Indigenous knowledge, skills and action: indigenous women's learning in the Peruvian Amazon.

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Abstract: Drawing on long term ethnographic research in the SE Peruvian Amazon this article asks what kinds and forms of learning do indigenous women value, how are the knowledge and skills they value changing over time and what is the nature of their agency in the face of the discrimination and prejudice that permeate their lives. Harakmbut women's lives have been transformed over the past 40 years in the wake of neoliberal globalisation, rapacious exploitative economic practices and unregulated illegal gold mining. Within this context three types of learning emerge as important: learning about indigenous cosmology and way of life; experiential learning through engagement with an expanding capitalist society; and learning through training and capacity building for participation, voice and rights-based advocacy. The article argues that all three types of learning give meaning to Harakmbut women's lives, their relationship to their history and their views of the world.

Key words: Intergenerational, knowledge, gold-mining, cosmology, indigenous women, agency.

Introduction

As the Introduction to this Special Issue discusses, indigenous women have suffered and continue to suffer from discriminatory stereotypes. Generic social indicators of health, wealth and education show indigenous women as lagging behind in relation to global and Latin American regional norms, while formal assessments of learning suggest that indigenous peoples consistently obtain the lowest results in learning achievement over the past ten years (UNESCO/OREALC 2017). Literacy rates in Latin America for indigenous women are less than half of those of non-indigenous women (Vinding and Kampbel 2012) while in terms of schooling and formal education indigenous people are counted among the most marginalised and discriminated against groups (UNESCO 2014). Such indicators feed into dominant discourses of indigenous women as under-educated, as victims of poverty and as vulnerable and disempowered. These discourses promote homogenising stereotypes about who indigenous women are, their educational performance and expectations for what education can do for them.

Taking a historical approach, this article looks at the lives of indigenous Harakmbut women living in the SE Peruvian Amazon to question this recognition of indigenous women as under-educated, poor, vulnerable and disempowered. It asks, on the contrary, what kinds and forms of learning do indigenous women themselves value, how are the knowledge and skills they value changing over time and what is the nature of their agency in the face of the discrimination and prejudice that permeate their lives. Harakmbut women's lives have been transformed over the past 40 years in the wake of neoliberal globalisation, rapacious exploitative economic practices and unregulated and illegal gold mining that have led to the loss of their indigenous territory and its biodiversity.

Drawing on my research with the Harakmbut people of the community of San Jose de Karene over a period of 40 years, the article looks at the life of one woman, Tambet[i], and her daughters, investigating the learning she values and has valued at different periods over her adult life and through periods of radical social, economic and environmental change. It focuses on three types of learning: a) learning and developing knowledge, skills and understandings of Harakmbut way of life, relationships to territory, spirituality and view of the world (cosmovision); b) knowledge, skills and understandings acquired through experiential learning in an expanding capitalist society; and c) learning through training and capacity building for indigenous participation, voice and rights-based advocacy. For each type I ask, what aims do Harambut women have for their learning, what recognition do they seek, what new knowledge and skills do they value, and what kind of action are they taking with the knowledge and skills they have developed?

These questions and the interpretative approach I take emerge from ongoing ethnographic research with the Harakmbut people and broad concerns with questions of social justice, indigenous rights and gender equality (see for example May and Sleeter 2010, Tikly and Barrett 2013). It asks about indigenous women's own values and agency, drawing on human development theory and education (see Unterhalter 2007) and is influenced by post-colonial and post-structural analysis in relation to understanding the nature of inequalities and recognition which indigenous peoples experience (see Blaser 2004, de la Cadena 2010). As Radcliffe (2015) notes there are not some definable or essentialised qualities of being an indigenous woman but 'their uniqueness arises from the interplay in interlocking hierarchies' (p.29) and historical marginalisation. In this way the article provides insights into indigenous

Harakmbut women’s learning in relation to the unique positions they occupy culturally, socially and historically as indigenous Harakmbut women, not as a generalised category of ‘indigenous woman’ (Fennell and Arnot 2008).[ii] There is an extensive and diverse literature on indigenous education and the education of and by indigenous peoples, (see for example: Battiste 2008, Bellier and Hays 2016, Lopez and Sichra 2016, Minde 2008) which discusses indigenous knowledge and indigenous education in relation to formal, non-formal and informal education. In this article the focus is on learning, where learning is ‘an activity of obtaining knowledge’(https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/education [accessed 20.12.18]) rather than formalised education and the process of teaching and learning.

