

Runa Simita Yuyarispa, Runa Simipi Kausaspa
Quechua se Recuerda, Quechua se Vive
[Quechua is Remembered, Quechua is Lived]

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I. About

Runa Simita Yuyarispa , Runa Simipi Kausaspa [Quechua is Remembered, Quechua is Lived] is an oral history project and virtual multimedia exhibit that centers on how collaboration with the local communities from the Andean region can allow for better representation of the history and culture of the Quechua people. This project is a collaboration between myself, a few members of the academic community, and some key people from the Quechua community, representative of a much larger group that reside in the Andean region. The collection of oral histories I created with my narrators is inclusive of community members, allowing them to share their own history, thus demonstrating a type of collaboration that should be a key element in the decolonization initiatives implemented in various museums throughout the United States. My greatest hope is that this project sparks curiosity for museum workers, educators, and any student who isn't being taught about the history that continues to impact the communities of the Andean region. Learning about the pre-Columbian and colonial history of Latin America is often neglected in American education, leading many to believe that the native cultures are a thing of the past when in fact they are lived through the communities of today. Sulpayki (thank you).

II. Land Acknowledgement

I recognize and acknowledge that the land this project was created on is on unceded Lenape territory, that is now known as the City of New York, and on unceded Kumeyaay territory, that is now known as the City of San Diego.¹ For centuries, the lands

of what is now North and South America have experienced colonialism perpetuated by genocide, forced displacement, and systemic oppression. I extend my gratitude and respect to the native people who have lived on these lands for millennia and who continue to strengthen their relationship to their ancestral lands in order to care for and protect the environment. Please visit <https://native-land.ca> to learn about the land that you may be residing on.

The lands that Quechua communities reside on throughout the Andean region are still being harmed and destroyed by big corporations, posing a threat to the local native communities. I also want to recognize the environmental and climate change dangers that the Quechua communities are actively fighting against to preserve the land and their homes. To learn more and contribute, please visit <https://aidesep.org.pe>.

It is important to acknowledge the land on which we reside to uplift the voices of those who have lived here for millennia, whose ancestors were forcefully displaced, and whose communities continue to face oppression when protecting their land, their human rights, and their traditions. Reconciliation and decolonization is a life-long process and I believe that by acknowledging these past, present, and future conditions we can work towards a more inclusive and safer world for everyone. To learn more about land acknowledgments, please visit <https://nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/>

1. When I created my final project, “Nuestras Raíces | Our Roots,” for the Curating Oral Histories class in April 2023, my final semester at Columbia, I wrote a land acknowledgement that I feel that is essential to the heart of this project and to the respectful acknowledgement of the communities that have been displaced for centuries. This land acknowledgement has been edited to be more fitting to this project.

III. Background

This project has bloomed from something I've been passionate about since my youth and have only felt more motivated to bring to attention. I grew up fortunate enough to travel to many cities across Mexico to vacation with my family every summer. It fascinated me seeing my own Mexican culture and the remnants of my ancestors, making me realize that I knew very little about Mexico's history that my ancestors have lived through. I felt a sense of responsibility for piecing together that history, ultimately leading me to decide I wanted to become a historian to not only learn my own cultural roots, but also teach the history that is often neglected or not fully represented in the United States. While I got glimpses of my culture on family vacations across the years, the cultural and colonial history of Latin America was brushed over or completely neglected in my classes growing up. While we were taught about the wars and the legacies of Europeans, we were made to believe that the pre-Columbian societies of Latin American had been eradicated and reinvented by the Spanish.² In comparing the content of world history textbooks in American schools, Erick D. Langer found that Latin American history was over-generalized, focused on a Eurocentric point of view, and was not mentioned past 20th century history.³ Langer also believed that "students' ignorance about Latin America is actually a structured ignorance, in which Latin America... is seen

2. While certain topics about the European expeditions were a part of our curriculum, it did not include the history of Pre-Columbian Latin America, colonial Latin America, or modern-day Latin America. Moreover, some of the Mexican history that we did learn about was through the American point of view, such as the Mexican-American war.

