Introduction

I have always occupied middle spaces of belonging and not belonging within academia and beyond. In academia, I have had to create theoretical and methodological medleys to align my work with my culturally situated ontoepistemologies. In this chapter I discuss the pathways I followed to be in integrity and harmony with myself, and to give myself some reprieve from various interconnected structures of oppression.

In sharing my pathways, I present a self-created emergent theory as method, describe its applicability, and share how such a method fills the void I encountered in my academic journey as an educational researcher. I describe how I applied this theory in three different contexts and how such work can cross multiple boundaries, even as I present it as situated within my own experiences. I begin with a narrative exposition to provide the backstory that culminated in the creation of this framework. Next, I explain the framework and a heuristic of six applicable tenets, which stands in its own liminality between ontoepistemic understandings and application. The final two sections of the chapter present application exemplars and discuss possibilities.

Philosophies of inquiry, qualitative research, and empiricism

I grew up in India for the first 14 years of my life. I then moved to Canada, where I completed high school, my undergraduate degree, and a post-graduation diploma. I subsequently entered the U.S. as a graduate student.

As a doctoral student at the University of Georgia, despite dense readings in philosophies of educational and qualitative research, I found myself unsettled and lost in my effort to carve out a path for a culturally situated inquiry and to identify the means to traverse it. I did not see my ethnic, cultural, and/or transnational identity within such scholarship. My advisor instructed me to take classes in theory and philosophy, which led me to read the work of many

As a student with Indian heritage at a predominantly white institution, I already felt dislocated, uprooted, and marginalized because discourses in relation to my identity, culture, and history were never presented. I remember submitting a response paper for a particular week’s reading in which I described the distance I felt from the scholar’s written perspective. My professor gave me a B, noting, “Lots of people read this scholar’s work and find value.”

Through this interaction I learned that these scholars’ works were viewed as so universally applicable that I dare not question them or even acknowledge my experience of distance. I was expected to interpret this distance as indicating a deficit in my intellectual abilities, not the lack of universality of these scholars’ works. Yet, I did not internalize this deficit thinking because I came from a family with an abundance of academics and university graduates in multiple generations. I fully acknowledge that belonging to such a family provided me with privileges through various social structures in India, including those of caste, class, and religion. While my privileges made me complicit with the oppression of many people in India, when I crossed oceans and came to the U.S., most of those privileges were erased.

As I read applied works in which scholars used theory as a method, I encountered concepts like rhizoanalysis (Alvermann, 2000) and rhizome and rhizovocality (Honan, 2007; Jackson, 2003), informed by Deleuze and Guattari’s work. Using the figuration of a rhizome, an underground stem without a defined center, like ginger root, the authors argued for decentering, non-linearity, working through tracings in the messiness, and engaging in multiple, nomadic lines of flight (Braidotti, 1994; Leach & Boler, 1998). This work privileged an understanding of free movement, figuratively albeit, without interrogating barriers of such nomadic travels that could 

deterritorialize and rer territorialize multiple discursive planes/terrains.

However, I could not reconcile myself to the nomadic nature of rhizoanalysis, passing from one terrain to another, as many people in the world do not enjoy such unrestricted travel, not even in their imagination, due to centuries of slavery and colonization. While advocating for rhizoanalysis and rhizovocality, did these scholars consider the challenges faced by those with different histories and privileges? Still, as a graduate student, I appreciated the ways in which the continental philosophers allowed me to think deconstructively, break apart binaries, challenge foundational assumptions, and unsettle that which was commonly regarded as stable. Not until years later would I come to understand that certain groups of people can live with a theoretical unsettling, especially when the materiality of their lives is settled and anchored and they do not have to live in the fear of their lives or homes being uprooted. To cultivate that understanding, I journeyed into postcolonial, anti-colonial, transnational (feminist), and decolonial discourses.

