

Co-creating and Decolonizing a Methodology Using Indigenist Approaches: Alliance with the Asheninka and Yine-Yami Peoples of the Peruvian Amazon

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Abstract

In this paper, the co-authors discuss how Indigenous theories are operationalized using an indigenist methodology grounded in intercultural collaboration. We describe the specific methodological considerations and methods that were incorporated into a decolonizing strategy for conducting research and co-creating knowledge with the Yine-Yami and Asheninka peoples of the Peruvian Amazon, including: (1) working with Indigenous co-researchers; (2) considering community members and federation officials as *allies* or *collaborators* instead of *participants* or *researched subjects*; (3) cultivating relational accountability and creating a research protocol by reflecting on the assumptions, motivations and values for conducting research with Indigenous peoples; (4) having each community ally identify desirable outcomes of the research; (5) sharing control of the design and delivery of the methodology; and (6) having collaborators validate co-created knowledge as the research was conducted. We argue that indigenist approaches are more appropriate frameworks for interacting with Indigenous peoples than methodologies typically deployed by Peruvian public organizations. With some adaptation, the methodology developed here could be used to conduct more respectful, meaningful and culturally sensitive research with Indigenous and historically oppressed groups.

Keywords

Indigenous and indigenist methodologies; Peruvian Amazon; collaboration; decolonization approach; co-creation; Asheninka and Yine-Yami peoples; Indigenous peoples and federations

“... peoples have the right to expect to be written clearly and affirmatively into research by appropriate methodologies.”

(Rigney, 1999)

Introduction

In 2015, the Peruvian Human Rights Ombudsman registered a monthly average of 211 cases of social conflict; 67% of these were directly related to the impacts of the extraction of natural resources¹ and over half of them reported at least one violent incident. Mostly seen as a major source of natural resources, the Amazon – home to hundreds of different Indigenous nations – provides a backdrop for much of this violence (Kichwa people from Sarayaku 2015; Varese, Apffel-Marglin and Rumrill 2013).

Hostilities toward Amazonian Indigenous peoples have increased since the establishment of the Peruvian republic in 1821 (Chaumeil, 2014; Espinosa, 2009). The relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples living in the Amazon has largely been shaped by colonial and (neo)colonial public policies that are inconsistent with Indigenous worldviews and values (Alza Barco & Zambrano Chávez, 2015; Chaumeil, 2014; de Sousa Santos, 2010). As a result of pressure from Indigenous populations, which comprise 55 different nations (Viceministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2016) and 40% of Peru’s population (Yashar, 1998), the Peruvian government has established mechanisms for dialogue. However, these have been deemed insufficient by Indigenous peoples and their federations (AIDSESP, 2017). More thoughtful and respectful decolonizing approaches are needed to guide interactions between Indigenous peoples, non-Indigenous peoples and agencies (public, private and non-governmental organizations).

This paper is based on a chapter of the main writer Master’s thesis project. The overall goal of the thesis was to identify factors and recommendations, from Asheninka’s and Yine-Yami’s perspectives, which could strengthen self-government systems and contribute to the effectiveness of Indigenous federations serving their constituents.

This paper describes the methodology and methods that the pluricultural research team employed to address the above-mentioned goals through a collaborative inquiry process with the Yine-Yami and Asheninka peoples. The team comprised one Yine-Yami, two Asheninka community members (who also

¹ Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and community members have drawn attention to the “reduction of Nature into a mere productive ‘resource’”. This term obscures a more complex web, including but not limited to territorial, identity and emotional dimensions, but also linked to power relations (Suárez, 2015, p. 166; Swyngedouw, 2004).

fulfilled the roles of cultural advisors and co-authors), and one Quechua descendent (the main writer). The methodology itself was rooted in Indigenous theories as a means of creating a set of customized context- and place-based methods that would be meaningful and make sense to the Asheninka and Yine-Yami peoples. In this study, context refers to the interrelated cultural, political, social and environmental conditions in a particular place (Kovach, 2010). Place included not just the “spatial” and “material”, but also the historical relationships among humans, animals, plants and spirits (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). It was important to adjust the study’s methodologies to account for the historical and current contexts and places, in order to minimize the risk of creating merely another form of assimilation (Maurice Squires cited in Kovach 2012).

Indigenous theories can relate to liberation or emancipatory epistemologies and their praxes resonate with feminist theory and critical theory foundations (Rigney, 1999). Feminist theory is not strictly concerned with women’s issues and struggles, but also informs broader movements under the guise of seeking “enlightenment and emancipation” from oppressing structural conditions (Rigney, 1999, p. 115). The logic, importance, and appropriateness of women formulating methodologies to assist female theorists, practitioners and struggles can also be extended to Indigenous peoples (Harding, 1987; Rigney, 1999)². In this study, emancipatory/decolonizing theories refer to those based on epistemologies seeking liberation of oppressive conditions and working towards self-determination, decolonization and social change (Rigney, 1999; Smith, 2012). A research methodology based on this premise and that constructs knowledge from Methodologies inspired on Indigenous epistemologies and for Indigenous peoples, rather than from (neo)colonial epistemologies, has been called indigenist, indigenous, indigenizing, or decolonizing (Coulthard, 2014; Rigney, 1999). In this article, the term indigenist will be used to refer to those approaches in general. For Smith, an Indigenous Maori researcher, this means, “centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (2012, p. 89).

A key element of an indigenist approach is that research methodologies are designed by Indigenous individuals to support Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous theorists and Indigenous practitioners. The goals of an indigenist approach “are to serve and inform the Indigenous liberation struggle to be free of oppression and to gain power” (Rigney, 1999, p. 118). Martin, a Noonuccal researcher, defines indigenist research as “culturally safe and culturally respectful research” (2003, p. 205) that is grounded in three principles: “(1) resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research; (2) political integrity in Indigenist

² To further explore the intersections and differences with feminist theories, the reader is referred to Rigney (1999) and (Radcliffe, 2015). Chilisa (2012), an indigenous researcher from Botswana, also devotes a chapter on exploring “Postcolonial Indigenous Feminist Research Methodologies”.

research; and (3) privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research” (Rigney, 1999, p. 116). Given that Euro-western ways of researching tends to follow a pattern of “extracting” knowledge and resources from Indigenous and local communities (Chilisa, 2012; Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 2012), and with the aim to identify a consistent methodology with Asheninka’s and Yine-Yami’s experiences, we opted for an indigenist paradigm. An indigenist paradigm is shaped by Indigenous ontologies (assumptions about the nature of reality), epistemologies (ways of thinking about that reality), methodologies (how to use the ways of thinking within that reality) and axiologies (sets of values, morals and ethics expressed by people within that reality) (Wilson, 2001).

