

INDIGENIST METHOD: Doing Theological Research with the Indigenous Peoples

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Abstract: This paper proposes an indigenist research methodology that interfaces the indigenous and western knowledges but prioritizes the former in knowledge production promoting the self-representation of the indigenous peoples in their communities. Documents on the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) fully support the indigenous peoples in their right to self-determination and self-representation. Instead of helping the indigenous peoples recover from colonization, scholars using western methodological and theoretical frameworks reinforce the re-colonization in their cognitive paradigms. As the indigenous communities reclaim their rights to self-determination and self-representation, scholars are challenged to relearn from the indigenous peoples in their communities and to devise methodologies that represent the indigenous peoples in their scholarship and publication. To execute this research, theologians ought to engage into reflexivity as they face the indigenous peoples and to involve into teamwork collaborations with them and their spokespersons. They should work together to rescue the indigenous worldviews and reassert their contributions in knowledge production.

Keywords: Indigenism, Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonial Theory, Research Method, Theologians

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1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been envisioned by the United Nations to address urgent needs of the people across the globe and to transform the world toward comprehensive development. Hopefully, these goals would alleviate sufferings and uplift the conditions of poor peoples and under-developed nations. The goals promise that no one should be left alone in this development. The indigenous peoples will then benefit from these goals since historically, they are the most vulnerable and in need of serious considerations. Within the framework of the SDGs, the indigenous peoples are not merely treated as passive recipients of programs from various agencies, but they are seen as agents of SDGs. The indigenous livelihood practices, traditional knowledges and cultural lives are fundamental in addressing their plights.¹

We can consider the SDGs as the concretion of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that affirms the equality of the indigenous peoples with the rest of the global population, recognizes the diversities of these peoples and respects their differences. These rights include equality and freedom of the indigenous peoples, not be subjected to the destruction of their aboriginal cultures and assimilation of their societies to the mainstream societies. Specifically, the indigenous peoples can sustain their histories, languages, traditions, philosophies, alphabets and literatures. To realize these aspirations, the indigenous peoples have the right to participate in deliberations through their chosen representatives of their communities. In that way, they are assured that their interests are represented, protected, and developed by themselves. To a certain

¹There are over 370 million indigenous peoples worldwide that constitute five per cent of the world population, making up 15 per cent of the world's impoverished sectors that have historically suffered from grave injustices. Although there have been programs in the eradication of poverty, the indigenous peoples remain the poorest. See, International Labor Organization, "Sustainable Development Goals: Indigenous Peoples in Focus."

extent, the SDGs have strengthened and implemented these aspirations.

After the SDGs were adopted in 2015, the UN Statistics notes that in order to address the SDGs, there should be improved data gathering for monitoring and accounting. Though many development indicators have been devised to measure the progress of the SDGs, they are applied universally to all peoples regardless of their conditions. In effect, they hide the comparative differences of the indigenous peoples and only provide partial views about their situations. The problem lies in the deployment of narrow frame of development using western paradigm of conceptualizations and measurements. The policies or programs cannot, therefore, appropriately respond to their needs for sustainable development because the indicators are erroneous.

This narrow frame produces what Sally Engle Merry calls "knowledge effect" and "governance effect" (Merry, 84). The knowledge effect occurs through framing the concepts and indicators by labelling and reducing the phenomenon (Yap and Watene). By quantifying the indicators without contextualizing, the phenomenon suffers from misrepresentation or underrepresentation. This knowledge effect is linked with governance effect. This government effect is located in the broader spectrum of power relations in connection with historical colonization by the imperial power and continuing re-colonization by the mainstream majority. To overcome this adverse effect, indigenous peoples should continue their ongoing struggles for autonomy and the right to representation that advances their interests and realities using their perspectives and worldviews. They would then contribute to this knowledge production for sustainable development.

2. Research Methodology

Dominantly, research is viewed from a binary logic between the researcher and the researched, the knower and the known, the subject and the object. This binary logic does not only oppose or separate the pairs but also hierarchizes or arranges them into superiority and the inferiority. In this relationship, the superior

researcher controls the inferior researched. In effect, the researchers alienate themselves from the researched through objectification. The researcher represents the researched and reflects the realities of the researched. This binary logic has been applied in the study of the indigenous peoples who have been intellectually excluded and academically muted from scholarship by western and western-trained scholars. With the rise of indigenous studies and researches, we can rectify this historical injustice (Coates, 12).²

The indigenist methodology is constructed by indigenous scholars applying indigenist methodology and combined with postcolonial discourses. Postcolonial theories strive for decolonizing strategies so that the experiences and interests of the indigenous peoples will be asserted and affirmed. There are thriving theological discourses already using postcolonial theories and benefitting from postcolonial insights. There are also indigenous scholars who are using postcolonial discourses and are applying them in their researches. This paper focuses on research methodology and not necessarily on theory, though methodology falls also under the rubrics of theory since it is a theory on methods.

