(Re)assembling Community
The ontological politics of academic and community-based research in/on/with/by a migrant community in London

Abstract

This article explores the ontological politics of research in the field of community studies. Focusing on a migrant community in London, UK, it shows how the community is (re)assembled in different ways through the different research practices of academics and practitioners. Guided by a framework based on material semiotics, the article compares the agendas, methods and representational texts that inform the different research practices. It argues that community studies researchers have an ethical responsibility to acknowledge the particular enactments of communities that emerge through their research and the role that agendas, methods and texts play in constructing those enactments.

Keywords: Community studies, community-based research, material semiotics, migration, research performativity, research ethics

[A]mong the many spokespersons that make possible the durable definition of groups, one must include social scientists... any study of any group by any social scientist is part and parcel of what makes the group exist, last, decay, or disappear.

(Latour 2005:33)

If methods help to make the realities they describe, then we are faced with the question: which realities might we try to enact? ... so the issue of ontological politics, about what is or could be made more real, is all the more pointed since every time we make reality claims in social science we are helping to make some social reality or other more or less real.

(Law and Urry 2005: 396)

1. Research performativity: some ethico-onto-epistemological assumptions

The quotations above articulate an issue that has become an increasing concern in social science research: the *performativity of research* (Callon 1998; Barad 2003; Law 2004; Latour 2005; Burawoy 2005) and the ethical implications of that performativity for social scientists. This article explores the issue within the field of community studies (see, for example, Tönnies 1955; Bell and Newby 1971; Anderson 1991; Crow and Allan 1994; Bauman 2001). It focuses empirically on a group of academic and community-based researchers engaged in research practices in, on and with a community in London defined variously as Latin American or Latino or Iberoamerican or Spanish-Speaking Latino or Spanish and Portuguese Speaking (LA/L/IA/SSL/SPS). The article addresses the following question: if community studies research enacts or helps to assemble communities as well as reflecting or generating knowledge about them, what factors contribute to an ethics of enactment which guides decisions about the type of communities that are brought into being, reproduced, or undermined through research practices?

Social scientists have been engaged in capturing and representing communities since the birth of anthropology and sociology as disciplines. The motivation behind research aiming to reflect the 'true nature' of communities is often based on social justice agendas to legitimate and 'give voice' to marginalised social groups. However, as critics such as Law (2004: 36) point out, such an aim is based on a perspective of reality as independent, anterior, definite and singular and which might be represented definitively through the tools of social science. This perspective becomes problematic when trying to explain the myriad of representations that emerge through different research studies in or on the same community, conducted not only by academics but also by practitioners from within the community (see following section). So how might community studies research be conceptualised in a way which allows for this variation without undermining the integrity of the individual studies?

In some of his earlier work Gilles Deleuze (1966, 1968) developed a metaphysical approach based on 'transcendental empiricism'. This approach was formulated in opposition to the Platonic transcendent assumption that an 'actual' pre-existing world is then represented in 'virtual' images by the privileged mind of the human 'subject'. (Colebrook 2002; May 2005). The model-copy relationship suggests that there are originals that can be used to measure and judge claimants (e.g. 'is this *really* a community'). A Platonic reading would suggest that each study of a community therefore constitutes a better or worse 'virtual' representation of an 'actual' community. The more it resembles the ideal of 'community', the more real it is.

Against this formulation, Deleuze argues that life does not rest on an ideal or original model but rather, is in itself no more than simulation. All social and physical matter exists on a plane of *difference* and the boundary-setting through which *identities* are defined occurs through discursive practices which act as copying devices (Deleuze 1994: 38). Indeed, the very idea of an original or underlying essence is the *effect* of the generated copies. So a convincing account of, for example, 'the Latin American community in London', will also help reinforce the idea of 'community' as a pre-existing model.

In this way, Deleuze argues that the real is always *actual-virtual* (Deleuze 1994: 207-12). An actual thing is produced only from virtual possibilities. There must already be some general notion of a community in order to build, recognise and perceive an actual community. What something *is* (actually) is also its power to *become* (virtually). A community might become a statistic in a census, a location on a map, or a political concept, or any number of other possibilities. So reality for Deleuze is not determined by some pre-specified end or on the basis of what already (actually) is but rather by the power to *become*. While national policy or academic theory might result in some measure of what constitutes a community, there is always evolution and deviation whether this occurs on an individual, institutional or societal level. Colebrook (2002: 99) refers to this philosophy as an "ethics of potentialities." However, it is important to note that a focus on *becoming* does not preclude attention to *being*. Or to put it another way, what is needed is both attention to the processes through which human, material and conceptual identities develop and to the ways in which they are fixed or defined to serve particular purposes. It is here that a distinction made by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) between 'rhizomatic' maps (the *processes* by which a community is designed or 'assembled') and 'aborescent' tracings (the *representation* of community embedded in the assemblage itself) is helpful. A tracing replicates existing structures and is linear: "All tree logic is a logic of tracing and reproduction" (1987: 12). In contrast, maps are creative open systems producing an organisation of reality rather than reproducing some prior representation. "The map is... detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation" (1987: 12). Importantly, Deleuze and Guattari stress that it is not simply a matter of replacing the tracing with the map but also about "connecting the roots or trees back up with the rhizome" (1987: 14). It is therefore important to understand the process through which a subject is produced (as an effect) but also the way that the subject is constituted and the ontological implications of that constitution.

