"Balancing the Books": Research Paradigms, Funding, Ethics and Accountability in Research with Indigenous People

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Abstract

Strongly emerging Indigenous methodologies have attracted researchers to employ diverse research paradigms within a moral commitment to conducting research based on ethical sensitivities and appropriate research protocols, as informed by research work with marginalized and unfamiliar groups including Indigenous Communities. However, adopting Indigenous methodological approaches may raise additional ethical considerations requiring a nuanced examination of what these may entail and competing ethical claims regarding research funding, research processes, outcomes and output. In this article, we draw sociological insights from Bourdieusian theory, as well as feminist epistemology, to explore the ethical implications arising from qualitative research the authors recently completed with Indigenous communities in equatorial Malaysia and Costa Rica, where Indigenous land rights and access issues form the contextualizing and comparative backdrop to the study, with reference to relevant international UN policies such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: Indigenous methodologies, research ethics, UN Sustainable Development Goals.

«Equilibrando las cuentas»: Paradigmas de investigación, financiación, ética y responsabilidad en la investigación con Pueblos Indígenas

Resumen

Las metodologías Indígenas que están surgiendo con fuerza han llevado a los investigadores a emplear diversos paradigmas en el marco de un compromiso ético de emprender investigaciones y protocolos de investigación apropiados e informados para el trabajo con grupos marginados y desconocidos, incluidas las Comunidades Indígenas. Sin embargo, la adopción de enfoques metodológicos Indígenas puede plantear consideraciones éticas adicionales que requieren un examen matizado de lo que puede implicar, así como de reivindicaciones éticas contrapuestas respecto a la financiación, los procesos, resultados y diseminación de la investigación. En este trabajo, nos basamos en las ideas sociológicas de la teoría bourdieusiana, así como en la epistemología feminista, para explorar las implicaciones éticas que surgieron de investigaciones cualitativas recientemente publicadas por los autores a partir de trabajos con Comunidades Indígenas en Malasia ecuatorial y Costa Rica, donde los derechos indígenas a la tierra y las cuestiones de acceso conforman el escenario de contexto y comparativo del estudio, con referencia a las políticas internacionales pertinentes de la ONU tales como los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS).

Palabras clave: Metodologías Indígenas, ética de la investigación, Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible de la ONU.

INTRODUCTION

The broader aspects of ethical approaches are frequently rehearsed, particularly the issue of research activities with marginalized and unknown groups as a *sine qua non* for positive engagement. Providing the means for marginalized groups to amplify their silenced voices is the moral mandate of qualitative ethnographic research (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2013). A strongly emerging research canon has coalesced to challenge traditional western research approaches with Indigenous people, as an example of these marginalized groups, and to offer new perspectives and *ethos* in the form of Indigenous methodologies (Chilisa, 2012; Jaime, 1995; Kovach, 2019; Mukherji; 2004; Smith, 2012).

These polemical works serve to strip away hegemonic epistemologies and onto-logical processes to prioritize Indigenous perspectives and practices. However, this in turn may create additional ethical dilemmas for researchers that require further exploration. With reference to our research work completed with Indigenous Communities in Malaysia and Costa Rica, we reflect on this epistemic journey and the implications that arise for researchers in negotiating the tensions posed between competing demands and research imperatives, where we consider the implications of Indigenous methodologies in connection with emic/etic/'insider/outsider' posi-tionalities, epistemic paradigms and research power sharing as influencing research processes. Sociological insights from Bourdieu and feminist theories inform the discursive and critical lens adopted in relation to the implications and reflections on research ethics.

BOURDIEUSIAN FIELDS AND INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

Contemporary disapproval has replaced sentimentality for the buccaneering immer-sion by roving western social scientists into the lesser-known realms of remote people in distant places (Chilisa, 2012).From a historical distance, we assume that the intrinsic value of these intellectual forays seemed comparatively unquestion-able, where, for example, anthropological research, like health and welfare, were parts of the moving machinery of the colonial administrative, economic, and mili-tary enterprise (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2012). Postcolonial critiques have rejected the notion of the exoticism and romance of encounters with the remote and Indig-enous *Other*, where this attitude is considered anachronistically mired in colonialist assumptions that carry a series of dubious beliefs and claims (Smith, 2012). These act as the Bourdieusian *doxa* of unquestioned beliefs (Bourdieu, 1998).

Chastened by greater ethical awareness, finding paths forward remains an undeniable challenge for constructive and benign research with Indigenous

Communities. Researchers can no longer expect the benefits of such research to be evident nor can they convincingly appeal to greater knowledge, unless the local gain is noticed as clearly proportional, an ethical position.

Non-exploitative research must be congruent with local understandings, kinship and relationship etiquette, moral value systems, and ontological ways of being and doing, and sensitive means of obtaining participants consent must also be considered (Ling, 2007). However, at the same time, there are broader institutional and academic demands that must be met within hegemonic constructs, which Bourdieu (1998) illuminates as demarcating fields of activities and practices regulated by their own disciplinary and bureaucratic rationales, these being the *fields* of capital: social/symbolic, cultural, and economic domains of power (Jenkins, 1999). This capital of *habitus* can manifest itself in cultural forms that influence the mind and body (McCall, 1992). The physicality of the ethnic *Other* is marked by bearing, gestures, aesthetic appearance, and clothing, whether consciously displayed or not. Bodily 'hexis' is the term that Bourdieu (1980, p. 70) uses to describe this physical phenomenon which carries elements of the performativity that Judith Butler (1990) refers to when deconstructing gender.

