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Equalizing Relationships in Indigenous Tourism Research: A Reflexive Praxis Inspired by Food Sovereignty

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Abstract

Although there has been increasing commitment towards equalizing the researcher-participant relationship in Indigenous tourism research, practices that transform this commitment into reality are still scarce. In this reflective paper, I argue that food sovereignty principles and a researcher's reflexivity can improve this situation. To support this argument, I draw from my experience of working collaboratively with Kichwa Napo Runa people in Ecuador while exploring the impacts of tourism on their food sovereignty. I examine my reflexivity in two aspects of my work: 1) research journaling to develop awareness of how my values and relationships influence the research process and outcomes; and 2) using this journal's content to reflexively analyse how my research contributes to food sovereignty goals surrounding the development of social relations that are free of oppression and inequality. My journal's passages show that constant attention to reflexivity can equalize power relationships in research and promote an ethical space between researchers and participants. Overall, this paper contributes to critical Indigenous tourism research approaches and the growing literature on practices involving the implementation of food sovereignty in various fields and contexts.

This paper brings together reflexivity and food sovereignty in the context of Indigenous tourism research. Reflexivity requires an active examination of how one's own values and practices may influence the research process and unintentionally marginalize research participants' voices (Kovach, 2009; Nicholls, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Food sovereignty as the right of people to define their own food systems (Nyéléni Declaration, 2007), has become a central piece in the anti-colonial and decolonization projects of several Indigenous organizations around the world (Coté, 2016; Grey & Patel, 2015; Martens et al., 2016; Morrison, 2011; Settee & Shukla, 2020). In this paper, I recount my experiences pursuing reflexivity as a core component of my research methodology and discuss how this pursuit presented an opportunity to promote an ethical space and equalize the relationships embedded in research I performed with Kichwa Napo Runa people [hereafter Napo Runa people] in the Ecuadorian Amazonia. Cree scholar Willie Ermine (2007) explains that the “ethical space” is formed when two societies, with disparate worldviews, are poised to engage each other. Sharing an ethical space becomes an opportunity to bridge the distance between cultures, especially in the context of Indigenous-settler relations (Crowshoe & Lertzman, 2020; Ermine, 2007). Because my project followed the decolonial principles of food sovereignty (Coté, 2016; Grey & Patel, 2015; Martens et al., 2016), I incorporated many practices into the research methodology that enabled Indigenous partners to influence the work's direction. This reflective paper is based on a content analysis of the reflexive journal that I kept during this research. I applied the People, Power, and Change (PPC) framework proposed by Levkoe et al. (2019) to analyse this content. I argue that constant attention to reflexivity can improve Indigenous peoples' role in tourism research in a way that supports their priorities and unfolds an ethical space in the research praxis.

Indigenous Peoples’ Role in Indigenous Tourism Research

This paper is important as Indigenous peoples worldwide face many threats to their wellbeing as a result of colonialism, violence, land degradation, labour exploitation, and poverty, which is not uncommon in the tourism industry (Lee, 2017; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Smith, 2012). Historically, Indigenous peoples have been passive actors in tourism development, which has been largely driven by outsiders with little or no regard for Indigenous peoples' needs, values, and concerns (Johnston, 2006; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Indigenous tourism has emerged as a strategy to improve Indigenous peoples’ role and labour conditions in the tourism industry. Butler and Hinch (2007) define Indigenous tourism as "tourism activities in which Indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction" (p. 5).

Although Indigenous tourism promotes more visible roles for Indigenous people in the tourism industry, their voices and knowledge remain largely invisible and untapped in tourism scholarship (Lee, 2017; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Depending on who leads the research, the passive role that Indigenous people play in Indigenous tourism research has implications for, and is connected to, decisions made on topics, methods, and sharing of results. For instance, Whitford and Ruhanen (2016) argue that although the concept of sustainability has been a priority in Indigenous tourism research, non-Indigenous agents' perspectives have shaped this knowledge. These authors also point out that research on Indigenous tourism has been largely driven by positivist and quantitative approaches, which tend to minimize both researchers' and participants' voices (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Furthermore, Nielsen and Wilson (2012) notice that Indigenous tourism studies have been mainly produced for the consumption of non-Indigenous academics and practitioners.

Researchers' Reflexivity

A number of authors have proposed that, a commitment to improve Indigenous peoples' role in research demands collaborative methodologies (Burnette & Billiot, 2015; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). Several authors have argued that one essential piece in these methodologies is the researcher's reflexivity (e.g., Hart, 2010; Nicholls, 2009; Watt, 2007), which refers to a researcher's active self-reflection on their research process and their positionality within it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In research with Indigenous peoples, this reflexivity is also connected to the principle of relational accountability, which according to Wilson (2008) implies that "we cannot remove ourselves from our world in order to examine it" (p. 14). In the sections below, I discuss how food sovereignty principles supported my awareness of the types of relationships that I developed during the research process. I also share how constant reflexivity helped me to develop strategies that enriched rather than undermined these relationships.

Food Sovereignty

As its core, food sovereignty emphasizes the democratization of food systems, policy, practice, knowledge and the rights and autonomy of food producers and consumers (Nyéléni Declaration, 2007). The process of democratization involves challenging institutions and research practices that have devalued Indigenous and other local and traditional knowledge by positioning Western scientific knowledge as the only value knowledge system (De Sousa Santos, 2010; Escobar, 2020; Martens et al., 2016; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014; Pimbert, 2006). This call has inspired several scholars and practitioners to propose progressive methodological frameworks for research in food sovereignty (e.g., Levkoe et al., 2019; Martens et al., 2016; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014; Morrison, 2011). In most of these frameworks, a researcher's reflexivity is a key component of efforts to equalize relationships and integrate multiple ways of knowing.

