“World” – Travelling With Professional Indigenous Women of Mexico: Collective weavings

Marina Cadaval Narezo

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“World”-Travelling With Professional Indigenous Women of Mexico: Collective weavings

Een 'wereld'reis met inheemse vrouwelijke professionals uit Mexico: Collectieve verwevenheden

Thesis

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Not all the acronyms are official translations from Spanish to English. Some of them are approximations to facilitate understanding the nature of the organization.

ANUIES	Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior (National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions)
CATIE	Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center)
CDI	Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples)
CEPIADET	Centro Profesional Indígena de Asesoría, Defensa y Traducción, A.C. (Indigenous Professional Center for Counseling, Defense and Translation)
CGEIB	Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingue (Office of Intercultural and Bilingual Education)
CIESAS	Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (Center for Research and Higher Education in Social Anthropology)
CIG	Concejo Indígena de Gobierno (Indigenous Governing Council)
CNI	Congreso Nacional Indígena (National Indigenous Congress)
CONACYT	Consejo Nacional de Humanidades, Ciencias y Tecnologías (National Council of Humanities, Sciences and Technologies)
CONEVAL	Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy)
DGEI	Dirección General de Educación Indígena (Office of Indigenous Education)
EADI	European Association of Development Research and Training Institutions

EZLN	Zapatista Army of National Liberation
FF	Ford Foundation
HDI	Human Development Index
IFP	International Fellowships Program
IIE	Institute of International Education
IIS-EUR	International Institute of Social Studies of the Erasmus University Rotterdam
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INI	Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Indigenous Institute)
INPI	Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (National Institute of Indigenous Peoples)
IU	Universidad Intercultural (Intercultural University)
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
Probepi	Programa de Becas de Posgrado para Indígenas CIESAS-CONACYT (Graduate Scholarship Programme for Indigenous Peoples)
PUIC	Programa Universitario de Estudios de la Diversidad Cultural y la Interculturalidad (University Programme for the Study of Cultural Diversity and Interculturalism)
Red IINPIM	Red Interdisciplinaria de Investigadores de los Pueblos Indios de México, A. C. (Interdisciplinary Network of Researchers of the Indian Peoples of Mexico, Civil Association)
RFD	Red de Feminismos Descoloniales (Descolonial Feminist Network)
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Education –Mexico)
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICH	Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas (Intercultural University of Chiapas)
UNO	Universidad de Occidente
Untref	Universidad Tres de Febrero (Argentina)
UVI	Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural

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ABSTRACT

This thesis emerges from personal and collective journeys through several contexts, lives, and times. It represents a living process that started before the academic exercise and will continue beyond it. The thesis is a point of encounters, of arrivals and departures, of changes and permanences, of synergies, coalitions, and disagreements among the many participants who helped me to craft it. It is formed by a series of plural narratives based on my listening, learning, and discussing with a group of Indigenous women from Mexico about how graduate education has informed their professional trajectories and how they are positioning themselves as political actors.

The empirical and theoretical research is framed within critical development studies, particularly by post-development approaches and uses various critical feminist perspectives, as well as decolonial and Indigenous methodologies. I use concepts such as "world"-travelling, "enunciations", "cultivation of knowledge", "enfleshed experiences" as living and vibrant conceptualizations from where to look for other ways to create knowledge and to foster the relationships within.

Within my main objective to acknowledge and make visible the contributions of professional Indigenous women as political actors the thesis has three further purposes. First, to generate spaces where diverse women can reflect together about higher education and strengthen coalitions. Second, to cultivate enfleshed knowledges and share them in various spaces. Third to generate intercultural dialogues and dynamics that challenge conventional ways to produce knowledge.

My approach of allowing the thesis to emerge over time and through a plurality of voices is ethically and politically important because it recognises diverse experiences in knowledge cultivation. In this way the thesis challenges the historical marginalisation and erasures that Indigenous women face in academia and other political spaces. The thesis aims to promote inclusivity, social justice, and gender equality by providing examples of how Indigenous women's experiences are relevant to build plural, intercultural understandings and practices, particularly in and for development studies.

SAMENVATTING

Dit proefschrift is het resultaat van persoonlijke en collectieve reizen door verschillende contexten, levens en tijdperken. Het is een weergave van een doorlopend proces dat voor het wetenschappelijke project al is begonnen en daarna nog doorgaat. Het proefschrift vormt de weerslag van ontmoetingen, van momenten van aankomen en vertrekken, van veranderingen en bestendigheden, van synergieën, coalities en meningsverschillen tussen de vele deelnemers die eraan bijgedragen hebben. Het bestaat uit een reeks meervoudige narratieven die gebaseerd zijn op het luisteren naar, leren van en discussiëren met een groep inheemse vrouwen uit Mexico. De gesprekken gingen over de invloed van hoger onderwijs op hun beroepsleven en over de wijze waarop zij zich opstellen als politieke actoren.

Het empirische en theoretische onderzoek wordt ingekaderd binnen kritische ontwikkelingsstudies, met name door post-ontwikkelingsbenaderingen, en maakt gebruik van verschillende feministische gezichtspunten, alsmede dekoloniale en Inheemse benaderingen. Vanuit deze theoretische basis gebruik ik een taal die afwijkt van de traditionele taal van de kritische ontwikkelingsstudies. Ik gebruik begrippen als ‘wereld’reizen, ‘formuleringen’, ‘cultivering van kennis’, ‘enfleshed (geconcretiseerde) ervaringen’ als levende en dynamische concepten van waaruit we op zoek kunnen gaan naar andere manieren om kennis te creëren en de verbanden daarbinnen te bevorderen.

Naast mijn hoofddoel om de bijdrages van professionele inheemse vrouwen als politieke actoren te erkennen en zichtbaar te maken, heeft het proefschrift nog drie andere doelen. Ten eerste om ruimtes te creëren waarin verschillende vrouwen samen kunnen nadenken over hoger onderwijs en coalities kunnen versterken. Ten tweede om enfleshed kennis te cultiveren en te delen in diverse omgevingen. Ten derde om een interculturele dialoog en dynamiek te genereren die conventionele manieren om kennis te produceren uitdagen.

Mijn benadering waarbij het proefschrift geleidelijk in de loop van de tijd en door een veelheid van stemmen ontstaat is ethisch en politiek gezien belangrijk omdat daarmee verschillende ervaringen in het cultiveren van kennis erkend worden. Op deze manier wordt de historische marginalisatie en uitsluiting waarmee inheemse vrouwen in de wetenschap en andere politieke ruimten te maken hebben in het proefschrift aangevochten. Het doel is om met dit proefschrift inclusiviteit, sociale rechtvaardigheid en gendergelijkheid te bevorderen door voorbeelden te geven van de wijze waarop de ervaringen van inheemse vrouwen relevant zijn voor het opbouwen van plurale, interculturele inzichten en praktijken, vooral in en voor ontwikkelingsstudies. Dit zou besluitvormingsprocessen kunnen beïnvloeden.

PREFACE.
Encounters, arrivals and departures

This thesis results from personal and collective journeys through several contexts, lives, and times. It represents a living process that started before the academic exercise implied and continues beyond it. I see it as a point of encounters, of arrivals and departures. Of changes and permanences. Of synergies, coalitions, and disagreements among the many participants who helped me to look for different understandings. It is about plural narratives from which I have developed my own voice while listening, learning, and discussing with the group of Indigenous women I worked with. It is a process of "world"-travelling (Lugones, 2003) around my internal and external plural-me but also one that wove collectively built enunciations (Walsh, 2013a). It is an intercultural dialogue among diverse women reflecting together on how graduate education has informed the professional trajectories of Indigenous women from Mexico and how they are positioning themselves as political actors.