Indigenist research paradigms usually differ from Euro-western research paradigms in that the former explicitly recognize “the role of imperialism, colonization, and globalization in the construction of knowledge” (Chilisa 2012, 8). They also embrace a co-creative process of “relational accountability” (Wilson 2001, 177; Kovach 2010). Relational accountability, according to the Opaskwayak Cree, Wilson (2001), includes identifying responsibilities and obligations as researchers in the investigation and a constant inquiry about how those responsibilities are being fulfilled through the design and conduction of the investigation.

The acknowledgement of an Indigenous theoretical underpinning allowed the team to co-create a context-based methodology and set of methods influenced by Yine-Yami, Asheninka and Quechua paradigms. Specifically, and building on the works of the Aboriginal Australians, Rigney (1999) and Martin (2003), the team outlined the principles of an indigenist approach: (a) recognition of Indigenous knowledge, wisdom and science in the study; (b) prioritization of Indigenous voices; (c) shared control of the study; (d) alliance³ as the basis of the research collaboration; and (e) the centering of the process around Indigenous agendas and terms in the research.

The study itself embraced a historically consistent perspective, wherein colonization processes are enablers of specific circumstances and experiences in colonized lives and places. The implementation of the study was very much on Indigenous terms. Its purpose was not to romanticize Indigenous peoples, but rather to recognize that Indigenous situations and actions are expressions of lived experiences, and to locate these lived experiences to form the foundation of the co-

³ The main writer incorporated the term *alliance*, used by the collaborators to describe the relationship between the research collaborators (community members and federation officials), research team and the NGO. Conversely in Canada, this term has been challenged by Indigenous peoples who argue that this type of relationship has been objectified by non-indigenous “allies” who seek to impose their own agendas (Indigenous Action Media, 2014). Throughout this paper, we use the term *alliance*, as it is the term that Indigenous peoples in the Peruvian Amazon still value and use.

creation of knowledge. To that end, the research team developed a contextualized de-colonial praxis for individual and collective liberation (Coulthard, 2014) through culturally-sensitive qualitative and collaborative research methodologies and methods using an indigenist approach. By describing this methodological strategy in detail we can shed light on more contextualized practices for working collectively with Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon on complex, nuanced and multifaceted research problems.

Positionality

The main writer is a Quechua descendent woman from Peru. Her parents are from the Andes, from areas now known as Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Huancayo. Her parents were not able to teach her the Quechua language because her people were taught, over hundreds of years of colonization, that any expression of indigeneity was a source of shame and synonymous with ignorance.

Although her parents lived and worked in Ayacucho, her father did his best to make sure that his children were born in Lima. In Peru, one is “from” the place where one was born, regardless of where one grew up or where one’s parents lived. Being born in Ayacucho would have given others the opportunity to stigmatize and discriminate against the family. A person born in Lima (or on the coast) would be “free” from terms used in a derogatory manner to refer to Andean people, such as *chola*, *serrana*, and *india*. *Terruca* was an additional term used to refer to people born in Ayacucho in the time of the armed conflict that took place in Peru between Shining Path, a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist group (that emerged among academics in Ayacucho), and the state. She lived her early years in Ayacucho, but had to escape to Lima with her family following the escalation of violence there. She will always miss the smells, colours, tastes and sensations of being in Ayacucho.

She identifies herself as a Quechua-descendant and a privileged agent who was able to escape from the violence in Ayacucho. She positioned herself in this study as a Quechua outsider visiting the Asheninka and Yine-Yami peoples with whom she shares *cariño* toward Indigenous peoples, who have experienced colonization – both imperialistic and corporate – and the pernicious laws that legitimize their abuses. *Cariño* can loosely be translated as *love* or *taking care of* or *caring about* the wellness of one’s people. *Cariño* could also be defined as “appreciation of others” (Russell & Stone, 2002), “altruistic love” (Sendjaya et al., 2008), “fellow feelings” (Geertz, 1963), “care” (Lavallée, 2009) and “de-colonial love” (Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Sandoval, 2000).

The main writer invited Asheninka and Yine-Yami peoples to collaborate in the co-creation of knowledge that would address their agendas to achieve desirable futures on their own terms. Her main motivation to pursue a Master’s degree and, consequently, engage in this study were rooted in *cariño*, admiration and respect for Indigenous peoples, responsibility towards her peoples and the aspiration to contribute to a common, liveable future.

Mrs. María Shuñaqui Sangama and Mrs. Miriam Pérez Pinedo are Asheninka leaders in their communities and abroad. Both are mothers and active members in their communities and federations, while also having important responsibilities in their districts, province and the region. Mrs. Shuñaqui is passionate about defining and defending the value of the Asheninka language and Mrs. Pérez is constantly promoting Indigenous women's rights in the region. Raúl Sebastián Lizardo, a Yine-Yami member, is a bilingual teacher and influential elder in his community. Besides playing an important role in advancing Yine-Yami education, he is an attentive listener and conveyor of his people's concerns and desires for their futures. Reem Hajjar, John Innes and Robert Kozak are academics working in the United States of America and Canada and have experience working with Indigenous communities from around the world within a forestry context. Each helped to guide the main writer's academic journey.

The alliance

Six Indigenous communities, their federations and a Peruvian non-governmental organization Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (hereafter called the NGO), formed the alliance. The communities⁴ and their federations belong to Asheninka and Yine-Yami native societies located in the province of Atalaya in the Ucayali region in Peru.

The Asheninka people⁵ traditionally inhabited large territories. Their societies have organized into small groups and keep geographical distance between families so that Asheninka families have good access to quality hunting, fishing, and other forest goods. These distances have been maintained in order to preserve the health of family members and child safety (Anderson & Dávila, 2002; conversation with Asheninka community members, 2012).