3. Erick D. Langer, "Introduction: Placing Latin America in World History," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84:3 (2004): 393-398.

as the site of odd or unusual events [and] are filtered through a popular culture that routinely reproduces the teleological narrative of a triumphant Western/Christian culture led by heroic white males.”⁴ This alludes to the fact that Latin American history is misrepresented in American textbooks and is not taught enough in the classrooms, evidenced by how little is known by students. I took notice of this myself throughout my high school years as I learned about U.S. and world history that excluded any depth of Latin American history from the curriculum. This realization further motivated me to want to expand my education on Latin America outside of what was merely talked about in the classroom.

During my undergrad years at UC San Diego, I came to realize that there was even more beyond Mexico that I knew nothing about. Taking classes and doing my own research about South America’s colonial history opened my eyes further and encouraged me to delve deeper into its history.⁵ I could perceive how much more there was to learn about the Andean region and especially how much I could teach others about the Andean region. The more I grasped the need for improvement of the American education curriculum, the more my passion grew for educating others about the history of Latin America. My work, including this thesis, attempts to acknowledge this gap in American education institutions and bring awareness to the need of better representation for Latin American history, specifically that of Peru.

4. Ibid., 395.

5. Some of this research outside of school included reading books, watching documentaries, and having conversations with professors during office hours.

IV. Concepts to Know

Quechua is one of the native languages of the Andean region that is still widely spoken by over ten million people and is often the first language of native Peruvians. Quechua also refers to the Indigenous culture of Peru that developed in the Inca empire between 1438 and 1532 AD. In working with Dimas Suarez, a narrator who forms a part of this project, offered to teach me some Quechua words and helped me translate the title I came up with in Spanish, “Quechua se recuerda, Quechua se vive [Quechua is remembered, Quechua is lived].” I thought of keeping the Quechua translation along with the English translation, however, I felt it was important to also include the Spanish translation. Part of today’s Quechua culture is deeply rooted in mestizaje. Mestizaje refers to the mixing of Spanish and Indigenous race and culture but is a term that is very much in discourse due to its centering around the idea of race that was reinforced during the colonial period.⁶ In the spirit of embracing this mestizaje, Dimas and I decided it was best to include the Spanish version as well. It was important to us to remember the history held in the Quechua language and to acknowledge that the Quechua culture continues to live within the Peruvian community.

Perhaps one of the biggest changes I had to make to a vital term within this project is the way I refer to the native communities of the Andes. Over the years there has been much debate on how it is most respectful and historically accurate to refer to the communities that are native to the Americas- from “Indians” to “savages” during colonial

6. Lourdes Martinez-Echazabal, “Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845-1959,” *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (1998): 21–42.

times, we have now widely accepted “Native Americans,” “Indigenous,” or “Natives.” It was brought to my attention with my narrators that “Indigenous” can be seen as offensive due to the fact that the term sounds similar to “Indian” (in Spanish, “Indígena” and “Indio”). From that point on I decided, after consulting with their expertise and opinions, that the best term to use is “Native.” It’s in this instance that I was reminded of the Latinization that is a part of the issue when it comes to Latin American representation in museums. Latinization is the generalization of all Latin American and Hispanic ethnicities, cultures, and ideas.⁷ In this sense, I had assumed that because I was still working within Latin America we would have the same ideas and views on Indigeneity and colonial history. While Latin America does share colonial history and many cultural aspects such as food, religious beliefs, and holidays, it should be recognized that there is also a lot of differences that must be acknowledged and tended to in creating a project that centers around better representing the history of the Quechua community.⁸

One of my greatest inspirations for working with native communities and further study the need of Latin American representation is the San Diego Museum of Us. Previously known as the Museum of Man, this iconic San Diego museum has made big strides in their efforts to acknowledge and reconcile the colonial past of the museum that once centered around the anthropological beliefs that “race was biological” and that there

7. Arlene Dávila, “Latinizing Culture: Art, Museums, and the Politics of U. S. Multicultural Encompassment,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (1999): 184.