The mechanics of these dual mapping/tracing processes (by which artefacts such as 'a community' are assembled through practices such as those surrounding research) have been explored by social science researchers over the past decade. Applying Deleuze' analysis of philosophy to the social sciences, Law (2004) proposes a conceptualisation in which method is important not because it determines the extent to which a representation of reality is more or less 'true' but because any choice of method contributes to a particular *enactment* of reality. This performativity is most likely to reproduce existing realities but may also generate new ones and in doing so, undermine old ones (Derrida 1982). In this way any method "unavoidably produces not only truths and non-truths, realities and non-realities, presences and absences, but also arrangements with political implications" (Law 2004: 143). Such claims strike at the heart of an ethics of social enquiry and resonate with Haraway's (1997) observation that research work is far from innocent. The question of what type of community might be brought into being through the practices of research and, indeed, what type of community *should* be brought into being (Law and Urry 2004: 396) constitutes 'ontological politics' (Mol 1999, 2002; Law 2004). As Mol (1999) explains, the term suggests a link between the real, the political and the conditions of possibility[i] we live with. The term also captures the sentiment of Deleuze's notion of virtual-actual *becoming* and Karen Barad's notion of "ethico-onto-epistem-ology." According to Barad, what is needed is:

> … an appreciation for the intertwining of ethics, knowing and being – since each intra-action matters, since the possibilities for what the world may become call out in the pause that precedes each breath before a moment comes into being and the world is remade again, because the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter. (Barad 2007: 185)

A good example of the analysis of ontological politics played out in the field of community studies can be observed in a study by Rowse (2009) of quantitative representations of the ‘Indigenous population’ in Australia. Rowse interrogates the conventions of interpretation that are built into and upon this quantitative archive, and the forms of action that are made possible by it. He argues that the national statistics enable the construction of two realities. Firstly, the ‘Indigenous population’ (a statistical artefact deriving from an 'Indigenous identifier' question) is constructed to represent an Indigenous *people* (a complex political artefact, a dense texture of kinship, association and normative regulation). And secondly, the population binary through which the ‘Indigenous population’ becomes a part of a classification system (see Bowker and Star 1999) in which those with ambiguous identities (e.g. because of mixed descent, or because of multiple ethnic identification) are *torqued* into the binary. Rowse argues that these realities enable multiple pathways to social justice:

> On the one hand, aggregating devices that measure the socio-economic inequalities between two sub-populations raise the question of distributive justice between the two halves of the population binary… On the other hand, there is more than one question of distributive justice to ask… Evocations of Indigenous people-hood may deploy population statistics in such a way as to document the grievances of a people, but alternative analytics of justice will complicate (and perhaps undermine) the assertion of people-hood (Rowse 2009: 46)

So whilst the simplification of the complex multiplicity of indigenous identity by the population label may result in the displacement of certain identities along the way, it can also serve as a form of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1990) – a type of ontological politics advanced by actors in their own attempts to mobilise resources and social justice. Again, this resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between the map and the tracing. Strategic essentialism is a form of tracing; a means of fixing the boundaries of a specific identity for strategic purposes. It is an important practice for many forms of political activism and a key means of inciting social change. Mapping, on the other hand, allows multiple identities to exist and evolve together. It casts identities not as 'actual' bounded entities but as social-material matter in a continuous state of *virtual becoming*.

2. (Re)assembling a migrant community in London

Ethnographic fieldwork [ii] with academic and community-based researchers researching the LA/L/IA/SSL/SPS community [iii] in London revealed similarly complex tensions between aspirations toward strategic essentialism (i.e. tracings) and more multifaceted and dynamic constructions of collective identity (i.e. maps). For over two years, the research practices of three academics, three community practitioners and the author's own practices as a doctoral researcher where followed and documented with 'data' consisting of fieldnotes, semi-structured interviews and research artefacts such as journal articles, conference presentations, community blogs, documentary films, museum exhibitions, motivational booklets and a PhD thesis. Presented here are examples of four such texts.

Figure 1 depicts an extract from one of the first posts in a community blog: *100 días de la AIU. Balance y perspectives.* The site was developed by the Alianza Iberoamericana de UK (AIU) as part of a campaign for the official recognition of ‘iberoamericans’ as an ethnic population in the British census. The central argument of this particular text is that the comparative advantage of the term ‘iberoamerican’ lies in its potential to reach beyond the borders of Latin America, incorporating southern Europeans and Africans from Lusophone countries and thus significantly increasing the statistical size of the population. Though there is no named author of the post beyond the AIU collective, it should be noted that the unofficial leader of that collective was a former historian.