In this introduction, I clarify what my doctoral journey has been about, the context in which the relations have unfolded, and the relevance this doctoral journey has for research in critical development studies. This thesis results from qualitative and empirical research based on the recognition of collaborative, collective and relational practices (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008), following my personal enunciations. I use enunciations in a very specific way. I understand "enunciations" as epistemic, political, and ethical places (Walsh, 2013a) that arise from our corporality, situated contexts, trajectories, and reflective processes. To enunciate is not only a term or concept but marks a politics against the erasure of the colonised peoples by the dominant epistemology of the white-Anglo-Christian-Western-male world. Therefore, it is a practice against epistemicide. These enunciations arise from our "enfleshed experiences" (Ahmed, 2014; Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2003; Motta, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Motta & Bermudez, 2019), considering not only our "positionalities" as shaped by socially constructed memberships

to which we belong and that are embedded in our society as a system (Misawa, 2010, p. 26) , nor to the intersecting social locations and complex power dynamics where oppression is reproduced (Hill Collins, 2000). The enunciations I refer to, go beyond the privileges that, personally, my body, my education, my stories reflect about me to rather refer to my empathies, my "'world'-travelling" (Lugones, 2003), the synergies and the "deep coalitions" (Lugones, 2003) that I have chosen and have guided my life.

Following decolonial thinker María Lugones (2003), by "world"-travelling, I mean the capacity to shift across worlds for women who are outsiders to the mainstream white-Western-Anglo organisation of life. For her, only people who have experienced subordination, exploitation, and enslavement are forced to do "world"-travelling to accommodate themselves in different situations as a matter of survival. "World"-travelling enables one to perceive others "lovingly" instead of "arrogantly", making it possible to identify with others, especially across racial and cultural boundaries. Following Sara Motta (2021, 2022b, 2022a), Xóchitl Leyva Solano (2021), Sara Motta & Norma Bermudez (2019), Sara Ahmed (2014) and Lugones (2003) , by 'enfleshed', I mean the experiences from, with, in relation to, regardless of, and because of our bodies: experiences that bloom and we embrace from and with our corporality, our skin, bones, and flesh; experiences of sensitivity and vulnerability that strengthen and root. The "enfleshment'" shares with the concept of "embodiment" that experiences are shaped by our situated contexts and particular stories (Harcourt, 2019). However, the enfleshment goes beyond these places. Our biological constitution – the colour of our skins, the length of our hair, the size of our hips – to take into account the world of the senses – the pains, joys, the malleability of our own enunciations – while acknowledging how coloniality (Quijano, 2000)and specifically the coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2016) have defined how we inhabit the world.

Therefore, this research is about personal and collective "world"-travellings and enfleshed experiences from where I/we have theorised, reflected, and narrated while weaving deep coalitions. By deep coalitions, following Lugones (2003), I mean the loving and empathetic understandings, the active listening, and the collective actions across differences from where to challenge and dismantle the underlying systems of domination. Coalitions based on differences are grounded not in coincidences of individual or group interests but in multiple

understandings of oppressions and resistances. Furthermore, following Shilliam (2015), this work has been about "cultivating" rather than "producing" knowledge because to cultivate is "to till, to turn matter around, and fold it back on itself so as to rebind and encourage growth" (Shilliam, 2015, pp. 24–25), whereas to produce is to lengthen, to prolong or extend, to accumulate, and to generate information of and for "subalterns". To cultivate is to water rooted relation that can be understood as "grounding" (Shilliam, 2015). Grounding here has been about the synergies and coalitions developed before, during, and beyond this academic endeavour, and also about the processes it is based on and its effects, shaping the thesis as hybrid material.

By 'hybrid', I mean my thesis is not a linear or an individual story. It is made up of various enfleshed and contextual experiences that happened, were shared, and discussed for months, for years. It is mine and others'. Those who actively participated in it as co-authors and others who shared their thinking at certain points. It has been about 'otherwise knowledge practices' because I/we move in the field of collective doing that crosses from singular to plural conjugations; that is, "I" as a "misdescription of formation of dispersed and complex collectivity" (Lugones, 2003, p. 227); an "I", taking into account that "our lived stories are moulded by the interconnectedness with other people's stories" (Cairo, 2022, p. 23); and for transforming the "I did it like this" to "we did it like this" (Leyva Solano, 2015, p. 27). The thesis is hybrid also because its structure is made up of three already published texts, an introduction – to explain the journeys, the processes, and the conceptual frames – and the conclusions.[1]

Using a decolonial feminist framework that focuses on learning "about each other as resisters to the coloniality of gender at the colonial difference, without necessarily being an insider to the worlds of meaning from which resistance to the coloniality arises" (Lugones, 2010, p. 753), led me to travel and comprehensively understand and address the complex dynamics at play. I could then critically examine the historical, cultural, and political legacies of colonialism, illuminating the power imbalances and systemic oppression that continue to oppress Indigenous communities. By adopting a decolonial lens, the thesis acknowledges and

1. I have included all the references at the end of the thesis for uniformity and clarity, despite that the published texts (chapters IV, V and VI) have their own bibliographies.

centres Indigenous knowledge systems, perspectives, and experiences, thereby challenging dominant Eurocentric paradigms and facilitate more inclusive and equitable understandings of the academic and professional trajectories of Indigenous women. This approach promotes a transformative dialogue that disrupts the colonial hegemony and offers pathways for the decolonisation of educational structures, policies, and practices.

Moreover, I found an appealing and beautiful language in some decolonial scholars to transmit and explain those complex dynamics while weaving deep understandings with other, multiple, and different – necessary – knowledges and meanings. Conceptualisations like "world"-travelling, deep coalitions, playfulness (Lugones, 2003), enunciations (Walsh, 2013a), enfleshment (Ahmed, 2014; Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2003; Motta, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Motta & Bermudez, 2019), knowledge cultivation (Shilliam, 2015), and epistemic injustices (Icaza, 2022), which inspired my own writing and reflections.

Chapter IV was published in the book by Harcourt et al. (2022) *Feminist methodologies: Experiments, collaborations and reflections*', while Chapter V is the introductory text to the book *Mujeres indígenas, mujeres diversas nombrando el racismo en la educación superior* (Cadaval Narezo, et al., 2023). Chapter VI has been published as an article in the international journal *Globalizations* as Cadaval Narezo et al. (2023) that will be part of a special issue focused on education and socio-environmental justice in the pluriverse. Chapters V and VI could be read as the 'findings' since they present topics that resulted as part of the research process and discussed these topics collectively: racism, tokenism, resistances, and intercultural higher education. The introduction and the conclusions present my own "world"-travelling in this academic journey as partly constitutive of cross-cultural and cross-racial loving (Lugones, 2003).

The efforts to create these texts and the overall thesis have had three central purposes within the main objective to acknowledge and make visible the contributions of professional Indigenous women as political actors. First, to generate spaces where diverse women can reflect together and strengthen coalitions; second, to cultivate enfleshed knowledge and expose it in various spaces – books, journals, seminars, in the communities, in academia, with our relatives and friends, with colleagues and acquaintances, at local, national and international levels; and

third, to generate intercultural dialogues and dynamics to weave and intertwine conceptual and methodological perspectives to challenge conventional academic ways to produce knowledge, particularly in critical development studies. It is necessary to present alternatives to Western practices and understandings to create plural voices as equally valid. These objectives were woven through time and not defined from the beginning.