Both the worldviews of Indigenous Communities and communities of scholars operate within a *habitus* of competing fields*;* and where the *emic* and *etic* distinctions will be brought together by scholars of Indigenous background, as well as others who wish to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing. This syncretic engagement forms what Heaslip et al. (2018) define, as a bridging, nuanced *etemic* positionality.

Bourdieu (1977) describes the concept of *habitus* as an enduring and self-reproducing and enduring dispositional conditioning that intrinsically prescribes habitualization of practices and procedures, of rules to follow, in a holistic conditioning that individual actors take for granted. This, the *doxa* of normality, is reproduced as natural or normative. Within the structuring structure of the *habitus,* the terms of research are fixed and reproduced, which are not impervious to influence. The interest in Indigenous methodologies that is seeping into many academic disciplines is testament to this development (Ling, 2007; Higgins & Kim, 2019).

Bourdieu has proven to be very adaptable to seemingly unrelated theorizing. Thus, McCall (1992) explores Bourdieu with respect to feminist theorizing and gender, which is also seen as embedded in and enacted through capital. Bourdieusian concepts have also been used productively when applying the notion of *habitus clivé.* Here Indigenous feelings of alienation and inauthenticity occur when the rationalities of the Indigenous *habitus* are disrupted and contradicted by dominant non-indigenous cultures (Burns *et al.*, 2023).

Habitus may form cultural arbitrary', as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p. xxii) point out, but by their very nature, they are enveloping social *milieus.* Within these

disciplinary limitations, research projects that require funds (and not all do) must become viable proposals, framed within normative institutional discourses capable of surviving a battery of scrutiny within an intense competition for scarce funds (and kudos), especially in times of austerity. These are not easy priorities to balance and even more difficult to achieve. Our experience in this regard sheds light on the broader ethical parameters of research funding, research activities and outcomes.

For research that is part of a new and prevailing *zeitgeist* (Parker *et al.*, 2020), greater funding abundance may be prioritized. Otherwise, much valuable research may not fit into any set of priorities, as is often the case with research with Indigenous peoples, who often reside in remote rural locations, as typified by our own work with the Jakun. "Orang Asli" Indigenous peoples of Tasik Chini in Pahang, Malaysia, and the Bribri Indigenous peoples of Bajo Coen in Talamanca, Costa Rica (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2016; García Segura *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the rare funding schemes that exist to promote research with marginalized and less visible groups, particularly if they reside beyond national borders or immediate national authority, offer a financial lifeline for the continuation of lower profile studies.

Contextualizing ethical research and Indigenous Communities

Contemporary research literature relevant to the topic of research with Indigenous peoples tends to fall into overlapping fields of the conceptual and theoretical, and the ontological and practical, and where research ethics encompasses both, as does the *emic* (approximately corresponding to *insider* information) and *etic* (*outsider*) positions. While conceptual/theoretical considerations relate directly to the emergence of Indigenous methodologies and the development of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2016), the ontological/pragmatic considerations tend to consider the logistical challenges and practical dilemmas of such undertakings.

Ethical considerations, in this sense, question the construction of working relationships and negotiated pathways towards shared goals; although one area of contention that frames the present research, but which is infrequently considered, relates to the ethics of research funding. An explosion of eloquent and harsh criticism from Indigenous researchers has challenged academia to reflect on the harm imposed on Indigenous Communities by research perceived as insensitive and exploitative. An example of this is the distrust towards Indigenous Communities in Canada following a history of research manipulation (Sylvestre *et al.*, 2018). In turn, the Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) offers a rebuking opening attack by denouncing research as deeply tainted for Indigenous peoples (Sylvester *et al.*, 2020). However, such criticisms have a longer pedigree: in 1974, Malaysian soci-

ologist Syed Hussein Alatas (1974) offered an analysis of the *captive mind*, resulting from the excising of the traditional cultures of colonized and subject people and the replacement of these with the alien mind-sets, knowledge, and values of the colonizer. Subsequently, Indigenism (Jaime, 1995) was formulated as forming a rising construction opposed to the dominant westernized epistemological hegemony. Indigenism is equivalent to the unique *ethnophilosophy* of Indigenous peoples in which we find codified language, cultural expressions, myths, metaphors, folklore, values, rituals, artifacts, and taboos, to which one may add cultural knowledge of everyday practices (Chilisa and Preece, 2005; Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2016). The complexities of Indigenous methodologies weave congruent methodologies, methods, fieldwork relations and dissemination (Chilisa, 2012) that are congruent in their base of values and practices. This is affirmed as constituting a distinctive Indigenous paradigm (Kovach, 2019; Kwame, 2017) in underlining that Indigenous research denotes holism, relationality, reciprocity and responsibility, with an emphasis on oral traditions of storytelling.

