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Indigenous and communitarian knowledges

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As we were planning the project application for the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (Norhed), I was reading an article by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro titled 'Cannibal metaphysics: Amerindian perspectivism' (partially reprinted in *Radical Philosophy*). According to Peter Skafish in his introduction to the article, de Castro shows that 'what falls under the domain of "social" and "human" relations for … Amazonian peoples' is very broad. In fact, 'animals, plants, spirits are all conceived as persons' so that 'modern distinctions between nature and culture, animals and humans, and even descent and marriage ties are effectively inverted' (Skafish 2013: 15).

At the same time, I had been reading a biography of Arne Næss (Gjefsen 2011). No one has influenced Norwegian thinking on matters such as philosophy of science more than the philosopher Næss. For decades, virtually all Norwegian students had his textbooks on philosophy and research methodologies on their reading list. However, in the 1950s other philosophers, such as Hans Skjervheim, began to view the textbooks on research methodologies as too narrowly focused on methodologies developed in the natural sciences, ignoring methodologies coming from the humanities. The critique led Næss to rewrite the textbooks to include chapters on hermeneutics and other methodologies from the humanities. Næss seemed to agree with his critics that methodologies imported from the natural sciences alone were not adequate to study human society. Subsequent developments in disciplines

such as history and cultural studies seem to build on and underline this notion of *difference* between studying nature and studying society.

My development as an academic took place within these debates. I was trained in research methodologies grounded in this supposed difference between studying society and studying nature. But what if indigenous peoples of the Amazon and elsewhere are right? How can research methodologies be developed where students do not take 'modern distinctions between nature and culture, animals and humans, and even descent and marriage ties' for granted?

According to Koch and Weingart (2016), research methodologies can never be 'transferred' from one locality to another. Instead, methodologies are sampled, mixed and socially reconstructed. In this chapter, I take a reflexive approach to sampling, mixing and socially constructing research methodologies. I consider what happened during the Norhed project process and what this can tell us about encounters between Norwegian traditions of education and research and indigenous people's perspectives on education and research. I try to shed light on this process by analysing what I see as a series of key moments. Ultimately, I hope to explain how and why indigenous and communitarian universities in Latin America are different from most universities participating in the Norhed programme.

Literature

According to Julian Baggini, 'by gaining greater knowledge of how others think, we can become less certain of the knowledge we think we have, which is always the first step to greater understanding' (2018: 6). Unfortunately, the philosophy most North American and European students encounter at university is 'based entirely on canonical Western texts … [and] is presented as the universal philosophy, the ultimate inquiry into human understanding'. Baggini, however, is convinced that 'we cannot understand ourselves if we do not understand others' (2018: 4).

Northern scholars such as Arturo Escobar, Eduardo Gudynas and Maristela Svampa are increasingly turning to indigenous peoples, indigenous organisations and indigenous knowledges in Latin America

for inspiration and guidance. Arturo Escobar (2018) believes that 'African, Asian, and Latin American nations can and should put forward alternatives to development that incorporate non-Western concepts of what constitutes a thriving society':

> With a firm footing in the worldviews of indigenous peoples, Buen Vivir embraces the inseparability and interdependence of humans and nature. In the current development debates, Buen Vivir has informed critiques of the prevailing development model, confronting basic assumptions about progress, competition, consumerism, and materialism. It rejects anthropocentricism and critiques capitalist and socialist forms of development because both, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, are destructive of both humans and ecological systems. The ethos of Buen Vivir centers on fostering harmony between humans and nature, quality of life, and conviviality. (Escobar 2018: 3–4)

A generation of radical thinkers such as Escobar has found the Zapatista notion of 'pluriverse' particularly useful to imagine 'alternative worlds'. The pluriverse is 'a world in which many worlds fit' built on the concept of diversity within a whole 'Earth system'. It is a world that accepts and celebrates diversity. 'The concept of the Pluriverse pushes us to think in terms of many possible worlds as well as the circularity of life, a perpetual flow and "radical interdependency" of all living things' (Escobar 2018: 5–6). For the indigenous Zapatista rebels of Chiapas, Mexico, the concept 'pluriverse' arose from the struggle for dignity and recognition of diversity after 1994. It helped put into words the demand not only for dignity and respect, but also for the right to autonomy and self-governance.

From a different perspective, Koch and Weingart (2016) have raised concerns about the praxis of 'transferring' knowledge from the North to the South in development work. After reviewing a large body of development reports, evaluations and so on, Koch and Weingart had to conclude that such knowledge transfer does not exist. Knowledge cannot simply be transferred from one locality to another. In a similar

vein, Adriansen et al. (2015) argue that knowledge production is always influenced by the local context. Koch and Weingart suggest that the weakness of African states and their inability to withstand pressure from the global North is a danger to the social construction of national identities. The answer, in this conundrum, is most likely 'to use the available means to support the knowledge communities in developing countries so that these become able to produce a critical mass of local experts who qualify as producers and critical scrutinisers of expertise' (Koch and Weingart 2016: 344).

