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Researcher Positionality in Participatory Action Research for Climate Justice in Indigenous Communities

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Abstract

This paper discusses researcher positionality in the studies of indigenous communities in the context of the Transforming Universities for a Changing Climate project. The paper is specifically associated with the project's participatory action research strand, which aims to design and implement interventions relating to mitigation and adaptation to climate change, involving local communities and universities in the countries. Despite an increase in the number of social scientists engaging in climate-change-related research, discussion on researcher positionality is still limited. The paper intends to fill this gap by analysing the empirical data collected from partner researchers who were asked about their own positionalities. Utilising the 'four hyphen-spaces' framework proposed by Cunliffe and Karunanayake, the paper identifies commonalities and variations in terms of the researchers' reflections on their positionalities. The paper concludes by addressing the complex aspects of 'insiderness' that have implications for participatory action research.

Keywords

researcher positionality, participatory action research, climate justice, indigenous communities

Introduction

This paper explores researcher positionality in the studies of indigenous communities in the context of the Transforming Universities for a Changing Climate project (Climate-U) (UCL, 2020). Climate-U examines the impact of locally generated university initiatives on climate change in Brazil, Tanzania, Fiji and five more countries. The paper is specifically associated with the project's participatory action research (PAR) strand, which aims to design and implement interventions relating to mitigation and adaptation to climate change, involving local communities and universities in each country. Studies of researcher positionality in social science have expanded in recent years (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020). Despite an increase in the number of social scientists engaging in climate-change-related research, discussion on researcher positionality is still limited. This paper intends to fill this gap.

Observing partners' PAR activities in indigenous communities as a co-investigator at the lead institution has inspired me to inquire how partner researchers position themselves in their PAR projects. I am therefore an 'outsider' in their projects. Employing qualitative methodology, I have studied participatory approaches in the field of disaster risk reduction including climate change adaptation. I often look at projects undertaken by other researchers as case studies. In doing so, I have developed an interest in how those researchers position themselves in working with laypersons.

The participating universities have set up PAR projects with a range of stakeholders, including university staff, students, activists, local and national governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), schools and community members. The aims and activities of PAR projects depend on the area of work of each

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institution and its collaborators, but each PAR is designed to generate local actions that respond to issues of climate justice (UCL, 2020). The notion of 'climate justice' has multiple theoretical backgrounds, but what is common is its focus on 'the equity and justice aspects inherent to both the causes and the effects of climate change' (Jafry et al., 2019, p. 3). Even though the root causes of climate change are greenhouse gas emissions driven by conventional growth models, poverty and power discrepancies exacerbate the negative impacts of climate change (IPCC, 2023). Through PAR projects in Climate-U, partners have addressed issues concerning climate justice in their contexts.

Participatory action research (PAR) is a methodology which is interventionist aiming to deal with real societal problems including climate justice (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Kindon et al., 2007). Originated by emancipatory theorists such as Freire, (1971) and Fals-Borda, (2006), PAR has three components which provide researchers with a clear analytical and operational direction: *participation, action* and *research*. Greater justice and transformative values are pursued through *participation* (Walker & Boni, 2020). Participants in PAR are 'co-learners and co-producers' of knowledge, and such a proactive or 'thick' form of participation should lead to *action* (Boni & Frediani, 2020). Activism brings researchers and participants together to examine problems and make positive changes (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). *Research* thus becomes a cyclical process of reflection and action (Baum et al., 2006; Godden et al., 2020). The following PAR phases are often suggested by researchers (e.g. Charnes, 2014): initial open-space meeting, the constitution of PAR groups, critical enquiry, action, evaluation, revised action, second evaluation, further revised action and final evaluation. PAR thus appreciates 'a plurality of knowledges' by 'connecting people, participation, and place' (Kindon et al., 2007). The Climate-U project has agreed on the principles of PAR and developed PAR tools, which were shared among the partners (Climate-U, 2021).

The paper recognises the complexity of the term 'indigenous'. Since the introduction of the UN Working definition in 1986, achieving a consensus on 'who is indigenous?' has been a challenge (Bello-Bravo, 2019; Corntassel, 2003; von der Porten et al., 2019). Corntassel's peoplehood model[1] is an example of an over-arching definition encompassing interrelated notions of 'sacred history', 'ceremonial cycles', 'language' and 'ancestral homelands' associated with indigenous populations (Corntassel, 2003; Holm et al., 2003). The three countries that the paper involves – Tanzania, Brazil, Fiji – share such a definition to a certain extent but have differences as well. In Tanzania and Africa more broadly, people tend to perceive 'we are all indigenous', while indigenous peoples become specific to certain tribes such as the San in Botswana or the Pokot in Kenya and Uganda when 'who came first' is questioned (ACHPR & IWGIA, 2005; Aikman, 2011; Hodgson, 2009). Since 1999, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) has developed a contemporary version of the understanding of indigeneity for Africa in addressing issues of human rights. ACHPR & IWGIA, (2005) emphasises that indigeneity should be a broader reference than merely 'who came first' by which to analyse inequalities and suppressions and to overcome human rights violations. Brazil has been leading the broadening of the definition of 'indigenous' to be inclusive of those populations who used to be assimilated as the state's general public (French, 2011). The Brazilian government has recognised more than 40 new 'tribes' in the northeast region in the past few decades. In parallel, many other groups have demanded recognition and access to land as Indians in eastern regions. In Fiji, indigenous Fijians comprise half of its population. Largely because of this, Fiji is a rare case 'where the indigenous populations power is elevated over other non-indigenous groups within existing governmental structures' (Corntassel, 2003, p. 93). Embracing such differences in the three contexts, the paper uses 'indigenous' to include both the non-dominant peoples living in rural communities, who came first or did not necessarily come first (in all Tanzania, Brazil and Fiji) and the dominant peoples living in cities, who came first (in Fiji only). The paper touches upon how such differences in the understanding of indigeneity manifests in researchers' positionalities.