Writing from Australia, Swijghuisen Reigersberg (2011) discusses how the research terrain has become a contested politicized terrain of competing demands between Indigenous Communities and western-oriented scholarship. Consequently, scholars may find themselves working within the dynamic tension of the perceived binary oppositions of two apparent colliding knowledge systems involving a dichotomization of the established euro-western academia and (*An*)*Other* (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2022). This tension demands resolution, which may involve a constructive *re-braiding* (Higgins & Kim, 2019) of knowledge traditions into new or complementary epistemic morphologies (Chilisa, 2012; Dew, 2019).

Furthermore, Wilson (2008) raises a moot question regarding the epistemic traditions of the so-called western approach, where knowledge is framed as autonomously discovered and individually owned, as opposed to Indigenous epistemic paradigms that emphasize relational and collective ownership. of shared knowledge. This calls into question what counts as legitimate knowledge and knowledge acquisition, considerations that may irritate current understandings of conventional research and intellectual property rights. Consequently, critical questions must revolve around how knowledge hegemonies can be reconstructed sufficiently to recognize and embrace epistemic diversity (Naude, 2019); and the decolonization of pedagogy (Higgins & Kim, 2019). While a more radical response may require the departure of non-indigenous researchers from Indigenous research fields (Kwame, 2017).

The development of a call for Indigenous methodologies also connects closely with broader strands of protest and social activism emerging from the margins of dominant structural hegemonies serving to recentre the dehumanized *Other* and

its exploited ecology (Mirka- Ljungerg & Cannella, 2017). Commensurately, Ball and Jaynst (2008) attempt to offer an *ethos*-driven outline of *good* research with Canadian Indigenous Communities, noting that a (re) building of working relationships can involve bruising encounters between researchers and communities as they confront a fraught history of fractured and damaging contact.

The conventions of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in the United Kingdom (UK) and Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) in North America form another area of criticism where it is recognized that closer examination of proposed research with Indigenous Communities by part of the UREC does not necessarily equate to a more profound moral scrutiny, but, in fact, can exacerbate offense and harm (Exley *et al.*, 2018). Lesser harm lies in presumptions of a shared understanding of the ethical protocols governing informed participation in research, which are themselves highly questionable. In an earlier publication, the authors (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2016) discuss how some of their Indigenous participants insisted that their personal identities should not be disguised under confidentiality protocols, expected in research ethics review in the UK. While Adler Hellman (2015) considers the problems caused by URECs' lack of understanding of the realities and commitments that fieldwork may impose. Sylvestre *et al.,* (2018) further articulate the need for a *back-end*, procedural protocol based on practical trust for successful work to be carried out with Indigenous Communities, such as offering honorariums in advance for payment of participants' time or hospitality.

Finally, an ethic of respect is also required in circumstances where certain information will be withheld from researchers because it is considered private to the community (Ball and Jaynst, 2008). However, these concerns do not explicitly yield entirely new ground, as social research and UREC conventions mandate that participants can opt out of sharing and even withdraw information at any point in the research process (Israel, 2015; Wilson and Darling, 2021). The exploitation of research on marginal and vulnerable groups is not an exclusive concern of Indigenous methodologies; This has also been argued by feminist researchers by recognizing the unequal power among women (Stacey, 1991; Patai, 1991). *Whitestream* Eurocentric feminist arguments that ignore Indigenous experiences are challenged by Indigenous feminists, bringing their own critical praxis to female subalterns' struggle in patriarchal, capitalist, and racist societies (Aikau *et al.*, 2015). Throughout these arguments we may find further development of *standpoint* feminist epistemologies, where otherwise inaccessible understandings of oppressive social structures are only revealed from the point of view of the oppressed (Harding, 2009).

Another controversial ethical issue is raised regarding the commodification of Indigenous knowledge linked to research with Indigenous Communities in

Namibia (Tomaselli, 2016). We learn that these groups may well view research activities conducted by external agencies as self-serving. However, it is possible to reverse the situation, so that the information sought is used by the communities as a profitable and material currency of exchange. In this sense, Tomaselli (2016) timely warns about the harmful dysfunction that can arise in consequence for both parties. This is an extremely sensitive issue given research encounters characterized by unequal resources, power, and responsibilities, but where it would be naïve to assume that the advantage must inevitably lie with researchers, particularly non-indigenous ones.

More positively the charting of challenges, successes and failures is leading to a greater understanding of how beneficial research with diverse Indigenous Communities can be. To that end, Chilisa (2012) defines the key dimensions of an authentic Indigenous methodology as sensitive towards the local contexts, centering around localized phenomena and understandings in the development of research approaches and theories. Based on Indigenous epistemological constructs, such research also aimed to be syncretic and integrative of Indigenous and western-ized concepts and constructs (Chilisa 2012).

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This two-year interdisciplinary study was built on the foundations of a previous study on the impact of ecological degradation of Indigenous territories through heavy industrialization on the Jakun people of Malaysia (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2016). In this second study, the objective was to develop a comparative exploration of the opinions of the Indigenous Communities of Malaysia and Costa Rica on the issue of land rights and traditional Indigenous territories, in a context where the exploitation and appropriation of these lands are rationalized by contemporary social and economic developments around the world (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2019).

