Unconditional Resistance as a Critical Research Methodology: The Power to Narrate

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Abstract. Unconditional resistance as a critical research methodology resists all forms of colonial projects. It explores the in-between, outside, and beyond of knowing research participants' pain and suffering. This article explores how we do research with racialized academic leaders (RALs). It focuses specifically on RALs because of their unique experiences in the academy, and because the current climate of equity, diversity, and inclusion in universities, RALs are highly sought for leadership roles. While universities are employing RALs, the fundamental question is how they are being protected as racialized leaders and how RALs protect themselves from lingering structures, systems, and conditions of colonialism. As researchers, we want to understand their experiences not just for the sake of gaining knowledge but also to foreground RALs' work and knowledge as forms of unconditional resistance. While the paper's main objective is to acknowledge that participants are empowered to narrate their stories when we do research, the power to narrate can only be achieved when researchers focus on the necessary platform of doing research. Therefore, I highlight that unconditional resistance is about the power to narrate the domination and annihilation of Indigenous and racialized peoples. Within this, I discuss the different ways of doing research with RALs, including unconditional resistance as a critical research methodology and the different questions that we can ask when we use this approach.

Keywords: unconditional resistance, power to narrate, Racialized academic leaders, critical research methodology

Introduction

Such an unconditional resistance could oppose the university to a great number of powers, for example to state powers (and thus to the power of the nation-state and its phantasm of indivisible sovereignty, which indicates how the university might be in advance not just cosmopolitan but universal, extending beyond world-wide citizenship and the nation-state in general), to economic powers, to corporations, and to national and international capital…in short, to all the powers that limit democracy to come. The university should thus also be the place in which nothing is beyond question. (Derrida, 2002, p. 26)

Derrida's discussion on unconditional resistance made me write this paper. I was ready to abandon my paper on critical research methodology for so many reasons. One of them is the realization (and frustration) that universities perpetuate violence through weaponization of academic rules and regulations (Garcia & Vemuri, 2017; Harris & Linder, 2023; Henry & Tator, 2009; Henry et al., 2017; Agresto, 1999). Racialized students and faculty members continue to experience violence (Battiste et al., 2002; Eisenkraft, 2010; Henry & Tator, 2009; Henry et al., 2017). While racialized leaders continue to fight and resist violence in the academy, they also continue to suffer and face negative consequences; for example, being punished, not getting promotion, being removed from their position (Ballard et al., 2020; Gooden, 2012; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Simson, 2013).

But then I came across Derrida's (2002) article "The Future of the Profession or the University Without Condition (Thanks to the 'Humanities')" which talked about unconditional resistance and how universities are focused on economic goals. Derrida speaks about unconditional resistance that will expose different powers that limit democracy because it centers accumulation rather than production of critical knowledge. This accumulation of resources defies the idea that university is a safe space for everyone who wants to learn new ideas—new ideas that focus on unconditional resistance to racial terror and fight against demonization of marginalized students. Unconditional resistance offers the hope of having an institution that allows for knowing the truth and dismantling colonial powers. While we live with the pedagogy of hope, it is then fundamental to understand how racialized academic leaders (RALs) exercise unconditional resistance, because the latter works through engagement and knowing when to question dominant ideologies or systems (Derrida, 2002; Foucault, 1978; hooks, 1994; Lather, 1991;; Tuck & Yang, 2012;). These dominant ideologies are meant to constrict one's ability to do good for others (Foucault, 1982; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 2000; Lather, 1998; Marx, 1867/1992; Zizek, 2009). Unconditional resistance is about exploring the hidden meanings of identity and complexities of working with a system that has been established by colonial

orders. It is about moving beyond what is right for the self and what is right for everyone. It is about questioning one's motive(s) and recognizing that each situation comes with nuances. It commits to questioning the simplification of doing, and focuses on allowing everyone's voices to be included in the process. It is also means understanding equity, inclusion, and diversity (EDI) from a critical perspective—about understanding the ongoing European colonialism and the impact it has had on Indigenous and racialized people. This calls us to retrace colonial history and trace how such a violent system of oppression continues to instill grievous pain on the body and psyche of Indigenous peoples and people of color. As we acknowledge the history of colonization, the enslavement of Black people, Chinese head tax, the Komagata Maru, Japanese internment, and the ongoing issues of anti-Black, anti-Asian, and anti-Indigenous racisms, then we can come to the realization that EDI is fundamental in doing research with RALs in the academy and beyond.