To facilitate reflexivity in research that follows food sovereignty principles, Levkoe et al. (2019) propose the People, Power, and Change (PPC) framework. The first pillar in this framework focuses on peoples' interconnections and the degree to which researchers can overcome traditional notions of objective research relationships that can be alienating for both researchers and participants. The second pillar is about power relationships. It focuses on the importance of researchers' critical reflexivity to ensure that research participants are not simply objects of study but are instead autonomous subjects with agency who shape the research process and its outcomes. The third pillar focuses on change and examines how the research process and its outcomes help address broader social issues such as inequality.

The purpose of this paper is to build on the above literature to show how reflexivity in my research with Napo Runa people, supported by a reflexive journal, improved the relationships embedded in this research and facilitated the integration of multiple ways of knowing in the process. My analysis uses Levkoe et al.'s (2019) framework to explore the contributions of my research towards Indigenous participants' priorities—in this case, their food sovereignty.

Methodology

In this section, I describe my standpoint, the context of my research project, and the research method, journaling, that I employed in my research project.

Situating Myself

I share the following reflections as they provide essential background on my positionality in this work and for the ongoing practice of self-location and reflexivity.

I am a Latinx woman, born and raised in the Andes of Ecuador. I acknowledge my Indigenous mestizo and *campesino*[1] ancestry. Thanks to the wisdom of my parents and Elders, I have maintained my cultural values, despite being raised in a society where Indigenous people have been the focus of discrimination and violent colonization (Martinez Novo, 2010; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020; Roitman, 2009). I understand traditional food as something far greater than just calories and nutrients; it is medicine, a teacher, and important part of my cultural values. It was 2008 when I heard for the first time the words food sovereignty during a large political meeting in Ecuador. In that meeting, I represented a youth's women organization, and I saw for the first time people from different backgrounds – Indigenous and non-Indigenous, from rural and urban regions, from different ages, and genders - get together to talk about something that matters for all of us, our right to food, specifically to food sovereignty. Since that meeting, I have been involved in academic and non-academic projects that promote food sovereignty. Later, I applied this concept as the framework for my doctoral dissertation, which explored paths to make tourism more just and sustainable for Indigenous host communities.

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[1] Campesino translates in English as peasant or person from the country. In agrarian and rural studies, the term campesino has become an identity marker, which inspires collective action among rural movements in Latin America (Edelman, 2013).

The Chakra Route Project

I developed this research as part of my doctoral dissertation at the School of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Saskatchewan. My research focuses broadly on the intersection between Indigenous tourism and food sovereignty. My specific goals were, first, to collaboratively understand the meanings of food sovereignty for participants and, second, to work with these participants to identify the impacts of tourism on their food sovereignty. To accomplish these goals, I selected a case in Ecuador, where food sovereignty[2] and Indigenous tourism are important topics in the political agendas of Indigenous people (Clark, 2016; Coca Perez, 2016; Renkert, 2019; Santafe Troncoso & Loring, 2020). Moreover, I applied a methodological strategy based on individual and group interviews, observations, and reflexive journaling. The fieldwork for this research was done in the summer of 2018 and the spring of 2019.

After getting recommendations of potential cases from Indigenous leaders and scholars working in tourism in Ecuador, I selected the Chakra Route, which is a tourism destination in the Ecuadorian Amazonia. Moreover, the leaders of this route showed high enthusiasm for participating in this research. One critical aspect of the Chakra Route case is that it overlaps with the ancestral territory of the Napo Runa people. They comprise the largest Indigenous groups in the Ecuadorian Amazonia (National Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador [INEC], 2010). Their livelihoods are mainly based on traditional agriculture, wild fishing, logging, and community-based tourism. Several authors have recognized the strong political agenda of selfdetermination and sustainability that the Napo Runa people promote, especially in Amazonia (Coq-Huelva, 2018; Uzendoski, 2018). In the context of Indigenous tourism research, Napo Runa people are often referred to as the pioneers of community-based tourism in Ecuador, and the promoters of Indigenous-led tourism to resist the expansion of extractive industries on their land (Coca Pérez, 2016; Renkert, 2019).

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[2] In September 2008, Ecuador recognized food sovereignty as a right in its national constitution. It is one of the first countries to incorporate a strong legislation for food sovereignty in its territory (Clark, 2016).

The Chakra Route was officially launched in 2017 under the name of the 'Cacao Route', but its origin goes back to 2010 when the Cacao Roundtable, a group of local small-scale cacao farmers, mostly Napo Runa people, created a project proposal for this route. The primary goals of this route were to diversify the local economy and extend the participation of Napo Runa communities in the value chains of cacao farming and tourism. Although this route initially focused only on Indigenous entrepreneurs engaged in cacao farming or tourism, it has expanded its focus over the years, by including settler entrepreneurs and enlarging its focus from cacao cultivation to the whole Napo Runa food system, which is embedded under the name of chakra system. Chakra is a traditional agroforestry system that Napo Runa people have used for centuries. Napo Runa women farmers, also known as Chakra Mamas, are bearers of this ancient knowledge and lead the sustainable agroecological practices in the chakra gardens (Coq-Huelva et al., 2017). In 2019 leaders of this route changed its name from "Cacao Route" to "Chakra: Chocolate & Tourism" to reflect the new focus of this tourism destination.