Many contemporary theological researches use the phrase 'doing theology' to imply that theology involves action, if not an actual action, it is, at least, summon to action. Thus, theological research also beckons for application and shifts of cognitive paradigm on research methodology. Theologians need to be conscious of their praxis of doing theology. As Gustavo Gutierrez observes theology is a reflection on praxis (xi-xix). Thus, practice is a necessary prerequisite to relevant theology. Ideally, theology should simultaneously combine practice and theory in the field, not just in scholarship. The assumption is that the action or practice should be informed or supported by theory so that it is grounded on a firm foundation because it calls for a commitment

²Scholars use the words 'indigenous', 'tribal' and 'ethnic' groups or 'minorities' as labels for these marginalized groups interchangeably since they overlap in their applications. Scholars are advised to use the word that is practical in their own fields or works.

or advocacy. However, reflexivity is not enough in this endeavour. Theologians need to connect with and learn from the indigenous community and practitioners in the field. They can be criticized but enriched by these conversations and exchangers. In that way, theologians can overcome the solipsistic scholarship. Basically, indigenist research follows the three fundamental and consistent principles, namely, emancipatory resistance, political integrity, and the indigenous privilege in doing research with the indigenous communities (Rigney). Moreover, it also adopts the four ethical principles spelled or laid by indigenous researchers such as respect, responsibility, reverence and reciprocity in doing research with indigenous peoples (Kirkness and Barnhardt)

3. Historical Background

The oldest disciplines – Philosophy and Theology – have focused more on content of the disciplines rather than on their respective methodologies and techniques. These scholars were concerned more with the logic of reason and purity of doctrine. Philosophy provided the mediation in the explications of doctrines. The logic in philosophy guided them in the search for the truth of revelation and in defence of faith. In fact, they considered philosophy as a prerequisite for theology (*ancilla theologiae*). That mediation would ensure the attainment of orthodoxy. They relied on the classics in philosophy and the scriptures in theology as their sources of knowledge and faith.

In the modern period, with the scientific revolution, there is a shift from a reliance on authorities and traditions to the rigor of empirical observations and experiments. The authorities and traditions in philosophy and theology were replaced by experts in the fields and specialists in the sciences. In a way, religion was superseded by science and scientific methods in the academia. In the beginning, there was an open resistance from the church authorities against science because it posed danger to the doctrines but this resistance waned and eventually the church expertise was restricted to faith and morals. Science has ascended to the pinnacle of experimental knowledge.

This scientific revolution has impacted on philosophy and theology. Generally, philosophy has embarked into methodological questions and reflected on human experiences. For example, the phenomenological movements focus on the question of experience. Phenomenology proposes a methodological attempt to study human experience. Theology takes that phenomenological contribution that includes human experiences into the *locus theologicus*. God communicates in our human experience just like in the biblical times where God revealed himself to the experience of his people. The sources of theology are no longer restricted to tradition and scripture, but also extended to human experience. Moreover, hermeneutic philosophy also impacts on theology. The Gadamerian hermeneutics focuses on interpretation of text by incorporating human pre-judgements as a way of understanding and the fusion of horizons in interpreting the world of the text. Thus, biblical theology has used hermeneutics to interpret the scriptures as a historical work. These related movements – phenomenology and hermeneutics – have highlighted human experiences and biblical text in theological scholarship.

Liberation theology has relied on the *loci theologi* of human experience and biblical text in their reflection on human suffering and prevailing injustice in society. They have used both Marxism in reading the situation of the poor and have related biblical passages on the Reign of God (Miranda). The prophets denounced the abuses of the rich and the powerful against the poor- orphans, widows and strangers. Jesus denounced the abuses of the rich and powerful against the poor – the ordinary people – and proclaimed the coming of the Reign of God. Thus, liberation theology uses the methodological model of the dual optics or lens in a dialectical relationship between human experience and the biblical text in justifying their struggles against poverty and injustice. Liberation theologies have recovered or reclaimed the historical Jesus who proclaimed the Reign of God (Segundo).