Figure 1: Community blog post: ***100 días de la AIU. Balance y perspective***

The post explains that the terms 'Latin American' and 'Latino' are inadequate to describe the community because they favour Spanish-speaking nations and therefore isolate Brazilians. It also suggests that 'Latin America' is a concept that was not used by the *libertadores* as is sometimes claimed but was rather created by France in order to claim Mexico and other countries where Latin languages were spoken or used for religious purposes. At the same time, a population indicator like 'Hispanic' is equally inadequate in the British context:

> In the USA they speak of a Hispanic minority which is comprised of 40 to 50 million people who speak Spanish, who come principally from Mexico or Central America and who can claim historical roots in the country since several states from Florida to Alaska were part of the Spanish empire. In the UK, however, only some of the thousands are from Hispanic Central American countries, there are more people with the native language of Portuguese and most iberoamerican immigrants come from the Iberian Peninsula, the Andean Community or Brazil.[1]

Instead, the post suggests that the historical ties between the UK and Iberia should be conceived quite differently to those between Iberia and the USA. The post explains that British territory has never been held by the Spanish or the Portuguese, but, unlike North America where the Spaniards arrived just half a

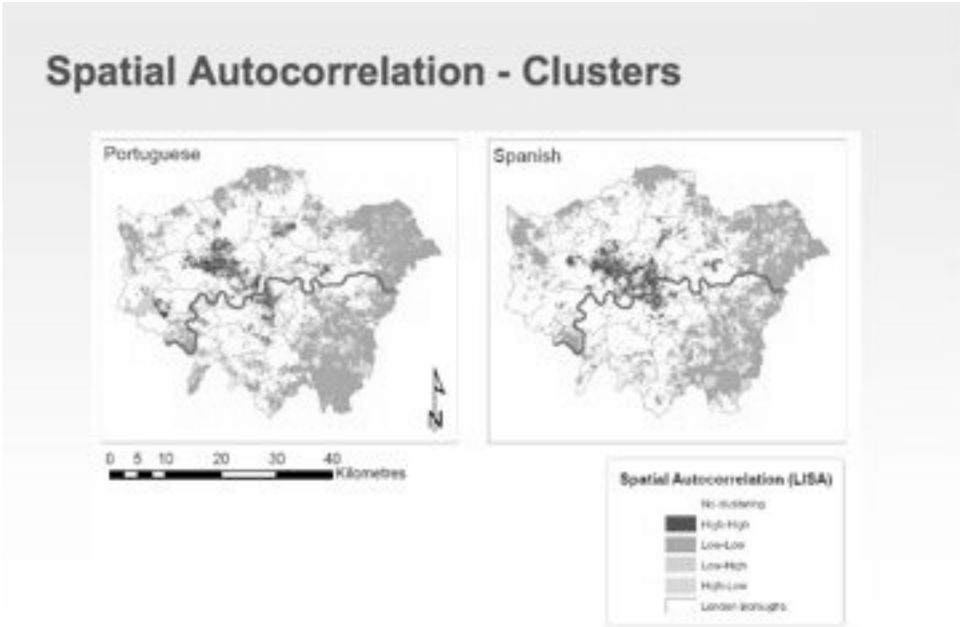
[1] Translated from the Spanish

millennium ago, the Iberian presence in the British Isles is 'ancestral'. Citing theories which claim that the first inhabitants of the British Isles came from the Iberian Peninsula, the post argues that the Iberian presence in the UK pre-dates that of the Anglo-Saxons. "*Before the invasion of the Anglo-Saxons and the development of the English language Celtic languages were spoken here, as in Iberia. The shapers of London were Latino and several of its leading figures (like Hadrian or Trajan) were born in Hispania. Many members of the English monarchy were either born in Iberia or had Spanish or Portuguese families."* These arguments for a historical Iberian influence in the UK are supplemented by similar observations of British influence in the Iberian Peninsula (the introduction of tea in Portugal, for example.) The post emphasises the inter-dependence of this historical relationship and also draws attention to the significant role of the UK in assisting the struggle for independence in several Latin American countries.

This enactment is undoubtedly controversial – subsuming identities such as those of indigenous groups and obscuring particular historical narratives of political oppression and revolt. However, it was also highly successful in highlighting the impact of the community (in terms of size and prominence) and influencing the introduction of language (in addition to ethnicity) into the British census.

Figure 2 depicts a second enactment of a community that is similar to the first but not identical. It comes from a PowerPoint presentation given at a conference by an academic from University College London.

Figure 2: Slide from a PowerPoint presentation



In the presentation, the academic describes his efforts to measure the size and geographical distribution of the “Latin American and Iberian community in London,” using “conventional” as well as “alternative” statistical sources. He suggests that one of the first steps towards increasing visibility of the community is to establish reliable figures about its scale, distribution and demographic characteristics. The academic argues that each of the official databases excludes a significant proportion of the “actual population.” Drawing on Seeman (1980) to argue that “identity, though complex, can be encoded in a name” he suggests that names can provide useful information about personal characteristics such as language, religion, gender and age as well as to track migration trajectories. On the basis of these assumptions the academic employs the electoral register to map the distribution of Spanish and Portuguese names. He also supplements this information with data collected from other academic studies which shows the distribution of the Spanish and Portuguese languages spoken in schools and at home across London. Together, these findings reveal that there is a clear overlap between the Spanish and Portuguese communities indexed by the names with both distributed in similar boroughs of London. In this way, the findings contribute to an argument for a broader community which consolidates all Spanish and Portuguese speakers. The presentation concludes with an estimate of the "actual Latin American and Iberian population in the UK" (an estimate far higher than official figure) and with a statement about the cohesiveness of the community in London (based on geographical dispersion) despite difference in languages and countries of origin.

The influence of this second enactment is somewhat similar to the first, developing arguments for the consolidation of the Spanish and Portuguese languages and emphasising the significant size of this particular community. As an academic text, it also carries an additional symbolic rigour which currency including references, official statistics and an accountable methodology.

