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# Immigrant-led Social Movements Confront Global Violence and Build Peace: Dialogue as Action Research Method and Collaborative Praxis for Transformation

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Immigrant-led social movements in the United States contribute to peacebuilding, catalyzing new Christian approaches to contest global violence and increase relational justice. This article is a reflective exchange on dialogue as method and praxis between two research collaborators pursuing this argument: a leader of the Latin American immigrant-led movement *Movimiento Cosecha* and an engaged scholar of peace studies and Christian ethics. Their conversation highlights challenges and opportunities in centering immigrant-led social change efforts in church ministries, vulnerability and power in intercultural research partnership relationships, and reshaping accountability. Key themes include the significance of long-term relationship-building, Indigenous knowledge systems, and negotiating the complexity of representation in writing rooted in collaboration. By foregrounding lived experience, the dialogue emphasizes the need for sustained, reciprocal engagement, and the co-development of ethical practices. The format itself—dialogue—shares a Latin American and Latine-inspired model for such engaged peacebuilding research and praxis.

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## **Introduction: Locating Social Movements in Relation to Transformative Approaches to Peacebuilding and the Western Christian Political Tradition**

Some responses to conflict around the world reduce violence and increase justice through efforts that address root causes, promote structural changes that shift power in society, support healing, and foster collaborative processes coordinating a range of actors. These are features of a transformative approach to peacebuilding (TPB), which maintains that conflict is normal and can be productive (Lederach 2003; Lederach and Appleby 2010).

Immigrant-led social movements in the United States (US) are a kind of peacebuilding. Social movements led by Brown and Black communities emphasize historical inequalities rooted in longitudinal effects of extractive colonialism, racialized expropriation of various kinds, the commodification of human life within slavery, US imperialism, and the “financialization of life as ‘human capital’ in neoliberalism” (Lowe 2015, 197). Such prophetic truth-

telling supports efforts to build social power (or specifically “*poder popular*”), impact public decision making, and create new political possibilities in the shell of the old. *Movimiento Cosecha*, a nonviolent immigrant-led social movement, and the Movement for Black Lives do not consider themselves peacebuilding groups, but neither did key nonviolent social movements in Colombia, Guatemala, the Philippines, and South Africa that created conditions and momentum for peace processes that altered the political landscape. Furthermore, these Brown- and Black-led US social movements promoting justice bear the above-mentioned features of TPB. Meanwhile, in the United States today, “peacebuilding” often refers to bridge-building and dialogue efforts carried out by White groups amidst political polarization (Schirch 2021). Given increased awareness about the relationship between the arrival of European refugees and immigrants and the genocide of Indigenous groups within the United States, the North Atlantic slave trade, the Civil War, and the legacy of these events in social movements led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities today, peacebuilders in

the United States need to recognize Brown- and Black-led social movements as important contemporary peacebuilding strategies.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, in the adjacent field of political theology, voices from the Global South and communities of color in the West likewise have identified the dominated, the marginalized, and decentralized social movements as the genuine subjects of history—at least of change that claims to be Christian in inspiration—and are rethinking politics and social change along these lines.<sup>2</sup> These theological voices converge with the TPB currents above to raise awareness about structural realities that were in plain sight, but were nevertheless invisible to many White Christian peacebuilding communities based in the United States. Additionally, some US Christian churches, affiliated institutions, and theologians are beginning to reckon with our entanglements in the horror and destruction of worlds in Latin America that fuel migration to the United States.<sup>3</sup> A critical theological approach to transformative peacebuilding includes reckoning with legacies of violence that coexist with our approaches to social change and therefore pays special attention to questions of power. It appreciates immigrant-led movements for justice as collective peacebuilding agents with a prophetic call.

This essay contributes towards Christian responses to global violence that honor decentralized social movements emerging from the political margins of society. Such Christian responses—sometimes referred to as decolonial and postcolonial—also reckon with the limitations and problems of Christian peace categories shaped by a Western Christian inheritance. This too contributes to a more just peace.

This collaborative initiative, based in participant action research (PAR) and intercultural dialogue, asks how people can relate to immigrants in ways that center immigrant lives and immigrant-led processes for justice. How can we move beyond helper/helped relationships that make one group hosts/insiders and the other group outsiders/guests? We think as and with members of Latin American immigrant-led processes about the

troubling assumptions embedded in the helper/helped relational pattern that is at the center of traditional models for serving immigrants, from the church sanctuary movement to nongovernmental organization advocacy efforts. We think about what it means for people from outside such processes and movements—such as Christians from dominant White cultures, among others—to join movements of protest that underscore the generative aspects of social conflict, transformation, and healing. We are thinking together about peacebuilding.