Based on ethnographic research carried out between 1980 and the present day in the community of San Jose de Karene, the article explores the changes in Harakmbut women’s lives over this period, viewing culture and indigeneity as dynamic concepts, rather than static and descriptive (Postero 2013). Specifically, I draw on fieldwork experiences and relationships developed as a participant observer over two periods of 20 months living in the community of San Jose in the 1980s and 1990s and annual and biannual periods of fieldwork of shorter duration over twenty years. The narrative of Tambet and her daughters has developed from ongoing analysis over this period, drawing on field note books kept while living and gardening, fishing, gathering in the forest and gold panning with Tambet, her daughters and sisters. It also draws on previously published and more detailed and expansive writing on the lives of the Harakmbut of San Jose de Karene (see Aikman 1999a, b, c, 2001, 2012, 2017). Research was carried out in both Harakmbut and Spanish languages.

Fieldwork in the Harakmbut community was complemented by participation in meetings, conversations and congresses of the Federation of Natives of Madre de Dios. (FENAMAD), semi-structured interviews and conversations with representatives of the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon (AIDESEP), through the collection of minutes, reports and other unpublished material and through my attendance at meetings of the UN Working Group on the drafting of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Geneva. Sections discussing Harakmbut cosmology, kinship and politics draw on three volumes by Gray (1996,1997a, 1997b). Since the early 1980s I have been an active supporter of indigenous rights and the development of FENAMAD as a critically engaged anthropologist (Low and Merry 2010).

When I first met Tambet in late 1979 she had experienced the decimation of her kin and clan from disease, flight and relocation, marriage and childbirth. Since then she has lived through dramatic rapid socio-cultural change and destructive environmental change from gold mining, timber extraction, and a plethora of exploitative economic relations, engendering a shift from the hunting/fishing small scale agricultural livelihood she pursued with her husband, children and extended family, to living today on the margins of an environmental wasteland created by massive in-migration of impoverished, landless and marginalised Peruvians turned gold panners[iii].

As a broad context within which to locate the discussion of indigenous Harakmbut women, the first section briefly considers Latin America and Peruvian attitudes, policies and practices towards indigenous peoples and education. Three subsequent sections investigate the specific experiences of Tambet and the Harakmbut with the three types of learning. The first follows

Tambet’s early life to investigate Harkambut learning, knowledge and the importance of territory and the invisible spirit world. The second considers the changes taking place in the community of San Jose de Karene and examines new knowledge, skills and understandings acquired by Tambet and her daughters through their experiences as part of an expanding capitalist and intercultural society, dominated by gold mining. The third looks at the ways in which Harakmbut women’s activism has emerged and the value attached to training and capacity building for furthering their goals of recognition, participation and self-determination as indigenous women. The final discussion section considers the ways these types of learning interrelate, their interdependence and their meaningfulness in the context of social and environmental change and generational shift.

The recognition of indigenous women and education for indigenous peoples in Latin America

While the experiences of Tambet and her daughters are unique to them, they emerge in the wider context of conditions shared with other indigenous peoples. In Latin America and the Caribbean region the indigenous population, that is the population which traces its ancestry before the arrival of Europeans, is estimated to be around 36.6 million, some 7 percent of the total population, amounting to 600 indigenous peoples living in diverse social and economic situations. Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru have the largest indigenous populations, comprising around 80 percent of the regional total (World Bank cited in UNESCO/OREALC 2017, World Bank 2015). However, as Morrison and Vaioleti (2011) highlight, definitions of indigeneity for statistical census purposes tend to rely on whether or not individuals speak an indigenous language ignoring socio-cultural-political aspects of being indigenous and self-definitions of indigeneity, which may or may not include language.

The ILO Convention 169, of which 15 Latin America and Caribbean countries are signatories, states that indigenous peoples are

> 'peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest of colonization or the establishment of the present state boundaries and who irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural or political institutions' (ILO convention 169, Article 1.1b).

With the European conquest of the Americas, the concept of race emerged for the first time as the term 'European' no longer identified a population in a continent (Europe), but was used to discriminate between coloniser and colonised. While the terms by which the non-European populations have been labelled may have changed over time (e.g. savage, Indian, *campesino,* native), they all denote 'otherness'. Similarly, the term indigenous has come to be used to identify those peoples perceived as being different from the dominant population of European descent and from subsequent migrant groups (Quijano in del Aguila 2016, p.5).

The indigenous population of Peru is estimated to be around 4 million, which represents 14.76 percent of the population of which 94 percent are Andean and 6 percent Amazonian (Defensoria del Pueblo 2011). The indigenous population of the Andes have a different history of recognition to that of the Amazon where many indigenous peoples have remained in relative autonomy well into the 20th century (del Aguila 2016). In the 1940 Peruvian census, the Amazonian Departments of Peru only gave a rough estimate of the 'jungle' population, meaning that for the most part the diverse socio-cultural-linguistic indigenous population was invisible in the statistics. The Harakmbut are numerically small, with a population that decreased from around 10,000 at the beginning of the 20th century to some 1,000 individuals (Gray 1996). Until the beginning of the boom in gold mining in the 1980s the Harakmbut in the socially and economically marginalised Madre de Dios region of the South Eastern Amazon had been invisible to the state.