The indigenous and communitarian universities discussed here have been moulded in these debates. The emergence of indigenous and communitarian universities can best be understood as an attempt to establish self-organised and self-governed institutions able to produce, as Koch and Weingart suggest, 'a critical mass of local experts who qualify as producers and critical scrutinisers of expertise'. However, indigenous perspectives on 'states' and 'countries' as key agents in the production of 'local experts' would normally be very different from those presented in the literature on higher education in Africa. In general, indigenous organisations in Latin America do not have high expectations as to what governments and state institutions can and will do to promote autonomous indigenous higher education (see RUIICAY 2017). Instead, most autonomous indigenous higher education initiatives have been met with responses ranging from suspicion, opposition, resistance and obstruction to outright confrontation. The very term 'post-colonial' looks different from the perspective of indigenous organisations struggling for autonomy. In Latin America, indigenous peoples have experienced 200 years of existence in 'post-colonial' states established after independence from (mostly) Spain and Portugal in the early 1800s. Most of the independent states eagerly sought to create homogeneous masses of subjects, minions and underlings. Since the late nineteenth century, nationalist ideologies in most Latin American states have been built on the 'powerful myth' that the country is homogeneous and its citizens are the product of 'mestisaje' between indigenous peoples and Spaniards (Gould 1998). Mignolo et al. (1998: ix) comment: 'In this telling, Nicaragua's native peoples no

longer exist and Nicaragua's advance into the modern world of capitalism and nationhood depend on this disappearance.' After independence from colonial powers, internal groups wanting to establish new 'colonial' relations soon enough captured the states. This time, however, the colonial relations were designed for internal exploitation of indigenous peoples, minorities and others generally on the periphery of the state. State independence from European colonial powers hardly meant an end to colonial relations in Latin America.

'Autonomy' is a key concept for understanding indigenous initiatives for higher education in Latin America. Article 4 of the UN Declaration dealing with indigenous governance states that 'indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions'.[1] Historically, indigenous autonomy has emerged out of indigenous people's struggles 'to preserve and strengthen their territorial and cultural integrity through self-government units practising participatory democracy' (López y Rivas 2013). Building institutions of higher education has been seen by indigenous organisations not only as a way to produce 'a critical mass of local experts' but also as a pivotal part in the struggle 'to preserve and strengthen' autonomy and integrity through self-governance and participatory democracy. More often than not, these struggles have pitted indigenous organisations against state and capital, keen to extract the rich natural resources often found within indigenous territories.

In short, the global indigenous movement has emerged out of countless local struggles between states and indigenous organisations over indigenous autonomy. Using transnational networks of solidarity has, at times, proved quite effective in limiting state powers and expanding indigenous territorial autonomy (Brysk 2000; Leyva-Solano 2001). The universities discussed in this chapter are members of the Network of Indigenous, Intercultural and Community Universities of Abya Yala[2] (RUIICAY). RUIICAY is an example of a transnational network uniting forces in the struggle to build and defend locally self-governed institutions of higher education.

Histories of indigenous struggles

Three members of RUIICAY took part in the Norhed project discussed here. The Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi in Ecuador and the Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural (UAIIN) in Colombia were both founded by indigenous organisations with roots going back to the early 1970s. The Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) had emerged in this violent region of Colombia in 1971. Cauca was, and continues to be, among the regions most affected by the civil war between leftist guerrilla organisations such as *Fuerzas Armados Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) and *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) and the Colombian army and right wing paramilitaries. For several years (1984–1991) an indigenous insurgent group (Quintin Lame Armed Movement) operated in the Cauca region, with the declared aim of defending indigenous communities against violence unleashed by the army and armed groups (Palechor et al. 1995). Peace negotiations led to the adoption of a new constitution in 1991, which enshrined important rights for indigenous peoples, such as the right to protection of communal lands, recognition of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation and the right to bilingual education. Building a system of education is defined as one of the central axes of CRIC's political struggle, seeking 'an education that promotes the recovery of our identity, our territory and cultural practice, that values and recognises the importance of our native languages'.[3]

CRIC emerged in a context of extreme violence and danger. According to reliable estimates, over 400 members of CRIC were killed during the first 30 years of the organisation (Gow 2008). The number of those killed has since increased significantly. This violence shaped and formed the political struggle of the indigenous peoples in the region.

Similarly, the Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi is closely connected to the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, more commonly known as CONAIE. As in Colombia, the indigenous movement in Ecuador has passed through a lengthy series of popular mobilisations and direct actions, such as the famous indigenous uprisings of 1990, 1994, 1997 and 2005 (Uzendoski 2010).

The third member of the project is the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN). The Nicaraguan context is different from the ones in Ecuador and Colombia briefly described above. In Nicaragua, the civil war after the Sandinista revolution (1979) prompted negotiations between the Sandinista government and (mainly) indigenous and Afro-Caribbean peoples on the Atlantic coast. The violence on the Atlantic coast came to an end when a new constitution was adopted in 1987 after a long struggle. The constitution recognises the fact that Nicaragua is a multicultural country and defines the Atlantic Coast regions as 'autonomous'.