Those whose work I relied on most heavily in understanding postcolonialism (and sometimes poststructuralism and postmodernism, as these were
the currency at my university) were Chandra Mohanty (1991, 2004), Ania Loomba (2002), Edward Said (1994), Kamala Visweswaran (1993), Lubna Chaudhry (2000), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993), Rey Chow (2002), Mitsuye Yamada (2002), Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994), and Trinh Minh-ha (1989, 1990). From these scholars, I learned that forces of imperialism, colonization, and globalization have divided the world hierarchically, silencing the subaltern and strongly reinforcing the binaried discursive terrain of us versus them in the flow of goods, knowledge, and labor across the world. I occupied a liminal space between what was taught to me that bore academic currency in my discipline and what I sought out to be more intelligible and culturally resonant. I often collaged multiple theories together to explore a possible path for my research, as none fully encompassed the juxtaposition of diaspora, transnationalism, decoloniality in the Global South, and methodological possibilities in educational research.

Postcolonial, postmodern, or poststructural discourses did not instruct me on methods of educational research. Hungry for methodological guidance, I found Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999/2002) foundational text, Decolonizing Methodologies. This text shaped my career trajectory, as Smith traced the violence of research, colonialism, scientific inquiry, and the Western imposition of intellectual superiority on Indigenous populations. How had I missed learning this history of scientific empiricism? Certainly when the National Research Council identified what would count as research (Shavelson & Towne, 2002), specifically scientific research, it omitted all the dark histories of empiricism in favor of counting, predicting, and generalizing—an approach opposed by many qualitative researchers, but none from a decolonial perspective (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004; St. Pierre, 2002). At conference after conference, panels of esteemed scholars debated philosophies, empiricism, educational research, and qualitative inquiry. Yet no one ever positioned a conversation about the colonial structure of research and its associated myopic, hegemonic understanding of empiricism.

Scholars like Peshkin (1988, 1993) and Spradley (1979, 1980) tried to legitimize the call for empiricism by providing a rationale for the goodness of qualitative research, elucidating the role of subjectivity in qualitative research and offering charts and tables laid out in a step-by-step manner to describe a process that is, by all accounts, messy, non-linear, iterative, and never truly prescriptive or replicable in its entirety. Terms like validity, reliability, credibility, and generalizability were reconceptualized within the discourse of qualitative research and assigned alternate meanings (Creswell, 1997). However, rather than elevating qualitative research, such moves situated it as a soft science, playing second fiddle to quantitative research. This positioned qualitative research as lacking value, until qualitative researchers decided to deal with these issues as moments of crisis in qualitative inquiry (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2005), and open up critical and Indigenous ways of doing qualitative inquiry.

While the history of qualitative research was illuminating for me, I was mindful of Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999/2002) alarming account of knowledge
Cultivating culturally situated theorizing

construction in the West. Smith reminds us to interrogate the relationship between the genealogical foundations of disciplines and classical and Enlightenment philosophies that resist engaging with knowledge systems outside their worldviews. For me, this meant that should I construct a methodology that deviates from those that are privileged in academia, I would be under the gaze of empiricism. How would I bypass marginalization and silencing to bring forward a belief system that is transnationally located within my heritage?

Transnationalism, at a rudimentary level, describes those with connections to two or more nation states, either through migration (Riccio, 2001) or, as I have argued elsewhere (Bhattacharya, 2009a), through the influence of technology. Transnational people shuttle between the historical, social, political, and cultural conditions of multiple nation states within the broader context of colonialism, patriarchy, xenophobia, and other interrelated structures of oppression. With technology so ubiquitous today, and given the large population of second- or third-generation children of migrants, the concept of transnationalism and the meanings of origin and home have become problematic (Bhattacharya, 2017; Chawla, 2014, 2015).

I entered a state of deep crisis, perplexed about how to position myself in this space of educational research. Educational research, by and large, is white. The curriculum is white, most of the educators are white (I had no educators of color in my undergraduate or graduate education), and the leadership and policymakers are mostly white. Where white educators could refuse empiricism or methodology of any sort (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015) and be supported for their departure from tradition, this option was not readily available to me. I was held to a different standard of accountability, and in some ways, it seemed that I spoke for my entire culture through my single study, despite my efforts to actively resist this. During my doctoral studies, as I learned which theories to privilege, I was also being widgetized and automatized, parroting theories like a robot – theories that were not resonant but gave me the false illusion of currency.

