INTERCULTURAL UNIVERSITIES IN MEXICO: IDENTITY AND INCLUSION

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Introduction

During the Fox *sexenio* (2000-2006) the Mexican state embarked on an initiative in the then quite new field of intercultural higher education which marked a radical departure in state-sponsored attempts to overcome the social and cultural exclusion of indigenous peoples in Latin America. While other state initiatives have tended to focus on institutional pluralism, as in the establishment of *usos y costumbres* in local government in Oaxaca† or of legal pluralism in the Bolivian and Colombian Constitutions,‡ and on bilingual education in primary schooling, as in Bolivia and Ecuador§, the Intercultural Universities (Universidades Interculturales – henceforth UIs) created a new type of institution from the ground up for a new type of student – mature and post-secondary - together with new buildings, newly recruited teaching bodies, AND new untried course content and structure. And given Mexico's notorious *sexenio* political and budgetary cycle, it had to be done fast, so that they would be 'up and running' with students and staff in place and an established budgetary item, before the end of the sexenio, and before the end of the tenure of the various state governors involved.

This experiment will eventually be the subject of educational evaluations, but at this formative stage, in which many issues are under discussion and systems still not set in stone, it offers a unique opportunity to explore what is meant by a concept, *interculturalidad*, which has become steadily more prominent in Latin America, coming almost to replace, for reasons which we shall discuss in the conclusions, that of multiculturalism.** Following on the important work of Luis Enrique López in defining intercultural education and of Joanne Rappaport in

* This research for this paper was funded by a British Academy large grant entitled 'Multiculturalism in Latin America: a study in the diffusion of ideas' which lasted from 2006 to 2011, for which I am extremely grateful. My debt to Sylvia Schmelkes and Lourdes Casillas of the CGEIB in Mexico, to Verónica Uribe, Ernesto Guerra and Estela Casados, for their cooperation and support is inestimable, as it is to the many other people quoted in the paper for their time and patience. In writing and revising the paper I have had invaluable advice from Fiona Wilson, Rachel Sieder and Dan Sperber. This research has been presented at seminars in various places including the Institute for the Study of the Americas in London, the Annual Meeting of ANPOCS in Brazil, and the Latin American seminars at the Universities of Newcastle and Oxford.

† David Recondo, *La Política del Gatopardo. Multiculturalismo y democracia en Oaxaca.* (Mexico DF, CIESAS - Casa Chata, 2007).

‡ See the recent Bolivian Constitution, and Van Cott, D. (2000). "A political analysis of legal pluralism in Bolivia and Colombia." Journal of Latin American Studies **32**(1): 207-234.

§ Bret Gustafson, *New Languages of the State: Indigenous Resurgence and the Politics of Knowledge in Bolivia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Barbara Noel (2006). Language, power and schooling: Bolivia's education reform program. MA thesis, College of Education and Human Development, George Mason University.

** For reasons which are unclear and perhaps unimportant, no one speaks of 'interculturalismo' – the usage which has established itself is interculturalidad

analysing the debates of Colombian indigenous intellectuals and sympathetic scholars linked to the CRIC (the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca) about what it means,[††] this Mexican initiative offers an insight into the meanings of the term in the context of state-run institutions. Like sections of Rappaport's study it concerns the meaning of interculturalidad in higher education. But the UIs' are located within the state, unlike the CRIC's plans, and this means that they cannot be reserved for any one ethnic (or other) group, or even for the broad category of indigenous people, nor can they resort to the technical 'fix'[‡‡] adopted in primary schooling for indigenous people, of bilingual education (as in Ecuador). The resources and skills for teaching indigenous languages to people in their early twenties are too scarce and the potential and actual students have, save for a minority, grown up monolingual in Spanish or with only a limited command of an indigenous language, and even less knowledge of a written version.[§§]

Whether intentionally or not, the UIs have come to constitute an arena in which different ideas of interculturalidad and intercultural education are brought into contention and worked through under pressure from the practical exigencies of time and institution-building. The debates and decision-making involve a range of interested parties on a variety of levels and in a context where theories of ethnicity and education and issues of principle and policy encounter the day-to-day life of universities. These are universities with many distinguishing features, not least the close social contact between staff and students, unheard of in mass universities like the UNAM . The actors involved include state Gobernadores, the academic staff and the Rectors, the students themselves, the leadership of the Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe (CGEIB), the Education Ministry's Programa Integral de Fortalecimiento Institucional (PIFI) which reviews teaching and learning in Mexican public higher education, and also external social researchers who study and write about them. This paper focuses mainly on the teaching staff and their interpretation and implementation of interculturalidad. The upshot will be that interculturalidad is far from a ready-made formula, that although the UIs were created under the Fox administration they had little to do with the 'neoliberal indigenism' label which was fastened onto the government during that period by some anthropologists,[***] and they also operated with little academic (as opposed to budgetary) interference from

[††] Gustafson, 2009, op. cit; Joanne Rappaport, *Intercultural utopias: public intellectuals, cultural experimentation, and ethnic pluralism in Colombia* (Durham, Duke University Press: 2005); Luis Enrique López, and Inge Sichra . "La educación en áreas indígenas de América Latina: balances y perspectivas' in I. Hernaiz (ed.) *Educación en la diversidad: Experiencias y desafíos en la Educación Intercultural Bilinguë'* (Buenos Aires, IIPE-UNESCO, 2004). The CRIC was was among the very first to fight for a modern indigenismo and has been in existence in the Colombian highlands since the 1970s. It is a combination of highly politicized movement and NGO providing services to the Nasa people and in other indigenous areas of the Cauca region, and it also runs local government under the autonomy brought in by the 1991 Constitution.

[‡‡] I use the term 'fix' because bilingual teaching can be a way of responding to exclusion in a narrowly technical way, especially since the exclusion suffered is only partly, and certainly not principally, to do with language use.

[§§] This is statistically untestable on the basis of official data in Mexico because the country uses language as the indicator of indigenous status – which now stands at c. 12% but with undemanding language criteria.

[***] Rosalva Aida Hernández, Sarela Paz and María Teresa. Sierra (eds.) *El Estado y los indígenas en tiempos del PAN: neoindigenismo, legalidad e identidad*. (México D.F: CIESAS, Porrúa, 2004)

state Governors who appoint their Rectors, or, so far as can be told, from Fox himself, who was content to give broad freedom of manoeuvre (and reputedly generous budgets) to the head of the Comisión de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI – ex-INI), Xochitl Galvez. The Rectors were appointed by state Governors, and as 'puestos de confianza' no doubt with political considerations in mind in many cases, but no one claimed during my interviews that the Governors had any particular agenda as far as the content of interculturalidad is concerned.

Demands by or on behalf of indigenous groups and organizations are usually directed at the state, and the UI experience may offer an instructive framework for the development of state responses to indigenous demands which are consistent with the universalist principles of Latin American republicanism. By this I refer not to autonomy or legalpluralism, but to major investments of resources in affirmative action in education and social policy.[†††]

The paper begins with a descriptive account of the UIs and an explanation of where intercultural education sits in relation to the various other approaches to education for indigenous peoples. It will then explore the meanings of interculturalidad and the purposes of intercultural education as expressed in documents and interviews and in academic discussion related to the UIs. This will establish the influence of 'educación liberadora' on the model and practices of the UIs and provides a bridge to an illustration of that influence in the introduction of field research early on in the courses followed by UI students. The article concludes with a critique of 'hard' versions of multiculturalism and its theoretical pitfalls in the light of this experience.

Interculturalidad and its institutionalization

It is necessary to clarify briefly the practical meanings of indigenous, bilingual and intercultural education, and also to distinguish education programmes dependent on 'soft money' – i.e. NGOs or international aid agencies – from those which are embedded and institutionalized in the state; then distinctions must be made between primary schooling and higher education, and between teacher training and broader based courses. Many institutions straddle these classifications.

Indigenous education is usually primary education with emphasis on the bilingual, as in Ecuador and Bolivia .[‡‡‡] Mexico has a fully fledged indigenous education system: its Dirección General de Educación Indígena, has 470

[†††] This distinction is developed in David Lehmann, 'Identity, social justice and corporatism: the resilience of republican citizenship' in *Shifting frontiers of citizenship in Latin America*, Mario Sznajder, Luis Roniger and Carlos Forment (eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[‡‡‡] In both these cases they have been institutionalized within the state and have also had substantial external financial support from UNICEF (in the Bolivian case) and the German Development Agency (GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) in Ecuador. Catherine Walsh, 'Políticas y significados conflictivos', *Nueva Sociedad* 165 (2000), pp.121-133; Bret Gustafson, *New Languages of the State: Indigenous Resurgence and the Politics of Knowledge in Bolivia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009)

professional staff and employs 37,000 *maestros indígenas* in primary schools. It oversees the schooling of indigenous people or indigenous areas, but does not have a particular commitment to intercultural or even bilingual education.