The next section discusses the key concepts and perspectives concerning positionality using the existing literature. The paper applies the 'four hyphen-spaces' proposed by Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) as an analytical framework. The paper then describes the methodology of the study. It sets out to identify commonalities and variations in terms of the researchers' reflections on their positionalities. The findings are presented in response to the research questions, which are then critically discussed together with the existing perspectives. The paper concludes by addressing the complex aspects of 'insiderness' that have implications for PAR.

Existing Perspectives on Positionality

'Positionality' Definition

'Positionality' refers to the position that a researcher applies in undertaking a piece of research following their worldview, mainly being discussed in qualitative research across various fields such as anthropology, sociology, geography and education (Holmes, 2020; Maclean et al., 2022). As opposed to a positivistic conception of objective reality, in qualitative research, 'there is no way we can escape the social world we live in to study it' (Holmes, 2020, p. 3). One's worldview is shaped by ontological and epistemological suppositions, as well as suppositions about human and natural relationships. Many researchers have demonstrated how these suppositions are formed by one's values and beliefs based on, to list a few, political and religious views, gender and race (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020; Marsh & Furlong, 2017; Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017). Some aspects of positionality, such

as race, tend to be 'fixed', while others, such as political views, are 'fluid' (Holmes, 2020, p. 2). In other words, positionality is constructed by the researcher's perceptions of self, but also their anticipation of how others perceive them (Bourke, 2014). Positionality has an impact on the nature of the relationships between 'the researcher' and 'the researched' because they share a research space (England, 1994). Thus, positionality affects the whole of the research process (Bourke, 2014; England, 1994; Holmes, 2020).

Core Principle of 'Reflexivity'

'Reflexivity involves a self-scrutiny on the part of the researcher' (Bourke, 2014, pp. 1–2) to consider the relationship between 'self' and 'other' (England, 1994; Fine, 1994; Violaris, 2021). Ethnographers in particular have built a rich body of literature on their positionality inquiries as part of their reflexive practice (e.g. Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019; Lian, 2019; Pierro et al., 2022; Violaris, 2021). Reflexive practice is a response to the critiques of ethnographies, which identified 'othering' (Fine, 1994) of research participants having reinforced misogynist and colonialist representations even without an intention (Fisher, 2015). With 'autoethnographic accounts', reflexive practice embeds the researcher within the research context to reflect on power and ethics to enhance the quality of the knowledge produced (Fisher, 2015). The reflexive practice has become one of the key approaches for researchers to situate themselves in the social world through positionality inquiries (Holmes, 2020; Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019).

One of the tools for reflexive practice is the credibility and approachability framework developed by Mayorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman (2017). Originally introduced by Lofland et al. (2006), credibility and approachability are something researchers ought to gain through their behaviour and performance to form positive relationships with participants for collecting quality data (Lofland et al., 2006; Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017). Credibility refers to research participants' judgements on 'whether the researcher is a worthwhile investment of time'. For example, the participant may see the researcher as credible when they are from the same ethnic background and decide to offer the information that the study requires (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017, p. 380). Approachability is about participants' judgements that the researcher is 'non-threatening and safe' in both physical and emotional ways (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017, p. 381). An example here can be being a 'comrade' or 'one of by finding a common interest or being friendly and 'easy to talk to' us' (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017, p. 389). While some ethnographers have employed the credibility and approachability framework in exercising their reflexivity (e.g. Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020), others have considered reflexivity in a multi-dimensional way.

'Working the Hyphen'

Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) explain how reflexivity underpins what Fine (1994) originally referred to as the 'working the hyphen' principle. Researchers need to 'work the hyphen' to 'probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations' (Fine, 1994, p. 72). Fine shifted the conceptualisation of research space between researchers (Self) and the researched (the Other) from 'boundaries' to 'relationships'. Conventionally, researchers have considered themselves 'all-seeing unbiased experts who maintain their neutrality by remaining uninvolved and distant from respondents' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 368) and stressed boundaries to study 'about those who have been Othered' (Fine, 1994, p. 72). Researchers 'deny the hyphen' in such research 'by ignoring and minimizing difference, decontextualizing research, and creating a supposedly autonomous text' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 368). Rather, researchers need to 'work the hyphen' by 'revealing far more about ourselves, and far more about the structures of Othering' and clarifying 'whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence' (Fine, 1994, p. 72). Such reflexive practice then surfaces 'the fluidity and pluralities of our research site and relationships' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 368), and 'we and they enter and play with the blurred boundaries that proliferate' (Fine, 1994, p. 72) towards social action and positive change.

The analogy of 'hyphen' has been shared by some researchers. Bayeck's (2022) term 'in-out-sider' derives from a similar critique against the dichotomised approach to positionality. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) emphasise bridging and joining up the two binary positions of insider and outsider 'with a hyphen'. The hyphen indicates not a pathway but 'a dwelling place' being 'with' participants, which is 'a space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity… and disjunction' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60). Kerr and Sturm (2019) examine how they worked the hyphen in their fields, using the expression 'the space between'. They conclude 'researchers can never be complete insiders or outsiders' having to deal with 'the nuances, oscillations, dissonances, and paradoxes' in their space between (Kerr & Sturm, 2019, pp. 1144–1145). Milligan's conception is 'inbetweener', which refers to researchers making active attempts to place themselves in between insiderness and outsiderness (Milligan, 2016). Milligan emphasises that researchers can exercise agency in developing trust relationships in the research sites in cross-cultural research.

Four hyphen-spaces as the analytical framework

This paper considers 'working the hyphen' has been central for researchers in PAR as well as indigenous methodology in

Figure 1. 'Mapping four hyphen-spaces' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 372).

which co-learning and co-production are regarded as the major goal of the research. Shifting beyond the positivist observer position and the Self–Other binary, the working the hyphen approach calls PAR researchers to 'explicitly share and devolve control of power by recognising research participants as knowledge partners' (Maclean et al., 2022, p. 335). This involves engaging partners in all phases of the research process from identifying research aims and ethics, designing research activities, implementing them and evaluating their outcomes. Building trust in the partnership becomes critical, which means researchers are required to possess an in-depth understanding of the culture and governance of the community (Maclean et al., 2022).