Around this time, I discovered the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and other feminist scholars of color (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002) and was especially moved by them. Anzaldúa introduced me to the concepts of hybridity and mestiza consciousness, which offered helpful framing devices as I considered my own border crossings along with those of the transnational Indian women participating in my study.1 Kamala Visweswaran (1994) taught me the valuable skills of moving in and out of ethnographic narratives and theorizing and troubling existing structures of knowledge production. Lubna Chaudhry (2000) illuminated the messiness and ethical implications of fieldwork when one operates from a cultural insider/outsider position.

Negotiating the privileged academic terrain and the one created by people who shared my ancestry confused and inspired me. It was at this time that I conceptualized de/colonizing with a slash as a way of framing the messiness of transnational existence. We desire a utopian freedom without having to be in relationship with colonizing forces. Yet we struggle against, resist,
accommodate to, and become complicit with various colonizing and other interconnected structures of oppression. The slash indicated a movement, a shuttling, a sense of un/settling, and the discovery of relations and practices within such shuttling as moments of anchoring.

I framed my work from this hybridized space while attending to the complications of my positioning as a cultural insider/outsider researcher. I stated:

As a transnational scholar in training in the U.S., I am painfully aware of my complicated positioning in conducting research on other female Indian graduate students. I realize that despite my best intentions to de/colonize my work, I cannot remain neutralized in what I produce because it is always already colonized through my British/Indian/Canadian/U.S. upbringing, training, and presentation of my work in the colonizer’s language to Western academia. Put another way, I write in English to capture the experience of people whose language of communication is a hybridized form of Hindi and English already in its colonized package. I write to translate the cultural productions of experiences of “Others,” unwittingly taking on the role of a “Third World” broker in a format acceptable in Western academic gatekeeping. These complicated situations and actions continue to create im/possibilities in which I exist, function, interrogate, and abandon thoughts, beliefs, and epistemologies.

(Bhattacharya, 2009b, p. 108)

From this complicated middle space, which offered few examples of ontological or cultural resonance within theoretical or methodological scholarly work, I often had to paste together multiple frameworks to conduct inquiry that would be valued in qualitative and educational research communities. For example, my dissertation was framed through de/colonial ontoepistemologies and further informed by postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism, transnationalism, transnational feminism, and Anzaldúaan notions of border crossings. While I did not have specific methodological guidance from these interwoven and entangled framings, I had to find a middle ground between empiricist and high theory surveillance of my work.

The empiricists required me to structure my work in ways that would illuminate all the pathways in my inquiry and the processes of traversing them, preferably acknowledging and not deviating too much from tradition. The high theory advocates, who valued theory-driven inquiry without any prior blueprint for methodology, urged me to discard all traditional approaches in favor of remaining open to what emerges out of the wreckage that remains after I deconstruct foundational assumptions.

Riding this middle space between empiricism and high theory, I felt discomfort with both these approaches of inquiry. I decided to trace this discomfort to embark on a journey of un/learning. If deconstructing is what I do, then why could I not deconstruct what was presented to me as foundational knowledge, breaking it apart to see what rises from the ruins? In the next
section, I highlight discoveries that arose from these ruins that allowed me to mitigate the pastiching of multiple frameworks in favor of ontoepistemologically and culturally congruent framing.

**Par/Desi framework: centering South Asian diaspora**

The expectation that I would find congruity with continental philosophers despite our cultural and ontoepistemic distance is a mark of the colonization that governs academia, normalizing Western knowledge-making and positioning whiteness as superior to all else. I learned quickly that in preparing conference presentations, if my title identified the population with whom I was working, my entire audience would consist of three or four Brown Asian people. It was as if what I had to say was irrelevant because it was culturally situated. Yet the reverse was not true. What continental philosophers and white qualitative research scholars had to say was rarely understood within the confines of its social, cultural, and historical context. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) did not interrogate their whiteness, nor did Creswell (1997) position his whiteness in writing his text. Yet Deleuze and Guattari are widely valued by theory-driven qualitative methodologists and educational researchers, while Creswell is equally valued by those who fetishize empiricism. Caught outside these polarized yet popularized discourses, I belonged to neither.