Bilingual teaching in primary schools is present in Bolivia, Ecuador and parts of Peru and the Brazilian Amazonia: the children are taught in the indigenous language and the hegemonic language is initially taught as a foreign language. Teachers are therefore supposed to master the indigenous language and ideally to be native speakers.§§§

Bilingual teaching in higher education is mostly to be found in teacher training it is provided in Peru, Bolivia and Brazil and to a limited extent in Mexico.**** A broader concept, namely *bilingual and intercultural* (EIB) *teacher training* has been adopted in Peru on two regional campuses established by San Marcos University for the lowland tropical *selva* region††††

In principle, *intercultural education* is distinguished at least in theory by not being specifically aimed at indigenous peoples and not centrally concerned with language. Gustafson describes its 'ideal product' as 'a citizen-subject, literate, numerate and orally proficient in both languages'.‡‡‡‡ It is more likely to include second-language teaching, which can include, paradoxically, learning 'one's own language' as if it was a second language, that is, teaching the indigenous language to indigenous students who primarily use the hegemonic language.

For many of those involved in its birth and development, the purpose of intercultural education is, variously, to raise awareness of different cultures among the bearers of the dominant culture and language as well as among bearers of indigenous cultures, or to achieve a situation of mutual respect among them, or to achieve a degree of competence in the hegemonic culture among the bearers of minority culture. It seeks to address issues of racial exclusion in society as a whole, not only issues facing indigenous peoples. However, in practice, for the time being, given its image and the circumstances in which is

§§§ All sorts of complications arise, some of which form part of the present research, but cannot be discussed here for lack of space. See Becker, M, 'Social movements and the government of Rafael Correa: confrontation or co-optation?', in *Social movements and leftist governments in Latin America: confrontation or co-optation?* p. 126; London: Zed Books, 2012). For Peru see Sheila Aikman, *La educación indígena en Sudamerica: interculturalidad y bilinguismo en Madre de Dios* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2003); Sheila Aikman, 'Interrogating discourses of intercultural education: from indigenous Amazon community to global policy forum', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 42:2 (2012) pp.235-257. For the highlands, see Virginia Zavala, *Desencuentros con la escritura: escuela y comunidad en los Andes peruanos*, (Lima, Red para el Desarrollo de las Ciencias Sociales en el Perú, 2002); 'Una mirada a la formación docente en educación bilingüe intercultural en la zona andina del Perú' in R. Cuenca, N. Nucinkis and V. Zavala.(eds.), *Nuevos maestros para América Latina* (Madrid, Ediciones Morata 2007).

**** For Mexico see Bruno Baronnet, 'La question de l'interculturalité dans les expériences d'éducation en terres zapatistes', in C. Gros and D. D. Kervran (eds.) *Le multiculturalisme au concret: un modèle latinoaméricain?* (Paris, Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle: 2011); for Bolivia see Gustafson, 2009.

†††† EIB stands for Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe. I visited the San Marcos *sede* in the Comunidad Arizona outside Satipo in 2009. The teaching staff is more academic (i.e. has postgraduate qualifications) than in an ISP, the students all identify as indigenous, and indigenous languages mix with Spanish in class.

‡‡‡‡ Gustafson (2009), p. 14

provided, intercultural higher education will attract principally and be designed principally for indigenous students, self-described as such.

Rappaport describes interculturalism as less a concept than a collective phenomenon or a web of shared meanings: it is, she writes, invoking Luis Enrique Lopez, 'the selective appropriation of concepts across cultures in the interests of building a dialogue among equals' and she then adds that it has been 'harnessed as a vehicle for connecting such domains as indigenous bilingual education to the political objectives of the native rights movement'. She too does not regard it as a doctrine or a theory, but as a political or policy tool, and she also contrasts it with multiculturalism, which is seen by Luis Enrique Lopez as 'fostering tolerance but not equality'.[§§§§] The difference with respect to my account is small: I see interculturalidad as less political in a partisan sense of connecting with political objectives of indigenous movements, than as a web of values and sensitivities which, at least in Mexico, are installing themselves in parts of the state apparatus and especially in parts of the country's educational system, and have been well established for some time in the anthropological profession. It is thus as much an arena in which rival versions are debated and adopted.

Within the Latin American panorama, Mexico's Universidades Interculturales (UIs) are the only *fully-fledged, freestanding, and state-funded* intercultural higher education institutions in Latin America. They are unlike previous institutions in the educational field as a whole or in Higher Education in Mexico, and are one of the very few institutional departures accompanied by substantial commitments of state resources to be undertaken in Mexico, or indeed in Spanish America, in the name of multiculturalism, interculturalidad or simply indigenous peoples.[*****]

The capital needed for their founding, in three cases for sumptuous buildings,[†††††] owed much to Xochitl Galvez, head of the CDI, which paid half the capital costs of new buildings. Galvez was an unusual person to hold that office: a civil engineer proud of her indigenous origins in a low-income family in Hidalgo, with a successful business background, and reputed to be close to President Fox[‡‡‡‡‡], she teamed up with educator Sylvia Schmelkes, founding *Coordinadora* of the CGEIB, who made the UIs her flagship project. Their future growth will depend on budget allocations, notably from the state governments, but they are

[§§§§] Rappaport (2005) p. 5.

[*****] Of course there have been innumerable legal and bureaucratic ventures, such as constitutional amendments, creation of Commissions and Departments of Indigenous Affairs, provisions for intercultural and bilingual education, but this claim refers to substantial investment - capital projects with funding for established institutions and positions beyond the legal or administrative spheres.

[†††††] Notably those in the State of Mexico, Tabasco and Chiapas: the latter is in San Cristobal de las Casas and exhibits a pastiche colonial mode, while those in Tabasco and the State of Mexico are very modern in conception: the former consists of two buildings opposite one another to form the Mayan zero, while latter combines a snail-like shape reminiscent of the Guggenheim Museum in New York with decorative motifs also evoking Mayan design. The Chiapas UI had by far the largest buildings in 2008. (Photos on the internet.)

[‡‡‡‡‡] She later tried to be elected as Governor of the state of San Luis Potosí, but was defeated, though she claimed she was the victim of electoral manipulations.

enshrined in budgets as established institutions, so neither they nor their permanent posts can be removed, though of course they can be eroded by inflation, non-replacement and so on. The only comparable case is the URACCAN (Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense located in Nicaragua's Atlantic region§§§§§), widely regarded as the pioneer for the whole movement for higher education for indigenous people and intercultural higher education, though unlike Mexico's UIs it also relies on international NGO support. The UIs represent a qualitative departure, because they are institutionalized within the state or, in one case, within an established public university, bringing the security of permanent existence and a stable core of academic staff, unlike NGO initiatives, and that in turn means that, like other state universities, they constitute a space in which a variety of ideas and missions can be developed and pursued.

Even so, the UIs have less formal autonomy from government than mainstream 'Universidades Autónomas' like the UNAM, since state governors appoint their Rectors and much of the course structure and broad content taught by them seems to have been, at least initially, provided by the CGEIB (Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe, founded in 2001).****** Like all public universities, they are also subject to the PIFI, with its procedures, inspections and standards for recognition. In this respect the UIs are in the same position as all Mexican public universities, whatever their formal autonomy. Students get the same entitlement to financial support from the state as students in other public universities.

This paper does not inquire into the motivations or interests which may have persuaded state governors to invest in these institutions, apart from a generalized interest in supporting indigenous populations, but this theme was marginal to the fieldwork and would quite possibly have undermined trust and thus also undermined the main purpose of interviews, which was to understand the meanings of interculturalidad itself.

Mexican background

The overall number of students in the state UIs is small: in total they had 5700 in October 2008, and 2900 of these were in two of them (UNICH - Chiapas and the UAIM in Sinaloa.).†††††† The Table shows a majority of women students – in one case reaching double the number of men. The Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) enjoys slightly more autonomy because it is established inside the Universidad Veracruzana as a stand-alone operation, but one that is governed by that University and thus somewhat insulated from direct

§§§§§ For an early account by its founder see Hooker, A. 'Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa del Caribe Nicaraguense (URACCAN)'. in L. Casillas Muñoz and L. Santini Vilar, eds. *Educación superior para los pueblos indígenas de América Latina: Memorias del Segundo Encuentro Regional',* (Mexico City, Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingu□e (CGEIB), 2004)

****** The UAIM in Sinaloa has 'autonomous' in its title, but its Rector is also appointed by the Governor.

†††††† Data kindly provided by Lourdes Casillas of the CGEIB, May 2009

dependence on the state government. However, it is comparable to the other UIs because the state Chamber of Deputies has increased the UVI's budget to fund it, so it is more than just a department within the UVI. Its administration is housed in premises in Xalapa, the state capital, but teaching takes place in small campuses located far from any town. The UNICH in San Cristóbal de las Casas is the only one established in a state capital but it too set up satellite campuses ('sedes') elsewhere in the state in 2011; the UIEM is located next to the small town of San Felipe del Progreso, some three hours' ride from Mexico City's Tasqueña bus station; the Tabasco UIET is deep in the countryside, and the UAIM in Sinaloa is located in the rather dilapidated village of Mochicahui 20 minutes' drive from Los Mochis (250,000 inhabitants, no bookshop).

