

Decolonizing Knowledge and Academic Practices through collaborative methodology: Reflections on Collaborative filmmaking with Indigenous Students in the Peruvian Amazon¹

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Abstract

This article reflects on a recent collaborative filmmaking experience in the Peruvian Amazon with indigenous students at the intercultural University of Nopoki. It draws on the theoretical notions of decoloniality of knowledge and knowledge production (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), functional and critical interculturality (Tubino & Flores, 2020), participatory visual methodologies (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2017), and the crucial input of indigenous knowledge (Rose, 2018). It focuses on the moments of intersection where collaboration provided new insights into the design and methodology of the research, the use of technology, and the distance between the theoretical framework and the experiential (*vivencial*) knowledge of the participants. Thus, underscoring that research and knowledge production should incorporate local knowledge from the Global South to continue its adaptable line (Finck Carrales, 2021).

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This piece focuses on our findings regarding the ubiquitous role of time during a collaborative process and the role of technology within. That is, the importance of considering that time in a collaborative research project should be conceived from the plurality of the group and not just the outsider researcher as it allows for a healthier framework for considering participation. Likewise, it underlines the criticality of learning new approaches to familiar technology that at first might discourage involvement as participants need time to experience new practices to give their *vivencial* inputs. Finally, it presents the importance of enjoyment as an essential consideration when contemplating, executing, and analysing collaborative projects with indigenous peoples.

Introduction

Peru is widely acknowledged for its intercultural nature and so-called integration of the 55 indigenous communities recognised by the State. However, a closer look reveals a functional interculturality that in fact perpetuates imbalanced assimilation. This approach prioritizes the dominant urban identity as 'valuable' and 'modern,' marginalizing indigenous identities as 'valueless' and 'primitive' (Tubino & Flores, 2020). This quagmire is not unique to Peru and the South American region (Stavenhagen, 2010). It is a global reality where indigenous peoples often find their self-determination and participatory democracy constrained by governments and organizations claiming to respect their rights (Perera, 2015). Consequently, they navigate their identities according to external, often unequal, power dynamics (Ndlovu, 2019), aligning with the persisting allegation of a 'Coloniality of Power' (Quijano, 2020) which continues to change faces and masks, upholding the same Colonial Matrix of Power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

This article looks back at and reflects upon a recent fieldwork experience (September to December 2022) with indigenous students in the Intercultural University of Nopoki in the Peruvian Amazon. This research experience was composed of 1) a *Convivencia*

(experience of embedded living) in which I had the opportunity to share daily living spaces and living conditions with the participants, 2) individual and small group conversations, and 3) a cellphilmaking workshop. Reflecting on the use of Participatory Visual Methodologies (PVM) and the knowledge put forward by participants, this article explores the question: How, and to what extent, can PVM challenge colonial practices in research?

This article seeks to participate in the ongoing trend in understanding the importance of decolonising western knowledge and its academic practices. For instance, recent research projects have looked into the relevance of intercultural universities in the Peruvian Amazon (Ames, 2023) and more specifically into the role of Nopoki in Atalaya and the indigenous population near the area (Azcona Ávalos, 2020). Likewise, Morelli (2021) has explored the use of audio-visual narratives with young indigenous peoples in collaboration with local and international artists. Finally, the same editors of this journal special issue also delved into the use of filmmaking as a community practice with young indigenous leaders in Junín (Women of Influence, 2023).

First, this article will outline the theoretical framework considered in the development of the fieldwork experience. It will introduce notions of decoloniality of knowledge, decolonising methodologies, PVM, and *vivencial* (lived) knowledge. Then, I will introduce more details on Nopoki and the research experience and focus on narrating relevant moments for the sake of this paper. Third, the article will focus on two relevant moments for this discussion: the knowledge participants brought into the experience and the lessons on the applied PVM. Finally, this piece will close with conclusions and final thoughts on the decolonising process of research.