As an emerging scholar of color, the theoretical voice I sought to cultivate was deemed undesirable, lacking currency during my doctoral training. I understood the hierarchy that insisted that I develop a theoretical voice that centered and privileged the already-privileged white philosophers and qualitative researchers. Whiteness was presented as inherently desirable and ubiquitously applicable, demanding that I create an intelligibility and intimacy with it despite its incongruence with my knowing, being, and materiality.

Eventually I learned that by focusing solely on the issue under investigation without identifying my population in my conference paper titles – thereby enacting self-censorship – people would attend my talks. For example, if I wanted to discuss the fluidity of the consent form in qualitative research, people would attend as long as I did not reference working with transnational Indian graduate students in the U.S. Centering the fluidity of the consent form signaled a postmodern sensibility intersected with empiricism. This intersection was palatable to an academic audience, but it came at the cost of erasure. By erasing the cultural situatedness of my work, the structures and agents of educational research compelled me to perform my own ethnic and racial erasure.

As someone from a once-colonized nation the British invaded and remained in for 300 years, this move seemed eerily familiar. I was replicating the moves of my colonized ancestors, as though it were genetically encoded in me to participate in my own oppression. I thought of Smith’s (1999/2002) and Spivak’s (1990) urging to consider the strategic use of postcolonial (i.e., the critique of colonialism and its pervasive presence) moves within the academy.
Additionally, Spivak (1990) reminds us that how we are being listened to matters. She states:

For me, the question “Who should speak?” is less crucial than “Who will listen?” “I will speak for myself as a Third World person” is an important position for political mobilization today. But the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously; not with that kind of benevolent imperialism.

(p. 59)

I realized that when I spoke as a student of color in predominantly white spaces, I was listened to with a sense of benevolent imperialism but not taken seriously. This is where Lorde’s (1984) reminder that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house became poignant. I began to chart a path of un/learning and deep self-exploration (Anzaldúa, 2015), realizing that healing is a critical part of doing anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-oppression work. Disrupting, resisting, and experiencing multiple forms of oppression are toxic for the body, mind, and spirit. We must therefore create dialogic spaces in which the oppressed can discuss these issues. I began to cultivate a hybridized voice that was at once theoretical, embodied, and empirical, yet did not fit within any specific predetermined structures in qualitative or educational research.

After nearly 14 years of this un/learning, I constructed a framework I call the Par/Desi framework. Desi is a contested term, referring to people who have in/voluntarily migrated from various South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, and others with varied histories. Par, in multiple Indian languages, identifies someone who is not our own, outside our family circle. Pardesi refers to someone from a foreign land, who is therefore not from the homeland. As I explained recently, “I do not impose this label on everyone, but rather acknowledge the existence of a group who use this label as a way to come together as a community in our collective struggle, liberation, and healing” (Bhattacharya, 2019b, p. 211).

In activating my culturally situated ontoepistemic and theoretical voice, I explained:

Par/Des(i), for me, represents a Desi person who shuttles between multiple subject positions, crossing borders to move between and occupy both “First and Third” world discursive realities. Pardesis are often portrayed in popular Indian media as either fair-skinned or white people who are privileged, embraced, desired, and longed for by the Desis. Par in Hindi, Bengali, and other Indian languages signals those who are Other, not part of the family, and separate from the self. Yet, the depiction of the Pardesi as privileged comes at the cost of situating the Desi as inferior within colorism and whiteness-centered discourses.

If Desi is indigenous, then Pardesi is the colonizer, automatically creating a binary relationship between Desi and Pardesi. The representation
of Par/Des(i) offers a way to blur these binaried boundaries, center Desi ontoepistemologies, and create relationality and movement between internalized discourses of colonization and de/colonial desires. Constantly in a state of flux, a Par/Des(i) framework highlights the movement of transnationals between national discursive subject positions, internalized colonizing perspectives, and resistance to the colonizing materiality of western superiority. 

(Bhattacharya, 2019b, p. 183)

Having already conceptualized de/colonizing with a slash to represent a hybridized transnational shuttling, the Par/Desi framing offered a more culturally grounded approach, using non-English words that triggered years of cultural discourses that were embedded in our memories, narratives, literature, media, entertainment, and other heritage-based resources. I created six tenets of this Par/Desi ontoepistemic orientation (Bhattacharya, 2019b, pp. 184–185), summarized as follows:

1 **Re-membering Desh**

We re-member Desh (homeland) as nostalgic, static, and romanticized. This tenet focuses on re-memorying a static Desh that signifies simultaneously belonging and isolation, intersected with shifting privileges.