I, Carlos Casteñeda, am from Movimiento Cosecha, which means Harvest Movement in Spanish. I, Janna Hunter-Bowman, am an engaged scholar of peace and theology working with Cosecha. Movimiento Cosecha is a national network of organizers in the United States. We are a decentralized movement fighting for dignity, respect, and permanent protection for the well over eleven million undocumented persons in the United States. Each state has its own dynamics, issues, challenges, and struggles. The Cosecha groups, called circles, in each state organize to improve the quality of life of their community in their context. We are a diverse, multi-generational movement that converges around fourteen principles, including reciprocity; nonviolence; movement linking for racial, gender, and economic justice; and the idea that we have all that we need in community. The “we” here does not mean exclusively our community of undocumented workers, though many of us are undocumented. Our main goal is to center the voices of undocumented immigrants. We include those who inspire and aspire to the creation of new worlds. We seek alternatives for creating worlds and systems different from what we live in now.

In this back and forth, we, Carlos first and then Janna, describe the circumstances that led us to Movimiento Cosecha, how the collaborative research initiative unfolded and is structured, and how the notion of “helping” misconstrues collaborative relationships in which knowledge is created through exchange. This essay does not proceed in a traditional academic

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<sup>1</sup> Schirch (2021) indicates that peacebuilders are beginning to recognize Black- and Brown-led movements as important for peacebuilding. Publications in the field of peace studies tend to focus on peacemaking/building in non-Western countries. A review of three journals in the field, *The Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, the *Journal of Peace Research*, and *Peace and Change*, include no publications between 2021-2025 that specifically examine Black- and Brown-led civil resistance or social movements in the United States. Nevertheless, three articles indicate a shift. Renown civil resistance scholar Erica Chenoweth and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham (2023, 3) characterize “the United States as an increasingly salient site of conflict and contention.” Ashley Bohrer (2023) includes a case study of the 2020 racial justice uprisings to diagnose state-backed epistemic violence.

<sup>2</sup> Key texts include Gutierrez (2004), Cone (1970), Mosala (1989), Katongole (2017), and Pui-lan (2005).

<sup>3</sup> See Rajendra (2014), de la Torre (2010), Campese (2008), Steck (2004), Heyer (2010), and peace theology’s third wave, “reckoning,” outlined in Hunter-Bowman, “What is Peace Theology? Reinhold Niebuhr’s Realism in Waves of Peace Theology,” in the *Journal of Moral Theology* (forthcoming, July 2025).

format. We developed this piece in dialogue and choose to structure the essay accordingly with the hope that a conversational format will help convey how insight, challenge, and innovation emerge in our work with a kind of PAR, which we discuss in relation to interculturality and the “*mujerista*” concept of dialogue as method and praxis. The following is a condensed and edited version of a series of conversations.

## **How We, Carlos and Janna, Arrived at Movimiento Cosecha and How We Met**

**Carlos:** When I left my mom in Peru and arrived in the US in 1994, I was living with my dad, stepmom, brothers, and one sister. It was a difficult, dysfunctional situation. My siblings and I stayed outside of the house as much as we could. That is to say, when I arrived in the US I didn’t feel like I came into any kind of community.

I got involved in various youth groups, ending up as director of an evangelical church’s youth group. I started organizing with them. It was enriching for me, and yet I felt like the potential of this community was caged in those four walls. I started studying the work of Martin Luther King Jr. and thinking about how this church and many others in the United States were not doing what the gospel tells us to do—namely, side with the powerless and not the powerful. After quite a few years as youth director, I started to feel the need to leave the congregation in order to join the bigger church, the broader body of Christ.

As I make this type of transition, I ask myself, “Am I betraying my faith by leaving this place so that I can go out to a bigger space that is the community?” I want to make this clear—by leaving a congregation, I was never leaving the church—neither the body of Christ, nor my faith, nor interest in Christianity as a force in the world.

I ended up organizing with a nonprofit in New Jersey. All the tools and skills I picked up in the church helped me a lot in organizing. A lot of the things I did outside of the congregation are things I learned within it, especially building community and drawing on faith and hope as elements that bring people together amidst despair, duress, and oppression. That helped me a lot.

