

Cartografias de Interculturalidade: Considerações Epistemológicas em Políticas Educacionais

Cartografías de la Interculturalidad: Consideraciones Epistemológicas en Políticas Educativas

Cartographies of Interculturality: Epistemological Considerations in Educational Policies

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Summary: This text offers a comparative analysis of Brazilian and Mexican intercultural policies, representing one of the outcomes of the project *Cartographies of Interculturality: Sorrows, Obstacles, Joys, Advances, and Epistemological Transformations through Educational Policies*. The project was conducted as part of postdoctoral research in the Mesoamerican region of Mexico. This initial exploration aims to systematize a topography of variation in intercultural policies, identifying key elements in both national contexts. The study seeks to contribute to the promotion and refinement of these policies, which are crucial for universities, democracy, and territorial development. Special attention is given to the epistemological dimensions embedded—or absent—in intercultural policies, engaging with Spivak's (2010) reflections on the viability of intercultural governmental institutions.

Keywords: Epistemologies; Interculturality; Public Policy; Education

Resumo: Nosso texto apresenta uma breve comparação entre políticas interculturais brasileiras e mexicanas. Ele é um dos resultados do projeto “Cartografias de Interculturalidade: Dores, Obstáculos, Alegrias, Avanços e Transformações Epistemológicas através das Políticas Educacionais”, realizado através de uma pesquisa pós-doutoral na região

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mesoamericana mexicana. Trata-se de uma das primeiras explorações dos resultados da pesquisa, na qual se sistematiza uma topografia sobre a variação entre políticas interculturais. Buscamos ressaltar alguns elementos das políticas interculturais em ambos os países, tentando colaborar no fomento e no refinamento de tais políticas, que são fundamentais para a universidade, a democracia e os territórios. Chamamos a atenção para a dimensão epistemológica presente (ou não) nas políticas interculturais, refletindo no sentido de Spivak (2010), se são possíveis instituições governamentais interculturais.

Palavras-chave: Epistemologias; Interculturalidade; Políticas públicas; Educação

Resumen: Nuestro texto presenta una breve comparación entre las políticas interculturales brasileñas y mexicanas. Es uno de los resultados del proyecto “Cartografías de la Interculturalidad: Dolores, Obstáculos, Alegrías, Avances y Transformaciones Epistemológicas a través de las Políticas Educativas”, realizado a través de una investigación postdoctoral en la región mesoamericana mexicana. Se trata de una de las primeras exploraciones de los resultados de la investigación, en la cual se sistematiza una topografía sobre la variación entre políticas interculturales. Buscamos resaltar algunos elementos de las políticas interculturales en ambos países, intentando colaborar en el fomento y refinamiento de tales políticas, que son fundamentales para la universidad, la democracia y los territorios. Llamamos la atención sobre la dimensión epistemológica presente (o no) en las políticas interculturales, reflexionando en el sentido de Spivak (2010), si es posible la existencia de instituciones gubernamentales interculturales.

Palabras clave: Epistemologías; Interculturalidad; Políticas públicas; Educación

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Introduction

Pihhy is music. It's our culture, our language and our history. Pihhy is body painting. Pihhy is the sun and the moon, the earth and the rain. Pihhy is health and education. Pihhy is our organisation. Pihhy is respect and our right. Pihhy is nature and water. Pihhy Our communion with the land. Pihhy is communication. Pihhy is ancient. Pihhy is the seed of indigenous origin (Gregório Huhte Krahô).

This multivocal, collective text represents one of the outcomes of the *Cartographies of Interculturality* project. Titled *Sorrows, Obstacles, Joys, Advances, and Epistemological Transformations through Educational Policies*, the project was conducted as part of postdoctoral research in the Mexican Mesoamerican region between 2021 and 2022. Thus, this work comprises the beginning of an exploration of the research's potential outcomes, aiming to develop a conceptual framework to analyze variations in Mexican intercultural policies. The project was conceived and developed based on my professional experience in Brazil, particularly through my engagement with the Intercultural Education Course (CEI) at the

Takinahaky Centre for Indigenous Higher Education (NTFSI) at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG). Particularly, this framework draws on key categories central to these processes, including autonomy, epistemology, and the critical interrogation of epistemic racism.

In fact, this text stems from a visit by a Mexican researcher to the NTFSI\UFG between July and August 2023. Such visit aimed to explore Brazil's intercultural policies, contributing to the researcher's doctoral studies conducted at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).

Mexico presents a diverse and compelling array of intercultural policies, many of which originate from indigenous communities. These include communal universities, autonomy projects such as those established by the Zapatistas, intercultural universities overseen by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), and a government education plan grounded in the principles of critical interculturality.

It is also worth noting that this text reflects the academic trajectories of two Indigenous intellectuals, Mehi-Krahô and Krikati. Both are graduates of the aforementioned Brazilian Intercultural Education Course, which forms the cornerstone of Brazil's intercultural policy. Currently, they are pursuing master's degrees in Social Anthropology through the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology (PPGAS) at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG).

I'm an Indigenous musician, and that means something a little different from being a musician elsewhere. My connection to the music of my people started out when I was just a child, still in primary school. Honestly, I think I was born with this gift—the ability to sing (Cohxyj, 2023, p. 5).

In their master's research, both scholars adopt an ethnographic approach grounded in epistemological and political perspectives to challenge dominant frameworks for understanding the world. This includes reexamining concepts such as *Incrér*, often misinterpreted by non-Indigenous individuals as merely "music," and *Pihhy*, which is intrinsically connected to knowledge.