The Asheninka practice of autonomy has been historically documented. Upon arrival of the Franciscans, which threatened their sovereignty and decimated their population through the spread of contagious diseases, Asheninka people expelled the missionaries with help from the Indigenous leader Santos Atahualpa (Anderson & Dávila, 2002). At the end of the eighteenth century, foreign interests

⁴ "Community" as a particular figure of social organization is not original from the Amazon. To learn more about it read Espinosa (2016b) and Killick (2008).

⁵ Although there has been a tendency to consider the Asheninka and Ashaninka nations as one ethnic group due to their linguistic similarities and geographic proximity, the Asheninka people self-identify as different from the Ashaninka people. According to the 2007 national census, the Asheninka population comprised approximately 9,000 persons gathered in different communities located throughout the Junín, Pasco and Ucayali regions (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2008). However, according to the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the Asheninka population is as high as 20,000 people (Anderson & Dávila, 2002). Chirif (2015) states that the Ashaninka and Asheninka populations could together account for 70-80,000 individuals.

again entered into their territories, this time to extract rubber. While some Indigenous people escaped to other regions, others were enslaved and worked to death (Havlkof & Veber, 2005). At the end of the twentieth century, the Asheninka people found themselves embroiled in a violent conflict between the Peruvian state and Marxist–Leninist–Maoist groups, so they formed self-defense committees to guard against waves of violence (Espinosa, 2009, 2016a, conversations with Asheninka community members, 2012 and 2015). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Asheninka people saw a dramatic increase in contact with outsiders “who brought disease and economic competition” (Anderson & Dávila, 2002, p. 23) and a developmentalist perspective, understood as an ideology advocating for economic growth as the main priority (RAE 2016).

The Yine people⁶ are distributed in communities throughout the regions of Cusco, Loreto, Madre de Dios and Ucayali. The Yine people in this area of the lower Urubamba in Ucayali self-identify as Yine-Yami, *Yine* referring to “real people” (Viceministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2016) and *Yami* referring to being “from the Urubamba River” (conversation with community members, 2012). Since pre-Inca times, the Yine people have been known as excellent merchants and navigators, which exposed them to a large number of relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups (Bisso, 2009; EIBAMAZ, 2012). The Yine people tend to be more cosmopolitan than other groups, co-existing with families from other ethnicities, such as the Ashaninka, Matsigenka and Quechua from the Andes.

Like the Asheninka, the Yine people have been subjected to ongoing incursions by outsider interests. Notably, Yine people participated in an iconic Indigenous movement to fight Spanish and missionary encroachment during the eighteenth century (Álvarez, Torralba, & Barriales, 2010). Today, however, both the Asheninka and Yine-Yami people’s struggles continue, largely as a result of natural resource extraction (Global Witness, 2014; The New York Times, 2014).

In all of the collaborating communities in this study, members indicated having concerns with extractive industries such as fossil fuel exploitation, industrial plantations and industrial fisheries. Currently, one of their biggest concern is related to the impacts of logging companies, stating that they do not fulfill their promises, for instance, to construct communal venues or to reforest the logged areas; commit infractions (e.g. extracting timber from outside of their annual operating plans) for which communities – as holders of the territories – are fined thousands of dollars by the OSINFOR (Organismo de Supervisión de los Recursos Forestales y de Fauna Silvestre); and erode the social fabric. As one community member stated:

⁶ Their population is said to vary, depending on the source selected, from 3,000 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2008) to 7,000 inhabitants (Opas, 2014).

The [logging] company knocks over the *shapaja*⁷ that is growing in my yard that I use to make my home. The *shapaja* is all the time further and further away. I told the company worker, ‘do your [logging] road better so as not to knock down the *shapaja* or leave [truck tire's] marks on my yard’. Sometimes they replied, ‘there is enough *shapaja*, you know nothing *campa*.⁸’ (conversation with community member, 2012).

Indigenous federations⁹ emerged in the 1960s as a new form of self-government in the Peruvian Amazon, with the principal aim of protecting Indigenous territories and ways of life (Espinosa, 2016b). Indigenous federations occur at the local, regional, national and international levels. They typically comprise officials or representatives who act as spokespersons¹⁰ for numerous communities. These officials are accountable to general assemblies – gatherings of member communities – and recognize the assemblies as the highest authority (conversations with Indigenous federation officials and community members, 2012 and 2013).

The alliance for this study came about as a result of long and candid conversations between the research team and federation officials and some communal authorities. The term “alliance”, was not self-ascribed, but articulated by Indigenous leaders in the process of interacting with the research team. Accounts of broken promises, lies and individualistic, selfish, paternalistic and abusive behaviours by outside researchers were conveyed from the outset:

We don’t want to deal with research or researchers! Some time ago, some people came from another country to ask us strange questions. They wanted to know about our medicinal plants. Shortly after making their research, they left and we never saw them after that. We never saw the document they wrote, what they wrote about us, nor do we know how or for which purpose the information taken

⁷ In addition to being key species for the ecological maintenance of the Amazonian forests, palm trees (such as *shapaja*) are also crucial in local communities’ diet, and used for the construction of houses and other utensils (Paniagua Zambrana et al., 2012).

⁸ *Campa* is identified as derogative term by Asheninka and Ashaninka peoples.

⁹ The indigenous federations are formally incorporated in Peru under the legal auspices of an “association” because there is no formal mechanism of recognition. Under the “Law of Native Communities” Law No. 22175, an indigenous person can associate and form an association, usually using the name of *federación* or *organización* (personal conversation with Iris Olivera Gómez, lawyer specialized in indigenous issues on 22.01.2016). This process typically involves following a series of onerous legal requirements (see Espinosa 2016).

¹⁰ The terms, “officials”, “representatives”, and “spokespersons” are used interchangeably in this paper and reflect also how these terms are used in these contexts.

from here was used (conversation with Indigenous federation official, 2012).

Although the directness and the strength of this statement were shocking, we understood its appropriateness and appreciated what this federation official was telling us. The extractive tendencies of Euro-western science have been extensively documented by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars (Cortéz et al., 2015; Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 2012) and substantiated during our conversations with community members and federation officials.