This approach is ethically and politically important because it recognises the plurality of voices and experiences in knowledge cultivation, challenging historical marginalisation and erasures that Indigenous women have faced in academia and other political spaces. The approach also promotes inclusivity, social justice, and gender equality by providing a platform to influence decision-making processes. The approach challenges prevailing stereotypes and narratives that undermine Indigenous women's expertise, fostering respect and understanding of different perspectives and knowledges.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter I is a broad introduction in which I have included my personal story and motivation to do a doctorate and the context in which I met the 17 women I worked with. Chapter II presents the study context, some general data and information about Indigenous peoples and Indigenous women in Mexico, particularly in (higher) education. Chapter III is about the theoretical foundations, specific conceptualisations, methodological principles and ethical decisions taken to develop and organise this thesis – with an explanation of the commonalities and disconnections among chapters. Chapter IV provides the methodological principles used and some of the methods followed to develop both the particular chapter and the thesis in general. The presentation to this chapter is particularly long because it describes and reflects on the other fieldwork activities I did before shifting the focus of the thesis – and that early fieldwork is not included in subsequent publications. Chapter V is about the experiences of racism in higher education and the strategies to confront it – including proposals to revert it. It is co-written by seven Indigenous and two mestiza women. I included this text after the methodological section because it illustrates the intercultural and collective process of working, thinking, and writing together. Chapter VI presents the epistemic contributions of two Indigenous women professors at intercultural universities (IU) in Mexico as encouragement for the pluriverse (Escobar, 2012,

2014). It is a grounding example of how professional Indigenous women actively nurture post-development practices and conceptualisations. Finally, in Chapter VII, I reflect on the overall contributions of this thesis for advancing critical development studies, considering a more grounded, feminist, decolonial perspective that can shift how we reflect and construct our daily lives regarding the way we cultivate relations and knowledge. I hope I can transmit the arguments and feelings that the weaving process in this research has carried.

CHAPTER I

Journeys, contexts and coalitions

Studying in the language with which I grew up, with which my heart thinks[1]

I grew up in Mexico City. I studied there all my life. I did a Bachelor of Arts in History at the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM; National Autonomous University of Mexico), about seven stops from a microbus[2] stop three blocks from my house. It took me 20 to 30 minutes to get there. Sometimes I would bike or even walk when I wanted the exercise. I usually went by car. I had options. Mine was a life that, without being luxurious, I thought that I was ordinary and common for a Mexican urban middle-class student. I studied in Spanish as I had done all my life – the only language with which I grew up, with which my heart thinks and in which I can express myself without difficulty. Since I was born, I had, in some way, a guaranteed educational path. Professional parents, basic and secondary education in private schools, and tertiary education at public and free higher education institutions, such as UNAM, that I would enter if I fulfilled the only responsibility I always had: to study.

After finishing my bachelor's degree, I began working full-time in 2001 at the first initiative aimed at developing the Indigenous people[3] by granting scholarships to Indigenous men and women to pursue graduate studies. The project was initially funded by the Ford Foundation and called the International Fellowships

1. A previous version of this text was initially published in 2021 in the blog Mujeres y Resistencias (2021) and later included in the book by Cadaval Narezo, et al. (2023). The introduction is presented here as Chapter III.
2. *Peseros* or *colectivos* (microbuses) are the most-used public transport, generally characterised by their poor condition, and the careless driving of the drivers. They cost between 5 and 20 (USD 0.25 to USD 1.00) depending on the region and the distance travelled.
3. I will be using Indigenous or original peoples along this thesis to give fluidity to the narratives and for practical reasons. I acknowledge the controversial use of the term *indígenas* that has had on the one hand, pejorative and racist connotations due to its historical classification of colonial origin (Bono López, 2019); and on the other, as a political claim and social re-signification by broad sectors within indigenous peoples and movements, particularly raised by the Zapatista movement (Semo, 2017) which represents a political position "allows us to name a series of struggles and circumstances that 'hermanan' (unite) different peoples with each other" (Aguilar Gil, 2018b).

Program (IFP), which 12 years later became the Programa de Becas de Posgrado para Indígenas (Probepi; Graduate Scholarship Programme for Indigenous Peoples Probepi), financed by the Mexican government through the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT; National Council of Science and Technology). Both IFP and Probepi were administered by the Center for Research and Higher Education in Social Anthropology (CIESAS).

Throughout the nearly 15 years I worked at IFP-Probepi, I met Indigenous womenwhose trajectories to access higher education taught me a reality completely different from the one in which I had lived. I knew about the deep inequalities in our country. However, it was not until I was part of this education project that they had faces, gazes, and stories of entire families and communities. They stopped being numbers and became people with daily struggles and permanent resistance. Many stories of struggle and resistance were those of the men too, but those of women were more complex and painful.

Stories that marked my life

Those stories and the women who characterized them made me question many things, made me challenged my privileges as a woman who had been schooled all her life in Spanish, and had 'only' a bachelor degree. Why did a degree matter? I wondered. I decided to study again, experience a different context, use a language that was not my own, and be uncomfortable. In 2015, I did a Master of Social Policy for Development that became a doctorate at the International Institute of Social Sciences – Erasmus University of Rotterdam (ISS-EUR) in The Netherlands. I had never thought of doing a doctorate. It was not in my life plan until those uncomfortable questions (and other questions) confronted and invaded me regarding my privileges.

Why were fewer Indigenous women applying for the IFP scholarship? Where were the sisters, friends, mothers, acquaintances, sisters-in-law, wives, neighbours, teachers, girlfriends, and colleagues of the men applying? What happened to the women who received the scholarship and did postgraduate degrees? What were the expected and unexpected consequences of doing degrees and travelling outside their communities or the country to do them? In a country like Mexico

that is wounded by its colonial heritage (Mignolo, 2011)–inherently racist, sexist and classist– would having degrees make a difference? For whom and why would the title matter? Would they be accepted in their communities – women breaking stereotypes? Would they find more or better opportunities – women historically excluded from the system?

The MA at ISS was the beginning of an academic journey where I learnt about critical theories of development to frame and respond to my questions from various angles. Post-development (Escobar, 2012; Harcourt, 2009, 2019; Sachs, 2010) as a conceptual foundation helped me understand the discourses and world-dive between the developed and the 'developing'-underdeveloped – for which difference, "otherness" (Said, 1997) has been established as a hierarchical social construction, stigmatising, and creating systemic inequalities. The Black intersectional feminisms (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015) were key to identifying the multiple layers of oppression women of colour experience. The Indigenous and decolonial approaches (Lugones, 2010, 2016; Quijano, 2000, 2014; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) allowed me to ground my political enunciations on reciprocity and relationality (Wilson, 2008), shift the individual to the collective as a research practice (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008), and contextualise my arguments having as a point of departure coloniality of both power (Quijano, 2000) and of gender (Lugones, 2016).

Therefore, by knowing women from various Indigenous peoples and looking critically at development studies, I understood that inequalities are linked to a colonial and patriarchal structure that excludes, oppresses, and racialises (Icaza, 2017; Lugones, 2016; Quijano, 2000) and that have defined the educational system (Mato 2015). I was also able to understand how women from south to north share, despite their diversity, at least a triple exclusion (Hernández Castillo, 2008; INMUJERES, 2006; Olvera Sánchez, 2009): sexism, racism, and classism. I encountered women from Yucatán to Chihuahua, women from Nahua communities, Otomi, Mazahua, Chol, Rarámuris, Mixtec, Zapotec, Zoque, Mayan, or from any of the 68 original peoples of Mexico. They are women, Indigenous and poor; and if one adds age (too young or too old), and if one adds gender identity (different from being women), and if one adds a disability (by being physically and/or psychologically different), those exclusions deepen: Colonial wound

(Mignolo, 2011), Intersecting oppressions (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015)

It was easy; I learnt the grammar, the analytical tools to name and problematise, to position myself to understand why most had reached higher education facing multiple obstacles, from going against family expectations to navigating a deficient, alienating education system. To go to university, most of the hundreds of women I met at IFP-Probepi chose bachelor's degrees taught in institutions in cities near their communities or where they had a relative or acquaintance who gave them accommodation. Most worked to pay for their studies, accommodation, daily transportation, school materials, and daily food. Many were domestic workers, and others sold products in markets or had to work full time – the same full time they dedicated to their studies. Some were luckier than others. They had families and extended networks that supported them: sisters and brothers who were working, migrating to send money; sometimes the fathers, sometimes the mothers, sometimes the grandmothers or grandfathers covered expenses. Also, they were supported emotionally so as not to give up, to move forward.