Huhte and Coxey assert that the university is structured in a way that fosters the training of individuals and the production of knowledge deeply tied to a Eurocentric epistemological framework. Grosfóguel (2016) argues that the academic literature predominantly engages with a limited number of Westernized authors. Similarly, Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell (2012, p. 10) expresses concerns about the dominance of knowledge production centered in the Northern Hemisphere.

The metropolis, the imperial center, has been the preeminent site for theory. Methodology, conceptual formation, data processing, and intellectual debate have occurred largely in the universities, museums, botanical gardens, and research institutes of this region of the world. Thus, an imperial division of labor structures the social process that underpins the texts we commonly call 'theory.' The forms of labor that constitute and direct the process of knowledge production are concentrated primarily in the elite institutions of the global North.

Within this framework, the inclusion of Indigenous intellectuals within academic institutions, particularly in the field of anthropology, holds significant potential to drive transformative change, as emphasized by Gersem Luciano Baniwa (2023).

I hail from a family deeply connected to politics and culture. We are part of the Hacotcatejê group, the Chapada people, who founded Cachoeira Village in 1983—one of the oldest and largest Krahô communities. It's a place alive with cultural richness, where traditions thrive through art and practice. Our community is home to Christian and traditional Krahô singers, messengers, shamans, storytellers, historians, and many others with unique roles. I was born into a time when my people were fully immersed in our cultural and traditional ways. Back then, ideas like health, education, and politics hadn't yet reached us. Our world revolved around the land and the organization of our own people. It was also a time when our elders, wise and knowledgeable, could explain events and processes with great detail. Growing up in that environment shaped me, as I learned from these elders, who were the keepers of our community's wisdom (Huhte, 2023, p. 5).

Our collective text emerges from diverse starting points, as becomes clear from the outset. However, it is unified by a shared focus on intercultural policies and institutions, with particular attention to the individual perspectives of its contributors. The text adopts a reflexive approach to the process of intercultural communication, aiming to foster a dynamic, multivocal, and transformative exchange. Within this framework, a non-Indigenous Brazilian researcher engages with the field of interculturality in Mexico, reflecting on the context of her home country. Simultaneously, a non-Indigenous Mexican researcher explores this field in Brazil. Meanwhile, two Brazilian Indigenous intellectuals, drawing on their expertise in Indigenous anthropology, contemplate the potential establishment of an intercultural university in Brazil, analyzing the similarities and differences between the intercultural policies of the two nations.

Through a series of discussions conducted both in person and virtually over the past year, we developed the following text, which aims to foster dialogue on the reflections, emotions, and perceptions tied to intercultural experiences across diverse territories and trajectories. As Argentine archaeologist Alejandro Haber (2011, p. 24) observes in relation to research methodologies:

I refer to conversation as a flow of intersubjective agencies that creates subjectivities in relation; these are not interrupted by linguistic exchange or by the humanity of those interacting. On the contrary, one does not engage in conversation as a fully formed speaker, but rather as someone 'being,' or, more precisely, as a participant in the process of 'becoming'.

The aim is to contribute to the advancement and refinement of intercultural policies, which are essential for universities, democracy, and territorial cohesion. This goal will be pursued through profound intercultural reflection grounded in tangible educational actions and experiences. To this end, we analyze several intercultural policies, emphasizing the degree to which they engage with epistemological considerations. As Cohxyj reflects in relation to his own educational institution, how might a more musical and spiritual approach be incorporated? Moreover, how could a disciplinary curriculum be deconstructed?

Spivak (2010) also questions whether state institutions, which are dominated by individuals trained within a Western knowledge framework, are truly capable of listening to or deeply understanding other epistemologies, and of valuing them politically in the same manner as they do the Western epistemic tradition.

As illustrated by Huhte in the epigraph, *pihhy* is a term that transcends the simple notion of a seed, as it is directly translated into Mehi Jarkwa, the language of the Mehi-Krahô people. From the Mehi perspective, *pihhy* is a polysemous and sometimes contradictory concept that encompasses knowledge.

2. Context

Brazil and Mexico, despite their social, political, and economic differences, both experienced violent processes of colonization in which European powers invaded territories already inhabited by numerous indigenous populations. This led to widespread domination and exploitation. Both countries continue to be structured around the colonality of being, knowledge, and power. Mignolo (2001) argues that the dynamics of colonality reveal mechanisms of domination through which, despite official political independence, local elites connected to a Eurocentric power matrix continue to exert control, exploit natural resources, and seek to subordinate other populations.

In both countries, for instance, the indigenous populations were forcibly displaced from their territories, and their traditional knowledge systems were profoundly undermined. As Nigerian anthropologist Oyeronké Oyewumi observes, societies that have undergone colonization have faced a range of adverse effects, including psychological, linguistic, and

intellectual challenges. However, one area that has received comparatively less attention is the subjugation of knowledge and the marginalization of local epistemologies that accompany colonization (Oyewumi, 2016, p. 1).

The contemporary world is shaped by the dynamics of these processes, which are inextricably linked to the specific colonial histories of various regions. These processes of domination can be described as internal colonization (Casanova, 2007), colonialities of knowledge, power, and being (Lander, 2005), epistemic violence (Castro-Gómez, 2005), and, as a whole, can be analyzed through the theory of cultural control (Bonfil Batalla, 1989). These processes are interconnected with the imposition of the nation-state and the institutionalization of domains such as land and education.