The study outlined a novel approach by developing a cycle of constructive dialogues in face-to-face encounters between representatives of two participating Indigenous Communities, the aforementioned Bribri people of Costa Rica with whom members of our team had conducted previous research work, and our previous participating community, the Jakun people of Malaysia. Our elemen-tary reasoning was that it was through the experiences of those most affected by such phenomena that greater illumination on the meaning of these changes would emerge. The study could foster conditions in which unknown groups of Indigenous peoples, but with similar experiences, could meet to share concerns, grievances and reflections, with the possibility of new or alternative understandings emerging from

synergistic forums grounded in authentic and experiential knowledge. We did not assume that resolutions, solutions, and actions would necessarily emerge from these dialogues, but they would nevertheless constitute, at a micro level, aspects of a larger, organic and macro movement of Indigenous solidarity (Smith, 2012).

While we rejected assumptions of the homogeneity of Indigenous lives and thereby acknowledged the experimental nature of our approach, clear commonalities exist between the two nations. Both Malaysia and Costa Rica are home to rich and unique biodiversity in terms of flora and fauna, as well as many Indigenous ethnic groups, for whom a traditional forest-based lifestyle remains important but endangered. Likewise, the delimitation of traditional Indigenous territories for economic exploitation, whether by State-mandated or State-promoted, unevenly enriches groups, with Indigenous peoples of both countries often being the least advantaged recipients.

In Malaysia, the State policy rhetoric of "social and economic development" and the goal of achieving full development status by 2020, has ensured that industrialization and economic wealth continue to be considered the top national priority. Although tourism remains important to the Malaysian economy, long-term ecological sustainability has not been prioritized over short-term profits (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2018), and where scientific evidence has shown that this has resulted in ecological degradation in areas of exceptional beauty and jeopardizing Indigenous livelihoods (Man *et al.,* 2019; Shuhaimi - Othman *et al.*, 2008). A body of qualitative research charting the lives of West Malaysia's 0,6 % of the Indigenous Orang Asli people of West Malaysia*,* reveal that such policies have neither enriched nor empowered them (Nicholas, 2000), but rather that, along with prevailing pejorative social attitudes, have jeopardized their autonomy and access to traditional territories to practice traditional livelihoods based on hunting, fishing and subsidence cultivation (Parker *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, in terms of political representation, the Orang Asli have little access direct to seats of power, but they have been administered and spoken for by successive government agencies, with the current incumbents being known as the Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli (JAKOA) (Nicholas *et al.*, 2010).

By contrast, Costa Rica is hailed as an ecological success story, where swathes of territory have been demarcated for ecological conservation in the country, generating a lucrative ecotourism industry that contributes a staggering US$ 2,85 billion to the Costa Rican economy annually (Tafoya *et al.*, 2020). The *green* side of Costa Rica may have a different and more ecologically acceptable appearance compared to that of Malaysia, but control of territory as a hegemonic dominance implicated in Indigenous marginalization remains the logical outcome of the policy (Isla, 2015). Much of the Bribri Indigenous territory is now controlled within the designated

Biosphere area of the La Amistad Biosphere Reserve in Talamanca, where this study was carried out, with agreed limited access to traditional cultivation, foraging and hunting activities (Sylvester *et al.*, 2016a). There have been repercussions on lifestyles, cultural values, and transmission, as well as health (Sylvester *et al.*, 2016b).

Compared to Malaysia, Indigenous self-representation and self-advocacy appears to be less paternalistically controlled in Costa Rica. Indigenous peoples in Costa Rica represent 2 % of the total population (IWIGIA, 2021). They can be elected to represent their interests in local government and state policies, such as on the governance boards of Indigenous reservations, such as the *Asociación de Desarrollo Integral del Territorio Indígena* (ADITIBRI) (Posas, 2013). Although Townsend-Bell (2014) argues that while multiculturalism is acknowledged, a prevailing racialized narrative of white homogeneity continues to decenter Indigenous and Afro-Costa Rican experiences.

Boza Villarreal (2016) argues that theirs is not a recent empowerment, since not only was male suffrage exercised by Indigenous men in Talamanca as early as the 1890s, but Indigenous groups in Talamanca showed considerable ability to organize the electoral votes, as well as understanding and deploying sophisticated arguments to promote and defend Indigenous interests from industrial and plantation incursions (Tafjord, 2016).

However, although protected areas in Costa Rica have had a positive impact on biodiversity (Tafoya *et al.*, 2000) generating tourism revenue, in both countries Indigenous peoples may be trapped into endemic poverty, according to UN criteria. due to State policies (Feraro *et al.*, 2015, Nicholas, 2000).

An important backdrop to the context of the study relates to the international policy framework that relate directly to Indigenous rights and which have a direct resonance for the communities we studied. The dependence of Indigenous peoples on the land has been recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Furthermore, both Indigenous Communities in the study resided in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, adding an additional layer of national/international importance and complexity to the exploration of local lives and concerns (Posas, 2013). An additional policy towards which we were interested in analyzing community responses was related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how these could be made to work more beneficially for Indigenous peoples at the local level. In Malaysia, the Orang Asli are described as the most impoverished people in Malaysia (Nicholas et *al.*, 2002) and this was an undeniable aspect of life in Tasik Chini along with local health concerns (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, we identified key SDGs as particularly relevant to this study related to poverty reduction (SDG 1), conservation of native territories (SDG 15), improved health and well-being (SDG 3), reduced

social inequalities (SDG 10), and ensuring that habitats are more sustainable for all citizens (SDG 11).