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I visited the following institutions in Mexico in late 2006, in May 2007 and May 2008: the UAIM - Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México (Mochicahui, Sinaloa – twice, in late 2006 and in May 2008); the UVI - Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (Xalapa and the Huazuntlan 'sede' near Acayucan) twice, in 2007 and 2008); the UNICH - Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas (in December 2006 and May 2008); the UIEM - Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México (San Felipe del Progreso, May 2008); UIET - Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Tabasco (Oxolotan, May 2007 and May 2008). I also visited the Centro Universitario Ayuuk (Jultepece de Angayoc, Oaxaca, near María Lombardo, in May 2008; this belongs to the Jesuits' network of universities in Mexico, but since it is not part of the state's system it does not figure in the present analysis. In addition I met with officials at the CGEIB and other interested parties, and took part in the Tercer Encuentro Regional sobre Educación superior intercultural de América Latina y del Caribe.

The multi-sited character of this research has enabled me to listen to a variety of actors; in particular teaching staff in different places – some permanent, some temporary, some full time, some part time. I have attended discussions among them, and I have heard contrasting versions from different actors, from officials and from interested outsiders, notably anthropologists. The outcome will resemble somewhat María Elena García's account of bilingual education in Peru: different agendas and interests homing in on a population perceived by activists and teachers as vulnerable and lacking power, yet at the same time also as bearers of voices which deserve to be empowered and heard, and which the educators sincerely wish to hear.

Interpretations of Interculturalidad in higher education

The constituency

The higher education (HE) context of interculturalidad in the UIs brings more emphasis on cultural than linguistic course content, and a much more diverse constituency than in primary or secondary indigenous or bilingual education. In

schools it is feasible to use an indigenous language as the medium of instruction, whereas at the HE level it is taught as a second language - in effect as a foreign language with Spanish as the medium of instruction: students are heterogeneous so it cannot be assumed that they will all understand any one of the 58 officially recognized in Mexico, and even when they do know an indigenous language they are very unlikely to know a written version, which is regarded as a necessary part of language teaching. A school, because of its location, will have a linguistically homogeneous constituency, and teachers trained in a uniform way to teach from a fixed set of texts, but in the UIs there is no question of restricting or reserving entry to certain culturally or ethnically defined categories of people.‡‡‡‡‡‡ The UIs draw students from a wider area than schools, so that even if students do predominantly identify as indigenous they are likely to be ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous: Dietz writes that at the UVI in Veracruz two thirds of students are 'native speakers of an indigenous language' and he cites eight different ones, but does not say how fluent the students are; the other third speak only Spanish.§§§§§§ It is impractical for any UI to provide teaching in more than one or two indigenous languages, given the extreme shortage of qualified teachers.

UIs as affirmative action

As explained in an interview by Lourdes Casillas (Directora de Educación Media Superior y Superior in the CGEIB), the idea of intercultural education has gained recognition as a reaction to years of frustration trying to improve the education of indigenous peoples and of the excluded generally. The CGEIB published in 2006 an exhaustive 288-page 'Modelo educativo' for the intercultural universities, which is available as a book and on the internet.******* The document contains an account of the genesis of the project and guidance for legal and bureaucratic purposes, as well as national legal and policy documents and texts of international conventions and declarations on human rights and indigenous rights. The core of the document lies in 60 pages of detailed guidelines concerning its underlying pedagogical and philosophical principles, curriculum design, evaluation and assessment.

The text explains that the title 'universidad indígena' was rejected in order to 'avoid the idea of segregation of ethnic groups from the rest of society' (p.131). In slightly different terms the UIs could be described as a venture in affirmative action: they do not select a particular ethnically or racially defined groups for admission, but by their location in the vicinity of indigenous populations, by their image and promotion, and the content of their courses, they are designed to increase the number of indigenous students in higher education, and to make

‡‡‡‡‡‡ Sylvia Schmelkes, 'Intercultural universities in Mexico: progress and difficulties', *Intercultural Education* 201, (2009), pp. 5-17.
§§§§§§ Dietz (2012) p. 186.
******* María de Lourdes Casillas Muñoz, and Laura Santini Villar, *Universidad Intercultural: Modelo Educativo* (México DF: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe (2006). Curiously, it seems not to be available on the CGEIB website, but it can be found at the site of the Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo (UIMQROO): http://www.uimqroo.edu.mx

them feel that their particular needs are being met and their background appreciated in a way which is less likely in mainstream institutions. Affirmative action provides a more universalist rationale for intercultural education, and reduces the sense of ghettoization or enclavization which would come from an exclusive emphasis on the role of cultural recognition in overcoming exclusion. Given that UIs do not directly select students on the basis of race or ethnicity, affirmative action would in any case well describe what they are doing already.

The 'Modelo' also sees the UIs as playing an important role in regional and local development, by providing professional qualifications for people from indigenous areas and also by placing high priority on students' own research and on links to communities. But the education provided also focuses on 'the fundamental humanist and social values of the intercultural approach', so that it is not solely a matter of gaining knowledge but should also instil a sensibility with respect to social commitment, to the preservation and respect for cultural diversity, for the environment and for sustainability. To this is added the strengthening of self-esteem and the appreciation of art and culture in all their manifestations (p. 207).

In their early stages the UIs are expected to provide degree courses (*carreras*) in Indigenous Language and Culture, Sustainable Development, Intercultural Communication and Alternative Tourism, though not all have adopted all of them. (The UVI in Veracruz, for example, set aside Alternative Tourism as 'superficial' despite its possible merits.†††††††) This syllabus testifies to the quasi-vocational dimension of the project, which clearly hopes to open the way for students to work in areas relevant to the socio-economic development of indigenous communities. But it may well be more important to pay attention to the culture emerging in the UIs themselves, which stands in contrast to the prevailing educational culture in Mexico and many other countries, starting with the social constructivist approach emphasized by the 'Modelo' and by some of my interviewees.‡‡‡‡‡‡‡

Social constructivism and 'hard' multiculturalism.

In the social constructivist perspective knowledge is acquired or built (but not merely transmitted) by placing value on a student's prior experience and potential with a focus on 'knowing how to do' (*saber hacer*). The entire 5-page section on the UIs' 'psychopedagogical approach' in the 'Modelo' is devoted to this subject – far more than to themes dear to multiculturalists like cultural difference and indigenous knowledge. Reference is made to the two leading constructivists, psychologists Lev Vygotsky (who lived and worked in Russia and

††††††† Words of the Director of its Communications programme: he said it seemed 'superficial para empezar' – that is, superficial as a subject for first year students.

‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ Laura Mateos claims an influence from contemporary Spanish ideas about interculturalidad but I heard none of this in my interviews, even at the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural on which her findings are based, though Tellez did mention a research collaboration with the University of Granada and the Madrid-based Universidad a Distancia (UNED), funded by the EU. Laura Mateos, 'The Transfer of European Intercultural Discourse Towards Latin American Educational Actors: A Mexican Case Study' *Anthropology Matters*, 13:1 (2011). Mateos' co-author, Gunther Dietz, came to Veracruz from the University of Granada through this collaboration.

died in 1934 aged 38) and Jerome Bruner (both of whom have been translated into Spanish), and who were frequently cited in my interviews. Vygotsky is known for his emphasis on the creation and communication of meaning in education, as distinct from the transferring of skills, while Bruner denounces the 'mould in which a single, presumably omniscient teacher, explicitly tells or shows presumably unknowing learners something they presumably know nothing about'. Instead, Bruner (b. 1915), a very prominent psychologist of his generation, defends a concept of learning as 'an interactive process in which people learn from each other, not just by showing and telling'§§§§§§§. These ideas, associated also with one of the most famous of radical educators of the twentieth century, Paulo Freire (1921-1997), have been widely applied in Latin American informal education –in the form of Educación Popular or Educación Liberadora, often stimulated and orchestrated by sectors of the Catholic Church committed to base communities. They have also been applied in participatory research – a method associated with the name of the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, in which some people working in UIs have been schooled and which Joanne Rappaport also used when working with the Nasa people in Colombia.********

The authors of the *Modelo* make it clear that the method to be adopted in the UIs stands in stark contrast to that prevailing in most educational institutions. Their purpose is to create a system in which the students are invited to interpret new information in the context of their own experience, and to break with the established practice of one-way transmission of information (p. 156). Learning is exploration, in which the subject formulates doubts and hypotheses, explores links inspired by personal experience and context. To this end they give pride of place to research and *vinculación*: students learn about research methods from their first year and are expected to undertake projects of developmental interest as part of their courses – *vinculados*, or linked, to their communities as advocated by participatory research. But they also create a context for radically new social relationships between teachers and students, reflected in the design of the first-year preparatory course consisting entirely of workshops or seminars, and reflected also in the relationships I could observe. Unusually, they prescribe *tutorías,* in accordance with a commitment to a student-centred education in which students have assigned tutors who oversee their progress and provide advice on personal challenges as well as academic ones. All the parties involved appreciate the particular problems which arise when they attract students from a rural, indigenous and low-income background – though in this respect the UNICH, with its location in San Cristobal de las Casas, (pop. 185,000) is

§§§§§§§ Luis Moll. (1990), *Vygotsky and education: instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); (Spanish translation: Vygotsky y la educación: connotaciones y aplicaciones de la psicología sociohistórica en la educación, Buenos Aires,: Aique Grupo Editor, 1996); Jerome Bruner, *The culture of education* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1996) pp. 20-21. (Spanish translation: *Escuelas para pensar: una ciencia para el aprendizaje en el aula*, Barcelona: Paidos, 1995).

