ORIGINAL ARTICLE

From rhetorical "inclusion" toward decolonial futures: Building communities of resistance against structural violence

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Abstract
In this paper, we name and uplift the ways in which Miya community workers are building communities of resistance as ways to address the manifold colonial, structural (including state-sponsored), and epistemic violence in their lives. These active spaces of refusal and resistance constitute the grounds of our theorizing. Centering this theory in the flesh, we offer critical implications for decolonial liberatory praxis, specifically community-engaged praxis in solidarity with people's struggles. In doing so, we speak to questions such as: What are the range of ways in which Global South communities are coming together to tackle various forms of political, social, epistemic, and racial injustice? What are ways of doing, being, and knowing that are produced at the borders and liminal zones? What are the varied ways in which people understand and name solidarities, alliances, and relationalities in pursuit of justice? We engage with these questions from our radically rooted places in Miya people's struggles via storytelling that not only confronts the historical and ongoing oppression, but also upholds desire—Interweaving and honoring rage, grief, pain, creativity, love, and communality.

KEYWORDS
Decolonial praxis, Global South, Miya community, Refusal, Storytelling, Structural violence

Highlights

- Reclaiming theory is a decolonial imperative for people excluded from Western knowledge societies.
- Miya women's praxis moves beyond "inclusion" to create non-oppressive modes of being and knowing.
- Miya people resist commodification and damage-centered narratives of Global South communities.
- Researchers must prioritize solidarity and honor communities' vocabulary, metaphors, and silences.

INTRODUCTION

I am tired, tired of introducing myself
To you.
I bear all your insults and still shout,
Mother! I am yours!

These lines are drawn from the poem, *Our Mother*[1] by Rehna Sultana. Sultana is part of the Miya poetry movement, an emerging arts-based resistance in the Northeast Indian state of Assam—where close to two million people were disenfranchised in 2019; people who are currently facing detention and statelessness (Murshid, 2016; Raj & Gettleman, 2019). The vast majority of those disenfranchised are Miya people who are often referred to as "Bengal-origin Muslims" in public policy and scholar discourses. This label has colonial roots as Miya people are descendants of Muslim peasants brought to present day Assam from pre-partition Bengal (now Bangladesh) for agricultural labor. Dating back to the early 19th century,

[1]See https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/writer/rehna-sultana/

this was one of many instances of British colonial population transfers or forced displacements (https://cjp.org.in/assam/#history). In Assam, Miya communities are considered the Other and have been subject to legacies of discrimination, state violence, and cultural erasures. The ongoing mass scale disenfranchisement[2] is part of protracted persecution of Miya people. Against a colossal scale of structural (including state-sponsored) violence and dehumanization, grassroots organizers and activists from Miya communities mobilize to challenge different vectors of injustice (political, social, epistemic, ethnic, linguistic). Miya communities are increasingly claiming their Miya identities, fighting for their dignity, rights, ancestral relationships to land, their very right to exist. In this paper, we narrate some of the ways Miya people are confronting the histories and consequences of structural violence. We write as, and, in solidarity with grassroots Miya community workers who seek to unerase Miya people's essence from the realm of subhuman (in)visibility.

Our purpose in this paper is twofold. First, we seek to name and uplift the ways in which we, as Miya community workers, are building communities of resistance as ways to address the manifold structural and cultural violence in our lives. These active spaces of resistance constitute the grounds of our theorizing; that is, we seek to theorize resistance *from* these lived experiences and knowledges, and not *about* them. Second, centering these knowledges, we offer provocations/implications for decolonial liberatory praxis, specifically community-engaged praxis in solidarity with people's struggles. In doing so, we speak to some of the key questions raised in the special issue call, such as: What are the range of ways in which Global South communities are coming together to tackle various forms of political, social, epistemic, and racial injustice? What are ways of doing, being, and knowing that are produced at the borders and liminal zones? What are the varied ways in which people understand and name solidarities, alliances, and relationalities in pursuit of justice? As we engage with these questions from our radically rooted places in community and struggle, we trouble assumptions and rhetorical practices of "inclusion" that maintain (post)colonial, imperialist, heteropatriarchal, and hegemonic cultural power (Ahmed, 2012; Cifor et al., 2019; Dutta, 2016).

We begin the paper with a brief discussion of our moorings—theoretical and relational. We link these moorings to the kinds of theoretical and methodological moves we make in this paper to write against coloniality and its myriad entrenchments and manifestations in academe. In the second section, we focus on the meaning and implications of what it means to *center community* in efforts to resist structural and cultural violence. Drawing upon Miya community workers' stories and critical

analyses of their praxis, we will focus on three community endeavors that demonstrate how Miya people speak truth to power and create humanizing spaces and modalities against pervasive dehumanization. Miya people's collective praxis has important implications/lessons for community-based research and action, which we will outline in the last section.

THEORETICAL MOORINGS: TOWARD RADICAL RELATIONALITY, REFUSAL, AND STORYTELLING

In this paper, we come together as people who are both *in struggle* (Miya community workers—Abdul Kalam Azad, Manjuwara Mullah, Kazi Sharowar Hussain, and Wahida Parveez) and *in solidarity with* Miya people's struggles (Urmi Dutta). Among the five of us, we move across different (at times overlapping) roles such as organizer, activist, teacher, caregiver, researcher, and poet. We move away from the university-community binary as such discursive framings and associated practices not only perpetuate epistemic violence but also undermine the complex relationships, alliances, shared histories, and commitments that bring us to this study (Butchart & Seedat, 1990; Carolissen, et al., 2010; Dutta, 2018). Some of us (Abdul Kalam and Urmi, and more recently Wahida) are part of building the Miya Community Research Collective (MCRC)—an archive that honors Miya peoples' histories, knowledges, suffering, arts, and culture and seeks to brings those into the public arena to be acknowledged and witnessed (www.miyacommunityresearchcollective.org). The MCRC, along with other dimensions of our work is part of the broader struggle of Miya people against multiplicities of colonial, state, and epistemic violence. Political intimacies are an important foundation of our relationships and work together (see Daigle & Ramírez, 2019; Erakat, 2020; Tabar & Desai, 2017). Erakat (2020, p. 479) describes this structure of intimacy as follows:

> —a realm of feelings cultivated by, and nurtured in, social kinship. Unlike the transactional and tenuous nature of business relationships, such kinship is upheld by a common repertoire of mutually reinforcing deeds and gestures based on the visceral knowledge that the relationship exceeds political conditions and is the source of survival in the plural "we."