Four Napo Runa cacao farming cooperatives and ten Indigenous community-based tourism associations (CBTs) are the primary members in this route (See Table 1). Altogether the membership comprises nearly 1,500 people (FECD, 2017).

Table 1: Kichwa Napo Runa organizations that are members of the Chakra Route.

Member Organization	Primary activities
Wiñak	Cacao and Guayusa (Ilex guayusa) farming and exporting Chocolate production "Bean to bar" tourism
Kallari	Cacao farming and exporting

	Chocolate production "Bean to bar" tourism
Tsatsayaku	Cacao farming Chocolate production "Bean to bar" tourism
Amanecer Campesino	Cacao farming "Bean to bar" tourism
CBT Sinchi Warmi	Chakra tours, lodging, traditional cuisine, Guayusa tea ceremonies, chocolate spa, artisanal chocolate making
CBT Shiripuno	Chakra tours, artisanal chocolate making, traditional dances
Kamak Maki	Chakra tours, handcrafts, environmental education
CBT Shandia	Chakra tours, lodging, traditional cuisine, biking, artisanal chocolate making
CBT Cotundo	Archaeological tourism
CBT Cavernas Templo de Ceremonia	Chakra tours, hiking
CBT Santa Rita	Chakra tours, artisanal chocolate making, traditional dances and music
CBT Amupakin	Traditional medicine, chakra tours, lodging, traditional cuisine, environmental education
CBT Tamia Yura	Cave tours, chakra tours, environmental education
CBT Sacha Waysa	Birdwatching, chakra tours, handcrafts, artisanal chocolate making.

Source: FECD 2017. CBT=Community-based Tourism.

Cacao cooperatives include tourism as a complementary activity to their cacao business by providing tours of their farms and engaging visitors in a “bean to bar” experience where they learn the process of making chocolate. The CBTs are comprised of Napo Runa members and their families, who work together to control the development of tourism in their territories and govern their entrepreneurship in a communitarian ethos. They are led primarily by the Napo Runa women, who are further innovating their services by providing tours in the chakra gardens guided and incorporating wellness and food experiences exhibiting their cultural values (see Figure 1). Settler entrepreneurs also participate in the route in a variety of ways; restaurateurs, for example, are integrating products from the chakra gardens into their menus.

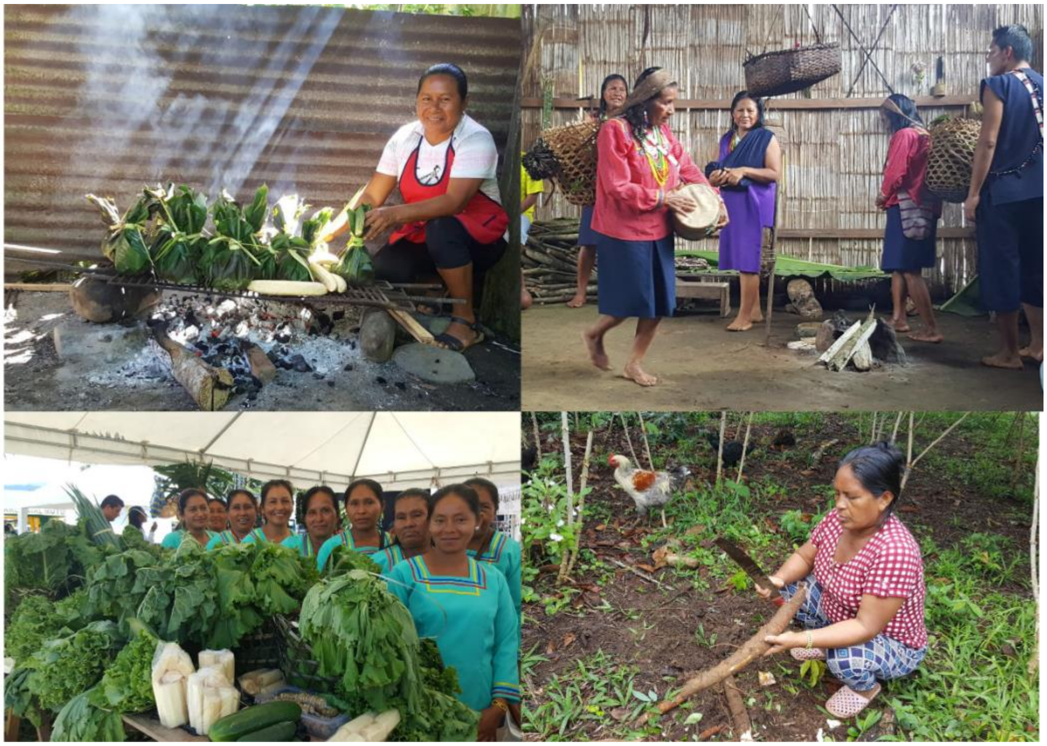

Figure 1: Chakra Mamas sharing their knowledge along the Chakra Route.

Note. Chakra Mamas and their multiple ways of sharing their traditional knowledge: Traditional ways to cook (upper left), storytelling and theatre at Amupakin (upper right), being part of farmers markets (bottom left), and growing food in their chakra gardens (bottom right) Photo credit: Veronica Santafe. Summer 2018 and Spring 2019.