In this light, PAR involves what Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) refer to as 'linking hyphens' in the partnership besides individual researchers 'working the hyphen'. Both researchers and research participants are aware of their influence on one another and their responsibility in such a partnership. Reflexivity is respected in the partnership to probe power dynamics to actualise co-learning and co-production in the shared research space. Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) thus employ the notion of a 'hyphen-space' in which multiple hyphens are linked. Figure 1 is their proposal of four hyphen-spaces – 'relational spaces in which connections and tensions between researcher and research participants may lead to practical and ethical dilemmas for each' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 371). They emphasise the interconnectedness of these hyphen-spaces, which is often experienced by researchers in the field, hence there are overlaps between hyphen-spaces. The hyphen-spaces might look similar, but they should be separately discussed given that various combinations are possible. For instance, a researcher may be an insider although being emotionally-distanced; a researcher with few samenesses with participants may be politically-active in supporting their social change (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). Thus, the four hyphen spaces address the complexity of and interactions between various aspects of positionality. For this reason, this paper uses them as an analytical framework in examining the positionality of three researchers in Climate-U. Each hyphen-space is briefly summarised below.

Hyphen-Spaces of Insiderness–Outsiderness

The insider–outsider debate has been ongoing for many decades in various fields of social science (Adler & Adler, 1987; Bayeck, 2022; Bukamal, 2022; Sherif, 2001). In Merton, (1972, p. 12) terms, its essence is the differentiation

'betweend Insider access to knowledge and Outsider exclusion from it'. With the recognition of multiple 'fixed' and 'fluid' aspects in one's positionality, a consensus has developed that the dichotomy of 'insider–outsider' or 'researcher–the researched' is too simplistic (Carling et al., 2014; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Fine, 1994; Kerr & Sturm, 2019; Kusow, 2003; McNess et al., 2015). Instead, as Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013, p. 371) suggest, insider–outsider is 'better thought of as hyphen-spaces of mutual influence in which "self-other" relations are critical and identity construction implicates'. Banks (1998), on the other hand, developed the 'Typology of Crosscultural Researchers' differentiating positionality into 'indigenous-insider', 'indigenous-outsider', 'external-insider' and 'external-outsider'. He analyses the pros and cons of each group of researchers' 'quest for authentic voices' in a given community, although broadly maintaining the framework of insider–outsider. I will return to this typology in a later section.

Hyphen-Spaces of Sameness–Difference

The hyphen-spaces of sameness-difference affect relationships with research participants and their engagement in research. Samenesses and differences refer to 'identity differences embedded in culture, ethnicity, religion, class, education, symbolism (dress…), and language' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 375). Some of such 'social categorizations' are easily identifiable, while others may take longer to find out or depend on researchers' and participants' interpretations. The sameness and difference spaces do not suggest more samenesses and fewer differences yield positive outcomes in research as 'culture happens when we encounter difference' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 375). For example, participants tend to respond to 'hierarchical differentiation' positively – established academics from known universities are considered credible (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017, p. 384). The hyphen-spaces of sameness-difference seem to play a significant part in researchers' gaining credibility and approachability from research participants.

Hyphen-Spaces of Engagement–Distance

The hyphen-spaces of engagement and distance are physical and emotional spaces 'involving epistemological, methodological, and personal choices about how far we get involved in our research and what forms of knowledge we create' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 377). Objectivist research has a large distance between the researcher and the research participants, whereas the distance is narrower between the researcher and the research participants, and they are more engaged in subjectivist and intersubjectivist research. Subjectivists work closely with participants to understand their knowledge, while intersubjectivists shape knowledge jointly with participants. Epistemologically and methodologically, engagement tends to be a condition in subjectivist and intersubjectivist inquiries (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013).

Hyphen-Spaces of Politically Active–Actively Neutral

These hyphen-spaces are about 'the politics of positionality', which is the major concern of Fine (1994) as well as Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013). Activism–neutrality concerns 'the identity politics of difference and inequality between researcher-researched and between groups of people we study' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 380). Researchers on the politically active side present their standpoint clearly to exercise their activism through intervention in research aiming for social change, while those at the actively neutral end believe in objectivity rejecting researchers' involvement in undertaking research. In a study on 'battered women's shelters', for example, the former group of researchers will see themselves as 'morally obliged to act', while the latter will focus on reporting the women's circumstances (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 380). Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013, p. 381) recognise this hyphen-space is 'the most challenging for researchers' – besides 'identity work' of 'who am I?', researchers have to figure out 'what are my values and responsibilities to act?' taking 'emotional, personal, professional, and political risk' into consideration.

Methodology

This study is of an interpretivist nature in inquiring about three researchers' positionalities in Climate-U. Three years after the start of the project, the partner teams were close to completing their PAR activities, except the Tanzania team who joined later in 2020. The study was guided by the following research question: *How do researchers position themselves in PAR in Climate-U? What are the commonalities and variations of their positionalities?*

Sampling

Three researchers, two male and one female, who were working with indigenous communities in their PAR were selected from the Climate-U partnership. I approached those researchers who satisfied the criterion, who then agreed to be interviewed. They are all professors who have a rich experience in PAR in their areas of work in the field of education. The three researchers can be divided into three types under the criterion 'working with indigenous communities': (1) an indigenous researcher from the indigenous community being studied; (2) an indigenous researcher from another indigenous community different from the indigenous community being studied, or (3) not an

indigenous researcher but studying indigenous communities. Below are the profiles of the researchers, which have been put together from the Climate-U website, their universities' pages and anecdotal information.

Researcher A, a professor of philosophy, development studies and applied ethics in Tanzania, identified himself as type 3). He specialises in action research, climate change ethics, sustainability thought and practices and transformative social innovations. He applies philosophical and ethical insights to explain climate change as a moral problem and one requiring ethical responses. The PAR team led by Researcher A comprises senior and junior researchers and members of the three community-based organisations working on climate change and environmental issues in the coastal villages in Kilwa District in Tanzania. These villages along the Indian Ocean have experienced rising sea levels and sea surface temperatures, severe coastal floods and damaging cyclones, which have negatively impacted their livelihood opportunities, the coastline and mangrove forests. The PAR team has designed and implemented cultural-rooted interventions to mitigate or adapt to climate change. As discussed earlier, this paper refers to these communities as 'indigenous' employing a broad definition of the term, even though Researcher A and community members may not use the term to describe the communities.