In other words, a politics of location and engagement rather than shared aspects of our identities alone do not seal our alliances. This is especially significant given that identity categorizations and classifications have been a primary mode of establishing colonial heteropatriarchal hierarchies (Bulhan, 1985; Lugones, 2014). In fact, our solidarity is produced through relationality and struggle,

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[2] These processes include: (i) updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC), a record keeping system rooted in colonial imperialist origins that purports to discern "genuine" citizens from "foreigners"; (ii) D-Voter or doubtful voter, a category introduced to deny voting rights and casting doubt on one's citizenship; and (iii) the Border Police, which can arbitrarily declare anyone a "suspected foreigner" within areas under their jurisdiction.

rather than preceding it (Dutta et al., 2021). We are building upon our inherited legacies of art, culture, perseverance, and ecology. We learn as we build, and we engage in radical dreaming to render possible that which may not currently exist. As such, we are constantly co-learning and supporting each other, and holding each other accountable to ways of being and knowing that are always in defense of love, and against that which is dehumanizing. We engage in storytelling sessions, community gatherings, capacity-building, action research, self-determined and collective care, transnational solidarity gatherings, sharing meals and poetry, and much more; defying strictures of institutions and borders, we are here because of our unwavering commitment to Miya people's struggles for justice and humanization. These relational complexities are reflected in the multiple usage of the term "we"—sometimes as a broader transnational collective committed to Miya people's struggles, and at times as Miya community workers at the frontlines of these struggles. Through a politics of location and engagement, we actively negotiate our varied identities and complex relationships to hegemonic power and write from our relationally rooted places of love, care, and accountability.

A theory and practice of refusal

The broader context of Miya people's struggles as well as this paper is anchored in a theory of refusal and desire (Ahmed, 2017; Atallah & Dutta, 2021; Cifor et al., 2019). A politics of refusal is characterized by concerted repudiation of processes that replicate and co-produce oppressive power arrangements of coloniality, imperialism, and heteropatriarchy. Refusal is generative in that it entails active efforts to create and sustain spaces outside of oppressive colonial modalities of being and knowing (Tuck & Yang, 2014b). In our work, analytic practices of refusal assume several forms (and will be elucidated further in subsequent sections). First, we embrace desire in our work. Desire, according to Tuck (2010, p. 644) is about "longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future; it is integral to our humanness. It is not only the painful elements of social and psychic realities, but also the textured acumen and hope." Desire is a framework, a mode, as well as a space for enacting refusal. It is this desire that animates Miya people's struggles and our work together toward nonoppressive futures.

Second, and relatedly, we resist damage-centered narratives of Third World/Global South peoples as sites of endemic dispossession. Within such narratives, pain and suffering constitute the monochromatic lens through which people's lives are viewed and understood. We defy such portrayals by uplifting stories that are complex, textured, and irreducible in their multiplicity. We engage in radical and emancipatory ways of bearing witness, which do not replicate fraught gendered, raced, and classed asymmetries that perpetually position some people as onlookers while others are always gazed upon (Bell, 2016; Cole, 2019;

Oliver, 2001). We resist normalized practices of theorizing about/on the backs of those suffering without committing to the fullness of their lives (Tuck & Yang, 2014b).

Third, we work from the ethical standpoint that there are stories and forms of knowledge that the academy does not have jurisdiction over. This is true of the kind of radical relationalities we have cultivated and nourished as we fight against the persecution of Miya communities. Our praxis is characterized by an unwavering ethical commitment to complex configurations of justice, self-determination, and complex personhood of those we are in struggle and/or solidarity with. We also nurture political intimacies and transnational solidarities to bolster our moral and ethical compass in this study (Erakat, 2020; Tabar & Desai, 2017). These are the decolonial and liberatory ethics and accountabilities we prioritize over discipline-based and institutionalized ethics.

Finally, refusal also requires a departure from theory/research that render Miya people/issues/struggles as inherently knowable, as objects of study. In fact, by directly expressing and enunciating our own stories, experiences, critical analyses, and implications, we (as Miya people) refuse to participate in processes that lead to our own objectification. In our work, and in this paper, Miya people are speaking subjects. As Miya community workers and those in solidarity with Miya people's struggles, we generate what Moraga (2015; p. xxiv) calls *theory in the flesh*: "The very act of writing then, conjuring/coming to 'see,' what has yet to be recorded in history is to bring into consciousness what only the body knows to be true…" As we write about what it means to build communities of resistance against structural violence, we generate theory *from* embodied, lived experiences, not *about* it; all the while recognizing that any knowing is only a fragment of what constitutes the fullness of Miya people's lives and struggles.

This turn to reclaiming acts of theorizing is a critical decolonial imperative considering how Global South communities are relegated to the periphery or excluded from Western knowledge societies. Theorizing is also a social necessity in light of complex layers of gradations of racialized inequality in South Asia along lines of caste, tribe, and religion. Guru (2002) has long critiqued what he calls the "pernicious divide between theoretical brahmins and empirical shudra" (p. 5003). This alludes to the epistemic violence that both stems from and maintains caste hierarchies in social scientific knowledge production in India; theory is considered the domain of brahmins and savarnas (oppressor castes) while those located at the bottom or outside of the caste structure are construed as intellectually inferior, whose contributions never ascend to that of "theory." We heed Guru's (2002) call to become subjects of our own thinking rather than the object of other's analyses.

Storytelling as *theory in the flesh*

Storytelling and listening are vital to how we theorize together. In many South Asian epistemes, storytelling and

listening have been the bases of collective memory and intergenerational modes of knowledge transmission (Khatun, 2018). Here, listening is an engaged, embodied, and deeply affective process rather than a muted, uni-directional, or passive activity (Bassel, 2017; Bell, 2016). We approach the task of listening from a relational and ethical orientation that is geared toward elevating those who have been silenced by crisscrossing vectors of colonial, state-sponsored, and epistemic violence. This process of listening liberates, makes, and remakes stories. Some stories are ripe—fully formed and years in the making—waiting to be told. Others commence as feeling, idea or experience and transform into powerful narratives in shared retellings. Some stories emerge from contradictions, fomenting and percolating, still taking form.

The *collective* process of constructing stories is as important as the stories that are generated. In our work, we understand collective as akin to what Lugones (2015) calls communality, that is, ways of being, knowing, and relating that are predicated on resisting oppressions, of "communal wanting, imagining, visioning, intending, and acting together…when intending is communal, the self that intends is communal." Communality is both the starting point and the method for crafting and reclaiming stories that restore Miya people's humanity—by naming oppressive practices, acknowledging the scope and depth of suffering, and up-lifting joy, creativity, and desire. In the process, stories become critical sources, sites, and modes of theory and knowledge construction.

