

Beyond Acculturation: Political “Change”, Indigenous Knowledges, and Intercultural Higher Education in Mexico

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Abstract: This article critiques the evolution of higher education in Mexico in light of the political “change” that led to the establishment of Intercultural Universities (IUs) for Indigenous communities. We argue that the “change” touted by the post-2000 regime isn’t as profound or beneficial as claimed. Although IUs embody valuable efforts, they unwittingly reinforce Indigenous subalternization, foster cultural segregation, and ghettoize Indigenous knowledges. The case of IUs in Mexico illustrates two unsatisfactory global trends in educational politics. First, the popularization of a bland ‘multiculturalism’ that allows only restricted pockets of epistemic and cultural development for historically subordinated and disadvantaged groups without challenging or transforming the hegemonic political and educational system(s). Second, an incomplete ‘interculturalism’ that is unilateral, not bilateral: on one hand, historically subjected and marginalized groups are allowed to teach their languages, knowledges, and cultures, but are also expected to teach the languages, knowledges and cultures of the dominant group(s); on the other, no major change is expected from hegemonic political, educational, and scientific systems which stay largely immune to the transformational influence of knowledges, practices, cultures, and institutions of hitherto subalternized groups. Bland multiculturalisms must be overcome by critical, proactive, fertile and bilateral interculturalisms that challenge power relations, redress historical injustices, and cultivate epistemic reciprocity. **Keywords:** University; higher education; Indigenous knowledges; interculturalism; Mexico; policy

In this article we critique the evolution of higher education in Mexico in light of the political “change” that led to the establishment of Intercultural Universities (IUs) for Indigenous communities. First, we argue that the “change” touted by the post-2000 regime isn’t as profound or beneficial as claimed, especially in what concerns the “Indigenous question.” Second, we illustrate with a case study of IUs. Although IUs embody some valuable efforts, they nevertheless reinforce Indigenous subalternization by fostering educational segregation, and the epistemic ghettoization of Indigenous knowledges (IKs). IUs accentuate structural impediments to Indigenous social mobility, reify a non-Indigenous/Indigenous divide, and fail to empower Indigenous scholars to design and implement curricula beyond delimited IU spheres. These arrangements don’t sufficiently challenge age-old racial, educational, and epistemic hierarchies. We *don’t* intend to minimize Indigenous struggles for higher education and cultural recognition: we aim to radicalize them by showing that governmental attempts to quell Indigenous demands by establishing IUs fall short of a full-fledged revalorization of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and knowledges. In light of a discussion of IKs we conclude that the case of IUs in Mexico illustrates two unsatisfactory trends in global educational and epistemic politics. First, an increasingly popular ‘multiculturalism’ that allows only restricted pockets of isolated epistemic and

cultural development for historically subordinated and disadvantaged groups without significantly challenging or transforming the hegemonic political and educational system(s). Second, a pretense of ‘interculturalism’ that is unilateral instead of bilateral: on one hand, historically subordinated and marginalized groups are allowed to teach (in) their own languages, knowledges, and cultures, but are obliged to also teach the languages, knowledges and cultures of the dominant group(s); on the other, no major change is expected from hegemonic political, educational, and scientific systems which are allowed to stay rather impervious to the transformational influence of the knowledges, practices, cultures, and institutions of hitherto subalternized groups. Bland multiculturalisms must be surpassed by critically-engaged, proactive and fertile interculturalisms that challenge power relations, redress historical injustices, and promote epistemic reciprocity.

Mexico’s new era?

Recently, it’s claimed that Mexico is finally experiencing effective democracy. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional—PRI*) monopolized power for seventy-one years following the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution. The year 2000 was the first time when a party other than the PRI attained the presidency, purportedly symbolizing the end of “the perfect dictatorship”¹ and a ‘democratic transition’ into a new era. The party succeeding the PRI was, unsurprisingly, the right-wing National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional—PAN*). It’s unsurprising because its arrival to presidential power in 2000 was preceded by the 1988 electoral fraud which prevented the opposition left movement, the National Democratic Front (*Frente Democrático Nacional*), from attaining the presidency. The PAN’s arrival to *Los Pinos*, the presidential house, brought about the administration of Vicente Fox who has since 2006 been succeeded by Felipe Calderón, also from the PAN, and also coming to power under suspicions of electoral tinkering. Given that the legitimacy of the Mexican state and elite *as a whole* have been facing variegated and successive crises since at least October 2, 1968 when the regime massacred student protestors at Tlatelolco, its very survival hinged on its capacity to convince the multiplying dissenters that Mexican politics and life could really ‘change.’ So when the right-wing PAN succeeded the PRI in the presidency on a platform based on the discourse of “change”, it wasn’t only the PAN’s reputation which was at stake, but the viability of the whole state apparatus, if not the whole country.

Although successive PAN governments have presented themselves as the bearers of ‘change’, little has changed since the neoliberal wave swept Mexico since the early 1980s. Instead of qualitative ‘change’, the PAN administrations embody neoliberal continuity. The actual change from nationalist-corporatism to “neoliberal governmentality” occurred since the 1980s (Lemke 2007; McDonald 1999). The “neoliberal transition”(Lomnitz 2008) was enabled by successive economic crises which set the conditions for the rise of ‘technocrats’ in 1982 under PRI President de la Madrid. The technocrats’ reign expanded during the Salinas de Gortari, and Zedillo administrations, both from the PRI. This is because following the 1970s and early 1980s economic crises, the technocrats seized the PRI’s high ranks, displacing the old corporatist elites sardonically called ‘dinosaurs.’ The neoliberal wave overflowed Mexico alongside the Anglo-American surf of Thatcherism/Reaganomics. (Harvey 2005; Fourcade Gourinchas and Babb 2002; Schwegler 2008) By the time Zedillo, the last known PRI president, handed the presidential sash to Fox from the PAN, the

¹ Reding (1991); Sonnleitner (2001)

rightist neoliberal conversion of the regime had already manufactured enough consent around the belief of its purportedly ‘commonsensical and global inevitability.’ Neoliberalism’s “bid for hegemony”(Morton 2003b, 160-161) in Mexico was facilitated by the crises of the welfare state, of ‘actually existing communism,’ and of the global left, which opened the floodgates for the ‘globalization’ of a new stage of capital accumulation.

The crisis of the welfare-state was embraced by most national and transnational elites operating in Mexico. Ever since the 1980s privileged groups have deployed the discourse of an ‘uncompetitive welfare state’ and an ‘overprotected labor force’ led by ‘corrupt unions’ to legitimize the dismantling of the socially-oriented government-sponsored institutions and of many social-support networks. The embrace of neoliberalism can be explained by the conservative elites’ strategic exploitation of a vicious intersection of classed, raced, gendered, and speciesist hierarchies in a continent characterized by resilient traces of a neo-feudal culture that hasn’t given way since the onset of colonialist-imperialism, and that reinforces itself through predatory forms of Euro-centric, androcentric and anthropocentric capitalism. These overlapping structures of oppression have been historically sedimented by centuries of ongoing structural and explicit violence. Their intersection into an overarching hierarchy of social and environmental dominance allows privileged classes to accentuate asymmetries of power and wealth by interlocking the exploitation of unorganized or forcibly disorganized workers/peasants, with that of historically colonized peoples (often also workers/peasants), the ‘liberalized’ female working force, and the environment, all accumulated, expended, and consumed as human or natural ‘capital’ or ‘resources’. Consequently, Mexico has become in the last three neoliberal decades the country with the dual ‘honor’ of producing both the wealthiest man in the world (Carlos Slim) and one of the highest net migration—rather exodus—in the world.⁷²

Nevertheless, based on the discourse of ‘change’, the PAN promised to remove the painful memories of generations past and prompt changes in how the government dealt with every issue, including the ‘Indigenous question.’ Hoping that democracy would bring a recognition of plurality, the PAN’s emergence raised expectations for the possibility that Indigenous difference, might no longer be identified as dissonant alterity or disciplined into subalternity. However, beneath the pompous promises of change operated a destabilizing sense of contingency concerning the spawning of Indigenous movements haunting the privileges of dominant groups. This sense of contingency fuels the recent state-propelled restructuring of the ever-*multiplying* “Indigenous questions.”(Castillo 2006) The atmosphere of contingency has been motivated by the elites’ urgency to deploy institutional buffers to counter the threat of emergent “counterhegemonies of contestation.”(Castillo, et.al. 2004, 359).⁷³ Many such counterhegemonic contestations have been triggered by Indigenous grievances like those motivating the Neo-Zapatista (Morton 2002), Neo-Magonista, and Popular Revolutionary Army movements of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero respectively.⁷⁴

⁷² See Cypher, Delgado, and Wise (2010).

⁷³ We translate into English all quotes originally in Spanish.