Researcher B also referred to himself as 3). As a professor in education in Brazil, he coordinates rural education in the Amazon and leads the Paraense Forum on rural education. His studies guide education in the multi-territorialities of the Amazon, concerning its diverse organisations, movements and identities of fishers, peasants and indigenous populations. The PAR of Researcher B's team is implemented in two Collectives of Territorial Governance (COGTER), a social movement in defence of territories: the COGTER of the Tocantins Amazon consists of the local leaderships of six non-indigenous communities along the Tocantins River, and the interethnic COGTER of the Municipality of Moju consists of one indigenous population and one *quilombola*[2] population. Dialogical research aims to enable rural and indigenous populations to voice themselves about changes in rivers, forests and cultures and against exploitation and oppression.

Researcher C identifies herself as type 2), a professor of education in Fiji. Her interest in indigenous knowledge developed as she was growing up learning from her elders whose daily activities were dictated by the condition of their environment. As an indigenous researcher, she has worked with indigenous communities, youth and teachers to integrate the traditional knowledge and practice of climate change into school curricula and community policies. Her research intends to synergise contemporary knowledge and indigenous knowledge. Researcher C and her team conducted PAR in an indigenous community in Tavua in the Fiji Islands addressing the water shortage issues caused by the intensive increase in temperature. The intervention was jointly created and implemented by the community members and her team, which was to replant the extinct fruit trees native to the village.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. All interviews were undertaken via Zoom between December 2022 and January 2023. The duration of the interviews was between one and 3 hours. Researcher B's interview was longer because we met twice due to a technical issue on the first day, and also he was assisted by another researcher when a translation was needed. With the interviewees' permission, the interviews were recorded and transcribed using the functions of the Zoom platform.

In each interview, consent was obtained verbally at the beginning. They were also informed about the limitation of anonymity and confidentiality within the Climate-U partnership but also amongst a wider audience who are familiar with their work. The interviewee was then asked to describe their positionality. Follow-up questions were broadly prepared to refer to the key concepts extracted from the literature to probe their positionalities more in detail. For example, 'when do you exercise your insider–outsider position?', 'are there strategies which contributed to raising your credibility or approachability?' and 'how important is activism in your research?'.

Applying Cunliffe and Karunanayake's framework, 'a theoretical thematic analysis' (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) was undertaken to make sense of the collected interview data. Specifically, the study utilised the 12 questions Cunliffe and Karunanayake formulated to understand the key features of each researcher's positionality. Therefore, I coded the parts that were relevant to those questions rather than coding every piece of data. The data was then thematically organised to identify how common and variant the researchers' positionalities are and also speculate the reasons behind them. The interviewees are anonymised and quoted using Researcher A, B and C in this paper. 'Researcher B (translator)' is used where his translator intervened. To maintain their anonymity, their publications are not referenced in the paper, although they were reviewed to obtain an understanding of their broader works outside of Climate-U.

Findings on Commonalities and Variations

Table 1 is a summary of the three researchers' positions in terms of 12 questions prepared by Cunliffe and Karunanayake, which is followed by the presentation of major commonalities and variations.

Commonalities Between Researchers' Positionalities

Being Both Insider–Outsider. Cunliffe and Karunanayake's first question, 'is the researcher indigenous to the community being

Table 1. Summary of Researchers' Responses to Hyphen-Spaces' Questions.

Hyphen-spaces	Questions	Interviewee response
Insider-outsider	a) Is the researcher indigenous to the community being studied?	No – A, B, C
	b) Does the researcher have an ongoing role in the research site or work primarily outside the site?	Yes – A, B, C
	c) Do respondents perceive the researcher as 'one-of-us'?	Likely – A, B, C
	d) Does the researcher feel 'at home' in the research site?	Yes – A, B, C
Sameness-difference	a) Is the researcher similar to respondents in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, meanings, values, identity, symbolically, etc.?	Yes as co-learners – A, B, C
Engagement-distance	a) Is the researcher engaged with participants in their activities?	Yes – A, B, C
	b) To what degree is the researcher emotionally involved?	Largely – A, B, C
	c) What part do respondents play in generating knowledge?	Most parts – A, B, C
	d) Are any elements of the research created between researcher-respondent?	Yes – A, B, C
Activism-neutral	a) Is the researcher involved in the agendas of respondents?	Yes – A, B, C
	b) Does the researcher intervene and/or play an active role in the struggles of respondents?	Yes – A, B, C
	c) Is the researcher oriented toward social/organizational change or political action?	Yes – A, B, C

studied' deems to be tricky. The three researchers' answers to the question were no, they were not indigenous to the communities they study. In this sense, they are outsiders. At the same time, they are insiders because they are originally from Tanzania, Brazil and Fiji in which they conduct PAR. Theoretically, they share the same hyphen-spaces of being both insider and outsider.

However, their sense of insiderness appeared stronger in the interviews, when they described their 'ongoing' roles in the communities through the PAR projects and previous projects. Researcher A's team has been in the communities since 2019:

> We have… contributed to addressing climate change…. So developed a close relationship with them…. We express our appreciation to them, and we support you [them] on your [their] own terms. After two months, the Climate-U opportunity came on. We could do some intervention together on climate adaptation…. This kind of trust and appreciation is important (Researcher A).

Researcher B prioritises 'indigenous identity' in considering his positionality:

> The important thing is their [indigenous people's] culture and bringing their awareness of their own rights. Our way of research is living with indigenous people, dialoguing with them, interacting with them, going to their territories, staying with them, doing jobs together. In this process, we register, record, write the memories, important to understand their education, work, culture, political relationship, organising daily life (Researcher B (translator)).