Multiple Knowledges in the Research

This research generally followed Western knowledge traditions that I learned during my graduate studies at a Canadian university. Although most of the authors I reviewed for this research were affiliated with institutions in the Global North, I also included authors affiliated with Global South institutions, especially those in Latin America.

The Indigenous knowledge in this research is connected to the values and practices that Napo Runa people have ancestrally developed with their land and food resources (Muratorio, 1998; Uzendoski, 2005). I recognized and experienced this knowledge by connecting with Chakra Mamas. They are trusted and respected in their communities, serving as knowledge keepers, especially of Napo Runa traditional food systems (see Figure 1). They shared their knowledge with me primarily in their chakra gardens and during Guayusa Upinas (morning tea ceremonies led by Napo Runa Elders).

The dialogue between Western and Napo Runa knowledges is not new in the region. For example, some tourism schools in the area have created courses and certifications that combine tourism management knowledge with Indigenous knowledge. During my field work, I was invited to attend the graduation of 70 Indigenous students at a local college, who had completed their Native Cuisine and Native Tour Guide diplomas.

Reflexive Journaling

A reflexive journal is a key research tool that enables researchers to promote transparency in their research process by keeping track of and reflecting on their experiences, thoughts, and feelings during the research process (Hays & Singh, 2012; Ortlipp, 2008; Watt, 2007). Including my reflections as part of the data I analysed in this research also contributed to the praxis of relational accountability. According to Wilson (2008), a researcher who is committed to relational accountability aims to develop practices that respond to the partner community's context and demonstrate respect, reciprocity, and responsibility for the community’s material and symbolic values. My journal entries focused on descriptions and reflections of how I and my research interacted with Napo Runa people and, their goals, values, and land.

Journaling facilitated the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in my research. Considering that Indigenous knowledge is primarily oral and experiential (Crowshoe & Lertzman, 2020; Kovach, 2009; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012; 2020; Wilson, 2008), I found that interviews and observations did not provide the opportunity to include other rich information that came from outside these data collection moments. Furthermore, it became difficult to describe my experiences with Indigenous knowledge in a memo or report format because this knowledge emerged in a diversity of ways, such as songs, food, dances, and storytelling. To better capture my experiences, I included words, images, and videos in my journal (Crowshoe & Lertzman, 2020; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012).

As part of my reflexivity practice, I tracked the events and thoughts emerging during the research process as soon as possible in my paper notebook or on my Evernote app. Evernote is a note-taking tool that allows for the storage of traditional and multimedia content, such as written notes, pictures, videos, and sound recordings (Beddall-Hill et al., 2011). I installed this app on my cell phone. Every day, after working in the field, I reviewed my daily notes and created a log in my reflexive journal, which I maintained in a Microsoft Word document. Each log included the data recorded in Evernote or my paper notebook, along with a written reflection concerning this data. After closing my journal, I uploaded this Word document into NVIVO 12. I used a deductive coding strategy (Hays & Singh, 2012) to analyse this content, looking for the themes outlined in Levkoe et al.’s PPC framework (2019).

Results and Discussion

As I discuss below, Levkoe et al.’s (2019) framework proved to be particularly useful for identifying key narratives and instances of how my reflexivity practice facilitated Napo Runa people's active role in the research process and contributed to their food sovereignty goals. Moreover, I chose the PPC framework (Levkoe et al., 2019) to support this analysis because it is based on the principles of food sovereignty and recognizes the need for dialogue and collaboration among the multiple identities that interact during the research praxis. While Levkoe et al.'s (2019) framework is designed to analize narratives regarding how researchers affect the research process and the communities they study, I also identified certain opposing details; in other words, I noted narratives when participants had an impact on me and the research process itself.

Pillar 1: Humanizing research relations

As the first pillar of a research praxis that contributes to food sovereignty, Levkoe et al. (2019) propose humanizing research relationships. Rooted in food sovereignty's relational ethos (Martens et al., 2016; Schiavoni, 2017; Wittman et al., 2010), this pillar involves overcoming the notion of instrumentation in research relationships, which can be alienating for both participants and researchers. Instead, this pillar advocates for relationships of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity. I identified several instances in my journal during which my research exhibited these three qualities.

Trust

Trust with research participants was not simple to achieve. I had to develop strategies to increase trust between myself and the participants and create a fruitful relationship. Although in a Western research context, one can promote trust by following ethical guidelines, it was not that simple in my research. I followed the Behavioral Research Ethics guidelines of my university in Canada, but most participants were unfamiliar with such research protocols. For instance, some were reluctant to sign the consent forms because they thought that by signing these documents, they would be giving away their lands, as shown in this journal entry:

> In today's meeting, I mentioned to community leaders that their signed consent is required to participate in this research. One of the leaders did not seem happy with this request. He said that he does not trust signing anything from a Canadian institution. This community's leaders told me that they have a longstanding conflict with a Canadian mining company that wants to develop mineral mining in their ancestral land. I feel that being a student from a Canadian university creates some doubts in this community. I might need to organize some meetings to explain the ethics and academic protocols required in my research. I need to clarify that the consent form's main purpose is to allow them to decide how they want to participate in the research. (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 5)

To reduce these feelings of uncertainty among participants, I developed several strategies. For instance, I organized meetings to explain the reasons behind ethical guidelines and the goals of the research to the participants. Several leaders mentioned that these extra meetings helped the participants better understand the ethics protocols and increase their trust in me as the researcher and the goals of my research.