The approach to storytelling as knowledge generation also informs how we co-write papers for academic outlets (including this one): by creating and nurturing expansive, linguistically fluid, multimodal spaces for storytelling, deep and sustained listening, mutual accompaniment, witnessing, and relating to each other's struggles and embodied knowledges (Dutta et al., 2021). In these spaces, we de-center both English language and the written word as the basis/criteria for knowledge production. Through iterative processes, we document, reflect, transcribe/translate, co-read, write, co-analyze, challenge, contend with, rethink, and build upon stories and themes that emerge. Thus, we have created our own grounded practices of knowledge production that are aligned with the decolonial ethics of Miya people's struggles. Rather than privileging English speakers/writers or ascribing scholarly expertize to those with PhDs or Global North institutional affiliations (such as Urmi Dutta), we approach academic writing as one of many different forms of labors that we contributed toward this paper. This is central to our decolonial ethics. In this light, we also reject colonial neoliberal binaries such as researcher-researched, academy-community, and global-local that not only flatten our complex histories and per-sonhoods, but also privileges institutionalized research as legitimate sources of knowledge and knowing.

In this spirit, we adopted a multivocal approach in presenting this paper. Our voices, stories, and analyses interact and interweave throughout the paper. In an en-deavor to honor and invoke the complexity of lived struggle, this interweaving takes several forms. As times, analyses are integrated into the main body of the paper. Often these are conceptualizations that have taken shape over the course of sustained engagement and dialogue. At other times, we present transcribed/translated excerpts to both honor and elucidate the textured nature of stories/experiences. Those excerpts should not be considered as individual stories or as mere examples but should be read together as a move toward *theory in the flesh* (Moraga, 2015)—a deeply grounded, relational, nonexploitative form of knowledge production that is accountable to people's struggles. In the following section, we examine the meaning and implications of what it means to *center community* in mobilizing resistance against structural violence.

CENTERING COMMUNITY: "WE BECOME THE RESILIENCE AND RESOURCE WE NEED"

Community is at the heart of Miya peoples' collective re-sistance against structural, cultural, and state-sponsored violence. Community is integral to our ways of being and knowing—in the mundane and the practical, and in our inspiration and imaginaries. As Abdul Kalam asserts, "I have never looked at my community with a bird's eye view…Whatever we do, the center of it is the community. We are not budging from that center." The centrality of community is captured in the term Miya community workers, which signifies Miya people working for their own communities. Eschewing rigid organizational identities or identifications (e.g., those based on financial support or other collaborations), Miya community workers center enduring relationships based on radical love, deep affinity, mutual recognition, dignity, and care. As important are the relationships between people and place. One such enduring relationship is between Miya people and chars, which are floating riverine islands created by the ebb and flow of the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries. For a century, char dwellers have borne disparaging labels and characterized as sites of endemic damage in public policy and popular dis-course. For many Miya community workers, the split be-tween such ubiquitous perceptions on the one hand and complex lived realities of char dwellers on the other, have been integral to their sociopolitical consciousness. As such, chars continue to be a critical node of sociocultural, political, and imagined communities.

Stepping into the role of Miya community workers: *If we do not do this, no one else will*

Miya community workers have different trajectories that foster their critical consciousness and bring them to their work against structural violence. Often, it is a lifetime of experiences and encounters with persecution and margin-ality that sow the seeds of critical consciousness. In

Manjuwara's case for example, it was her lived experiences of gender injustice—from witnessing women's subordinate positions in her own family to rural women's struggles against patriarchy and other forms of structural violence. Many others felt called to community work in the face of escalating violence and persecution. While many of us were working in our communities in scattered ways, it was unprecedented state violence (viz., mass scale disenfranchisement and detention) along with the conspicuous absence of civil society response that led to collective mobilization. We facilitated capacity building, fostered critical consciousness through political education, and walked alongside the hundreds of thousands of people impacted. Importantly, these efforts were not driven by nongovernmental organizations or nonprofits, but they emerged as we acted on a deeply felt moral obligation to respond to this cross generational subjugation.

Witnessing the precarity and struggles of Miya communities, especially char dwellers is also a turning point for many. Witnessing here is not a cognitive act; instead, as Hatley (2012, p. 3) has argued, it is an ethical and affective involvement where "the wounding of the other is registered in the first place not as an objective fact but as a subjective blow, a persecution, a trauma. The witness refuses to forget the weight of this blow, or the depth of the wound it inflicts." Abdul Kalam narrates one of those moments:

> I cannot forget what I saw. I reached out to local government officials who categorically dismissed my concerns. Our communities are devastated by floods every year yet no government official or journalist show up. Our people's conditions and precariousness remain excluded from mainstream stories. I started writing about the devastating impact of floods on char dwellers. Up until then, I had not written any journalistic articles. But it was the reality of people's circumstances that compelled me to write.

It is not only about the stories they we, but *how* we tell it. Abdul Kalam and Wahida recently published a journalistic article[3] on detention centers in Assam and how those function as zones of social death. This is not detached reporting, but embodied stories of injustice and persecution—stories that we community workers seek to hold and uplift with dignity, complexity, and compassion they deserve. As Wahida explains: "My thoughts and memory of working on that piece are indelibly tied to Firdaus Chacha [uncle]. I saw the detention center, the pain, and the darkness through his eyes. Everyone needs to see what he showed us." These are but a few stories of what it means for Miya community workers to step into these roles for, and in our communities in the face of pervasive structural violence.

The fluidity of community workers' roles: Disruptions and challenges

To be a Miya community worker is to take on assorted roles of activist, journalist, organizational steward, filmmaker, storyteller, researcher, human rights advocate, educator, translator, accountant, organizer, and healer. This demand to take on a multiplicity of roles stems from protracted histories of structural and cultural violence leaving Miya people with profoundly limited economic and social capital. Take for example, Manjuwara, gender justice activist and founder of Amrapari, a rural women artisan's collective. She provides social emotional support to members of the collective, intervenes in cases of domestic violence or child marriage, listens to women's stories, and fosters sociopolitical awareness at the same time as she develops design ideas, secures funding and raw materials, trains women, creates social media posts, manages accounts, and so on. The plethora of roles reflect the unremitting labor involved in addressing the deficits of the state (e.g., absence of aid in the face of devastating floods) as well its excesses (e.g., mass disenfranchisement and detention). As Miya community workers, we are compelled to acquire new knowledges and become more skillful as we confront new adversities. Across these varied overlapping roles, responsibilities, and relationalities, Miya community workers trouble dominant notions of expertize. Neoliberal ideas of change are premised on the promotion and embedding of professionalized and "expert" knowledges predominantly framed by a colonial logic (Sultana, 2019). Disrupting such perceptions, Miya community workers strategically and creatively re-envision their communities using local resources and readily available skills.