The women had to forget or deny their mother languages to study. They had to also learn from and in a world that limited their opportunities, marginalising them. Many had to demonstrate and justify that the time invested at school was worth it – more than the worth of marrying, having a family, and cooking, which, although necessary, is not the only way to maintain the community fabric. They all broke and are still breaking with something: expectations, stigmas, and fears. They have all experienced exclusions and inequalities derived from a world that invented races (Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2015; Quijano, 2000) to label and see differences as disadvantages and not as wealth. In Mexico, the classification and hierarchy of races create a system of distribution of oppression and privileges that continues to generate inequalities, denials, and oppressions (Carlos Fregoso, 2021; Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2015; Navarrete, 2016).

What was behind those stories of constant struggle and permanent resistance? I dare say that the diversity of those stories was also the diversity of excuses and strategies to make it to higher education. Some were good at school since, as children, they liked to study and knew that it was the path they wanted to follow. For others, the school was a refuge, a space to imagine a different reality and escape a violent home. Thus, they rather kept studying. Some were forced by their

parents – or grandmothers, grandfathers, or a relative – who knew it was a way to improve conditions for themselves, their families, and their communities. For others, studying meant freedom, opportunities to learn about other contexts and explore other realities. I also met and learnt about stories of wives or partners who accompanied the men, as well as the mothers or female relatives who supported those Indigenous men –stories sometimes shared by those men, recognising and dignifying the collective, joint paths with the women. The coincidence in the women's stories is that there was not; or perhaps the link was that of resistance and resilience.

What was behind my 'ordinary' life, my guaranteed access to education? From those lives that I accompanied and those stories I knew for more than a decade, I became a woman in permanent deconstruction and decolonisation, reflecting on the stories of Indigenous Mexico that textbooks do not teach. I started to reflect and enunciate on my mestizaje, as "a compass that points to the south" and not to an imperialist north that looks to homogenise and universalise (Segato, 2010). A compass to the south, looking for pluralities. A south – even within the north – to recognise and build deep coalitions (Lugones, 2003). I gained other perspectives from where to raise questions and to respond to questions from a different angle.

I understood and valued even more the work of the women whom I met five, ten years ago: social and political actors who contribute with knowledges and actions to transform the conditions of inequality of their peoples. These women are professionals, engineers, cooks, mothers, poets, activists, lawyers, wives, nurses, daughters, merchants, housewives, and agronomists who are challenging the roles and stereotypes historically assigned to Indigenous women as submissive, and passive. They are transforming those stereotypes into spaces of identity, political, and social revindication. Some women I met are academics and professors at higher education institutions (HEI) —some at intercultural universities. Some women as activists are raising awareness of cultural diversity and care for the environment through art, social movements, or community organisations. Some work with *la milpa*,[4] protecting the territory and teaching the children to take care of it. Still others do care work for family and community in their particular contexts.

4. Land for the sowing of corn that represents the central axis in the communities. Corn is the main product for Mexican families. Working on la *milpa* entails a series of important collaborative processes that strengthen the family and community relations (Hernández Vásquez, 2019).

For most Indigenous women, attaining a degree was not written on their birth certificate as it was on mine. My responsibility has been, at least, to identify those privileges, question them, and act with and from them. I recognise my privileged situation guaranteed me an education, the opportunity to choose a career, the transport that took me to school, not having to justify that I wanted to study, and migrating by choice and not by necessity. Privilege has also been, above all, the possibility to write, speak, and communicate in the language of my parents and my grandparents, thus is not necessary to say a word, to translate. With these privileges, I developed my own enunciation always looking to generate synergies to value and promote diversity and interculturality, to build for and from it. This thesis and its processes to cultivate relations and knowledge aims to it.

Kaleidoscopic vantage point

I joined IFP in 2001, a few months after the first call was opened and the first cohort was selected. I left in 2015, three years after IFP became Probepi,[5] to do my postgraduate degrees. As programme officer and later as executive coordinator, I was able to interact, to get to know, link, and create networks with multiple actors: Indigenous men and women from many groups, states, ages, and professional interests. Some are activists, scholars, decision-makers, executives, and academic and administrative staff. I worked, and I learnt. I linked. I questioned.

From this mirador (kaleidoscopic vantage point), I was able to get closer to and have access to people, to files, to grey literature, to meetings, to informal conversations, to data shared by the various participants, and to personal and institutional interests and the politics behind them. I crisscrossed perspectives, intentions, and expectations. Therefore, IFP-Propebi was a point of departure for me, from where I raised uncomfortable questions.

However, those questions and the theoretical and methodological approaches to answer them changed during my doctoral journey. When I started my doctoral programme, my research aimed to problematise the role of higher education policies as a strategy of including Indigenous women. I was trying to understand

5. I will present IFP-Probepi in Chapter II.

the women's expectations and experiences about having a degree and how their viewpoints could inform those policies. Both then and later, my focus was on the voices of the women to listen and continue learning from them. To act. I was interested in the structural barriers Indigenous women face, such as racism, sexism, and classism, and how the barriers affected their personal and professional trajectories years after finishing their degrees. I was interested in demonstrating the need to design intersectional educational policies that consider gender, race, and class perspectives based on contextual experiences.

Shifting centres

I submerged myself in the literature of post-development, intersectionality, decoloniality, and Indigenous methodologies. Then, I did my fieldwork between 2018 and 2019 with many questions in mind. The questions were related to the IFP-Probepi policy and the experiences of the women granted: What did 'development' mean? For whom? From what epistemic and contextual places was it understood? To what extent did having a degree define their professional activities? What had changed for them and for their communities? What remained? What suggestions would they make if they could change something about the IFP-Probepi?

I divided the activities into four stages: two pre-fieldwork research stays (2018) to explore the IFP and the Probepi archives and to interview the executive directors of IFP, the Ford Foundation, CIESAS, and CONACYT searching for the policy perspectives. The two other stages took place in 2019 when I visited the 17 IFP-Probepi alum women in their communities of origin or where they were working or living. I also did other activities, such as, for instance, to participate in the selection round of Probepi fellows, attended the Probepi alum forums where they presented their research;[6] and interviewing IFP (former) staff and Probepi staff.

6. For more information see: *Ichan Tecolotl* (2020) and Probepi (2020).

Archival research, interviews and reflective conversations

In the spring of 2018, I spent 15 days at the IFP archive saved at Columbia University Library in New York. I read hundreds of pages of meeting minutes, internal reports, general data, and a few financial statements and newspaper articles.[7] Nothing revealed broader objectives and clearer methodologies to implement this study. Nothing led me to understand what 'development' through graduate education meant for the Ford Foundation and why the graduate education was directed at Indigenous peoples in Mexico. Then I approached the three main characters in this story: Joan Dassin, former IFP worldwide executive director and the designer of the IFP project; Susan Berresford, Ford Foundation president at the time; and Pablo Farías, director of the Ford Foundation office in Mexico also at the time IFP was launched.

Joan Dassin hosted me at her house in Boston for two days. I developed a kind relationship with her over the years the IFP took place. She attended the fellowship's selection processes in Mexico every year, and we also met at many IFP meetings worldwide to share and discuss country-specific experiences. She was always kind, approachable, respectful, sensitive, and a good listener. She was also a runner, like me. This could sound frivolous and irrelevant, but it is not. We always coincidentally met up at hotel gyms while using treadmills when having meetings in other countries. When Joan hosted me in April 2018 for a talk about IFP, I also ran the Boston Marathon. I spent two days at her house reflecting on the IFP, and also about running, and our families. We had reflective conversations as former IFP colleagues and shared life beyond our professional experience – coalitions and synergies as part of the collective effort this thesis has been built with and represents.