A uniformity of approach towards the indigenous populations of many Latin American countries continues to be a persistent feature of social and educational policy and to replicate social, cultural, political and economic divides through what Quijano (2000) calls the coloniality of power. It obscures their diversity as peoples and denies their distinct histories and cosmologies as well as the diversity of their age- and gender-related relationships with their ancestral territories. Stereotypes about modernity's impact on indigenous women means that they are often seen as more 'traditional' than men in contexts where the gradual erosion of subsistence hunting and gathering gives men a more dominant role in economic activities and commerce. Changing gender hierarchies can mean that women often have less experience of urban types of work and less dominant economic positions within the community (Wade 2010). IWGIA (1999) notes that relationships between indigenous men and women have often been viewed from the outside as embedded in customary ways of living and as pertaining to their culture, leaving issues of violence and gendered abuse unchallenged. While many of these dynamics are part of indigenous women's experiences, to treat them as universal or inevitable is to deny indigenous women's own perspectives, as well as their aspirations, agency and struggle.

The representation of all indigenous women as similarly poor, under- or un-educated and/or illiterate ignores, for example, the diversity of their economic situations be these urban or rural. Many indigenous women have incomplete or no formal education, while others, albeit a minority, have university degrees and diverse professional qualifications and careers. Missionary and government education policies through much of the 20th century were oriented to educating indigenous populations out of their 'backwardness' and integrate or otherwise assimilate them into modern society through formal schooling. Today there is recognition that indigenous peoples have been historically underserved by education systems in terms of access to formal education and that current persistent educational gaps and inequalities are related to broader economic, cultural, social and political inequalities. There are calls for more effective strategies and programmes in order to meet the needs of disadvantaged young people and adults in today's fast changing world (UNESCO/OREALC 2014, 2017). The solution to high drop-out rates for the poorest young people and those living in rural areas has been to expand primary and secondary schooling in indigenous areas but there has also been a questioning of the nature of curricula and pedagogies which bear little relationship with the kinds of lives and challenges that indigenous students face (Cueto et al. 2009). Critique of the content and orientation of schooling led to the emergence of intercultural bilingual education, which has been actively pursued in the region for over 20 years by indigenous organisations, UNESCO agencies and international and national NGOs. Today most governments have intercultural bilingual departments or offices within their Ministries of Education and have been enacting laws recognising their societies as intercultural and multilingual (see e.g. Lopez 2008). However, expectations for intercultural bilingual education are often very ambitious, including extolling its potential for 'overcoming poverty, social inequalities, exclusion and the lack of social integration' (Defensoria del Pueblo 2011, p.9). What happens in the name of 'intercultural bilingual education' is diverse and often contested (Lopez and Sichra 2016).

Beyond the focus on primary and secondary schooling for indigenous children Schmelkes (2011) notes that campaigns and plans for intercultural education for adults seem to have evaporated and there has been little progress in developing intercultural adult education. The 2005 Peruvian Intercultural Bilingual Education Law (No. 27818) legislates for intercultural bilingual education for adults and literacy but there is little evidence of this happening. So, while the educational practice lags behind and is extremely challenging, the global and regional policy discourses for adult education call for new kinds of recognition. The CONFINTEA V and CONFINTEA VI [iv] reports refer to 'respecting different cultural groups' beliefs, practices and ways of knowing and learning as a condition for relevant and quality education' (Schmelkes 2011, p.93). The UNESCO/OREALC (2017) document entitled 'Indigenous Knowledge and Practices in Education in Latin America' calls for 'the recognition and legitimation of indigenous culture and knowledge, and their inclusion in public policy' (2017, p.5). Indeed, it goes further and demands 'cognitive and epistemic justice' (p.5), that is the transformation of relations of power in the construction of knowledge and the acceptance of marginalised and excluded knowledge (Rodriguez et al. 2016).

In the absence of education programmes of any orientation for indigenous women in the SE Peruvian Amazon, how do Harakmbut women value their marginalised and excluded knowledge, how and what are they learning through their intercultural lives in an exploitative gold mining environment, and what learning do they want in order to support their movement for recognition and rights as women, as indigenous women and an indigenous people? The next three sections consider types of learning that are meaningful for Harakmbut women in their changing lives.