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researcher positionality

In line with a self-reflexive approach, a hallmark of feminist epistemologies (Burman, 2006), here we identify our own positionality, a strategy of transparency and accountability originally associated with feminist epistemologies (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2022a). A deliberately diverse but representative research team was formed; one, moreover, where emic/etic, 'insider/outsider' dynamics proved both facilitative and constraining (Dew *et al.*, 2019). The research team consisted of two Caucasian British-European academics, female and male, based in the United Kingdom (UK); the first on the list was the Principal Investigator (PI). Additionally, an Indigenous Costa Rican male Bribri academic, an Indigenous Malaysian female academic from the Semelai people, and finally, a Caucasian Canadian female academic based in Costa Rica. Diversity was demonstrated not only in terms of ethnicity, nationality and gender, but also in terms of academic disciplines, where three are social scientists (anthropology, sociology and social policy), one colleague straddles interdisciplinary areas of humanities and, finally, another in the natural sciences. In terms of seniority, the team of authors ranges from full professors to lecturers/early career researchers. All members have experience conducting research in Indigenous Communities. The non-Indigenous researchers inevitably occupied a nominal *outsider* position compared to the *insider* status of our Indigenous colleagues, although in the former case this was mediated by prior knowledge and established working relationships with the respective communities.

An evolving methodology

In developing the study, the research team was committed to ensuring that it was based on Indigenous methodologies and would capitalize on agile and innovative qualitative approaches that complimented these. Thus, we posited that the heuristic co-construction of epistemologies between the researcher and the community would create the opportunity to develop research methods capable of encompassing the beliefs and practices of the local population. This would be characterized by interdependent and respectful working relationships, where reciprocity and shared goals were the ethical starting points for the creation of Indigenous research (Chilisa, 2012).

The original research bid proposed inter-community dialogues as *capacity building* initiatives. We recognize that this term carries the weight of neoliberal *givens* within a Bourdieusian hegemonic field. that fetishizes the valuation of measurable, metrics-based production; discourses that appeal to westernized rationalizations of funders. However, dialogues *per se* offered a potentially positive and culturally congruent means of data collection (Wilson, 2008), supplemented by ethnographic methods. Community asset mapping tools and participatory action research, which we had previously used in our work with Indigenous groups, were also available for adaptation and use, if necessary. It was decided that a primary outcome of the study would be the development of biocultural *experiential storybook* narratives collected within communities, in accordance with an oral tradition (Kovach, 2019) and serving to amplify the social and cultural capital of an Indigenous *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1980). These would be supplemented by more formalized *vignettes* of alternative Indigenized approaches towards inclusive and respectful social policy that addresses communities' concerns towards cultural, ecological, and economic sustainability as outlined in the UN SDGs. Finally, a platform dedicated to shared and decolonized pedagogy was planned to improve its dissemination. The rigidity of standardized research methods was avoided to create greater epistemological and ethical space for the development of novel methodological approaches, within the particularities of the study context.

Ethical considerations

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), under the auspices of the UK Research Innovation (UKRI) funding body financed the study under the Principal Investigator's (PI) (main author) UK institutional designation. It was subsequently approved through the standard UREC procedures of the UK university, where increasing familiarity with studies focusing on human diversity offered a comparatively enlightened attitude towards adaptive and sensitive ethical procedures.

However, the UREC process was also facilitated by the sudden delegation of members of the British team to an adjunct role in data collection. This had not been anticipated at the proposal stage but was later agreed upon in preliminary discussions with members of the research team in Costa Rica, where they had expressed critical concern regarding any possible misrepresentation of the Bribri people, due to an Indigenous history of colonial research. It can also be inferred that a perceived *outsider* position was viewed as an additional barrier to understanding. There was also a possible unspoken sense that community knowledge needed to be protected from *outsider* manipulation (Ball and Jaynst, 2008). However, upon reflection, it is necessary to recognize that the positioning of the research *outsider* as ignorant (and therefore irrelevant) in contrast with *insider* expertise (hence validity), carries the

risk of insufficient reflective criticality of familiar phenomena, as warned by Smith (2012)[6].

Nevertheless, although non-indigenous researchers had recently conducted successful qualitative studies in the Bajo Coen community (Sylvester *et al.*, 2016a, 2016b), the conditions under which this collaboration could operate required that data be collected solely by the Bribri community themselves, facilitated by the community's selected representative, who was also a co-researcher. This strategy was reflected by our Indigenous Malaysian researcher as a logical extension of the agreement, within the team's recognition that the question of representation, along with the question of who speaks *of* and for whom, is a highly *contested* terrain *(Alcott,* 1991; Kara and Pickering, 2017; Swijghuisen Reigersberg, 2011).