******** Rappaport is currently engaged in a research project to study 'the dynamics of collaborative research teams in Latin America' which involves using much of Fals Borda's work and his archive. See the website of the Georgetown university Centre for Latin American Studies http://pdba.georgetown.edu/CLAS

somewhat different.

Towards the end of this discussion the *Modelo* links the constructivist approach to the mutual exchanges between modern science and the 'knowledge and wisdom based on the axiology of the peoples of Mexico' in which the knowledge of the *pueblos* can complement and collaborate' with modern science (pp. 158-9). And so constructivism feeds into the ' intercultural dialogue of knowledge' ('diálogo intercultural de saberes'), but the message from this *Modelo* as well as from the interviews reported in this paper is that the two elements are of equal weight in the thoughts of the policymakers and in the daily culture of the institutions themselves. In terms of feasibility, the constructivist objectives are more straightforward than those inspired by harder versions of interculturalidad, which require elaborate constructions of other knowledges, other epistemologies and indigenous cosmovisions. These versions imply that 'indigenous knowledges' are somehow incommensurable with the knowledge described as Western, modern and monocultural, as in the extreme cultural relativism of Dietz, and to some extent Walsh, who denigrate what Dietz calls the 'mono-logical' or 'mono-epistemic' feature of Western university education.††††††††

In fact the CGEIB did issue an earlier document which provided a good example of 'hard multiculturalism', aimed principally at the primary education sector and entitled *Políticas y fundamentos de la educación intercultural bilingüe en México* (2004).‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ In this document, which may no longer reflect the CGEIB's philosophy but is a good example of the genre, the word *diversidad* is mentioned at least 45 times in the space of 27 pages and 13,500 words. This excludes quotations from other documents and uses in senses other than cultural diversity. The word *otro* in the sense of 'my other' or 'one's other' is used 15 times, each time italicized, and the word *otredad* 3 times. Two other favourites are *lógica* and *epistemología* which are mentioned 16 and 13 times respectively. In contrast, the more universalist words *equidad, inequidad*, and *justicia* both appear 9 times, whereas in the *Modelo* (a much longer document of course) *equidad* appears 37 times, *inequidad* 5 times, *justicia* 9 times, *diversidad* 37 times (excluding transcribed official documents and bibliography) – and *otro, otredad* and *epistemología* do not appear at all.

This earlier document speaks emphatically of the equal validity of 'other logics' and of the need to contrast basic scientific concepts with those deriving from other cultures ('so as to uncover the logic contained within different themes of science'). It calls for ethnocentrisms to be laid bare so that 'each body of knowledge can be freed of a distorting and unnecessary outlook'. Further on, a more concrete claim is made about the contributions of indigenous cultures

†††††††† See Gunther Dietz,'Diversity Regimes Beyond Multiculturalism? A Reflexive Ethnography of Intercultural Higher Education in Veracruz, Mexico', *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 7:2 (2012), pp. 173-200, and Walsh, 2009, quoted above. Such attacks, or expressions of disdain, avert the simple question of how it is that the idea of cultural relativism itself emerged from the universities and especially the anthropology departments of North American and Western European universities.

‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ Also available as a booklet on the website of the Secretaría de Educación Pública.

which are 'fundamental for modern science' such as *herbolaria*, soil classification, and 'the lunar cycles and their relation to human labour' followed by a sentence asking whether the significant contribution of indigenous cultures has not been in 'broadening the horizon of logical possibility and alternative ways to understanding of the world in which we live'.§§§§§§§§ From there the text shifts to claims about cognition ('nuevas síntesis cognitivas') and about how 'an epistemological dimension attempts to articulate the logics of construction of indigenous cosmovisions…and contains within itself a broad and complex vision of the process whereby knowledge is constructed'. Overall the document is more tentative than dogmatic, as if the authors are hovering on the edge of a claim that thought processes and rationality (denoted by terms such as 'cognitive' and 'epistemological') differ from one culture to another.

Are these ideas about cultural differences purely theoretical, or are they relevant to the classroom? In the Tabasco UIET I was able to face this question when I was brought in to a staff discussion of 'what constitutes an essay' and above all what weight should be given to 'opinions' in students' work. I gave the standard response which my own background would produce: an essay is not the place for the expression of personal opinions unless they are grounded in publicly available information. To this one of the teachers replied with an eloquent reminder that codified, established knowledge might invalidate, delegitimize or dominate the students' own knowledge. Now when stated in theory such ideas may sound irresponsible, denying the task of education to provide structure and to develop analytical capacities. But context does matter, and my prescription had quite different implications in Mexico compared to my own home context, in which students have numerous opportunities for self-expression – in extra-curricular activities, in small group discussions with academics – so the discipline of impersonality in their essays and exams is unlikely to suffocate them. In contrast, Mexican students, especially those from the UIs' areas of recruitment, arrive with what the UIET's programme advisor called 'asimetrías escolares y sociales tremendas', having been subjected to an unadulterated version of Bruner's 'teacher knows all' throughout their lives and, even when they reach the UIs, are barely able to express themselves orally or in writing in non-colloquial Spanish. (UI students' first year is a preparatory year designed to instil basic writing and mathematical skills, compensating for the deficiencies of secondary schooling.)

As the discussion about essays continued to bat to and fro, under the guidance of the programme advisor, so opinions fanned out and became nuanced. While one person said that 'if everything or anything goes' then 'todo se vacía' – nothing is left (literally 'everything empties out'); another said the challenge of multiculturalidad was to 'be competent in any place' – taking the 'multi' of multiculturalidad seriously; an eloquent voice was raised in reminder of the repressive or humiliating educational background of the 'chamacos' (the 'kids'). As children, when they went to school, they had to stop talking about the magical and supernatural beings which populated their imaginary because teachers

§§§§§§§§ 'Pero quizá la contribución más relevante haya sido el ampliar el horizonte de las posibilidades lógicas y de rutas alternas para conocer el mundo en que se habita.' The lunar cycles, it should be said, are hardly controversial, and constitute the basis for Jewish and Muslim calendars.

would laugh at them. The discussion had two axes: on one the cultural repression was seen to be inseparable from the authoritarian character of the education system generally, and thus cultural regeneration was very important in building young people's confidence, while on the other the adoption of educación liberadora and the constructivist approach were equal in importance to strategies to recover ancient traditions and teach difficult languages.

Educación popular (1): the UAIM project

The most ambitious reformulation of the educational project was developed at the earliest of these institutions, the UAIM in Sinaloa, by the anthropologist Jesús Angel Ochoas-Zazueta and the university's first Academic Coordinator Ernesto Guerra, who after being originally trained as an economist engaged himself fully in educational theory and practice. They enjoyed more autonomy than the later ones because they came into existence before the federal government had even created the CGEIB and were located far from the intellectual centre of Mexico City. They also enjoyed the support of the state governor. In their elaborate programmatic document Ochoas and Guerra start[*********] from a simple observation of the spectacular failures of Mexican education, and denounce the preference given to *didáctica* and *pedagogía* over learning. In paragraphs reminiscent of the contestatory educational doctrines of Paulo Freire (cf. his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), and the ultra-iconoclastic Ivan Illich (author of *Deschooling Society*, who gets a mention), they sing the praises of education as a process of creation and discovery and denounce the infantilization (my word) to which standard methods subject pupils and students. They challenge the standard contrast of adult and child on the grounds that searching, curiosity, conceptualizing, checking out and the like are attributes of all people at all ages: they criticize notion that childhood and youth are for learning, or receiving, knowledge, and only adulthood is for seeking knowledge. Educators are responsible for preparing people to learn, in an exploratory sense, and not to depend on teaching. The suggestive phrase 'pasividades del pupitre' ('the passivity embodied in sitting at a desk') is contrasted with a project to change a candidate for instruction into a person who is aware that his needs can be satisfied and that he lives in a 'decision-making arena'. In their alternative model the student body, or 'grupo sociointercultural' of students (a variant on 'intercultural' designed to encompass non-ethnic differences) are rechristened 'Titulares Académicos' and join together with the 'Facilitadores-Clarificadores' (no longer 'profesores') to diagnose learning needs, and to plan, evaluate, and jointly undertake an activity better described as research or exploration than teaching or imbibing knowledge.