But things were not as beautiful as they seemed in the social justice nonprofit world. The way the nonprofit was organized tokenized Brown, Spanish-speaking immigrants like me. The director of my organization—serving and organizing mostly Spanish-speaking undocumented workers—always instructed me to give the opening welcome at our Thursday 7 p.m. community meetings. I was to employ my natural charisma and public speaking skills to say, “we are a community-centered and community-led organization,” but I saw that the community was not pulling the strings; instead, the direction and ideology came from

the top. The few times initiatives were received from the bottom, they got stuck on the way up and didn’t materialize. My supervisor, the executive directors, and others behind the desks, were disconnected from people on the ground.

**Janna:** I recall that another Cosecha leader described feeling like an “organizing puppet” of the Latino immigrant community when working with a national faith-based organizing group.

**Carlos:** I resonate with that. Also, the nonprofit organization was very close to the establishment. We worked with Democratic elected officials to draft bills, but always on their terms. We dared not disturb or deviate very much from the establishment. That shaped power dynamics in the organization and with the community. Nevertheless, I learned a lot there too.

When I needed to transition out of the nonprofit organizing space for those reasons, I moved to Movimiento Cosecha, a decentralized movement that fights for dignity, respect, and permanent protection, where roles are flexible. For example, I didn’t have an executive director who was telling me to read the script or not to read the script, metaphorically or literally.

In Cosecha, I was able to push forward a broader agenda with the community I grew up with. I joined Cosecha in 2017 at the beginning of a campaign in New Jersey that would grant all undocumented workers the minimum needed to drive vehicles. It took us about two years to win the campaign to pass the law. I want to point out, however, that this campaign had been going on for about 16 years prior to Cosecha’s participation.

In those two years, all of us in the community learned so much. We also went through processes of unlearning many things. We do not have legal immigration status. We had to unlearn the idea that we are undeserving of full humanity, of dignity. This movement was led by women. The majority of Cosecha’s organizers are women of color taking control of their own lives, and their own campaigns. They had lived their own process of transformation.

In a space like Cosecha we do have more flexibility than when working for an NGO (non-governmental organization), but we have challenges, like few financial resources. We are not connected to an establishment, so we have to be creative to secure resources. We also have to create alternatives to what other people are doing that has not worked to reach goals like the driver license issue and we have to struggle in ways that are transformative for participants.

My mission has continued to expand and unfold. There is so much to do. That’s when we met Janna, in the context of working to amplify the fight and struggle of our communities, communities of color, migrants,

and workers. That support is very welcome and comforting.

**Janna:** I first met you on a Zoom organizing call in preparation for the *caminata* (walk) across Indiana. You spoke about organizing in terms of drawing on memories of the ancestors to become a messianic force, in terms of an interruption in history, with reference to the German philosopher Walter Benjamin. I direct messaged Dara Marquez and asked—*who is that?* That was early summer 2021. Five years prior, in 2016, I met Dara Marquez at a meeting at the seminary in which a room full of church people, mostly White Mennonite, was organizing to protect and stand with immigrants through a new sanctuary movement, as churches and other groups were doing elsewhere in the country. Dara was among the dozen or maybe twenty members of the Latino/a immigrant community participating in the consultation. She interrupted the momentum of the conversation when she asked “Excuse me, what if what we want and need is not to go into your churches but for you to join us in the streets, would you do that?”

At the time, I was writing about how rural Colombian war victims—what liberation theology calls “nonpersons”—become political agents that extend life and contribute to transformation. In what became the book *Witnessing Peace: Becoming Agents Under Duress in Colombia* (Hunter-Bowman 2022), I was arguing that much that is significant for peacebuilding flies under the radar of larger NGOs, state entities, and academics because it is accomplished through a form of agency that they don’t recognize. Based in life and work in peacebuilding and human rights in Colombia (2001-2004; 2006-2010, followed by research), I was arguing that peacebuilders need to pay attention to the forms of power, knowledge, and processes developed by those most affected by the forms of violence we wish to resist and in which we are entangled. So often, human rights protection and peace plans are developed by white-collar workers at desks in Bogotá, Washington DC, New York, or Brussels, far from the violence-affected areas and disconnected from the communities on the ground that develop their own context-specific but fragile responses. Organizations often impose pre-formulated models of protection and transformation rather than attending to the critical and constructive voices on the ground.