In his 1989 work, Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (p. 10) argues that:

This idea reflects central themes in postcolonial theory, particularly the concepts of cultural hegemony and epistemic violence discussed by authors such as *Guillermo Bonfil Batalla* (1989), who highlights the systemic erasure of colonized cultures as part of the colonial project. This dynamic is closely related to the imposition of a Eurocentric worldview, as explored in works by scholars like Walter Dignolo and Aníbal Quijano. These scholars argue that such processes of domination not only affect the physical spaces but also seek to reshape the very knowledge and identities of the colonized, further entrenching cultural and epistemological hierarchies.

The history of both countries is marked by an enduring conflict between those who advocate for a path aligned with the principles of Western civilization, particularly focused on neoliberal capitalist development, and those who resist this trajectory, instead rooted in traditional ways of life founded on alternative principles and values. As Raewyn Connell (2011, p. 12) notes, the tension between these opposing trajectories reveals the persistence of colonial legacies that continue to shape social, political, and economic dynamics.

any form of social theory that does not discuss the colonial encounter automatically defines itself as a matter of lesser importance. This includes most of what is currently known as 'theory' in sociology.

National public policies have often embraced a concept known as integrationism (or "catalanisation," as it is referred to in Mexico). This concept can be defined as the attempt to eliminate epistemic and ontological differences, leading to the reinforcement of patterns of epistemic violence that ultimately culminate in epistemicide.

The resulting exterminatory, segregating, assimilating, integrating, or homogenizing policies, which are collectively grouped under the polysemic concept of indigenism, have early on found in the educational field one of

their main areas of political-cultural intervention and one of their most effective governance tools (Dietz; Selene, 2019, p. 165).

National public policies have frequently adhered to a concept known as integrationism (or 'catalanization,' as it is referred to in Mexico). This concept can be understood as the systematic eradication of epistemic and ontological diversity, resulting in the perpetuation of epistemic violence, which ultimately leads to epistemicide.

This area of action has been closely associated with critical interculturality. Within this framework, intercultural education has emerged as a central element in Indigenous struggles against colonialism, effectively displacing the multicultural paradigms that were previously dominant.

This intrinsic ambiguity reappears at the beginning of the 21st century when, in different Latin American countries, the concept of intercultural higher education begins to be articulated, a subsystem with strong indigenist reminiscences that arises at the interface between the nation-state, Indigenous organizations, academic institutions, and both governmental and non-governmental actors who, in each context, characterize the respective national educational system (Dietz; Selene, 2019, p. 166).

According to anthropologist Gunther Dietz (2019), the concept of interculturality in Mexico remains in its early stages and warrants further investigation. Despite its recent emergence, the ongoing debate surrounding intercultural models, approaches, concepts, and solutions underscores the continued influence of traditions deeply embedded in national and regional 'identity politics.

2.1. Mexico

Currently, Federal Governments are actively engaging in the appropriation of elements within this field. The Mexican Education Sector Programme (2020-2024) places significant emphasis on the overarching goal of ensuring that all students have access to an equitable, inclusive, intercultural, and comprehensive education. To achieve this, the programme proposes the implementation of measures aimed at addressing socio-economic, regional, and gender inequalities in access, transitions, and persistence across various educational trajectories.

The relationship between the Mexican state and Indigenous peoples has historically been characterized by the incorporation of Indigenous communities into national society, with

indigenism serving as the political framework guiding this process. As a result, the National Indigenous Institute (INI) was established in Mexico in 1948.

The relationship between the Mexican state and Indigenous peoples has historically been characterized by the incorporation of Indigenous populations into national society, with indigenism serving as the political framework guiding this process. In 1948, the National Indigenous Institute (INI) was established in Mexico with the objective of implementing planned acculturation initiatives, which would have implications across ethnic, cultural, political, and economic dimensions. These initiatives were designed to consolidate mestizaje, promote national integration, and advance development in alignment with the capitalist model. From 2018 to 2024, the National Institute for Indigenous Peoples (INPI) was established with the same mandate. Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples are now legally recognized as subjects of rights, with the INPI serving as the Federal Executive Branch authority responsible for ensuring the exercise and enforcement of these rights.

The formation of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) on January 1, 1994, marked the end of 20th-century indigenism. The Zapatista uprising brought to the forefront the debts that the Mexican state and society had concerning Indigenous issues, including the potential for an education connected to discussions within the field of interculturality. It is important to note that the debate surrounding this concept, which is inherently polysemic, is central to the development of intercultural policies and practices in the country.

Conversely, during the same period, the reform of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution was approved, leading to the dissolution of collective land ownership and its subsequent liberalization for the market, coinciding with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This reform had a profound impact on Mexican farmers, undermining their access to communal land and exposing them to the forces of neoliberal market policies.

The emergence of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) catalyzed the inclusion of Indigenous rights and diversity management policies into the national public agenda, explicitly demanding the recognition of the autonomy and self-determination of Indigenous peoples. In this context, the San Andrés Accords were signed on February 16, 1996, following negotiations between the EZLN and the Mexican government, with the aim of establishing a new national and state legal framework. However, despite the significance of the accords, the Mexican government has consistently failed to honor their terms.

In this context, several legislative changes can be identified over recent decades. The most significant amendments have been made to Article 2 of the Constitution, which

recognizes the multicultural nature of the nation based on its Indigenous populations. In 2001, the article was amended to provide further clarification regarding the nation's multicultural composition, formally recognizing the existence of Indigenous populations and emphasizing their right to free self-determination. In 2019, Afro-Mexican communities were also recognized as part of the nation's pluricultural makeup, granting them the rights outlined in this article and aiming to ensure their self-determination, autonomy, development, and social inclusion.