The common trait in the historical context of these three institutions is that indigenous peoples and minorities have gained rights and autonomy only over the last three decades, and only after protracted and violent struggles. However, the struggle to build autonomous systems for higher education continues and has been an ongoing issue throughout the course of the Norhed project.

Methodology

As mentioned in my introduction, I have chosen a reflexive approach to my analysis of the encounter between Northern perspectives on knowledge and research methodologies and those of the Latin American partners in the project. The approach is based on 'a less instrumental, more constructivist, relational and social theory of learning, which, through a process of reflective dialogue, engages the learner in a critically reflective construction of meaning' (Doyle 2003). Taking a 'reflexive approach' means considering what is happening during the research or learning process. In the instance discussed in this chapter, the process is not simply a research process, although elements of research certainly have been a part of the process, but rather a process involving local institutions for higher education and research in the co-production of knowledge.

I build on the work of Sheila Jasanoff (2004), who sees 'co-production' of knowledge as 'simultaneous processes' through which modern societies form their epistemic and normative understandings of the world. The concept of co-production can be used to understand the

production of scientific knowledge in most areas and disciplines. Concerning indigenous peoples, however, the concept should be defined more narrowly as a 'process where people intentionally try to collaborate on equal terms to develop a more collective wisdom, which can become a basis for making the quality of life "better"' (Romm 2017: 49).

Adopting a reflexive approach means that my focus will be on 'interpreting one's own interpretations, looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author' (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: vii). To achieve this, I draw on and refer to important debates and discussions from the workshops where we co-produced the application for funding (thereby choosing the future research subjects), as well as on discussions with students and the papers they handed in during the course of the project. I also analyse some of the outcomes of the project, mainly the research manuals, public declarations and books on pedagogy and philosophy of science published at the indigenous and community universities. These key documents are, in the order in which I discuss them:

- The journal *Revista Ciencia e Interculturalidad*, Volúmen 23, Núm. 2, Julio–Diciembre, 2018, which contains 20 articles written by graduate master's students on intercultural communication from indigenous and communitarian perspectives.
- A manifesto produced by 50 invited participants from ten Latin American countries at a pre-conference to the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) 2017 annual conference in Cartagena, Colombia, titled 'Manifesto: Minga of thought "Communication and indigenous peoples"'.
- A jointly produced documentation of indigenous science and research methodologies titled 'Base Document for Cultivation and Nurture of Wisdom and Knowledge'(CCRISAC).
- The final document I discuss is also the result of a long and participatory process. Ten indigenous researchers jointly authored an introduction to the pedagogy of the indigenous university of Ecuador: *Kapak Ñan Pedagógico: Filosófico de la Pluriversidad*

'Amawtay Wasi' (*The Great Road of Learning: The Philosophy of the Pluriversity 'Amawtay Wasi'*).

In order to consider what was happening during the research or learning process, I connect the discussion to five key moments that have been helpful in prompting me to look at my 'own perspectives from other perspectives', and to turn a self-critical eye onto my 'own authority as interpreter and author', as Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) suggest.

Key moments and documents in the reflexive process

El bastón de mando will always be here

In April 2015, at a conference held in Popayan, Colombia, the CRIC indigenous leader in charge of education gave the opening speech: 'I am here today, but someone else will represent us the next time. Thereafter someone else will come. But the *bastón de mando* will always be here. It is the *bastón de mando* that leads us. We are only passing through.' (I have translated from Spanish to English.)

The *bastón de mando* is a ceremonial stick that represents the authority installed in elected leaders of indigenous communities in the region of Cauca, Colombia. The anonymous leader wanted to instil a sense of communality into the audience by underlining the insignificance of individual leaders. In fact, CRIC is collectively led by nine leaders, each elected for two years to represent different parts of the region. At both regional and local levels, leadership rotates regularly between trusted persons. The rotations reflect the difficult security situation of the region. It is dangerous to be a leader. Significantly, however, the system of frequent rotations also reflects a scepticism about all forms of specialisation. Therefore, the university founded by CRIC, Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural (UAIIN), does not have a rector. Instead, a 'co-ordinator' is appointed for two or three years to lead the UAIIN before being 'rotated' to another position in the indigenous structure of governance. In addition, across the spectrum of staff at the university, teachers, researchers and directors are required to have a broad range of experience of all aspects of communal life.

Who am 'I'?

The indigenous students have a sense of belonging to a collective that seems to be different from mine. The divergent perceptions of belonging to a collective surfaced numerous times during lectures and workshops. A few months after the first batch of master's students had graduated, we held a workshop on academic writing with the aim of publishing a special issue of a scientific journal based entirely on their master's theses (the first 'key document' mentioned earlier). As we were reading and discussing first drafts, it struck me that the former master's students were using the word 'we' frequently. One wrote 'We, the Nasa people decided to …'. Another wrote, 'We, the people, feel that …'. To my Norwegian academic ear, the liberal use of 'we' sounded strange. One of my teachers on a PhD course I attended many years ago even forbade us to use the word 'we' in this way. Therefore, I tried to explain why an academic audience in the global North probably would not appreciate statements such as 'We, the people, feel …'.