Equity allows us to provide opportunities to others who continue to be marginalized by a system that is geared towards social exclusion and expulsion of those who are different. We have to create transformative conditions that cater to and focus on marginalized groups in terms of their unique needs, grounded on their specific experiences. We are then called to disrupt the various colonial mechanisms that hinder the chances of marginalized groups to achieve livable life. We have to question all colonial projects that continue to negatively characterize marginalized peoples on the basis of their race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, and other forms of identity.

With a clear understanding of EDI as one of the commitments of unconditional resistance as a critical research methodology, we can use it as a framework to design the different mechanisms of how to do research. Such mechanisms will foreground how RALs exercise unconditional resistance. Research is one of the most important works of higher education. There are millions of dollars available in research, and in most cases there is an "acceleration of the rhythm…meaning the extent of powers of capitalization of such" (Derrida, 2002, p. 31). But what are the different aspects of research we must consider when we do research with RALs to understanding their mechanisms for unconditional resistance? In this article, I will discuss the different factors that need to be included when we do research with RALs, such as the questions that are being asked in the process of collecting data. These questions are not geared to be the only questions that need to be asked in the research, but they serve as an example of what can be used in any research endeavor, especially when they are beneficial to the research topic. Then, I conclude that it is necessary to account for the reality of the everyday struggle of RALs in the academy and their mechanisms of unconditional resistance.

Increased Numbers of Racialized Academic Leaders

Universities have long been referred to as centers of learning and advancement, producers of knowledge, and promoters of equity, diversity, and inclusion (Bensimon & Malcolm, 2012a; Courage, 2012; Dei, 2016; Fisher, 2009; Harper, 2012; Pocklinton & Tupper, 2002; Schmidt, 2013). Students from all walks of life must work very hard to enter a university and face very stiff competition to get into the most prestigious universities based on the McLean's rating. As universities continue to promote quality education, inclusivity, and creativity, racialized faculty and students continue to endure pain and suffering (Crenshaw, 1991; Gusa, 2010; Hernández, 2016; Patton, 2016; Smith & Wolf, 2018; Tatum. 1997; Yosso, 2005). In recent decades, fundamental changes in policies have incorporated the framework of EDI. Many EDI programs, workshops, and trainings have been promoted to all members of the academic community, addressing (among other topics) anti-racism, Islamophobia, sanism, and homophobia. Yet, despite such initiatives, racism, violence, and discrimination still exist in universities and undermine the very ideas they claim to uphold of respecting everybody's rights to study in a safe university (Chesler et al., 2005; Dei, 2016; Eisenkraft, 2010; Gusa, 2010; Hamer & Lang, 2015; Henry et al., 2017; Yosso, 2005). RALs continue to suffer while they do their work on anti-oppressive and anti-racism (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012a; Hernández, 2016; Hirsch, 2016; Kena et al., 2016; Smith & Wolf, 2018). EDI has increased the number of faculty members and students in universities; however, we cannot ignore the racial and gendered violence that persist within these spaces (Collins, 2019; Morrison, 2020; Smith et al., 2007). RALs have been given the main responsibility to follow the EDI framework and do the work for EDI (Bensimon, & Malcom, 2012a; Brown, 2018; Cohen, 2019; Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Matsuda & Saito, 2014; Turner & Myers, 2000). RALs are also tasked with teaching anti-racism courses and discussing the long-lasting impact of colonialism and white supremacy. RALs must implement EDI while the rest have to supervise them. RALs have to walk the minefields of colonial rules and regulations while trying to fulfill the mandate that they signed up for. How do they exist within this kind of environment?