⁷⁴ January 1, 1994 awoke not only to the implementation of the neoliberal North American Free Trade Agreement(NAFTA), but also to the first public appearance of the mostly Indigenous Zapatista Army of National Liberation(*EZLN*) in the southernmost state of Chiapas bordering with Guatemala. Neo-Zapatismo has drawn inspiration both from the Zapatista movement of the 1910 Revolution and from various traditions of Maya and other Indigenous resistances. This was followed by the 1996 appearance in Guerrero of the Popular Revolutionary Army(*EPR*) whose more Marxist tendencies also drew strength from Indigenous and Afro-Mexican resistance traditions. Then, 1997 saw the rise of a complex network of Neo-Magonismos in Oaxaca; these autonomist movements draw inspiration from Flores Magón and

Indigenous grievances converge with other national and transnational counter-hegemonic dissidences such as environmental, *campesino* (peasants), feminist, student, teacher, and urban proletarian movements. The articulation of distinct counter-hegemonic demands owes much to the anger provoked by intensified modes of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2009) accelerated by the globalization of the neoliberal order. (Morton 2003a; Rupert 2003; Carroll 2007)

The neoliberal wave has further pauperized many of the already marginalized and/or subordinated identity groups, prompting their articulation into “rhizomatic” networks (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 23-24) of diverse, open ended, and mutually reinforcing counter-hegemonic resistances that transnationally struggle for empowerment, rights, and means of social and environmental reproduction (Purcell 2009; Chesters and Welsh 2005; Chomsky, Meyer, and Maldonado 2010). Elites are particularly sensitive to Indigenous counter-hegemonies. This is because the modern political economy and the status and privileges of elites in Mexico has been built on the systematic subalternization and exploitation of the predominantly Indigenous and hybrid (mestizo/mulatto) social body over a 500 year-old history of ongoing coloniality. It’s the fact that the subalternization of Indigeneity is the constitutive foundation of a political economy of accumulation by dispossession and exploitation by subalternization that makes elites particularly sensitive to Indigenous contestation.

Hegemonic strategies to cope with Indigenous counterhegemonies have long been sedimented into Mexican political practices since colonial times. The elites’ structural response to Indigenous contestation is five centuries old. One such strategy entails granting delimited spaces of modest autonomy for Indigenous practices and peoples, spaces which might be respected by dominant groups so long as whatever occurs there doesn’t influence, destabilize, subvert or spillover into the ‘mainstream’. (Bonfil Batalla 1981) Such was the case of the subordinated “Republics of Indians” during Spanish colonial times (Levaggi 2001), comparable, albeit with variations, to the South African Bantustans during Apartheid, and the North American Reservations. However, in Mexico, the gradual formation of the modern state since the time of formal (though questionably actual) independence sought to incorporate Indigeneity into the dominant identity, albeit as subaltern. (Bonfil Batalla 1996) This process was accelerated by the post-Revolution PRI whose officialist *Indigenismo* ideology/policy sought to paternally select the aspects of Indigeneity to be valued, developed and incorporated by the state so long as they didn’t contradict the ‘imperatives’ of (Euro-Westernizing) modernization.⁷⁵

Yet, the corruption of the post-revolutionary elite prompted the 1980s “neoliberal moment” (Lomnitz 2008) which eventually allowed the rise of the ‘technocrats’ followed by the PAN presidencies. The PAN is known to house staunchly conservative, catholic and Euro-centric elites, proud descendants of Spanish imperialism and Ibero-American settler-colonialism. The PAN’s higher ranks have a

his associates from the early 1900s Mexican Liberal Party (*PLM*). Magón was a mestizo political thinker of Indigenous-Mazatec uprising whose radical libertarian anarcho-communist movement helped trigger the 1910 Revolution. Neo-Magonismo has influenced the self-organized Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (*APPO*) whose broadly Indigenous anarcho-communist mode of self-governance has been deployed to create several self-governing municipalities (comparable to Neo-Zapatista autonomous municipalities), and for a time even in Oaxaca city where barricades were used (e.g., 2006) against the PRI state-government and the federal PAN-led regime. (Chomsky, Meyer, and Maldonado-Alvarado 2010; Maldonado-Alvarado 1994, 2002; Beas, Maldonado-Alvarado, and Gaibrois 1997; Marcos, Pena-Vargas, and Ruggiero 2007; Marcos, de León, and Saramago 2003; Bruhn 1999, 29-55; Khasnabish 2010).

⁷⁵ For influential critiques of *Indigenismo* see Bonfil Batalla (1981, 1996) and Gutiérrez Chong (1995, 2001); a paradigmatic articulation of PRI-era indigenism is Caso (1958).

revolving door with capitalist and landed elites. The neoliberal moment eroded the institutions of the post-Revolutionary regime through which Indigeneity had been selectively incorporated into the PRI corporatist state-apparatus through the officialist *Indigenismo* paternalism. This allowed the old conservative elites, sidelined or weakened by the 1910-1920 Revolution and its institutions, to bid for the cultural *restoration* of the old colonial governmentality. These Eurocentric elites enthusiastically embraced the 1980s-1990s neoliberal waves of economic ‘liberalization’ and political ‘democratization’ largely because it would enable them to dismantle the government-sponsored institutions that supported—though not unproblematically—the ‘development’ of mestizo, mulatto and Indigenous groups. The crisis of modern welfare-corporatism allowed them to push the regime to default to the classic colonial strategy⁷⁶ to cope with Indigenous counter-hegemony: *cooptation and pacification through segregation and isolation*. This strategy entails granting delimited, restricted, and generally small spaces of supervised ‘autonomy’ to potentially counter-hegemonic groups whose practices and circumscribed spheres of social and biological reproduction are respected so long as they don’t influence or spill-over into the mainstream.

When the PAN attained the presidency in 2000 on the discourse that it would become the ‘administration of change’ (*gobierno del cambio*) the atmosphere became suffused with great expectations that the new millennium would symbolize a rupture with the evils of history and its old regimes. High hopes were raised that the ‘ethnic problematique’ would also benefit from the disjuncture. Expectations for a whole new set of developmentalist, still pluralist, public policies were raised; along came grand promises to radically modify the history and institutions of higher education that affected Indigenous peoples. But, as Marx warned, the tradition of all purportedly dead regimes “weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” (1972, 437) Although PAN administrations have sought to claim that their arrival to presidential power marks an epochal ‘change,’ a closer look reveals that while 2000 may have marked a change in the color of the governing parties, it didn’t change the composition of the elites, their ideological proclivities, or the governing model; instead, it accelerated the insertion of Mexico into the global expansion of a Westernizing neoliberal governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Schwegler 2008) in which Indigeneity is still the mark of ‘underdevelopment’.

Promises of ‘change’ and neo-indigenismo

Throughout the Latinized regions of the Americas the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of ‘modernization’ sought to finish off the work of colonization in erasing all remnants of Indigenous civilizations. It’s pertinent to ask whether and to what extent this has ‘changed’. As Salgado explains,

...the modernization project aimed at de-Indianizing the population, bringing it closer to a Western referent, and in the best cases “integrating” the Indian into a “national identity.” The assimilation of the Indian into the dominant culture has been the motto; the homogenization of society didn’t give space for the recognition of difference. [T]he Indigenous roots of *mestizaje* [biocultural miscegenation/hybridization] were—and for many still are—considered... an embarrassment which must be hidden. *It’s revealing that one of the most frequently used insults [to this day]...is precisely that of “indio/a” with its vast derogatory connotations.* (2001, 16; emphasis added)

⁷⁶ Bonfil Batalla (1981); Bonfil Batalla (1996); Maldonado Alvarado (2002).

The reason why structural and discursive discrimination and self-discrimination persists even when the modernization project fell in crisis is because of a more powerful underlying force: the force of Westernization through *asymmetric biocultural mestizaje* that underpins Ibero-American settler colonialism. Rahier (2001, 222) explains,

In...Latin America the official imagination of a national identity has been constructed by the white or *whitened*-mestizo urban elites around the notion of *mestizaje*... *Mestizaje doesn't* mean that the whites become Indianized but conversely, that Indians must *whiten* themselves racially and culturally: the official imagination of the national identity “[is] an *ideology of whitening* within the agglutinating framework of *mestizaje*.”(Norman Whitten cited by Rahier; our emphasis)

“Nation-building” has continued the work of a Latinizing settler-colonialism bent on large-scale Europeanization of bodies and cultures. The most crucial policies, including those concerning education, have been geared in this direction. The aggressive deployment of “education” as universal, compulsory, and free can be interpreted as a policy of massive Westernization. Settler colonialism and its Europeanized-Mestizo offspring fetishized ‘education’ as the magic wand for ‘progress’ through the *acculturation* of the Indian (and African) into Western civilization. Most people in Latin(ized) America have been and still largely are educated in programs designed to “substitute their defective cultural elements”(Bartra 1974, 7) with fashionable versions of (Westernized) national and global culture. Such substitution of cultures and whole civilizations through institutionalized *acculturation* exemplifies what Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2010) critique as “subtractive education” and codify as cultural genocide under international law. Hence, the educational system is far from innocent: as an ethnocidal weapon of acculturation “education” has often had “the intention of de-Indianizing people” and destroying “cultural and linguistic diversity.”(Santillán 2003, 2) Yet colonialist intentions have faced myriad resistances which have caused the failure of several Westernizing attempts:

The policies of Latin American States during the twentieth century... *failed* in their attempts to de-Indianize the Indian, to make the Indian in the image of the [Europeanized] mestizo, to incorporate, integrate and assimilate the Indian into Western culture. This demonstrates the strength and vitality of Indigenous cultures which, throughout their ethnic resistances haven't only prevented the materialization of policies of cultural ethnocide, but have also strengthen their own ethnic projects, including the struggle for...rights as Indigenous peoples...(Sandoval 2009, 3)

Considering the limits that modernization and developmentalist projects encountered in serving the underlying purpose of large-scale Westernization, the Fox administration retrenched and pursued a ‘change’—which we contend is but a ‘change’ *of strategy*: from an offense based on aggressive educational assimilation, to a truce relying on educational segregation. It's in this light that we must critically engage the establishment in 2000 of ‘Intercultural Universities’ (IUs) for communities that have historically resisted de-Indianization. Some good intentions notwithstanding, IUs don't challenge — let alone dismantle — settler colonialism; at most, they retrench it.