The driving question is evident in the book’s title, *Witnessing Peace: Becoming Agents Under Duress in Colombia*. How do those under duress—what liberation theology calls “nonpersons”—become agents, and not just agents but constructive political agents? My notion of “constructive” is linked to the term “duress” and its place in legal scholarship and Catholic moral theology, where it refers to constraints on autonomy that might lead someone to cooperate with illegal or evil acts that

she would have extricated herself from, were it not for forced choices. It is an analogical extension, but I am not talking about how people have been forced into entanglements with evil but rather about what people have been able to accomplish under duress through positive freedom (freedom *to*, a risk to take that opens possibilities) that is distinct from liberal notions of negative freedom (freedom *from*, or negative immunities). The present situation of *duress* that agents negotiate is related to a bundle of factors including histories of colonialism, economic exploitation, and racism. That is, duress is deeply embedded in histories of injustice. The array of dominant discourses—common language and thought from a shared knowledge collection, institutions, laws, decisions to enforce or not enforce laws, and moral concepts that together bolster and perpetuate the exertion of power within society—can be traced back to these histories but are not overdetermined by them. It is within these interconnections that the organization of power relations takes shape, is reshaped, and even reconfigured. The significance of violence-affected communities’ efforts comes into focus through understanding the intersecting and interlocking constraints that place them under duress.

Dara’s question “Would *you* join *us*?” confronted me as the meeting facilitator because I realized some of the same dynamics might be playing out. Mostly White church people were offering church sanctuary to immigrants from Latin America. Church sanctuary is largely part of the White progressive church memory and moral imagination from the sanctuary movement of the 1980s. It has not led to robust structural and political change. Might it reproduce paternalistic power and reinforce racialized host/guest dynamics of power? That would be very awkward, given our stated wishes for radical solidarity. Dara’s voice was interrupting the logic of sanctuary with an invitation, ending with a question that hung in the air: *would you do that?* As I stood from my chair to respond, as the meeting facilitator, I visualized the significance of Dara’s question in terms of the directional flow of people: will Brown bodies enter predominantly White churches (sanctuary), or will White communities move into a predominantly Brown collective social movement in the streets?

## How the Project Unfolded

**Janna (continued):** After that meeting, I followed up with Dara with the support of our mutual friend, organizer Jason Shenk, and from there we developed relationships. Dara, her father Don Alvaro Marquez, and others from Indiana-based immigrant groups (who later developed Cosecha) generously collaborated with my engaged pedagogies classes at the seminary where I

am on faculty, the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), and I began participating in Cosecha activities. Over the years, we supported each other in various ways. Cosecha continued working with AMBS students, and AMBS sought to provide a space and community of support for Cosecha Indiana. For example, Don Alvaro Marquez's tragic death due to Covid in November of 2020—as result of exposure as an essential worker and reluctance to go to the hospital because he did not have documentation—sent the immigrant community and wider Elkhart community into shock and deep grief. The seminary was deeply honored to host a widely attended lantern release memorial service. Then in January 2021 we drew up a formal engaged research agreement. (See text box.)

As I look back on the 2021 research agreement, I see that we have developed our praxis and understanding since then, even as the initiative's North Star remains the same. By North Star, I mean the commitment to articulate an alternative to models of solidarity with immigrants rooted in the helper/help

logic through answering the question, what does it mean to say yes to the invitation to *join us*. For example, we later identified and agreed upon final products, namely an academic book for use in places of formation, like divinity schools and seminaries, and accessible resources for church communities. Audience shapes the theory-building and writing process. Second, the movement/church framing lends itself to confusion that a caller on the community *Radio Cosecha* program identified. When you facilitated a series on the relationship of churches and social movements descriptively and aspirationally, the caller right away said: "Don't get confused—we are the church!" She was speaking as a movement and popular process participant. I became clearer on the conceptual distinction between *el pueblo* as church and institutional church. But getting back to how things unfolded...

**Carlos:** Right, after you all drew up the agreement in 2021, we met when you tagged along for the *caminata*

#### **January 2021 Collaborative Research Agreement**

A number of Cosecha leaders in Indiana have noted that much of Cosecha's base, as well as allies, are people of faith. In this context, they have identified a problem and a number of goals:

#### **Problem and Goals:**

**Problem:** Churches tend to ignore immigrants' agency, including with movements like Cosecha. This propensity has contributed to various forms of disconnection, including between people and their nourishing communities.

#### **Goals:**

1. Develop resources to help churches.
2. Recognize limitations of common approaches to immigrant communities and the troubling assumptions that often accompany them and explore approaches that center immigrant agency (e.g., immigrant-led movements).

#### **Process: Engaged Pedagogy and Research with Cosecha and JHB**

This initiative aims to address the problem and contribute toward the goal that Cosecha defined.

In so doing, it touches on conversations in universities, seminaries, and churches including the sanctuary model, organizing, theories of change, and decolonization.