2 **Par/Des(i): the more desirable Other?**

Reflecting on the messy consequences of colonization, this tenet focuses on the interplay between indigeneity, homeland, invader identity (the identity of the colonizers and how such identity can be internalized and normalized), the desired foreigner, the desired foreign land, and experiences of hostility and isolation in foreign lands. Also embedded in this tenet are issues of internalized colonization, casteism, colorism, homophobia, Islamophobia, classism, ableism, sexism, and other forms of oppression that are not simply artifacts of the invaders’ cultural histories and practices. Therefore, shuttling between the Par and Desi subject positions yields messy negotiations in which we may simultaneously be oppressed and enact oppression.

3 **Home is permanently deferred**

This tenet refers to a fleeting and problematic understanding of and relationship with home, especially for those who cross oceans. Home is no longer just a physical dwelling, especially when a return to that dwelling reveals shifts in both those who return and those who remained, creating a constantly evolving, fleeting, and deferred relationship with home. Desis who were born and raised in the Global North are frequently questioned about where they are from, indicating that they cannot claim an unproblematic relationship to home within such lands. Home in this context
becomes a desire, an imagination of a romanticized and utopian picture, something that may not be present in the current moment. Such an aspiration is not entirely attainable under various colonizing and other oppressive forces, and our relationship with it is continuously in flux: constantly reconceptualized, recalibrated, and reimagined.

4 Beloved and problematic communities

Our communities can be sites of survival, strength, and resistance. Critical to this tenet is how much work we have done to bring awareness to our internalization of oppression – including but not limited to colonization, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, casteism, classism, Islamophobia, and so on – and how much freedom we have afforded ourselves to imagine alternate and transformative realities and futures. We are always moving between being part of a beloved community and resisting communal disciplinary gazes and structures.

5 Commodification of multiculturalism and diversity

This tenet calls for the vigorous interrogation of the commodification of multiculturalism and diversity, which are too often limited to tokenization or identity politics. The framework helps eliminate such detrimental practices and opens spaces for dialogue, action, and policy-building within higher education and beyond.

6 Communal healing as our priority

Communal healing is an utmost priority for our transformative futures. The hybridity, liminality, and shuttling embedded within the Par/Des(i) framework offer opportunities for our communities to meditate on healing while being responsive to our diversity, dialoguing across differences, and crafting possibilities for solidarity and common agendas. Our solidarities should employ multipronged approaches to work with/against/through oppressive structures, identify interventions, and engage in and enact communal healing.

In creating this theory – now to be used as method, I have negotiated the messy middle space between fetishizing empiricism and privileging high theory. This framing grounds experiences and materiality while abstracting six broad tenets. It creates space for transnational theorizing, which is implicated not only through my own experiences as presented here but also through the experiences of many others within and beyond my cultural group who find themselves in similar liminalities.

I nurtured the theorizing voice that was silenced in graduate school, making space for that voice to emerge to make certain implications for inquiry that were previously dismissed. I collected the pain points that arose for me over the years and pinned them cartographically on my paths, creating a map for navigating the terrain of educational research and qualitative inquiry. I secretly
hoped these cartographic moves would facilitate testimonials of a deep metamorphosis in how we approach qualitative inquiry within the context of educational research.

Yet such optimism also bears the risk of disappointment. I desire to reject colonial and imperialistic structures of inquiry, yet I fail to detach myself from these oppressive structures. I believe in the collective works of those who challenge the empire such that even when we are tethered to the empire’s influences and infrastructures, our energies and talents can move us forward to spaces and ways of knowing that the empire cannot imagine. My evidence for this conviction comes from my ancestors, who sustained their optimism and belief for 300 years before they ousted the British from India.