8. Much of the cultural similarities across Latin America is due to the natural resources that are native to the Western hemisphere and also due to the Spanish colonization that imposed their cultural traditions onto the native communities they united under the Spanish colony, “Nueva España.”

were racial hierarchies.⁹ I had dreamed of interning at this museum for years and had applied countless times until I finally got accepted in February 2020. Although my time was cut short just one month later due to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was able to see a different side of museums that truly propelled me to want to expand on the work they had begun.

The Museum of Us credits much of their decolonization initiatives to the work of Dr. Amy Lonetree and her book, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. In this work, Lonetree presents the changes that museum curators are making when creating museum spaces about Native American communities.¹⁰ She uses a few case studies from various museums across the United States to exemplify how rather than exhibiting Native American history in name of the communities, curators should be collaborating with the Native communities to allow for “recognition that controlling the representation of their cultures is linked to the larger movements of self-determination and cultural sovereignty.”¹¹ Lonetree points out that sometimes this self-determination can bring differences to the surface between the curator and the collaborating community.¹² For example, my narrators pointing out the negative connotations of the term “Indigenous” in Peru helped me to understand that changing my vocabulary to respect their culture and beliefs was key to allowing for self-determination

9. “History: History of Cultural Resources & Exhibits,” Museum of Us, accessed July 10, 2023, <https://museumofus.org/history#history-of-cultural-resources-exhibits>.

10. Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 1-28.

11. Ibid., 1-2.

12. Ibid.

and cultural sovereignty of the Quechua community.

The creation of museums in Europe was deeply rooted in colonialism as their main purpose was to exhibit the artifacts and relics that were pillaged throughout the colonial period and into the post-colonial period.¹³ For instance, the first exhibitions at the Museum of Us that opened during the early 20th century displayed objects that were stolen from local and non-local native communities, upheld the ideas of race and racial hierarchies, and celebrated the colonial foundations of the museum.¹⁴ Native American people did not have a say in what was being displayed, oftentimes being devalued and dehumanized in the depictions created of them. The museum now works closely with native communities from the San Diego area and from around the world to give back objects that might've been stolen or are valuable to their community, including the remains of many Native American people from the Kumeyaay community.¹⁵ The museum has become dedicated to learning the best ways that will prioritize the care and respect towards the native communities. This dedication has continuously inspired me to assess how I collaborate with native communities to ensure that their voices and their community are at the center of the project.

V. Narrators

When planning this project I was certain that I wanted to travel to Cuzco, Peru to

13. Robert Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* Vol. 2, No. 2 (July 22, 2009): 137-56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630902981118>.

14. Museum of Us, "History."

15. Ibid.

tourist and had the opportunity to make connections with many locals. The friendships I built with taxi drivers, the hotel hostess, and the tour guides taught me the deep appreciation that the community has for the Pachamama (“Mother Earth” in Quechua).¹⁶ By respecting the lands that they live on and are nourished by means they are also able to honor their ancestors who have tended to those lands for centuries. Thus, witnessing the cultural and spiritual significance of Pachamama to the community encouraged me to want to reconnect with community members for the interview process of my thesis. But alas, I was faced with a difficult decision to cancel my travel plans as I was faced with financial hardship while living in New York City and soon found myself back in San Diego as a new graduate with no job. Fortunately, I was able to conduct the first interview in person while in San Diego. As for the other narrators who live in Cuzco, they graciously agreed to conduct virtual interviews through either zoom or a phone call.