From within the Fox administration's discourse of ‘change’, IUs can be interpreted as one of many efforts to materialize the promise of a rupture with the old regime. Under the halo of a democratic renaissance IUs were momentarily exempt from suspicions concerning the old inattention to Indigenous difference. They claimed to address the “Indigenous question” in “new” ways by targeting the “lag” of Indigenous

peoples in higher education through institutions “special” for “them.” IUs would address two dimensions: (1) the “revaluation of culture” through the opening of (delimited) “spaces” for the “Indigenous sector”(Paz 2004, 361)—though still under an overarching Western/ized order; and, (2) the “economic development” of Indigenous regions via the implementation of focalized programs for specific “Indigenous necessities” designated as such under the supervision of the central administration. From the start, the definition of ‘Indigenous necessities’ *by* the central government reveals the elites’ unwillingness to resist the temptation of rehearsing the old regime’s paternalism, betraying its claims to have radically broken with the past. Old practices in which the government ‘knows better’ than the *indígena* what the *indígena* needs were reenacted. The failure to live up to the promise of rupture revealed the renewal of a pattern in which policies aimed at the marginalized sectors proceed from the idea of a single self-same subject: “the Mexican.” Becoming ‘Mexican’ has historically entailed a constant doing-away with traces of ‘Indigeneity’. Indigeneity has been constitutive of Mexicanness, but only as its *residual abject* which is continuously being left behind in order to ‘modernize,’ ‘develop’ or ‘globalize’. For most people, identity-building still entails a continuous de-Indianization coupled with the embrace of (Western) ‘civilization’.

The Indigenous condition does have a place in officialist versions of Mexican identity, but mostly as the figure of the past, whether as carrier of ancient traditions that belong to a once glorious epoch, or as the living remnant of characters inhabiting museums of bygone civilizations. Indigeneity embodies a past which all Mexicans should value while concomitantly declaring it ‘pre-Hispanic’—i.e., dead, overcome. Hence the term *India/o* along with a host of quotidian practices and (often unstated) norms are employed to coerce people into accepting Westernization as fate. A construct of Western apparatuses of knowledge and power, the ‘formal’ term *Indígena* cannot be interpreted as objective demographic descriptor; it implies a *residual category* containing those bodies and practices (and bodies of practices) that resist settler colonialist Westernization. ‘Indigeneity’ as a category delineates *the threshold of assimilation*, the *temporary limit and limitation* of acculturation, a contingent truce in the offensive to erase the Other. ‘Indigeneity’ hence entails a *liminal* condition denying *both* identity and difference. This double denial engenders a schizophrenic bind as those subject to it are allowed neither full entrance into nor final exit from the hegemonic order—they must instead endure permanent marginality: never ultimately embraced by, nor ultimately free from ‘Mexico’. Paradoxically, hence, the Mexican State is said to both *partly contain* the ‘Indigenous’ within, and *partly relate* to the Indigenous as outsider(s).

This latent coloniality deconstructs the new-regime’s claims of a “new *relation*” with Indigenous peoples. As Gutiérrez Chong argues (2004, 30, 47) the government still *glorifies* the “dead Indian” of “pre-Hispanic” civilizations as the ‘essence’ of the Mexican state, but *laments* that the “live Indian” is ‘lagging’ behind in the ‘peripheries’ of Mexican ‘development’. This “dead Indian/live Indian” binary enables a strategy where the nostalgia for a great (dead) Indian past stimulates patriotism, political obedience—and tourism, while it subjects the live Indian to disciplinary developmentalism. This hegemonic account which turns Indigeneity into both essential and peripheral to national identity prevents those subsumed under such a condition to opt either into or out of the hegemonic order. The live Indian cannot be liberated from the ‘nation’ because the ‘nation’ symbolically *and* materially feeds on the living ‘remnants’ of a devoured civilization and its lands. Like pyramids ‘in ruins’, live Indians are dramatized as exotic relics: historically fascinating but lacking

contemporaneity or future. As the remnants of an irretrievable past, live Indians are best conserved *in situ*, in ‘special spaces’ for endangered culture. And it’s the appeal to ‘the tragic but *irreversible* collapse of past Indian grandeur’ which is used to ‘explain’ why contemporary ‘Indigenous’ communities must renounce their civilization and accept the patriarchal guidance of the West.

The “new relation” doesn’t entail a rupture with the Eurocentrism of *every* old regime (not just the PRI). Live Indians are still portrayed as ‘lamentably lagging behind.’ This ‘backwardness’ seems all-too-easily demonstrable as the Indigenous repeatedly score lower than “normal(ized)” *mexicanos* in standardized tests and national programs. This is, however, unsurprising: such instruments are best interpreted as proxy measures of the extent to which students have assimilated canonical Western language(s), culture and knowledge. Yet for hegemonic society, there seems to be no difficulty in ‘proving’ the ‘Indigenous lag’ statistically. But beneath the illusion of statistical objectivity it’s obvious that people(s) systematically pushed to abandon millennial civilizations and languages to take up a place in some arbitrarily imposed order will constantly have to ‘catch up’, which guarantees their long-term subordination. The same ‘lag’ would bedevil Euro-Mexicans (and Westerners) if they had to find their place in Mesoamerican civilizations. The discourse of the ‘lagging’ Indian and the political performance of ‘lament’ concerning how people are ‘unfortunately’ being ‘left behind’ masks the systematic attempt to erase whole civilizations, and forcibly assimilate and subordinate their living ‘remnants’ into the dominant order; it camouflages the institutionalization of ethnocidal ‘acculturation’ passing as ‘education’.

‘Indian’ should be reinterpreted as a category containing whoever resists ‘insertion’ or ‘integration’ into the hegemonic order. Today’s neoliberal (govern)mentality, however, interprets the ‘Indigenous lag’ as evidence of a ‘sector’ that ‘fails’ to ‘contribute’ to the country’s global ‘competitiveness’. The resistance of this ‘sector’ to attempts that would make it ‘fit’ for competition in a Western neoliberal market is attributed to ‘lagging education’. ‘Normal’ education seemingly doesn’t cover for the lag; hence ‘special’ assistance is due for a group claimed to be have ‘fallen behind’—when it’s just resisting. Civilizational erasure still drives the hegemonic political culture and enables the reconfiguration of Westernizing attempts: from the old officialist *indigenismo* through which the PRI sought to co-opt, governmentalize and ‘develop’ Indigenous communities in its centralized terms to the PAN’s *neo-indigenismo*. (Hernández, Paz, et.al., 2004) Imperialism shed its old corporatist clothes, but still refuses to disclose its naked violence; copying the West’s late-modern styles it has refashioned itself into the lighter and trendier neoliberal attire. This new fashion celebrates the marketing “spectacle” (Debord and Knabb 1983) that prompts the commodification and consumption of everything, including life itself. (Bauman 2007) Hence, the elites implemented the “marketing of *indigenismo*” (Gutiérrez-Chong 2004b) which commodifies Indigeneity as exotic ‘folklore’ for ethno-tourism and advertises ‘pro-Indigenous’ programs primarily to enhance domestic loyalty and international reputation.

Neoindigenism hasn’t renounced the colonialist tendency to exoticize Indigeneity, but this exoticism is transformed from a source of embarrassment to one of profit that can be commodified, advertised and sold in the ‘globalized’ market. The old paternalism in neo-indigenist guise still assumes that the government can define what the *indígena* ‘needs’. For example, the government insists that communities ‘need’ to ‘attract business’ and pushes them to lure tourists and investors. In this fashion, the

'government of change' devised multiple assistentialist⁷⁷ social, educational, health, housing, and land policies. But their implementation aimed more at embellishing the image of the elite before its international (mostly Western) and Mexican audiences than engaging the problems of different Indigenous communities, whose solution would entail the dismantling of the very powers presuming to 'assist' them. Moreover, the civilizationally subjected *indígena* rarely participates in the elaboration and implementation of such policies, yet it's expected that she will recognize and accept the authority, administration, laws, and resources coming from the powers 'above.' Yet no matter how benevolent, the assistentialism granted *by* power cannot quell the desire for freedom *from* power.