Feminist theology has, however, criticized liberation theology on the problem posed by human experience and biblical text

(Lacugna). Feminists have hurled their reservation on human experience as it is not neutral or innocent and complained on the dearth of women characters and sexist representations due to the prevailing patriarchy in the biblical world. Thus, feminists question the assumption of human experience as heavily masculine and the subservience of women to men. The general absence and silence of women whether it be in human experience and biblical text renders women on the disadvantaged position. Elizabeth Shussler Fiorenza tried to reclaim and reaffirm women in the biblical world and Rosemary Radford Ruether to reimagine and retell the contribution of women in the world. Here the strategy is to augment and magnify the biblical data and invent alternative way to hear the voices and to write the words of women in society.

4. Indigenous Peoples and Communities

Definition is a controversial and a political act for the indigenous peoples.³ There is a difficulty in defining them because as it includes some indigenous peoples, it also excludes other indigenous peoples since there are different situations of these peoples across different states. The definition cannot capture the complexities of their differences. Nonetheless, we take two definitions as cited by the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. From a historical perspective,

Indigenous communities [...] are those which, having historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form as non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to

³In the representation of the western imaginary, the indigenous peoples were described as savages (people living in forests) as opposed to civilized to refer to the west. Savagery is a negation of civilization, lacking in clothes, manners and settlements, education and other institutions (Samson and Gigoux, 58-59).

preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system ("Introduction," 4).

From a sociological perspective,

The focus should be on more recent approaches focusing on self-definition as indigenous and distinctly different from other groups within a state; on a special attachment to and use of their traditional land, whereby ancestral land and territory has a fundamental importance for their collective physical and cultural survival as peoples; on an experience of subjugation, marginalization, dispossession, exclusion or discrimination because these peoples have different cultures, ways of life or modes of production that the national hegemonic and dominant model ("Introduction," 6).

The historical perspective focuses on the historical continuity beginning with the pre-conquest period up to the present. The indigenous peoples survive the colonial period and continue to exist as a community and preserve their culture in their respective territories. The sociological perspective highlights the self-definition and self-identification of the indigenous peoples. They sustain their sense of belonging to their community and preserve their distinct identities from the rest. The historical and sociological definitions diverge on their focus: the historical perspective underlines their continuity, that is, their history marks their identity, while the sociological perspective underscores social belonging, that is, their community confers identity on them. Both historical and sociological perspectives converge on the importance of ancestral land and the history of their subjugation and marginalization within the state. Even in post-colonial times, the indigenous peoples remain marginalized and even excluded from the mainstream of power.

Generally, the western construction of self-identity is different from or even opposed to the indigenous construction. Western identity focuses on the individual as the bearer of self-identity and the nation-state confers identity to self-identity while the

indigenous peoples emphasize on their special relationship with the communities and the lands. "In western representation, individualization and racialization of indigenous identities are built upon ideological frameworks that accompanied colonial processes." (Samson and Gigoux, 58-59).

The indigenous peoples usually live in the upland and dwell in the forest. They are characterized as having "strong emphasis on kinship and clan structures and ethnicity bonds and a strong sense of identity as well as the higher position of women in these societies." Having been colonized, they are "subject to the overlordship of state systems" and "largely remained outside of these states." In their livelihood, they have been "carrying on a combination of swidden and terraced agriculture along with the gathering of forest products" (Nathan and Kelkar, 16). They are engaged in farming and food gathering. There is a high incidence of poverty among them and a higher proportion of morbidity and mortality among women. They are displaced by development projects such as dams and deprived of revenues extracted from their resources like mining. Although their region is rich with natural resources, they are disadvantaged and impoverished by the expansionist and colonizing development of the states. Thus, "they are vulnerable to both market and natural shocks and so they deserve special attention for their food security and livelihood program" (Nathan and Kelkar, 18).

Scholars have viewed the situation of the indigenous cultures into two lines of thought. Some are pessimistic arguing on the looming death of the indigenous cultures, while others are optimistic asserting that the indigenous cultures continue to live on despite the devastation wrought by the intrusions of the outsiders into their communities. We know that the indigenous cultures still survive despite this grim prognosis and the communities are struggling to hurdle this onslaught. They have bonded together and fought for their rights and freedoms. They have sought support from local and international organizations so that they can fortify their position and advance their interest. In all these times, "The indigenous peoples have demonstrated their resilience, determination and creativity" (Coates, 23-24). Like all

human societies, indigenous peoples “will adapt to new realities. Some changes will be incorporated voluntarily; others will continue to be imposed on them. The resulting societies will be indigenous and aboriginal, but they will not be precisely the same as those that first emerged in their traditional lands” (Coates, 266).