For Researcher C, learning by doing with communities has been her ethnography:

> [I use] action research approach – observation, imitation, practice. Important for me to immerse myself as part of what they are doing. People want to see me doing. This is how we wanted it to be done. I will have to be able to learn. How we do it and do it together. If I don't do it, I don't become part of it, part of them. I will be seen as an outsider (Researcher C).

Trust was built, and the researchers felt 'at home' spending time in the communities. The interviews, however, revealed the researchers' positions concerning the communities being studied are more complicated than what Cunliffe and Karunanayake's question addresses.

This will be explored further in the following variation section.

Sameness as Co-Learners – Difference as an Obstacle. All researchers referred to being the same as the research participants as being co-learners and co-researchers in their PAR projects. Particularly at the beginning of the PAR, researchers' attitudes were critical:

> [From] the beginning, we [researchers] were clear, we were not there to tell them [community members] what to do. We are there to learn from them to help address the issue. If we don't, they will see us as outsiders and won't cooperate. We give them the voice, and they take the ownership. They are benefiting from them [the PAR] (Researcher C).

Such 'mutual relationship' had to be developed consciously being as 'learners and doubters' as Researcher A explained:

> Researchers are there to learn about the community…. Knowing what they [community members] know and do, we support them what they can do removing hindrances…. We value what they do…. they are co-researchers (Researcher A).

As co-researchers, a partnership has been developed in the PAR group. When the team reported the findings, for example,

the whole partnership got involved. For Researcher B, sameness is achieved through living together with peasants, fishers and other indigenous people:

> Our way of research is that all cultures, identities, knowledge are incomplete. They complete themselves in relation with 'others'. We aren't separate, we are integrated. Power relationship transform others' invisible identity, culture and knowledge. Impossible to be neutral in research (Researcher B).

As demonstrated by Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013), certain differences between the researchers and the participants often hinder trust relationships and partnerships within PAR. As an indigenous researcher, Researcher C is highly aware of the significance of knowing the specific culture and protocol in each indigenous community. If she does not follow them, 'they will kick you out!'

> In Fijian culture, it is important to understand taboo relationships. In those instances, there are protocols to follow, that has to go through someone else. I am mindful of the relationships with them to get that rapport (Researcher C).

In the case of Researcher B, he recognised that a political difference might have obstructed the building of a relationship. The indigenous people were already politically engaged in defending their own territory threatened by construction companies to produce mineral and plant palm trees:

> The indigenous people were already very aware of the problem, and we came to add climate change factors. Not all of them weren't able to understand climate change scientifically…. Every time we go, there were different indigenous people…not the same people came twice. Probably religious leaders were right-wing; researchers were left-wing (Researcher B (translator)).

Political and religious differences could be challenging to overcome in PAR.

In-Depth Engagement – Conscious Distancing. One of the robust commonalities found among the three researchers' positionalities is in the hyphen-spaces of engagement–distance. This was no surprise given that PAR as a methodology tends to be intersubjective involving both researchers and research participants in shaping the whole of the research project (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Fine & Sirin, 2007). The researchers were 'engaged with participants in their activities' with a high degree of emotional involvement. Their participants played an integral part in 'generating knowledge', and many 'elements of the research created between researcher-respondent'. Every researcher spent substantial time in the interview explicating why engagement is important and how they engage with community members.

Researcher A stressed that 'communities are at the centre stage' because 'the whole purpose is to generate the evidence to inform back to the communities to continue social dialogue'.

> The communities were over-researched, but no feedback. Usually, researchers collected data and left, but we shared our findings and invited them to create the proposal together…. [Through] culturally sensitive climate interventions…what we are trying to do is to be critical and support them (Researcher A).

Researcher C also mentioned that community members needed to know she was not there to simply study them: 'They have to see I am genuine. Unless I am emotionally involved, it won't show my passions, I cannot influence.' She referred to 'bi-directional learning' as the key to community engagement.

> By listening to them, not dictating to them, understanding their issues, as well as understanding how they have been addressed, what's best. The key is being able to listen to them, with an open mind – bi-directional learning (Researcher C).

Her PAR partners held a discussion meeting at the beginning of the project to address gaps.

> We can work together [to figure out] what is best. They know their community better than us. The project is all about them. Participants get to benefit from their actions. Solesolevaki [a traditional principle of working together for the common good] – the term we use as a principle bottom-line of PAR (Researcher C).

For Researcher B, 'our philosophy is to bring their [indigenous people's] perspectives and voices [to us]'.

> We try to understand their ways of life… through dialogue, participation and integration. We are also forming themselves in ourselves… we learn from them traditional knowledge, the way they are constructing their territoriality with the relationship with the nature (Researcher B).

Hence, 'living with them' is critical in co-generating knowledge.

> I don't believe research without interacting with them…. We aren't there only to investigate their life; we are there to live with them. In this interaction, we learn about them, and we also teach them in a broad way to live together, sharing our meaning and understanding (Researcher B).

As a means of communication and engagement, 'dialogue' was emphasised by all researchers. Researcher B put it succinctly: 'The dialogue is the principle of the relationship. There isn't a collaboration without a dialogue.' The continuity of dialogue was also stressed, as Researcher A indicated: 'We want to develop community members' based-on way of thinking and knowing and systematise them so that we could promote dialogue.' In the field where co-generation between researchers and

participants is intended, dialogue rather than interview or observation should occur. Dialogue helps both parties to question conventional perspectives and develop fresh ideas to enable positive change (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013).

When researchers are engaged in communities' agendas and involved emotionally, they are also aware of a need to be distanced themselves because 'they could affect the quality of data', as Researcher C indicated:

> When you are immersed, you get to feel what they feel. For example, if someone dies in the village, as guests, we [researchers] have to still participate in their mourning. At the back of our minds, we research, although with great respect. Respect is very important (Researcher C).

Distancing themselves as researchers is also significant in co-generating knowledge. In Researcher B's (translator) view, researchers 'have to say something' in the process of knowledge generation by interpreting and analysing findings.

In the hyphen-spaces of engagement and distance, the researchers' positionalities are clearly oriented towards engagement, even though there are moments when they create distances to fulfil researcher responsibilities.