Figure 3 comes from the opening sequence of a documentary film which is a key output of a community-based oral history project. The sequence (communicated in the film through a Spanish voice-over with English subtitles) introduces the following argument: *despite the fact that the Latin American community in the UK is comprised of different nationalities, these nationalities are bound together by collective cultural memories from the pre-Colombian era*.

Figure 3: Stills from the documentary film 'Jovenes sin Fronteras'

The community enacted through this sequence is named ("Latin Americas" *sic*) and located (both in the present in "this country" and in the past in the "pre-Colombian culture"). It is this relationship between the past and the present;

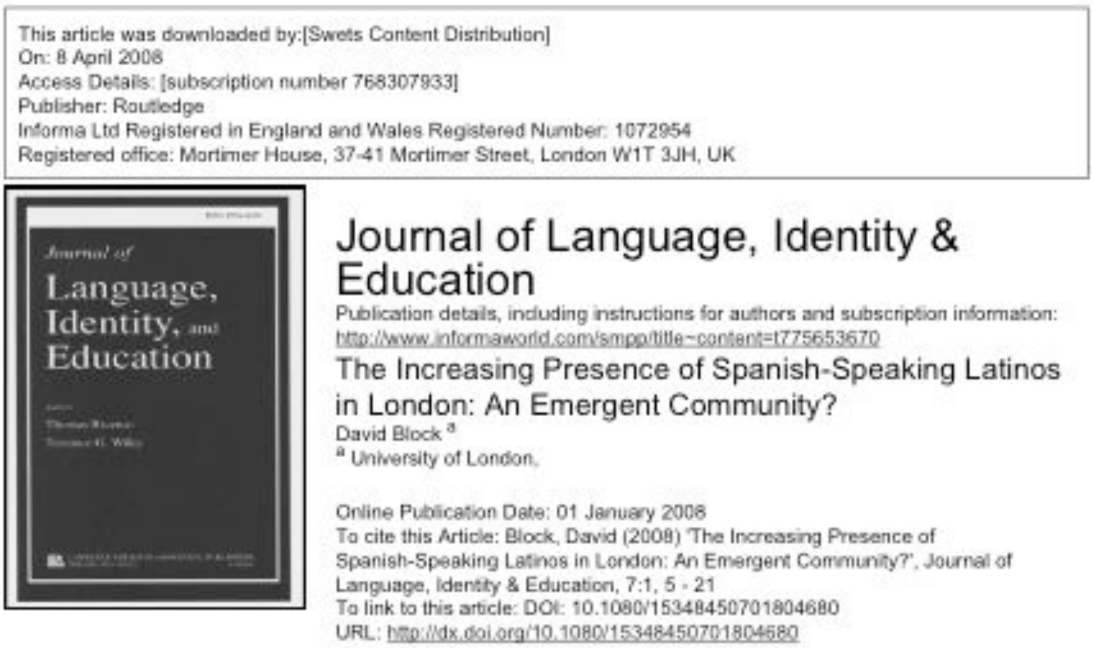
Britain and the pre-Colombian region that constitutes the collective identity of this community.

However, words alone are insufficient vehicles through which to express this account. The images depicted in the sequence (Andean and Venezuelan artefacts and Mexican jumping beans) and the composition of the images (backgrounds consisting of contrasted orange material and an atmospheric blue light; a smaller and larger image in each frame; square boxes against a black background) evoke both a conventional museum format (the mounted display cases and even a suggestion of the physical experience of honing in on an artefact for a closer look) as well as something more spiritual (the blue light and mystical panpipe music which forms a soundtrack to the sequence and the orange drapes, suggestive perhaps of desert sands). In the final frame of the sequence the focus shifts from the museum artefacts to a woman sitting in her office or more probably her home. It becomes evident that the voice from the Spanish voice-over belongs to her, that she is the human authority behind the artefacts. This authority is further implied; firstly, by her positioning behind a laptop (she is clearly a researcher or some sort of expert with access to 'information'); and secondly, by her clothes, accessories and the objects surrounding her (she is clearly an indigenous member of this community and so should be able to speak from experience as well as on the basis of her expertise.) The documentary sequence uses this final image to add authority to the final clause of the written text ("which is from all and for all") which is also the basis of the argument, underpinning the collectivity of the community. In this way, image, written and spoken text unite to drive home the point made by the sequence.

Unlike the first two enactments, the cohesion of the community here is justified in terms of a shared culture rather than language. This culture celebrates the indigenous roots of the community as well as the political history of the region from colonisation to independence to migration and incorporation of British culture. While this argument necessarily excludes European (and indeed African) speakers of Spanish and Portuguese from the community – and in doing so reduces its size – it reclaims status through cultural importance. The documentary was part of a broader 'awareness raising' campaign which included events such as an annual carnival, museum exhibitions and a campaign to preserve a local Latin American shopping centre. It also contributed to the development of services geared specifically towards Latin Americans, for example, a Latin American Women's Rights service and local media outlets.

Finally, Figure 4 depicts the front page of an article from an academic journal. The title of the article suggests that its focus is on the 'Spanish-Speaking Latino community in London'. However, the formulation of the independent phrase following the colon, raises an element of doubt. Is or is not this group an emerging community?