The poverty of the indigenous communities is often traced to and blamed on the economic models of development that states have imposed on them. The states employ a modernist model of development that produces goods and accelerates mass production. This model produces surplus supply beyond the demand of their domestic markets and exports the surplus to international markets. Thus, the states can increase its profits at the expense of both people and planet. Contrary to this development model, the indigenous communities have historically been based on a sustainable approach to development by protecting land use and conserving their natural resources. Thus, “the subsistence societies of the indigenous communities live within ecological constraints, while the surplus economy alters the ecological resources, asserting human primacy over the rest of the ecology” (Coates 268-269).

The indigenous peoples have been praised for their ecological consciousness and their communal solidarity. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis considers the indigenous peoples as partners and not objects deserving our outmost respect.

In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture (146).

Moreover, Pope Francis in *Querida Amazonia* defended the indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and prior consent on land use calling their violation "injustice and crime."

The businesses, national or international, which harms the Amazon and fail to respect the right of the original peoples to the land and its boundaries, and to self-determination and prior consent, should be called for what they are: *injustice and crime*. When certain businesses out for quick profit appropriate lands and end up privatizing even potable water, or when local authorities give free access to the timber companies, mining or oil projects, and other businesses that raze the forests and pollute the environment, economic relationships are unduly altered and become an instrument of death. They frequently resort to utterly unethical means such as penalizing protests and even taking the lives of indigenous peoples who oppose projects, intentionally setting forest fires, and suborning politicians and the indigenous people themselves. All this accompanied by grave violations of human rights and new forms of slavery affecting women in particular, the scourge of drug trafficking used as a way of subjecting the indigenous peoples, or human trafficking that exploits those expelled from their cultural context. We cannot allow globalization to become 'a new version of colonialism' (14).

5. Prerequisite in Doing Research

In 2009, the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues admitted:

Indigenous peoples' concerns have not always been represented at the United Nations and, for the first decades of existence of the Organization, their voices were not heard there. This has slowly changed and the United Nations system has, in recent years, taken number of steps to atone for past oversights, increasingly building partnerships with indigenous peoples ("Introduction" 1).

After eleven years, in 2020, *Querida Amazonia* Pope Francis wrote: During the Synod, I listened to the presentations and read them with interest the reports of the discussion groups. In this

Exhortation, I wish to offer my own response to this process of dialogue and discernment [...]. At the same time, would like to officially present the Final Document, which sets forth the conclusions of the Synod, which profited from the participation of many people who know better than myself or the Roman Curia the problems and issues of the Amazon Region, since they live there, they experience its suffering and they love it passionately [...] 2 and 3).

Both the Secretariat and the Pope point to the necessity of one thing: Listen to the voices of the indigenous peoples and to the people who live with them. The Secretariat has acknowledged with regrets the non-representation or invisibility of the indigenous peoples in the United Nations. The Secretariat has also recognized the struggles of the indigenous peoples in pushing for their agenda in the United Nations. The Pope humbly listens to the discussions and read the reports of the participants in the Pan-Amazonian Synod at the Vatican. He has acknowledged his limitations and even the Roman Curia in dealing with the issues of the Amazon. He does not invoke his infallibility or universality but his finitude and inadequacy. By listening to the participants and reading the reports, he has discovered the complexity and the range of the indigenous peoples' problems in the Amazon.

In a face to face encounter, the communication between groups of speakers and listeners is, in one level, spontaneous and immediate. The spokespersons of the indigenous people speak and the Secretariat of the United Nations or the Pope during the Synod listen to them. However, in another level, the listeners also register and interpret the speech or message of the spokespersons. In effect, there is no one to one correspondence between the speakers and listeners because the message is filtered into the mindset or, if there is a disturbance, the message is misread or misunderstood by the listeners. In these instances, the listeners should clarify the points to the speakers. The rule remains that the starting point should always consider the sides of the indigenous peoples.

In this communication, there are interpretative action going on among the participants. The spokespersons interpret the

experiences of the indigenous peoples and relay them to the audience. These experiences of the indigenous peoples are interpretative actions constructed by the indigenous peoples themselves or by their spokespersons. The messages or speeches are inevitably registered and interpreted by the listeners. As representatives, the spokesperson as a starting point, begins with the indigenous peoples' experiences or situations on the ground. The listeners as audience should be attentive and careful on the speeches and messages coming from the spokespersons. Faithful to the indigenous peoples, the spokespersons merely act as representatives, not to arrogate the privilege and right to substitute for them. Being open-minded, the listeners remain open to the alterity of the other, that is, the indigenous peoples remain an incommensurable narrative.