These changes to how data would now be collected reframe aspects of the study in terms of ethical parameters, as well as research roles, fieldwork logistics, financial management of the funds, and research outcomes and output —all of which took on a new aspect with the associated implications. It also exemplified the experimental nature of privileging an evolving and unfamiliar but culturally congruent Indigenous methodology that expands the fields of epistemology. Such fluidity is consistent, in turn, with the epistemic innovation of *Indigenous métissage*, as described by Higgins and Kim (2019, 114) following its conceptualization by Cree Indigenous scholar Dwayne Donald as a rejection of proscribed research method.

The research process

All fieldwork was completed between 2018 and 2020, following additional negotiations for permissions to proceed by the communities. Indigenous members of the research team conducted most of the data gathering over numerous visits, but there were opportunities for the entire team to participate in data gathering on two separate occasions.

It was during these larger team visits when representatives of the Jakun communities visited Bajo Coen in 2018 to meet with Bribri villagers and engage in dialogue. This was later replicated in 2019 with a reciprocal visit to Tasik Chini. Limited research funds restricted the number of representatives visiting each other's communities, which involved lengthy and complicated journeys by various modes of transportation: automobiles, planes, buses, and boats. However, we were aware that a smaller number of visitors was better for the host towns due to logistical issues, accommodation, and the problems of interrupted wage-earning on both sides, despite the help of generous research honorariums paid in advance for bed

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[6] The Indigenous Bribri author assured the research team that the centering of Indigenous voices was simply a way to counteract historical erasure and non-centering.

and board (Sylvestre *et al.*, 2018). However, even with a smaller number of participants, communities had significant difficulties in identifying suitable representatives capable and willing to travel, due to domestic responsibilities, loss of income, inexperience in international travel, among other personal limitations. Although we would have liked an equal number of women and men to represent their communities, in the end the selected Indigenous participants were composed of three men and one woman, where gender norms influenced the availability of women. Once the logistics were overcome, all visitors were warmly received by the host communities with the best examples of local hospitality.

Once the cycle of dialogues was completed, the next phase of fieldwork was carried out solely by our Indigenous colleagues, who focused on group facilitation of a community-developed biocultural *storybook*. These would be brought together and shared in one large, translated volume that could be used in a variety of ways as the community deemed best served their interests.

Discussion

Implications for research ethics and funding are discussed here in terms of the unfolding direction in which the study in conjunction with competing epistemic frames of reference. These, in turn, altered the dynamics of the research encounter and fieldwork roles. Insights from both Bourdieu and feminist epistemologies offer perspectives that illuminate and problematize the experimental nature of such research.

The 'empowered' community

The power of Indigenous Communities to shape the research process and outcomes was considerable here and consistent with a methodological commitment to reciprocal and respectful fieldwork relationships with Indigenous Communities (Chilisa, 2012). This further demonstrated an overturning of the researcher-subject power hierarchies defended in Indigenous methodologies and earlier feminist epistemologies (Webb, 2000; Oakley, 1984).

The Bribri community enthusiastically supported the proposed *storybooks* as a vehicle for examining their Indigenous *ethnophilosophy* (Jaime, 1995; Chilisa and Preece, 2005). These featured Bribri explanatory moral tales about diversity and sustainability alongside the Jakun's favorite story about the origins of their people (Kovach, 2019), embellished with community artwork (Man, 2020). Gratifyingly, they were well received within the communities at the time of their publication.

The community dialogues proved to be a highlight for participants in outlining topics of interest that they wished to pursue. These included a comparison of

Indigenous lifestyles and Indigenous knowledge related to local flora, agricultural cultivation and herbal pharmacology.

Similarly, explorations were conducted on the formation of ethnic identity, lineage, and kinship structures, including examination of gender constructs and norms. The Jakun were particularly impressed by the much higher levels of Indigenous political self-representation afforded to Costa Ricans than their counterparts in Malaysia enjoyed, recognizing that different competing fields and *doxa* abound within and between Indigenous and non-indigenous groups (Bourdieu, 1998; Smith, 2012). The fact that the local government representative was a Bribri woman was considered very impressive and significant. This should not necessarily be interpreted as indicative of greater gender egalitarianism in Bribri society compared to Jakun; but it may indicate ways of promoting Indigenous feminism, such as Aikau *et al.* (2015, p. 86), Indigeneity as a *political category*. However, he highlighted to participants the superior enfranchisement of the Bribri community to influence state policy and affirmative Indigenous political representation over that of the Malaysian Orang Asli.

In terms of results, the most important and valued aspect of the study, as originally conceived and welcomed by our participating communities, revolved around opportunities to meet other international Indigenous peoples. The sharing of Indigenous epistemic knowledge in relational bonds of reciprocal connections (Wilson, 2008) evidently provided much needed hope to the Jakun community. From what we discerned from their experiences, hardships, and losses, these far exceeded those of the Bribri community, who had been comparatively fortunate by their own standards and conspicuously so in the eyes of Malaysians.