As a compromise, I suggested using 'I' instead of 'we'. I even argued that a reflexive approach needs a human subject – an 'I' – that is willing to turn 'a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author'.

The graduate students protested and tried to convince me that 'I' without 'we' is an illusion born out of modernism and 'individualisation'. My counter argument was to present the ideal of 'transparency' in academic writing. An author should, I argued, be open about his or her evaluations and judgements, so that readers, too, could turn a critical eye onto the authority of the author as interpreter. For the sake of transparency, you should make your personal judgements visible where appropriate, I argued. In the end, I did not get much support for the view that an individual author was making the evaluations and judgements. It seemed that my former students were more concerned with the fact that individual authors are embedded in cultures consisting of norms, values, traditions, and so on that in effect, make evaluations and judgements for them.

Re-reading the articles as they have been published in *Revista Ciencia e Interculturalidad*, it becomes clear that these master's graduates are in

the process of constructing a culture of academic writing that is not willing to submerge itself in the hegemonic cultures of academia. A similar issue (which I will mention only briefly here) is related to the style and structure of academic arguments. An academic article, for instance, typically follows a linear path from introduction, question or problem, theory and methods, to results, discussion and conclusion. Following this pattern helps most readers to understand what the author is trying to convey. However, as Joanne Rappaport so elegantly has demonstrated, indigenous Nasa storytelling follows different patterns and structures (Rappaport 1990). The Norhed project put much energy into enabling students to communicate with hegemonic academic cultures, including the ability to read and write European- or North American-style academic papers. However, there is no reason to expect that Northern norms of academic writing are universal or are the only useful way to communicate science. Building local institutions, as Koch and Weingart recommend, will lead to the construction of a multiplicity of academic worlds in Latin America.

Some academics worry that such a pluriverse of science will be a threat to higher education and universities (Saugstad et al. 2018). A more pressing concern is how to make 'the many worlds' enrich one another.

Making a manifesto at La Minga (collective work for the common good)

It is not possible to translate 'Minga' into other languages without losing some of the meaning of the word. In Norwegian, 'Minga' is best translated as 'dugnad'. In English, it is probably best to explain the concept as a form of collective work for the common good. A Minga could be many things – a march, a demonstration, collective work on communal land or intellectual work at a workshop.

Some 40 students and researchers from the three indigenous and communitarian universities involved in the Norhed project attended the 2017 IAMCR conference in Cartagena, Colombia. Attending a conference by presenting a paper and receiving a few comments before retreating to your offices to complete an article appeared to be a rather

meaningless academic exercise for those coming from the communitarian and indigenous universities. It somehow represented the zenith of *individualised* knowledge production. Instead, the communitarian and indigenous universities wanted some 'real collective work' to be done and invited participants to join a 'Minga of thought' (a 'pre-conference', to use the language of IAMCR). In the call, the organisers wrote:

> For the indigenous people, 'Minga' means to circulate, making every physical and spiritual force meet in the Minga. Minga means to construct unity from the vision of the people. It means looking for ways to improve communication, food autonomy and to revitalize the mother tongue, always seeking dialogue between human beings and Mother Nature in order to remain in harmony and balance. In the Nasa tradition, Minga is 'pi' txya or pi 'txyuwe', an invitation from a person or community to others to work for a day in partnership to carry out different tasks such as planting corn. In indigenous agriculture, work is demanding and many hands are needed. As a result, indigenous peoples use the Minga to create unity and as a strategy of solution. This Minga is the MINGA OF WORK.[4]

As a Minga is a space for open dialogue, there were no calls for papers. Instead, the organisers invited people to come and 'help produce a result in the form of a text or declaration that corroborates the power of indigenous communication in the contemporary world'. The value of meeting and discussion would be manifested in a collective document that could be used to focus energy and direct future collective efforts.

Close to 100 participants at the IAMCR conference came to take part in the collective work. Discussions were held in plenary sessions before participants were divided into groups to discuss specific issues. A long day's work ended with plenary sessions to construct a manifesto based on reports from the various groups. For the indigenous participants, this was a very familiar methodology, well-tested at numerous indigenous conferences. Most non-indigenous participants had little experience with such collective efforts.

The manifesto, the second of the above-mentioned key documents, was later published by openDemocracy, an independent global media platform covering world affairs, ideas and culture that 'seeks to challenge power and encourage democratic debate across the world'.[5] The manifesto began:

> We, the Originary Peoples and Afro-descendants of Abya Yala have been walking for years in processes of struggle and resistance in defence of our collective rights and ancestral territories. This struggle once again vindicates the maintenance of knowledges, know-hows, wisdoms and ancestral practices, together with the recognition of our own systems of communication, organisation, production, health, justice and education.