The government has circulated an image of the *indígenas* that is tailored more to the discursive requirements of national and international policy spheres and markets than to the recognition and respect of differences whose resistance and emancipatory impulse cannot be domesticated. Borrowing Giroux's terms (2005, 263) for the dominant society there's still little to learn from the subordinated-other who is presumed "to lack redeeming community traditions, collective voice, or historical weight" and is instead "reduced to the imagery of the colonizer" who, absorbed into a neoliberal (govern)mentality, can only perceive the "other" as a source of profit that is expected to 'offer' its ('ethnic') 'exoticism' as a commodifiable, marketable, and consumable product for the satisfaction of the colonizers' desperate craving for something 'authentically different' from the overtly-standardize world of globalized capitalism.

Indigenous peoples, education, and the administration of change'

The arrival of the "administration of change" coupled with rising demands from Indigenous peoples⁷⁸ heightened expectations for a rupture with traditional policies regarding the "Indigenous question." Under a framework of "development and equity" this rising demands would be addressed by the promise of a renewed state subject to expectations of hard and fast action before the impending threat of disorder from Indigenous quarters. Dense Indigenous communities throughout southern Mexico had grown restless and belligerent (e.g., *EZLN*, *EPR*). This added to the eroding legitimacy and growing corruption of previous administrations. Claims to autonomy, the spread of subversion and the increasing legitimacy of Indigenous insurrection materialized during the 1990s; this combined with the pauperization of Indigenous communities accentuated by neoliberalization and NAFTA. The scenario promised boiling tensions which the new administration would have to face in the form of exorbitant expectations for radical change. The challenge was almost too much to confront and called for immediate response through concrete policies without which the fire of rising discontent wouldn't be quelled.

The calls to create "intercultural spaces" thus obeyed a logic beyond the clean rhetoric of "educational development." The government faced actual challenges to the legitimacy of its claims of sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and to the specific claim that these peoples were indeed—even if uneasily—"Mexican." Angered voices raging against "the broken compromises and unfulfilled promises with the Indigenous

⁷⁷ "*Asistencialismo*" (e.g., Alayón 2000): acts or policies by purportedly powerful agents that claim to magnanimously 'assist' or help a comparably weaker subject. The term is often used to critique patriarchalism developmentalism.

⁷⁸ Indigenous demands: (a) recognition of Indigenous autonomy, (b) reconfiguration of national institutions through *direct* Indigenous influence, (c) greater attention to social and economic issues of Indigenous peoples according to *their own* conceptions of well-being, and (d) incorporation of gender perspectives.

peoples”(Nahmad 2004, 81) were incinerating political debate since at least January 1st, 1994—when NAFTA implementation came alongside the Zapatista uprising. Years went by through uneasy negotiations and confrontations that transformed the term ‘Indigenous’ into a public signifier standing for anything from ‘historical vindication’ to ‘anarchy’ to ‘the political ineptitude of the central government.’ Whatever the ‘Indigenous’ stood for, it wasn’t an unproblematic category anymore: it became an unsettling source of destabilization which the ‘administration of change’ sought to discipline by asserting the idea of the Indigenous as an ‘other’ culture, both “different” and “lagging behind,” therefore *subaltern*—entailing both inferiority and alterity. But this discourse, subtle and poignant, wasn’t openly racist as it was articulated through the terms of “educational development,” “aid” and “assistance” for historically marginalized “minorities.”⁷⁹

Yet assistentialist discourse reinscribes the racialized differentiation between the ‘developed/normal(ized)’ Mexicans, and the ‘lagging indigenous’ purportedly in need of “special attention” and assistance. This discourse serves to “relegate” the “history, language, experiences, and narratives of the Other...to invisible zones of culture, borderlands where the dominant culture refuses to hear the voice of the Other.”(Giroux 2005, 148) The manufacture of “blind spaces” requires a complex matrix of speech, legislation, and policy-making by which the sovereign’s voice can claim to speak *in the name of* the subaltern by appropriating for itself the ‘right’ to define the identity, needs, origin, station, and destiny of the subordinated people. The ‘Indigenous’ becomes defined through the terms of the sovereign who unilaterally articulates what the Indigenous ‘is’ by claiming to know what the Indigenous ‘needs’ to get to where the Indigenous ‘wants’ to get—and finally claiming the altruistic role of ‘assisting’ the Indigenous in her path to her own destiny. The ongoing coloniality behind the fabricated categories of ‘Indian’ and ‘Indigenous’ is then swept under an “invisible zone”; whatever lives under these categories becomes perceivable only through the social imaginary of the hegemonic culture, and even those subject to the categories may come to see themselves through the imagery of the dominant culture.

Still, “Indians” resisted this assistentialist discourse by petitioning their own universities where their different ethnicities could be recognized as autonomous spheres of knowledge, culture and power. And yet, by admitting that they did “need” clearly differentiated institutions of higher education *from the government* many Indigenous activists confirmed the claims to authority of the government by buying into the assistentialist discourse that rendered them subaltern and in need of “special” education. A conundrum emerged where Indigenous people were left with the equally distasteful options of having to accept, *either* a violent assimilation into a uniform Mexican identity defined by the dominant groups, *or* the recognition that they were an ‘other’ group whose difference rested on a ‘lag’ or backwardness requiring educational assistance and “special institutions” to be overcome.

In the architecture of public discourse much of the executive’s art went into circulating a particular definition of equity which would enable standards of quality according to efficiency criteria. The 2000-2006 National Program of Education (PRONAE) defines “equity” as equitable access to quality educational goods and services and conceives of higher education as “a strategic means to increase the human and social capital of the nation”(183). It argues that “equity” is necessary to foster social cohesion, restore State legitimacy, and ensure national unity. This market-based

⁷⁹ By referring to the ‘Indigenous’ as ‘minority’, the de-Indianized/hybrid-Indigenous ‘majority’ and the persistent racial hierarchy were deftly set aside.

definition of equity subtly raises consumer equity to the standard of justice, displacing alternative notions. Social cohesion, state legitimacy and national identity become a function of the creation of “human *capital*” in an overarching *market* of quality goods/services. It can be inferred that the type of “human capital” needed must adapt to the demands of the globalizing neoliberal economy. The PRONAES states “the betterment in the *productivity* and *competitiveness* [of the population] will depend in great measure on the increase of their educational level.”(61; our emphases) Without this adaptive capacity enabled by educational programs, no equitable access to quality goods/services can be attained, and for it to develop all citizens must fall into educational models shaping them into subjects capable of competing, producing and consuming. Many groups resist these standards; among them, the Indigenous resist most. This resistance has drawn backlashes from the state, its allied elites and local chieftains (*caciques*):

[T]he State, the *caciques* and the politicians make peace impossible for Indigenous peoples since they attack the Indigenous resistance with lies, empty rhetoric, manipulation, selective and massive assassinations, imprisonment, forced disappearances, co-optations, the buying off of leaders, *irrelevant constitutional modifications and an infinity of educational, cultural, economic, political and social programs aimed at de-Indianizing*. . . . For that, the State relies on conditions inherent to the capitalist system: corruption, negligence, nepotism, simulation, imposition, bureaucracy, complicity, law violations, and impunity. (Sandoval 2009, 12; our emphases)⁸⁰

The State and its allies aren’t short of devices to adjust for the incongruence between Indigenous needs and cultures on one hand, and a global market of labor and goods/services on the other. One particular instrument deployed to bridge—or overwrite—the incongruence was the 2001 Constitutional recognition of Mexico as a “multicultural nation.” This legalistic celebration of cultural diversity serves to downplay the fact that the diverse cultures that *do* exist are *hierarchically* arranged into strata of social dominance (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Instead, the different Indigenous cultures appear as just another different culture. Little is said about how their alterity entails subordination. The question of which cultures dominate, the debate about the history of domination, and the call for liberation and just redress are eclipsed by banal legalistic celebrations of diversity that don’t seriously challenge power relations, although they might serve as window dressing for domestic and international onlookers.