Theoretical Framework

Decoloniality of knowledge

A first step towards the decoloniality of knowledge is to recognise that 'knowledge and knowledge production was also colonised in the form of an epistemic hierarchy

that privileges Western knowledge and cosmology' (Mpofu, 2022, p. 44). And, thus, outside western traditional academia there is a plurality of knowledges with multiple perspectives and epistemologies, each of them grounded in their cultural and historical context (Finck Carrales, 2021) that seek not to disrupt but to build new and stronger relationships between academia and marginalised societies (Bianchi, 2018). By critically and continuously challenging this Western-centric epistemology and ontology, we can create room for a diverse knowledge system to thrive and flourish (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Furthermore, decoloniality of knowledge necessitates an understanding of the researcher's and knowledge makers' positionality. Researchers must engage in self-reflection, recognizing their own historical context and biases, to avoid perpetuating oppressive knowledge hierarchies (Reiter, 2018). Participatory and dialogic practices become essential in this process, fostering co-creation of knowledge by engaging with diverse voices and knowledge bearers. It is through this inclusive approach that the richness and complexity of different scientific knowledges can be unveiled (Reiter, 2018).

Thus, decoloniality of knowledge demands fluidity; a constant reworking and re-evaluation of notions infused by local knowledges which introduce new perspectives and understandings (Jajj, 2018). And though contemplated from hegemonic spaces of academia, there are valuable discussions on participatory and dialogic methodologies that allow for and foster spaces of true dialogue.

Decolonizing methodologies and research: Relevance and implications.

Addressing the foreign positionality of the author in relation to the locality of the indigenous participants, this research follows an Anti-Oppressive researcher standpoint which seeks to recognise our limitations, to acknowledge that all knowledge is politically and socially constructed, and that the research process entails power relations that need to be challenged and re-wired (Potts & Brown, 2005). As such, this research moves closer to the methodology of group compilation that is more

associated with indigenous ways of working, and drifts away from notions of the individuality of one person managing and analysing research and knowledge (Rose, 2018).

This research also follows the pluriversality of knowledge and the necessity 'to relink with whatever is relevant in each specific project and to connect with coexisting decolonial projects in different areas' (Mignolo, 2018, p. 95) and thus pursues a transdisciplinary framework that aims 'to go beyond a level of collaboration to develop a shared conceptual understanding between research disciplines that synthesizes into a common shared theoretical perspective' (Pye, 2018, p. 39).

Thus, the research values indigenous perspectives that normally allow for a more inclusive and holistic approach to knowledge production. With the aim of providing and nurturing spaces of inclusivity and effective dialogue between different actors, this research utilised participatory methodologies that can be transformative, when carried out carefully and respectfully.

Participatory visual methodologies and engaged anthropology: Establishing collaborative principles.

Participatory methodologies have been challenged on their early top-down paradigm (Lennie & Tacchi, 2013; Chasi & Rodney-Gumede, 2018) and have been pushed to reconsider notions specific to the context in which they are applied (Pyles & Svistova, 2015). Therefore, choosing participatory research might be a powerful tool to either challenge colonialism (or perpetuate it when approached uncritically) but it could be advanced that participatory methodologies require unfettered participation to be truly decolonizing, an approach that entails many logistical challenges especially when the project is set up within the context of a highly regulated institution where the participants expect there to be rules. One way to facilitate this kind of 'less fettered' participation is presented through debates on Participatory Visual Methodologies (PVM) which consider the production of visual arts, like film, as a propitious moment of collaboration in which participants engage with the research

design, actions and the reflexion on these experiences (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2017). Filmmaking with indigenous participants has been suggested as a useful and active way to promote personal and group reflections on topics important to the participants (Morelli, 2021), and also has the potential to drive conversations around identity and representation when discussing the final film product (Zamorano Villarreal, 2017).

However, there is no certainty that all these theoretical considerations and lessons from previous similar experiences will stop a project from following the same conventions it tries to challenge. As such, this project follows ideas from engaged anthropology that sets out that research might be 'open-ended and experimental', that an intervention may not be 'successful', and that the researcher identifies politically with the project (Kirsch, 2018, p. 223). Furthermore, engaged anthropology challenges established notions of Western social sciences, authorship of knowledge, the researcher's ideals, and when working with indigenous people, will seek to 'accommodate indigeneity as defined in local and relational terms' (Theodossopoulos, 2015, p. 36). The fieldwork experience analysed in this text was approached with these concepts as cornerstones. However, it is crucial to recognize the dynamic nature of the field, making it challenging to always stay fully aware of one's own positionality.