The manifesto goes on to list seven issues that need to be resolved if indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants are to achieve self-governance in higher education. The first issue reveals much about the priorities of the communitarian and indigenous universities:

> First: We demand that states and society in general recognise, respect and guarantee the systems of self-education that Indigenous Peoples have been able to build and consolidate through intercultural universities, pluriversities and community education projects as legitimate places for the transmission and reproduction of ancestral knowledges, know-hows, wisdoms and practices that are essential to face the civilization crisis looming over the world, by integrating the ancestral wisdom of the grandmothers and grandparents of the Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in Abya Yala. (RUIICAY 2017)

As much as producing a list of demands on behalf of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants was the purpose of the Minga, so, too, its purpose was to introduce scholars from the global North to indigenous ways of producing collective knowledge. Post-conference essays by the master's students make it clear that many saw the Minga as a small act of civil disobedience or a silent subversion of typical forms and

procedures of academic work at academic events. One student wrote: 'You wanted to introduce us to the academic world of communication and media scholars. We wanted to make sure that the academic world was introduced to *our* ways of producing knowledge' (unpublished document).

Equality versus diversity?

During the Norhed planning process, we met in Nicaragua to write up the application. We needed to find the right words to capture the meanings and intentions of all parties. The Norwegians were eager to use the concept of 'equality' to describe the type of partnership we wanted to build. However, as I have described more fully elsewhere, the indigenous university leaders did not share the Norwegian fondness for the concept 'equality' (see Krøvel 2018). On the contrary, they received the proposal to use 'equality' to describe the nature of the partnership with some suspicion.

'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' was a much-used slogan during the French Revolution. In the history of Norwegian trade unionism, the call for 'equality' has been a central part of the discourse. 'Equality' is a word with numerous positive connotations for most Norwegians. For indigenous leaders, however, the word is closely related to a particular discourse of governance that has sought to produce a more homogeneous body of subjects. Nationalist ideologies in most of Latin America continue to promote the 'powerful myth' that the country's citizens in reality are the product of a 'mestisaje' between indigenous peoples and Spaniards. Many indigenous leaders have come to see 'equality' as meaning 'integration', 'incorporation' and even 'annihilation as peoples'. Instead, they wished to build the application to Norhed around concepts such as 'diversity'. As the rector of Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi explained, they did not seek to become 'equal'. The university ('pluriversity') was built to ensure that indigenous peoples could remain different, thus helping safeguard continuing cultural diversity.

Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss has also pondered the relationship between socal justice and diversity. In 'The Deep Ecology Platform', co-penned with George Sessions in 1984, the first two points read:[6]

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth, intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.

For Næss, 'richness and diversity of life forms' includes diversity of human life forms. Yet, what appears to be 'diversity of social and cultural life forms' can prove to be cultural or social hierarchies. Elsewhere, Næss has argued for 'extreme caution towards any overall plans for the future, except those consistent with wide and widening classless diversity' (Naess 1973: 97). At the workshop held to write the Norhed application, Næss's warning that plans need to be consistent with 'widening classless diversity' provided the cultural translation I needed to understand the indigenous participants' scepticism about the equality discourse. Similarly, indigenous and communitarian universities in Abya Yala are sceptical about 'multiculturalism'. The 'multiculturalism' of Latin American cities, for instance, is understood as resulting from processes of inclusion, integration and incorporation that celebrate a superficial 'diversity' while diversity in fact is being reduced as minorities are forced to adapt to life under neoliberalism and the dominance of the Spanish language. Instead, to promote 'widening classless diversity', the indigenous and communitarian universities promote 'interculturalism' in much the same sense as Martha Nussbaum (1997) and Ali Rattansi (2011). According to Rattansi, interculturalism could be a more fruitful perspective than multiculturalism from which to view different ethnic groups co-existing in mutual understanding and civility. Nussbaum understands interculturalism as a recognition of common human needs across cultures as well as dissonance and critical dialogue within cultures. For the RUIICAY network of universities, 'interculturalism' signals a conscious effort to create dialogue between cultures free of deep-rooted power relationships and social/political hierarchies.

An indigenous feminism?

Concern about social and cultural hierarchies and discrimination against particular groups within indigenous cultures led me to ask the master's students to write essays on internal discrimination. I asked them to use the online learning platform established for the project to discuss discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. The assignment led to a very heated debate, but not for the reasons I had anticipated. In fact, the debate soon came to revolve around me as a foreign professor asking questions about internal discrimination.

The first to take issue with me was a very experienced and eloquent male student from an urban indigenous community. He posted a polite message that nevertheless managed to make it clear that the assignment was 'inappropriate' as long as 'the indigenous communities are involved in a battle to survive as peoples'. Others agreed. 'First things first'. However, a more helpful stream of posts quoted numerous internal documents and manifestos highlighting the struggle against gender discrimination. All the universities had plans and strategies to improve gender balance and to end discrimination based on gender, religion and ethnicity. It seemed that the debate was less about disagreement over the issue of discrimination than over disagreement about discussing these issues with an outsider such as me.