Figure 4: Front page of article from the *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*



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The Increasing Presence of Spanish-Speaking Latinos in London: An Emergent Community?
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The author of the article introduces his study (based on life-story interviews with four informants) by asking whether 'Spanish-Speaking Latinos' (SSLs) "can be considered a community in the burgeoning multicultural patchwork that is London" To guide his analysis he then proposes two understandings of "community:" the first based on demographics and the second taken from social theorists Zygmunt Bauman and Alain Touraine who, as paraphrased by the author, conceptualise community as a "sense of belonging to a collective and trust in one's acceptance by that collective, which can, in turn, be a refuge from feelings of alienation in contemporary life." The author uses the definition of community based on demographics to guide his expansive discussion of the SSL population in London for which he draws on census figures and studies focusing on the Colombian sub-group. He concludes that "there are probably a sufficient number of SSLs in London for one to talk about community in statistical terms," at the same time reminding us that these absolute figures are still far less than in many cities in the US. However, Bauman's definition is the one against which he measures the sense of community expressed by his informants, concluding that “It is safe to say that the different comments made by my four informants indicate that community, in Bauman’s sense of the word, does not exist. Instead, it’s a dog-eat-dog world, riddled with envy; unlike more supportive communities like the Turks”.

The author acknowledges that with his limited and opportunistic sample, his informants should be regarded as “telling-cases” rather than as representative of a larger group. However his conclusion hints at some tentative generalisation – at least in terms of his rejection of the existence of a community (either the SSL community itself or indeed any such migrant community in “late modernity”).

Though this final enactment was relatively inconsequential (accessible only to academic subscribers and of interest solely to a small group of social linguists) its authoritative status as an academic text has the potential to be used as a tool to undermine community efforts at mobilisation for recognition. For this reason, the community practitioners who came in contact with it found it to be a threatening resource.

The examples above (visualised though Figures 1-4) offer a flavour of the empirical field encountered over the course of the fieldwork. While they are by no means exhaustive, they provide a sense of the breadth of actors (researchers, methods and texts) involved in research on, in and with the LA/L/IA/SSL/SPS community in London. They also show that the community in question is neither singular nor plural but rather *fractional* or 'more than one, but less than many' (Strathern 1991). There are both differences between the enactments as well as similarities or overlaps. Most explicitly the enactments differ in their different naming practices of the community (as Iberoamerican or Latin American or Spanish-Speaking Latino) but there are also more implicit differences such as the differentiated use of languages, historical and geographical frames, and discourse around issues such as unification, recognition, ethnicity and disadvantage.

In the case of the final example, the (SSL) community embedded in Figure 4 is at once enacted and undermined. The author is saying: *as it is, there is no such community in London; but if there was… it would look like this*. The feelings of "mistrust and envy" that characterise this particular community are certainly absent from the other enactments. At the same time, however, commonalities also exist. For example, all four enactments focus on the Spanish language (at least) as a unifying community resource. All are mapped out (primarily) on the landscape of London. And all include arguments about the importance of recognition and visibility for the community.

So if enactments of a community are *fractional*; at the same time both legitimating and undermining different aspects of the enactments of other research studies, what type of framework might capture the ways in which communities are assembled through research and the ethical negotiations that underpin these enactments?

3. The ontological politics of research: a framework

Law (2009a) argues that researchers theorising research tend to conceptually separate firstly, the representations of the research (outputs or findings); secondly, the putative realities being described in the research (inputs or data); and thirdly, the institutional and methodological context in which the research takes place (processes). However, if research is conceived as performative this separation becomes problematic. In order to make sense of the ontological politics of research, what is needed is a conceptual model which maps (in the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari) this complex ecology of realities, representations and research processes, bringing together the agendas that drive the research and the methods and texts which shape and represent the research.

3.1 Researcher assemblages

The enactments that emerge from the four examples above are all driven by a range of personal, political and professional agendas. As already noted, a common goal is the pursuit of recognition of the LA/L/IA/SSL/SPS community (articulated in terms of cultural and economic impact of the community compared to others in London, inclusion in national statistics such as the census, enrichment of visible spaces, appearance in public forums etc.) but other more or less explicit agendas also include protection of immigrant rights, design of more responsive services, promotion of indigenous culture, greater political representation, pursuit of theoretical and/or methodological knowledge, legitimation of community-based organisations, personal status as a leader in the community and academic kudos. All of the enactments respond to the agendas of recognition and visibility and in doing so seek to 'measure' on some level the size and nature of the community. And all generate 'findings' about that size and nature which might also contribute to community-making: that it is far bigger than previously estimated; that it has specific ethnic, linguistic and national characteristics; that its coherence is due to a collective cultural memory or shared language practices or a common place of residence or personal identification with a particular label. Most of the enactments are also driven by a form of strategic essentialism (Spivak 1990) or in the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari, an intentional 'tracing', to justify the coherence and significance of the community despite its heterogeneous makeup. The final academic enactment in Figure 4 is an exception to this, undermining the existence of the community in any way at all. However, these agendas are not necessarily those of the individual researchers. The ethico-onto-epistemological discussion in the first section of this article calls into question the assumption that a human researcher (subject) reflects an aspect of the 'real world' (actual object) in her data (virtual object). In such a formulation, all agency resides with the human subject, while the material object (the raw data or the data reconfigured as a research text) remains passive. However, in Barad's reformulation "agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has" (Barad 2007: 144). The notion of intra-action is important here. In contrast to the usual 'interaction' (which presumes the prior existence of independent entities) Barad proposes a profound conceptual shift arguing that "relata do not pre-exist relations; rather, relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions." (p.133) Through this reconceptualization, agency is cast not as a thing to posses but rather as a verb, which becomes a force through the intra-action between phenomena. So the agency of a researcher might be understood as the intra-action between a human subject, material things like texts, technology and other research artefacts and social identities defined in part by institutional discourses (e.g. those surrounding academic publishing, doctoral protocols and research funding). At the same time, the virtual idea of 'researcher' as a solid identity and its ascription as a uniquely human attribute is produced through the material-discursive practices of institutions such as academia. In this way, a researcher may be perceived not as a uniquely human actor with personal, political and professional agendas, but rather as an assemblage whereby agendas are the product of a host of human, material and institutional elements in intra-action.