The 'academic architecture' of the UAIM as described here and in interviews with Guerra does not include classrooms ('aulas') but rather meeting places

[*********] This account is taken from two articles in the UAIM's own journal *Ra Xinhai*: Ernesto Guerra-García, 'Anerogogia y skopeóutica: retorno a la educación por aprendizaje' and 'La aneregogia de la voluntad: Propuesta educativa sociointercultural de la Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México', *Ra Xinhai – Revista de Sociedad, Cultura y Desarrollo Sustentable* 1:1 and 2 (2005).

suited to learning. There are no admission exams, since they would exclude young people from an indigenous background for whom Spanish is a second language; and when an assignment concludes, the 'titulares académicos' (and they themselves do use the term) work in groups to present a piece of work, since the purpose is not to test their knowledge but rather to evaluate their research and learning capacity. There are no attendance registers. Students learn under their own steam, so that for example some 'titulares' have become computer technicians outside their official course structure. The culture is a dissident one: students are invited to draw on what they know of their own lives to lay the foundations of a critique of both dominant and subordinate cultures.

In two interviews more than one year apart Ernesto Guerra expressed his hostility to traditional forms of assessment which set up unnecessary competition among students and impose uniformity, in circumstances where 'we are working with diversity'. Exams, he said, 'produce failure', as well as carrying a message of cultural supremacy: 'one culture cannot fail another' ('una cultura no puede fracasar a otra').

Guerra's cultural relativism was nuanced: he believed that 'knowledge is relative to each culture', but also said 'no estamos hablando de saberes indígenas, sino de conocimientos indígenas', meaning that indigenous people know many things ('conocimientos') which others do not know, but – in contrast to 'hard' multiculturalists - that theirs is not a different way of knowing ('saberes'). The students mix their own cultural baggage with that of other students and of the 'facilitadores', producing an intercultural dialogue without implications for the veracity, or truth, of one or another culture ('sin decir cuál es el verdadero'). Yet at the same time, he points, as an example, not only to indigenous knowledge of the properties of plants, but also to the need to take into account the perspective from which a person is describing, say, a tree: 'we think there is a universal body of knowledge, but from the point of Tzotzil, Tzeltal or Yoreme†††††††† people, the tree's meaning is different.' Finally, Guerra criticized the PIFI evaluation system as 'universalist, mestizo and based on the idea that western culture is the only one'.

The UAIM model encountered a mixed reception in the CGEIB. Leading individuals in the CGEIB team led by Sylvia Schmelkes had themselves emerged from the Centro de Estudios Educativos which, led by the former Jesuit and public intellectual Pablo Latapí (1927-2009), had been at the forefront of research and advocacy on non-formal education, Educación Liberadora and the constructivist approach, but they were also now institutional actors in the state's education system, which may explain their ambivalent response to the UAIM experiment. On the one hand it simply did not fit into the model of a university in the usual sense, yet on the other hand it offered a 'natural space for intercultural reflexion and dialogue', especially since, uniquely, it drew students from all over the country. They also found the examining arrangements interesting, which was to be expected since they too wanted to change the authoritarian relationship between pupils and teachers in Mexican education.

†††††††† Tzotzil and Tzeltal are from Chiapas, mostly, while the Yoreme are in Sinaloa.

The CGEIB sent a team to inquire into the UAIM, and I listened to one of its members as she told me of her astonishment on arriving and finding what seemed like a scene out of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with students 'reading and studying under the trees' and queuing up to present themselves for examination: 'there are no set subjects: the *facilitador* offers his or her project to any students who might be interested and remains available'. Once a sufficient number have shown interest they are provided with basic information, a reading list…' She also confirmed my observations about the enormous sacrifices UAIM students made – sleeping 12 to a room in precarious accomodation, collecting harvest remainders from local farmers to supply the university's refectory. But the pressure on teachers in such a system, where they were permanently available to students, and the rejection of a conventional examination system and abandonment of the classroom made it difficult for either the CGEIB or the PIFI to fully support the 'modelo'. There were also serious issues of budgetary mismanagement, which Guerra himself complained of, under Ochoas. Although Ochoas was ousted and Guerra eventually was shifted out of the position of Academic Coordinator, the model remained an inspiration at the UAIM and even beyond: in 2007 a seasoned PRI operator had replaced Ochoas but he too defended the model enthusiastically, albeit with modifications to preserve the UAIM's recognition as a university.

Educación popular (2): the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI)

The UVI is distinguished not only by its location inside an autonomous university, but also by the fact that its leadership came to intercultural education after a long period of involvement in educational research along lines similar to those described for the leadership of the CGEIB. Sergio Tellez, its founding Director, who described himself as an anthropologist with a bias towards socio-linguistics, had previously been a leading figure in the 50-year-old Instituto de Investigaciones en Educación of the Universidad Veracruzana (UV). In an interview in 2007 he described an intercultural agenda – which he distinguished from indigenismo – as a conception of education which produces people who will be proud to speak their own or their ancestral language, and will develop projects in their communities. Neither in this interview nor in the interviews conducted at the same time with coordinators of the UVI's programmes, was there mention of alternative epistemologies or 'saberes'. On the other hand there was much mention of the role of student research in contributing to the development of their communities (*vinculación*), and of the ways in which learning indigenous languages strengthened their self-confidence. For example, I was told that quite often candidates do not admit to speaking their own language on their application form – because of the stigma attached to the use of indigenous languages - but once they begin their studies they reveal that they can speak them, and by the second year they are expected to be able to translate texts in both directions, although by no means all are fluent in an indigenous language.

The Coordinador of one of the UVI's three campuses, located in an indigenous

area, Huazuntlan, who had a Masters degree in Indoamerican Linguistics from the well known social science graduate school, CIESAS (Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social), explained the intercultural ethos in terms of dialogue, mutuality and renewal rather than in terms of emphasising difference and non-translatability. He described interculturalidad as 'a concept still under construction' and said that in the area there are people of different groups including those he described, interestingly, as 'castellanos' (Spanish-speakers), as well as speakers of indigenous languages. So, he said, 'we are multicultural [his word] in the sense that the population is culturally mixed', which could be described as a minimum definition, But then he went on to speak of the intercultural character of the student body in terms of a shared space in which they engage in dialogue and in a joint venture to retrieve different ways of being and thinking and a common search for a way forward.

Just as the Huazuntlan Coordinador joined the theme of interculturalidad with that of dialogical learning,‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ so also the head of UVI's programme on Regional and Sustainable Development spoke of the importance of joining up the many sources which one person might have acquired in education, with knowledge and practices which have been acquired by others over hundreds, even thousands, of years in order to produce useful knowledge. His particular concern was with local development projects, reflecting his background in the 'Latin American tradition of Educación Popular' and non-formal education in NGOs, and he included the idea of drawing on the accumulated knowledge of indigenous peoples, but without implying any sort of conflict or incompatibility with modern science; on the contrary the implication is that such knowledge is a result of testing through trial and error over innumerable generations, like modern science, albeit without the speed and complexity brought by advanced technology.

The politics of recognition

Even if they are not devoted to hard multiculturalism, the UIs are still much more than an innovative educational venture open to all with an interesting sideline in language teaching. Clearly the intention of their originators includes an ideals-driven, or cause-oriented, intervention in the politics of identity, or recognition. Recognition could mean opening a space for a culture to retrieve a degree of institutional autonomy by reinstating institutions and authorities; it could mean helping the heirs to a culture to learn 'their own' language whether spoken, written or as a historical source; but it could also mean – and this is what I think is in their minds – enabling the bearers of these cultural traditions to achieve recognition of what they actually produce. Recognition also means full participation in existing, or 'mainstream' institutions such as education, as well as politics and business and the creative arts§§§§§§§§§, and taking part in reshaping

‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ Freire uses the term dialogical learning repeatedly cf. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of freedom: ethics*, *democracy and civic courage* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield 1998) among many other sources.