On their visit to the Bribri, the Jakun discovered that there were many things that reminded them of their own homes, although this was a cultural idealization: home, as it had been before, within another community, on the other side of the world. This mnemonic encounter acted as a powerful reaffirmation of their encultured Bourdeusian *habitus,* with its ways of being. Furthermore, the integrity of a thriving, nurturing ecosystem, as enjoyed by the Bribri, in addition to a history of determined Indigenous expulsion of aggressive incursions into Bribri territory by the American colonial United Fruit Company in the 19th century (Boza Villarreal, 2016; Tafjord, 2016), was an inspiring example for the Jakun of how active resistance may be rewarded. On the other hand, the equally passionate, concerted, but ultimately unsuccessful efforts to resist 21st century encroachment and despoliation of previously pristine Jakun Indigenous territories (Parker *et al.*, 2019; Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2018; Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2016) could equally act as a salutary lesson for Costa Ricans about how such efforts, when ignored by governments, may ultimately end in failure, thus forming alternative discourses of cultural negation.

In contrast to this level of mutual engagement, there was marked disinterest shown by communities towards the discussion of the SDGs or the UNDRIP. These international policies make direct reference to the issue of poverty, however, as it turned out, this was not an association considered appropriate for a Bribri interpretation of their own condition, where poverty seen as stigmatizing, disempowering and therefore irrelevant (Sylvester et *al.*, 2020). Nonetheless, problems of access to land and, in the case of Tasik Chini, land degradation (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2016), have resulted in negative consequences for both communities with respect to the challenges in maintaining traditional self-sufficiency, a point emphasized by the UNDRIP. Such challenges relate to ecological habitats where community income levels are low, while domestic amenities in terms of access to clean water, sanitation and general infrastructure are, by comparative national standards, basic. Rejecting poverty-related discourses, primarily for the Bribri community, would not completely negate the underlying philosophies of the UNDRIP, but would compromise discursive engagement with the ideas that underpin the SDG agenda, and by extension, the ideas that support the GCRF philosophies).

The ontological and epistemological constructs of poverty are related to structural inequalities and privation, which are manifested in paid and unpaid work, health, welfare and well-being, gender and education, among other factors (Saunders, 2019). Although participants resisted the term "poverty," it remains a common term when considering the high rates of material privation affecting Indigenous peoples in other Latin American countries (Hall & Patrinos, 2012). Putative discussions revolving around notions of wealth/poverty/privilege/privation concepts represent a contestation of discursive understandings (Naude, 2019). These issues clearly require a sensitive and negotiated fieldwork application, but arguably also a participatory commitment to the deconstruction and *reconstruction of* contested concepts, such as "poverty", which should not be abandoned if social justice for marginalized communities is to be served.

Methodological and fieldwork considerations

The conditions imposed on the study in Costa Rica and subsequently adopted by the Jakun community fundamentally altered the direction and dynamics of the study. The conditions were, first, that only Indigenous researchers were to undertake research with the communities and, second, that the participating communities and their spokespersons, represented by our Indigenous research colleagues, would exercise control over the data gathered.

The consequence of these preferences that the team adhered to, drastically diverted the envisioned research journey. This led to modified objectives and the gathering of a reduced dataset with differing outcomes and modes of dissemina-

tion, which only partially meet the original objectives of the research proposal. Team dynamics also changed in fulfilling community requests, where the PI and other senior colleagues had to step back from the data-gathering process, to enable Indigenous colleagues to lead the research and only later provide feedback to the team. These changes duly affected the application of the entire methodological *toolbox* of expertise within the research team, to which not all members had the same experience in using.

The community dialogues used traditional familiar resources of oral storytelling devices, with the addition of some artistic expression where desired. These techniques were used in preference to the data-gathering tools of ethnography, asset mapping and participatory action research, although these can also be egalitarian and participatory (Bryman, 2012). The limited use of proven methodological tools for working with cultures and communities appeared to limit the amount and depth of potential data that could otherwise have been collected. However, this also enacts assumptions that arise from the cultural capital spheres of different and specific *habitus* of plural traditions. Here, then, Eurocentric conventions about what constitutes data and data collection can profitably yield to an alternative Indigenous reinterpretation, congruent with a holistic and relational Indigenous methodological paradigm (Kovach, 2019),

However, we must openly acknowledge that the revised approach to data collection was not able to fully meet the original objectives of the study, raising some concerns regarding accountability to the funding body and associated professional kudos. The changes requested by the communities meant a possible gap in understanding between various stakeholders (Sylvester *et al.*, 2020). This was evidenced in the different epistemic, theorized, and subjective understandings brought to the study, where Indigenous authoritative ways of knowledge had priority over others (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2022).

It can easily be argued that changing hierarchies and hegemonic values associated with the *othered*, non-indigenous, external and professionalized world is healthily subversive and effectively emancipatory for all, offering philosophies and perspectives otherwise rarely found outside of Indigenous Communities, similar to a feminist position (Harding, 2009). This had pedagogical value, where an original aim was to share accessible learning between the four participating universities to which the team members belonged.