The first narrator I interviewed, Amy Kennemore, was my anthropology professor at UC San Diego who did legal activism and collaborative research in Bolivia and in other parts of Latin America. I had taken a class with Amy for two different quarters during the pandemic, so I only knew her enthusiastic and passionate personality behind a computer screen. It wasn’t until after I graduated UCSD and applying to graduate school that I finally met her in person to ask for her guidance in the application process. In her classes, Amy guided me through topics about colonialism and politics in Latin American in a different perspective that inspired me to think about how history is told in our society, especially in the United States. One of the biggest inspirations for me was an

16. Terence N. D’Altroy, *The Incas* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 147.

article Amy and her mentor, Nancy Postero, wrote about what it means to do collaborative work between Western and Indigenous academics. In their article, “Reflections on Collaborative Ethnography and Decolonization in Latin America, Aotearoa, and Beyond,” they discuss the role that collaborative research has in working toward political agendas in Native communities.¹⁷ While the topic of collaboration is quite similar to that of Lonetree’s work, Kennemore and Postero also work in the realm of anthropology, ethnography, and the decolonization of the politics of knowledge. These studies are more closely based on observing and working with the communities within their environment, rather than in a museum setting where the research is typically less direct, thus making consent as a major factor in their work. This collaborative research that Amy introduced me to through her classes became an inspiration not only for my career goals as a museum curator, but also for this project.

The two other narrators I worked with on this project were located in Cuzco, Peru. These were people I had the fortune of meeting when I visited Peru in 2021 with my parents. On one of the tours we took to visit the last preserved Inca bridge, known as the Q’eshwachaka Rope Bridge, we met Aquino Huilcas who led our group visit. With a Mestizo father and a Quechua mother, Aquino takes pride in being an “Andino” man (Andean man) that is fluent in his native language, Quechua, and gets to share his knowledge with tourists and friends from across the world. One of the most memorable

17. Amy Kennemore and Nancy Postero, “Reflections on Collaborative Ethnography and Decolonization in Latin America, Aotearoa, and Beyond,” *Commoning Ethnography* Vol. 3 No. 1 (December 2020): 25.

aspects of the tour Aquino gave us was his passion for sharing the Quechua language. His soft voice and poetic way of speaking drew our tour group in as he taught us the meanings of Quechua words, phrases, and its roots in Inca culture. Aquino has been a tour guide for 30 years and still has a deep passion for showing people the lands that he calls home. He was very enthusiastic to be a part of this project because he wanted to keep sharing his knowledge in ways he typically doesn't when he gives tours. I interviewed him over zoom, and despite some technical issues and a few unexpected interruptions, we were able to get through a wonderful conversation about the Quechua culture, the lands that his community works to preserve, and the way he hopes to share his ancestors' legacy with other people who visit Peru. Speaking with pride and passion, Aquino made evident his commitment to sharing the history and the culture that he grew up loving and appreciating.

When we made it to Machu Picchu, Dimas Suarez provided us with a private tour around the archeological site. Much like Aquino, Dimas's devotion to teaching us about Machu Picchu's history that was welcoming to his Quechua culture and community. After the tour, we had lunch with Dimas and got to know him more personally. He also introduced us to traditional Peruvian dishes like fried cuy (guinea pig) and grilled alpaca, teaching us about their significance that went back to the Inca culture. Dimas showed us many aspects of Peru's history through the food, the Quechua language, and our surroundings that make up the values of his culture and are kept sacred to his community. I was captivated by his passion and was able to interview him over the phone for this project two years after meeting him. Listening to him two years later was bittersweet as I

recalled to our time in Machu Picchu, but it was compelling to hear him talk about new information in a more fluid and free-flowing way that he couldn't do when he was our tour guide. Rather than adhering to this job as a tour guide, Dimas now had the opportunity to tell me about the history of Peru in a personal manner. My interview with Dimas was enlightening and gave me a deeper perspective into the views of cultural and historical representation that are held by the Quechua community. His passion for preserving the traditions of his community by way of sharing with me was motivating as it reminded me that collaborating like this not only allows for narrators to tell their own side of history, but it is also a way that I get to contribute to keeping their ancestors and their community's legacies alive.