It will reflect on what Cosecha members (and other mobilizing immigrants) are doing and teaching from perspectives of peace studies, theology, and biblical studies *and* rereads these perspectives in light of perspectives from Cosecha.

Cosecha evaluates the success of the project, as will those who read what comes of it in the academy.

Therefore, the initiative speaks into conversations at universities, seminaries (and other academic spaces) where leaders are taught how to think about immigrants. It recognizes the limitations of common approaches to immigrant communities, exposes troubling assumptions that often accompany them (e.g., tendency to depict immigrants one-dimensionally, as vulnerable, broken, needy, or objects of "our" White host church care; and uplifts approaches that center immigrant agency (e.g., immigrant-led movements).

(the walk across Indiana) that summer. My clear recollection is Dara saying, “this person would like to meet with you.” Dara explained to me about the seminary, peace studies, and peacebuilding. At that time, we were just going to have a conversation, maybe a one-time conversation. When we met in person, you asked me—is it okay to record? And you started asking me questions and listened. When you spoke, I noticed that you were able to understand the ideas I wanted to share. That helped me to feel comfortable enough to continue. After a second or third conversation, I said: “anything that uplifts our struggle, whatever can be a platform for our struggle is fine.” By this time, we had talked about this project you were cooking, and I agreed—if I speak with you and share with you, if this will help get the message, if people might read a book and with this project do some things differently—well, may it be so. I hope they read it, think about it, and do something with it, instead of going about their regular business and refusing to listen to the voices and attending to the agency of the people they think they are “helping.”

## The Structure of Our Collaboration:

### Dialogue

Summary statement of the initiative’s unfolding and methods: meetings with organizer and Quaker minister Jason Shenk to support early relationship and initiative development; *immersion through participation* (JHB) and *engaged pedagogies* (29 class sessions from 2017-present); developing questions and carrying out *structured conversations* (147 in 2022-2023); *transcribing structured conversations and coding fieldnotes in MaxQDA to avoid confirmation bias*; ongoing *dialogue* with collaborators Dara Marquez and Carlos Castañeda to come to agreements about processes, how we are fulfilling our agreements, to negotiate various kinds of developments, and reflect together (2021-present), and *member checking* conversations about theory building with interlocutors and in focus groups (2023-present).

**Carlos (continued):** As the process unfolded, I found that working together was cathartic. For example, in spring 2023 we developed questions for the structured conversations (with the Cosecha circles in different states). After two years of Janna’s participant learning, we moved into a phase of semi-structured conversations that explored participants’ backgrounds, reasons for joining immigrant-led processes, experiences with the

processes, moral/spiritual vision, relationship with church spaces, and hope for the future. Going back and forth about different questions that we then asked in the conversations was cathartic, because I was able to express what I have been able to capture in my years of experience with our community. It’s not just me that I offer, but what my organizing has brought to me. It’s the significance of our traditions and the knowledge of our ancestors. Faith and traditions play a big role in our communities’ lives. Making the questions together and creating those spaces of conversation for our community members felt like we were being heard on a small scale. It felt liberatory; we were creating spaces of liberation.

**Janna:** I’m curious what you mean by “the spaces of structured conversation were liberatory.”

**Carlos:** A part of it is that I didn’t feel like I was under conditioning supremacy that I must submit to or have to comply with as a minority, as people of color are usually told to do [or feel we have to do, and so we code switch], right? We are told to behave a certain way; we are told to fit into a certain model. We are told to live life in a specific way based on the force of racialized supremacy in social systems. You know, I remember not only the executive director telling me when to read the script but my dad telling us “You have to be like this. You have to behave like that. Otherwise, you’re going to be called out.” I’m assuming he did this *bona fide*, trying to protect us from any harm or any public shaming, but, in reality, what he was doing was forming us to internalize the exceptionalism of Whiteness, of that system. He was telling his kids that the way you are now is less than others, so you need to behave in this way to fit in.

When I say liberating, I am thinking back to my dad and saying, no I don’t have to fit that way because we’re humans, and we’re free too, or at least that’s what we want to think, how we want it to be. In our conversations, being able to move around without having to be in compliance or submit to something that negates who I am or my identity but rather contributing from it is liberating. It’s the feeling, “oh, I don’t have to justify my existence.” That’s what I mean by liberating.

**Janna:** And this whole project would not exist without your collaboration, Dara’s collaboration, the participation of any others. What you are talking about with the creation of the questions happens through what we call “checking-in” and “talking regularly.” Recently we have talked about how it approximates what Ada María Isasi-Díaz calls dialogue, as decolonial praxis and method (Isasi-Díaz 2010).