Chilisa (2012) reminds us of the ethical starting points of research for Indigenous methodology: reciprocity and shared objectives; and this commitment offers useful learnings that emerge from this study. While prioritizing an *insider emic* position may be an understandable reaction to histories of entrenched marginalization, it undermines the insightful Bourdieusian reflexive deconstruction of the

everyday assumptions of the enveloping *doxa* that characterizes the group'*s habitus* (Bourdieu, 1998; Smith, 2012). Just as feminists have theorized gender as performative (Butler, 1990), so too may be the political project of Indigenism (Aiku *et al.*, 2015). This is then where a more porous *etemic* position (Heaslip *et al.*, 2018) may offer a fruitful syncretism of traditions which serve to resist any pendulum swing towards dominance over certain hierarchies of conceptual and epistemic hegemonies (Ashencaen Crabtree *et al.*, 2022), to create a new and unexpected corpus of knowledge diverse and inclusive application.

Indigenous research and funding futures

Researchers often consider studies focused on marginalized groups to be marginal by proxy. Consequently, available funding streams are scarce and subject to high levels of demand. In this regard, the UK's GCRF fund offers a valuable source of otherwise hard-to-access research funding that made this study possible.

Working in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, the GCRF addresses the UN SDGs. However, the aims of the GCRF reflect a neocolonial position, where the underlying reason is to promote the UK's interest in low and middle-income countries. It is open to interpretation what kind of national advantages are being discussed, but clearly these could be in terms of absolute economic returns in relation to trade and entrepreneurship. Equally, however, the benefits could be exercises in *soft* power that may offer valuable geopolitical returns. The study proposal evidently successfully met these underlying funding agendas, where we argued, quite reasonably, that there was a fundamental international policy contradiction that needed to be resolved between SDG ambitions, national economic development agendas and the promotion of social justice and equality for Indigenous minority groups, as prescribed by the UNDRIP.

However, even if the material and political benefits were deducible from the justification for GCRF funding, an uncomfortable ethical position remained with respect to manifestations of First World philanthropy toward low-income nations, with all that it implies in terms of a continuation of neocolonial attitudes. Our proposal may also have appealed to that mentality in its additional stated rationale that the study provided an opportunity to facilitate transformative, peaceful, and positive change in nations, where there have been examples of violent social conflicts occurring between groups of unequal power over territorial land claims, particularly Indigenous lands.

Either position, whether aiming for profit or philanthropy or both, raises ethical considerations regarding research-funding sources. While funding is typically less likely to be seen as an ethically ambivalent terrain, it may nevertheless subtly contribute to the disempowerment of marginalized groups by the very premises

under which it operates. An obvious counterpoint to this argument relates to the unresolved issue of the proven value for money' of research funds, the public purse, and researcher accountability to deliver high-calibre research with broader societal impact, such as *capacity-building* agendas.

The continuation of funding streams, such as the GCRF, is based on the general assumption that the findings will contribute to and expand the relevant scientific/disciplinary corpus. Funding bodies therefore demand demonstrable accountability from researchers to ensure the sustainability of future research revenue streams. Consequently, these run counter to commitments to non-conventional researcher's roles, hierarchies, knowledge production, and putative research outcomes.

Finally, in our study, by moving some objectives to the peripheries of the research in favor of other topics, significant elements were left unexplored for further excavation. If some original priorities have remained undeveloped, others important to the communities have come to the fore, consistent with Kwame's (2017) argument for affirmative methodological realignments of power that favor Indigenous Communities and their needs. However, this must also be seen against the *realpolitik* of universally dwindling research funds and competing (inter)national pressing priorities that are likely to reduce future research opportunities in areas considered exclusive, esoteric, or experimental. This, in turn, and regrettably so, risks reducing the influence and impact of Indigenous methodologies on the dominant discourses and supposed *doxas* that govern what is research, what is considered legitimate knowledge, and what social efficacy is served and for whom.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous peoples have further expanded the scope of what ethical research encompasses, particularly with respect to studies employing qualitative approaches. The fracturing of ethical certainties (and indeed, at times, ethical negligence), has been reinforced through innovative epistemic perspectives, such as early feminist epistemology and, pertinently, later Indigenous methodologies. This is not to say that they offer a single, uniform perspective, but rather that they flourish through plurivocal approaches, inviting researcher engagement in these as iterative dialogic forums. In reference to Indigenous methodologies, these continue to develop and where researchers are far from achieving either mastery or unified approaches that meet the competing needs of diverse Indigenous Communities, academic institutions and public funding bodies with which they must necessarily interact.

Conducting research that is sensitive to Indigenous methodology remains a challenge, where ethical dilemmas will arise despite commitments to research that is respectful, sensitive and inclusionary. Constructive ways forward require

a nuanced appreciation of the complexities of assuming ethical research positions and the methodologies that support them. Furthermore, it must be openly acknowledged that the recognition of competing ethical claims constitutes an *additional research problematics* that involves both the participating communities and the accountable researcher together as moral agents. This argument in no way detracts from serious engagement with Indigenous paradigms, but rather extends the academic conversation to examine ways forward to ensure that important epistemic approaches remain more accessible and viable for engagement with research, rather than less. The use of Bourdieusian and feminist thought has allowed us to explore and acknowledge the multiple directions and nuances in research claims and positions. While this theorizing has predominantly developed in the Global North, these perspectives offer broader lenses and provide multiple opportunities to explore the various aspects of the terrains and landscapes of research in Indigenous and non-indigenous fields.

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