Vivencial or Experiential knowledge and authorship

We could describe *vivencial* knowledge as the intersection between everyday living and the moments of experience and reflection when participants develop and engage their own relationship with the research, methods, knowledge, and knowledge production. This experiential knowledge is produced at different moments of the research process and if this is not carefully acknowledged, the everyday life of the participants may lead this knowledge to be unavailable for the core research or inaccessible for themselves when engaging in analysis. This influence of participants' daily lives on the accessibility of this knowledge is evidenced by the challenges posed by their other classes and responsibilities towards the *albergue*, demanding attention

before and after the workshop, sometimes resulting in forgetfulness about prior sessions of the workshop. Furthermore, the constant production work and the lack of secure storage conditions lead to multiple cases of lost papers, written drafts, and drawings. Likewise, these moments will not necessarily be linear, but overlapping as participants' engagement will occur at different moments; the lead facilitator needs to encourage reflection and spaces of dialogue. Likewise, it is important to notice that we are not working as a 'unified group of people, but rather a grouping of individuals and groups with their own characteristics and their own interests' (Bessette, 2004, p. 19). Thus, we must be careful that the group knowledge does not eclipse the individual input (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2017) nor ignore that creative or prejudicial conflicts may rise during the development of the collaborative research (Lawson & Caringi, 2015).

Furthermore, most hegemonic academic practices are often centralised around a certain form, style, and language (Guttorm, Kantonen, Kramvig, & Pyhälä, 2021). Unfortunately, knowledge developed with indigenous peoples, once it leaves the field, rarely results in a familiar product that is easy to access, engage with, and reproduce; nor does it often remain with or get back to the participants. This aspect of knowledge production must be highlighted, as indigenous knowledge 'is a relational entity that does not exist individually'; that is, it needs a specific context and relations with other beings to exist (Virtanen, 2021, p. 242). Hence, though I might be following the conventions of Western knowledge production/sharing by writing this piece, I also highlight that none of the findings that will follow would have been accomplished without the invaluable input of everyone who participated in the project directly and indirectly, nor without the specific context of Nopoki. It is also fair to say that the films produced (that's to say, an important output of the fieldwork) have stayed with the individuals and with Nopoki and as such, some of the project's outputs, findings and reflections continue to exist within their own context.

Methodology

About Nopoki and the participants

Nopoki, situated in Atalaya (Ucayali) in the eastern part of the Peruvian Amazon, is an intercultural university established in 2007 through a collaboration between Universidad Católica Sedes Sapientiae (UCSS) and the parish of San Ramon (Azcona Ávalos, 2020). Its mission is to offer the Intercultural Bilingual Basic Education (IBBE) programme, encouraging indigenous individuals to return to their communities as educators proficient in Spanish as well as their own indigenous languages. Additionally, Nopoki provides an *Albergue* (living accommodation on campus), supporting indigenous students lacking sufficient resources to sustain themselves in Atalaya. Students live in gender-separated rooms, ideally with peers from their own *pueblo originario*² (indigenous identity), receiving daily meals and study spaces. To support the campus and costs of the *albergue*, students engage in 10 mandatory hours of communal labour a week. Living within Nopoki involves adhering to a formal internal statute and an unwritten social code regulating behaviour, restricting outings without permission, limiting laptop use in the initial three years of study, forbidding romantic relationships, and mandating attendance at the weekly Catholic mass on Saturday afternoons.

In adapting the research process to the Nopoki context, the original plan to initiate collaboration with participants through the development of a research schedule had to be modified. Due to students' packed timetables, dedicating free time to the research project would be unfeasible without them sacrificing time for rest and personal activities. Nopoki proposed integrating the workshop into the Spanish class schedule to ensure dedicated time for the workshops. Following the principles of participation and avoiding imposition (Oldano & Duraschi, 2022), the workshop was

² Though a direct translation refers to 'original people', *pueblo originario* is the second preferred term of indigenous peoples in the Peruvian Amazon. First is the use of its own name e.g. (Ashaninka, Nomatsigenga, etc.)



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made optional, allowing students to choose between participating in the workshop or attending their regular Spanish class.

Additionally, I was requested to tutor students during their night study sessions, assist with the radio project, and document institutional events at Nopoki. Although these roles were not initially envisioned, they became significant moments of intersection, embodying the *cariño* (intercultural respect) integral to working with indigenous peoples (Meza Guzmán, et al., 2021). Furthermore, getting involved in these activities led participants and the wider student community to get to know me and form opinions about me; it was through these shared experiences that I was (then) able to build trust with the student community and specifically the fieldwork participants.