When the skills we need are not readily available, we seek those out. This may take the form of learning by doing or sharing critical knowledges and skills among ourselves. This may also assume different forms of solidarities, collaborations, partnerships, and/or strategic alliances with people/institutions/organizations. Crucially these endeavors must be understood as ways of expanding community capacities rather than hierarchical flow or transfer of knowledge/expertize/skill between the West and the so called Third World—a fundamental characteristic of the neoliberal development apparatus (Kapoor, 2008; Sultana, 2019). Miya community workers are steadfast in centering community as their ethical and moral compass; an ethical orientation that is integral to resisting commodification and disrupting ubiquitous damage- or deficit-centered narratives of Global South communities. Yet these powerful ethical praxes come with costs and should not be idealized or romanticized. As community workers, we are at the forefront of Miya people's struggles; we do not have the luxury of taking on specialized roles according to interests and/or passions. For example, Kazi is an artist with a deep desire to write poetry and make films. Yet, he finds himself stepping into the roles of journalist and researcher when that is what his communities need. Kazi recalls a salient moment during a visit to the chars several years ago:

Our first night, there were torrential rains leading to a lot of erosion. As the night progressed, people left their homes to escape the rising waters. I assisted people, and I also documented what was happening. The next day we saw that some 20-25 houses were washed away. People had retreated to platforms, and it was quite cold. I took photos, and documented the issues faced by people, and sent it to NE ZINE for publication.

Persecution of Miya people across generations have deprived us of social capital. Thus, one person is compelled to take on a multitude of roles leaving us with limited opportunity to hone our knowledges/skills/capacities in specialized ways. Given the premium placed on specialized knowledges and skills in neoliberal knowledge regimes, the immense depth and breadth of Miya community workers' capacities and knowledges remain undermined and devalued. Furthermore, the need to take on a multitude of roles and responsibilities have critical psychosocial ramifications for community workers. At the heart of this work is deep listening, of being present, and of expanding webs of radical care. This means that community workers perpetually find themselves in proximity to trauma whether it is embedded in the lives and stories of those they accompany, or their own inherited legacies of intergenerational trauma (Giacaman, 2017). For Manjuwara, these encounters are particularly pronounced given her work with char women whose everyday experiences are configured at crisscrossing vectors of patriarchy, poverty, and state violence. She encounters the unfathomable pain and recurrent loss wrought by the precarity of char dwellers' lives:

I listened to so many traumatic stories shared by women. One particularly stands out—a woman lost two grandchildren to drowning incidents in the char. First, it was her son's child who she was raising after her daughter-in-law's death. I still remember her pain and was devastated to get the news that she lost a second grandchild to drowning who had ended up in her care after her daughter's death. We rush to families when we get such news. We stand by them even if we cannot do much.

The sheer scope of structural violence also means that we as community workers must contend with the impossibility of addressing the manifold critical needs faced by many in our communities. We are constantly confronted with our limits as people's lives—their families, their citizenship, their livelihoods—and in fact their very right to live are in perpetual threat. Against the backdrop of precarity, there is a powerful collective imperative whereby all knowledges, capacities, and even ideas and insights are shared. Similarly, there are no personal accolades/failures, but consequences for entire communities. A different kind of abundance—a critical resilience praxis—is created when everything is collectively owned and shared; what are seen as "barriers" within a neoliberal scarcity paradigm are transformed by horizontal, unobstructed flows of knowledges, capacities, and care (Atallah, 2021; Atallah et al., 2019). This kind of resilience is distinct and represents a departure from traditional, individual-level conceptualizations of resilience that emphasize adapting to adversity. Instead, our understanding of critical resilience praxis is characterized by:

increased attention to (1) transdisciplinary commitments to social justice; (2) intersectionality and the interlocking power relations that interweave racism with other forms of oppression and social problems at local and global levels; (3) centering at the margins, building relationships toward directly prioritizing and privileging the voice(s) of marginalized individuals and groups with an emphasis on experiential and indigenous knowledges. (Atallah et al., 2019, p. 19)

The scope of Miya community workers' collective endeavors to disrupt structural and cultural violence is immense. It spans gender justice, political education, climate justice, health, education, the arts, and much more. It is not possible to attend to the breadth of this study meaningfully in any one paper. Therefore, in the subsequent section, we present three grassroots community initiatives that are at the heart of Miya people's struggle. These grew out of and continue to be animated by crises, needs, and desires that shape Miya people's lives.

MIYA COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AGAINST STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL VIOLENCE: TOWARD HUMANIZING POSSIBILITIES

In this section, we present three grassroots community initiatives/movements: Ango Khabar (Our News), a Miya community media platform; Amrapari (We Can), a women artisans' collective; and Miya resistance poetry; these not only highlight the ways in which Miya people are resisting violence and persecution, but also demonstrate the power of a desire-based framework as Miya people claim their humanities from the realm of dehumanization and sub-human invisibility. Across these endeavors, Miya people reclaim and uphold their complex personhoods from their radically rooted places (A. F. Gordon, 2008).

Ango Khabar (our news): Painting a landscape of Miya humanity

When Ango Khabar started and I first heard about it, I was astounded! *Ango* Khabar?

Seriously, **our** news? I have witnessed the same reaction in so many people. The first reaction that Miya people have when they encounter Ango Khabar is—**is this really our news? Are they going to tell our stories**? **In our language**? And then they feel good when they see these are our community's stories… they can relate to these stories. (Wahida)

Ango Khabar (https://www.facebook.com/angokhabar assam) is a digital community media platform that was created by Miya community workers as part of narrative interventions against public discourses that are systematically deployed to dehumanize Miya people (Azad, 2018a, 2018b; Hussain, 2020). The primary target audience of Ango Khabar are Miya people in Assam, most of whom have some access to mobile internet. In fact, the decision to select a commonly used social media platform (Facebook Page) to disseminate the stories was a strategic one to facilitate popular access. Ango Khabar is a movement to build a repository of stories that uplift complex dimensions of Miya people. Centering Miya communities, we generate digital stories at complex intersections of history, ecology, citizenship, and culture. Through these stories, we uphold our humanity and dignity, refusing to be coded within master narratives of deficit, disaster, or danger. This is an opportunity for us to tell stories of the oppression and domination meted out to our people (e.g., *What Remains After Five Years in Detention,* https://fb.watch/5hdJm BKkyf/), but also stories of art, culture, resilience, joy, love, and resistance (e.g., *Life is Coming Back to Rhythm in the Char-Chaporis of Assam,* https://fb.watch/5hdQJcQ0Ew/; *Oral History Project: Featuring Kurban Ali Choudhury,* https://fb. watch/5hdAWLvPZX/; *Troubadour Shahadat: A Folk Singer from the Chars,* https://fb.watch/5hdvAiv8hP/). In 13-year-old Hamidul's story, we highlight the trials and tribulations of youth in Kharballi char as they contend with the manifold structural barriers to education. Yet, as people listen to Hamidul's story, they are simultaneously able to see the beauty of the char: the shimmering surface of the river, gentle movement of the boat, the ebb and flow of the waves (*Harsh Reality of Hamidul,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccB5Ocz99qY%26t=16s). Through such stories, we are transforming the meaning of chars in the popular imaginary—from places replete with criminal activity, oppressed women, and no culture to those of immense beauty, culture, and perseverance (see *Revolution is Unfolding in the Char,* https://fb.watch/5hdi0ig1kw/). We are also expanding the scope of Ango Khabar as a space to uplift other struggles for justice (e.g., Adivasi and Dalit struggles/movements) and to build critical solidarities across struggles (e.g., *What Does Independence Day Mean to Adivasis in Assam,* https://fb.watch/5heGuRbXkF/).