Wooing onlookers becomes crucial as Indigenous movements and insurrections expose the artificiality of the State’s fabricated stability, thereby threatening its reputation before ‘investors’ (i.e., capital), intergovernmental organizations (e.g., OECD), and Western NGOs. Neoliberal governmentality is far more worried about its ‘country risk’ and ‘state failure’ ratings than about the ‘Indigenous.’ Still, with the globalization of identity politics and the ‘mainstreaming’ of class, gender, race and even ‘indigenous’ issues into intergovernmental agendas, the State’s economic and security calculus changes. By the arrival of Fox to power, the twentieth century dream of national sovereignty, order and unity was already crumbling as dispersed movements revealed a general discontent with the idea of a centralized national-State. A weakened state, Mexico, having endured repetitive political crises since 1968 and economic crises since 1979, now had to cope not only with growing local resistance but with the

⁸⁰ For contemporary examples of structural violence and genocidal massacre(s) see Gutiérrez-Chong 2004.

pressure of international actors like NGOs, intergovernmental observers, and all manner of peeking gazes whose fixation on the recognition of diversity had embarrassingly undressed the government to a point where further hiding its shameful modes of discrimination became unpalatable. Across the Americas the struggle for the recognition of diversity pushes governments to devise strategies to cope with demands for autonomy while keeping their claims to sovereignty over all peoples living within “their” territory. But the intergovernmental pressure to roll-back the nation-state and give colonially subjected “ethnic” groups more breathing space and power is mounting. Instruments like the 1989 International Labor Organization’s *Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries* prompt States to include Indigenous communities as participants in policy-making and to adopt a constitutional multiculturalism recognizing the practices and customs of “ethnic groups” as juridical systems.⁸¹ Government initiatives concerning multilingual and/or intercultural education partly respond to such internationally pressures. After the constitutional reform, other changes followed in governmental organs, social security policies, plus the major educational project creating IUs. Although the government claimed that these amounted to a “change” in the State’s relation to “ethnic” groups, they were often performances adapted to shifting patterns in diplomatic, political, and economic recognition.

IUs also emerged in a particular local context. Growing deficiencies in the Mexican educational system at all levels revealed its desperate but failed attempt to (re)adjust to a growing market economy increasingly driven by global demands (Didrikson 1993). This enabled a reconceptualization of what it meant to speak of “vulnerable groups”: vulnerable because the turbo-capitalist global market disables their ability to access “quality goods/services.” In this sense, Indigenous groups are particularly “vulnerable”. Consider the *2000-2006 PRONAES* data,

- In all levels, the “Indigenous population” appears significantly *lagging*. 23% of males 15 and older haven’t undergone any (Western and/or State sponsored) instruction. Only 8.8% surpassed elementary schooling. Women *lag* more: 39.2% of Indigenous women 15 or older lack any instruction; only 5.2% have surpassed elementary schooling.
- The geographical bias of educational attainment reflects an underlying racial bias as the greater concentration of universities (out of 1,500) is in the “developed” (i.e., Western-accultured) zones where few people who cherish their Indigenous heritage dwell. Contrastingly, rural zones with higher concentrations of people resisting de-Indianization (particularly Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero) are short in educational options. Inattention could be interpreted as structural punishment for resistance.
- The Federal District (Mexico City), Mexico State, Nuevo Leon, Puebla, and Jalisco concentrate most bachelors, graduate, and research programs. Teaching and research in these localities often downplays or ignores ‘Indigenous’ knowledges and concerns, which discourages ‘Indigenous’ youths.
- States with larger ‘Indigenous’ concentrations show the highest *marginalization indexes*. Chiapas’s is 2.2507 while Mexico City’s is -1.5292; the gap between them is 3.8702. Oaxaca’s is 2.0797, at a distance of 3.7437 from Mexico City. Guerrero’s is 2.1178, a difference of 3.4351 with Mexico City’s.

This information shows the educational inequity for the Indigenous, who are concomitantly excluded from political, social, and economic participation—in short,

⁸¹ The 1989 Convention has since then been followed by the *2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

from the ‘national project.’ The data, however, can only indicate ‘how much’ discrimination but cannot explain why or how discrimination emerges and persists, even after the many policies supposedly designed to reduce it. Consider the extraordinary dropout levels for “Indigenous” people (even in IUs).⁸² *From a hegemonic viewpoint* dropping-out is precisely what keeps people ‘Indigenous’: ‘successful’ education should de-Indianize, the educated should no longer think, behave, talk, dress, or even look ‘Indian’ and hence should no longer be counted as demographically ‘Indigenous’. ‘Indigenous desertion’ becomes almost tautological and serves to normalize the association of Indigeneity with marginality and impoverishment. But *from a counter-hegemonic perspective*, the ‘Indigenous dropout’ phenomenon looks different: desertion doesn’t result from a purely academic under-performance, but from a lack of recognition that ‘Indigeneity’ is the product of an ongoing settler colonialism that structurally and systematically *subtracts* non-Western cultures from their inheritors, marginalizing anybody who dares to seriously foster them in a society whose hegemonic culture and state apparatuses are largely the embodiment of institutionalized Eurocentrism. These institutions cannot respond to the demands and aspirations of Indigenized peoples and understandably alienate them, engendering negative impacts (Table 1) that affect the whole country:

Table 1: Impacts of Higher Education Inequity for Indigenous Peoples.

Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marginalization. • Costly State ‘management’ of Indigenous affairs. • Lack of spaces to train/materialize Indigenous creativity/productivity.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination. • Alienation. • Insurrection.
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National identity crisis. • Eroding state legitimacy. • Crisis of political obedience. • High electoral costs, low turnout. • Absence/attrition of non-violent paths to social harmony. • Government’s loss of public credibility. • State’s dwindling international reputation.

Source: summary of findings.

The partiality and levity of “equity” discourse in educational policies for Indigenous peoples was reflected in the cultural marketing of the Fox administration. (Gutierrez-Chong 2004, 27) There was no shortage of loudly performed governmental gestures to quell resistance and window-dress the ongoing historical injustices. Illustratively, the government distributed numerous elementary school textbooks with bilingual content adapted to the context of the Indigenous child. However, such textbooks are only targeted at the elementary level and only at ‘Indigenous’ children. This perpetuates the vices of subtractive education and fails to expose ‘mainstream(ed)’ youths to Indigenous cultures, knowledges, and languages. But the limits of the “new relationship” are best examined through a critique of the interesting IU model.

⁸² Consider dropout rates for the IUs of Chiapas (21%), Mexico State (15.6%), and Tabasco (9.2%); according to Schmelkes (2008) desertion doesn’t correlate with poverty, ‘other’ non-economic factors are responsible.

Intercultural universiteit (IUs) and ‘the change’

IUs were loudly advertised as elements through which the government would pay its innumerable dues to Indigenous cultures. Also, it was expected that they would enhance national unity and social cohesion. (Casillas, 2004, 31) It was presumed that there was a direct correlation between higher education and the increase in “the human and social capital of the nation and the individual and collective intelligence of Mexicans.” (PRONAE 2000) IUs would create “human and social capital” while concomitantly responding to Indigenous demands (e.g., from the Cocopa Law negotiated between the *Zapatistas* and the National Indigenist Council). IUs however, weren’t designed to recognize Indigenous autonomies or to challenge the structural racism of *national* institutions and local *cacicazgos* (bossism); and they were certainly not created to dismantle the settler colonial hegemony of Euro-Mestizo culture. The solution offered, while not without value, is still a very limited and specific one, aimed only at producing educational spaces responding to some of the needs of each particular Indigenous community.

First, IUs were no institutional innovation; universities opening Indigenous spaces already existed (e.g., the Autonomous Indigenous University), plus other universities actually designed from Indigenous quarters are being inaugurated. Maldonado (2006, 4) notes,

“[I]ntercultural universities” have been...viewed as...“original” Fox initiatives, although their identity hasn’t been clarified... Intercultural universities were created mainly to serve Indigenous communities, but...cannot be judged as...original...since some Indigenous universities were previously established... Intercultural universities attempt to offer programs that differ from...classic universities (i.e., language and culture, alternative tourism, sustainable development, intercultural communication, or ecological agriculture). The project seems interesting but remains incomplete...

The IU project is indeed incomplete, falling short of the great expectations it would supposedly fulfill. The model isn’t equipped to address large-scale historical injustices, even in higher education. IUs emerge less from Indigenous concerns, initiatives and projects, and more from the federal government’s urge to cope with Indigenous resistance. Nevertheless, let’s analyze them.

Nine IUs were established in states with the highest Indigenous populations (Table 2):

Table 2: Intercultural Universities created during the Fox administration (2000-2006)

	Founde d	Located	Enrollment (2007-08)
<i>Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México</i>	2003	San Felipe del Progreso	487
<i>Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas</i>	2004	San Cristóbal de las Casas	692
<i>Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Tabasco</i>	2004	Oxoltapan, Macuspana	328
<i>Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural</i>	2005	Totonacapan, Huasteca, Grandes Montañas y los Tuxtlas	552
<i>Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Puebla</i>	2005	Huehuetla	235

<i>Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México</i>	2002	Mochichahui, El Fuerte y los Mochis Sinaloa	1,287
<i>Universidad Intercultural Indígena de Michoacán</i>	2006	Pátzcuaro	N.A.
<i>Universidad Intercultural de la Zona Maya</i>	2006	José María Morelos, Quintana Roo	N.A.
<i>Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Guerrero</i>	2006	La Ciénega, Malinaltepec	N.A.

Source: our elaboration; data from the listed universities.