I defined reflective conversation as discussions and encounters that depart from common and mutual understandings with the people I talked to during my research and with whom we examined ourselves at many times and in many spaces. For me, they are different from other conversations because they start from past stories that reconnected us, and allow reflection on those previous stories. We looked at who we are now at what has changed, what remains, how time, con-

7. See Appendix 1: International Fellowships Program Archive.

texts, and circumstances have defined some parts of who we are now, the things we do, the challenges we continue facing, the transformations of ourselves, of our surroundings, and how have we "world"-travelled.

Joan shared how IFP was implemented, listening to the political interests of each country and being convinced that education has always been essential for 'development'. She reflects that the idea of development behind it, was very contextual. Her perspective when we met in April was influenced by Escobar (1995) and other post-development scholars whose ideas she applies as a professor at the master's programme in Development Studies at Brandeis University, a position she has held since 2015. She says, "Now I have the literature that sustained some actions that we were doing at IFP, like challenging in practice the traditional notion of development" (Dassin, 2018). The IFP was designed under the motto of 'learning by doing'. Thus, IFP and the Ford Foundation (FF) were open to adjusting and learning from each country. The objectives and the structure in terms of supporting marginalised groups did not change. However, then and now, she is convinced that higher education opens opportunities and creates critical thinking. That critical thinking to question and to act is the closest idea to development we discussed together.

For Susan Berresford (2018), to whom Dassin suggested I talk, implementing IFP is a way to locate the surplus economic resources in something meaningful and in line with FF tradition, which is within education. In a random cafe on a random corner in New York City, Berresford gave me another side of the story. The institutional, practical, and financial versions. According to Parmar (2002), the underlying objectives of the 'Big 3' foundations in America (Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie) form and organise scholars at universities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to foster and expand the United States hegemony. The effects or aims of the network were to construct an intellectual hegemony helpful to disseminate a particular worldview, which was initially that of the developmental project (Parmar, 2002, 2015)[8] and in the 1990s for the promotion (imposition)

8. The FF was created in 1936 but was active until early 1950 in the context of the Cold War. According to Parmar (2002), the FF was a developmentalist project of the former United Sates American President Harry Truman's (revealed in his presidential opening speech in 1947) that propelled the FF aim. The same speech that for some post-development scholars (Escobar, 1995; Sachs, 2010) represented the world-dive between the developed, developing, or underdeveloped countries as a control mechanism.

of liberal democracy as world order. An example, according to Parmar (2015) is Michale Doyle, a former FF fellow who developed the liberal peace theory, emphasising the importance of global free trade as a way to sustain peace among countries. This was used as a doctrine to justify efforts to impose democracy on other nations in a form that suited American interests.

However, according to Berresford, Dassin, and Farías, the IFP was planned and implemented otherwise. Times have changed, and people within the current political climate are looking for different approaches. When I talked to Pablo Farías, whom Berresford said would be the right person to ask about the decision behind targeting Indigenous peoples for the IFP-México, he confirmed that the political environment had defined the scope. The institutions and Indigenous representatives with whom they discussed the programme agreed that the Indigenous peoples and those who have never been considered for graduate education were the most vulnerable groups.

Farías was not surprised that some women supported by IFP were challenging colonial and imperialist structures and criticised the capitalist model of which the Ford Foundation has been a promotor. Cruz Cruz (2019), for instance, recognises that she took the opportunity of the scholarship as a political space regardless of being funded by an "imperialist" organisation such as the FF since original peoples do not get many opportunities and "we have to take those at hand". Cruz Cruz (2019) elaborates, "I thought about the political implications, but I had my own agenda while doing my degree, which was to get access, information and create networks to challenge Eolic parks at Tehuantepec Isthmus in Oaxaca".[9] Those stories and approaches to education were also part of the IFP objective, as Farías (2020) recognised.

9. In Mexico, the narrative surrounding renewable energy is closely intertwined with colonial practices of dispossession and the violation of the collective rights of Indigenous peoples. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is a narrow stretch of Mexican land separating the Pacific Ocean from the Atlantic Ocean. The Indigenous peoples residing there have endured the consequences of this imposed colonial dispossession and rights violations for over a decade. Within this area, wind energy has emerged as a symbolic representation of 'sustainable' development for local, state, and federal government administrations, serving as a flagship for development and investment. However, the installation of over 2,000 wind turbines has significantly affected the everyday dynamics of life in the region, according to Cruz & Flores Cruz (2022), "The wind megaproject in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is an example of how the expansionist nature of this so-called development recreates the irregular conditions of leasing contracts and the negative effects on the life of the communities in the area".

I also talked to IFP and Probepi coordinators and CIESAS directors when IFP and Probepi were launched and developed, in addition to CONACYT executives linked to Probepi and other administrative staff. I did not find anything that I did not know except for some personal and political decisions or implications due to being part of the programmes. For some, IFP-Probepi was another job or an institutional opportunity to broaden relations; others were more involved in its social and political relevance or valued the personal impact for each fellow granted. In general, graduate education was perceived as positive and necessary for strengthening local and regional conditions, and IFP-Probepi (a social justice initiative), even if not enough, at least is a door to access graduate studies.

Therefore, in relation to the contributions to my research, the archive work and the interviews or reflective conversations I had at this stage confirmed or gave me some background and understanding of the policy perspective. However, the archives and interviews were not enough to answer all my questions. Although I initially considered the archival research a valuable source of knowledge, it became an opportunity to reflect on its limitations due to the colonial nature of archival practices, which, more often than not, omitted or distorted the non-colonisers knowledges. Moreover, the very act of archiving has been a tool of colonial control and domination, as it often involved the extraction and appropriation of cultural heritage and knowledge from colonised societies (El-Malik & Kamol, 2017; Smith, 2012; Stoler, 2002).

Eager to know the perspective of those who might help me change the narratives for educational policymaking in 2019, I visited 17 Indigenous women who pursued their degrees between 2004 and 2017. It was before the pandemic, so I could travel to several cities and towns in Mexico (Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Mexico City) to look in the eye, share food, and walk and hug those women whom I had met years back and with whom we shared an important – and long – time of our lives. I will not discuss these encounters here because they are presented in Chapter IV.

Instead, I will highlight that after those encounters, something shifted. I found myself at a point of arrival of coming back to my questions and thinking about them further. It was also a point of departure, of "world"-travelling (Lugones, 2003), starting to root, to ground, to kick in, without me having the grammar to name it. I systematised the hours of recordings, the dozens of pages with notes,

with senti-pensares (feeling-thinking) (Méndez Torres et al., 2013) shared and derived from each encounter of each talk. Senti-pensar in Indigenous worldviews means to vindicate a thinking heart and a latent, heartfelt thought that reminds us that we live and are whole with parts that we have to weave (López Intzín, 2018). The research became an octopus. Each tentacle was a story. Each story had many others, many worlds. I travelled through them, shifting and grounding my multiple selves, my own multiple worlds, playfully travelling to make sense of the conversations I had and stories I have re-discovered and re-learnt. To make sense of myself. I looked at myself as part of the encounters, trying to recognise the women's inner selves and my own, and how, from that plurality, to articulate ideas of justice and liberation (Lugones, 2003).