Harakmbut ways of learning and knowing: life, territory and the spirit world

Tambet is an indigenous Harakmbut-speaking woman, today in her late 70s. In her early years she lived with her family and kin in their communal longhouse in their ancestral forest territory in the headwaters of the Madre de Dios river. Their way of life centred around fishing, hunting and small-scale swidden agriculture. But as a young girl in the early 1960s her people were forced to flee to a Dominican mission to seek relief from infections and fevers contracted through incursions into their territory by explorers, lumberers and game hunters. Illnesses that were new to the Harakmbut, such as yellow fever, measles and influenza, were decimating the population. At school in the mission she learned that her way of life, beliefs and values were ‘uncivilised’ and should be cast aside to make way for Christian beliefs and an Iberian missionary concept of what a good and dutiful woman should be and do (Junquera 1978). Tije (1995) writes that this schooling devalued their culture, changed their ways of eating and dressing, their economic activities and also their language. ‘In all this process they showed us that learning Spanish was more important than our own language’ (Tije 1995, p4). Being confined within the mission led to continuing deaths and sickness and tensions between different Harakmbut clans and kin groups. As game became scarcer for hunting and accusations of witchcraft abounded, Tambet and her kin group decided to leave. They left at night, silently, and travelled upriver by canoe to where they established the community of San Jose de Karene and regained their autonomy. By the 1970s the Peruvian government had officially recognised the community and provided collective legal title to a defined and delimited territory, situated within the much wider rainforest lands of their ancestors.

Tambet arrived in San Jose de Karene as a young mother positioned within a strong extended family. There she was able to build on her knowledge and learning through practical experience, through listening and watching her elders, both men and women, through learning about the significance and meaning of myths and stories, and also though communicating with the spirits through dreaming and chants. She continued to expand her knowledge of the forest and river and her skills in agriculture. To be the successful gardener that she became and to provide for her growing family meant learning about the forest and the creatures that inhabit it and learning how to develop relationships with the spirits of the forest and river so that they would guide her gardening and keep her and her family safe (Aikman 1999a).

For the Harakmbut, the world is unpredictable and inhabited by invisible spirits which influence health and wellbeing. Women and men learn to communicate with the spirits to help maintain the health of the family members and the community. This learning is lifelong and knowledge accumulates with experience, allowing men and women to develop distinct and specialised vocabularies to communicate with the spirits of the forest (Aikman 1999a, Gray 1997a, b). Over the decades I have known Tambet she has developed the knowledge and skills to cultivate several gardens with a diversity of crops and use her knowledge to ensure her family’s physical and spiritual health as well as forge strong reciprocal relationships with her kin and clan. She is recognised within her community as a woman of status and wisdom. Tambet is also a teacher, encouraging her daughters as they learn through their joint activities and expand their knowledge, understanding and wisdom through its application. Learning and gaining knowledge that is constituted in the setting of everyday life - 'knowledge-in-practice' (Lave 1988) - is based on values of trust and respect for the teacher, the meaningfulness of the skill and knowledge itself and through the patience of the learners as active seekers and users of knowledge (McCarty et al. 1991, see also Aikman 1999a).

Through Tambet's early life and adulthood she grew in stature, learning from and through her participation and experience in activities of cultivating her own gardens, becoming skilled in biodiversity-management, acquiring an extensive knowledge of different varieties of crops, their properties and optimum conditions for their cultivation and accumulating extensive ethnobotanical wisdom. While her daughters could list seven different types of pineapple grown in her mother's garden, Tambet herself could name 17 randomly intermixed varieties growing in one of her gardens which was situated on high ground suited to pineapple cultivation. Her knowledge of how to garden, how to fish in the rivers and gather in the forest had developed through dreaming and forming relationships with the spirits of the invisible world. From the myth and story-telling of the elders she learned about Harakmbut relations with the spirits of the forest and the gardens, and learned about the behaviour of animals, birds and fish.

For Tambet using her learning for the benefit of her family and community gained her recognition as an able gardener with great knowledge of the forest and river, as a woman of wisdom and understanding of the interplay between the visible world of the Harakmbut and the invisible world of the spirits and as someone who uses this knowledge to try to keep her family safe. She is respected for these qualities and over her adult life gained status, recognition and influence within her family and community.

Learning through experience in an encroaching and expanding capitalist society

The 1980s and 1990s were a time when the Harakmbut experienced gradual but profound change in their lives. Alongside their gardening, fishing and gathering women also took part with the men in panning for gold during the dry season in the sediment of the rivers. As the price of gold soared nationally and internationally, the number of seasonal migrant gold panners arriving in the Karene river multiplied and tensions increased over their incursions onto San Jose titled land. Over time game became scarcer as squalid settler gold camps lined the river banks and penetrated deep inland where over time semi-permanent settlements transformed into sprawling informal townships[v]. Well-organised and powerful gold bosses and gang masters expanded their enterprises using increasingly larger and more highly mechanised machinery to extract the gold bearing soil and sediment, dredging the river beds and excavating the forest all year round.