Following the first meeting, the research team reiterated its desire to generate information *together*. Some federations declined to be part of the research alliance, while others accepted. Those that accepted were: the regional federation Regional Union of Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon from Atalaya Province (URPIA) and the local federations in three of four districts of the Atalaya Province: Organization of the Tahuanía District (OIDIT) in the Tahuanía district, the Federation of Asheninka Communities of the Atalaya Province (FECONAPA) in the Raimondi district and the Federation of Yine-Yami Communities (FECONAYY) in the Sepahua district.

Why decolonize methodologies and methods? Using indigenist approaches

Peruvian Indigenous movements have been pushing the Peruvian state to improve interactions between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples and agencies (public, private and non-governmental organizations), but these initiatives were advanced with little consultation with Indigenous populations (Alza Barco & Zambrano Chávez, 2015). For instance, the Indigenous Prior Consultation Law No. 29785 and its instruments (the Law's Regulation and the Methodological Guidelines for the Consultation with Indigenous Peoples)¹¹ were enacted to guide how interactions could be better cultivated between actors. However, this legislation has been contested by Indigenous federations and communities because it did not come from their perspectives, and their key concerns were not included (AIDSESP, 2012; Gamboa & Snoeck, 2012; Hiperactiva Comunicaciones, 2014; Salazar-Soler, 2015; Schilling-Vacaflor & Flemmer, 2013).

The broader study described in this paper tried to address these deficiencies by advancing approaches and methods that aspired to be decolonizing, respectful and culturally sensitive. In order to conduct this endeavour with a strong sense of relational accountability, we fostered a meaningful dialogue between the collaborators for the collective creation of knowledge. The methodology and

¹¹ In Spanish "Ley N° 29785, Ley del derecho a la consulta previa a los pueblos indígenas u originarios, reconocido en el convenio 169 de la organización internacional del trabajo (OIT); Reglamento de la Ley Nro. 29785; and Etapa de identificación de pueblos indígenas u originarios: Guía Metodológica"

methods were designed, conducted and shaped by the research team with the help of members from the six collaborating communities.

Inspired by Rigney (1999), Martin (2003), and Chilisa (2012), the research team expanded upon the following notions of an indigenist research approach:

- Recognize and honour – discursively and actively – Indigenous knowledge and science.
- Prioritize Indigenous voices with research that focuses on the Indigenous peoples' "experiences, ideas traditions, stories, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggles" (Rigney, 1999, p. 117).
- Share control of the research, with Indigenous peoples – experts of their own realities – being able to define, control and own the ontologies and epistemologies that give value and legitimize interactions (Rigney, 1999).
- Work with Indigenous peoples as research allies and collaborators, rather than objects or subjects of research.
- Centre Indigenous agendas and terms of the study such that there is a focus on the responsibility to Indigenous peoples and their struggles (Smith, 2012).

These notions are common practices in the cultivation of respectful relationships that consider historical legacies with and among Indigenous peoples. A community member stated: "I want all leaders and NGOs to come like you and consult [with] us. Just like this. [...] That is what we want: through consultation, our own ideas will come out" (group session, 2012).

Application of the methodology

The study was conducted in collaboration with six Asheninka and Yine-Yami Indigenous communities, their federations (one regional, and three local Indigenous federations) and a Peruvian NGO which was a financial, institutional, and logistical ally in this inquiry.

Developing the methodology and methods was in practical terms an ongoing cultivation of relationships – among the allies (to ensure the viability of the results and continuity of the study), among the research team members (to ensure rigour of the study) and between the research team and collaborators (to conduct the study and assure its quality). Before starting the creation of knowledge, we had extensive conversations to put together activities that were culture, place and context sensitive. The methods were conceived and tailored by the research team with feedback from the collaborators in the communities and federations in an iterative process, as recommended by Ball and Janyst (2008). The research team was careful to conduct all procedures respectfully and meaningfully, following cultural protocols.

The main writer and cultural advisors formed the research team. Each cultural advisor was delegated by their federation and was responsible for collaborating in the study in matters related to the communities selected by each federation. Each cultural advisor assessed their interest in supporting and potential involvement in the study. Their responsibilities included cultural translation and interpretation, translations of the Indigenous languages and being an active part of the research team. They were directly involved as co-researchers in the design, analysis and dissemination of the study.

Flexibility and reflexivity were maintained during this process, enabling the evolution of the methods on a daily basis. Flexibility in research “reflects the extent to which the researcher is prepared to show respect in understanding that research is not the priority in times of crisis, grieving, celebration, ritual or maintenance of relations” (Martin, 2003, p. 212). Reflexivity is the critical assessment of “empowerment and participation in a counter-colonial context. This enables rigorous evaluation of the ‘messiness’ that emerges in collaborative efforts” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 118). A collaborative study requires a multi-layered reflexivity: self, interpersonal and collective (Nicholls, 2009).

Self-reflexivity was a continual process. As an Indigenous academic in a western institution, it was a challenge for the main writer to leave behind assumptions inherent to a colonized mind expressing herself in colonizing languages such as Spanish and English. She had to be very careful about her assumptions and position so that the research did not turn into a potential source of oppression and marginalization (Martin, 2003; Sundberg, 2015).

Interpersonal reflexivity was a periodic procedure that enabled the assessment of the collaborative work among the research team, “as opposed to lead, control or delegate” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 112). This process evolved in depth as the research team got to know each other. The research team drew on the intersection of their values to put together seven principles that guided the work and interactions within the research team, and between the research team and the collaborators:

Cariño or love toward Indigenous peoples and places;

Respect for the recognized Indigenous structures and protocols;

Centering Indigenous knowledge, science, wisdom, and intellect in the study;

Flexibility and adaptation to Indigenous agendas, spaces, available time, languages, and daily activities;

Listening and waiting for the collaborators to provide answers on their own terms and time;

Facilitating collaborators’ own processes to express their views. This implied *asking* and *listening* rather than *telling* and

Recognizing, with words and actions, that community members and federation officials are the experts of their own realities.

These principles were an expression of the research team's inner reflections and were useful as a frame of reference to delineate each interaction throughout the research. Interpersonal reflexivity with each cultural advisor took place at the end of each day, reflecting on aspects and occurrences that emerged through participation in research and other activities. Finally, collective reflexivity occurred with community-based knowledge holders and spokespersons after group sessions and personal interviews, therefore providing an important means of verifying validity (Nicholls 2009).