It is necessary to explore the intricacies of the academy and how policies have been used to benefit and denigrate Indigenous and racialized students and faculty—policies rooted in white supremacy (Blumenfeld, 2012; Gordon, 2019; Hinton, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lipsitz, 2006; Ransom, 2020; Sleeter, 2011). The policies represent a colonial ruling that focuses on the disappearance of Indigenous people so that they can claim that they own the land and decide who stays on the land and who is out—a ruling that has resulted in the deaths of people of color and Indigenous people (Crosby, 2004; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; King, 2012; Miller, 2000; Peters, 2002; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Veracini, 2010). For example, highly stereotypical lenses are being used against RALs. These highly stereotypical lenses become a barrier to leadership because they are muddled up with hate against marginalized

people (Blum, 2002; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Morgensen, 2011; Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). Whiteness has been used as a metric for eligibility to be considered as a leader. Despite using these colonial metrics, unconditional resistance has been useful in continuing the work for social justice (Ahmed, 2012; Davis, 1981; hooks 1994; López, 2006; Milner, 2010; Spivak, 1988; Tuck, 2009). It is a resistance that never ends and never expects anything in return other than faith in the university—a faith that the university will acknowledge that they are implicated in an ongoing colonial practice that has resulted in racial and gendered terror in and outside the classrooms.

Unconditional Resistance as a Critical Research Methodology

Unconditional resistance as critical research is an anti-colonial, anti-racist methodology. It focuses on understanding the long-lasting impact of colonization on Indigenous and racialized people. It explores the impact of violence and trauma. In this exploration, participants and researchers are able to have an effective dialogue to talk about the topic that both of them have selected. It is a critical methodology that centers on the lives of those who are part of the research. Mainstream methodology only wants to know the experience of the researcher, but unconditional resistance is not only about knowing the issues that the participants are facing but also creating a space where the participant also hears the researcher's experiences. According to Fook (2011):

> Most approaches to research foreground either the researcher's or the participant's perspective. For example, methods like deconstruction or discourse analysis ultimately use the framework of the researcher to analyze, interpret (and sometimes implicitly judge) participants' experiences. On the other hand, methods like narrative analysis or grounded theory run some risks inherent in "standpointism," namely over-privileging the participants' perspective (Brown, 1995). For instance, there might be discrepancies between what people say about a situation and what they actually did in it, or between what they say about it and what they are aware of. (p. 59)

Unconditional resistance as a critical research methodology is not concerned about privileging one side but rather bringing everyone to challenge every complexity of a topic that needs to be discussed. Its central tenet is to resist all forms of colonial violence. In the issue of racism, unconditional resistance focuses on understanding the history of colonization and the ongoing technologies that continue in and through different systems, structures, and institutions. It explores the very core of the interlocking systems of domination: capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy. It examines how each system of domination cannot exist without fueling each other. It exposes how racism becomes the root cause of these

systems of domination. It showcases the practices that while they speak about the experience of racism, they simultaneously discuss forms of resistance. A resistance that shows the power and agency of the participant. A power to speak up without fear of judgment. A power of expressing emotions without fear of being seen as weak. The power to narrate their experience without fear of exposure. A power to narrate in detail about their experiences without fear of being reported to the court of law. A power to feel the love that they have been longing for.

The other tenet is having a space of healing. Healing from pain and suffering. Healing is central in the unconditional resistance critical research methodology because it centers on the experiences of the racialized participants. It begins with the discussion of pre-colonial history. Then, we discuss colonization and how it is embedded in laws, procedures, and structures. When colonization is embedded in every law that governs everything that we do, then colonization is in us, and while it's in us, unconditional resistance will now open the way to the exploration of different forms of resisting. This exploration can be very painful because it opens the wounds and it can trigger different kinds of emotions such as anger, frustration, desperation, and fear. This methodology acknowledges all these emotions as part of embracing power and love.

The process of unconditional resistance as a research methodology is not polished; it goes through rugged terrain. Rugged terrain is a metaphor that I like to use when I talk about the process because it shows that it is not an easy process; it all depends on how both the participant and researcher feel as they discuss the topic that they agreed to discuss. What is important in this process is respect for one another and trust in each other. If respect and trust exist, no matter how rugged the terrain, they will always find a way to reach the destination. It has no structure, no rules and regulations; it only prioritizes the needs and wants of the participants and the researcher. There is no structure to follow (e.g., the hours to discuss the questions). All these depend on the agreement of both participants and researchers. The question would be, how do we follow guidelines mandated by ethics review boards? When the researchers write the ethics protocol to be submitted to a research ethics board, they will state that the time, place, questions, and other points will be determined by both the participants and the researcher.