The IUs' official framework includes nine constitutive components (Table 3):

Table 3: Constitutive Components of Intercultural Universities

<i>Mission:</i>	Train professionals and intellectuals committed to develop their communities/regions.
<i>Objectives:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer associate professional, bachelors, and graduate degrees. • Develop linguistic competences. • Disseminate cultures. • Undertake regionally-focused research • Establish relations with the public, private, and social sectors
<i>Total enrollment:</i>	2,294 students
<i>Educational model:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporates regional knowledges/cultures • Enables mobility to <i>similar</i> regions to create a labor market • Provides basic infrastructure • Foments expressional spaces for Indigenous culture • Orients specifically Indigenous students
<i>Curriculum/programs:</i>	Language and Culture, Intercultural Communication, Sustainable Regional Development, Alternative Tourism, Municipal Governance and Development, Solidarity Economies, Intercultural Health
<i>Admission:</i>	None, it's open.
<i>Research:</i>	Prospectively: languages and cultures corresponding to the given region.
<i>Inter-institutional Relations:</i>	REDUI: information-sharing network among IUs
<i>Local Rootedness:</i>	IUs are expected to have a tight relationship with the region, community and student body.

Source: our elaboration with data from our research on IUs.

IUs emerged as decentralized public organisms at the state level, with land-grant juridical status. Decentralization “entails...three spheres: one of power redistribution, a second of political terms, and a third of a learning culture relative to educational contents in socio-cultural terms”(López 2001, 85). IUs depend on the State which is the agent that *grants them* a decentralized character and *some* authority as institutions with *predetermined* responsibilities over *certain* spheres. The IUs' policy objective was to *amplify equitable educational coverage* for Indigenous populations. This was sought through the inclusion of different local and regional cultural expressions to reduce higher-education marginalization in certain zones. The framework was *interculturalism*. Interculturalism was promoted as a radically innovative institutional design but often ended operating as ad hoc adaptation to local marginalized communities *and has had no inverse effect on dominant communities*: “Inter-culturalism” doesn't effectively flow “between-cultures” as cultural influence hasn't run from marginalized to dominant cultures. Dominant cultures and institutions haven't been transformed by the aspirations

and knowledges of historically subalternized cultures. Table 4 evaluates the IUs' implementation and its implication for interculturality in Mexico.

Table 4. Evaluation of the Intercultural University Policy.

Official Actions	Desirable Effects	Actual Results/Assessment
National Constitution reforms (Articles 1 and 2).	Recognition of Indigenous “uses and customs.”	Legislative modifications don’t assure a decrease in the asymmetry of opportunities, or in the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from actual power. The Executive’s behavior hasn’t lived up to the Constitutional reforms.
Creation of the General Coordination for Bilingual and Intercultural Education—CGEIB (ascribed to the Secretariat of Public Education— <i>SEP</i>)	The institutional change would reframe the official objectives through an “intercultural” policy-focus on the Indigenous sector.	Although the CGEIB proclaims laudable aims like promoting “intercultural education not only for the indigenous but for all Mexicans” ⁸³ its ancillary status in SEP barely grants it enough power to promote interculturality for ‘indigenous’ sectors. The CGEIB doesn’t have the power to interculturalize mainstream education. Its claims are grand, but its power minor—except over the Indigenous sector.
Attempts to establish IUs under “ <i>intercultural</i> ” framework.	This can be appreciated as a partial reply to the “Indigenous question” and the demand to eliminate the asymmetries regarding “access to education.” It can be identified as an element of the “new relationship” between the PAN government and the Indigenous population.	Complete interculturalism demands more than just the establishment of formal institutions under State frameworks. If the mainstream cannot be made to play the bilingual/intercultural game, Indigenous knowledges/languages risk becoming ghettoized. If public and private mainstream universities, institutions, and markets cannot be reshaped to activate Indigenous languages/knowledges, IU graduates and researchers will likely become segregated in IU spheres. Effective interculturalism would require a wholesale transformation of ‘mainstream(ed)’ society in accordance with Indigenous contributions. But, as an ancillary organ, the CGEIB isn’t equipped with the <i>power</i> to do this. Even if the whole SEP aggressively promoted interculturalism, the increasing privatization of education would prevent it from implementing it across the mainstream.
IUs were thought of in response to the inequity in higher education. They would supposedly foment social mobility and cohesion.	The creation of the CGEIB and the IUs works as a banner for the state to presume to have opened spaces for Indigenous peoples <i>within</i> the hegemonic educational system.	Since the CGEIB’s aims and the IUs’ logic haven’t effectively stretched to the ‘mainstream’ the Indigenous sector will likely end up playing the intercultural game alone. The public and private mainstreams can largely ignore interculturality; CGEIB has no power to do much about it except publish recommendations. While the CGEIB claims to

⁸³ <http://eib.sep.gob.mx/cgeib/index.php/interculturalidad-para-todos>

		promote interculturality nationally, it has no effective jurisdiction over non-Indigenous sectors. While the CGEIB can foment and supervise bilingual IUs for Indigenous sectors it's has no power to transform mainstream public or private educational institutions into bilingual and intercultural bodies <i>structurally</i> reshaped by and through indigenous languages/knowledges. IUs will likely end up playing the interculturality game alone, consequentially becoming ghettoized.
IUs are created in zones with higher "Indigenous" concentrations	To grant "special attention" to the "special needs" of the 'Indigenous'.	The policy doesn't question the construction of 'Indigeneity' as the threshold of ethnocidal de-Indianization. It assumes the 'Indigenous' as a 'minority'. The de-Indianized 'majority' is uncritically assumed as de jure "non-Indigenous." The 'mainstream' resulted from (ongoing) ethnocide; neither IUs nor the CGEIB are equipped to redress the damage or reverse the injustice.
No selection process for admission	Youths completing preceding levels of education and wanting to access other institutions will be able to.	The modern State establishes meritocratic rules for social belonging. By eliminating selection/admission requirements for anyone "Indigenous", individuals will be further stereotyped by the mainstream as 'unfit' for meritocracy. This reduces their ability to effectively participate in 'mainstream' society.
Fomenting research regarding the cultures and peoples where the IU is rooted.	Creating quality universities under established standards. Training Indigenous scholars, intellectuals, scientists.	The resulting research serves the region well, but since the mainstream isn't reshaped to accommodate Indigenous languages/knowledges, Indigenous graduates/scholars are likely to become segregated in IUs. Notwithstanding the CGEIB's tall claims, to this day mainstream educational institutions haven't become Indianized in any significant measure: while the Indigenous are still compelled to learn Spanish and grasp Western(ized) knowledges, the 'mainstream' carries on largely ignoring Indigenous languages/knowledges. While for subalternized cultures interculturality is compulsory, for the hegemonic culture interculturality is optional.

Source: *Our elaboration based on research presented in this paper.*

Interculturalism becomes segregationist when it applies effectively only to the subaltern, and not to the hegemonic: *interculturalism for the Other, not for the Self*. This explains why interculturalist frames circulating in the "developed" world were pragmatically seized by the government to give a noble content to the ignoble idea that the Indigenous required differential 'treatment'. Strategically interpreted to apply compulsorily *only* to those few communities visibly preserving their 'ethnic' identity,

interculturalism was used to devise separate educational models for the residual 'minority' populations not already de-Indianized. The CGEIB's tall intentions notwithstanding, ultimately, interculturalism applies effectively only for some communities, not for the nation (or even the states). Asymmetric power relations are responsible for this inequitable application. To this day interculturalism has had negligible effects on the hegemonic educational order which continues to systematically de-Indianize the majority of the population. This implies that the government could have been using interculturalist ideas only selectively, conditionally, and mostly with the purpose of pacifying, co-opting, and isolating dissent.

Legislative modifications: officializing plurality?

National Constitutional reforms did make one significant shift towards the formal recognition of the "political rights" of Indigenous peoples. (Paz 2004, 13) Such constitutional modifications enabled debates by which some tensions accumulated from the 1990s were sublimated through policy-making. Some new organs for the representation of the 'Indigenous sector' were created; like the CGEIB, these enabled instruments by which political pressures could be buffered, filtered and channeled into collective actions.

However, these instruments embody a structurally innocuous performative excess. First, policy devices serve to defer large-scale *structural* transformations in the overall socio-economic and political order. Second, they essentialize 'Indigenous' identity, reifying a mainstream/Indigenous binary that sweeps the ongoing history of large-scale de-Indianization under the carpet by equating 'Indigenous languages and knowledges' exclusively with the most culturally resistant groups. Such division must be challenged as most people in the 'mainstream' aren't there because they chose to but because throughout centuries they have been systematically subtracted from "their [supposedly] defective [non-Western, non-Hispanic] cultural elements." Most of the "mainstream" continues to be forcibly "de-Indianized". Separating the seemingly 'majoritarian' "mainstream" from the supposedly 'minoritarian' "Indigenous" world(s) serves to construct a boundary that blocks the specter of *re-Indianization*⁸⁴ which haunts Euro-Mexican social dominance and its settler colonial order. That a large part, if not most of the country's population, could be tempted to re-Indianize itself after centuries of de-Indianization is an always latent possibility whose materialization can only be obstructed by upholding the myth that only a few groups who have (admirably) managed to maintain a certain language, dress, or custom are 'actually Indigenous.' The IU model may unwittingly distance the subjects of a 'mainstream(ed)' culture (re)produced out of systematic de-Indianization from the "Indigenous" resources and people that could help them challenge forced Westernization and the racialized structure of social dominance upheld by the hegemonic culture and the state apparatus.