In hindsight, I realise that I had moved too fast, asking intimate questions before having managed to establish trust between the master's students and me as a foreign professor. Additionally, my way of formulating the question revealed that I had transferred concerns based on European experiences of how discrimination functions in Northern contexts to indigenous contexts without the cultural sensitivity needed. In fact, even those students who pointed me towards documents discussing discrimination (primarily) against women, were reluctant to accept my premise for the debate. Even self-proclaimed indigenous feminists made efforts to explain why discrimination in indigenous communities is not the same as the discrimination described by 'occidental feminism'. In keeping with the injunction made by Koch and Weingart, it seems that not even knowledge of discrimination can be transferred from the global North to the global South.

'Base Document for Cultivation and Nurture of Wisdom and Knowledge'

The five moments just described help explain why it was necessary to organise a series of workshops to formulate indigenous research methodologies and pedagogical philosophies. As Viveiros de Castro (2013) and Escobar (2018) remind us, indigenous worldviews are different from dominant (European and North American) ways of understanding the world. It would therefore be strange if indigenous and communitarian philosophies of science and research methodologies turned out to be mere copies of those found in the North.

The 'Base Document for Cultivation and Nurture of Wisdom and Knowledge' (CCRISAC) gives us a glimpse of what indigenous science could look like (Gutiérrez et al. 2018). First of all, it shows that indigenous and communitarian universities envisage the production of knowledge more as 'cultivation' and 'nurturing' than as 'dissection'. Knowledge 'grows' and 'flourishes'. CCRISAC intends to (re)construct a decolonised episteme that has the strength to 'wake up' wisdom, cultural expressions, knowledges and praxis. CCRISAC defines 'eight principles' for indigenous and communitarian research in order to avoid reductionism. The principle of *relationalism* holds that all the elements that make up Mother Earth are intimately related. The principle of *communality* promotes participatory processes where collective construction takes priority over the individual. The principle of *reciprocity* means that mutual sharing motivates construction and evaluation of knowledge and wisdom. The principle of *complementarity* implies the necessary presence and participation of the other. *Spirituality* is considered as the forms of relationship that help achieve physical, mental, emotional and spiritual balance and harmony between all persons and communities that make up Mother Earth. *Intraculturality and interculturality* is appreciated as the process of strengthening internal manifestations of the cultures and identities of all peoples. The principle of *bioethics* involves exteriorising love of life in order to live in harmony with Mother Earth. Finally, the principle of *flexibility* means embracing the permanent possibility of making use of all the 'different

ways' and the 'different ways of walking' as part of the cultivation and nurturing of knowledge and wisdom.

For a professor trained in Norway, the most thought-provoking moments of CCRISAC were those when spirits and spirituality were discussed as part of the research methodology. For instance, one of the first things a researcher is advised to do when investigating a particular issue in a community is to listen, feel and sense the community. This includes the spiritual level. Spirituality is accepted as one way of producing knowledge. As Skafish (2013) explains, it is the responsibility of the shamans to negotiate with the supernatural beings when balance and harmony has been broken. Collective knowledge produced by shamans and religious leaders is part of the tradition of indigenous knowledge the researcher is expected to use.

The great road of learning: A philosophy of pedagogy

The CCRISAC deals with the relationship between worldviews (*cosmovisión*) and research methodologies. The language of the text reveals how life as small farmers informs the ways in which indigenous and communitarian universities envisage that knowledge is produced. Knowledge will grow, flow and flourish if the researcher allows it to. The book *Kapak Ñan Pedagógico: Filosófico de la Pluriversidad 'Amawtay Wasi'*, meanwhile, sets out to explain the philosophy of the indigenous university as it has emerged from struggles to resist the obliteration of the peoples it serves (Sarango 2017). By doing so, the document places the university firmly within the ongoing social and political struggles of Ecuador:

> The arrogant, hegemonic and destructive (*avasallador*) system of education of the occident … has as its prime motive to maintain the world as a market and to extinguish culturally original peoples because we are an obstacle to achieving their goals … Now, the system lacks the moral authority to push through their goals. It is not a question of becoming more like them. We are already demonstrating that the nature of humanity is to be *distinct* … we come from a different matrix of civilization. We

> are only similar in the condition of being *humans*. Nothing more. (Sarango 2017: 16)

Within this framework, education is not necessarily a good thing: ' the occidental school is a perfect domesticating space for manipulation. It is where the deceiving death of cultural identity begins, the ethnocide of originary peoples' (2017: 16). Historically, higher education and science are seen as having played a pivotal role, together with the Catholic Church, as guardians of scientific truths. The current epoch, however, is dominated by the 'globalisation of capital' (2017: 20). Therefore, science and higher education have become 'responsible for producing efficient, effective and competitive products' thus '"quality" is measured in terms of mercantile parameters'. Universities are 'capitalism's most cherished creature used to impose its regime of truths' (2017: 23). The role of the pluriversity is no less than to help 'recuperate the feeling of belonging to a community'. Indigenous peoples need to 'change the system of economic, social and political organisation of society' and replace it with an alternative (2017: 29).