However, trust did not only involve participants trusting me and my research. An episode I recorded in my journal helped me view trust from a different perspective:

> Yesterday, I felt sick. Lupe [a Chakra Mama who knows traditional medicine well] offered me a cup of a dark beverage. Before drinking it, I asked her what was in this beverage. Instead of answering my question, she said, "you do not trust my medicine and knowledge, but you want that I trust your university knowledge." After this answer, I drank her medicine, which indeed made me feel better. (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 13)

This episode made me reflect on the need to see trust as reciprocal. After that, I decided to record conversations in my journal in which participants asked for my trust both explicitly and implicitly. Overall, I learned that trust in collaborative research must go both ways, from the researcher to the participants and vice versa. Only then we can talk about opening an ethical space in the research.

Reciprocity

According to Levkoe et al. (2019), to fulfil reciprocity in research practice, researchers and participants must understand each other's needs and expectations, recognize that they may not always align, and seek ways to contribute towards each other's work. Based on my research experience, first meetings between a researcher and participants are crucial to understanding each other’s needs and developing actions of reciprocity:

> During these first meetings, participants and I sat in a circle and talked about our needs. At this point, I feel that most of the leaders were aware that my primary goal in this research is theoretical. Aware of my goals, they have agreed to contribute to this research by providing their time, attending to meetings, referring more participants, discussing, and giving feedback during the research process. Community leaders have also expressed their expectations and ideas as to how I can contribute to their needs. They requested that I facilitate some workshops in tourism-related topics to be reciprocal of their support. (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 20)

These initial meetings provided information on the topics and concepts which were important to the participants. For instance, at the beginning, community leaders requested the integration of Indigenous knowledge in the research process and outcomes. To accommodate this request, I invited Chakra Mamas to co-facilitated group interviews and workshops as a component of the research. The result was the development of interactive and entertaining workshops where Napo Runa participants expressed their ideas through different formats including drawings, theatre, storytelling, painting, and cooking.

Solidarity

Levkoe et al. (2019) argue that solidarity is connected to identifying common spaces and empathy between researchers and participants in their work supporting food sovereignty. One can connect this approach to Habermas's (1990) description of solidarity, which goes beyond the asymmetrical idea of charity and highlights the idea of common experiences. Following Ritchie and Rigano (2007), solidarity in a truly collaborative research practice makes researchers and participants think more about their common experiences than their contrasting experiences.

The need to equalize relationships in food sovereignty research opened my mind to experiencing different approaches to solidarity during my fieldwork. First, I questioned my own understanding of solidarity, which I had perceived as charity, and learned to think about it in a different fashion. Then, I became critical of the process for identifying commonalities between the participants and myself. For instance, I found that being from the same country and sharing cultural values were not enough to create solidarity between myself and the participants:

> When local leaders introduced me to the community as a student at a Canadian university, I feel that participants changed their attitude towards me. I feel that before mentioning this detail, they treated me as an "insider," and once I mentioned that I study in Canada, they see me as an "outsider." Is there any way to change this outsider perception? (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 15)

The River of Life tool (Moussa, 2009), served as an excellent way to develop solidarity in my research. This tool encourages participants and facilitators to use the symbol of a river's path to reflect on their life experiences and how they connect to the research. I used this tool to introduce myself and the research project every time that I met with a new group. Overall, I found that this tool increased participation and improved rapport with participants. For instance, during meeting breaks, participants often approached me to talk further about some of the elements mentioned in my "river of life".

Pillar 2: Equalizing power relations

This pillar in the Levkoe et al. (2019) framework focuses on critical reflexivity that enables participants to become subjects rather than objects of study. These authors suggest three areas to reflect on how the research process promotes equal relationships: sharing of control over the research process and outcomes, acknowledging positionality, and establishing effective coordination mechanisms.

Sharing Control

The primary outcomes of my research contribute to the scientific knowledge of Indigenous tourism and food sovereignty. By developing collaborative research, I was also able to identify participants' priorities and obtain their insights into how this research could deliver practical outcomes.

Participants provided valuable insights into how to increase their role in decisions concerning the "what" (focus and priorities), "who" (whose voice and knowledge), and "how" (protocols) in this research. When discussing food sovereignty, Napo Runa participants recommended using the term chakra, which made more sense for participants than the term "food sovereignty". When deciding who would participate in the research, Napo Runa leaders wanted to play an active role in making these selections. In the beginning, I had proposed involving only Napo Runa people, but their leaders recommended I include settler actors too. They thought that this research could bring together Indigenous and settler communities to talk about sustainable tourism policies and local food sovereignty in the region.

Napo Runa leaders also had ideas about the methods for the research process, recommending the inclusion of Indigenous values and protocols. For instance, before starting the formal data collection process, Chakra Mamas asked me to participate in a Guayusa Upina ritual, which involves sharing guayusa tea. Per Napo Runa tradition, drinking guayusa tea before sunrise helps a person cleanse their spirit and have a clear mind for the rest of the day:

> During the Guayusa Upina, Chakra Mamas gave me some medicine to cleanse my spirit. They also told me to be respectful of their chakras gardens and their traditions. They said that food is a teacher, and for this reason, it is important to always have *guayusa* tea in the research activities…They also told me a phrase that I will never forget: "Do not come to *capacitarnos* (training us) because we are *capaces* (capable)." (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 09)

To address the Chakra Mamas' and other leaders' suggestions relating to the use of their traditional knowledge in my research, I followed the protocols that they recommended to me. For instance, guayusa tea was served in all research meetings. Since that time, I enjoy a cup of guayusa tea every time I write or share my research experience with Napo Runa people. Furthermore, the research participants and I agreed that the research results would be shared with all the participants in Spanish and would be kept online for future access.