Taking Action Aiming for Social Change. Another commonality can be found in the hyphen-spaces of activism–neutrality, in which the three researchers were involved in communities' agendas and acted on them for improvement. Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013, p. 384) imply it is usual in PAR that researchers and research participants share 'an explicit agenda for social…change' and work together 'in a hyphen-space of full engagement and political activism'. This position was demonstrated in Researcher B's comment, 'impossible to be neutral in research'. The researchers' interventions in the communities are to play an active role in the struggles of the communities aiming for positive change.

For Researcher A, advocacy and activism comprise important aspects of his research.

> I advocate focusing on how to use empirical research to develop ethics, showing how that could be possible and to say it is possible. I…pay attention to culture and how it hinders or contributes to climate change…. I can also do some activism trying to draw attention to policy-makers, trying to change things. Not necessarily policy-makers but communities of science for different ways of thinking…. We are all responsible (Researcher A).

Researcher B clearly states that 'we are researchers and political activists'.

> We engage in social movements. We are built in together. University people don't just teach but engage with society, in a justice way, so that we can better live in the world. To transform relationships because the power is from anthropocentric, colonial, gender, race and complex (Researcher B).

He went on to describe such complexity in the context of Amazon where external interests proliferate to exploit lands and resources. His PAR is therefore part of their broader activism against the 'movement of colonisation, by own people…. We are the defender of human rights. They with us, us and them…to change the hegemonic relationship we face.'

> The ideology of city knowing better than rural. Peasants should move away from rural to the city to have a better life. We try to challenge this. We try to bring awareness of their own values…. We don't become the voice of them. We work with them to empower them (Researcher B (translator)).

Researcher C also highlights the 'reciprocal' nature of the relationship with her indigenous community: 'Participants give me what I won't take for granted…. I will protect whatever information they gave me not to cause tension or conflicts but to bring about benefits'. However, one variation concerning the activism dimension is that Researcher C does not consider her research activism and herself as an activist. This point will be discussed further in the following section.

Variations between researchers' positionalities

Insiderness, Sameness and Indigeneity. An earlier discussion referred to all three researchers as outsiders applying one of Cunliffe and Karunanayake's criteria of insiderness–outsiderness – whether the researcher is indigenous to the community being studied. Two distinctions can be identified. First, Researchers A and B preferred not to use the notions of insider–outsider in describing their positionalities. They are from cities but study indigenous communities. As they have been working with the communities for many years, they might not see the point of identifying themselves as insiders or outsiders. Researcher C, on the other hand, uses the terms frequently.

> Where I am in my community [being studied], I am both an insider and an outsider. I can consider myself an insider, but there are outsider aspects too…. When I go to other communities, I am an outsider to them. But insider in a sense I understand certain protocols and cultures (Researcher C).

What this comment refers to is the fluid nature of researcher identity. Because of that, some researchers may consider identifying themselves with the insiderness–outsiderness category less significant.

Second, indigeneity is multi-dimensional, which separates Researcher C from Researcher A and B. Researchers A and B were clear they were not indigenous researchers, whereas Research C referred to herself as 'an indigenous researcher', even though she is not indigenous to the community of the Climate-U PAR. This distinction may influence the researchers' processes of integrating themselves into the communities, and the community members' perceptions of the

researchers being 'one-of-us'. It appears that Researcher C already possesses many samenesses with the community being studied given certain 'cultures and protocols' are similar across indigenous communities in Fiji, as she explained. The indigeneity of Researcher C may make her more insider to the community she studies, compared with Researcher A and B who are from cities.

Endorsement and Reluctance of Activism. Researchers who choose PAR as a methodology are bound to be on the politically active end because they are 'involved in the agendas of respondents' with an understanding of 'the struggles of respondents'. Together, they aim to enable 'social change' through a 'thick' form of participation that PAR allows (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 372). As discussed earlier, the three researchers' hyphen-spaces of activism–neutrality is oriented towards activism – their PAR projects aim for social betterment through co-learning. The variation here is whether the researchers regard themselves as 'activists' or not. Researchers A and B did, while Researcher C did not because

> I don't like the word 'activist' because you are forcing people – very radical, aggressive. We cannot bring change with aggression…. Any of my colleagues never use 'activism'. It's a foreign concept. You can hardly see people protesting (Researcher C).

Being an indigenous researcher seems to explain Researcher C's reluctance against the concept of activism.

> One thing [Fijian] communities avoid is confrontation. You have to know your place. Our relationships are very important. If what you [researchers] bring is not comfortable, they [community members] can kick you out. They can kick you out by not attending because Fijian are not confrontational, they are better not accepting you to ignoring. That's why being an insider is important, otherwise you don't understand the politics. We use soft power to agenda in (Researcher C).

Instead of being an 'activist', Research C prefers being an 'educator'. Non-confrontational culture and the importance of 'soft power' in Fiji seem to have contributed to the building of Researcher C's unique positionality concerning activism.

Engagement and Activism Methodologies. Earlier, full engagement and political activism were highlighted as commonalities. How the researchers pursue them varies. They passionately spoke about other methodologies for engagement and activism besides the overarching methodological framework of PAR. Researcher A emphasised the importance of the Ethics of Collaboration, which is for him an operational tool for Empirical Development Ethics Research. He draws on Dower's (2008) interpretation of 'development ethics'.

> What development ethics consists of is looking at the values and norms involved in development, often comparing different approaches and seeking a justification for what seems the right approach (Dower, 2008, p. 184).

Researchers such as Christen & Alfano, (2014) argue for empirical approaches to development ethics proposing generating empirical data relevant to ethical theorising. To execute such Empirical Development Ethics Research, one of the means for Researcher A is the Ethics of Collaboration, which is

> a good way of how to go about [undertaking PAR]…. You know the responsibility, distribution of resources…. I strengthen upfront Ethics of Collaboration, for example, to design the mechanism and product of the critical engagement with the PAR members (Researcher A).

Researcher A explains to the PAR members, '"This is what will guide us." If an ethical analysis could be a threat to collaboration, we develop strategies to mitigate them…we talk about it and decide.'