The impact of the burgeoning migrant population’s ecologically destructive economic practices had subtle but pervasive effects on Harakmbut women’s ability to use their learning in their daily lives. It also restricted their freedom to move through their territory and access the forest resources. The Harakmbut men began to spend more time on gold work, as their ability to sustain their families through hunting and fishing were compromised by the destruction of the forest cover, pollution of rivers and scarcity of wild pig, tapir, deer and birds. From being one of several different economic family-oriented activities within their subsistence economy, gold mining became a crucial income generating activity dominated by the men who for the most part controlled the money. This in turn had an impact on internal social and gendered relations. Senior women such as Tambet gradually stopped growing surpluses of manioc for beer making as men could directly purchase bottled beer available in the shanty gold mining settlements along the rivers (Aikman 1999b, c). Men no longer had time to help the women clear the forest for new gardens to plant manioc and plantains, while migrant labourers working together with the Harakmbut in gold mining would not eat Tambet's garden produce demanding instead bought foodstuffs, such as potatoes, rice and pasta.

So Tambet learned that wider changes were influencing her ability to use her knowledge and complex understandings of the physical and spiritual environment for the good of her family. Gold mining and the ability to obtain a fair rate for gold at the trading post had taken on a new importance. On trips to the trading post to sell gold and buy foodstuffs, she experienced discrimination and humiliation and learned that her way of speaking Spanish marked her out as a '*nativo*'. She and her family were viewed with suspicion and in some instances with fear by migrants with ingrained prejudices about the indigenous peoples of the rainforest. She learned through repeated invasions of the community's legal territory by miners, the plunder of hardwoods and forest fruits and other infringements of their freedoms that their rights went unheeded by the Departmental authorities, the police and the judiciary. On the contrary she was discriminated against on the basis of her race, ethnicity and gender. After some years she rarely went to the trading post with the men and kept to the community.

As Tambet's daughters grew, they too learned through gardening, collecting and fishing together with their mother and aunts. Harakmbut knowledge is oral and belongs to an individual as the culmination of a lifetime of learning. While Tambet's daughters learned much about their cosmology, the spirit world, how to provide for a family and live a rich and valued life in the forest environment, the forest environment itself was changing through the activities of gold mining. Tambet passed on her learning as well as she could to her daughters who were also learning through schooling and close interaction with migrant gold miners now living in and around the community. Travelling salesmen and saleswomen brought their wares - beer, clothes, mobile video screenings of Tarzan and other adventure films which caused much mirth in San Jose - laboriously upriver by canoe to the community. Meanwhile, Puerto Maldonado, the Departmental capital, was slowly transformed from frontier outpost to regional hub, thanks to the burgeoning gold economy, commercial agriculture and forestry. State institutions became established, the banking sector expanded and communications with Lima were regularised.

Since her brief attendance in the mission school in the 1960s, Tambet had no access to any educational opportunities offered by the state or the missionaries. This is not to say that she did not value schooling for her children. As mining took a hold over the subsistence activities and hunting and fishing no longer provided the basis of the economy, she hoped that school certificates would provide her daughters with alternatives to heavy work involved in gold mining, cooking in gold camps or, worse still, prostitution. Tambet’s daughters attended the Dominican mission-run primary school in San Jose. The school, first set up in the early 1980s, is staffed by Spanish speaking lay-missionaries and follows the national curriculum. The demands of schooling five days a week meant that they had less time to accompany their mother and to learn from and with her about the intimate spiritual links between crops, how they grow and the nutritional and wellbeing of the family and community. At the same time, they had less inclination and motivation to do so as they saw their mother toil in their gardens, struggling to bring home enough fish from the contaminated rivers to feed the family once the forest game – wild pig, tapir, birds and monkeys – had become scarce. Schooling for Tambet's children was focused on learning to be Peruvian citizens through curriculum and educational practice that was ignorant of Harakmbut knowledge, learning and teaching (Aikman 1999b). Schooling was, as Corbett (2007) writing about Canada aptly puts it, about learning to leave, to leave behind Harambut values and knowledge and to look for new kinds of lives elsewhere. On completing primary schooling, Tambet's daughters boarded in a nunnery in the regional capital in order to attend secondary school.

In their daily lives, Tambet and her children learned that social institutions and individual Peruvians of diverse backgrounds held deep-seated prejudices against them. They learned this in multiple contexts and reinforcing ways: from their struggle to mine for gold legally according to ever changing laws and regulations; their attempts to eke out a subsistence through fishing, agriculture or hunting in their territory that had been illegally invaded and occupied; their interactions with miners, commercial travellers, bureaucrats, representatives of the police, judiciary and the law; the proselytising strategies of the Dominican missionaries and through the education system and its national curriculum. In this environment Tambet learned the importance of finding ways to continue to keep her family safe through her skills of gardening, fishing and gathering, her knowledge of Harakmbut ancestral territory and her relationship with the spirits of the invisible world.