Here, we encounter the problem of representation. Representation can mean to replace someone else or to stand in for another. Spokespersons (both the activists and the researchers) are chosen to stand in for the indigenous peoples. In this sense, they cannot arrogate to themselves the right to take the place of the indigenous peoples; they can only claim the right to stand in for them by virtue of their knowledge and expertise on the situations of the indigenous peoples. However, they need to always connect or carefully listen to the indigenous peoples. Borrowing from the argument of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the indigenous peoples cannot speak because they cannot directly and purely represent themselves; they are instead being represented by their spokespersons. Moreover, even if they can speak, the indigenous peoples are not heard. Taking the cue from J. Maggio, the indigenous peoples cannot be heard because they speak different worldviews that the rest fails to register in their paradigm. Thus, both Spivak and Maggio call for translation that would render the worldview or language of the indigenous peoples intelligible for the rest. They can only speak and be heard once their language is faithfully translated.

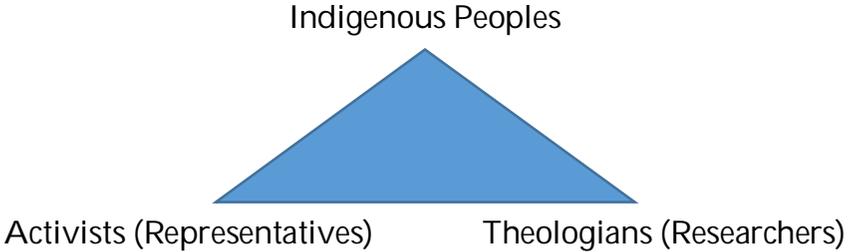
6. Doing Research among Indigenous Peoples

Taking the models of the Secretariat and the Pope, the non-indigenous and the non-resident people have no privilege to take the place of the indigenous peoples. They cannot assume the role of ventriloquism in their behalf. They have to learn from the indigenous peoples themselves or from the experiences of people living with them. Thus, for theologians, the necessity of personal encounter and actual experience with the indigenous peoples is a prerequisite for doing theology. In doing research among the indigenous peoples, theologians as researchers ought to familiarize themselves with the situations of the indigenous communities in the area. However, the researchers cannot just go straight to the indigenous communities; they need mediators to contact the local government, especially the local or indigenous leader. The researchers also should know the People's Organizations (POs) in the area or the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working with them. They have to communicate with their leaders as resource persons of the community.

The theologians ought to listen to the leaders and workers of their organizations because they know better the situations or conditions of the indigenous peoples for the simple reason that they live with them and they are conversant with their issues. They ought to listen to them so that they can be oriented and acquainted with the indigenous peoples. They should be open-minded to the 'new world' or the 'uncharted terrain' of the indigenous peoples and not immediately impose their prejudices or frameworks on them.⁴ Moreover, they should not consider their orientation and familiarization as the final and ultimate arbiter about the indigenous peoples. They should go and visit the indigenous peoples in their regions to feel their conditions so that they become accustomed with their lives. Listening both to the indigenous peoples and their representatives provide

⁴There are available ethnographic researches and reflexive methods in doing research with the community in the fields, especially in anthropology and sociology. Reflectivity has been theorized in sociological theology and employed by anthropology.

theologians better pictures of the conditions of the indigenous communities. There is no substitute for actual experience and encounter with the people in their real-life situations. The indigenous peoples remain to be the sources of knowledge. We can consider the spokespersons of the POs and the NGOs as activists since they advocate social change among the indigenous peoples. We can then illustrate the interaction in a triadic way.



This triad among indigenous peoples, activists and theologians describes their continuous interactions and team workings. They can be considered as discursive community combining knowledge and praxis together. The indigenous peoples remain the privileged source of knowledge. There may be differences among them in their perspectives and criticisms of their situations. These divergences should be factored in and reflected on by the community and facilitated by the activists and researchers. Their leaders, representatives and the theologians forge their commitment and dedication to the welfare of the indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples are elevated in the triangle because they assume the privilege and right to claim their knowledge. The activists and theologians should be grounded in the lives of the indigenous peoples and commit themselves to their struggles and advocacy.