In 2022 (when this fieldwork took place), the IBBE program at Nopoki had 426 indigenous students across five academic years and seven indigenous languages. The initial idea for a general open call for participants in the film project was adjusted to target exclusively third-year students, as fourth- and fifth-year students were doing their professional practices in nearby communities. There were no second-year students due to the Covid19 pandemic, and first-year students were still acclimatizing to university life. The third-year cohort was divided into two sections, comprising a total of 78 students from various *pueblos originarios*. From the open call, 45 participants showed interest. In terms of gender split, only 16 women participated, representing just over a third of the project participants and half of the total women in the third-year cohort. Participants remained in a similar age range between 19 and 25 years old and with an average of 21 years between all of them. The chart below shows the split by both gender and indigenous group, with the Ashaninka participants in the majority noting that they also represent the largest indigenous group at Nopoki. The implications of the demography of the participants on aspects of power and agency will be considered in the analysis that follows in section four.

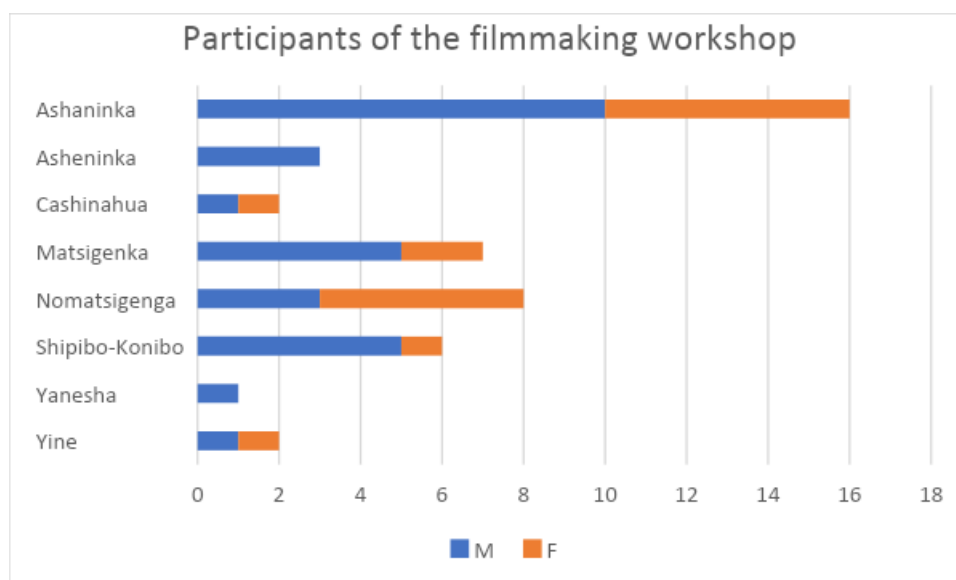


Chart developed through data from the fieldwork

Challenges and Opportunities of Collaborative Cellphilmaking Research

Early imagery around the Amazonia portrayed the land and its habitants as in need of development and domestication (Biffi, 2011). This research set out to disrupt this stereotypical Western-centred portrayal and, though harnessing the accessibility and familiarity of cellphilmaking with personal smartphones also aimed to challenge ‘the assumption that marginalised individuals need an intermediary to tell their stories or to help them do so’ (MacEntee, Burkholder, & Schwab-Cartas, 2016, pp. 7-8). While also seeking to democratize the research process through this methodology, I was also mindful of Henley’s consideration that participation in technology-based projects ‘tends to be monopolised by up-and-coming political leaders, predominantly male’ (2020, p. 214). I needed to seek ways to bring as many of the participants as possible into the process and enable their agency, if the representations created were to be meaningful and, in some way, decolonised.