Researcher B combines the Pedagogy of Alternance with PAR. Originating in France, the Pedagogy of Alternance has widely been deployed in Brazil. It is 'an educational model founded in a rural context in order to guarantee…children a proper education whilst…preserving their local ties, where they keep working along with their families' (Rubin, 2021).

> In the social movement of peasants, we use the Pedagogy of Alternance in their territory as a praxis to recognise different times, spaces and knowledge, which can be used as an educative research intervention dimension…. When researching them, living with them, doing some activities, in the space that they live and where they have their culture (Researcher B).

Pedagogy of Alternance is useful in his PAR and in his dialogue research as a 'constructivist' perspective.

> [It is a] strategy of the way we research indigenous people in Amazon, fishermen and peasants living in the forest…. We organise the research to put everyone together at different times, different spaces and different knowledge. We try to do everything together, not 'now it's time to research…'. You need to plan with the people…. We always research in their territory…. They continue to extend the research to other times, to recognise not just scientific knowledge but indigenous knowledge, traditional knowledge, cultural practice as legitimate knowledge (Researcher B).

Researcher B goes on to describe the contribution of the pedagogical model.

> Pedagogy of Alternance articulates education dimensions with work, production and territory dimensions. Difference between

> city territories and rural territories and hierarchical power relationships. City works against rural. All fundings and political problems are active in city territories. This motivates or forces rural people to move to cities. Our social movement is to strengthen rural territories…. The city only exists because of rural territories (Researcher B).

As an indigenous researcher, the foundation of Researcher C's research is the Fijian Vanua Research Framework, an indigenous methodology originally developed by Nabobo-Baba (2008). 'Vanua' means

> universal whole, which is inclusive of a chief or related chiefs, their people and their relationships, their land, spiritualities, knowledge systems, cultures and values…. The philosophy behind Vanua Framing is one of the interconnectedness of people to their land, environment, cultures, relationships, spirit world, beliefs, knowledge systems, values and God(s) (Nabobo-Baba, 2008, p. 143).

The Vanua represents the Fijian identity. Nabobo-Baba (2008) argued that Fijian research should be underpinned by Vanua identities and cultures. This approach is shared with Researcher C.

> Vanua is most important…. I just want them [indigenous communities] to look after their environment and have a sustainable way of life. Not only for them but for their children…. We should go back to the ways we used to do things, what is best for us. Climate change is added stress, nothing new. It's been happening. Our forefathers were able to focus, adapt, mitigate. This knowledge our children don't know (Researcher C).

Drawing on the Fijian Vanua Research Framework, Researcher C created a practical tool called the Community Engagement Protocol in Climate-U. It outlines the procedure researchers must follow in requesting cooperation from indigenous communities in Fiji.

> We have a saying, 'cock crows in my village, the next village cannot hear it'. People in other villages won't listen to me. Indigenous researchers have to understand their little things. You don't overstep your boundaries. Need to trade carefully. The Engagement Protocol is very important (Researcher C).

Vanua then determines data collection methods: 'It's important to use methods that suit them. Interviews they aren't used to, so focus group. Drawing instead of writing…. Learning is through observing, imitating' (Researcher C).

By applying Cunliffe and Karunanayake's four hyphen-spaces as a framework for analysis, this paper was able to highlight the commonalities and variations among three Climate-U researchers' positionalities. Some aspects of commonalities and variations are more evident than others. The final part of the paper delves into four particular aspects that concern PAR.

Propositions for Participatory Action Research

From the above findings, four propositions can be made. Firstly, in the hyphen-spaces of insiderness–outsiderness, Cunliffe and Karunanayake's criterion 'indigenous to the community being studied' does not capture diverse researchers' situations. Strictly applied, all researchers studied were outsiders, which is not an accurate understanding. Banks' (1998, p. 8) typology involves a breakdown of insiderness: an 'indigenous-insider' and an 'indigenous-outsider'. The former 'endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her primordial community and culture' and an 'indigenous-outsider', whereas the latter 'was socialized within the cultural community but has experienced high levels of deserialization and cultural assimilation into an outside…culture'. In the case of Researcher C, however, she is in the middle, neither 'indigenous-insider' nor 'indigenous-outsider' – she is not indigenous to the community being studied but to another community. Banks' typology still holds the dichotomy nature without being able to express nuanced positions like Researcher C's.

Researchers A and B are an 'external-insider', who 'was socialized within another culture and acquires its beliefs, values…and knowledge' of the community being studied (Banks, 1998, p. 8). They bring in 'unique' perspectives stemming from their experiences in the 'second or "adopted" community' (Banks, 1998, p. 8). However, there seems to be a limitation to this category given that Researchers A and B are from the countries where the researched communities are located. This situation differs from those researchers born and bred elsewhere coming to study these communities. Uniqueness can be identified in Researcher A's position when he said 'I play multiple roles' acting as the PI and an advocate and activist, with both critique and support. For Researcher B, he aims for merging the two types of knowledge – one of his 'white, male, middle-class, city' knowledge of the 'privileged' and the other of the traditional knowledge of indigenous populations who belong to rural Amazon regions.

Banks' (1998, p. 8) viewpoint on external-insiders is harsh – they are 'adopted' in the new communities so cannot fully be integrated and are 'often negatively perceived and sanctioned' by their first communities. Researchers A and B's self-analyses, however, provide us with more positive aspects of external-insiders, who bridge the inside and the outside through learning from each other and generating new knowledge together. As Researcher B put it: 'I recognise my privilege. I try to show communities how I learn about their daily lives and their knowledge. That is when we start to change our relationships.' Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013, p. 370) endorse that external-insiders are also able to develop close relationships with research participants. 'A deep understanding of the culture and people under study' can be 'accomplished if the researcher can show he or she "has been

there"'. Researchers A and B repeatedly mentioned the importance of 'being there', which is a hyphen-space in which researcher-researched identities are strongly connected and reciprocally influential.