The *Kapak Ñan Pedagógico: Filosófico de la Pluriversidad 'Amawtay Wasi'* resonates with some 'occidental' perspectives on science. The *pluriversidad* itself sees similarities between 'action research' and the ways in which the *pluriversidad* envisages research and community. Some define action research as research initiated to solve an immediate problem or as a reflective process of progressive problem-solving led by individuals working in teams or as part of a 'community of practice' (Stringer 2007). It could also be seen as an example of the co-production of knowledge, in Jasanoff's sense of the concept.

From this framing of the role of higher education, the indigenous university describes how new elites emerged in the post-colonial states after independence to reproduce colonial exploitations internally. The new elites constructed new forms of identities, such as Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Colombians, and so on. That is, 'they planted a tree without roots' (Sarango 2017: 30). The elites used those newly created 'imagined communities' to 'de-indianize' indigenous peoples. However, as Sarango correctly notes, the elites could hardly have succeeded in 'de-indianizing' indigenous communities without the help of indigenous

teachers and other indigenous community leaders. It is not surprising, then, that the text reserves some fierce criticism for those within the indigenous communities who think and behave 'as if they were North Americans' (2017: 55). In many ways, Sarango echoes Franz Fanon when describing how 'shame' (of being indigenous) becomes a driving force in the homogenisation of cultures when people prefer not to speak their language outside the home (2017: 54).

The reader might be forgiven for thinking that this line of reasoning will lead to a collective form of what Gregory Smithers and Brooke Newman have dubbed 'stubborn and at times self-destructive isolationism' (Smithers and Newman 2014). However, this would be a misunderstanding. The *pluriversidad's* curriculum is remarkably outward looking, more so than at most European universities. Sarango (2017) describes the 'Chakana curriculum/Cycles to achieve intercultural learning'. The first three semesters are reserved for 'traditional knowledges' (*conocimiento originario*). The following three semesters are dedicated to 'occidental and other knowledges' (*shutak yachaykuna*). The most advanced stage, however, is the last four semesters, the cycle of 'the dialogue of knowledges' (*yachaykunapura*).

The three cycles of intercultural learning do not indicate a backward-looking project determined to preserve and conserve culture as it is imagined to have been, although concepts such as 'revitalisation', 'reawakening' and 're-enchantment' are in frequent use. Instead, the curricular design is geared towards reconquering at least some agency over rapid-paced changes currently affecting communal life. The eagerness to learn from outsiders is further demonstrated by the frequent citation of 'occidental' scholars such as Paolo Freire and José de Souza Silva.

Abya Yala is not Africa

I believe the experiences of working with indigenous and communitarian universities can inform debates about the possibility of 'knowledge transfer' and about development support for local education and research institutions on several levels. To begin with, because RUIICAY provides us with a case that would appear to be significantly different

from the experiences of projects in Africa or the Middle East. Based on the RUIICAY experience, I believe it is worth revisiting ideas of the 'post-colonial' or 'de-colonial'; the role of the state in emancipatory knowledge production; the use of concepts such as 'nation' and 'nation-state', and also to reconsider the often taken for granted role of education and higher education in improving well-being and *buen vivir*.

As the heading for this section states, Abya Yala is not Africa, an obvious difference being the fact that Latin American states gained independence from the European colonial powers some 150 years before most African states did. Existing literature on knowledge production, transfer of knowledge and indigenous knowledge in Africa emphasises historical colonial relations and new forms of colonial hegemonies when discussing 'local' knowledge production. Resolving the problematic relationship between the 'global North' and the sovereign African states is depicted as the key to building a critical mass of local knowledge. Indigenous scholars, meanwhile, are much more concerned with the state as a problem in itself. For them, the crucial issue is not North–South colonial relations but the internal colonial relations between dominating groups that use state institutions to further their own interests at the cost of indigenous peoples and other minorities.

Learning from indigenous peoples' struggles in Latin America could translate into a more critical attitude to the potentialities and limitations of state-centred thinking in higher education programmes such as Norhed, as well as thinking in academic research on knowledge production and knowledge transfer. So far, there is little evidence to suggest that most states in Africa, the Middle East or Latin America have been part of the solution if the problem is to construct education systems capable of supporting well-being, *buen vivir* or emancipation, as put forward by De Sousa Silva, Freire and Escobar.

I also believe the experience of the indigenous and communitarian universities should inspire both donor communities and researchers to reconsider the often cavalier use of concepts such as 'nation' and 'nation-state'. The modern idea of the 'nation-state' was born in a particular historical context (Europe and national struggles for independent states in the 1800s). Proponents claimed that each

'nation' had the right to an independent state. However, the so-called nation-states always consisted of more than one nation. Peoples such as the Sami rightfully felt excluded from the imagined community of the 'nation' in Scandinavian countries, for example, and were subjected to policies designed to minimise cultural diversity. As a concept, the 'nation-state' travels badly when used to analyse relationships between states and peoples and nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Instead, researchers and donor communities alike should be keenly aware of the historical fact that governments and states have employed the idea of the 'nation' (by creating an imagined community) to subjugate minorities. Formally, at least, most Latin American constitutions today accept the fact that their states are multinational. Nevertheless, donors and researchers continue to transfer concepts such as 'nation-state' uncritically from one historical context to another.

