

Collaboration without Fluency: Grammars of Action & Refusal

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What is at stake in working together, amidst tension? How might we read disjuncture, generatively? What relationships, ethics, aesthetics, and knowledge are reproduced when participatory development and other liberal mandates to “collaborate” recast assumptions of access, competence, interpretive authority, and understanding as egalitarian practice? Drawing from my fieldwork in eastern Taiwan (2021-present), this presentation does not abandon collaboration, but uplifts it in its imperfections and incompleteness, to examine grammars of action and refusal in cases of collaboration without fluency (which, I will argue, may be every case). Thinking specifically through innovations with an Indigenous-centered research team that I curated in Taiwan – and yet cannot fully “understand” – I share an imperfect innovation in decolonial ethnography that takes local (Bunun) grammars of action and refusal as a starting point for a decolonial collaborative methodology, grounded in movement. Insights from the Taiwan-based work increase, through retrospective analysis on the past two decades of collaborative ethnographic in the Navajo Nation and eastern North Carolina. Thinking beyond strict linguistic notions of communication (as “fluency” may suggest), I suggest that collaboration is always a matter of confluences: (co-influences; confluences; co-laboring fluencies, and so forth). Collaboration is not binary (e.g., “university-community partnerships” as administrators like to say), but is radically plural and asymmetric, acting and refusing dominant forms of epistemic labor, and potentially inviting fresh modes of theory and praxis. As the conceptual anchor for my current book project, *Collaboration without Fluency*, this presentation invites push-back, disagreement, empathy, and storytelling – practices of communing that invite a collaborative epistemology of what it means to work together, within and against structural relations of power that all too often evacuate and flatten intersubjective relationality in performances of “collaboration.”

27th April 2026 -3pm

Venue: **Sociology Seminar Room**
AS1 #02-12



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or via
<https://tinyurl.com/fd4x6r5j>



Dana E. Powell (she/hers) is an Associate Professor in the Graduate Institute of Medical Humanities and Director of the Center for Humanities Innovation and Social Engagement at Taipei Medical University (Taiwan). She completed her MA and PhD in Anthropology at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, where she was a founding contributor to the UNC Social Movements Working Group. Powell has been a Faculty Fellow in the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University (2019-2020) and in the College of Indigenous Studies at National Dong Hwa University (2021-2022). She is author of *Landscapes of Power: Politics of Energy in the Navajo Nation* (Duke Press, 2018) and numerous articles and chapters in environmental anthropology. Powell's research lies at the intersection of environmental health and justice, gender, political ecology, and Indigenous sovereignty, in contexts of extractivist development and socio-ecological vulnerability. Her work in Navajo Nation, eastern North Carolina, and Taiwan foregrounds collaborative and community-aligned qualitative research that uplifts mentorship, advocacy, and social justice. At Taipei Medical University, she works with graduate students in medical humanities, global health, and Indigenous studies to bring transnational and ethnographic analytics into medical and social science education.