vital that we do this hard work, and that we write about it, because it opens up new possibilities for moving beyond current conditions.

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