Cariño was identified as the principal driver of action by the research team. Not knowing each other before the research began, the team had diverse starting points of *cariño* toward Indigenous peoples. In the main writer's case, it started as a general *cariño* toward Indigenous peoples with whom she empathizes. She related to and interacted with Asheninka and Yine-Yami peoples in the same way that she would like her people (her loved ones) to be treated, with *cariño* and respect (Martínez Buján, 2007). Later in the process of enacting *cariño*, the relationships began to generate, grow and mature. During the interpersonal and collaborative reflexivity processes, this term took life and became a strong element in the inquiry process.

Cariño needs to be enacted and embodied. *Cariño* is action-dependent and it is not (just) discursive. In the study, *cariño* came up in different conversations among the research team and collaborators as an encompassing/holistic aspect important to the success of processes and actions. Community members argued that by loving their people, Indigenous leaders demonstrate their willingness to serve their communities especially in such leadership positions that could endanger their lives and their families' wellbeing (conversation with community members in Nueva Unión and Nuevo Paraíso; group session with men in Nueva Unión and Bufo Pozo, 2012). Furthermore, among community members, *cariño* was described as a sentiment that motivates and drives people toward action in favour of their people. *Cariño* has no monetary implications (Martínez Buján, 2007). It is a starting point, catalyzing the desire to conduct actions, which could benefit collaborator communities.

We used various methods to articulate and create knowledge collectively throughout the study. As recommended by the Indigenous co-researchers and cultural advisors, several channels of expression for collaborators to express their thoughts and sentiments were fostered, including through individual interviews, fostering individual and collective spaces for everyone involved in the study (including single gender sessions), and going to the places where the elderly and disabled were located. Within some of the collective sessions, we had sharing circles and action research circles, each comprising different activities (discussed below). The research team used methods and activities that encouraged experts (the

collaborators themselves) to share their perspectives, leaving the research team as facilitators (Chilisa, 2012; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 2012). Interviews and collective sharing were important spaces during which collaborators debated about their concerns, achievements, and desired futures. Collaborators used this information to formulate recommendations to strengthen their federation system.

The “participant recruitment strategy” was instead an *invitation to collaborators*. Collaboration was voluntary, open to everyone in the communities, and followed Asheninka and Yine-Yami recognized protocols that included several meetings, conversations, deliberation, and identification of agreements prior to the actual articulation and creation of knowledge. At the beginning of each interview or group session, we addressed nine important points to introduce the study and ourselves. The research team elaborated a relational research protocol by explaining (1) the study (showing collaborators the document written and signed by the Indigenous federation that acted as a visa-type entry permission into Indigenous autonomous territories), (2) the components of the academic researcher’s collaboration with Indigenous federations (for instance, a commitment to deliver the co-created information in a format significant to the community members), (3) the research team’s principles and assumptions, and (4) where we came from. Later, we consulted with them whether (5) they wanted to share their stories for this study, (6) we could record their voices and, (7) we could take pictures of them. We also made it very clear that (8) they could feel free to express any suggestions or observations about any aspect of the study (the research team, the methods, methodology, the requested outcomes, etc.), and that (9) they could ask us any questions including inquiries about our possible relationship.

The methods

The study involved 102 individual conversational interviews, 18 group sessions and 2 full-day workshops with federation officials and communal authorities. The methods, summarized in Table 1, are described in detail in this section. Each of these methods and the metaphors used were developed by the research team based on the Asheninka and Yine-Yami paradigms, contexts and place. Also, they were improved during the study as collaborators and research team members made suggestions and observations to modify them to particular circumstances, contexts, histories and cultures of collaborators. The cultural advisors translated the conversations between the research team and the collaborators simultaneously in each interaction. These were not *literal* translations rather they were *contextualized* translations. For instance, there are Spanish and Quechua terms used in everyday conversations in this part of the Amazon (e.g. *wiraqucha* to refer to the outsiders including Peruvians, or *mezquino* to refer to a selfish person). Besides reflecting on different aspects regarding the methods and methodology, the reflexivity sessions (mentioned in the section above) were also important for verifying the translations and understanding ourselves and each other better within this pluricultural endeavour. Furthermore, it was necessary for the

research team to meet prior to any sessions with the collaborators to collectively find the best way to translate ideas and ensure that we were all on the same page.

Table 1: Phases of our collaboration

Phase I	: Preliminary visit and invitation of collaborators
Phase II	: Co-creation of knowledge with federation officers
Phase III	: Co-creation of knowledge in the communities Contacting community authorities Participating in the communal assembly Conducting individual conversational interviews Conducting group sessions Single gender group sessions General sessions
Phase IV	: Final session in Atalaya Welcoming collaborators Private sessions Storytelling sessions General session Closure meeting Post-meeting reflective data
Phase V	: Closure of the study Preparation of outcomes and distribution

Phase I – Preliminary visit and invitation of collaborators

Preliminary meetings were conducted with the NGO representatives in Lima, and later in Atalaya to meet the cultural advisors and to invite different Indigenous federations to collaborate in the study. In these meetings, the research team and allies defined the responsibilities, commitments and the type of information each ally would be interested in receiving, and clarified that the knowledge mobilization would be based on feedback from community members. After several conversations, the research team and allies formally consolidated the process by drafting a document detailing the purpose, commitments and responsibilities of all the allies in the study. It was subsequently signed by each of the parties (see Figure 1), as well as by the NGO's executive director.

After consulting with their respective communities, the Indigenous federations confirmed which communities had agreed to collaborate in the study (see Figure 1). Before entering into the communities, the federations issued a document that acted as a visa, granting us temporary permission to enter, subject to the approval of the communal authority and the communal assembly.

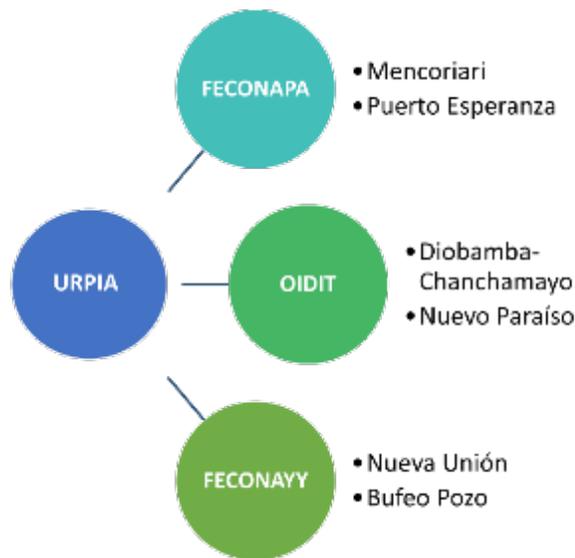


Figure 1: Federations and community allies in the study. FECONAPA, OIDIT, and FECONAYY are local federations under the umbrella of the regional federation URPIA. The six communities in the study are listed besides their respective local federations.