The General Law on Higher Education (2021) identifies intercultural and bilingual education as one of its five strategic axes. One of the criteria that will guide the future of higher education is the emphasis on fostering inclusive and culturally relevant pedagogies that reflect the diverse linguistic and cultural composition of the nation.

interculturality in the development of the functions of higher education institutions and respect for the linguistic plurality of the nation, as well as the linguistic and cultural rights of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples and communities (SEP, 2021).

The recently proposed educational plan for 2022 suggests a redefinition of the role of education, with the formation of citizens based on the principles of equality, solidarity, interculturality, and ecological and social justice. The national educational strategies to be developed are as follows: teaching Indigenous and Afro-Mexican languages and cultures, inclusive education, multigrade education, care for children, adolescents, and young people in situations of internal and external migration, strengthening schools as part of the community fabric in urban contexts, establishing a gender perspective to keep schools free of violence and harassment, and developing a national reading strategy.

2.2. Brazil

Since the 1980s, particularly through the efforts of national Indigenous movements and with the support of allies in universities, organizations, and certain segments of the church, institutional education has been embraced by Native social movements. In this context, institutions such as schools and universities are seen as key sites for reinforcing identities, languages, and epistemologies

As outlined by Luciano Baniwa (2014), prior to the 1980s, research on Indigenous schools primarily focused on their impact on Indigenous communities. However, from the 1990s onward, the focus shifted toward exploring the various ways in which different

populations engage with schooling. Since then, Indigenous leaders, researchers, and intellectuals have played a crucial role in producing studies on this subject.

Furthermore, we sought to conceptualize the notion that, while Indigenous education often (and frequently does) erase Indigenous cultures, thereby legitimizing an epistemic indigenist policy, it can also be operationalized in the opposite direction. Specifically, it can serve to reinforce Indigenous identity and affirm the distinctive ethnic characteristics of each community.

In Brazil, the integration of Indigenous peoples into national society has been a long-standing objective, with Indigenous education playing a central role in this process. From the missionary activities of the 16th century to the secular state programs of the 20th century, various strategies have been employed to achieve this goal. The Indian Protection Service (SPI, 1910) and, later, the National Foundation for Indigenous Peoples (FUNAI, 1967)—the official institutions responsible for implementing Indigenous policies—along with educational institutions throughout the 20th century, followed this trajectory. The school emerged as the primary site for learning, particularly regarding the 'knowledge' of non-Indigenous society, grounded in a Eurocentric epistemic framework.

As observed, these schools were conceived as part of the broader process of integrating Indigenous peoples into the surrounding society. This integration was predicated on the systematic denigration of Indigenous cultures. The process of cultural inferiority was internalized even by Indigenous peoples themselves, who often came to devalue their ancestral cultural frameworks in favor of non-Indigenous practices and perspectives. This internalized devaluation is particularly evident among young people, who experience and enact it through a sense of shame. This phenomenon can be understood as a manifestation of the coloniality of knowledge, as postulated by Lander (2005).

The process of re-democratization in Brazil during the 1980s resulted in significant changes, culminating in the enactment of the 1988 Constitution (Brazil, 1988). This constitutional document brought about substantial advancements for the Indigenous population, recognizing new rights, including the right to education at the community level, to be conducted in Indigenous languages or through bilingual and multilingual formats. It also affirmed the right of Indigenous communities to determine their own future. Additionally, the Constitution mandates that the State protect Indigenous cultural expressions (Art. 215) and guarantees the use of Indigenous languages and the preservation of their learning processes (Art. 210). Furthermore, it recognizes original rights concerning land and the practice of specific customs (Art. 231).

Subsequently, a series of legal frameworks have been enacted with the aim of preserving the multi-ethnic character of Brazilian society. These include the Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB) of 1996, the National Curriculum Guidelines for Indigenous Schools (RCNEI) of 1998, among others. It is clear that, alongside demands for land and health, institutional education is increasingly seen as a vital component of Indigenous peoples' autonomy (Lopes da Silva, 2001). As Indigenous lawyer Eloy Amado Terena asserts:

Indeed, the decision to instrumentalize the indigenous struggle was a political one, driven by leaders who channeled both individual and collective efforts to facilitate the university-level education of their youth. This decision also resulted from the increasing demand for education within indigenous communities (Terena, 2020, p. 3).

This strategy aligns, among other aspects, with the concept of preserving differences. In Brazil, the existence and recognition of ethnic diversity function as fundamental pillars for ensuring rights and autonomy. In the contemporary context, education plays a dual role: reinforcing Indigenous cultural distinctiveness while simultaneously safeguarding the right to participate in the globalized world (Capacla, 1995).

The field of interculturality is closely linked to the demands and challenges faced by Indigenous populations in Brazil. As a universal principle, interculturality remains in its developmental stages within the realm of public policy. Notably, there is a significant interconnection between inclusion policies and affirmative action, initially driven by the demands of the Black population and later by Indigenous groups. This connection was institutionalized through the enactment of Law No. 12.711/2012, commonly referred to as the "racial quotas".

The struggle for education serves as a mechanism for enabling each population to strengthen its unique identity, representing a political and epistemic process of decolonization. The concept of school education has ultimately been associated with the recognition of distinct pathways, as enshrined in the Brazilian Constitution.

Following a further decade, the Brazilian state is poised to establish its first indigenous university. The push for differentiated education has gained momentum at the institutional level, marked by the creation of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples (MPI), led by Sonia Guajajara, under the administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Additionally, the reestablishment of the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Youth and Adult Literacy, Diversity, and Inclusion (SECADI) within the Ministry of Education underscores the

government's commitment to inclusive and intercultural policies. Looking ahead, the Brazilian state plans to establish its first Indigenous university within the next decade.