Ango Khabar has considerably influenced mainstream media outlets in terms of both content and narrative. As more and more people circulate the stories, major news platforms—including those that had never covered these issues—have begun to report on structural violence faced by Miya communities. In addition to amplifying our communities' issues/voice, Ango Khabar also offers narrative framings for people who are unfamiliar with the complexities of our struggles. This is especially significant considering the profusion of narratives that render Miya people's experiences unintelligible outside of suffering. However, there are impediments (e.g., limited financial resources, social capital, and human resources) that hold back Ango Khabar from growing and soaring in the ways that we—community workers—dream of. Nevertheless, Ango Khabar has accomplished what no one had before: to reach and to connect with people in Miya communities who are relegated to liminal existence. They mobilized themselves, gathered necessary resources, skills, and capacities over time to tell Miya people stories: stories that call attention to the nature and impacts of structural (including state-sponsored) violence against Miya people; stories that are calls to action; stories that fill the void left by cultural erasures; and stories that counteract ubiquitous dehumanizing narratives that are deployed in justifying and naturalizing state-sponsored violence that targets Miya people.

Amrapari: Stitching together resistance against patriarchy and poverty

Amrapari (We Can) is a women artisan's collective that promotes gender justice via women's self-determination, dignity, and sustainable livelihoods in Miya communities. This is primarily accomplished through the creation of self-help groups of women artisans who have revived a centuries old legacy of quilt-making (called kheta in Miya language) passed down by mothers and grandmothers (https://amrapari.org).[4] While the need for sustainable livelihoods for char women has long been a concern, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown served as the impetus for starting Amrapari (Begum, 2021). Women who relied on daily wages (e.g., those who work in fisheries, agricultural work, brick kilns, etc.) suddenly found themselves out of work and without any means to secure food for their families. Manjuwara Mullah, long time gender justice activist and Miya community worker played a pivotal role in mobilizing women in chars to form Amrapari. Here she narrates the story of how Amrapari came to be.

> In the early days of the first lockdown (2020), we received numerous distress calls from women—typically daily wage earners—who were suddenly out of work. I was emotionally distraught as I heard story after story of women's struggles as they faced acute food insecurity, atrocities at home, and the fear of the pandemic. Any relief that we managed to organize was negligible considering the massive scale of the need. During those bleak times, I took up embroidering as a way of coping. A sense of serenity enveloped me even as I embroidered the first outline of a red

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[4]See *Stitching Dreams on Fabric,* https://fb.watch/5gi4UlU2IO/

flower on a white sheet. In the legacy of my grandmother, mother, and aunts, I began layering old fabric between embroidered sheets to create a kheta (quilt). Just as I finished the first quilt, we were hurled into yet another disaster—devastating floods. Once again, char women were confronted with food scarcity. Our relief work did little to alleviate the anxieties and needs of the women who were frantically seeking more sustainable livelihoods. That is when the idea sparked—the possibility of establishing a women's self-help group and collective to stitch and sell khetas. I shared this idea with women in several chars and was met with unequivocal enthusiasm. That was the beginnings of our collective Amrapari.

Amrapari is based on three interconnected themes that form the mainstay of their work, and which are direct responses to Miya women's struggles. First Amrapari recognizes the fundamental heterogeneity of women's oppression, that women at the margins of the nation state experience violence generated by structures, institutions, and histories that make their experiences irreducible to discrete categories (e.g., livelihood, health, domestic violence).[5] Amrapari is committed to the interconnected nature of women's struggles and resistance.

Second, Amrapari creates spaces for women's stories—where stories are shared, heard and received with dignity, respect, and compassion. Amrapari not only honors women's labor but also their experiences, their stories, struggles, and their critical analyses. Listening to women's stories of struggle, and holding space for them, has been an integral part of Manjuwara's work over the years. Recently, she along with a few other community workers wrote and performed a street play (see https://fb.watch/7h3y9Jux0A/) to enhance critical consciousness among members of Amrapari and to explore strategies for disrupting patriarchal violence (e.g., child marriage, domestic violence, halting education of girl child). The content was drawn from the trials and tribulations that Manjuwara and other community workers experience, and also witness as they accompany rural women. The performance was profoundly moving as it spoke to women's intimately lived struggles, to the pain, the wounds, the scars, and untold grief that they bore in their bodies and spirits. In these retelling of everyday and acute incidents, women's stories catalyze interstitial spaces of resistance and self-actualization.

Third, Amrapari is committed to elevating women's labor, which is devalued and often rendered invisible in neoliberal heteropatriarchal societal and family structures (Gopal, 2007). Manjuwara illustrates this by narrating an encounter with a woman in Majidbhita char:

I asked her what she does, and she replied "nothing." So, I asked her to describe a typical day. She told us that she gets up at dawn to take the cows out to graze. She then cooks, feeds her children, and gets them ready for school. Then she cleans the sheds, works in the fields, cuts grass, brings back cows from grazing, cleans the house, feeds the cows, makes dinner, feeds her children, and puts them to sleep. Only then, she eats and goes to bed.

Rural women have always worked hard, but Amrapari renders their work visible. Women's collective labor—stitching and selling khetas/quilts—is named and conferred dignity and respect. By transforming perceptions around women's work—namely that it has economic, social, and creative value—Amrapari supports women claim access to decision making (e.g., making decisions about children's education, exercising voting rights, holding elected representatives accountable, financially supporting elderly parents) that were previously denied to many.

Across these principles, the women of Amrapari collectively challenge multiple, interconnected manifestations of structural violence in their homes, families, villages, and larger society. These ways of challenging and disrupting routine configurations of gendered violence are rooted in an ethic of radical community care (Chowdhury, 2014). Amrapari is emerging as a counter-space for engaging in innovative and proactive actions. Crucially, these actions are not mediated by donor-structured development operations but predicated on Miya women's self-determination. Amrapari is an embodiment of Miya women's aspirations, their hopes and desires—for themselves, for their children, and for just futures.