Acknowledging Positionality

According to Levkoe et al. (2019), a commitment to equalizing power relations requires reflexive consideration of a researcher's positionality. Several authors argue that being aware of who researchers are and where they come from helps them recognize that their own identity (which includes, e.g., class, race, gender) could influence the research process and outcomes (Baikie, 2020; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). In the beginning, I erroneously believed that being from the same country and speaking the same language with the participants, as well as our shared Indigenous ancestry, could offer path to equalizing my relationship with Kichwa participants. My error, however, was revealed by an event that made me reflect on my real position in this research:

> I am having conflicting feelings on my position and role in this community. In the afternoon, the community had a celebration, and I was not invited. Welli [one of the community members] said that this celebration was only for family members. Three girls from another town were working in the community lodge. Although they were not technically part of the family-community, they were invited to this celebration. All of the foreign visitors (tourists, volunteers, and me) were not invited. Does my status of being a doctoral student in Canada create barriers with the participants? (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 16)

These reflections made me realize that I needed to acknowledge my position in this research. I understood that my role as a researcher was shaped by features that the participants considered to be privileges, such as, having access to postgraduate education in Canada and speaking a foreign language. The participants, of course, were right: I was privileged. To reduce the privilege gap, I set out to learn as much from the Napo Runa participants possible. For instance, I asked the Chakra Mamas to teach me how to grow cassava and make fermented cassava beverages. I thus encouraged myself and the participants to engage in activities in which I was the learner, and they were the experts.

Establishing Effective Coordination Mechanisms

According to Levkoe et al., (2019), to ensure that participants take an active role in the research, a researcher must coordinate several strategies. At the beginning of my research process, representatives from the participant organizations and I developed and signed a research agreement. This document included an overview of the research, detailed my role as a researcher, and outlined the participants' expected contributions to this research. Furthermore, the organizations' leaders suggested ways to increase participation, especially among women and youth. For them, the most important element was that research meeting take place in their communities, in spaces that represent them. I noticed that most of the Napo Runa participants felt more comfortable meeting in a rustic tent in their communities rather than in a meeting room owned by government agencies (See Figure 2). Through the research, I found that the participation of women and youth increased when the meetings took place in spaces belonging to their communities. Some women indicated that they were more likely to attend meetings in their communities because they could bring their children with them, and they would not have to spend money on a bus ticket to travel to a meeting at a government building in the city.

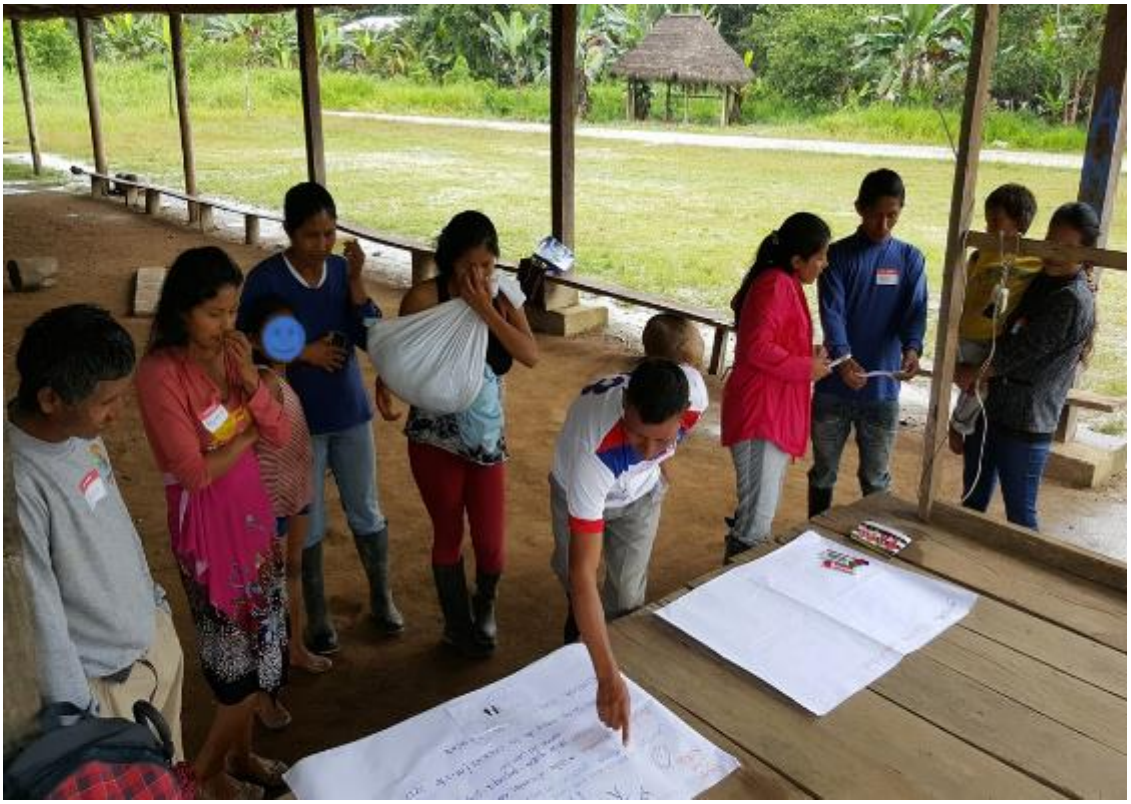

Figure 2: Research location meetings.