3. A few concrete situations

Several experiences with intercultural policies have been found to replicate historical power dynamics that undermine Indigenous agency. This phenomenon, described by Walsh (2013) as "functional interculturality," poses a significant obstacle to the meaningful implementation of such policies. Notable and innovative examples in the Mexican and Brazilian contexts include intercultural universities, community universities, autonomy initiatives by various collectives and social movements, the Zapatista experience, and numerous related projects in Mexico. In Brazil, particular attention should be given to the Intercultural Indigenous Education Courses and affirmative action policies, commonly referred to as the "Racial quotas."

An illustrative example is the project titled *Milpas Educativas*, also known as *Laboratorios Socionaturais para el Bem Vivir*. As an external evaluator of this initiative, I observed its collaborative approach to developing a multilingual, intercultural pedagogical model in partnership with Indigenous teachers from various regions across the country. Coordinated by Prof. María Bertely and Prof. Stefano Sartorello, the project drew upon the Intercultural Inductive Method developed by Jorge Gasché (2008). It was implemented in Chiapas, Puebla, Oaxaca, and Michoacán, emphasizing the collective construction of a political, educational, and pedagogical vision for *Living Well* (*Buen Vivir*). According to the project's framework, *good living*...

the concept is inherently polysemous, representing a philosophy of life shared by various indigenous communities. It is characterized by the integration of society and nature. Each indigenous community, according to its worldview, possesses its own conception of a good life. This includes interconnected social dimensions, encompassing spiritual, axiological, productive, nutritional, educational, and other aspects (ME Project, 2016, p. 2).

Intercultural Universities, recognized for their educational initiatives in regions with significant Indigenous populations, offer undergraduate and postgraduate programs to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. These programs encompass a diverse range of disciplines, including Language and Culture, Intercultural Tourism, Intercultural

Communication, Sustainable Development, Intercultural Health, Art and Design, Intercultural Nursing, and Intercultural Law.

They represent an institutional innovation within the national education system, sharing features with other Latin American higher education initiatives for Indigenous peoples across the continent, while also reflecting distinct characteristics of Mexican educational policies (Dietz; Selene, 2019, p. 167).

The concept of these spaces has faced criticism for being state-created and managed, effectively undermining mobilizations for autonomy, as envisioned in the proposals of the EZLN. The turn of the millennium marked a political shift with the election of Vicente Fox Quesada from the National Action Party (PAN), breaking over seven decades of dominance by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). This change in leadership initially inspired considerable optimism, which ultimately went unrealized for several reasons.

Interculturality, under these circumstances, became a convenient rhetorical tool for the government to address demands for autonomy through state-controlled intercultural public policies. However, this approach sustained systemic inequalities, as non-Indigenous individuals continued to wield decision-making power over Indigenous communities. Furthermore, Afro-descendant groups, other diverse populations, and migrants were excluded from the scope of these intercultural policies, perpetuating their marginalization.

Such policies, therefore, appear to be designed primarily to regulate political mobilizations rather than to effect the structural transformations necessary for meaningful change. As Gunther Dietz and Laura Selene (2019, p. 169) note:

In contrast to conventional educational institutions, intercultural universities emerge with a dual mandate: on the one hand, they aim to expand access to public higher education in rural and agricultural regions; on the other hand, they justify their existence by offering non-conventional, non-urban-centric programs designed to provide 'cultural and linguistic relevance' to the regions they serve.

Concurrently, it is clear that intercultural universities play a crucial role in shaping individuals through the principles of Indianness, thereby impacting social and political dynamics. For instance, Valle Pineda's (2024, pp. 30–307) study of graduates from the Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México (UIEM) illustrates this phenomenon:

1) The UIEM does not align with the postulates and demands of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), as argued by Celote Preciado (2013) and some government institutions. However, it can be seen as a materialisation of a local indigenist project of an institutional nature, which reached its peak in the 1970s. In practical terms, the revitalisation and

vindication of the Jñatrjo language and Mazahua knowledge, as well as the forms of indigenous representation promoted by the UIEM, can be seen to derive from this local movement. 2) The experience of the UIEM engenders a distinctive temporality and spatiality in the lives of the interlocutors, which is reflected at the social level in the north-west of the State of Mexico. 3) Mazahua individuals who have pursued university studies emphasise the diversity of native identity in the contemporary era. In order to capture the internal diversity within the Mazahua population, the term 'mazahuidades' was employed. This term refers to the various subjectivities from which individuals construct their individual and collective artistic, political and academic projects. In this context, Mazahua identity is understood as a construct that is shaped through the public statements and actions of the research participants, who draw upon Mazahua culture and knowledge as the foundation for their creative endeavors. However, it should be noted that these activities, projects and creations do not always fall into the category of traditional Mazahua practices and knowledge. This is because their procedures, tools, creative inputs and final results are not conventional within the history of the aforementioned group. 4) External cultural and material elements, such as the technologies employed by the interlocutors in this thesis to produce their creations, also play a role in shaping and modifying these creations. 5) Subjective configurations, public recognition of *mazahuidad*, and institutional support from organizations such as the UIEM, CEDIPIEM, CGEIB, and the 2019–2022 municipal administration for Mazahua culture are contributing factors in the formation of a Mazahua social space that extends across the northwest region of the State of Mexico and beyond.