Miya poetry: arts-based resistance and healing

That land is mine
I am not of that land
The land where my throat cracks with appeals and no one hears
Where my blood flows cheap and no one pays
Where they play politics with my son's coffin
And cards with my daughter's honour
The land where I wander crazy, confused as a beast
That land is mine
I am not of that land
(Excerpt from *That Land is Mine I am Not of That Land* by Kazi Neel)

The term *Miya* means gentleman in Urdu. However, in Assam (Northeast India), the term is employed as a slur—used synonymously with "illegal migrant," and "foreigner" to delegitimize Miya people's citizenship and belonging in Assam (Azad, 2018b, 2020). For Miya people, identity itself is a site of struggle, and from this struggle has emerged Miya poetry—a powerful form of resistance and healing practice. Across decades, dominant societal discourses have consistently portrayed Miya people as the Other.

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[5]For more examples of this in Northeast India, see: Dutta (2017).

Against this backdrop, Miya poetry has emerged as an important form of bearing witness—what Miya poet Shalim M. Hussain calls "a roll call of the history of violence" (Dutta et al., 2021). Miya poetry speaks to the myriad ebbs and flows of injustice (e.g., Rehna Sultana's *Ango Maa*; Ashraful Hussain's *Quit India '83 Basbari*; Kazi Neel's *The Son of a Doubtful Citizeni*). Miya people are discursively constructed as people lacking intrinsic dignity and value, where any vestige of humanity for Miya people can only be claimed through assimilation to dominant culture, the parameters of which remain a moving target (Azad, 2020). Infused with a radical humanizing politic, Miya poets write actively against assimilation as a criterion of being human, in defiance of identity categories that truncate their personhood.

Miya poetry has been inspired and deepened by various people's movements that draw upon the arts as social commentary and resistance, such as Black Arts Movement, Negritude Movement, Palestinian struggles for decolonization, and Dalit people's movements. In particular, the works of Malcolm X, James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, Mahmud Darwish, and Amiri Baraka have influenced Miya poets as they engage in concerted and intentional movement building against more than a century's worth of self-hate narratives. As Miya people, we have been taught to despise and reject everything about ourselves—our mother tongue, our bodies, our clothes, our food, our ways of being. Time and again, the very subject of our love and affection are dehumanized and reduced to objects of hate. Now that we are reclaiming our hated *Miya* identities, *geda*—a term of endearment for children—is being used as an insult. Miya poetry is predicated on a refusal of such inherited and evolving legacies of hatred. Thus, at its core, Miya poetry is a humanizing and healing project.

Miya poetry is an intimately experienced and lived political commitment. As Abdul Kalam notes, "I am not a poet, but even I wrote a poem to express what I feel and witness—about Fazal Chacha, about Khagrabari, about detention centers." Miya poetry is also a recuperation of denigrated Miya language, discourse, and symbols. Miya poet Kazi reflects:

> I could not envisage writing in my own language, that Miya bhasha [language] too has dignity. Shalim Bhai and Hafiz Bhai (Miya poets) helped me see this… we have to tell our own stories and write our own poetry. Indeed, if we have the potential to write poetry why should we draw on other cultural icons? We need to write about nau [boats], kaisha ban [a species of tall grass], jhau [a species of tree that grows on marshes] in the char!

Miya poetry is written in Miya, Char-Chapori languages/dialects, Assamese, and English along with translations into various other languages. Notably, what sets Miya poetry apart is the defiant absence of a grammar. Miya poets assert that poetry belongs to the people and must not be policed. Correspondingly they refuse gatekeeping practices and resist domestication by establishment literary scholars (Hussain, 2020).

As Miya poetry movement gathered momentum, those associated with the movement found themselves confronting widespread backlash from the state and civil society alike (Dutta et al., 2021).[6] As community workers, we are intimately acquainted with the costs of speaking truth to power. But the growing Miya poetry movement in 2019—a time when the state and wider civil society were implicated/complicit in mass scale disenfranchisement of Miya communities—marshaled unprecedented levels of hate and hostility against Miya poets. The force of the state machinery was brought to bear down on us. Miya poets were criminalized and labeled as threats to "national security" for naming our oppression and asserting our identities. The memory of those challenging times still evokes a visceral reaction in those of us who were affected (including Abdul Kalam, Kazi, and Manjuwara). But we acknowledge the power of the movement; in fact, the repressive measures had the contrary effect of drawing attention to Miya poetry, aiding its transnational circulation.

Miya poetry has become a powerful mode of expression and imagination that spans many facets of Miya people's lives and our very existence. We take the rocks and stones flung at us—the swears, curses, slander—and transform those into love. In this way, Miya poetry is a salve against the wounds inflicted by dominant society. Miya poetry has become integral to contending with legacies of collective historical trauma as well as fostering collective healing that is necessary to sustain larger struggles for dignity and rights. Wahida explains what this healing looks like:

> In Miya poetry, I see glimpses of my home; I see the trees and flowers in and around my home, I see the foliage, animals grazing. In some poems, I see my parent's childhood, I see rivers, I see the char, and I see our people's culture—our clothes, food, what we celebrate. I was indescribably drawn to Miya poetry. It was as if this was the one thing lacking in my life and now I have it. That is how I feel about Miya poetry.

Collectively reading and singing Miya poetry has become an integral part of any gathering—social or political, formal or informal, in physical proximity or socially distanced. Amin Nozmul Islam's melodious rendition of Mirza Lutfar Rahman's *Chore ekta jhori utse re*[7] (A revolution is unfolding in the char) has become an anthem for Miya people. Revolutionary Miya poetry is a life force, as we reclaim our personhoods from the realm of subhuman (in)visibility. As

[6]See also: https://www.huffpost.com/archive/in/entry/nrc-miya-poets-assam-woman_in_5d3f3e2ee4b0d24cde03f6d6; https://caravanmagazine.in/communities/assam-against-itself-miya-poets-asserting-identity-intimidation-fir

[7]This poem/song speaks of how silver and golden shards of the sandbars in the char bear witness to Miya people's rebellion. Listen to the song here: https://www.facebook.com/751295161695722/videos/1523381744454441/UzpfSTEwMDAwMzU0NTUzMjI2MzoyNTQ1ODgwNjE4ODczNDMx/

Miya poet Siraj Khan asserts (*My Son Has Learnt to Cuss Like the City,* trans. M. Shalim Hussain):

> Just as the tongues of beasts and birds
> Have no books, my language has no school
> I draw a tune from my mother's mouth
> And sing Bhatiyali.[1] I match rhythm with rhythm
> Pain with pain
> Clasp the sounds of the land close to my heart
> And speak the whispers of the sand
> The language of earth is the same everywhere.

