Unions, Academics and the Research Process as Political Terrain

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Argument

The research process IS a political terrain; unions, workers and academics can connect through it to mobilize, organize and share information.

The connection between research products and the union movement is centrally important but the engagement and politicization can and does begin in the research process.
Context: Why should we be thinking about the politicization of the research process?
Neoliberalism driving two trends:

1. Contemporary challenges for unions
   - changing nature of work (precarious work)
   - globalization/ internationalization of prod’n makes fragile economies & labour markets

2. Contemporary Challenges for academics:
   - Growing Academics in precarious working conditions
   - the corporatization of the university, industry partnerships and commercialization of research in public grants
Empirical Work

- Research from 2001-2006 on globalization, gender, work, and community in Automotive Parts Industry
- Results: *Negotiating Risk, Seeking Security, Eroding Solidarity* with C. Yates and B. Leach (Fernwood Publishing 2012)
- Gendered ways in which insecurity and risk have been heightened and individualized and the challenges this poses for solidarity
- 5 communities: 4 in Southern Ontario and 1 in Northern Mexico
- Conducted ethnographic interviews
Research Process as:

1. **Information Sharing**
   to disrupt management/political information
   to share information about politics & policies

2. **Organizing**
   interviews an intervention to access workers

3. **Mobilizing** *(sense/acts of Solidarity)*
   unions demonstrated “ownership” of the research process

Union felt the interview process itself would encourage work-politics-unions connections
Interventions into 4 discussions

1. Epistemological and Methodological Questions about Political Projects and responsibility to research communities raised by Feminists & Postcolonial theorists and others

2. The legitimization and growth of academic research with Community Partnerships/stakeholders

3. Globalization, Information and “The Other” worker:

4. Public Academics & Knowledge Transfer, Union-Academic Relationships in Research Product to Action
Existing Tensions

1. Controlling the politicization?

2. Autonomy to produce critical research?

3. Ability for planned politicization?
Moving forward...

- Continue to build typology and practices to legitimize the language of this type of political engagement as academic work.
- Continue to see the research process as politicized and that this can be positive – hopefully encourage research that engages workers as knowers and therefore, methods that engage workers and unions.