Note. This picture shows a research meeting hosted in one of the communities' gathering locations. Three of the female participants hold their children during the meeting. Photo credit: Ayme Tanguila (Summer, 2018).

Pillar 3: Pursuing transformative orientations

The last pillar of Levkoe et al.'s (2019) PPC framework focuses on reflecting on how one's research contributes to the transformative work of progressive social movements and social change in the area of study. Although I used this pillar to reflect on the changes the research brought for the participants, I complemented the framework by reflecting on how I perceived the research to have changed me and my research journey.

Commitment to Contributing to Transformative Action Among Participants

The most noticeable change I perceived at the end of my fieldwork was related to Indigenous and settler relations in the context of the Chakra Route. At the beginning of my research, I noticed that Indigenous and settlers in this region shared no common topics of interest regarding tourism and food sovereignty. According to some of the participants, this separation stems from a colonial legacy of discrimination that affects primarily Indigenous people and creates barriers between Indigenous and settler communities in this area. To promote an ethical and collaborative space between them I arranged group gatherings where Indigenous and settler participants came together to identify common issues and develop partnerships in the context of tourism development. During these gatherings, I noticed that participants often used the word "solidarity" as a critical value to promote in the Chakra Route project.

In the second year of fieldwork, I noticed that more settler entrepreneurs were engaged in activities related to the Chakra Route. According to the route leaders, settlers had in the past distanced themselves from the Chakra Route project because they thought it was opened for Indigenous members only. Once they became aware of this perception, route leaders decided to welcome settler members on the route project under some requirements. To be part of the Chakra Route, Indigenous or settler entrepreneurs must include elements of Napo Runa food systems in their businesses. For instance, some of the settler entrepreneurs have partnered with Napo Runa communities to offer tours to chakra gardens in their tourism itineraries.

The second change I identified was a shift in the tourism goals of the region. This shift is reflected in the route's name change, from the Cacao Route to the Chakra Route. Several participants argued that the former name, Cacao Route, indirectly promoted the mono-crop model of cacao farming that fails to follow the traditional agroforestry systems of the chakra gardens. They maintained that Chakra Route better represents their local values and food sovereignty. Some of the research participants indicated that my research had raised awareness of the importance to connect tourism development to their food sovereignty.

Changes on My Academic Journey

To finalize this reflexivity exercise, I want to share how this research experience changed me and my academic journey. First, the stories of resilience and hard work that Napo Runa women shared have inspired me during difficult times in my personal and professional life. Second, I noticed that in my journal, I had tended to record experiences that represent indigenous people's strengths rather than their weaknesses. This tendency could have biased my perceptions of their roles in tourism development. However, by connecting with Indigenous scholars and participating in talking circles with Elders after my fieldwork, I understood that my own Indigenous roots had been influencing how I saw Indigenous people and that this positive narrative was not a shortcoming of my research (Baikie, 2020; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020; Settee, 2011). Indeed, I also found that reflexivity was crucial while interpreting and writing about the data I had collected. According to Hays and Singh (2012), being transparent with the reader about the researcher's values and experiences that might influence research outcomes contributes to the trustworthiness of the research.

Third, practicing reflexivity in this research by keeping a journal became a liberating act. My mother tongue is Spanish with a Kichwa influence. I learned English just before beginning my graduate program in Canada. In several instances, I found that articulating my ideas in English was frustrating and that I could not express certain concepts and words. Writing, drawing, and creating collages in my journal was an opportunity to express my ideas and reflections freely in English, Spanish, Kichwa, and occasionally in Spanglish (Martinez, 2010). Using alternative formats to express my thoughts also helped me in applying the critical approach that I followed in this research. Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) and Crowshoe & Lertzman (2020) argue that the use of alternative formats to Western academic writing (e.g., visual and oral formats) are forms of political resistance and empowerment. During my research process, I found that while numbers can reveal the experiences of Indigenous peoples efficiently, the narratives behind these numbers offer powerful insight into ways to improve their lives. I would like to share a collage (see Figure 3) I prepared during an academic writing workshop led by Louise Halfe[3] at the University of Saskatchewan. Although it is in the format of a graphic, creating this collage and placing it on the wall in my office was a way for me to remain cognizant of my values while interpreting the data and detailing the results.

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[3] Louise Bernice Halfe, whose Cree name is Sky Dancer, is Canada's ninth Parliamentarian Poet Laureate and served as the first Indigenous Poet Laureate of Saskatchewan.