Some common threads

Across these exemplars—Ango Khabar, Amrapari, and Miya poetry—we see how Miya community workers are building communities of resistance against deeply entrenched structural, cultural, epistemic, and state-sponsored violence. Taken together, the interwoven stories and storied analyses underscore the different dimensions of Miya community workers' critical move toward resistance and desire. We see how they enact different forms of refusal such as rejecting donor-driven models of development, challenging colonial parameters of intelligibility, and actively resisting neoliberal pulls of commodification and cooptation. They traverse multiple roles and responsibilities (e.g., researcher, journalist, poet, activist, storyteller, translator, and so on) in their efforts to *become the resource and resilience they need.* And, in all of these, community—and not institutions/organizations—is the center and the basis of ethics and accountability. Miya community workers' praxis represents a powerful decolonial alternative to hegemonic developmental and research paradigms. Thus, these praxes have important implications for community-based research and action informed by a decolonial ethic. They offer critical lessons for those seeking to work in solidarity with communities at the frontlines of struggles; that is, research and action that centers, and in support of community struggles rather than rendering communities, their issues, or struggles as the object of study. We present these implications in the following section.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

> People come here with different agenda. Some people want to write a report, others seek to write research papers, and yet others may want to write a media article. *But we are always here.* We cannot go anywhere else. Our responsibility does not end with writing a story. There are big ethical questions to consider. If research is about knowledge production, then *who is this knowledge for? Who holds the steering wheel?* Often researchers come with their own frames, carry

on the way they want, and write what they think. We are reduced to providing support and manual labor to aid their work! *If we do not have any say in the actual arguments made about us and our conditions, to what extent is this research valid or ethical?*

> Abdul Kalam Azad

Collaborations and partnerships with researchers, journalists, NGOs, and activists represent a critical way in which we as Miya community workers expand capacities, connect with broader audiences, and forge political intimacies with other movements. These endeavors and relationships are shaped by a fundamental desire to tell our stories with dignity, on our own terms, using our own lenses and frameworks. Community workers assume a multitude of roles such as key informant, fixers (for journalists), translators, interpreters, gathering data for researchers located in other countries, acting as intermediaries for NGOs or developmental organizations, conducting surveys for external reports, and so on. The terms of these encounters are often mired in exploitation and epistemic violence. For this paper, we focus on some key dimensions of exploitation and erasures perpetuated by academic researchers and NGOs.

First, academic researchers tend to reduce people's lived struggles to raw materials for theory and analysis. This is deeply linked to questions of epistemic justice where those with institutional power (especially with ties to Global North) are considered knowledge producers while the intellectual, emotional, political, and esthetic labors of frontliners are erased. Abdul Kalam offers the following examples:

> I worked with a senior scholar in South Asian Studies who is well known for her work on gender and violence. When we were in the field, I found her treating our communities like reservoirs of data and stories. There was no dignity for the people whose stories were being consumed… Another time, I hosted a scholar I deeply respected. He lived and ate with us in the char library. I helped him in his research and translations. But in his published article, he deidentified and anonymized all people and place. He used pseudonyms without even asking us what we wanted. No one reading it would know that it was our community library that was integral to his work.

Second, researchers often fail to acknowledge or appreciate the trauma that community workers witness, experience, and hold in the process of gathering interviews for them. Community workers are seen as providing a service rather than recognizing those specific activities in the larger context of Miya people's struggles. Wahida relates one such experience where they were involved in interviewing people incarcerated in detention centers as suspected "foreigners":

During the initial encounters with the academic researchers, I was led to believe that they would be sensitive. We conducted the interviews, wrote those up, and shared the stories with the researchers. You would think that they would respond, but no, there was no response! We cannot eat or sleep after we return from the interviews. The trauma of holding the stories of our people—there is no space for processing that with the people who ask for the stories. It is infuriating when people do not honor our experience, our perspectives. That is why we are doing the work in the first place!

Third, researchers, NGOs, nonprofits, and other developmental or activist media organizations are complicit in the exploitation and erasure of Miya people's physical, intellectual, emotional, and political labor. This is also true of well-regarded organizations that take a critical stance and speak truth to power. Consider the following vignette from Abdul Kalam:

A media activist group approached us to research hate speech in Assam. We worked hard—selecting, analyzing, and translating more than 1000 social media posts/comments. But we did not receive any remuneration or credit for our labor. They had promised to remunerate us, but the funds never came through because of bureaucratic red tape. There were people on the team with whom we have worked before—people who have visited the chars and eaten with us, people we helped gather stories for. They could have easily sorted the bottleneck, but they did not. *People take what they need but are often not proactive in working through/around bureaucratic barriers that are deleterious for us.*

This vignette from Manjuwara also highlights such exploitative erasures:

When NGOs need women representatives from our community, I help them because they do not have access. Once I arranged for five young women from our community to join a residential workshop in another state. This was a huge deal in our community! After a lot of struggle and personally taking responsibility for the young women, I made it possible for them to travel. *Yet not only do we not get any remuneration for our time and labor, but they also never mention our names in their reports.*

Across these vignettes (and there are many more), we begin to glimpse the manifold labors and costs that are concealed from peer-reviewed articles, books, and oft-cited reports that are regularly consumed by academics, including those who identify as scholar activists. These vignettes name a few of the exploitative practices that are institutionalized, normalized, and naturalized as part of the academic research and developmental work. Until we—community workers—challenge this as a collective, we cannot be at peace. Abdul Kalam unequivocally states:

I can be a researcher, a fixer for journalists, but whatever I do, *I cannot detach myself from my community*. If our collaborators do not afford us dignity, we cannot work with them. I am called arrogant because of that, but people do not try to understand why we say NO.

This refusal is not a rejection of collaborations, but a generative process of setting the terms and limits of potential collaborations (Tuck & Yang, 2014a). *What does it mean to bring oneself to this work in ways that decenter institutionalized research, ethics, and priorities and center the labors and struggles of frontliners? What does it mean to confer respect and dignity—to actively resist assumed hierarchical flow of knowledge and skills? How do we fight the coloniality and epistemic violence inherent in the university/academy-community binary?* In the following section, Miya community workers Abdul Kalam, Kazi, Wahida, and Manjuwara respond to these concerns in the form of an open letter to those who seek to engage in community-based research.