Phase II – Co-creation and articulation of knowledge with federation officials

Conversational interviews with the federation officials were conducted to learn more about their institutional objectives, concerns, achievements, and other historical or contextual information, including reflections about their forms of self-government.

Phase III – Co-creation and articulation of knowledge within the communities

The research team coordinated with communal authorities and community members to conduct conversational interviews, single and mixed-gender group sessions, and social activities. Interviews and group sessions followed Asheninka and Yine-Yami cultural protocols, as well as the nine points from the team's relational research protocol. After these interviews, we had a better understanding of the contexts in the communities and discussed the collaborators' desires for their futures, current concerns, achievements so far, and their views about their federations and officials.

The highest authority in Asheninka and Yine-Yami societies is the communal assembly, where community members congregate periodically to discuss issues and through which power is shared among community members. This was the appropriate platform to confirm the alliance and to invite community members to collaborate. Publicly, in a communal assembly, communities were given a formal invitation and the potential benefits and drawbacks of collaboration were discussed.

Every aspect of the study was discussed during these assemblies and community members' concerns and suggestions were addressed. The research team acted as facilitators in this process, emphasizing the importance of incorporating community members' knowledge in this study. Some comments about previous experiences with outsiders emerged from conversations, such as: "They [the outsiders] call us 'oh, poor things!' while taking photos of us... we do not know where they took our faces away to, and if they will make money from them, but we never see them again" (conversation with community member, 2012).

Based on this and similar comments, it was agreed that we would bring back photos taken. Community members were assured that their knowledge would not be appropriated without their permission, and they were reminded that there would be several options for voicing their opinions during the study.

Individual interviews with community members were designed to co-create knowledge based on conversations (Chilisa, 2012). At times, the individual being interviewed would call their partner, oldest children, or a relative to collectively recall and analyze a particular event or detail. Community members highlighted the importance of the group sessions in the process of remembering. In one community a woman asked the main writer: "Andrea, could you sing a song?" for what she agreed. Although she knows many, she could not remember any songs at that moment, to which they answered, "do you see that sometimes when suddenly someone asks us questions, we don't remember? Just like you don't remember now one song of the many you know" (conversation with community members, 2012).

Group sessions were participatory in nature and included sharing circles for discussions and activities with metaphors and storytelling being important forms of sharing ideas. The sessions themselves were either comprised of a single gender or mixed gender groups. Collaborators were under no pressure to participate, and could opt out or remain silent. Through sharing memories, conversation, and storytelling, the groups began to build collective narratives based on shared, conflicting, and/or complementary ideas.

Following the recommendations of Asheninka co-researchers, the research team designed three single-gender group activities. The first one, called "*my palm, my community*", was used to identify community members' desires for their futures. The collaborators used palm leaves: each collaborator took at least three leaflets and sat down, forming a circle with the palm's rachis in the center (see Figure 2). The cultural advisor then indicated segments of the rachis that represented the past, present, and future (using the equivalence of these words in their own languages¹²). After taking time to converse amongst themselves, each collaborator shared events and stories that they remembered. For each story/event

¹² For instance, in the Asheninka language *pairani* = past; *iroñaaca* = present; *otsipa otzarentz* = next year (which also refers to the near future). For the distant future, other metaphors were used.

told, they placed one leaflet within the segment that referred to the past. Later, each individual reflected about their present and then, by taking into account their past and present situations, they formulated opinions and gradually built a desirable future for their communities.



Figure 2: Asheninka co-researcher explaining “my palm, my community” activity

The second activity was called “*what are our difficulties in our community?*” Via stories and desires for the future based on the previous activity, individuals were encouraged to identify difficulties impeding them from achieving a desirable future. Later, after a process of deliberation, community members conveyed their thoughts on these matters. In the final activity, “*the desired characteristics of a federation official*”, community members were asked to identify desirable and undesirable characteristics that they would like to see in the spokespersons of a hypothetical federation put in place to achieve the objectives of the communities (based on the outcomes of the first two activities). These characteristics were invoked through storytelling, wherein people were placed in a hypothetical federation. The activity culminated with each person pasting two coloured sticky notes on a surface, one colour identifying desirable and the other undesirable characteristics of federation officials.

General sessions were held with men and women on their visions for their communities in the future. Local materials were collected by community members from the surrounding area, including palm leaves, stones, sticks, plants, clay, seeds of different types and colours, charcoal, *achiote* (*Bixa orellana* seeds prepared with fat), tubers, bark and fruits, for use in this activity (see Figure 3). Using these materials to make illustrations, collaborators shared their reflections with the rest of

the group and explained the meaning of their drawings. These group sessions ended with general reflections from community members, traditional songs, closing remarks from communal authorities, community members, and co-researchers, and more informal interactions.



Figure 3: Elements used in the group sessions

During interviews and group sessions we tried to address asymmetrical relationships by making sure that community members knew that they could also ask us anything, which occurred very often. For instance, they asked the main writer about her family and ancestors.

Phase IV – Final session with the officials and communal authorities in Atalaya

In the final session, officials and communal authorities met to reflect on community members' suggestions and to articulate viable solutions and recommendations on how to accommodate communal concerns. This phase was an essential bridging mechanism between member communities and federation officials. The meetings themselves followed the research protocols, were conducted in three languages, Asheninka, Yine and Spanish, and were organized around three types of sessions: private, storytelling, and general, with specific activities for each.

Private sessions were held to encourage spaces for dialogue between federation officials and communal authorities from member communities. This session was destined for one federation to discuss in privacy with member communities. At the beginning of the session, the main writer left the room and turned off the recorder for them to discuss their internal issues privately. After deciding which issues they want to make public, the main writer return to the room. Federation officials and communal authorities worked in pairs to prioritize

recommendations to achieve communities' objectives. Using the Three Filters method – inspired by the Three Lenses of Human-Centered process – they followed three hierarchical filters: desirability, feasibility, and financial possibility (IDEO, 2011). The community concerns ultimately addressed in this exercise were based on the emphasis given to them by the communities.