Applications

I have applied this framework as a method in three instances by: (1) revisiting my dissertation data; (2) analyzing two popular South Asian cultural narratives in the U.S.; (3) writing autoethnographically. In my dissertation, I re-read through a Par/Desi lens the experiences of international students from India experiencing their first year of graduate education in the U.S. (Bhattacharya, In Press). In this reading I fleshed out the ontoepistemic negotiations of a connection to home, lack of belongingness in a foreign country, and that which is lost in the liminality of crossing oceans.

This was not a linear, step-by-step exercise. I had to feel my way through it, with my own experiences as well as those entrusted to me by others. I reviewed the six Par/Desi tenets to look for cartographic possibilities and identify points of convergence. For example, an internalized narrative of the superiority of whiteness and colonial masters creates an aspiration to be in the proximity of whiteness. Yet the participants’ experiences of violence when in proximity to a desired whiteness created continuous instability and unsettling, influencing a re-membering of a home that never existed.

In this re-membering, participants glorified a sense of home, clinging to cultural elements they had never attended to or aligned with while in India by re-imagining them as something retained and internalized. Neerada was never religious or spiritual, but she began to align with nationalist discourses, downloading Hindu chants from the Internet and cultivating rituals she had never participated in or experienced personally while in India. Yamini began to cook Indian food to retain aspects of her cultural memories, although by her own account her diet in India consisted of pizza, burgers, and pasta, supplemented occasionally by home-cooked food prepared by her mother or paid staff, which she frequently rejected.

In my re-reading, I re-analyzed how the participants’ experiences are a re-membering of homeland, negotiating with their aspirational whiteness and their own minoritized positions. Highlighting Neerada’s and Yamini’s other experiences, I began to trace how they negotiated their belongingness in their local Indian student community and academic discipline. When
Neerada faced a crisis and needed a refuge outside of her local Indian student community, and requested to stay in my tiny apartment, I re-read that experience through a need for individual and communal healing from multiple oppressive gazes.

In my autoethnography (Bhattacharya, 2019c), I highlighted my experiences as a teenager after migrating from India to Canada. Immersing myself more deeply in Par/Desi ontoepistemologies, I re-read that data through a direct Bengali cultural lens (my direct cultural lineage) and a broad South Asian lens. Such reading provided a deep interrogation and exposition of how aspirational whiteness, re-membering homeland, and a permanently deferred sense of home create not only cultural imbalance and unsettling, but also such extensive cultural erasure that an entire generation of transnational Desi youth prefer to camouflage their heritage in favor of belongingness in predominantly white cultural spaces. I used writing, meditation, and being in community with like-minded friends, authors, and family members as my method of inquiry for this project, which further highlighted the need for individual and communal healing.

In my reading of South Asian narratives in popular culture (Bhattacharya, 2019d), I explored a 2017 documentary titled *The Problem with Apu* that problematized the character of Apu in the TV series *The Simpsons* (Melamedoff, 2017) and a Netflix special featuring a biographical account of comedian Hasan Minhaj (Storer, 2017). *The Simpsons* creators maintained that they were inspired by a character from the works of award-winning filmmaker Satyajit Ray named Apu, who was a free-spirited child raised in poverty who became a sensitive man of the world. When questioned about the grotesque caricature of Apu in *The Simpsons*, Dana Gould, head writer of the series, explained that they considered what might be funny, without concern for cultural sensitivity. Hari Kondabolu, who wrote and starred in the documentary, reminded viewers that there were no writers of color in the room, nor were there other South Asian representations in popular media when the show began to gain popularity, to challenge such a caricature. Multiple second-generation South Asian community members in the documentary reported being bullied in school, with the bullies referencing and mimicking Apu as a racialized slur.