As part of my postdoctoral research in Mexico, I delivered lectures at community and autonomous universities, including the Tēkaam Academic Unit of the Intercultural University of the People, located in the community of San Juan Guichicovi, within the Ayuuk/Mixe territory. I also taught at the Mixe Community University of Tlahuitoltepec (UNICEM), which is part of the network of Autonomous Universities of Oaxaca/Mexico (UACO). During these engagements, I participated in processes of participatory action research.

These higher education institutions operate autonomously from both the SEP and CGEIB, as well as the respective state governments. Their funding is derived from a variety of sources, including non-governmental organizations, regional cooperatives, in-kind contributions from the host community, and, occasionally, international cooperation agencies. Nevertheless, their primary means of support is the "academic tequio," a term employed by the ISIA to refer to the exchange of expertise with educators from other universities, who temporarily and periodically contribute their services to the intercultural university (Dietz & Selene, 2019, p. 168).

In both spaces, the concept of 'communality' is employed to develop political and pedagogical plans and curricular matrices, and serves as the foundation for teaching and learning processes. Prior to embarking on my activities at the Universidad del Pueblo, for instance, I had the opportunity to review the text 'La Flor Comunal: Explanaciones para

interpretar su contenido y comprender la importancia de la vida comunal de los pueblos indios', which is anchored in the ideas of the Ayuuk intellectual, Floriberto Diaz Gomes.

The Communal Flower presented here is a schematic representation aimed at summarizing and illustrating the various aspects of indigenous community life. These are not presented as isolated elements but as an interconnected set of knowledge, institutions, and activities that provide meaning and cohesion to family and communal life" (Monzón, 2011, p.13).

In Brazil, there are at least two significant avenues for inclusion policies: the 'quota policy,' which has been the subject of debate and experimentation since the early 2000s and was officially endorsed in 2012 by the Superior Court of Justice (STF), although references to this field remain limited; and the Indigenous Intercultural Education Courses (CEII), which began around the same time. The latter initiative is supported by the federal Program to Support Intercultural Graduates (PROLIND), a policy that has allocated resources to these educational experiences since 2005, through SECADI/MEC.

These policies seek to promote the inclusion of historically marginalized groups in higher education, challenging the Eurocentric and exclusionary nature of traditional university structures. The implementation of quotas has resulted in a significant shift in the demographic composition of federal universities, which were once predominantly comprised of a self-declared white population from middle and upper income brackets. This transformation has underscored the complex challenges related to ensuring the long-term stability of academic careers, while little attention has been given to the necessary epistemological transformations that accompany such changes.

The Indigenous Intercultural Education Courses (CEII) are grounded in the field of critical interculturality and are typically managed by federal and state institutions with expertise in Indigenous affairs, as well as in disciplines such as anthropology and linguistics. This policy aims to promote the inclusion of Indigenous populations and has been recognized as an innovative and successful approach. It serves as a central platform for knowledge production in critical interculturality, conducting research in Indigenous or bilingual languages (including Portuguese), promoting Indigenous authorship, and advocating against epistemic racism.

The Intercultural Education Course (CEI) at NTFSI, where I am currently employed, has been operating for seventeen years and has trained over 400 Indigenous teachers. This initiative has contributed to structural changes in both Indigenous schools and the university.

In addition, the design of the degree incorporates insights from political-pedagogical projects of indigenous schools, the language policies

implemented in the villages, and the alternative economic development initiatives active within the communities. It also addresses the future aspirations and plans of indigenous peoples (CEI/NTFSI Political Pedagogical Project, 2006, p. 21).

Admission of Indigenous students is based on their performance in a specialized entrance examination, which is held annually. The course spans five years, with Indigenous students initially completing a two-year foundational curriculum before choosing one of three specific programs: Cultural Sciences, Language, or Nature. In the specialized curriculum, students are required to complete two final academic activities: the Supervised Pedagogical Internship, which focuses on pedagogical practice in Indigenous schools, and the Out-of-School Project, which involves action research conducted within the community (CEI/NTFSI Political Pedagogical Project, 2006).

We collaborate with official educational institutions, particularly those affiliated with the Brazilian state system, including the State Secretariats of Education (SEDUCs) and the Ministry of Education (MEC). Our goal is to equip teachers and leaders with the skills needed to transform Indigenous schools in a collaborative and egalitarian manner, in line with the principles of horizontal and symmetrical change. This approach, which we have observed in various contexts, emphasizes the active involvement of communities in the process of educational reform.

Furthermore, the graduates have taken on prominent roles within state and municipal education secretariats, as well as municipal and state education councils, and in their respective communities. They have also assumed leadership positions as headmasters and pedagogical coordinators within their schools. In addition, many have pursued postgraduate studies at various institutions across the country, with some attaining doctoral-level qualifications in fields such as anthropology, linguistics, and human rights. Notably, two graduates of this course have reached the rank of full professor at UFG, marking a historic achievement not only for UFG but also for Brazilian universities and the Indigenous movement.

The CEI is linked to several other educational and intercultural initiatives, including the Culture and Thought Connection Programme of the Ministry of Culture's (MinC) Secretariat for Training, Books, and Reading (SEFLI), the Indigenous Knowledge at School Action (ASIE), and the Institutional Teaching Initiation Scholarship Programme (PIBID), which is associated with the Ministry of Education (MEC).

Considerations

It is crucial to consider the evolving nature of intercultural policies promoting Indigenous school education and intercultural education in Brazil and Mexico. These policies are increasingly moving towards the consolidation of a critical and decolonial perspective, while also interrogating the colonialist foundations of educational institutions and projects. They advocate for counter-colonial practices and seek to reformulate public policies in education. However, there remains the persistent risk that these initiatives may inadvertently reproduce colonial power structures, albeit with more carefully updated terminology.