§§§§§§§§§ Sergio Tellez spoke at length of a successful participation by a group of students in a video 'Festival de la Identidad' at Papantla and another member of student-produced videos, both fiction and

them. As Charles Taylor said, in a rarely quoted passage from a much-quoted essay, to value a culture or its products because one feels obliged to do so – notably on account of prior victimhood - amounts to 'unsufferable patronizing': authentic recognition of a people is for their worth, and the worth of their products (in the broadest sense)[*********]. Recognition is a subtle affair and involves much that is unspoken and hard to articulate. If it were limited to specifically cultural renewal, it would risk falling into the genre of state-sponsored folklore, and also would place all the investment in a single basket riddled with the uncertain outcomes arising from complex interplay between how the 'recognized' perceive, interpret and experience the attitudes of the 'recognizing', and vice versa, in a never-ending play of mirrors. It must be said, though, that this kind of recognition by mainstreaming rests on a degree of acceptance of the legitimacy and 'reformability' of mainstream institutions. In that respect it parts company with those, like Iris Marion Young at a certain stage, who would regard mainstream institutions as irredeemably exclusionary.[††††††††††] It also parts company with those who would denounce all and any sort of mainstreaming – otherwise labelled integration or mestizaje - as a form of oppression.

In their responses to my questions UVI academics saw themselves as developing a package which aims to equip intellectuals or professionals as development agents, and in which the themes of indigenous language and culture had their place, but not a privileged place. The recovery of a lost or partly lost culture, or simply the desire to learn more about one's ancestors, did not in their conception seem to be part of a project to reconstruct the past but a contribution to a process of enabling their students, once they had graduated, to take up leadership positions in their communities, and Dietz's article on the subject does mention 'several former students and two former lecturers' who have been elected to positions in local government.[‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡]

External agents would do well to distinguish between the content of a cultural heritage and the sense of victimhood which affects the heirs to a repressed or despised culture and leads them to demand recognition: it is after all not inconsistent for me to resent the persecution of my ancestors for their religious practices without wanting to adopt those practices, let alone share their beliefs. Likewise, I might well want to know more about an ancestral language of which I have only a shaky command, but that does not mean I want to institutionalise its use. In other words, cultural inclusion is part of social inclusion but the fluidity and uncertainty of the meaning of cultural practices and symbols should

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documentary, with no input from staff. They also took part in an 'Encuentro de Videoastas Indígenas' at the archaeological site of El Tajín.

[*********] Charles Taylor, The Politics of Recognition', in A. Gutmann (ed.): *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994). pp. 69-70

[††††††††††] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the politics of difference* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1990).

[‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡] Gunther Dietz,'Diversity Regimes Beyond Multiculturalism? A Reflexive Ethnography of Intercultural Higher Education in Veracruz, Mexico', *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 7:2 (2012), pp. 173-200.

moderate the ambitions of those who would rescue and rebuild a culture, especially when it is another's culture.

Thus we can understand why the same person who speaks of the legitimate resentment of one who is forever 'trying to recover his language - for language gives one identity', and who complains that 'for hundreds of years governments have told us our language and our culture are of no use to the country's development',§§§§§§§§§§ also expresses his worries about the 'essentialist or fundamentalist' tendencies of certain indigenous intellectuals who arraign to themselves the authority to speak on behalf of 'we the indígenas', using a discourse which merely serves to reinforce power structures within communities.**********

The above quotation replicates the tension found in an anthropology which rebels against the essentialization of cultures and their representation in excessively homogeneous terms while simultaneously fighting for their recognition. This central and touchy issue of essentialization is debated, often in interestingly cross-cutting ways, in the Mexican anthropological literature. Essays by Aida Hernández and Hector Díaz-Polanco show that even authors who were fiercely critical of what they saw as the manipulative and culturally tone-deaf neoliberal neo-indigenism†††††††††† of Fox's government, hesitate to endorse a wholly culturalist or identity-based approach to indigenous marginalization. In a similar spirit to the UVI Coordinador just quoted, they are particularly unwilling to endorse the marginalization of women in indigenous cultures, or, more precisely, the instrumentalization of indigenous cultural heritage for the purpose of perpetuating that marginalization and the position of local power brokers. And they certainly do not go anywhere near the 'hard multiculturalist' critique, which can sometimes go so far as to describe human rights as a western imposition. On the contrary Hernández invokes women's rights as universal human rights, and sees indigenous women's struggle for 'differentiated citizenship' not as a step to self-exclusion or enclavization but as a 'fundamental axis for setting the terms of their participation in the national project'. Even when she criticizes the notion, which she associates with current ruling ideas, that electoral democracy is the only proper form of political participation, she

§§§§§§§§§§ The metaphor used was that of a student 'running after his dying grandfather' (Coordenador of UVI Las Selvas again).

********** In the words of a UVI programme head: '… muchas veces tienen rasgos esencialistas o fundamentalistas …en el lenguaje de ciertos intelectuales indígenas o de lideres indígenas se hablaba de universidades indígenas, para los indígenas, y eso es como un discurso que sirve para mantener ciertas relaciones de poder al interior de las comunidades indígenas… cuando no forzosamente es la reivindicación de los grupos mas a nivel local reivindicar *nuestra* identidad indígena.'

†††††††††† i.e. a new version of the acculturation which lay at the heart of indigenism from Gamio through Aguirre Beltrán, but one which puts the market in the protagonic role which the state had previously occupied. for background see Guillermo de la Peña, 'La ciudadanía étnica y la construcción de los indios en el México contemporáneo', *Revista Internacional de Filosofía Política* 6 (1995) pp: 116-140, and 'A new Mexican nationalism? Indigenous rights, constitutional reform and the conflicting meanings of multiculturalism' *Nations and Nationalism* 12:2 (2006) pp. 279–302.

does so in terms of political theory, not with reference to cultural specificities.‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡

Although anthropologists have barely commented on the UIs, these would be vulnerable to a common criticism of neoliberal indigenism, namely that they have been developed with no visible input from indigenous representative organizations. There does not even seem to have been an effort to involve the corporatist "Indian" associations which the state has occasionally tried to encourage.§§§§§§§§§§ The only significant ones available would of course have been the Zapatistas, but the state would not work with them and they probably would not want to work with the state – though it is rumoured that an independent UI in the municipality of El Rayón in Chiapas which has attempted unsuccessfully to gain recognition, is under their influence.

The one anthropological view of a UI as an exercise in the politics of recognition is contained in the recent article by Gunther Dietz, member of the Instituto de Investigaciones en Educación of the UVI's 'host' institution, the Universidad Veracruzana (UV), and a sometime research collaborator of the UVI's founding Director Sergio Tellez.********** Dietz describes the UVI's programmes in some detail together with their rationale or ethos. He emphasizes the UVI's vocation to develop 'flexible, interdisciplinary and professional degree programs of a good academic standard that are also locally and regionally relevant, useful and sustainable for both students and their wider communities', which sounds very practical, almost managerial, bringing the knowledge transmitted through generations of agricultural production, or informal medical treatment, into contact with conventional science and medicine. But he also repeatedly returns to notions such as the 'intercultural construction of knowledge' (drawn from García Canclini)††††††††††††, and of the 'epistemic diversification embedded in these processes'. In terms characteristic of 'hard multiculturalism', he speaks of the hybridization of knowledge, of knowledges in the plural, of 'the identity discourses and the epistemological ownership of academic actors, associations and community stakeholders', as if indigenous people really think differently from people educated to respect the procedures and results of modern, official or formal science. In a similar vein he claims that 'the inclusion of a diversity of actors and a broad range of regional knowledge in the very nucleus of academic degree programs challenges the universalist, rather mono-logical and mono-epistemic character of the classical western university' (p. 192). This highly controversial language does not chime with what I have quoted here from my interviews in the UVI and elsewhere, or that of the CGEIB's *Modelo*, though the

‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ Héctor Díaz-Polanco, 'Reconocimiento y redistribución' and Rosalva Aida Hernández, 'La diferencia en debate: la política de identidades en tiempos del PAN'in *El Estado y los indígenas en tiempos del PAN: neoindigenismo, legalidad e identidad*. Rosalva Aida Hernández, Sarela Paz and María Teresa. Sierra (eds.) (México D.F: CIESAS, Porrúa, 2004) p. 302

§§§§§§§§§§ Guillermo de la Peña, 'Social and Cultural Policies Toward Indigenous Peoples: Perspectives
from Latin America', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34: (2005), p. 733.

********** Dietz (2009)

†††††††††††† Nestor García Canclini, 'Sociedades del conocimiento: la construcción intercultural del saber', in *Diferentes, desiguales y desconectados: mapas de la interculturalidad*, ed. N. García Canclini (Gedisa, Barcelona), (2004), p. 194

ideas do bear similarity to the earlier document (*Políticas y fundamentos…*). Dietz's article contains no quotations from the mouths or pens of UVI staff or students, aside from programmatic documents, so we have no way of knowing whether this language reflects what was said in the interviews he conducted.