For her daughters growing up in a changing environment, being schooled in Spanish, mobile, smart at business negotiations, able to engage with and use the diverse discourses of miners, officials and non-indigenous people were important aims and valued for alternatives to the potential penury that gold mining and the destruction of the physical environment presaged

(Aikman 2001). They used their learning, their knowledge and skills to seek out new ways to lead their lives and assert themselves as indigenous women and as Peruvians in the midst of rapid social change and an abrasive intercultural environment. They valued the opportunities that schooling afforded them in terms of encounters and relationships with individuals from diverse indigenous and non-indigenous backgrounds, learning a good level of Spanish from the lay-missionary teachers and acquiring academic qualifications on a par with other Peruvians. While some young women of this generation have taken up opportunities to train as health workers, teachers or forestry technicians, others have become involved in the emerging movement for the recognition of indigenous rights, finding new ways to challenge stereotypes and assert themselves as indigenous peoples and as indigenous women.

Learning through training and capacity building for indigenous participation, voice and rights-based advocacy.

In 1982 the Harakmbut, together with 46 indigenous communities from the 17 indigenous peoples of SE Peruvian Amazon, established the Federation of Native of Madre de Dios (FENAMAD) (www.FEMAMAD.org). It was set up to defend indigenous territories from invasion and destruction and to sustain the ways of life embedded in these territories. Its mandate included a search for alternatives to gold mining in order to secure the futures of the indigenous communities. As with other indigenous organisations emerging in the 1980s and 1990s (Deten 1990), men were most active and held leadership positions. Over time, however, the women began to engage more actively within FENAMAD and pushed for the establishment of a Secretary for Women's Issues where they could be represented and their voices heard. In 1990 women representatives from the Harakmbut and other neighbouring indigenous communities held the First Meeting of Native Women of Madre de Dios, organised with the express aim of uniting as indigenous women. Travelling for several days by canoe and lorry, they congregated in one community to discuss their status and representation in the organisational structures of their communities and how they felt their positions as women in these structures was being devalued. They gave voice to their anxieties about changes emanating from beyond their communities, stating that

> In recent decades we have suffered from alienation because of contact with western society and the introduction of ideas, values, which have brought with them an alteration in our ways of being and thinking as well as that of all our cultures of origin (FENAMAD 1990, p.1).

Using Spanish as their common language, the Harakmbut women learned that they could work together with other Amazonian indigenous women, could voice their opinions, develop their analyses and shape their own development. They felt they had been ‘poorly advised by the colonists and because of this we have come to view our traditions as something outdated and of little importance today’ (FENAMAD 1990, p.1). They felt marginalised because: ‘We know little about the importance of revaluing and recognising the worth of our culture, customs and values’ (ibid). They also voiced concern for their low level of inclusion in community decision-making and voiced their desire to more active in the welfare of their communities.

With a growing determination, they discussed the importance of the family as a locus for children’s learning and looked for new ways to reassert their indigenous knowledges and practices. They began with sharing their own knowledge of medicinal plants and crops and also looked to indigenous health promoters from other regions of the Peruvian Amazon to expand their skills and knowledge in areas of childbirth, hygiene and nutrition. They agreed that schooling had not equipped them with the resources needed to negotiate their futures in the harsh and brutal environment of gold panning, timber extraction and oil exploration. And there was an absence of adult basic education or non-formal programmes in their communities. They wanted learning that would help them secure their rights vis-à-vis the burgeoning migrant population, the state and international businesses and organisations (FENAMAD 1995).

The women voiced concern that the schooling provided in indigenous communities was irrelevant not only for indigenous children's functioning in wider Peruvian society but also for their relationship with their own society. A study carried out for indigenous organisations in Peruvian Amazon at this time concluded that schooling was contributing to the loss of indigenous cultural knowledge and languages and that indigenous children's performance in locally administered tests was 'disastrous' (Chirif 1991, p.61). As schooled women themselves they valued bilingual education but noted that that even when bilingual teachers were posted to indigenous schools, they were not necessarily bilingual in the children's indigenous language. The lay-missionary school teacher in the Dominican-run school in San Jose in the 1990s claimed to be a bilingual teacher because he spoke Quechua and Spanish, but he had no knowledge of Harakmbut. They used their insights to demand better coordination with the Departmental Office of Education and for appropriately qualified indigenous teachers who were alert and sensitive to young peoples' learning and knowledge of their indigenous heritage, experienced in the way of life in this gold mining frontier environment and also knowledgeable about their country as citizens.

By sharing their experiences of the changes that were taking places in their lives and the lives of their families and community the Harakmbut women found common cause with other indigenous women. Together they learned from each other, shared, taught and organised themselves. On the one hand, they learned how to revalue the ways of learning and knowing about Harakmbut land, life and the spirit world they had acquired from their mothers' generation, Tambet's generation. On the other hand, like other indigenous women in Peru they 'learned that it is not a natural condition to be discriminated, mistreated or disadvantaged' (Tarcila Rivera, Quechua indigenous leader, Rivera 2000, p.36). They learned a language of critique and rights and identified abilities and skills they required for effective collective action through training workshops, capacity building and regular meetings to search together for solutions to their collective problems and challenges as indigenous women (FENAMAD 1995).