Storytelling sessions were run as a means of discussing ancestral Indigenous self-determined ways of government. Through storytelling and/or image rendering, communal authorities and federation officials laid out the historical background and current context of communities. The collaborators found this session to be valuable because it revealed that Asheninka and Yine-Yami histories are not being told or taught in schools and are getting lost. Collaborators identified this particular exercise as being a source of self-empowerment and connectedness. After three storytelling sessions were run at different moments of the day, collaborators shared the outcomes within the general group.



Figure 4: A. Asheninka co-researcher and a banana tree in construction (left photo) and B. Tree already made by one federation officials and communal authorities (right photo)

Lastly, a general session was held to articulate ideas on the desirable characteristics of federation officials, from the perspectives of the officials and the communal authorities. To make the construction of information more dynamic, the research team used the banana tree as a metaphor to refer to Indigenous federalism. This narrative was based on the similarities between a fruitful banana tree (an Amazonian staple crop) and a fruitful federation (an Indigenous system of self-government that exists to serve communities). The roots represented the member communities, the trunk the federation, and the fruit the federations' objectives. Desirable and undesirable characteristics of federation officials were identified and written on the leaves. Graphically, the banana tree showed that federations could not exist without base communities in much the same way as the roots of banana trees nourish the plant and prevent it from falling (Figure 4). Each federation was asked to construct their own banana tree, identify key elements and present their

findings to the rest of the group. Through individual and collective reflection on how their attitudes intersected or differed with community members, collaborators were able to better understand the desired and undesired characteristics of federation spokespersons.

We invited collaborators to prepare closing thoughts, reflections, analyses or messages at the end of the two-day workshop to validate (or not) the co-created knowledge from the meeting. A space was promoted for comments and suggestions about the methods and methodologies used. This provided valuable feedback to the research team, and was an important venue for the officials and communal authorities to reflect and explore further recommendations on how to invigorate their system of self-government.

During the final sessions with federation officials and communal authorities, the research team also held meetings to assess the entire co-creation process. In many cases, comments and suggestions on the sessions with the collaborators had been made informally, some directed at the cultural advisors (because of their greater familiarity and knowledge of Asheninka and Yine-Yami languages). These post-meeting talks enabled us to share and reflect on the comments made by the collaborators to different members of the research team. For instance, one collaborator mentioned that the food provided during the gathering could be better aligned with community members' usual meals of fish, bananas and cassava.

Phase V – Closure of the study

To close the study, four outcomes of the study were prepared and disseminated in a way that respected and recognized the allies' protocols. The first outcome was a package of photographs taken in each community. Second, reports and presentations were provided to the NGO. The third was a previously agreed trilingual, illustrated magazine-format document in Yine-Yami, Asheninka and Spanish languages to be used as a self-government tool. The content of this document was consensus-based and prototypes of the document were vetted by the communities prior to the final version being published. After completion, it was distributed to communities at assemblies and posted online by the NGO¹³. The fourth outcome consisted of ten 100x100 cm full-colour posters (printed and in digital format) with a summary of the whole study (focusing on the methodology and results for the federations and collaborator communities), and four copies of the main writer Master's thesis detailing the procedures and results of the overall

¹³ The local federations were responsible to deliver the document to some communities and the Yine-Yami and Asheninka research members to deliver it in other communities. To see the document, refer to the following web link:
http://www.dar.org.pe/archivos/publicacion/103_Revista_OOII.pdf

study's objectives. With this, all of the research team's promises and commitments to the study's allies – communities and their federations, and the NGO – were met.

Considerations in decolonizing this research

Research in Indigenous settings, about or with Indigenous peoples, requires Indigenous worldviews and concerns to be placed at the centre of the research by using decolonizing methodologies, methods, and theories to inform the research (Smith, 2012). In co-creating and articulating knowledge with the Asheninka and Yine-Yami peoples regarding strengthening Indigenous systems of self-government, our goal was to operationalize decolonizing, respectful and culturally sensitive methodologies and methods.

The research methodology and methods were designed and conducted by an Indigenous research team. The credibility and trustworthiness of the research team (and consequently, the research results) were enhanced by including community members as cultural advisors and core members of the team. Without them, the main writer, as an Indigenous outsider to the region, would likely have had a decontextualized approach. The research team acted as facilitators with the acknowledgement that community members and federation officials are the experts of their own realities, leaving behind the *foreign expert* versus *local non-expert* or the *knowledge owner* versus *knowledge needed* colonial perspective in relation to the research team and the collaborators. Instead, the team embraced a process whereby knowledge formulation and articulation was relational and co-created through doing (Kovach, 2012; Wilson, 2001). The conversational interviews and group sessions prioritized Indigenous voices and were centered on Indigenous knowledge, experience and context. From the start, we saw the communities that we worked with as equal collaborators in the co-creation of knowledge: the group sessions, where knowledge was articulated and co-constructed through storytelling and the dynamic activities associated with building common narratives both recognized the experiential aspect of Indigenous approaches to learning and knowing (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2001). The conversational interviews were treated as dialogues, rather than question-and-answer sessions. To ensure that everyone had an opportunity to express themselves freely, the research team followed the advice of the cultural advisors and community members in defining the 'spaces' where these dialogues took place: work spaces (group sessions and individual sessions); geographical spaces (in an Indigenous community and in a city); environments (gender-based, family-based, community-based and federation-based); channels (speaking, drawing, singing, writing and dancing); and receptors of information (a co-researcher from their context and speaking their language, and/or an Indigenous co-researcher from outside the context).

The research process was based on cultivating relationships that the team had built by following community protocols and presenting ourselves and our nine-point relational research protocol transparently at the start of each of the sessions. Relational accountability was enacted/performed in the study by constantly

fostering spaces for collaborators to indicate their preferences and requests, and accommodating those to the fullest extent possible. A cultivated relational accountability can be seriously constrained by western academic practices (Martin 2003; Sundberg 2015); but in this research, we chose to remain accountable to the collaborators first by prioritizing and completing their research outcomes – particularly given their past disappointments with empty promises made by outsiders.