The research and activism have different activities undertaken by different people employing different tools for different goals. The researchers organize the indigenous knowledge using relevant method and theory in framing their experiences in scholarship, while the activists advocate the agenda of the indigenous peoples by organizing the indigenous communities and protesting for social change. While activists assert claims to traditional indigenous knowledge, the work of the researcher is to

articulate the worldview of the indigenous peoples in the educational system that denies the existence of their knowledge or devalues their worldview. Nonetheless, the issue of indigenous knowledge is pivotal for the work of both activists and researchers. The battleground has been the indigenous knowledge in the arena of academic scholarships as well as political actions. The researchers have to train prospective researchers from the indigenous communities who can do researches on indigenous knowledge and soon they can do independent researches trusting on their own skills and capabilities. The activists have to organize the indigenous peoples for their survival and their agenda. Thus both researchers and activists have to forge their actions in protecting the indigenous peoples. Researchers have to protect, defend, expand, apply, and pass indigenous knowledge on others in the field as well as in scholarship. Thus, “[...] getting the story right and telling the story well are tasks that indigenous activists and researchers must both perform” (Smith 226).

These triadic actors in a group are engaged in hermeneutic enterprise. The indigenous peoples interpret their experiences in the community, the activists are also interpreting their situations planning for social change and theologians also interpret their conditions articulating their worldviews. Thus, we have a series of simultaneous and diverse interpretative actions of various actors. There is then not just double hermeneutic but in fact, triple hermeneutic going on among them. These actors may never arrive at a concentric understanding but at least they may intersect at some points of understanding. There is a necessity for an ongoing conversation among them as a check and balance, as a justification and criticism in the production of knowledge. The indigenous people ought to validate the knowledge produced by the theologians and should be consulted by the activists for actions. Again, the status of the indigenous communities remains the privileged source of knowledge.

Although we recognize these series of interpretative actions among actors, we do not imply that these actions are walled and enclosed. There is rather an intersection among the actors in that interaction and interpretation. The activists and scholars intersect

with their affinity with the indigenous peoples. There is a common organizing advocacy in different arenas in the academes, streets, and communities. The actors intersect along different points such as the welfare of the indigenous peoples. The lines connect at certain points and also create spaces among them. Spaces created by these intersecting lines are sites of freedom and resistance. The actors may agree in some points, but they may also disagree on several points with regard to different issues raised in the discussions. In those instances, the actors are free to express themselves openly and honestly and the disagreements should provide rooms for further reflections and exchanges. These lines that intersect at some points create and are created by unstable, arbitrary, and intense conditions (Cordova and Knech). There will never be a point of equilibrium and stagnation. These disagreements are opportune times for further studies and reflections. The common point converges on the commitment to social justice, on changing the conditions and relations that exists in society as they create cultures and identities in the community. "In its broadest sense, struggle is simply what life feels when people are trying to survive in the margins, to seek freedom and better conditions, to seek social justice" (Smith 199).

Indigenous researchers ought to encourage the participation of the indigenous peoples by allowing them to narrate their stories and by listening to them. These stories are valued by the communities because they encapsulate and articulate the lifeworld and worldview of the indigenous peoples. Researchers devise storytelling as the way of gathering data from the indigenous peoples. "In this story research process the researcher must listen to indigenous people's stories with respect, develop story relationships in a responsible manner, treat story knowledge with reverence and strengthen storied impact through reciprocity" (Xiiem, Lee-Morgan, and Santolo 2). Researchers' role is to listen to these stories attentively and write them down faithfully. They analyse these stories by connecting them with their bigger contexts. "The meaning-making process continues when researcher searches for ideas, seeking an interrelated understanding of historical, political, cultural, social or other

contextual impacts upon indigenous peoples, their stories and their communities” (Xiiem, Lee-Morgan, and Santolo, 4).

Moreover, the indigenous peoples need to be consulted and respected with regard to the interpretations of their lives. Since they have been silenced by the states and authorities, they should be given enough space and priority in voicing and naming their experiences or situations. The activists and theologians should listen to their experiences so that they can articulate their repressed or suppressed voices and words in the academe and in advocacy. The activists and the theologians should facilitate the recovery of their subjugated knowledge and accompany them in their advocacy to social justice (Smith 198). For the theologians, they need to seek feedbacks from the indigenous peoples with regard to the framing of their lives.

7. Hybridist and Indigenist Positions

Postcolonial scholars are influenced by Homi Bhabha’s work on hybridity, in which two knowledges derived from the local and western knowledges are considered. Just like Bhabha who was brought up in a predominantly Hindu culture and educated in a western Anglophone culture, two cultures are accessible to the person being socialized in both. Postcolonial scholars experience living in two simultaneous worlds, the native place and the western society. These two knowledges create a space between them. This (third) space is a creative site for the researchers that produce new knowledge.