The above point leads to the second proposition. PAR is unlikely to be associated with those who Banks (1998) identifies as an 'external-outsider' – 'socialized within a community different from the one in which he or she is doing research' (Banks, 1998, p. 8). Without having an in-depth understanding of the culture, politics and value systems of the community, working with research participants and taking action for a positive change is unrealistic. PAR, therefore, benefits from insider researchers, whether an 'indigenous-insider', 'indigenous-outsider' or 'external-insider'. Following the first proposition, indigeneity is something researchers born with and cannot be nurtured, while insiderness can be developed through building relationships.

Thirdly, credibility and approachability, which are most associated with the hyphen-spaces of insiderness–outsiderness and those of sameness–difference, may not always be the most relevant concepts for PAR researchers in expressing their positionalities. The literature review earlier demonstrated that many researchers agree that their positionalities move within the insider-outsider spectrum. Ethnographers in particular, as Mayorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman (2017) have shown, often use the same and different features with research participants to gain credibility and approachability from them. The three researchers being interviewed in this study, however, did not talk about credibility and approachability in describing their positionalities. They seemed to have been confident that the community members regarded them as credible and approachable. This is probably because the researchers and the communities already had histories and hence certain levels of relationships. Judging from the previous experience, Researcher A's participants said to him, 'now we know you are not liars'. 'Confidence, trust and credibility' have been built between the research team and community members, who knew that 'we are serious researchers who are concerned with the problem and trying to learn from them' (Researcher A).

Researcher B was more definite that 'we aren't concerned about credibility or approachability' because of the 20 years of involvement in 'constructing continuing relationships' for the 'collective governance of the territory'. In this social movement, 'we research, form and act. We are part of the process' (Researcher B). It could be suggested in PAR which is predicated on partnership and action, credibility and approachability, or at least some foundations, are already 'there' before the project commences. The opposite may be claimed as well – PAR is probably not a suitable choice if researchers do not have any relationship with the community which is to be studied.

Fourthly, the existing literature has not yet paid attention to the fact that researchers' indigeneity has implications for how they approach activism. They may show hesitance or even rejection to refer to themselves as 'activists'. Being indigenous means community members perceive them as 'one-of-us' and 'a legitimate community member' and accept that they 'can speak with authority about it' (Fine, 1994, p. 8). At the same time, indigenous researchers have to be 'mindful' not to 'overstep the boundaries' to maintain the unity of the community, as Researcher C reflected. Fijian researchers' hesitance against the use of 'activism' may also be linked to the political roles that some indigenous people in Fiji possess. This may make activism redundant given indigenous Fijian belong to the dominant society, while activism prevails for indigenous peoples who are non-dominant.

Conclusion

Despite some variations, what has come through strongly in this study is the three researchers in Climate-U share a strong sense of responsibility to support indigenous communities and pursue climate justice. Primarily being education experts concerned about social justice, reflexive practice and PAR were already part of their research before Climate-U. Along with PAR, the Ethics of Collaboration, the Pedagogy of Alternance and the Community Engagement Protocol enable them to practice- reflexively. Thus, the researchers' positionalities can be characterised by insiderness, full engagement and political activism, even though the indigenous researcher had a different take on activism. The interconnectedness of these hyphen-spaces of insiderness–engagement–activism seems to be substantial among PAR researchers. Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) do not necessarily elaborate on the meanings of the overlaps of the hyphen-spaces beyond a reference to their interconnected nature. It can be suggested that researchers' insiderness contributes to their engagement in communities and enables activism, and conversely, their activism deepens their engagement and makes them more insiders. Borrowing the researchers' words, 'being an insider is important' (Researcher C) because it allows 'living with indigenous people, dialoguing with them, interacting with them' (Researcher B) to 'develop[ed] close relationships with them' (Researcher B).

In return, the indigenous communities being studied were responding through proactive participation in the PAR projects. Referring to the project event held in the previous month of the interview, Researcher A spoke about the growing relationship with his community.

> [For the event on] 18 November, we invited the community leader and members to the university. We wanted them to see and listen to what others say and to understand climate adaptation they are doing… giving them more confidence. Bringing all evidence into social dialogue and into more action (Researcher A).

Researcher B called it 'an authentic relationship' that was being built with his community.

> During living with indigenous people…we have learned so much about the Amazon region and the way they work in a comparative way…. Our relationships transform because they understand how we respect them. The problem is that society thinks indigenous people don't have knowledge, they don't contribute to development. Exactly the opposite. They have a way specially to live in harmony with nature. We can learn with them. We have learned so much with them (Researcher B).

Researcher C had already collected some evidence.

> Recently we conducted an evaluation in them [research participants] taking ownership. They have done sustainable actions. They talked about what we did together. Some of the things have changed (Researcher C).

Signs of positivities are emerging, although the impacts of the PAR projects are yet to be assessed.

Participatory action research is an increasingly deployed methodology in projects aiming for climate justice. For PAR to bear intended positive outcomes, researchers' reflexive practice becomes even more significant. Further positionality studies on researchers from diverse contexts will contribute to advancing PAR and achieving climate justice.

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Notes

1. Corntassel's (2003, pp. 91–92) full definition is as follows: 1. Peoples who believe they are ancestrally related and identify themselves, based on oral and/or written histories, as descendants of the original inhabitants of their ancestral homelands; 2. Peoples who may, but not necessarily, have their own informal and/or formal political, economic and social institutions, which tend to be community-based and reflect their distinct ceremonial cycles, kinship networks, and continuously evolving cultural traditions; 3. Peoples who speak (or once spoke) an indigenous language, often different from the dominant society's language even where the indigenous language is not spoken, distinct dialects and/or uniquely indigenous expressions may persist as a form of indigenous identity; 4. Peoples who distinguish themselves from the dominant society and/or other cultural groups while maintaining a close relationship with their ancestral homelands/sacred sites, which may be threatened by ongoing military, economic or political encroachment or may be places where indigenous peoples have been previously expelled, while seeking to enhance their cultural, political and economic autonomy.
2. *Quilombolas* are Afro-Brazilian residents who established quilombo communities after escaping slavery in Brazil (https://cpisp.org.br/).

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