The declaration of cultural plurality without the *overall* dismantling of structural asymmetry and social dominance reveals the shortcomings in the dialogical normativity of interculturalist ideals:

Dialogue experiences and other intercultural education practices reinforce the prevailing colonizing and dominating hegemony... when, absent a central focus on social reconstruction for equity and social justice, the rules of engagement require that... disenfranchised participants render themselves more vulnerable to the

⁸⁴ Bonfill Batalla (1981, 123), Sandoval-Forero (2009, 3, 20-21).

powerful than they already are... this demand necessarily exists during any dialogic encounter between... people who inhabit different points on the dominator-dominated continuum.(Gorski 2007, 8)

Even the acknowledgement of past abuses doesn't dismantle power relations. As long as dominant groups are allowed to maintain effective hegemony over social/state apparatuses, there will be no measure of good interculturalist intentions that will be able to redress historical injustices. No amount of hegemonic benevolence, understanding, or guilt can liberate the subaltern from hegemony. Interculturalism with power cannot supplant liberation *from* power.

Curriculum and instruction

IU curricula should prospectively address the “necessities and potentialities of the region’s development.”(Schmelkes 2003, 6; 2005) This *does* contribute at the *local* level by responding to proximate demands. However, if the policy purpose is to achieve *national* equity, then it’s unlikely that IUs may contribute since, given that the dominant society is hardly intercultural, the IU graduate will only be able to use her IU education within the ‘Indigenous circle’. Instead of equity, this will likely produce two divided and unequal spheres, one of which will have little capability of mobility into the other—and being smaller and weaker, will have little capacity to compete. Few, if any of the programs offered by IUs open for students prospective careers beyond the ‘Indigenous circle’ so that one of the normative principles of the multicultural state, the right to exit one’s ‘ethnic’ community, is structurally disabled if IUs succeed in absorbing most Indigenous students. The risk of epistemic red-lining becomes imminent as employers beyond the ‘Indigenous circle’ can appeal to the difference in programs in discriminating against the ‘special education’ of IU graduates. IU graduates will have a chance at finding a place in the larger economy only if the economy itself is transformed by a heavy dose of ‘special education’ concerning the value of ‘Indigenous’ languages, knowledges, and skills.

The reformed National Constitution stipulates that IUs must “guarantee and increase... scholarship, favoring bilingual, intercultural education...”(Article 2,b,II) But intercultural bilingualism is only of local value, *unless ‘mainstream’ institutions also teach, and use as compulsory Indigenous languages and culture—which they don’t*. Otherwise, the Indigenous language-speaker will unlikely ever be able to use her language and knowledge/culture beyond her communal sphere. Effective interculturalism requires a significant (re)indianization of the ‘mainstream’.

The reformed Constitution emphasizes the “defining and developing of educational programs of regional content that recognize the cultural inheritance of their peoples.”⁸⁵ IUs were established as such. However, their low enrollment compared to the numbers of potential students (only 2,294 enrolled out of 546,690 potential youths)⁸⁶ raises questions about whether IUs actually embody the regional content and cultural inheritance of the people they’re designed to attract. The disjuncture between projected and effective demand is revealing. The 2000 PRONAE sought to “multiply by three the enrollment of students of Indigenous origin.”(200) That hasn’t happened. Why aren’t more youths attending? Our answer is simple: youths notice that the dominant culture doesn’t recompense or even incorporate indigenous values or knowledges, so they infer that an IU education won’t translate into the epistemic authority, politico-economic power, or social mobility they desire. Pursuing an IU education is risky in a society

⁸⁵ *Official Gazette of the Federal Government* .(08/14/2011)

⁸⁶ <http://www.conapo.gob.mx/publicaciones/indices/pdfs/002.pdf>

(mis)educated for centuries to devalue indigenous languages and knowledges. It's the dominant society which needs a 'special (re)education'; but it doesn't think itself in need of any. Interculturalism is largely seen as a *moral* concession to the historically mistreated 'Indigenous.' The celebration of *interculturalism for the Other* hasn't been followed by any serious large-scale attempt to *learn from the other*: mainstream curricula at every level, whether private or public, hardly show any signs of 'Indianization'. Settler colonialism might have relinquished the attempt to impose itself, but it hasn't abandoned its superiority complex. A disaggregated analysis of IUs clarifies this problem:

a) Management and organization:

The "key elements of higher education and development" according to Altbach (1998, 187) are autonomy and accountability, academic freedom and the academic profession, students and the political figure of the university. IUs don't adequately embody these and lack autonomy. Their needs and designs regarding academic organization are administered by the government's SEP through the CGEIB whose budget comes 50% from the federal government and 50% from state government(s). Besides financial decisions, this organ also governs political, administrative and curricular decisions. IUs aren't in equity with mainstream universities which enjoy full autonomy. Academic freedom is constrained by the designation, without consultation of faculty or students, of curricula designed under the supervision of SEP. Hence, knowledge validation is filtered not through the communities who are its subjects but through the hegemonic public discourse.

b) Access to education:

The disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions of 'Indigenous' populations reinforce the structural obstacles which disable their youths from obtaining a higher education. If they obtain it from IUs they will be unlikely to reap the socioeconomic benefits associated with degrees from 'mainstream' universities. The expansion of the university system (1950s-1970s) opened few spaces for Indigenous communities. The spaces that were accessible sought to nationally homogenize. During the 1980s education became neoliberalized: private schools proliferated, however, these weren't an option for Indigenous populations given their expensiveness. Indigenous communities became subjected to double educational stratification: first as subalterns of the public system and then of the private. The hyper-neoliberal 1990s saw the prestige of public education dwindled vis-à-vis private; Indigenous peoples were pushed deeper in the socio-educational hierarchy, now marginalized under public university students who themselves fell under private university students. Bilingual (Indigenous-Spanish) education was limited to the elementary level and was still subtractive and hence promoted "linguistic genocide" (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2010): students were expected to "surpass" their origins to become integrated into the "national" (i.e., Hispanized) and "global" (i.e., Anglicized) societies by assimilating the dominant language(s).

The message given then, although slightly different now, still isn't too promising. *Then* the concern was to integrate Indigenous peoples so long as their integration would be filtered through the hegemonic curricula. *Now* with the IUs, Indigenous peoples are still marginalized from the hegemonic educational system: they can study 'indigenous' careers within their "intercultural" circles but they're still not empowered to transform the hegemonic system as a whole through their culture and knowledge. Today, the option is *either* to fall into the assimilationist hegemonic system (still implemented as previously) *or* to 'stay put' in a differentiated 'ethnic' sphere subalternized under the hegemonic order. But the possibility of changing or moving beyond the hegemonic

order through the activation of Indigenous knowledges *in all* power dynamics and structures is nullified by the now dual domination of (1) the nationalizing system which *subordinates* Indigenous peoples and (2) the *othering* system which precludes them from an effective communication and transit across the hegemonic system.

The old *logic of acculturation* generally persists in the ‘mainstream’ education that continues to Westernize the majority of the population, but is now coupled with the particularizing *logic of intercultural differentiation* used quite specifically for delimitating ‘Indigenous/multicultural spheres’. Trapped in an unpalatable undecidability between these two logics, the *indigena* becomes subject to a *double bind*: *on one hand*, she can ‘choose’ to exit her Indigenous circle by pursuing ‘mainstream’ higher education (if she can surpass structural obstacles) but at the expense of de-Indianizing herself, *or on the other*, she can ‘choose’ an IU education to preserve the value of her ‘ethnic’ culture, community, and knowledge at the cost of accepting second—if not third—class citizenship in the nation and letting go of the opportunity for substantial social and economic mobility. The Indigenous subject is no longer forced to accept self-erasure through acculturation as before; now she can “choose” between (a) self-erasure (through mainstream/ing education), or (b) marginalization through an IU education that assures either third-class citizenship in the mainstream (behind private, and public university graduates) or ghettoization in the ‘ethnic’ sphere. The new Indigenous subject emerges at the interstice between two undesirable worlds: *either* subordination through ‘nationalization’ *or* marginalization through unilateral ‘interculturalization’—or both simultaneously.