Indigenous scholars influenced by Linda Tihwai Smith deploy the indigenist methodology. This methodology recognizes two sources of knowledges – one from a dominant western knowledge from the university and the other, the marginalized local knowledge of the indigenous peoples. The indigenous scholars choose the priority of local knowledge of the indigenous peoples. Since they have been marginalized or excluded in the production of knowledge, the indigenous scholars must exercise their agency in advancing the interest of the indigenous peoples.

In this indigenism, we can use western scientific methods but we start with the indigenous peoples. We can then employ the

western methods as long as they are useful for the indigenous research. We can still subject these western methods into refutation or interrogation from the lens of the indigenous knowledge. We learn in the process of using and questioning these western methods (Ryder, Tamara Mackean, et al). Considering the asymmetry between indigenous and western knowledges, scholars should prioritize the indigenous knowledge. If hybridity implies creativity between two knowledges, indigenism implies priority of the indigenous knowledge and so western knowledge is only supportive and secondary.

Indigenist scholars work as a team of researchers. They have to recruit and train prospective indigenous researchers and encourage their participations. They need to grapple on developing culturally sensitive research and applying to their experiences. The relationship should not be the binary division between teaching and learning, but both of them must teach one another and learn from one another. In that way, there is a mutual relationship. Thus, research must involve the indigenous peoples as individuals and communities in all levels of the research process so that they can contribute their knowledge in making difference in the outcome of the research. Indigenous research breaks the walls that divides the researchers and the researched because the researched become the researchers themselves. When indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed and enriched. Topics are thought differently, procedures are chosen differently, questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, and people participate actively (Smith, 196-207).

Moreover, the non-indigenous researchers can join and collaborate with the indigenous researchers by recognizing their capacity and affirming their skills in doing research. They have to be aware of their own identities, their cultures, the contradictions and ambivalence in their lives, in their works, and their relationships. That reflexive engagement should be coupled with cross-dialogue providing critical focus on their world (Exley, Whatman, and Singh). They need to unlearn their traditional

privilege as masters and experts of the research process and field. They ought to journey with the indigenous peoples and enter into their experiences. The process is slow because it demands patience and humility. In that way, the indigenous peoples are empowered because they can do research among themselves and feel that their knowledge is valuable. Empowerment means that indigenous people should regain their lives and reclaim their experiences in the way they represent themselves and struggle for self-determination. Indigenist research should take up the challenge of emancipatory struggles from all exclusionary actions of the dominant western knowledge and expansionist state.

Even if both the activists and the scholars work with the indigenous peoples, they cannot claim to equate themselves with them. The indigenous peoples remain the privileged sources of knowledge. They cannot immediately represent them because they still need to enter into their world and learn from them. There remains a difference between them in various ways. Thus, there is a need for ongoing dialogue among them, not to flatten these differences, but to encourage them to express themselves and understand them in their own terms. The activists and scholars always need to update themselves and revise their knowledge so that they are not congealed and sedimented. We have to note that indigenous knowledge predates and precedes the activists or scholars' knowledge. They should learn from the lead of indigenist researchers. Indigenist researchers or scholars are doing a decolonizing strategy that reclaim and reassert their knowledge. "Decolonization... does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of a theory or research or western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and worldviews and then to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our purposes" (Smith, 39).

Thus, indigenist research as a decolonizing strategy undoes the colonial knowledge through a double gesture. First, the indigenous knowledge is moved to the centre. The method and theory are viewed from that perspective. This act is a political move because there is a struggle of power that reverses the asymmetric position between the indigenous and western

knowledges. However, the move does not end with reversal. Second, we need reject western knowledge but to view it as one among many available knowledges. Thus, indigenist research focuses on the standpoint of the indigenous peoples in terms of their questions and objectives. When the marginal indigenous knowledge vacates its previous position and moves to the centre, the indigenous knowledge takes the centre stage and realizes the unjust relationship. The indigenous knowledge is seen as being pushed by the western knowledge to the margin by colonizing force and through a political strategy. The indigenous scholars disrupt that asymmetry and reposition their knowledge. To reverse the hierarchy is only to reinstall the logic of domination, but to view it as one among many knowledges is to democratize knowledges and to provide space for the indigenous knowledge (Exley and Whatman).