Access to appropriate technology was a key consideration in the democratising agenda. Out of the 45 participants, two did not have their own smartphones and borrowed them from others. Smartphone capabilities varied, affecting image quality, storage, and data access. Additionally, gender disparities emerged in certain roles. To subvert conventional power dynamics and colonial research practices, extensive time

was dedicated to organic narrative and story development from each of the participants. The 24-session cellphilmaking workshop unfolded twice weekly, with the initial four sessions negotiating expectations, goals, and evaluation (Lennie & Tacchi, 2013), which highlighted the importance of *desenvolvimiento*³, representation, and video production skills. In the following weeks, an *asamblea* exercise addressed topics such as the conditions of the *albergue*, education, identity, and relationships, leading to different ideas emerging from each of the two sections.

One section explored issues relating to the *albergue* and education, creating short films based on their experiences. The other section emphasized representation, crafting short films centred on ancestral stories. The workshop tried to avoid traditional film language conventions (Schiwy, 2009) and instead embraced the poetics of participant-developed film language emergent from the positionality of the participants (Dowell, 2016). Initially, participants engaged in small exercises to familiarize themselves with the mechanics of the smartphone cameras, capturing topics discussed during the *asamblea*. As they grew more comfortable, discussions revolved around presenting stories and script development. Again, there was a bifurcation between groups as those who worked on ancestral stories focused on adapting the oral narrative to an audio-visual script, meanwhile the groups focusing on their context had to work on developing a script from no original source. Finally, there was a commitment with Nopoki to present the short films during the IBBE week at the beginning of December 2022. For this, the tentative schedule had contemplated editing on individual smartphones thereby maximising the participant-led storytelling approach, but Covid-related complications led to most editing being done on a laptop with facilitator guidance.

As was noted through this workshop-fieldwork experience, collaborative knowledge creation poses a substantial challenge, necessitating adequate time and conducive spaces. Participants needed not only engage and align with the aims of the project

³ Though roughly translated as 'personal development' it also entails the performance of challenging and overcoming difficulties, especially in social contexts.

but also acclimatise to the methods used, fostering a level of comfort that facilitated the expression of personal thoughts, enabling individual voices to actively contribute to collective discussions and analysis regarding the work done (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2017).

However, all these participatory efforts would be futile without addressing a fundamental discussion—the questions concerning power dynamics and authorship that emerged several times throughout this project. Acknowledging power dynamics is not a guarantee against their reproduction; rather, researchers should prioritize 'methodological flexibility rather than rigid methods' (Paksi & Kivinen, 2021, p. 202). Moreover, efforts to mitigate the replication of imbalanced power relationships when working with indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon should be based on the founding principle of intercultural research through intercultural respect (Meza Guzmán, et al., 2021).

My own engagement in intercultural respect with the indigenous participants required me to identify power relationships such as institutional context and expectations from authorities, beyond the immediate experience that could unintentionally influence or deliberately limit participant collaboration. This entails considering the broader context of participants' daily lives, where they are subject to unbalanced power dynamics within colonial structures (Gonzales Casanova, 2006). In my role, I bore witness to and heard cases of discrimination towards indigenous students from within the very institution purporting to assist them. Consequently, maintaining a dynamic of mutual respect and openness throughout the project was well received by most students even though it was at odds with their relationship dynamic with some other members of Nopoki staff.

Findings and Insights

The plurality of time in collaborative research

As I finished the final recorded conversation with a young Shipibo woman near the end of my time in Nopoki, I asked what she would change about the overall experience. She thought for a while and said: 'It was too short'. We both smiled. It was not the first time she had brought this up, she had been in one of the groups affected by weather and had asserted the need for longer filming experiences to make the involvement even more enjoyable. This time, as we traced memories of the different stages of the project, she added that it was saddening that she 'didn't have much time to use the camera [in their smartphone] more'. She added that though everyone was nervous to film at first, the men quickly took over the responsibility of using the smartphone as camera, and thus her time re-learning the technology was cut short.

I had heard similar thoughts from other participants, but this one complemented the words of a young Yine woman who, just a few days before, had asked not just for the workshop to be longer, and for more 'encouragement toward female participants', but for the entire experience to be repeated as other *paisanos*⁴ wanted to do their own films next semester. These instances underscore not only the gender dynamics at play throughout the research experience, but also the intricate development of time in collaborative research which is not just about the linear progression of time during the experience but also the intersections of participation with personal moments.