I had the opportunity to speak with my roommate's cousin, Sara Lopez, who runs The Jungle Journal with her partner, Gabriel Álvarez. The Jungle Journal is an online platform with an annual print magazine that focuses on connecting with native communities from around the world to highlight some of the social, political, environmental, and cultural topics that are significant to the communities. Sara and I shared our mutual passion for collaborative work and amplifying the voices of native communities, and she provided me with footage of two interviews she conducted while in Peru. Sara and her partner interviewed Yurakmayo, a shaman or "curandero" native to Peru, and Ashli Akins, a human rights advocate and social scientist from Canada. While I do not have personal connections with Yurakmayo or Ashli, seeing the unedited footage gave me insight into the relationship that Sara and her narrators created. Yurakmayo's traditional job as shaman provided a rather spiritual understanding of the Quechua

culture, demonstrating it through his connection to his ancestors who also served as shamans in their community. On the other hand, Ashli has worked in the Andean region for over a decade, collaborating with the local native communities to amplify their voices in stopping the destruction and intervention that affects their natural resources. Including Yurakmayo and Ashli's voices to the project brought a different perspective that showcased traditions and community activism that was not touched upon by Aquino or Dimas.

V. Exhibit Creation

Creating this project that incorporated a museum structure was important to me to exemplify the ways in which curating in collaboration can be valuable to uplifting native voices and their culture. Being that creating an in-person exhibit would be physically limiting to my narrators and myself, I decided to create a virtual exhibit that would be accessible to a wider audience. I found the Artsteps website when I was planning for my final project, *Nuestras Raíces | Our Roots*, that I made for the Curating Oral Histories class at Columbia. In that project I was able to build a multimedia exhibit to test and learn the technical handling of the website, as well as figure out the most effective structuring for curating an exhibit.

I drew in a lot of inspiration for the curatorial decisions from an exhibit that opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) where I worked during my time at Columbia. The exhibit, *Lives of the Gods: Divinity in Maya Art*, was partially curated by

Laura Filloy Nadal, the Associate Curator of Ancient American Art at the Met.¹⁸ Laura gave me a tour of the exhibit where she explained many of the curatorial decisions, such as organizing the exhibit by seven gods significant to the Maya culture, collaboration with a community member of the Maya community, and even artistic decisions such as the lighting and color palette in each section of the exhibit. These decisions made my experience seeing the exhibit feel structured and concise, making learning about the topics much more enjoyable. I felt it more enjoyable because the organization of the exhibit felt like storytelling by way of the collection of artifacts and through the audio clips that were readily available through QR codes provided throughout the exhibit. I wanted to bring this kind of storytelling and structure to my virtual exhibit that would best showcase the stories of my narrators.

For the collaborative element in this project, I focused more on working with Aquino and Dimas. From creating the project name to the content included in the virtual exhibit, I kept in touch with Aquino and Dimas regularly to ask for their help and opinions. Because they are passionate about sharing their knowledge and teaching people from around the world about their language, culture, and history, I wanted to make sure that Quechua was highlighted in certain areas of the exhibit, such as in the introduction where it is written in English, Spanish, and Quechua. Another very important part of the exhibit is the inclusion of the oral histories I conducted with the narrators, along with the footage that The Jungle Journal provided. I wanted to ensure when envisioning this

18. "Meet the Staff: The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed 16 August 2023, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/the-michael-c-rockefeller-wing/meet-the-staff>.

project that I didn't speak on behalf of my narrators because it's what's been done by museums and curators for decades. This strips away the collaborative element and allows the curator to decide the tone, the words, and expressions that the narrator perhaps did not intend to use. For this project, having the advantage of the exhibit being virtual meant I was able to give the space to the narrators to project their own voice through audio clips or video footage.

VI. Addendum

During my trip to Peru in 2021, I witnessed the way the local community deeply cherishes their culture and honors their ancestors in a multitude of ways. One of those ways is by sharing their traditions and the legacies of their ancestors with others, namely tourists. The Inca culture is vivid around Peru and lives within the Quechua culture through the foods, the traditions, the religions, and in the people of the Quechua community. While the community is deeply rooted in their history and culture, it is oftentimes misrepresented and neglected outside of Latin America, specifically in the United States. Having better representation of the Quechua community in American educational institutions, like museums and school, would allow for greater preservation of the Quechua culture. This representation can be made possible by working alongside the native communities to help amplify their voices and stories. In this manner, Quechua will be remembered, and Quechua can continue to be lived.

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