Indeed, several obstacles hinder the promotion of structural changes within institutions, including issues related to calendars, timetables, pedagogical practices, and management methods, among others. A key challenge lies in how experience is categorized and organized. Specifically, we refer to foundational concepts such as person, health, knowledge, and society, which underpin institutional educational processes. These concepts do not carry the same meanings across different epistemological frameworks, such as those of the Mehi-Krahô, Krikati, and Westernized traditions.

The absence of an artistic dimension in teaching processes is a significant issue that highlights the limitations of projects claiming to align with original epistemologies. How can we discuss sustainability and self-management without incorporating Indigenous cultural elements such as offerings, songs, and dances? These are integral to the worldview and knowledge systems of many Indigenous communities. Moreover, how can we effectively integrate interculturality within disciplinary boundaries without recognizing and valuing these cultural expressions? Incorporating such elements is essential for fostering a truly inclusive and transformative educational experience that respects and upholds Indigenous epistemologies.

In this context, the project *Alfabecantar, cantando o Cerrado vivo* (Alphabecantar, singing the Cerrado alive) was conceived from the reflections of the intellectual Julio Kamer Apinajé, in collaboration with the Takinahaky Nucleus (NTFSI) and the Graduate Programme in Social Anthropology (PPGAS) at UFG. The project addresses the social and ecological issues stemming from the erasure of the complex indigenous musicality of the Timbira people. It is grounded in a reflection on the term *me increr*, which is used in the original language to describe the sound in question. This term, which goes beyond the Western concept of 'music', reflects a deeper connection to the sustaining of the Timbira world (www.alfabecantar.com.br).

These circumstances are closely aligned with the observations made by Dietz and Mateus (2011) regarding the processes of domination in Latin American societies. They argue

that an understanding of the colonial nature of Latin American societies also entails recognizing the colonial nature of their knowledge systems. These continuities and their impact on perceptions and self-images underscore the need for an "epistemological reconstitution" (Dietz & Mateus, 2011, p. 59).

The core question, therefore, is whether it is feasible to incorporate alternative epistemologies into the established processes of government institutions. For this to occur, it is crucial that institutions such as SEP (Mexico) and MEC (Brazil) recognize the efficacy of community-based experiences that align with both their own pedagogical approaches and those rooted in alternative epistemic foundations. This recognition should be accompanied by official validation and a commitment to learning from these experiences.

This underscores the need to acknowledge the epistemological pluralism inherent in the diverse educational models that exist. This perspective is supported by sociologist Raewyn Connell (2012, p. 3), who advocates for a re-foundation of theory.

Another strategy is the search for Indigenous systems of knowledge, understood as contexts for producing knowledge that was originally outside the Eurocentric system and that may still establish a foundation for autonomy.

In this sense, as posited by Silvia Cusicanqui (2018, p. 73), it is imperative that we

building our own science – through dialogue among ourselves – engaging with the sciences of neighboring countries, affirming our ties with the theoretical currents of Asia and Africa, and confronting the hegemonic projects of the North with the renewed strength of our ancestral convictions.

In this context, the primary challenge is to establish a clear definition of the term 'interculturality'. This requires moving beyond superficial forms of neoliberal multiculturalism and embracing an understanding of interculturality as a conflict that acknowledges the need to transform the power dynamics inherent in the ongoing internal colonialism.

This approach helps overcome the false dilemma that positions interculturality for all in opposition to interculturality specifically for indigenous peoples and people of African descent. It is not a matter of choosing one path over the other. Rather, it is crucial to address both simultaneously—strengthening the cultural identity of historically marginalized communities while also creating intercultural policies for society at large. This dual approach will foster recognition of the existing power imbalances and pave the way for the creation of a more inclusive and just society.

It is, therefore, imperative to reject the state-driven indigenism that has positioned governments as the "saviours" of indigenous populations. This requires transcending the view that equates indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants with poverty and, by extension, links interculturality to welfarism. Additionally, it necessitates the abandonment of the paternalistic and developmentalist perspectives that have historically underpinned policies labeled as "intercultural." Moreover, it is crucial to distinguish between the inclusive approach and the intercultural approach. The former emphasizes the creation of conditions for incorporating diverse groups into society, while the latter advocates for the establishment of new social agreements that enable the coexistence of distinct cultural groups within an environment defined by equality and respect for difference.

Also, to promote decentralization processes that allow for the formulation of policies grounded in local experiences and initiatives, driven by indigenous communities themselves, without the need for external, centralized oversight. This should be accompanied by efforts to redistribute resources across the three levels of government, ensuring that budget allocations and responsibilities are sufficient to support the effective implementation of these policies.

It is incorrect to assume that intercultural public policies can be uniformly applied across the country. Moreover, it is improbable that such policies can be directly transferred from other contexts. Instead, they are inherently contextual and dynamic, requiring the active participation of the populations they are intended to benefit in both their design and implementation. One could argue that there are multiple forms of diversity, each requiring a tailored approach. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that urban centres themselves are diverse spaces, which is why intercultural public policies should be developed not only for rural areas but also for urban areas.

In this regard, it is crucial to recognise and promote epistemological pluralism, which places diverse forms of knowledge, lifestyles, worldviews, aesthetics, and practices on an equal footing and attributes them equal value. This approach is essential for fostering genuine dialogue. As Spivak (2010) poses, can subalternised populations speak—and more importantly, can they be heard?