How Do We Conduct Unconditional Critical Research Methodology?

I took part in collecting data for our research on accessibility of mental health because I would like to know more about the participants and build a deeper relationship despite my very busy schedule. It was a rewarding experience because I was able to understand the importance of methodology in research. It is crucial to use the methodology that fully respects the participants on how they want to share their experiences. Research is not only about collecting information; it is also about building relationships. During my visits to one of our campuses, I met with our participants. In my initial meeting, I don't normally introduce myself as the

head of a school; this information will come later in my introduction or there are many times that it is not necessary to share. It all depends on the situation where the participants ask where I work.

I began my conversation with a greeting like *kumusta kapatid*, which means how are you, brother or sister? *Kapatid* can be used for all genders and sexualities. A greeting that is rooted in our Filipino culture means acknowledging their presence and, at the same time, wanting to know how they are doing. This kind of greeting opens up a deep connection to the *inang bayan*, or our motherland. Our motherland, that we long to be because this is a place where we were born and grew up. This is a place where our ancestors live and are buried. This is a place where we get to understand and learn our cultures and traditions. This is a place where we learn the history of our people and the history of colonization and its never-ending impact on all of us. A place where colonizers stay for centuries so that they can continue to rip out the heart and soul of every member of the community. This is also a place where our ancestors have been practicing resistance through spirituality (Torres, 2021a, 2021b).

Our motherland is where we came from and where our roots are. To greet Filipino women participants in this manner is about reminding them that you are together and to feel the connection. A connection that comes from a place where you studied the national hero named Jose Rizal and the revolutionary leader against colonization named Diego Silang and his wife Gabriela Silang. They taught us how to fight back against forces of domination, and against evil principalities. It opens a lot of emotions and understanding while you know that you are both visitors in a country where you are now both citizens. A place where you both know that it is your permanent country, yet you feel that there is something missing. There is this unsettling feeling that cannot be described by any words other than embracing that feeling. The longing for each to talk about the motherland is a powerful way to get to know each other and be able to trust one another. This process can also be used when we want to understand the experience of racialized leaders in the academy. I talked about the process because it is important for unconditional resistance as a critical research methodology to respect these processes, to go through such a process and allow it to happen and not to rush it in order to get to the content. The content would not be as meaningful if the process of getting into the content is violated. Assumptions can be arrived at through the content and one of the ways to challenge these assumptions is to look into the process of how the research has come to know about the content.

Ways of Doing Research: Questions to Ask

It is important to recognize that all facets of the academy are not run by Indigenous and racialized leaders. When we examine the composition of each department, Indigenous and racialized faculty are the minority members. This department's makeup does not demonstrate diversity. This composition affects the way policies are formulated. How can social justice occur in a department that lacks diversity?

RALs are given a long list of mandates to fulfill within the dominant policies, which have been foregrounded by the legacy of colonization. The question is, how could they fulfill their mandate within a space that lacks diversity and what consequences will they face if they do not fulfill their mandate? If they try to fulfill these mandates and fight their way through, what would be the impact on their own career? Within this structure of the academy, the experience of a racialized leader is always a struggle. A struggle to make a change in the system. A struggle to be healthy so that they can deliver what the dominant system expects them to do. But how can a racialized leader be healthy when the policies that surround them are coming from a colonial legacy? A person can be healthy when the environment is suited to their needs. What if the environment is cruel to their well-being? What would their health look like? A change that would challenge the dominant policies and procedures and a change that will open doors for racialized and Indigenous students. The question that always lingers is: how can a racialized leader decolonize such space when everything is colonized? According to Fanon (1963), decolonization is a violent process. If it's a violent process, what are the questions that we can ask the participants that begin this process?