Sentiments can be a source of strength in generating action for social change. *Cariño* was a sentiment that was present throughout the inquiry. On the ground, *cariño* was the engine for our interactions and the foundation from which we built the study methodology. The research team practiced *cariño* while interacting with the collaborators and continually reminded one another about our commitments and responsibilities during downtimes. The research team also learnt that *cariño* is an important means by which community members can gauge the commitment of Indigenous officials in their roles as spokespersons and leaders. Furthermore, Ahmed (2004) argues that the *cariño*-based (love-based) approach challenges Euro-western assumptions that cognition is superior to feelings as a form of intelligence and its social and political appropriateness (Reed, 2010) while underestimating its power to motivate and sustain social change.

Researchers need to “sit *alongside* us and not sit *on* us”¹⁴. This methodology went beyond participatory action research approaches to adopt a decolonizing and indigenizing endeavour, by respecting self-determination of Indigenous peoples and supporting Indigenous leadership in the conceptualization and carrying out of the research (Braun, Browne, Ka’Opua, Kim, & Mokuau, 2014). One of the cultural advisors reflected after listening to women’s testimonies in one community:

In previous projects (...) [t]hey just came saying, “OK, let’s work on a forest management project”... But what’s that? We didn’t know. That’s the problem, and it’s now shocking to the community of Puerto Esperanza as well. They were selected for this project [to obtain certification by the Forest Stewardship Council - FSC]. (...) And why is it shocking to Puerto Esperanza community members? Because it was not consulted from the bottom (group session, 2012).

Outsiders “come to impose their reality against that of our people. They have another culture... another way of thinking” (conversation with federation official, 2012). The research was implemented through constant dialogue and consultation with community members in order to avoid “participatory” methods being imposed on collaborators and that way falling into the paradox of participation (Arieli, Friedman, & Agbaria, 2009; Ospina et al., 2004). We tried to address these issues

¹⁴ Personal conversation with the Noonuccal researcher Karen Martin on 22.05.2017.

by having three community members as cultural advisors and members of the research team. These individuals substantially shaped the research methodology and methods with help of community members. Activities and tools were contextualized to local realities; for example, the use of local materials and metaphorical activities were appropriate for a population with a strong Indigenous education. Furthermore, the collaborators were the final judges of the work.

Our methods were not without their limitations. As in similar studies (see Sikes 2006 for a review), questions and issues of language and interpretation were important. The use of Spanish during discussions with collaborators was kept minimal¹⁵, so that collaborators were able to express themselves freely, but also so as not to potentially offend them (Sikes 2006). However, this likely brought with it potential errors in interpretation as native languages were translated into Spanish (and later into English¹⁶), bringing with it potential mistranslations.

Researchers bring their own biases that may be evident in more than just language interpretation. In this study, we attempted to minimize biases through a variety of strategies suggested by Chilisa (2012) and Jensen (2008). First, we recognized the positionality of the researchers in the study and multilayered-reflexivity procedures. The set of seven principles that the team put together acknowledged their motivations, assumptions and values. We built confirmability by using multiple triangulation procedures that forged the trustworthiness of the research team. Peer debriefing (Chilisa, 2012) amongst the team helped us to identify and challenge our own values and biases. We implemented peer-to-peer checks through post-interview and post-group sessions with community members and federation officials, and through communal assemblies at closure of the study.

Some of the processes might have been limited by internal tensions (Radcliffe, 2015). For instance, between the NGO and the main writer (e.g. funding and logistics constraints), among the research team (e.g. distrust, gendered roles, (dis) ability to travel, age, language and notions of professionalization), and between the research team and collaborators (e.g. the perception of who possess knowledge and who is seen as an expert figure). These tensions were addressed through face-to-face discussions during the main writer's (and co-researcher's) visits to Atalaya and the respective communities.

¹⁵ However, in certain contexts, for instance in Yine-Yami communities and in Atalaya, it was also necessary to use Spanish as some indigenous persons had Spanish as main language. It was explained that before the establishment of a bilingual education in the Amazon, indigenous peoples pursuing western education were forbidden to speak their languages and socially discouraged to practice it, thus with time and after some generations they lost the ability of speak the native language.

¹⁶ The main writer did all the Spanish-English translations.

We hope that the self-reflexivity among the research team throughout the research process has carried forward in some way in our writing, which was the responsibility of the main writer. However, what is the right or necessary amount of self-criticism and reflexivity when a colonized mind writes? Would a researcher even notice all the imperialist conditions (practices, attitudes, assumptions and language) carried with Euro-western institutions and how these conditions affect the research (Said, 1989; Sundberg, 2015)? The co-authors acknowledge the inherent limitations in the principle writer's ability to conduct decolonizing research considering the cultural illiteracy that comes from being an Indigenous outsider to the region and conducting this research within a Euro-western institution, despite the efforts described above.

This work is an example of the implementation of a methodology inspired by a "framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice" (Smith, 2012, p. 35). This methodology and set of methods provide suggestions on how to conduct a study that aspired to have meaningful, culturally sensitive, respectful, and non-extractive interactions with Indigenous groups.

Conclusion

Indigenous collaborators and the research team shared power and control of the research. With the aid of indigenist and Indigenous research methodologies, we were able to develop a methodology and set of methods based on indigenist paradigms, centering on Asheninka and Yine-Yami objectives, through a research team formed by two Asheninka women, one Yine-Yami man and one Quechua-descendant woman. In doing so, we have shown one way of implementing intercultural and place-based procedures that are compatible with pluricultural settings in Peru.

Methods such as the ones described in this study may be useful for other researchers looking to employ Indigenous methodologies that aspire to be decolonizing. Sentiments such as *cariño* could contribute towards the decolonization of collaborative research with Indigenous peoples in the Amazon. Additionally, to get closer to a decolonizing approach, those perpetuating the colonizing context and their strategies also need to be identified. The co-authors argue that, in order to complement a decolonizing approach, it is important to (re)draw those unseen/invisible connections between the impacts in Indigenous communities and the (neo)colonial initiatives that benefit from those abuses. Chosen methodology and methods are a living process of constant improvement towards a dynamic decolonizing approach, fostering the co-creation of meaningful knowledge and the enhanced visibility of Indigenous perspectives.

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