At the Latin American level, intercultural educational proposals and teacher training with sociocultural relevance implemented in Peru (Trapnell, 2011), Bolivia (Caurey, 2013), Brazil (Herbetta, 2017; Pimentel et al., 2019), and Chile (Quilaqueo & Quintriqueo, 2017; Quintriqueo & Arias-Ortega, 2019) highlight the importance of adopting an epistemological pluralism that recognizes and values indigenous knowledge. These initiatives promote situated educational processes that connect learning with the ways of life, worldviews, and cultures of indigenous peoples and strengthen the indigenous sociocultural matrix (Sartorello, 2024, p. 2).

From this epistemological perspective, it is clear that progress is being made in the field of intercultural policies. However, it is equally evident that there are limitations to this progress. In this context, we regard the emergence of new epistemic foundations and the particular valorization of local knowledge, as proposed by Raewyn Connell (2012, p. 4), as a crucial point of consideration.

The social thought that emerges from this historical experience is what I have called 'Southern Theory' (Connell, 2007). Regardless of what it is called and how it is analyzed, this historical experience – which, it is worth remembering, involves the majority of people in the world – is crucial for social theory.

Similarly, anthropologist Stefano Sartorello (2024, p. 2) argues that

promoting meaningful learning among indigenous children requires an epistemic transformation of the school institution and traditional schooling methods. This involves contextualizing education by integrating indigenous and local knowledge into the school's educational practices.

A series of categories, notions, and concepts emerge within the conflictive intercultural process, which could play a pivotal role in the refoundation of actions and the refinement of intercultural policies. In Mexican contexts, for example, the categories "from above/below" frequently arise to elucidate the fundamental elements of each process. The term 'from above' is typically used to describe processes originating from and closely tied to governmental and state-level institutions. In these cases, initial critiques often highlight the limitations and constraints imposed by national institutions. Conversely, 'from below' processes arise from the community, integrating local perspectives into their context. These processes are highly valued for their responsiveness to community demands, yet they face challenges in ensuring sustainability due to insufficient support.

The concepts of "above" and "below" do not merely represent a simplistic dichotomy that oversimplifies the intricate social reality. Rather, they offer the potential for a typology in interculturality, allowing us to identify, analyze, and reflect on the diverse and multifaceted experiences that emerge within the complex network of multiple intercultural interactions.

The category of autonomy is indeed a complex and multifaceted concept. In the context of Mexico, as pointed out by anthropologist and educator Maria Bertely (2008), autonomy can be understood in different ways. It can represent the agency of individuals or communities in relation to neoliberal capitalist forces, or it can refer to the political and territorial autonomy sought by groups such as the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), which has long mobilised for self-determination and resistance against state and capitalist control.

These educational projects promote the revaluation of socio-cultural and territorial knowledge, recognizing the ontological and epistemic value of indigenous and local cosmovisions and knowledge, which have traditionally been devalued by formal education systems. They also foster the active participation of community members in educational processes, as bearers of this knowledge and ways of life. Furthermore, these projects give rise to critical pedagogies that transcend the conventional association between education and schooling, advocating for the transformation of school practices and the creation of methodologies grounded in ethnically situated languages, pedagogies, and epistemologies (Gasché, 2008a; Bertely, 2009; González-Apodaca, 2004; Baronnet, 2017; Jiménez-Naranjo & Kreisel, 2018; Hamel et al., 2018) (Sartorello, 2024, p. 3).

In Brazilian contexts, particularly at NTFSI, categories such as stretching, updating, gathering, and literacy are used to re-found knowledge production processes, institutional management, theoretical reflection, and the training of individuals (Herbetta, 2024). All these concepts are aimed at integrating alternative approaches to knowledge creation into institutional practices, challenging Western dualisms such as nature versus culture, and body versus reason. As José Cohxyj Krikati questions, is it possible to establish an educational institution that is spiritualised and aligned with indigenous epistemologies?

For the professor and intellectual Bruno Ferreira Kaingang:

It is essential to identify concepts that can strengthen Kaingang school education and support a paradigm shift within the educational framework of Kaingang lands. To highlight the importance of indigenous knowledge, it is crucial to incorporate cultural traditions, customs, values, knowledge, and our unique worldview (Ferreira Kaingang, 2023, p. 6).

Universities, like other institutional spaces, are not villages, and schools are not communities, and vice versa. There are knowledges and practices that cannot and should not be institutionalized. What is proposed here is a reflection on the possible and necessary articulation between these domains. In this context, the Indigenous intellectual Daniel Munduruku argues that there is a structural issue in the development of some of the policies mentioned and invites a reflection on inclusive pedagogies. According to him, such policies often “amount to mockery in addressing the ‘Indigenous problem,’ as they further emphasize the lack of a real understanding of what an Indigenous people are and their true needs” (Munduruku, n.d., p. 3).

Following this line of thought regarding the real possibilities of social transformation, the sociologist Cusicanqui (2018, p. 15) maintains that: “to truly change things, we must change the episteme, the matrix of culture,” aiming to dismantle the monocultural and

monoepistemic universalist spirit that sustains the current power structure (Pimentel; Herbetta, 2018).

In this mirrored interplay of knowing, reflecting, and feeling progress and limits, in perceiving the variations present in intercultural policies of transformation, it seems crucial that these processes effectively pursue epistemological transformations, which are inherently political. If the categories that organize the world and experience are not the same, imposing only one version is nothing more than reproducing epistemic racism.

The solution is not simple, but the creation of possible strategies is underway, present in the experiences briefly mentioned, and others, which may contribute to the creation and implementation of more effective intercultural policies and processes, generating new practices in the formation of individuals and strengthening collectives, mitigating psychological suffering, and building a more just and dignified world, where many worlds can coexist.

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