Thus, in collaborative research work time is not just mine, ours, or belonging to others. It contributes to recognising the plurality of voices, perspectives, and complexities of the collaborative project. As the following examples will demonstrate, external researchers such as myself should be aware of the many nuances that co-exist in the moments and places they share with participants and the wider

⁴ Most indigenous peoples in Nopoki used the word *paisano* to refer to the other people from the same indigenous identity.

community. By doing so, the outsider researcher may then be invited into less filtered conversations with the project participants and have a greater chance of recognising internal power dynamics within the community, which in turn should allow for a clearer understanding of the context in which knowledge is being produced.

It was throughout my time in the *asamblea* events that I was able to witness an illustration of the importance of the time spent by the participants outside the project. During our group discussions of relevant topics of the participant's context, we arrived at the topic of romantic relationships (which still exist despite being prohibited): some women brought up their own experiences of harassment whilst in Nopoki such as being shamed by students, gossip being spread around, and even unwanted touching. At this moment, some men interjected to refute these allegations and to 'explain' (in their view) why some women 'got themselves in that position'. This discouraged further discussion and participation by women on this topic; however, some of them chose to raise it during more personal conversations. This highlights not just the importance of considering unequal gender dynamics when acknowledging external and internal power relationships, but also the importance of how the everyday life of the participants comes forward during their participation in the project. Hence, it is important to contemplate that the project's aims should also consider those moments, contexts and events that impact on the participants' levels of comfort in making contributions of a more personal and sensitive nature.

Furthermore, it is also important to consider the time and role of *convivencia* (living together respectfully) with the participants outside the more formal workshop moments. For example, when the *asamblea* exercise led us to discussions around gender and heteronormative roles in communities, most participants aligned with a conservative Catholic position. And when I was asked to participate, though I chose my words carefully to present solely my disagreement with such conservative views, I was later informed that this was seen as a reprimand from my part. Yet at that moment, none felt comfortable enough to challenge my input and it was only after the workshop was over that this was brought up to me in an informal conversation

during my last week in Nopoki. This stresses that the facilitator of the research-oriented dialogues should be careful when following nuanced topics as there will most certainly be an instant impact of our participation from our position of power (as facilitator, as part of the institutional framework bound by its own rules and values): I might instead have chosen *not* to give my own view, but simply to facilitate the discussion of the participants. This example also brings to light the cruciality of time in the research and the need to dedicate time to building trust, through conversation outside the formality of the research framework.

Indeed, building trust is essential in the context of research, and necessitates a researcher's commitment to understanding how their actions, interventions and words are perceived, and how their alignments with others in the organisation might be (mis)understood. In my case, I initially agreed to support the radio project led by a Nopoki lecturer. Upon my arrival, I assumed that they would be my point of contact for addressing my requests. Assisting them in the early weeks appeared beneficial, as I believed it could facilitate future permit requests for filming on campus and for student activities in the *albergue*. During this initial period, I noticed troubling behaviours directed at some indigenous students by this lecturer. This observation led to a particular incident during a study session with a group of first year students about the persistence of Catholic beliefs. It was not the first time I was helping most of them in their study time, and I had become aware of some gestures when certain topics around religion came up. Thus, when referring to the persistence of values, I ventured to address this lecturer's behaviour with them, highlighting inconsistencies between their professed Catholic and intercultural values and their hostile conduct towards the students. Students responded with shy smiles and with looks behind their shoulder before they started to share their own experiences with this individual. As the evening concluded and I got ready to leave, a highly participatory Shipibo woman approached me, expressing her gratitude for my awareness of the lecturer's actions. She added that there had been concerns about my positionality, given my initial closeness and willingness to assist the lecturer, and my alignment with the organisation. After this

episode, I made the decision to be more open with the students, which in turn also led them to feel comfortable in sharing their ideas and concerns.

Thus, the time in a collaborative research process should be considered in plurality. That is, not just the time the outsider researcher invests in the established framework but also taking into account the personal and informal time of everyone directly involved and the people around the experience. Likewise, it becomes crucial to highlight that participation methods must remain critical and (self)aware of power dynamics if there is to be a chance of achieving less fettered collaboration. Furthermore, becoming familiar with the participants and the context of the research is imperative in order to reduce misunderstandings and to create an atmosphere of respect and *cariño* (intercultural respect or care) that would allow participants to come forth in the research with confidence that their views and knowledge are welcomed and appreciated. All these approaches and plural considerations of time should allow for a collaborative project to remain aware of unequal power dynamics that may affect the performance of collaboration in the research experience.