As a researcher, the first thing we need to ask is: How do racialized leaders navigate their position in a white space? This question will lead to an open discussion of the pain and challenges of being a leader in the academy. The rationale of asking this question is not about counting their pains and challenges, but for us to be able to learn about these pains. It is equally important as well to ask how they conceptualize pain. This question is a recognition that we see things in a different way. It is also to recognize the diversified meanings of pain. It is imperative to ask what they think is the root cause of their pain. We need to know the root cause so that we can link it to their pain and we can also ask them if they can trace it from the different institutions that were involved in their lives. This exercise is not about reflection but is rather a reflexive way of understanding the occurrence of events in the lives of racialized academic leaders. According to Torres and Nyaga (2021),

> While it is important to interrogate the structure, it is equally imperative that we interrogate our own implicit participation in the oppression of ourselves laterally. In fact, to think and act in interrogating the structure reminds us that we are part of and embody the structure that we are investigating. Consequently, the decolonization of the structure is equally a representation of how we engage in reflexive exercise of our implication in colonization. To that extent, critical reflexivity plays the role of outhabiting us from ourselves in ways that we mourn and question the role we play in the elimination of others from national imaginaries. (p. 10)

Another important point to consider is the word *challenges*. We may think that they are going through challenges, but since they are in the position, it is necessary to hear their point of view. As researchers, we ask what challenges mean to them and if they can give an example. This will give us a clear view of what we are looking for when talking about challenges.

When our research is focused on pain and challenges, we must understand that these two categories can trigger emotion. As a researcher, it is important that we know how to handle different emotions when we do research. Some of the advice on how to mitigate this means referring them to a counseling organization. Based on my own experience, I would allow the participants to tell me what they want me to do. I would not assume that they are in pain. I would wait for them to tell me that they are in pain and what they are willing for me to do. But before I ask the question about pain and challenges, I would let them know that it may spark emotion, in which case I would be honest to tell the truth about whether they are ready to answer the question. I would be very transparent to them that I do not have the capacity to do counseling; instead, I would be there for them to listen and to support them by referring them to a counselor. This reference will not be addressed by the research project. This kind of openness will provide more room between the researcher and participant to discuss the question of pain and challenges.

If the participant agrees to continue and expresses willingness to discuss their pain and challenges, as researchers we also have to be ready to deal with our own emotions. For example, I did research with a Filipino health care worker who happens to be a leader in the workplace. I asked about her experiences in the workplace, and she informed me that she has to deal with abuse. With this information, I felt the pain in my chest—I could not breathe. I could not believe what I was hearing; this situation reminded me of what Razack (2018) states: that we live in a "fantasy that North America was peacefully settled and not colonized" (p. 114). I realized that I am living in a world of fantasy. I thought that abuse does not exist in North America because I was told that North America is a haven for people who come from Third World countries. In the moment of realizing that my knowledge about North America is just a fantasy, I felt a heat on my forehead, and while I was feeling the heat, I started feeling a sharp pain on the right side of my head. At this point, I had to excuse myself so that I could take a painkiller to help me ease the pain. I am sharing this experience because, as researchers, we have to be ready to deal with our pain as well.

A follow-up question would be, while we recognize these pains and challenges, how do you see the importance of your role in the middle of the EDI climate? This question would then lead to a discussion of their joy and the beauty of who they are. What is important in this process of discussing joy is the healing. To speak of pain will open so many wounds and it may re-traumatize the participants, but to speak of joy and beauty is at the same time healing because in this process they can see that they have been resisting and fighting back. To resist means to transform colonial policies.

In this transformation, racialized people have been erased and invalidated because the system is resisting as well. In this process, dominant policies become beneficial to the dominant group and become a tool in enabling oppression. However, the process of transformation will slowly break these tools in a way that racialized leaders can instill the anti-racist way of doing things. This question will also lead to a discussion about EDI and how they see EDI from their own specific location. How EDI has been used as a site to reaffirm whiteness. This question can also lead to a discussion of how they have used it as a form of unconditional resistance. A way to continue working even when they know it is consequential to their own position. This question will be a discussion of how they have sacrificed their own lives in order to reify justice. That it is possible to fight justice while the system continues to disavow the long-lasting effects of residential school, slavery, and other forms of oppression.