An open letter to collaborators: Toward an ethical theory of community-based research

We are rooted in our communities and in our struggles. Feeling backed up against a stone wall is our perpetual state of existence. We do our work (and the work for you) fully cognizant of the risks that come with it. Our work, our very existence is seen as a threat by dominant groups and by the state. We do not get government jobs; even when we do, it is hard. We do not receive any aid from the state. Gatekeepers do not open the gates for us. We are at constant risk of criminal cases and charges of sedition brought against us. **We still do this work because there is no other way.**

When people come to do research in these circumstances, they should have some responsibility toward our people. **If you want to get together with us, with our people, with community workers, it cannot be project-based**. It must not be the kind of work that ends with the funding cycle. For us, there are no deadlines or end points; this is our full-time work, our life's work. Our people are some of the most persecuted communities of our times. The scale of our persecution is immense. The state and many factions of civil society are aggressive in their agenda to dehumanize us, harass us, disenfranchise us, and incarcerate us in detention centers. To collaborate with us, you must be prepared to work with people in active struggle. This work will yield little material benefit and **you must be prepared to be courageous and share the risks**. How can researchers stay

here for one or two months, even six months, and presume to understand our experience and write about us? That is not possible. It is not that easy to grasp our realities or our lifetime's worth of experiences.

It is our shared responsibility to write in ways that do justice to people's experiences and the way they tell their stories. It is always a challenge to capture the complexity of people's lives. We may not be able to do it well or we may end up excluding some things. What does it mean when we leave things unsaid, or remove something from another's narrative? Perhaps those were as important as the things we do say! We must constantly contend with these tensions and learn from them. **We must not assume knowability; we must not take the easy path. We should feel the weight of discomfort, remorse, and responsibility so that we do things differently the next time.** These are ethical imperatives when representing the stories of people in struggle.

At times, you receive accolades for presenting stories and images of our community's suffering. But never assume that you are doing us a favor or charity. That is disrespectful. Respect and dignity are foundational to our work. **We do not work for people; we work with and alongside our fellow community members. We do not just do our work and leave.**

Researchers often come from different worlds, fortified by their professional tools and theoretical vocabulary. They use these tools to explain what we are going through. When people come to do research in the chars, the assumption is that we do not have the language or vocabulary to articulate our experiences—that someone else needs to tell our stories. They impose their own jargon and sophisticated vocabulary on our experiences and how we understand it.[8] Say you are a researcher, and you must present your findings to your funding agency. Do you really need to describe flooded huts as "swimming pools?" Or describe flood waters as "oceans" if you are a little sensitive? When you come in to conduct assessments in the wake of disasters, how do you quantify the suffering of families huddled in desperation as flood waters rise? **We do not need our experiences to be rendered intelligible through your armature of definitions, scales, and criteria or via metaphors that are not our own. We too can speak. We are good enough. As researchers and journalists, honor our vocabulary, our metaphors, and our silences**.

We are always open to collaborations, to the possibility of our stories, experiences, and struggles being amplified, however incremental or marginal. We are not saying that you should not or cannot tell our stories, but **if you do tell our stories, tell those with human dignity; tell our stories as an act of solidarity.** In fact, it is vital that we listen to and uplift each other's stories of struggle, resistance, and desire. We see connecting across struggles and learning from each other as important to our work. We believe that people

come to work with us with good intentions, but it is our heartfelt request that you do it with authentic respect and dignity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, we have glimpsed some of the ways that Miya people in Northeast India are responding to intricate webs of colonial, structural (including state-sponsored), and cultural violence by building communities of resistance. Across Ango Khabar, Amrapari, and Miya poetry movement, we see how Miya community workers' everyday praxis speak truth to power and transgress colonially configured tiers of humanity. Community is at the heart of Miya peoples' collective resistance. There is an urgency and collective commitment that animates community workers as we step into and navigate variegated roles (e.g., as researcher, poet, teacher, activist, etc.) and mobilize resistance against prolonged persecution. Eschewing positivist notions of generalizability, we offer stories of Miya people's enactments of resistance as provocations to rethink current arrangements and to imagine possibilities of existence, intersubjectivity, and solidarity beyond colonially configured modalities (see also Dutta et al., 2021).

Rather than rendering Miya people's resistance through a prism of research, we offer stories and elucidate stances of refusal that community workers directly contribute to the paper. In doing so, this paper presents important implications for epistemic justice. Epistemic justice is not only concerned with the content of knowledge, but also who possess the power to produce knowledge and to determine what constitutes valid knowledge. What is at stake here is not simply the rhetoric of voice, but the sort of voice one comes to have as the result of one's racialized, gendered, and geopolitical locations. Moving beyond apolitical and rhetorical practices of "inclusion" of subaltern voices, we demonstrate possibilities to reimagine theorizing as an activity undertaken by community workers in ways that do not draw strict boundaries between academy and community. Through this analytic practice of refusal, Miya community workers highlight how community psychologists can learn from and act in solidarity with dispossessed peoples in all their dignity and complexity without reifying or fetishizing their marginality. Furthermore, Miya community workers' philosophy and praxis underscore the importance of taking up an ethic of objection—that is, studying *to object*—rather than pursuing objectivity (Tuck & Yang, 2014b). As we show, an ethic of objection requires a sustained interrogation of legacies and enactments of coloniality as they manifest in geopolitical and epistemic power arrangements.

Our work rooted in Miya people's struggles have important implications for decolonial enactments in community psychology. First and foremost, it is not possible to have a decolonial discipline (e.g., decolonial community psychology) in and of itself; in fact, a disciplinary focus is

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[8]This is an example of the kind of symbolic violence that Hooks (1990, p. 343) critiques of social scientific research: "No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself… I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own."

inimical to decoloniality (see Atallah & Dutta, 2021; Gordon, 2014). Thus, decolonial community psychology is not another disciplinary sub field that we must now describe and delineate, but a strategy to call attention to create, nurture, and sustain ways of being, relating, and knowing beyond oppressive colonial modalities. It is meaningful only when relationally, politically, and ethically tethered to varied struggles for justice. Merely inflecting community psychology research or teaching with decolonial ideas is limited if the white Euro-American centric knowledge continues to be the preferred vantage point. Therefore, we need concerted repudiation of oppressive power arrangements (e.g., coloniality, imperialism, and heteropatriarchy) and their specific manifestations within the discipline and beyond. It is not about "including" majority world people or perspectives, but the very centering of knowledges generated in struggle and resistance; it is about theorizing from below as a fundamental ethical imperative. As Miya people's struggles teach us, we need to resist damage-centered narratives of majority world people and embrace desire—uplifting textured that are irreducible in their complexities. Thus, any decolonial endeavors in community psychology must refuse normalized practices of theorizing about/on the backs of those suffering without committing to the fullness of their lives. We must do this work from a deeply rooted place of care, responsibility and ethics that emanate from being in struggle or in solidarity with those at the frontlines of struggle.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

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