Lessons on collaborative cellphilmaking

It is also important to note that due to the high price of smartphones, almost none of the participants had a new phone, recent model, nor an established brand; instead they had older smartphones given to them by siblings or bought refurbished in town. The limits of the technology determined how comfortable and confident participants felt when engaging in audio-visual exercises of taking pictures, recording sound, filming, and editing with their own equipment.

Moreover, there was not just a physical limitation relating to the technology but a *vivencial* one (related to lived experience). Something we noticed early when using the cellphones was that most of us had not explored using this equipment as a filmmaking device. Amongst the participants, smartphones were mostly used to keep in contact with their families, to search for information on the web when data was available, or to listen to music and watch videos on Facebook (as Youtube and Kwai

consume more data, and there are mobile plans that offer free Facebook time in their contracts). As such, in their final reflection, all participants admitted being 'afraid of filming' at first, while it was mostly the male participants who took the time to practice using their smartphones and overcoming this fear by the end of the experience. Thus, it is important to highlight that though the physical technology may be available, the collaborative filmmaking experience should consider that participants need to learn to repurpose this equipment for its new context and goals. And even then, this process may not be successful if the hardware of the filmmakers does not allow them to explore all the steps in the filmmaking process, if time is not taken to practice and make mistakes, or if the internal dynamics of the group does not encourage open and less fettered participation.

Another important insight that arose during the fieldwork was the relationship between the different processes of adapting a story to be filmed and creating an original story for the project. These varied approaches tended to follow different focuses in terms of the selection of each narrative. One of the groups decided to adapt indigenous stories into the audio-visual format which led to discussions on how feasible the adaptations of some of these stories were considering the technology we had at hand. The second group decided to present stories based on their current reality and had no original material to adapt.

As such, an adapted story like the Yine narrative of *Lleseñ: the god who defeated Malaria* demanded less writing time from the production group, which was invested in researching the story more deeply, engaging in discussions around filmmaking, the challenges of working in an intercultural group, and the importance of language representation in the film. On the other hand, the story focusing on the importance of identity for the students of Nopoki demanded more time in its conception, as the individuals within the group had to negotiate what each of them envisioned as the best creative decision. While the more open approach adopted by the second group demanded more production time that unfortunately the project did not have, it had



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the benefit of creating rich spaces of discussion on what and how to represent the importance of identity.

In both groups, regardless of their different stories, narratives were selected via the same pitching process: every individual presenting an idea to small groups, these groups selecting one or more stories, and then finally each participant selecting the story they wanted to be involved in. This led to 8 different short films divided equally between indigenous ancestral stories and stories that explored their current context. They were developed by intercultural groups, that is, no group had just one *pueblo originario* (indigenous identity) but a mix of two or three. This production scenario allowed for discussions on representation of identity and highlighted the role of Spanish as the connecting, dominant language that was for some 'easier to use' especially considering that it would make the films more accessible to outsiders.

Finally, considering the challenge of accessibility and relearning of technology, participants had to innovate the use of their equipment to respond to their reality. For example, though we engaged with notions of editing and filming 'productively' with an organised plan of production, participants felt more comfortable when partially following a No-Editing-Required (NER) (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2017) process: filming a whole scene by pausing the recording and finishing a scene they could view and enjoy straight away. In this way, they developed a technique of filming a scene continuously that would later fit into the non-linear editing at its corresponding moment.

Enjoyment⁵ (or the lack of it) was referenced by almost every participant when describing their opportunity to participate openly and related to whether they felt integrally and equally part of the project, that their presence and input was relevant to the experience and vice versa (that the project was relevant to them). This concept of enjoyment (or, positive and enthusiastic engagement) is crucial to the success of

⁵ Roughly translated from 'disfrute'

any collaborative filmmaking experience as it is often a new practice for the participants who are not used to the process, and which demands substantial hours of labour. The fatigue of making a film, the restrictions of technology, and the limitations of weather conditions are all elements that could end up in *desanimo* (discouragement) and impact negatively on engagement with the project. In our experience, it also highlighted the fact that some production groups were able to film for entire days, while others (due to the weather or specifications of the script) divided their filming experience into fewer hours throughout many days. The first groups had more enjoyment during the filmmaking process and were able to see their story come to life, while the other groups struggled to finish their films and were open in their feedback that any subsequent filmmaking experiences should be celebrated throughout a full day or two, and not so fragmented.