Systematisation of the reflective conversations

I systematised the conversations recorded and the personal reflections written after each encounter with the 17 women in an Excel spreadsheet. In the process of framing the research, I felt that it was difficult or inconsistent to encajonar (to box) or to tag living, thoughtful experiences according to the feminist (Harcourt et al., 2022), Black intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015), and Indigenous principles (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). On the other hand, it was helpful for identifying certain experiences that were transversal among the women with whom I spoke. I finished the first rough systematisation in the first term of 2020. Then the pandemic hit. Online meetings became ways to connect, to work, to study. For me and this research was an opportunity to bridge distances. I organised two online sessions in June 2020 with all 17 women to share the preliminary findings. It was another point of encounter to connect and reflect among all of us. Some participants knew each other while being part of the IFP-Probepi project; others met for the first time in those sessions. I organised the findings based on the commonalities I found and pinpointed some specific situations that I considered evocative to reflect on collectively. I divided the findings into three sections:

Expectations of doing a degree

The majority expected to achieve two main objectives with their master's or doctorates:

• To contribute to specific problems in the community

After graduating, they are not detached from their community, and they contribute as professionals (anthropologists, environment experts, and gender specialists, among others) and as women who challenge stereotypes/roles within and outside their communities. Some work at the local level, directly with their communities or in the region, even though their activities hardly generate economic resources in some cases.

For instance, a Zapotec activist from the Tehuantepec Isthmus in Oaxaca who did a Doctor in Rural Development said, "The fight and the contribution are political and not economical" (Cruz Cruz, 2019). A Maya from Yucatán who did a Master of Sustainable Development recognised that living and working in the community is a personal and political position of resistance from the territory: "I get dirty by working my milpa every day. It is a way to say 'this is our land, let's take care of it' because the only way we have to resist is by valuing and appropriating our own practices and worldviews" (Chan Dzul, 2019).

• Better living conditions

Most of them considered that a degree would help to improve their and their family's material conditions. After graduating, several obtain economic resources outside their communities, working for academic, governmental, private, civil institutions or non-governmental organisations; and do various types of jobs – professors, consultants, collaborators, in administrative or managerial positions. The activities they are involved in are usually related to the Indigenous peoples' affairs, together with their areas of specialisation – environment, social policy, education, cultural heritage, law and human rights, health, and media. For example, a Zapotec sociologist from Oaxaca collaborates with a civil organisation to raise awareness of racism at the national and international levels. A Tseltal anthropologist scholar from

Chiapas researches Tseltal worldviews; she cultivates knowledge in, for, by and with the people of her community, publishing and participating in academic forums nationwide. A Nahua from Veracruz did a Master of Gender Studies and works in Mexico City for a feminist institution that oversees the design of intercultural programmes and institutional policies that consider an intersectional approach to include Indigenous and Afro-descendant women's needs and perspectives. Those women who do not live in their communities return as often as possible and participate in or organise activities when they visit, such as workshops or consult. They also provide economic resources for festivities and manage resources with governments and institutions, among other activities.

In general, their expectations have been fulfilled in terms of their contributions to their communities and their personal and professional opportunities. However, it has not been a linear story. Having a degree is important because it legitimates the knowledge in some spaces, such as in universities, governmental institutions, and civil organisations, but in others, especially in Indigenous communities, collaboration and the personal trajectory legitimates the knowledges and the actions. Degrees do not count much (Chan Dzul, 2019; Cruz Cruz, 2019; Osorio Hernández, 2019).

Unexpected consequences

Some women identified structural barriers that, even with a degree, affect their professional trajectories, such as racism, sexism, and classism. This was not a surprise for other women because of the systemic exclusions that do not disappear with a degree. However, an encouraging outcome regarding the IFP-Probepi and studying abroad influenced processes of identity resignifications: individual and collective, political positionings and networking. That is to say, fellows, when meeting and discussing at internal sessions, workshops, and academic events, as well as when developing their research,[10] they reflected and strengthened their Indigenous origins, their mother tongues, and worldviews as sources of knowled-

10. From my years of work at IFP-Probepi and by being close 6to the actual operative team, I would there to say almost all fellows developed their final degree research and wrote their thesis around topic from their communities, regions or about Indigenous peoples' matters in general. Some of the titles could be found in the various issues of the IFP alums journal, *Aquí Estamos* (IFP-México, 2012)

ge and as political stances. They developed networks among Indigenous scholars and with other organisations (rural women, human rights defenders, and writers) who helped to continue the reflection on their identities and experiences as Nahua people, Maya, Mixtec, Zapotec, Rarámuri, and Huaves, among others.

• Unemployment, racism, tokenism, and sexism

The most common unexpected situations or conditions were unemployment or sub-employment. Some women related the unexpected situations directly to structural racism and gender inequality within and outside their communities. Most accepted jobs below their experience or struggled to get higher positions.

Tokenism is the misappropriation or exploitation of minority groups to justify diversity and inclusive policies within an institution (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). Tokenism was sometimes evident. A constant practice was to 'use' them as translators from their mother languages to Spanish – or vice versa – or as masters of ceremonies. For example, a Mayan visual communicator from Yucatán said: "In the governmental institutions that I have worked, even if they are focusing on Indigenous peoples' matters, they do not care about us. They just value the Indigenous identity, not the Indigenous person (*valoran lo indígena no al indígena*)" (Uitz May, 2019). Some women identified and named these conditions, but for others, these were experiences that they might have lived but did not have the grammar and wording for until sharing them collectively in the online meetings. For instance, a Zapotec from Oaxaca who studied a Master of Anthropology and is an expert on racism elaborated further about structural and microracisms experienced by all since children. The microracisms are reflected in differentiated education, in difficulties accessing higher education, and in low self-esteem (Bautista Pérez, 2019). The Zapotec woman's reflections were key for understanding, naming, and differentiating discrimination based on race, gender, and class.

• IFP-Probepi as an identity hub[11]

A relevant finding was the impact of the IFP-Probepi as a space in which women and men from different Indigenous groups met and discussed their identities and political struggles – either at local or community, regional or national levels. Before starting their degrees, they participated in multiple activities organised by IFP-Probepi, some specifically designed to develop a sense of group belonging and create networks among fellows from different cohorts and alums. These encounters resulted relevent to reflect on and strengthen their identities. For some, their identities were rooted since childhood, and for others, the encounters were and have been a process of self-recognition due to the historical denial of the original peoples among whom they grew up. Listening to others made them recognise their own stories while learning about the plurality of struggles in the country.

Therefore, when they started their degrees, they did so as part of a community, reflecting and positioning themselves as Indigenous peoples. For example, a Ch'ol anthropologist from Chiapas who did a Master of Gender Studies shared her experience with the IFP: "Part of my political training would not be if I had not studied a degree with the IFP fellowship because to focus on Indigenous people not only responded to a specific social and political context but also because it had a clear trend from where we could reflect with peers on who we were and how our stories and identities have been denied" (Méndez Torres, 2019b). A Mixtec from Oaxaca who pursued a Doctor of Rural Development said that "during the doctorate, I was rediscovering and recognising my identity" (Osorio Hernández, 2019). Studying abroad or outside their regions of origin was important because they had to introduce themselves in front of students and professors who did not necessarily know about Mexico, the Indigenous peoples, or about the specific Indigenous groups to which the fellows belong. They could also compare and learn from other (Indigenous) groups in Latin America or other 'minority groups' like the Basques and the Catalonians in Spain.

11. I have called the IFP-Probepi an 'identity hub' as an axis that allowed identity encounters between fellows and alums. Although in general 'hub' refers to a term linked to information technology, I found it evocative because it also refers to a central point or a central location where things come together or connect. A hub acts as a central space where various parts, elements, or activities converge or interact.