In the IU model, while the dominant culture carelessly continues to ignore Indigenous languages, culture, and knowledges, the IU students are still *obliged* to learn the language(s) and ways of the dominant culture. Not even IUs allow a way out of hegemony. This sort of interculturalism hence reveals itself as a cheap concession in exchange for continued subordination within a hegemonic order that doesn’t really reciprocate the intercultural gesture. The rules of interculturalism really just apply to the indigenous. IUs are but small pockets of interculturality subordinated and contained within a hardly intercultural hegemonic order. IUs merely allow ‘intercultural’ spheres for the populations that aren’t yet de-Indianized. If ‘interculturalism’ was general and reciprocal, the ‘mainstream’ would have to be actively (re)Indianized as part of the ‘intercultural dialogue’. But the mere prospect of such an interculturalism would make settler-colonial hegemony scream. Dominant groups would never permit that their children be *obliged* to learn *and* use an Indigenous language, but they expect the Indian to be thankful because she is ‘allowed’ to speak Spanish plus an ‘Indigenous’ language. Even in IUs the Indian continues subject to Westernization, while there’s no sign that the ‘mainstream’ will become Indianized any time soon. Settler-colonialism now tells the Indian: ‘you can keep your language and culture in your IUs so long as you also practice/learn/use mine—but don’t expect me to learn yours.’ The application of interculturality only for the ‘indigenous sector’ and not for the ‘mainstream’ illustrates the proverb ‘do as I say not as I do.’

c) “Rational” and “non-rational” knowledge

Indigenous knowledges (IKs) are often marginalized from the ‘mainstream’, ghettoized into ‘ethnic’ spheres like IUs because they resist the epistemic authority of positivist Western scientific rationalism and empiricism. IKs are articulated and transmitted in ways that often clash with the Western penchant for highly structured, logo-centric, individually-centered, property-based, and standardized modes of epistemic representation and (re)production. Knowledges *become* indigenized not only because they don’t ‘fit’ the epistemic expectations of hegemonic science, but because

they don't participate in the definition and redesign of validation criteria: Indigeneity isn't allowed to exercise epistemic authority and judgment. Epistemic criteria aren't of a purely abstract design: they emerge from extrapolations of epistemic exemplars that *historically* attained the canonical status of "valid knowledge." (Agrawal 2002)

Ongoing colonialist attitudes assure that Indigenous modes of epistemic experience and articulation counted as exemplary of what knowledge is and thus are seldom allowed to partake in the design of validation criteria by which we judge what 'knowledge' should be. This is what prevents IKs from transforming curricula and politics beyond the Indigenous IU sector. A subtle racism prevails through the hegemony of Western forms of methodological-epistemic validation underpinning educational policy-making. The "techno-sciences", Thésée notes, still "cannot be separated from the colonial system, where they created not only tools of exploration, penetration, domination and economic development, but also the scaffolding of militaristic and cultural superiority..." (2006, 28) Consequently, IKs aren't only marginalized, but 'mainstream' society, overprotected by its ethnocentric methodological commitments, remains desensitized to alternative forms of knowledge. This damages society *as a whole*: Indigenous peoples and knowledges are ghettoized, while 'mainstream' society is unable to learn from them. Domination harms even those who seemingly benefit from it as they're unable to learn from subalternized modes of life and wisdom and can only appropriate or steal (Varese 1996, Hountondji 2002) them piecemeal when they can be cast into the mold validated by Western methodologies.

Conclusion

Intercultural Universities (IUs) emerged as an institutional innovation in the Mexican educational system. They resulted from the touted "new relationship" of the government to Indigenous peoples under the claim of a rupture or "change" that served as platform for the new PAN regime after seventy-one years of PRI rule. IUs take a step into the recognition of Indigenous difference and a smaller one into the valorization of Indigenous knowledges (IKs) but fail to (re)valorize them beyond Indigenous circles. The subalternization of IKs responds to a latent coloniality that can be challenged only by de-colonizing difference (Paz 362, 2004) and revalorizing indigenous civilizations. We showed some insufficiencies of IUs and explained the structural and discursive conditions sustaining and reinforcing these insufficiencies. We critiqued the injustices reproduced and/or unchallenged by the post-2000 Mexican regime while unearthing the sedimented structures, discourses, conditions, and causes enabling such injustices and the grave consequences to expect if a thorough restructuring of the "Indigenous question" is further deferred.

The problem rests in the politically contested character of the signifier *indígena*. Who gets to identify and define the *indígena* and according to what discourses, and by so doing to configure what the "(Indigenous) question" might be? (Thésée 2006). The signifier *indígena*, a manufacture of settler colonialism, serves to strategically sever the de-indianized *mainstreamed* 'majority' from the 'still indianized' 'minority' that advanced-colonialism has failed to assimilate or erase. Unwittingly or not, IUs reproduce this powerful discourse. Whilst IUs might be designed to conserve Indigenous circles of culture and knowledge, they're far from empowering them to participate in the transformation of the national (let alone global) hegemonies of power/knowledge. *(Re)Indianization is still a latent threat to hegemony*. So while the *indígena* might be allowed to preserve small pockets of culture and local ('ethnic' ghettoized) knowledges, she isn't be allowed to embody national power, reshape policy making, design national curricula, or take leadership positions by which her culture and

knowledge may shape the character and orientation of the nation or the world. IUs are deprived of the privileges and recognitions of ‘mainstream’ universities and are granted a sub-status relative to them. Not even local autonomy is granted as IU curricula and decision-making are paternalistically supervised by governmental offices. IUs don’t embody equity. They’re strategic responses, buffers against the growing threat of ‘Indigenous’ insurrection and the deeper threat of large-scale (re)indianization. IUs serve to defer the *overall* structural transformation that would challenge power-relations at the national, continental, and global level. Like little academic Bantustans, IUs co-opt potential challengers by granting them limited power in small supervised spaces, leaving the overarching hegemony largely untouched. The discursive use of ‘interculturality’ unsupported by actual reciprocal influence serves only as self-legitimation for a government under pressure.

The assistentialist patriarchalism overprotecting and overregulating Indigenous life hinders equity and justice. Advanced-colonialist and racialized dominance persists. Structural domination cannot be eclipsed by *in situ* conservation policies that protect endangered cultures in ‘special spaces’ supervised by the very cultures whose predatory practices are responsible for their endangerment. Some good intentions notwithstanding, the asymmetric and unilateral interculturalism underpinning the IU model confronts the Indigenized with a ‘choice’ between two modes of subjection, assimilation into the dominant society or segregation into ‘special spaces’ where subaltern cultures can be fostered so long as they still defer to the dominant culture. IUs promote educational equity and interculturality only *partially*:

- IUs are only partial in the defense of values defined as ‘Indigenous,’ of their curriculum and of the degrees granted. While these degrees are innovative as they address the regional ‘realities of Indigenous communities’, they disclose a one-sided framework where IUs must negotiate the character of curricula with the mainstream (Westernized) apparatuses of power/knowledge, but the ‘mainstream’ need not negotiate its culture and institutions with Indigenous knowledges and movements. This one-sided framework allows the government to designate the educational needs of Indigenous communities through specific curricula and often from the viewpoint of just a few authors whose schematically applied models⁸⁷ perceive only some of the needs of specific Indigenous communities, *while completely failing to notice the many needs that ‘mainstream(ed)’ (i.e., Westernized) communities have which could be addressed through the valorization, application and development of Indigenous wisdoms.*
- IUs diverge somewhat from the traditional discourses that used education as a weapon of mass acculturation. IUs offer a modest alternative to forced assimilation. But IUs don’t displace the racialized hegemony which normalizes the idea that Westernized policies and methods can influence the definition of the educational needs of Indigenous communities but not the other way around. Still, the fact that IUs were established reveals that settler/Euro-Mestizo colonialism recognized some limits and failures to its acculturationist ambitions. IUs betray the elite’s acknowledgement that Indigenous movements cannot easily be ignored and that *something*, however small, must be conceded.
- The relationship of IUs to “rational-scientific” (Westernized) knowledge in settler colonized settings is understudied. The recognition of subjugated and hybrid knowledges and the creation of validation modes that don’t privilege some types of knowledge to the exclusion of others is required to redress historical faults and

⁸⁷ Fatnowna and Piquett (2002)

project constructive long-term interactions (Dove 2007, 137) between diverse ways of knowing. There's evidence that IKS can be effectively combined with "scientific, methodologically-validated" knowledges in "key areas"; yet hybrid knowledges are often systematized only for *ad hoc* technological innovations and complementation of 'scientific' knowledge (Carneiro 2008) and not as general modes of (re)organizing the sciences and societies as wholes. This is partly because IKS challenge the legal systems of intellectual property, authorship, and ownership in general (Oguamanam 2006), yet it's precisely these challenges that can enable epistemic equity and social justice.

The case of IUs in Mexico illustrates two unsatisfactory trends in global educational and epistemic politics. First, an increasingly popular 'multiculturalism' that allows only restricted pockets of isolated epistemic and cultural development for historically subordinated and disadvantaged groups without significantly challenging or transforming the hegemonic political and educational system(s). Second, a pretense of 'interculturalism' that is unilateral instead of bilateral: on one hand, historically subordinated and marginalized groups are allowed to teach (in) their own languages, knowledges, and cultures, but are nevertheless expected to also teach the languages, knowledges and cultures of the dominant group(s); on the other, no major change is expected from hegemonic political, educational, and scientific systems which are allowed to stay largely impervious to the transformational influence of the knowledges, practices, cultures, and institutions of hitherto subalternized groups. Bland multiculturalisms must be surpassed by critically-engaged, proactive and fertile interculturalisms that challenge power relations, redress historical injustices, and promote epistemic-reciprocity.

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