**Carlos:** Yes, that’s right.

**Janna:** What do you think makes our dialogue possible, if we are indeed having one?

**Carlos:** I think one of the reasons why we have a dialogue is because of our mutual interests. We both come from the church and are part of the church, and we care about processes led by affected groups. We both want to see greater understanding and convergence.

And there is mutual interest on the level of method. This project has been enriching because we live in a world in which immigrant workers are always rushing, always working. We work ourselves to death. Pausing to think and reflect feels like a privilege. The project gives me and others in Cosecha and other immigrant-led processes moments to think, not only about struggle and resistance, but about our own lives through time in relationship to the organizing that we are doing. That has been rewarding.

It is rewarding to think together about the challenges we confront. Movements are made of people, of human beings, who think differently and feel differently. One of the challenges is to not think about the movement as a monolith. We have really fun times thinking together and working together to create theory. Janna organizes and codes the fieldnotes and interviews in MaxQDA [qualitative data analysis software, to work against confirmation bias]. This provides another source for reflecting and theorizing on various topics, including internal pluralism.

Second, there's some trust being built around mutual interests and over time. With my own agency, I choose trust. We or I do not do that lightly. It is through conversation, back and forth, and then thinking on my own through the different issues, as I described when we first met.

Third, there's the fourth characteristic of Isasi-Díaz's dialogue: you are a part of the community. Isasi-Díaz writes, "Participants understand that in this process they must consider themselves and act, not as individuals, but as members of a community" (2010, 48). You might not look like the community that is Brown, but what brings us together and builds trust links us into a community.

**Janna:** Wow, thank you, Carlos. A few things here. First, when you say that you choose to trust, you also acknowledge that there is some risk involved, right? It's serendipitous that you are saying this right now because I am just finishing an essay about how each encounter, effort to dialogue, and exchange carries the risk of injustice and misunderstanding. Yet I trust that we are going to go back and forth, that we are going to keep showing up, and that we are figuring it out as we go.

**Carlos:** Right!

**Janna:** Since our agreement of 2021, we have located our collaboration in relation to PAR. Colombian sociologist Fals Borda has said that the attempt in Colombia to create a "science of the proletariat" through action research was no definitive success. He said that action researchers were usually impatient and imposed principles of historical materialism to the local context. The guiding frames were not ideas emerging from the people's own experiences or conditions or grounded in their own lives. His self-critique led him to argue for a form of action research that empowers affected individuals to establish horizontal "subject/subject" relationships between researchers and community members that nurture transformation from the margins. For the self-critical Fals-Borda writing later, PAR becomes a part of social activism to promote people's (collective) praxis (Fals-Borda 1992, 15).

Enrique Dussel takes this subject/subject relationship further by naming the possibility of ethical knowledge creation through *exchange* as an alternative to the conquering ego, the European "I" as the universal standard. We pick up this challenge of intercultural dialogue as we invest in the risky possibility of a dialogue of knowledges that foregrounds voices of struggle, including the need to be heard/to listen, to foster alternatives for shared future (Dussel 2013). And this is where we come back to the risky or fraught part. There are questions about the possibilities of voices in or from the Global North having a dialogue with voices from the Global South, across differences, because of the colonial enterprise that continues to reproduce asymmetries of power (Dussel 2021).

We are trying to do this. We, I, participate imperfectly. But I also don't think we are delusional when we say we are having a dialogue...

**Carlos:** I don't know what to say to those who question the possibility. I think we are having a dialogue! (Laughs) I will say that our conversations have reinforced and deepened ideas I have about how each person is their own world. It helps me to be mindful that we come from really different backgrounds. When I engage in dialogues and conversations, I am not looking for others to reflect my world. I try to be aware that it could be very enriching and for me to continue figuratively climbing, through back-and-forths with others, with you, into a bigger, more expansive understanding of the world itself. This is a kind of liberation—to grow, explore, expand paradigms.

When I speak with you, sometimes you come across as sounding like you know what you want to say, because of everything that makes you, you. I may agree with you or disagree initially, but I take things in, and process later. There are times that you overlook something that is important. I think back on those

instances and about how that might be because of who you are. This happens with everyone of course, not just with you. I bring those things into my processing moments. And I think to myself, okay, well, this is why she said this, this is why she didn't say that. Then I bring my reflections about what you missed to the ongoing conversation we are having.

This has much to do with trust. If I didn't trust you, I would be less flexible and less fluid. But I know you and trust you, so I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt and want to work to understand where you're coming from instead of jumping to conclusions.