3.2 Method assemblages

There is a clear association between the agendas of the researcher-assemblage and the logic of a particular method assemblage. For example, an agenda to promote the community as a 'significant' population in London is likely to give rise to an enactment of the community that promotes and enhances its size (for example, by including all Spanish and Portuguese speakers from Europe, Latin America and even Africa like the enactment in Figure 1) and this necessitates a methodology based on quantitative population statistics which may also suggest a preference for visual representation in the form of a chart, graph or map. At the same time, however, the researcher-assemblage is not the only agentive actor in the process. The choice of research method also has a significant impact on the ontological politics of research.

Responding to the tendency of social scientists to use 'method' uncritically, Law (2009a) suggests that all methods lead a "double social life." First, they are socially shaped: they have sponsors and serve agendas and they draw on or are adaptations of, existing resources. But second, they also shape or *enact* the social. As well as reflecting or explaining reality, methods also make more or less self-fulfilling assumptions about the nature of reality, producing what Law (2009b) refers to as "collateral realities." An example of this double social life might be observed in the method of the sample survey. Deriving from the census poll (which from the late eighteenth century served to convert countries into populations in line with strategies of governmentality – see Ruppert 2007); the sample survey emerged at a time of post World War II democratization as a cost-effective means of determining the social in industrialised societies (see Osborne & Rose 1999; Savage 2005; Law 2009). While the survey has proved fairly successful at demonstrating patterns and trends in the attitudes and behaviour of large numbers of people it also performs a number of collateral realities. For example, it is based on assumptions about subjectivities (such as the fact that people have long-term attitudes; that they are capable of making rational choices as consumers; that they are essentially ethical beings etc.) and assumptions about collectivities (for example that they are based on individuals rather than households and can be aggregated in a particular setting to form something called the national or regional citizen or consumer – see Savage 2005 and Law 2009.) So the sample survey-as-method enacts social reality on two levels. Most explicitly, in its 'discovery' function the survey may impact on the social by convincing people that things are a certain way. In many cases this can provide a useful commentary on social attitudes and behaviour. In some cases, this can also *influence* attitudes and behaviour as observed, for example, in the case of pre-election opinion polls (see Osborne and Rose 1999). More implicitly, however, the survey may also impact on the social by (re)producing particular versions of reality based on the construction of taken-for-granted social entities such as the 'national economy' (Mitchell 2002), caste groups (Dirks 2001), and social aggregates such as classes (Savage 2010). This is a far more insidious type of performativity and is difficult to subvert.

In the four examples above, the different methodological strategies for measuring the community also produce 'collateral realities' through their various assumptions. The geo-historical analysis method (embedded in Figure 1) includes assumptions about ethnicity based on historical migration patterns; the spatial autocorrelation method (embedded in Figure 2) includes assumptions about ethnicity being embedded in surnames (with related assumptions about marriage); the oral history method (embedded in Figure 3) includes assumptions about culture and ethnicity being carried through indigenous artefacts and a collective consciousness; and the life-story method (embedded in Figure 4) includes assumptions about a sense of community being carried through personal testimony. Assumptions are also made about the existence of community, the stability of the community and the homogeneity of the community. These different methodological approaches are example of what Law (2004) refers to as a 'method assemblage' or "the process of crafting and enacting the necessary boundaries between presence, manifest absence and Otherness" (Law 2004: 161). So, for instance, in the spatial autocorrelations, Iberian forenames (such as those of an indigenous nature) slip through the grasp of the method-assemblage as do names which are lost through patrilineal marriage practices. And in this vein, it is important to stress the highly gendered lineage captured by naming practices in most societies – an Othering device of the trajectories of many women. Similarly, those who are not registered to vote and therefore excluded from the electoral register are also Othered and this figure includes the significant proportion of 'irregular' migrants who are also more likely to be indigenous Latin American and therefore less likely to have Iberian names. So while this method assemblage enacts the Iberoamerican community as a co-located collectivity, it does so by subsuming a variety of identities under those which are formally Spanish/Portuguese and legal voters. Conversely, the method assemblage of the academic in Figure 4 which results in the claim that "the Spanish-Speaking Latino community does not exist" simultaneously:

i) enacts realities through presences (there is something called a Spanish-Speaking Latino);
ii) undermines realities through manifest absences (there is no such thing as a Spanish-Speaking Latino community) and;
iii) erodes realities through Otherings (there is no such thing as a Latin American or an Iberoamerican).

Though it seems unlikely that an article written by an academic could make much difference to the lives of his research subjects, for a community engaged in mobilising around the recognition of a common ethnicity and for whom research acts as strong currency, the absences and Otherings in such work may have political consequences.