The final issue where I believe learning from indigenous and communitarian universities could enrich academic debates on higher education, is their deeply rooted sceptical attitude towards institutions of higher education and research. The experience of indigenous peoples reminds us that we cannot take for granted that higher education and research will play a positive role in human emancipation.

These issues are not limited to Latin America, of course. However, I would argue that the issues become more salient in the Latin American context because indigenous peoples in Abya Yala have succeeded in building autonomous institutions for higher education and research. These autonomous institutions provide us with what Koch and Weingart call 'a critical mass' of local experts capable of challenging knowledges 'transferred' from the outside and, in addition, construct alternative readings and narratives of history.

Becoming less certain of the knowledge we think we have

The purpose of this chapter has been to reflect on the experience of working with indigenous and communitarian universities in Abya Yala by 'looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author' (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000).

One issue has concerned me more than anything during the process: the role of spirits and spirituality in the research methodologies. As Skafish (2013: 15) explains, for indigenous peoples 'modern distinctions between nature and culture, animals and humans … are effectively inverted'. Trees, plants and animals can speak. Spirits and spirituality interconnect all the interrelated beings in the world.

I have referred earlier to Arne Næss and in particular to eco-philosophy as one 'occidental' perspective that could help non-indigenous researchers better understand indigenous philosophies. Næss was profoundly influenced by Baruch de Spinoza (1632–1677). However, it has rightly been said that Næss, while drawing heavily on Spinoza, quietly chose to ignore the important aspects of spirituality in Spinozism. Other eco-philosophers, meanwhile, such as George Sessions, see de-spiritualisation as a key problem:

> Western society has been diverted from the goal of spiritual freedom and autonomy … modern Western society has arrived at the opposite pole of anthropocentric 'absolute subjectivism' in which the entire non-human world is seen as a material resource to be consumed in the satisfaction of our egoistic passive desires. (Sessions 1977: 481)

In my case, I did find the re-spiritualisation of science challenging for reasons related to the history of the community where I was born (Volda). Drawing on Sheila Jasanoff's notion of science as 'co-produced', it is fair to say that modern science 'came to' and was 'co-produced' in my community by a group of young and radical journalists in the 1880s. With some higher education, they set out to publish new radical ideas of the time in the local newspaper *Vestmannen*. Radical ideas inspired by Darwin, Marx and Kropotkin were met with fierce resistance from the clergy as well as those speaking with the authority of 'traditional knowledge'. Rereading the newspaper some 130 years later, it becomes clear that 'co-production' of scientific knowledge happened through numerous struggles over issues such as what to include in the curricula at local schools: science or religion; Darwin or the Bible? Another contentious issue was the introduction of

new scientific methods in farming that embraced animal welfare in the pursuit of improving the well-being of animals. New methods emanating from newly established institutions for research and education collided with traditional knowledges and local (indigenous?) ways of doing things.

Those young, radical journalists were my idols while I was growing up. I still sympathise with their belief in an emancipatory science building on the 'radical humanist message of the Enlightenment' (Chomsky 2014). In the social and political context of the time and place, turning to 'scientific methods' originating from the natural sciences of the day was an appropriate answer to challenges and difficulties the community had to meet. However, it did lead the young radicals into conflict with tradition, the clergy, the elders of the community and with traditional knowledge.

My concern over issues such as spirituality has diminished considerably over time. As Luis Fernando Sarango, rector of Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi has explained on numerous occasions, indigenous people's knowledges are characterised by a great deal of pragmatism, as illustrated by the principle of flexibility documented in CCRISAC. 'Flexibility' embraces the permanent possibility of using all the 'different ways' and all the 'different ways of walking' as part of the cultivation and nurturing of knowledge and wisdom. Additionally, Sarango assures me, the end goal is not agreement, but preserving the greatest classless diversity possible.

What would be the benefit, then, of scientific co-operation, if not to find an answer all could agree on? As the CCRISAC document eloquently argues, it is impossible to understand and respond to most problems that affect local communities today without communication on a global scale (RUIICAY 2014). Mutual understanding across borders and cultures is essential. Indigenous peoples have become important actors in international communication and negotiation on issues of global reach, such as global warming. However, attempts at mutual understanding on issues such as global warming will be fruitless unless everyone involved makes an effort to understand, for instance, indigenous people's worldviews and knowledges.

Also, as Baggini (2018: 4), rightfully says, 'we cannot understand ourselves if we do not understand others'.

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Notes

1 See https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf
2 Indigenous name for Latin America.
3 CRIC, *Programa Educación*, http://www.cric-colombia.org/portal/proyecto-cultural/programa-educacion/
4 For a description of the conference and call for proposals, see https://cartagena2017.iamcr.org/static/pre-conferences/minga-of-thought/
5 See https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/about/
6 See http://www.deepecology.org/platform.htm

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