While Harakambut women were strengthening their presence within FENAMAD and raising pressing issues related to the condition of indigenous women, access to land and resources, violence and marginalisation in their daily lives, they also forged alliances with indigenous women from across the Peruvian Amazon region. FENAMAD is an affiliate of AIDESEP (the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon) an indigenous organisation influential on the national and international stage lobbying for indigenous rights, legal titling on indigenous lands, health and education. In the run up to the 1995 Fourth World Conference on the Status of Women held in Beijing indigenous women established an AIDESEP Office of Women's Affairs to provide them with a platform within the women's movement and enable them to take their demands to global policy arenas (Oliart 2008). The

Office of Women's Affairs initiated a national workshop to support indigenous women from regional organisations such as FENAMAD to articulate their priorities within their communities and to deliver leadership training to develop their capacity to organise and actively take part in developing a political agenda (AIDESEP 2007). So, while engaging in the wider women's movement for recognition and rights, they sought to highlight the inequalities and discriminations they experienced as *indigenous* women. In 2000 Rivera noted:

> There has been progress for women in Peru, seeking spaces for participation, influencing policy formulation, laws, and seeking alternatives with which to improve the conditions of Peruvian women in general but that, in this context indigenous women have still not managed to gain recognition or respect with regard to gender, ethnicity or culture (Rivera 2000, p.36).

Slowly Harakbmut women and the women of FENAMAD strengthened linkages and expanded their networks with indigenous women around the globe. In 2013, the World Conference of Indigenous Women, took place in Lima Peru, and the Conference Statement 'Indigenous Women Towards Visibility and Inclusion' notes: 'We recognise ourselves as rights holders and, also at the collective level, we identify specific problems because of our condition as women and as members of indigenous peoples' (WCIC 2013, Section 7). This Statement calling for the 'development of leadership and continuous training and capacity building processes based in principles, values and methodologies that are in accordance with our cultural worldview' (ibid) echoes FENAMAD women's demands and has grown out of their grounded experiences. Indigenous women's learning through training and capacity building has shaped their action as women, as indigenous and as indigenous women. The

International Indigenous Women's Forum at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has a programme for training in rights and other issues identified by indigenous women to enable a 'breaking with paradigms of victimisation and vulnerability' (p.12). This is training to build their capacity as self-determining actors within their dynamic societies today and 'building on indigenous cosmovisions, spirituality and intergenerational dialogue' (IIWF 2009, p.22).

Learning through training and capacity building for indigenous participation, leadership, voice and rights-based advocacy is part of a clear and explicit demand of indigenous women engaged in action for recognition as self-determining actors. It has been identified by indigenous women from FENAMAD to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as vital for achieving the kind of recognition they desire in order to shape for themselves the kinds of change they value.

Concluding discussion

The previous sections have investigated three different types of learning that Harakmbut women value in different ways. The first - developing knowledge, skills and understandings of Harakmbut society, relationships to their territory and spirit world - is discussed through the example of Tambet. A glimpse into her young and adult life has offered some insights into the value and meaningfulness of this kind of learning for Harakmbut women of her generation. Learning emerges from and through the relationships Tambet develops with the visible world around her as well as the invisible world of the spirits and link her with her predecessors and their collective territory. How she uses her learning and teaches her daughters and subsequent generations contributes to her recognition as a strong and respected Harakmbut woman. Non-Harakmbut are not interested in this learning and its language and are ignorant of the view of the world (the cosmovision) and understandings it encompasses. Hence Tambet's knowledge and wisdom go unrecognised and unvalued in the turbulent and often violent gold mining society on the fringes of the Peruvian state.

The second type of learning for Harakmbut women is experienced through daily encounters in what was and continues to be an increasingly intercultural environment through the relentless increase in migrants in trying to eke out a livelihood in the gold economy. Tambet and her daughters' experiences offer insights into the complex and abusive relationships that Harakmbut women experience in their encounters with migrants and representatives of state institutions. Their learning happens through unplanned and unanticipated interactions, the cut and thrust of life in the gold economy and through experiences of humiliation and discrimination. But the language skills, social skills, and different bodies of knowledge that Harakmbut women learn are important for their navigation and survival in this changing social and physical environment. Schooling became a regular feature of Tambet's daughters' childhood and youth and there they gained schooled knowledge, albeit disconnected from the lives they were living. They also gained certificates and qualifications which brought a certain status as 'educated' Peruvians, despite its potential to alienate them from the values and knowledge they learn from their mother.