The notion of the 'method assemblage' then, opens avenues to understanding the relationship between putative realities and the way they are configured through method into enactments. However, as has been shown (Fransman 2012; 2013) it does not by itself account for the social and material conditions of possibility set by the representational media which also plays a role in shaping the different enactments of community.

3.3 Text assemblages

As well as embedding particular method assemblages, each of the four examples above is also realised as a communicative event or *text* (Kress 1996; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001) which is actualised materially and has a socially identifiable form. These include a blog post, a PowerPoint presentation, a documentary film, and a journal article. Just as particular methods generate particular types of findings and conceal particular assumptions, so too are 'conditions of possibility' shaped by texts. The representational potential of a documentary film, for instance, is very different to that of journal article. The former can convey meaning through music and moving image as well as written and spoken language while the latter is limited to written text standardised to the conventions of a particular British academic journal. This is not to say that greater representational freedom provides a 'better' or 'more accurate' or 'more authoritative' enactment. Indeed, standards are often perceived as 'quality-control' mechanisms providing high levels of institutional accountability.

However, it is important to bear in mind the different *modality values* (Halliday and Hasan 1985; Van Leeuwen 2005) of these different representational media, or in other words, the way that claims about reality are made implicitly or explicitly through them and the extent that they are authoritative or convincing either in their own right or in relation to other texts.

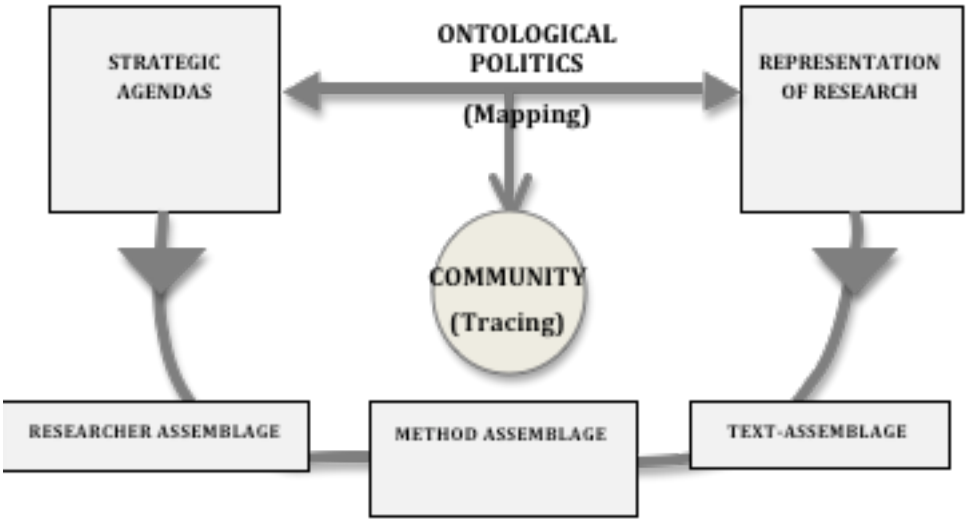
To understand the social and material conditions of possibility of meaning making, social semiotics offers the reformulated concept of *affordance* van Leeuwen (2005). All instances of communication involve the use of semiotic resources or 'modes' (such as speech, writing, gaze, gesture) communicated through material media (such as voices, bodies, paper, digital websites, video-audio recordings) and shaped by social genres (such as blog posts, journal articles, documentary films, PowerPoint presentations). According to van Leeuwen (2005) these modes and social-material multimodal arrangements have a *theoretical* semiotic potential (constituted by all past uses) and an *actual* semiotic potential (constituted by those past uses that are known to and considered relevant by the users of the mode and by potential uses that might be uncovered by the users according to their specific needs and interests). The blog post represented in Figure 1 will be based on notions of blog-writing (and also integrate other types of writing such as conventions established by 'history' as an academic discipline) but at the same time, will also be shaped by the digital website through which it is actualised (which promotes the inclusion of a 'front page image', for example). The academic writing the journal article from Figure 4 will draw on previous experiences of writing for journals but will also face the specific remit and in-house requirements of the Journal of Language, Identity and Education and will adapt his becoming-text accordingly. So 'affordance' in this context is shaped by the different ways in which a text has been used, what it has been repeatedly used to mean and do, and the social conventions and material possibilities that inform its use in context.

The use of particular types of text and multimodal arrangement is both pragmatic and political. Certain texts serve certain agendas better than others. For example, the digital blog post in Figure 1 has the advantage of being accessible to the public and therefore likely to reach a larger audience than a journal article with controlled access. The blog also allows for evolving revisions and additions based on political opportunism and community developments which suits the agendas of the AIU as 'researcher-assemblage', whereas the legitimacy of the journal article is in its preservation as a fixed thesis which exists independently of the development of its author or the journal in which it is housed. As already discussed in the account of Figure 3 above, the documentary film text adds weight to its argument of community cohesion based on shared cultural memories by evoking this heritage through music and the visual representation of indigenous artefacts. However, its inclusion of the authorative researcher behind her laptop also suggests some hierarchy of representation in which the portrayal of a human 'expert' is necessary to legitimate the argument.