They all recognised that it was not the IFP-Porbepi or the degrees per se that defined their political enunciations and professional trajectories. It was education understood as a broader and more *urdimbre* (complex warp) woven contextually in time and space by multiple relations with the family, the land, with other worldviews. A Nahua from Veracruz who did a Master of Social Communication wraps up this idea by saying: "What I am and what I do is not because of my schooling, it is just one part. The community, my family, the legacy of the elders, my surroundings, and the land, have taught me much more than the school. The degree gave me concepts and words, the rest came from life" (Hernández Vásquez, 2019).

• IFP-Probepi as political strategy

On the other hand, and according to some of the women I talked to, becoming an IFP-Probepi fellow and doing a degree were political strategies to foster resistance, access information, and consolidate critical thinking. A Zapotec lawyer from Oaxaca with a Master of Criminal Law said, "I know that with a degree, I'm not going to change the world, but it would be enough if I can make an impact by exposing the lack of gender perspective in law policies. We are many who resist racist and patriarchal practices" (Gutiérrez Gutiérrez, 2019). Cruz Cruz (2019) reflected that the doctoral research gave her access to information, people, and institutions that she would have never had access to otherwise. With all these resources, she gathered proof to expose the harm of the eolic park project in the Tehuantepec Isthmus, in Oaxaca, which was affecting the Indigenous communities in various ways (Cruz Cruz, 2019). Chan Dzul (2019) said that the master's was an excuse to go back to her community and do meaningful, grounding work with her people because she was working as an anthropologist for a private company doing extractivist research – doing interviews in the region to convince people to use insecticides.

• Networks and political organisations

Networking was an outcome linked either from the IFP-Probepi community or from the academic programmes. It was relevant to know and understand other

realities and to strengthen regional articulation and organisational processes. As one said, "networking does not translate into economic resources, on the contrary, you normally must put money, but in return, I have contributed to actions that have a social impact and political positioning for me and for other (Indigenous) women. They are needed to act collectively and strategically, as well as not feeling alone in the struggles" (Osorio Hernández, 2019).

For example, the creation in 2005 of the civil association Red Interdisciplinaria de Investigadores de los Pueblos Indios de Mexico, A.C., (Red IINPIM; Interdisciplinary Network of Researchers of the Indian Peoples of Mexico, Civil Association). It was founded by IFP alums and represented the first collective initiative in Mexico developed by, with, and for Indigenous professionals with degrees.[12] Among the projects and initiatives developed, probably the most significant from my perspective were two: 1. *the Primera Asamblea Latinoamericana de las voces de los pueblos: El otro bicentenario – Los pueblos indígenas frente al futuro* (First Latin-American Assembly of the voices of the Indigenous peoples: The other bicentenary – Indigenous peoples facing the future) that took place in October 2010;[13] and 2. The seminar *Repensando el género desde adentro. Diálogos y reflexiones desde y con los pensamientos de hombres y mujeres de los pueblos originarios* (Rethinking gender from within: Dialogues and reflections from and with Indigenous men's and women's thoughts), organised in 2011 at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). The seminar represented a watershed in several ways because it implied to "transcend from 'giving workshops' and courses to train Indigenous women, to listen to them and learn from them. […] [It also] allowed the presence of Indigenous intellectuals, not as students to teach, but as colleagues from whom to learn" (Red IINPIM, 2013, p. 15). The book edited by some of the same participants, like Georgina Méndez Torres, Juan López Intzín, Sylvia Marcos and Carmen Ososrio Hernández (Méndez Torres et al., 2013), *Senti-pensar el género: Perspectivas desde los pueblos originarios* (Feel-think gender: Perspectives from the Original peoples) was published as a result. It represented a very relevant contribution "to think academia from

12. The main objectives were to "look for alternatives so the knowledge acquired in the academia can become heritage of the original peoples; to enhance local knowledges; and to create conditions for the dialogue among other knowledges" (Red IINPIM, 2013, p. 15).
13. For more information see Méndez Torres, et al. (2013); and Red IINPIM (2010) .

other parameters, one that arises in the interrelation between organisations, in the creation of coalitions, where dialogue strategies prevail, to question hierarchy and racism, but above all to analyse [Indigenous peoples'] own perspectives, analysis, training and political-academic commitments (Red IINPIM, 2013, p. 25). Unfortunately, the Red IINPIM is not active anymore. The reasons behind this, from my understanding, are not fully identified, researched, and systematised.

Contributions as professional Indigenous women

The third group of findings were organised considering the personal and collective enunciations on how they are changing stories, stereotypes, and narratives about Indigenous women within and outside their communities. The most outspoken and evocative were three:

• Dismantling the idea of the professional

Several women returned to their communities – even if it was temporary – and worked closely with their people, listening, and understanding the local dynamics and problems, which has been essential to what one of them called the "dismantling of the idea of the professionals": "The title does not mean that we are or should feel superior and that we must trample on the community. There are nuances of how the community looks at us, walking and talking with the people; we all ask together how and what we want for the community, and by doing that, we are dismantling the image of the professional, of those who leave and return thinking that they can step on anyone, forget our logics and worldviews. Some people see us as crazy, wondering why we are working the land, *la milpa*, if we already have a degree, but it is a political stance" (Chan Dzul, 2019). We collectively discussed that this approach has a gendered perspective by placing care and respect at the centre of the community's relations. Not by imposing but by listening and taking time to adapt and change at the same time. Some men do the same, but they say it is more common among women.

• The ‘flourishing’ of Indigenous peoples

Some of indigenous professional women with whom I am working have participated in the Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI) (National Indigenous Congress), which is an Indigenous organisation at the national level established in 1996 after the Zapatista movement. CNI is “a space for reflection and solidarity to strengthen our struggles of resistance and rebellion, with our forms of organisation, representation, and decision making” (CNI, 2017). As the core of CNI, the Concejo Indígena de Gobierno (CIG) (Indigenous Governing Council)[14] was the representative body “organised nationwide from below and to the left to govern from otherwise politics, the politics of the peoples, of assembly of the participation of every man and woman” (CNI, 2017). As part of this political organisation, in August 2017, a civil association was registered to include the name of the first Indigenous person, a woman, on the electoral ballot in 2018 as a candidate for the Mexican presidency. The civil association was called *Llegó la Hora del Florecimiento de Los Pueblos* (The Hour for Our Peoples to Flourish has Arrived). The IFP-Probepi alums involved in this organisation considered that they were contributing to this process, to what they called the “flourishing” of the Indigenous peoples rather than to the development of Indigenous peoples (a concept that I explain in Chapter III) (Chan Dzul, 2019; Cruz Cruz, 2019).

• Confronting gender roles

Daring to travel and live far away from their communities was the most common challenge the Indigenous women faced, which represented moving from the ‘known’ and shifting their families’ expectations in relation to the roles assigned to women (marrying, having children, making tortillas, and cooking). The Zapotec lawyer said, for example, that “the point is not that women stop doing what they do (tortillas, caring for the children), but rather that our work and contribu-

14. The Indigenous Governing Council was gathered by a councilman and a councilwoman from each original group and language and of the various regions. These council members were elected by use and customs in their assemblies and/or spaces of decision-making, and assumed the commitment of actively participating Council, carrying back to their assemblies the proposals and actions that emanate from the CNI (2017).

tions are recognised. We are working on revaluing being a woman, not on being equal to men, but giving a new meaning to family and community relationships from an Indigenous or communitarian feminist perspective" (Gutiérrez Gutiérrez, 2019). A Tseltal anthropologist from Chiapas has researched gender violence and language, so she has facilitated workshops in her community to discuss gender inequalities and patriarchy, not using these Western terms, but contextualising them from local understandings. Another alum fellow wrote an article challenging the assigned gender roles:

> *Many Indigenous women have constituted ourselves as political actors throughout these last two decades. We have ventured into academic, political and civil organisations spaces in which we began to have public visibility, that is, we have surpassed the space of domestic and disrupted "the should be" of Indigenous women that referred to our link with the community and the family circles. A "must be" that considers identities as static but that nevertheless contradicts the reality that Indigenous women live on a daily basis. Likewise, the dynamic effects of culture have allowed us to question, reflect on the meaning of being Indigenous women in a context of cultural, political, and racist violence such as the one we experience in Mexico and other Latin American countries* (Méndez Torres, 2008, p. 27).