To understand the ways in which racialized leaders resist oppression is to acknowledge the work that they have done in a white space. The acknowledgment gives them strength to continue fighting back and find ways to transform the system. A structural system that continues to apply the legacy of colonization. The legacy of colonization has been embedded in different institutions, policies, and procedures and has resulted in different forms of oppression.

Furthermore, it is important to ask a question about how to walk the thin line of decolonization and modernization. This question is necessary to ask when we do research with racialized leaders in the academy because it helps reflect the reasons why they are in the position and how they can use the position to make a change. This question will lead to a reflection on how colonization has changed them as racialized leaders and how they have handled issues of oppression in the academy. A question that recognizes the difficulties of wanting to change the status quo. A question that unravels the complexities of one's existence. A question that peels back the denial of not wanting to recognize who we really are. A question that recognizes how we shift our identity because of the complexities of decolonization and modernization. It is a question that exposes the neoliberalism aspect of the university.

How do you change the system that is so guided by white supremacy? This question will give you a sense and detail of every single thing they do to make a change in their own department. For example, in my role, it starts with a simple motion. A motion to approve the removal of a policy. To bring a motion is the very first step in changing the status quo. However, to get a majority to approve an anti-colonial motion is extremely difficult. A motion that dispels one of the workings of white supremacy, which leads to a transformative change in the institutions. The content of the motion is not important to know, but the process of arriving to have this motion is fundamental in the everyday life of a racialized leader. The question of how you arrived at proposing a motion would be the follow-up question. This question would help you understand who they are as a

racialized leader in the academy. The arrival of a proposal for such a motion is also very important to explore, as it gives us a more critical appreciation of what they have been doing. I am going to give you my experience of the motion that I proposed, the motion of removal of the professional admission processes. I joined the school with this policy, but while I am in the process of understanding the protocols and procedures, I can realize that many racialized and Indigenous students were not getting into the school.

How do you deal with racism? This question is fundamental in doing research with racialized leaders in the academy. Since colonization is embedded in every aspect of every system, it is important to ask to understand the workings of colonial technology that brought into the hierarchization of races. This question will return you back to the history of colonization and how it changed the whole dynamics of indigeneity. It also reveals the complexity of how racialized leaders walk through the terrain of leadership. In this question, you will hear their experience that while they do their work that is in line with the mission and vision of the department, they are prone to punishment. You will hear talk about how they have been regarded as hostile and violent. The process of experiencing being regarded as violent while you are fighting against injustices is fundamentally important to explore in research. This will help us understand that while racism is amalgamated in every structure of the system, racialized people continue to fight back. Whether this form of fighting back is effective or not is irrelevant. The lesson that a critical research methodology wants to learn is the unconditional resistance to colonization.

What are the ways in which you respond to issues that you face as a racial leader? This question will open a conversation on the guiding principles that they are using to hold onto their principles. It will give us a sense of their strengths and weaknesses. It is necessary to have this knowledge so that we can also highlight their weaknesses as a form of strength and unconditional resistance. This form of resistance is a process, and it evolves depending on the kind of oppression they face.

It also worth considering the notion of empathy as pedagogy. The question of the importance of empathy will give us a sense of who they are as a racialized leader. How do they treat their students and colleagues? This is a question of value. We have to understand the values so that we can get a sense of the different forms of unconditional resistance.

Conclusion

Unconditional resistance as a critical research methodology paves the way of doing research from the perspective of racialized participants and researchers. It gives a venue to speak about who they are without fear of getting punished. It is a critical research methodology that is anti-colonial and anti-racist. An anti-colonial framework is about challenging and resisting colonial regimes, systems, and ideologies. Unconditional resistance is about dismantling these colonial regimes of doing research.

Unconditional resistance is about breaking the systems of dominations that serve as a barrier for racialized leaders to speak up. Unconditional resistance as a critical research methodology centers the struggles of racialized leaders. A struggle that can be discussed in relation to the history of colonization.

This paper is an introduction to unconditional resistance as a critical research methodology. It discusses the meaning of how unconditional resistance becomes a critical research methodology. It lays the foundation of how we can conduct research through unconditional resistance. It explores the different ways that a researcher can ask while doing research with racialized leaders in the academy. It explains how unconditional research as a critical research methodology is a methodology for the people and by the people.

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