7. Implications on Theology

Liberation theology has used the theoretical underpinnings of the margin and the poor. However, this theology is still wanting for a collaborative research because theologians are used to being in a solitary research or, if they are in a group, they are outsiders to the situations. Theologians are experts in theology but they are still amateurs in indigenist research methodology. Theologians have used library researches and hermeneutic methods in demonstrating their scholarships and in publications.⁵ Comparatively, sciences in both the natural and the social disciplines have progressed along this methodological requirement. They concretize the abstract and general

⁵Usually, the methodological part in a thesis or dissertation is short and shallow because it only focuses on documentary, doctrinal, analytic and hermeneutic methods, to name a few, which is usually done in libraries. If ever theologians go into the field, they are only occasional or intermittent visitors in the place as part of exposure or immersion programs. Nonetheless, these methods remain in abstraction and generality as in systematic theology. They are still done dominantly in a documentary and textual manner.

philosophical methodologies and apply them in various fields and experiments.

Theologians should learn to do qualitative researches that combine empirical data and theoretical reflection on those data. Theologizing must blend a data-grounded and reflection-based researches giving it flesh and bone, details and nuances. Theology must be situated in the field and with the people on the ground. Moreover, theologians must learn to do research as a team work done in the fields outside the comforts of the libraries and beyond occasional visits to the indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples must speak and theologians must heed them. Theologians are challenged to represent the indigenous peoples by standing in with their sides and to translate their worldviews in intelligible manner. Theologians as field researchers witnessing the social injustice and debilitating poverty of the indigenous peoples can have impacts on their own relationships, identities, perspectives, and lifestyles. They should side with the right and dignity of the indigenous peoples. "Speaking for and speaking about can land a researcher in considerable trouble, being named as leftist researchers or native sympathizers is likewise a risk that is carried even in societies that value freedom of speech and of academic discovery" (Smith, 198). Theologians should learn from the scholars from indigenous communities, "developing a body of literature that incorporates transcultural methodologies and indigenous knowledge" (Coates, 19). Theologians must learn from those in the fields that "participation in struggle can and often does come first before a raised consciousness" (Smith, 199).

8. Conclusion

We can link the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the phrase: There is no sustainable development without the participation of the indigenous peoples. The Indigenous peoples have always been historically and politically neglected in the concern of human development. The indigenous peoples belong and live in this world and so deserve our attention and our commitment to their plight. In this paper,

we have highlighted the importance of self-representation of the indigenous peoples as part of their struggle for self-determination. Since they have not represented themselves in scholarship and in publication, they have always been represented by western scholars or western-trained scholars using their preferred methods and theories in framing these peoples. In effect their faces have been hidden and their voices have been muted by western scholarship and publication. With the indigenist methodology, they can finally take the centre stage in advancing their self-determination.

This paper contributes to the possibility of representation of the indigenous peoples by using indigenists methodology that prioritizes the knowledge of the indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples occupy the centre of this research in the production of knowledge. Western knowledge cannot claim universality and priority and should be localized or provincialized. Indigenist methodology enters into a teamwork among actors – the indigenous peoples, their representatives and the researchers. Both the representatives and the scholars work for the welfare of the indigenous peoples. In particular, scholars should train and involve indigenous researchers to be faithful and reliable in the production of indigenous worldviews.

Meaningful dialogue is not limited to speaking and listening to words of indigenous peoples, but visiting the indigenous communities for better interaction and relationship. When we dialogue, we bring our assumptions into the picture and subject our assumptions to critical interrogations by listening attentively, feeling sensitively and observing carefully the words, emotions, and gestures of indigenous peoples living in their contexts or situations. Dialogue demands sharing of words among participants so that we can mutually enter into the worlds of each other. Moreover, we also enter into the world of the indigenous peoples in their communities. We need to socialize with them in their own areas or territories. As we enter into the world of the other, we are transformed in the sacred revelation of the other. Since we have neglected the indigenous peoples in our consciousness and attention, we need to give more priority to

them. By living in their world and listening to their words, we can hopefully translate their worldviews into plausible articulations of their worldview.

As theologians, we need to use dialogue as our way of entering into the world of the indigenous peoples and doing researches on indigenous communities. We are used to solitary activities like teaching in the classrooms, doing research in the library and submitting our works for publications. We need to develop team work in our research composed, not just of theologians, but practitioners or activists working and living with the indigenous peoples in their communities. We need to enter into the sacred ancestral land of the indigenous peoples in their communities and learn from their cultures about community life and care of creation. Theologians can bond with the indigenous peoples by joining their struggles and advocacies. This dialogue in an opportune time to shift our cognitive paradigm in doing theology with the indigenous peoples. As we learn from the indigenous peoples, we need also to unlearn and abandon many of our baggage that only hinder our fruitful engagement.

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