For example, in a recent text message, you reminded me about how you parked at the church while staying at the Cosecha house in New Jersey last summer. One of the first nights you were in town I asked you, where are you parking? I asked because it is often difficult to find parking around the house and walking alone, especially at night, is risky. And you said, "at the church" And I was thinking, "What church?" because we never park at that Catholic church across the freeway. We do not feel welcome there.

You explained that you couldn't find street parking, so you asked permission, they considered the request, and then said yes, go ahead if necessary. I was like, okay, I guess that's how things are different when you look different, White, and when you sound different. I bet you were very articulate in asking if you could park there and explaining why you should be able to in ways that made sense to them. The point is how that happened to you, or for you, versus how it has not happened for us.

**Janna:** Hmm.

**Carlos:** When you came back, and you asked me, "Should I not have parked there?," there was the internal stirring up that occurs when having to explain why we are not welcome at a given place, this time in our neighborhood church. Having to explain why we're not welcome in that place forces me to *face* a contradiction of my own humanity because I was having to *explain* this contradiction of my own humanity to you! (Laughs)

At first, I felt frustrated and then as the night progressed, I thought to myself—as *compañeros* and comrades, even though it hurts, we must go beyond emotional reaction and dig deep. If you were just a one-time person, someone who was just passing through, then I would not have to use my emotional and mental capacity to try to let you in on things, but since you are not just anybody glancing at us one time, because we are becoming a community that sees each other, because we are embracing your person, we're bringing you in, we are letting you know not only how we live but how we feel and think—thinking-feeling. That to me requires

the extra step of moving beyond an emotional reaction. The dynamic changes when I see that you are willing to become community with me, with us. I best explain my perspective and hear your feedback so that we can get on the same page. This is what I was saying about climbing together. In this way, we minimize those situations where we are going to feel frustrated about things that have to do with our humanity in the way we are seen in the world and by the world.

**Janna:** Wow, that's a clear illustration of my gap in understanding in the shape of myself, the limits of my reflexivity (Das 2022, 28), critical self-reflection throughout research, and the possibilities of dialogue. (Pause)

I wonder what you think about this—in that scenario, I felt vulnerable and afraid walking around the neighborhood at night in part because you told me it was dangerous for me and not to. The ways I carried forward a sense of my embodied self that was afraid, the way that I moved in the world that day, prioritized protecting my sense of self rather than interrogating or refusing the systems that made safe parking accessible for me and inaccessible for those who live in the neighborhood. I connect what you are saying to what we talk about in [the Cosecha member] Rutilio's terms of "phantoms," here phantoms of Whiteness that make White people self-centered while persistently dismembering, negating, and killing the existence and full life of Brown immigrants, particularly those who do not have legal status. In these terms, I leaned into all the phantom had to offer my White woman sense of self rather than accept the opportunity to cross over into the reality of those with whom I am in solidarity, with the explicit purpose of collaboration towards dismantling what I had embodied and so reproduced. Does that make sense?

**Carlos:** Yes. What's more, those phantoms are dealt with in the community, literally meaning a "unity," becoming one. In this figure, we come from different places, but we are coming together here, now. We create reciprocal relationships through practices of attention, care, and trust. So how are we going to deal with those phantoms that you bring and that I bring—because your phantom of Whiteness is not the only one that needs to be dealt with. It is not the only one we do deal with. So how are we going to deal with those phantoms that keep us from coming together? That keep us from developing relationships of reciprocity, from becoming one, from becoming a community?

As "one," I don't mean uniform or locked in. I do not want to convey the message that we want to program robots who think the same or become the same. When I say "one," I mean build communities of people who look at each other as people with the same worth, [sighs]

and switches to Spanish] who struggle towards the same rights that we do not currently enjoy, the right to be treated equally, the same chances to flourish in life...

**Janna:** I hear you saying people who are equal, of equal worth, even though right now our rights and possibilities as political subjects are unequal.

**Carlos:** *Exacto, exacto.* If any positive phantoms help us to come together and to be stronger as one, then we bring those too. And figure out how to work with them also.

**Janna:** I think about the second phantom that Rutilio mentioned, the phantom of organizing. As Rutilio [from El Salvador] stated in a 2022 conversation, “Given my understanding of the gospel and my formation in the base communities, there is something like a phantom of organizing that we have known since we were very young, that we don’t want to leave behind, that we want to keep alive, that we have to hold on to, that I want to carry with me and pass on.” And what it means to be collaborating as people from different kinds of backgrounds.