To describe this language as controversial is not to deny that different indigenous peoples have different classification systems of, for example, plants or illnesses, or that they have different ideas about causality in nature. That has been standard since at least the publication of Lévi-Strauss's *La pensée sauvage* in 1962 and the ethnobotanical work of Brent Berlin. But those same authorities also confirm that folk classification and modern science see 'essentially the same discontinuities in plants and animals regardless of their scientific background'.‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ This view that there are deep-rooted problems of communication between cultures originated in Benjamin Whorf's ideas about language – so really they are arguments about language and not culture in general - but psychologists have found only the flimsiest of evidence for it ,and even then not in wide-ranging aspects of culture but in very detailed things like the perception of certain hues of certain colours.§§§§§§§§§§§§ The evidence certainly does not justify wide-ranging claims opposing Western and non-Western cultures as radically different ways of knowing – indeed, if the evidence did support the Whorfian claims, it would make the gulf between, say, English and Tzotzil cultures as great as that between English and Finnish cultures. Many people, including many scientists, hold views which are incompatible with modern science (religious views notably) but that does not imply either that those views should be granted some sort of scientific equivalence, or even that those who hold them believe they should, let alone that those people are incapable of grasping modern science. In the same way people who use plants as objects in ritual procedure may very well use the same plants in non-ritual ways as food or decoration, and may also use them in contexts of trial and error, looking for causal relationships and seeking peer-group consensus on the results. In other words, to construe beliefs surrounding magic and ritual procedures as representing an indigenous notion of causality is to misunderstand completely the anthropological study of these matters, starting from Durkheim.

Vinculación

In an interview in May 2007 the head of Higher Education in the CGEIB, Lourdes Casillas, described how, with her colleagues, they had been taken aback by hearing of students' incomprehension when being told to learn agricultural techniques from a blackboard: had they not learnt all this from their

‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ Laurence Hirschfeld, review of Brent Berlin: Ethnobiological classification: principles of plant and animal classification in traditional societies, *American Ethnologist*, 21:2 (1994), pp. 430-431.

§§§§§§§§§§§§ This field is outside the expertise of myself and also outside that of other writers in the field of multiculturalism mentioned here, but a survey can be found, for example, in John Lucy, J 'Language, culture and mind in comparative perspective' *Language, culture and mind*. M. Achard and S. Kemer (eds.), (CSLI Publications, 2004). I am indebted to Dan Sperber for clarification on this issue.

parents?********** Her conclusion was that a balance has to be sought between the contributions of science and the experience of the communities. She attached much importance to encouraging students to value their own experience and also to stimulating teachers to appreciate how 'on the ground things can be conceived differently and be systematized in a different way ('tener otras formas de sistematización'). And continued with the theme of 'action research linked to the strong work-based ties in communities', in other words 'vinculación'. But since students usually undertake the linking research in their home communities, vinculación is bound to be more than an educational device, bringing personal issues into the learning experience. Thus at the Pátzcuaro Conference on Higher Education for Indigenous Peoples in 2009 the head of research at UNIET revealed the moral and even emotional hazards which may arise when students undertake research in their own communities, telling of an occasion when the issue had arisen of sexual violence against women: one woman in the community concerned was so deeply affected that she followed the students back to the UNIET campus to join in a class with them.

To illustrate how this translates into classroom activity, I can describe discussions of research projects – known also as 'investigación-intervención' or 'investigación-acción' - at the Sede Selvas of the UVI in 2007. The sede, or campus, was at the time housed in very simple premises, and had neither photocopier nor Internet access. Nevertheless classes proceeded in a regular fashion. The class in question had three staff and eight students and the latter presented their projects, all to be undertaken in their home communities. It was conducted like a committee meeting: first a Chair and Rapporteur were elected from among the students, amidst a ripple of amusement and chatter, though, as the students seemed to be uncertain how to proceed, a teacher did eventually take the lead. The projects were concerned with the solution to local problems, and they were to be conducted in a 'reflexión común' with the people in the communities, without any 'imposition' – though there was an admission that they did have a 'concrete objective to encourage the indigenous language'.

The academics laid down five guideline questions:

> How will my research contribute to the development of my community ('pueblo')††††††††††††?
> Do I have the required theoretical and practical tools?
> How will my subject strengthen my community's culture?
> How can I ensure that the research-intervention will not get stuck in 'activitis'‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ and fail to contribute to the community's development?

********** 'la imposición del maestro…la creencia absoluta en lo que da el maestro…Nos dimos cuenta hablando con estudiantes que decían que no entendían como un profesor podía ensenar como sembrar en el pizarrón cuando ellos lo saben perfectamente…o sus padres les han enseñado otro tipo de cosas

†††††††††††† I have translated 'pueblo' as 'community' because 'people' is too broad: they were clearly talking about their localities of origin – which is often described as 'comunidad' in Mexico, as has already been noted.

‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ This is the original word – it means feverish activity without much reflexion.

> How can I help to create a space for the discussion of the problem of culture?

These students were talking about projects in their own communities, where they had probably grown up, but within two years of studying at the UVI and despite the campus location in their own area, their words already expressed their feelings as quasi-outsiders : 'We must start from their needs, not our own….we must be neither *campesinistas* nor *tradicionalistas*…it will be hard to coexist ['convivencia'] with parents, children and schoolteachers…' Thus, paradoxically their return home with a project to recover heritage and promote development places them at a distance, alienates them in the Brechtian sense, because they come armed with a theory of what the community is doing. It also points to a simple but crucial aspect of their experience. They have not just been on an intercultural training course: they have become immersed in university life.

The origins of the UVI's *vinculación* system may not lie only with the constructivist approach. As Dietz describes it, there seems to have been a debate and a negotiation between academics looking to 'introduce constructivist student-centered pedagogical approaches' and 'indigenous activists' who 'rejected these "too postmodern attitudes"', such as those quoted here, and wanted students to be 'trained as bearers of collective ethnic cultures that require group empowerment through the transfer of knowledge from academia to community actors'.§§§§§§§§§§§§ Eventually, the debate was also joined by environmentally-conscious NGOs and out of it came a mutual fertilization in which 'teachers and students share community development experiences through their NGO participation, indigenous organizations learn from continuous education courses and NGOs enter the university through 'expert teaching and student supervision activities.'********** This account portrays indigenous activists (who rarely got a mention in my interviews in any UIs) as looking to the university to provide tools for their politics in a somewhat instrumental, even 'top-down', way which they believe to be out of harmony with the constructivist approach. Dietz for his part may be a true postmodernist, advocating a multiculturalist relativism which he describes as inter-cultural, inter-actor, and inter-lingual. In any case his description provides support for my interpretation, that the UIs constitute a space in which in which interculturalidad is debated and experienced, not decreed or imposed.

Whereas communities are accustomed to 'losing' their young people once they acquire an education, these students are returning home, but with ideas acquired in a university atmosphere of open discussion and dispassionate analysis – something which could destabilize customary relationships of authority, though my interviewees did not mention this. This, paradoxically, in the name not of the destabilization of the community, but of a project to recover, or at least gain a respect for, its heritage. So while, as Dietz describes them, indigenous activists

§§§§§§§§§§§§ To my mind, if anyone, it was the activists who were the postmodernists, since they contested practical teaching in the name of identity politics.

********** Dietz (2012), p. 189

view education as providing tools for their agenda, the constructivist teachers wanted the students to explore their identity for themselves.

Although interviews with individual students were not part of my agenda, collective conversations were arranged for me in four institutions. In a meeting with a group of third-year students at the UNICH in San Cristóbal de las Casas, I heard of four projects: one involving waste management and another crop diversification (from maize to market gardening) with the use of natural fertilizer. The other two were presented as providing a responsive survey and diagnosis service to issues raised by villagers, arising from a concern that communities were going from one project to the next without sustained guidance. In response to my query that the use of natural fertilizer would require much more labour than chemical fertilizer, a student said that the most important part of their course was combining what they have learnt theoretically with the experience accumulated in the comunidad. There is nothing in this exchange about the superiority or inferiority of one way of knowing or another, simply a recognition that people who are heirs to centuries of farming experience have much of value to say on the subject.

In conversation with a group of teachers also at UNICH similar ideas were expressed with more elaborate vocabulary: through 'vinculación comunitaria', 'the university goes to the community not to bring knowledge to it, but rather to gain feedback from the traditional ways of knowing ('saberes') which are to be found in those places'. Here again we find a practical construction of what in multicultural jargon would be a story about other knowledges, and epistemologies. Similarly, 3rd and 4th year students at the UNIEM in the state of Mexico used the term *cosmovisión*, but not in the sense of a system of knowledge, or a religious eschatology. It just served as the opening to an ethnographic discussion about cultural differences: there was mention of blessings to bring on rain and of rituals and exchanges surrounding marriage among the Mazahua – that is, among these students' own people - and a general remark about the importance of religion 'which forms part of their beliefs and their relationship with nature'. In other words, they were speaking of a heritage, not an epistemology, and, speaking in the third person, did not quite claim it as their own, though they identified themselves to me as Mazahua.