Some texts are also more easily recontextualised than others and may therefore be more appealing as political devices. Visual representations such as the auto-correlations in Figure 2 (as well as graphs, tables, maps and even official statistics) lend themselves particularly well to the generic and modal affordances of the journal article, PowerPoint presentation or policy document. As illustrations of Latour's 'immutable mobiles' (Latour 1996) these representations can be easily recontextualised without loosing their internal coherence. Such attributes make them both convincing policy tools (for behind them must surely lie the workings of rigorous empirical data analysis) and user-friendly devices. The graphic or statistic can be decontextualized and transported to a new document with far less effort than a documentary film (though the changing affordances of online journals for multimedia is making this more possible) or a lengthy extract from a transcript (which tends to rely on some contextualisation and does not 'speak for itself' like a map or graph.)

So the social and material forms of text assemblages help to shape the conditions of possibility of research. However, research texts and 'collateral realities' such as enactments of communities are not the only effects of the research process. Drawing on Barad and Deleuze, feminist scholars such as St. Pierre (2001); Davies and Gannon (2005); and Lenz Taguchi (2009) have all argued that an intra-active relationship exists between researchers and their research. Davies and Gannon stress that "researchers cannot be separated from their data" (2005: 319) and St. Pierre shows how "not only do people produce theory, but *theory produces people*" (2001: 142, original italics). Exploring the intra-active writing process, Lenz Taguchi identifies a negotiation between the conditions of possibility of the text (Deleuze and Guattari's 'tracing') and its own becomings (Deleuze and Guattari's mappings): "What is possible to say negotiates its own meanings and positionings, and fits itself into available concepts and into the framework of the style of composition that has already been decided or is emerging." (2009: 12-13) So there is a tension between the productive potential of research as *becoming* and the *conditions of possibility* of research defined in a Foucaultian sense by discourse. The discursive conditions of possibility are partly set by the research apparatus (method and text) and partly by the agendas of the researcher-assemblage but at the same time, both research and researcher assemblages are also defined by discursive conditions of possibility. The process through which this tension is mediated is conceptualised here as *ontological politics* (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Framework for understanding the ontological politics of research



4. Conclusions: the ontological politics of this research assemblage and implications for community studies

In keeping with the ethnographic method assemblage that informs this research, this article concludes by reflecting on the ontological politics at play in its representation through this journal article before considering the implications for community studies research.

How is community enacted in this article? How does the interplay between agendas and methodological/textual framings contribute to this enactment and what are the ethical implications of the ontological politics at play through this process? This article has enacted the community in question through the acronym 'LA/L/IA/SSL/SPS' (Latin American or Latino or Iberoamerican or Spanish-Speaking Latino or Spanish and Portuguese Speaking). This enactment is a representational artefact which responds to the researchers' political agenda of presenting an enactment of community which captures multiplicity without undermining cohesion: community as 'fractional'. The research represented in this article also produces politically-informed 'collateral realities' such as the legitimation of community-based research on an equal level to academic research through a method assemblage which considers the four examples comparatively. At the same time, the primary agenda which drives the representation of this research here is the development of a high-quality article for publication in an academic journal (which will contribute to a legitimation of the author herself as an authoratative academic researcher). While there is some compatibility across these agendas, they also sit in partial tension to the method assemblage they interact with (for instance, the extensive corpus of ethnographic data necessitates significant selectivity, which has implications for the partiality of the representations and thus calls into question the 'rigour' of the academic text) and the textual affordances they are framed by (for example, some of the representations embedded in the four Figures are more easily recontextualised in this journal article than others, and this too has implications for their comparability.)

While this article has focused on the politics of community naming or 'branding' through research practices, it has implications for other instances of community-building across heterogeneous identities (for example, in the work of Miranda Joseph 2002). The analysis of ontological politics (or the 'ethics of enactment') also has implications for community studies beyond the research reviewed in this article. It has shown that ethics in community studies is not just a matter of appropriate treatment and representation of the human subjects of research, but also implicit in the social-material tools and texts of research in intra-action with the strategic agendas that drive the research. It has also shown that research (whether academic or community-based) is subject to hierarchies of representation in line both with the social organisation of knowledge/power established discursively through institutions as well as the material affordances set by the texts and media through which research is communicated. At the same time, this article has stressed the multiplicity of community-(re)assembling practices at play in all community studies research – at the very least through the different enactments of individual community members, 'representative' community organisations or platforms, and community studies researchers. The intentions of this article have not been to identify 'better' or 'worse' enactments of community or to establish criteria for generating more 'accurate' enactments of community. Rather, the conceptualisation of communities as *fractional* contributes to an 'ethics of enactment' for community studies whereby the *mapping* of multiplicity does not undermine strategic essentialist agendas that necessitate the temporary *tracings* of cohesive collectivities.

Notes

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[i] Latour and Woolgar (1979) Mol (2002) and Law (2004a) all adopt the notion of 'conditions of possibility' from Foucault (1970 and 1972) who argued that the apparatuses of scientific production sets limits to what is possible. The notion of 'ontological politics' as used by Latour and Woolgar, Mol and Law differs slightly from Foucault's use in that it is drawn on a more modest scale suggesting that "the limits to scientific knowledge and reality are set by *particular and specific sets of inscription devices*" (Law 2004: 35 italics in original) rather than by larger epistemes.

[ii] Conducted 2007-2009 to inform a PhD from the Institute of Education, University of London and funded by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) studentship.

[iii] This acronym is employed in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner to name the particular enactment of the community that emerges through the author's own research. See also conclusion of this article.

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