**Carlos:** You parking in the church parking lot hit home for me more than it would have for others. Others in the Cosecha house would have been much faster to dismiss it, saying that the church people are bad people in the neighborhood, because they have personally experienced the church as an oppressive institution that rejected, excluded, and betrayed them. But for me, who still identifies with and as the Church, it created cognitive dissonance to have to explain that the Church that once embraced me—the Church that once took me in, that I once believed was altogether true and good in everything it touches—was not that now to this community.

**Janna:** Right, “churches” are not one thing; there’s variety and diversity, among them and internally as well.

I understood that cognitively, yet when it came to an embodied felt need, I just went ahead and did it, anyway. My solidarity failure pushed to the surface my inability to live fully into my commitments and provided ground to stand on when we say that dialogue as praxis moves beyond reflexivity. Your posture pluralizes the instance; what might have been only a failure on my part becomes a part of our praxis that enables me to see both of us more fully. This supports mutual recognition and exchange as knowledge production.

**Carlos:** Yes! Yeah, it’s good, this exercise that we are doing right now, this dialogue in which we are exchanging feelings and information.

**Janna:** I want to acknowledge that earlier when we were talking about risks of encounter in the course of developing subject-subject research relationships and knowledge production through dialogue, I relied on theorists to make the point rather than name concrete instances in which I deviated from my script of how I engage. Maybe I was subconsciously concealing my own mistakes or my messy humanity, which is one way of exercising control, which is of course in tension with shared power in a dialogue. I apologize for that!

This back-and-forth shows how we work with the core issue of accountability in long-term action research relationships. Without accountability, we do not have dialogue or ethical relationships. A core premise of our work is that all identities and people are complex. That starting point supports intercultural listening and dialogue, for we recognize that even in our intimate relationships we are coming into contact with complex identities while never arriving at transparency. We can say to each other, “I know you and trust,” fully aware that the effort of dialogue and exchange needs to be ongoing.

On a related point, this back-and-forth has impressed upon me the need to write as a participant of the community in a way that acknowledges my positionality and moral imperfection in this dialogue and exchange. Efforts to engage nonviolently will be ongoing and full of mistakes. Looping back to what you said about point four of Isasi-Díaz’s dialogue (2010), I would specify that a given person in the community speaks from her own standpoint to make it clear that she is offering one interpretation. A modified statement might be something like, “the person is speaking from their own standpoint as a participant or member of a community with which one shares experiences, understandings, and to which one is accountable.” That provides me with a really clear sense of voice for writing the book that I’m working on now on this project. Examples might include naming but *not dwelling* on key mistakes and recognizing how interpretation unfolds through dialogue. Does that specification on voice make sense to you, given that the book is my effort to understand what it would mean to accept the invitation to “join us”?

**Carlos:** Yes, my answer to that will be, “yes that is right.” As we continue going forward, as we continue doing this kind of exchange exercise, it’s going to continue to bring us together and strengthen the project. Also, beyond this project, it makes us better human beings, people, comrades, *compañeros*. May we continue to feel that it is so. This is good, it’s a good way to start my day.

**Janna:** I hear you; it is for me too.

## Conclusion: Collaborative Research Moves Us Beyond Helper/Helped Relationships and Toward Transformation

Carlos' reference to well-intentioned people who think they are "helping," his description of his experience with organizing nonprofit organizations, and this dialogue about dialogue signal that collaborative research moves us beyond helper/helped relationships in which asymmetries of power are reified and towards transformation. The term "helping" reveals problems in how the relationship is construed. First, the logic of helping often focuses on immediate needs or problems, whereas our collaborative research (positioned in relation to PAR) engages with underlying causes and long-term social change. Second, the relations of power to which our collaboration aspires clash with the notion of helping. One dimension of our work together involves highlighting how traditional helper/helped relationships are often structured by an implicit power imbalance between the helper (who presumably has resources, knowledge, or skills) and the helped (who is in need). In relation to immigrant populations, this helper/helped relationship is generally racialized and is imbued with host/guest dynamics. Collaboration and dialogue seek to move beyond "help" to seek alternatives to it in support of transformation.

*This dialogue is part of a larger project that provides an alternative to the helper/helped model. The alternative centers immigrant-led movements of protest and transformation as key to peacebuilding. Theological interpretation, the model, and specific recommendations are included in a forthcoming book by Hunter-Bowman tentatively titled "Would You Join Us?": Latin American Migrant-Led Social Movements & Re-membering the Crucified Body."*

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