The third type of learning emerged in context of expansion of the gold economy, the lack of regulation and the need to act in the face of marginalisation and structurally embedded inequalities. The first steps taken by Harakmbut women to organise themselves through FENAMAD illustrates two aspects to this learning. One the one hand, Tambet's daughters' generation began to question their internalisation of their supposed inferiority and their prejudicial stereotyping as ignorant, vulnerable and powerless. They began to reassess and revalue the knowledge and skills which they learn from their mothers and came together as women to challenge the dominance of men in decision-making in their own families and communities. Drawing strength from the growing women's movements in Peru and Latin America they joined in the call for women's equality but defining and engaging on their own terms to dismantle homogenising and discriminatory conceptions of who indigenous women are (Duarte 2012). In her 2008 article, Oliart traces the nature and trajectory of indigenous women's resistance in Andean Peru. She refers to the diversity of indigenous women's agency and actions and their positionality and histories throughout Latin America to note that indigenous women respond to the challenges they face and the opportunities they have on their own terms and in their own ways.

Looking back over the past 40 years, as this article has done, it is clear that not all Harakmbut women have had the same challenges and opportunities in their lives. Harakmbut women have tread different paths at different times and made different decisions about their learning and the knowledge and skills they value. Tambet has not been active in formal campaigning for indigenous rights and indigenous women's rights – and nor have all her daughters or those of her daughters' generation – but she supports the aims and work of FENAMAD and supports the younger women who do. She has continued to live and work in San Jose, while the gold mining economy has expanded around her, destroying huge tracts of forest cover and polluting the rivers. Her three daughters left the community to attend missionary secondary schooling. While one returned, two continued on to further education and were posted to positions as health worker and teacher respectively far from San Jose. Nevertheless, they are engaged in different ways with the work and campaigning of FENAMAD. The daughter who returned has worked in the gold economy, cooking for groups of miners and working with her mother in their gardens. Her children are growing up alongside children of mixed

Harakmbut-non-indigenous marriages and non-indigenous children of the contract miners. Tambet's grandchildren have only a rudimentary ability in the Harakmbut language and their knowledge of Harakmbut territory, rivers and forest is dominated by the destructive effects of gold mining. They attend the community school which is still run by Dominican lay-missionaries and still offers only a monolingual Spanish national curriculum. The dominant language heard in the community today is the language of the gold economy.

Tambet has learned how to fish and garden and sustain her family in a changed physical and social environment. She has learned how to interact with miners living in her community and her house and how to maintain her distance and dignity. Her knowledge and relationship with the forest and river, despite their erosion, has continued to give meaning to her life as an Harakambut woman. She maintains her self-respect through relationships with the spirits of the forest and rivers of her ancestral territory inhabiting remote areas still untouched by gold mining. While her daughters' lives are being played out in a different social and physical environment the knowledge passed on from their mother and her generation grounds them as Harkambut. The women who began to speak out in FENAMAD have developed a new awareness of the worth of their culture, language and way of life. It is this knowledge of their indigenous cosmologies, histories and their Harakmbut ways of learning that gives meaning to their struggle and their search for new skills in leadership, negotiation and advocacy. Indigenous women are bound together at national and international levels by the knowledges, skills and understandings of their indigenous world views, relationships to their respective territories and spirituality.

Harakmbut society and culture has changed since Tambet was a young woman and mother, a society and culture that has always been dynamic and changing. But the shifts over recent decades have been swift and profound. A younger generation now uses the skills and knowledge they have gained of contemporary Peruvian society to set out demands and strategies for the recognition and benefit of their families, communities and people. And they are doing this having re-valued the learning and knowledge they acquired from their mothers and grandmothers and by shaping it for the lives they lead today. All three types of learning are interdependent and integral to achieving individual and collective recognition as Harakmbut women. It is their ongoing learning that helps them continue to reshape their indigenous ways of life, their relationship to their history and their Harakmbut view of the world in ways that are meaningful. From the outside and at a quick glance, it would be easy to categorise Tambet and her daughters as poor, disempowered and vulnerable. But that would be to deny their agency, dignity and recognition.

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[i] Tambet is a pseudonym. I have changed some of the details of 'Tambet's life and situation to ensure her anonymity.

[ii] I write as a non-indigenous academic – I am not writing on behalf of Tambet or Harakmbut women – but offer my analysis from the privileged insights I have gained through sharing in the lives of these women (see for example the work of Smith 2008, 2016 on decolonising methodologies).

[iii] The miners who have settled in Madre de Dios are diverse ethnically, economically, in terms of their provenance, the kind and scale of the mining they carry out, their relationship to the environment, and their aims and their relationships with the Harakmbut. For more details see for example Aikman 1999c, 2012.

[iv] CONFINTEA, the UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education is held every 12 years. CONFINTEA V was held in 1997 and CONFINTEA VI was held in 2009 in Belem, Brazil (see Morrison and Vaioleti 2011 for more detail about the discussions of indigenous peoples at these conferences).

[v] The growth of gold mining over this period is documented in Gray 1986.