Conclusion

Summary of key findings and contributions

In summarizing key findings and contributions, this study underscores several critical insights. It is strongly advised that participatory projects align with the living and research goals of indigenous communities, fostering collaboration from the project's inception. This approach ensures a theoretical and methodological framework that resonates closely with contextual needs, reducing the need for early adaptations. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of researchers being aware of explicit and implicit power dynamics, recognizing their direct and indirect influence on dialogues within the collaborative setting. While no universal remedy exists, an open awareness empowers individuals and groups to collectively negotiate and assess their experiences.

Collaborative projects require a constant evaluation of the concept of time. Researchers should appreciate the multifaceted nature of time, including acknowledging the moments that occur beyond the research context, contributing to familiarity with participants and the broader community. This encompassing

perspective also extends to the personal time participants invest in the project beyond the scope of research and their interactions with individuals both within and outside the collaborative experience. Recognizing these temporal intricacies enriches our understanding of the collaborative process, yielding diverse insights, examples of which have been identified in this paper.

Additionally, it is essential to recognize that accessibility and technology usage should not be universally generalized among participants unless explicitly provided by the researcher. Researchers are urged to critically evaluate how internal power relationships shape participation opportunities and devise tailored solutions accordingly. The process of film production within a collaborative context should be perceived as a celebration of knowledge and knowledge production, fostering an atmosphere of enjoyment and engagement for all stakeholders. This celebration serves to maintain participants' interest and acknowledges the respect and *cariño* they bring to the collaborative experience. However, it is paramount to remain vigilant regarding the potential for discrimination within the collaborative process, particularly concerning internal power dynamics based on identity, such as gender and ethnic disparities.

This study's findings demonstrate that indigenous participation in knowledge production through Participatory Visual Methodologies (PVM) has the potential to challenge colonial practices in research (that's to say those that rely on researcher-led assumptions) and can also facilitate the development of more inclusive, equitable, and respectful methodologies. However, it is essential to acknowledge the diverse internal and external power dynamics that impact participation and may directly or indirectly influence the nature of the experience. Thus, it is vital to acknowledge that local issues often necessitate context-specific solutions that external perspectives may not fully comprehend. This underscores the significance of intercultural respect and the decolonization of knowledge production, that's to say, listening and responding to the ideas and needs of the participants in their own context. The experience

presented in this paper is deeply rooted in unique and specific circumstances, drawing attention to the importance of adaptability with such work methods.

Reflection on the importance of indigenous participation in knowledge production

It was my last week in Atalaya, and a young Asheninka man and I were chatting and walking together to get some dinner. In our conversations throughout my time on campus we had engaged in a diverse range of topics and on that occasion, we were talking about the ill-informed criticism some lecturers in Nopoki made about his group's film on the living conditions in the *albergue* of the university. He shared that one of the lecturers had called their film 'garbage', that it was 'useless', and how dare they present such a story. He told me that he and his group were proud of the story because, although not perfect, it depicted one of the many realities present in the *albergue*. After hearing those comments, they all felt anxious about presenting their films and about the idea of creating new films in the future. He even suggested that if the university authorities were going to be so upset, for the next time, they should instruct the students what to film rather than give them the impression they had a free choice.

I revisit this memory because it presents several issues I would like to highlight in the closing of this paper. First, it accentuates the importance of building trust and familiarity with participants and other actors in the project, including the authorities, to arrive at positive conclusions with a plurality of voices. Second, it stresses that functional interculturality, that is, an interculturality that functions within a hegemonic system without being truly transformative (Tubino & Flores, 2020), and functional indigeneity will likely reproduce the same oppressions they claim to challenge. Third, sustainability of critical collaborative projects may be inconceivable within functional organisations that refuse to or cannot challenge their own oppressions. Finally, it shows the value of a critical collaborative project that works with a plurality of subjects and a reality that extends beyond the research project. The insights would have never been able to be shared in this paper without the pivotal input of everyone involved in the project, and thus whatever accomplishment may be



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within these words, it is also theirs. We can only hope that eventually, this knowledge will come back to them; or that we will open our ways to their knowledge production.



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