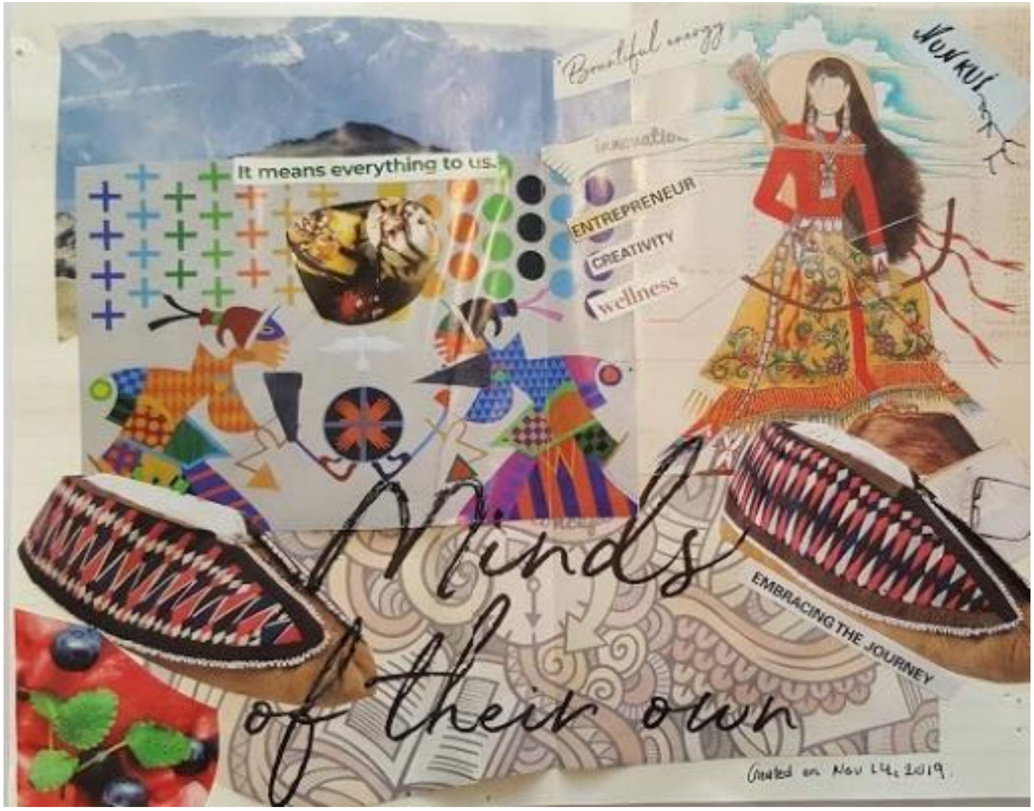
Beautiful energy
Nunkui
innovation
It means everything to us.
ENTREPRENEUR
CREATIVITY
wellness
Minds of their own
EMBRACING THE JOURNEY
Created on Nov 14, 2019

Figure 3: A collage that inspired my academic writing.

Note. I created this collage during an academic writing workshop led by Elder Louise Halfe (Fall, 2019).

Finally, attending university as a full-time student in Saskatchewan, Canada, and completing my fieldwork in Napo, Ecuador, allowed me to identify commonalities between the stories of Indigenous people in both Ecuador and Canada and between the research traditions of the Global North and South. Being aware of these commonalities gave me a new perspective on collaborative work and an ethical space in academia. Instead of focusing on what separates us, I now seek to explore opportunities to bring us together.

Conclusions

As the demands for more active roles of Indigenous people in Indigenous tourism research grow, there is an equivalent, compensatory need to revisit researchers' roles and explore strategies that promote more equal, respectful, and transformative research practices. In this paper, I have provided instances of how progressive frameworks such as food sovereignty and methodological tools such as journaling can trigger more democratic research praxis in Indigenous tourism. Food sovereignty has been on the political agendas of Indigenous communities for decades, but it has been primarily applied in food studies (Grey & Patel, 2015). In this article, I brought this concept to the studies of tourism, which is also a growing topic of interest among Indigenous people around the world (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Here, I presented a case that contributes with methodological implications on the intersection between food sovereignty and Indigenous tourism. This intersection is growing in interest and calls for empirical research (Grey & Newman, 2018; Santafe Troncoso & Loring, 2020). Moreover, this article contributes to the “second generation” of food sovereignty research (Edelman et al., 2014), because I have connected the concept of food sovereignty to a new field (tourism).

I applied the People, Power, and Change framework (Levkoe et al., 2019), which is based on the democratic values of food sovereignty, to analyze and organize my reflections from this research. Although this framework proposal did not specifically follow Indigenous values, it proved to be a powerful tool to guide the research praxis of food sovereignty in multicultural contexts. As the authors of this framework mentioned, this proposal needs to be tested on multiple contexts and will require some adjustments to meet the needs of the contexts where it is applied. For instance, here I expanded the focus of the third pillar by including my perceptions of how participants and the research itself changed me and my academic journey.

This article was also an opportunity to show the benefits of using reflexive journaling in collaborative research with Indigenous people. The journal facilitated my reflexivity praxis and made me consciously acknowledge how my own experiences influenced the research dynamics. Journaling helped me realize how research practices affected participants' roles in the research (e.g., how I introduced myself and the project, ethics protocols, and terminology). By being aware of these issues during the fieldwork, I could modify some of these practices where necessary and accommodate participants' needs and goals. Besides the benefits that constant and systematic reflection can bring for equalizing researcher-participant relationships and unfolding an ethical space between them, I found that journaling can be a tool of empowerment for researchers studying in different cultural contexts. Personally, keeping this journal helped me to express my experiences and thoughts during the research process with more confidence.

Facilitating an active role of Napo Runa people contributed to democratize the research process, in which Napo Runa people’s voices and knowledge were critical to the production of knowledge. Inspired by food sovereignty principles of knowledge democratization, the narratives described in this article showed that understanding and including Indigenous people knowledge in the research process is an important step towards an ethical space in Indigenous tourism scholarship.

The primary limitation of this paper is that it focused only on the researcher's reflexivity side. Future research in Indigenous tourism would benefit from a focus on participants' reflexivity. Overall, integrating food sovereignty and reflexivity in Indigenous tourism, research, and practice more frequently, would support more democratic and sustainable ways of developing tourism in Indigenous contexts.

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