In contrast to the detached quasi-ethnographic third person used to describe the social character of their communities, the subject of language could bring out the first person in students' reflections and thus a stronger sense of identification: in the UNICH student group each participant began by identifying him or herself, unprompted, as a speaker of one or another language, and there were remarks about the contrasting experiences a person can have in using his or her language – and indeed about the very notion of possessing a language of one's own. In several conversations students also spoke of a range of situations in which language issues were complicated for them or for people like themselves: often parents had distanced themselves from their mother tongue when migrating because they felt ashamed to speak it and had likewise discouraged their children from doing so; stories were recounted, autobiographical or not, of

schoolteachers who punished children for speaking 'lengua' (i.e. 'lengua indígena'). Students described how some people, because they get told off for using an indigenous language, prefer to cover up their ethnicity, 'keeping it just for themselves', like the applicants to the UVI who did not mention their knowledge of an indigenous language on their application forms. Others, in contrast, 'are in the fight for recognition as persons, whether or not they speak an indigenous language… they are proclaiming the culture from which they sprang however much or little they knew of it'. The sentence is confused, yet the confusion is itself revealing: language is identified with the affirmation of origins. These words are saying, surely, that poor command reflects the strenuous effort required to learn an indigenous language in adulthood; it is the effort that counts as part of the reclaiming of one's distinctive heritage. In the end the command will probably be limited, but that is not the point.

Universalism, relativism and a space for experimentation

If this paper has described a range of opinions, including doubts, about the nature and purpose of intercultural education, that may well be because it draws on the experience of state institutions which, as I have said, are quite unique in this field at the higher education level.

Within this context we observe a confluence of ideas derived from educación popular, or constructivism, and from multiculturalism. The former is universalist and addresses the repressive and authoritarian features which pervade public schools in many parts of Mexico, not only in indigenous areas, while the latter is concerned to redress the unequal respect paid to different cultural traditions by claiming, in its 'hardest' versions, that indigenous cultures are so radically 'other' that their bearers have a different epistemology, that not only do they know different things, which is not controversial, but that they 'think differently'. The people I have interviewed tend to skirt around that issue, but instead bring into the classroom the indigenous students' distinctive knowledge and heritage, encourage them to undertake development-related research projects in their own communities, and help them to develop their self-confidence. Their vocation could be described in the words Sylvia Schmelkes used in an interview in 2006 when she explained that Mexico's new self-description, inscribed in the Constitution in 1992, as 'pluricultural', put an end to centuries during which the dominant culture said to indígenas 'if you want to mix with me you have to cease being yourself'.†††††††††††††† Now, she said, intercultural higher education is taking up the challenge of strengthening indigenous languages and cultures to enable Mexicans to be more plural than ever before, while also trying to pull down the innumerable barriers against indigenous participation in society's mainstream.

These elements come to constitute a culture in the UIs which is different from that found in other intercultural ventures and in other educational institutions. One difference vis-à-vis other intercultural ventures from the students' viewpoint is the prolonged immersion in higher education, since the UIs offer

†††††††††††††† 'Si quieres mezclar conmigo tienes que dejar de ser tú'.

four-year Licenciaturas rather than short or one-year courses. The pedagogical difference vis-à-vis other Higher Education Institutions lies in the intensity of contact between staff and students, and the introduction of research activity into a student's life from the beginning of the first year. At the same time the intercultural identity of the UIs has created a culture within them which encourages the constant inclusion of resources drawn from indigenous culture, and also a recurrent atmosphere of debate and invention about how to achieve this, whether through the teaching of languages, the undertaking of research projects, the infusion of indigenous elements into courses on development and on tourism, or the encouragement of students to take their video productions to a videomakers' festival.‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡

Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to overcome a normative, policy and interpretative impasse in the literature on interculturalidad and indigenism in Latin America. The normative impasse consists in the difficulty of ensuring that a politics of recognition goes hand in hand with a politics of inclusion. It is revealed in the difficulties over women's rights and in claims that official indigenist initiatives are a modernizing façade, or a neoliberal distraction from underlying structures of inequality as Hale seemed to be saying in 2002.§§§§§§§§§§§§§§ The view in this paper is that these concerns are secondary once it is understood that cultural and even juridical recognition in the form of legal pluralism, as in Colombia, or 'usos y costumbres' in Oaxaca, or bilingual education, should not operate as a distraction from socio-economic inclusion, that is measures like conditional cash transfers (viz. Oportunidades in Mexico and Bolsa Familia in Brazil) or more radical policies like the wholesale reform of primary and secondary education or to the provision of genuinely free medical care. This fits with the approach taken by the leading figure in teacher training for bilingual education, Luis Enrique López, who takes what he calls the traditional and the modern to be complementary, and argues for incorporating indigenous knowledge and the cooperative learning habits found in indigenous society, while adapting to variations in levels of bilingualism and the indigenous demand for the revitalization of their own languages.********** It would be consistent with his approach to say that if one seeks to resist the undoubted destructive effects of modernization (marginalization, ecological destruction, neglected or trampled heritages) the way to do it is not for outsiders, be they activists, professors or state officials, to attempt a reconstruction of a mythical or lost past, or to artificially promote the literate usage of languages whose survival

‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ See note 35 above.

§§§§§§§§§§§§§§ Sierra op. cit. (2009) ; Hale, C. (2002). "Does multiculturalism menace? governance, cultural rights and the politics of identity in Guatemala." Journal of Latin American Studies **34**: 485-524. In an often convoluted paper, Hale also seemed to be welcoming the neoliberal sponsorship of pro-indigenous policies or projects on the basis of a kind of cynical bargain between indigenous leaders, social movements and NGOs who dislike the neoliberalism but welcome the resources and opportunities and the World Bank and its associates in government who see in indigenist policies a way of avoiding structural change.

********** López, L. E. and I. Sichra . "La educación en áreas indígenas de América Latina: balances y perspectivas' in I. Hernaiz (ed.) *Educación en la diversidad: Experiencias y desafíos en la Educación Intercultural Bilinguë'* (Buenos Aires, IIPE-UNESCO, 2004), p. 143.

is owed entirely to oral transmission. Precisely such a tension is documented by Emiko Saldivar who describes the differences dividing INI field workers, proud of their practical, 'down-to-earth' commitment, and office-holders in thrall to the rhetoric of indigenity and cultural difference.††††††††††††††

This article emphasizes the 'inter' of interculturalidad by conceiving it as a programme of affirmative action with recognition which depends on the encouragement and empowerment of indigenous voices in all their variety. These are grandiose ambitions, and the resources and mission of the UIs are very limited in comparison with the dual challenge of recognition and inclusion. No wonder then that they are treated here as an experimental arena and, by implication, a venture which should encourage the growth of indigenous professionals and the broadening of indigenous leadership, which is very scarce in Mexico despite the media projection of the Zapatistas.

Some commentators see interculturalidad as the pursuit not just of equality of cultural respect but equality between cultures 'tout court'. This is disingenuous, not least because it portrays the hegemonic and indigenous cultures as either radically separate or separable, because it ignores their internal diversity and intermingling influences, and because it sometimes can spill over into a radical essentialization of 'Western culture', reducing it to a single body of knowledge and experience to be summarily dismissed as 'monologic'.

Instead, the cases reported here, modest as they undoubtedly are in scale, start from two recognitions: that the cultural traditions, apparatuses and hierarchies in play in Mexico, or any other country, are interpenetrated and cannot be unbundled, yet at the same time that the collective exclusion and individual discrimination suffered by the bearers of indigenous culture have an undoubted cultural dimension which can be confronted inside the state's higher education system, among other places. This is achieved by offering courses in subjects hitherto marginal to higher education but relevant to the development needs of indigenous areas, as well as by providing access to a four-year university life experience, and by introducing *vinculación*, which can create a new type of role for young people as researchers and eventually leaders in their communities and beyond. The perhaps optimistic argument is that the methods and ethos of 'educación liberadora' and 'educacion popular', combined with the practices of cultural recognition which permeate those institutions, in their course content, in their student population and in the commitment of the academic staff, as well as the intellectual curiosity aroused by their location and social contexts, will contribute to enhancing the politics of recognition regionally and nationally. These are ambitious aspirations, but they are aspirations proper to interculturalidad, one of whose purposes is to avoid or escape the ghettoization

††††††††††††††† Emiko Saldívar, 'Everyday Practices of Indigenismo: an Ethnography of Anthropology and the State in Mexico', *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 16:1 (2011) pp. 67–89.

which may not be the intention of multiculturalism, but is often laid at its door in Europe.‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ That, however, awaits another discussion.

‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ Lourdes Arizpe, a Mexican anthropologist who has occupied important positions in Mexico and in the UN related to indigenous and cultural issues, told me that the term intercultural has gradually replaced multicultural in Latin America because of a desire to distinguish the Latin American concept from the ghettoization and cultural relativism associated with the European and North American versions.