Hasan Minhaj noted how the U.S. Constitution has been differentially applied to South Asian Muslims in the U.S., tracing his experiences in K–12 education and the violence his family endured in post 9–11 California. Using a Par/Desi lens, I examined the commodification of multiculturalism through benevolent imperialism and communal gazes. My Par/Desi reading demonstrated the pain of shuttling, of not belonging, which disrupts one’s sense of equity, dignity, and place and creates cognitive dissonance. Minhaj’s experiences demonstrate the pain of a Desi kid growing up in the U.S. to understand that equity is not something he could access easily, even if it is the law of the land. Juxtaposing these narratives with multiple Par/Desi tenets, the need for healing again became salient.
While this framing method is culturally situated, it can be applied outside of the South Asian context. For example, inspired by this method, researchers could engage in inquiry in multiple ways that either break from or modify established approaches to create more culturally situated alternatives. For example, we could abandon formal interviews in favor of kitchen table conversations, and replace focus groups with walks in gentrified neighborhoods to understand the intersectionality and lived realities of multiple structures of oppression. Justice-oriented scholars could use this framing to analyze culturally situated understandings of dislocation, lack of belongingness, communal solidarity and gazes, and the need for healing. Collectively, we could abandon a linear process of inquiry and bring all parts of ourselves that we might previously have censored into sense-making of a phenomenon in educational research. We could use resources outside of academia to demonstrate the boundary crossing value of theoretical readings and disrupt the practices that privilege the knowledge-making that occurs in academic spaces.

To these ends, multiple doctoral students are currently using this method to highlight South Asian experiences in the U.S. This group of emerging scholars reports that this method gives them language and pathways through which to change direction and advocate for both a focus and a mode of inquiry that do not concede to the empiricism fetish nor situate themselves as inferior to high theory work. I am also co-editing a special issue of the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* that focuses on scholarship informed or implicated by a Par/Desi framework.

**For whom is this theory? Concluding thoughts**

Educational research, especially qualitative inquiry, is deeply immersed in whiteness-oriented ontoepistemologies. The countries that produce such work are predominantly white, as are the authors who are privileged and celebrated within discourses of qualitative research and the philosophies of inquiry that inform qualitative work. With academic gatekeeping, it is arduous to insist congruency with work that emerges from non-white cultural perspectives when we have been force-fed a whiteness-centered curriculum and taught to devalue culturally situated theoretical and methodological voices. Worse, we have used these normalization moves to erase and silence ourselves, our colleagues, and our students simply because many of these oppressive moves are so normalized that it requires ceaseless vigilance to become aware of and dismantle them.

I recommend that readers who find themselves in between the empiricism fetish and the privileging of high theory find their own terrain and theoretical voice. To do so, one might lean on the scholarship and moves presented in this chapter. Additionally, one can move beyond academic discourses to identify valuable community-based knowledge construction.

Perhaps we are always already colonized and oppressed, and therefore never completely free from enacting violence toward ourselves and others. But even with such complicity, complacency and helplessness are not options for many
of us who are gravely concerned about the ways in which lives are devalued and suffering is normalized locally, nationally, and globally. For that reason, we, as educational researchers, need to move beyond what we were taught, enact a process of un/learning, trace our cultural histories and heritage, and find the courage to do risky work with a theoretical method that may even come from the streets (Bhattacharya, 2019a).

I have created a framework out of frustration that the existing ones did not represent the lived conditions of those who might find themselves as transnationals due to in/voluntary migrations. While all transnationals do not have identical experiences or demonstrate their agency similarly, this framework begins a conversation in educational research that has been silenced for far too long. The field of education is increasing in diversity (Han, 2013; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008) among both students and educators, who confront daily the effects of racism, xenophobia, ableism, homophobia, Islamophobia, transphobia, and more. The interconnections among these structures call for a multidimensional, intersectionally framed understanding of the ways they play out in people’s lives.

Perhaps not everyone can find full resonance in this theory as method, but it nevertheless provides educational researchers with an approach for dealing with messy complexities and complicities that traditional empiricist methods can neither recognize nor engage. Additionally, high theory approaches to inquiry often become lost in minutiae, refusing methodology and dismissing a closeness with the embodied, raw centering of human experiences. Those of us who seek culturally situated, just theoretical influences on our inquiry can use this framing, or elements of it, to cultivate our own theory-driven frameworks for inquiry.

There is no prescriptive format for inquiry to which researchers must adhere, as the colonial masters and western knowledge-makers purport. Inquiry and its design, execution, analysis, and representation can arise from a culturally situated framing that ontoepistemically rejects restrictive boundaries and imagines expansiveness and generativity. This is how we create our own paths, reject savioristic thinking, and create deep metamorphosizing conditions to change the direction of our journey.

Note

1 I was studying how transnational Indian women navigate the overt and hidden structures and curriculum of higher education in their graduate studies in the U.S.

References