In Chapter III I briefly introduce different feminist perspectives -Indigenous, communitarian, Black intersectional, from where these enunciations could be frame.

The online meeting's collective aftermath

The results of the two online meetings are presented in Chapters IV and V as part of the context that explain each text, thus I do not want to repeat some of the stories here. Rather I reflect here on how the overall process of the research allowed me – and I would dare to say also the same for the women with whom I was discussing this research– to recognise ourselves in the others' stories. We were "world"-travelling, using Lugones' (2003) concept, and were able to identify similar experiences and to create deep coalitions that allowed us to recognise

their contributions. The women I talked to did not want to be perceived as victims but did want to expose their resistance. They wanted to read their words in this research and not my interpretation. Smith's (2012) and Wilson's (2008) Indigenous perspectives resonated. Not only in terms of relational accountability and the need for shifting academic paradigms to consider Indigenous peoples' own terms and worldviews but in the relevance to flip what Western academia tends to replicate: research focused on the problems of Indigenous peoples – looking at diseases rather than at health – from where external solutions and reproductions of negative stereotypes are imposed (Wilson, 2008). Their position was also echoed in bell hooks' (1995) invitation to "talk race": for racialised women to expose their reflections as political and social actors to contribute to identifying, naming, and revealing the oppressions and discriminations experienced. It is an epistemic and methodological claim, a political stance.

Changing pathways: The research question

After my conversations, I started to imagine a different doctorate. If some of the claims were in relation to their misrepresentation or the lack of presence and exposure of their contributions, why do I not use my doctorate – and the spaces it gives me access to (journals, conferences, and books) to share what we were discussing collectively? How, I thought, can I really take a step forward in writing to draw common concerns together? I adjusted my initial objective of looking at the professional Indigenous women's experiences to inform intersectional educational policies, focusing on barriers and exclusions, to centre their academic trajectories as points of departure and encounters from where to frame their contributions as political actors. Hence, the final research question looks to answer:

> *How has graduate education informed Indigenous women's professional trajectories and how has graduate education contributed to position other-than-dominant narratives about Indigenous women?*

To answer this question the reader is invited to follow different paths in this thesis. One is by looking at the whole thesis as one body in which intercultural dialogues weave collective thinking, exposing those trajectories and contributions from an I/we. The other is by looking at each chapter, within which each story provides elements to identify how a degree can create and expose difference-from-the-norm, otherwise narratives about Indigenous women.

However, before turning to those central arguments, it is necessary to give some context and general information about the IFP-Probepi and the conditions of marginality of the Indigenous peoples, particularly among women. Here I will contextualise the education system in Mexico as a mechanism of exclusion, which therefore positioned the IFP-Probepi as a relevant initiative. After the presentation of the context, I will present the theoretical foundations and some conceptualisations important to the framing and sustaining of this work.

CHAPTER II

'Development' of Indigenous peoples through graduate education

Most of this section was written as part of my Design Dissertation Seminar (DDS) before going to fieldwork at the end of 2019. I made some adjustments and updated some data, but the socio-historic context presented here is still relevant. The reader might find a different tone and narrative style than the one used in Chapter I, which will continue from Chapter III. The reason is that the present chapter responds to the original research I was then doing, focusing on education policy, and based on archival research that aimed to mainly expose policy processes. I am including this section here because, even though the original focus and methodological approach of the research changed, offering some context on Indigenous peoples' and Indigenous women's situation in Mexico can support a better grasp of the arguments presented in this work.

Indigenous peoples in Mexico, numbers of inequality

Indigenous peoples encompass 68 linguistic groups who live in almost all the 32 states of the country; although 90% live in central and southern Mexico, only 30 of 2,443 municipalities do not have an Indigenous population, according to the official records (Figure 1).

Indigenous peoples' disadvantaged position and unequal access to opportunities stand out compared to non-Indigenous people. Based on the international measurements of well-being, 89% live below the poverty line, and the gap in the Human Development Index (HDI) between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous is almost 15%. Each of the three main components of the HDI (health, income, and education) shows sizeable differences. The health index is 0.7319 for the Indigenous population and 0.8841 for the non-Indigenous population, which represents a variance of 13.1%. The values of the income index are 0.6471 and 0.7579, a difference of 14.6%. Education shows the greatest gap, with a value of 0.7319 among the Indigenous population and 0.8841 among the non-Indigenous

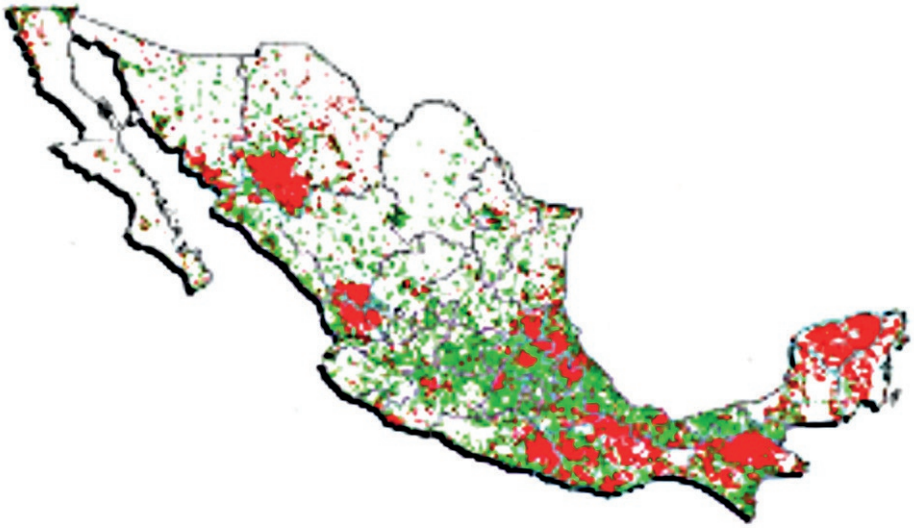


Figure 1: Distribution of Indigenous communities (2010)
Source: Map obtained from Diario Oficial de la Federación (2014)

population, a difference of 17.2% (CDI-UNDP, 2010). Furthermore, in 2020 four out of ten indigenous people presented an educational gap (47.0%), which means that they do not attend school or that according to their age they do not have the compulsory levels –from preschool to high school–; or that they do not attend a formal education centre (CONEVAL, 2022).

A nationwide survey on discrimination in 2010 showed the Indigenous population is among the most affected. For example, 40% of Mexicans would be willing to politically organise to prevent Indigenous people from moving near their homes, and 20% would not be willing to share their homes with an Indigenous person. Three out of four interviewees think that if they are to overcome poverty, Indigenous people should not act Indigenous; their social marginalisation, in other words, was attributed to their origin. Nine out of ten Indigenous people interviewed stated that they were discriminated against because of their race, and three out of four believed their educational and employment opportunities were less than other Mexicans for the same reason. The study also provides evidence for discrimination linked to class, for which they suffer at least double discri-

mination – and women triple: on account of being "indians", poor and women (CONAPRED, 2005, pp. 49–59).

In 2001, the Indigenous population was more than ten million (10%) of the whole population (INEGI, 2000), although the 2015 intercensal survey revealed that 20% self-ascribed as Indigenous, representing 20 million people (INEGI, 2015).[1] According to recent calculations, 60% of Indigenous households do not have indoor plumbing, 33.5% lack access to drinking water, and 79% live in one-room homes. Regarding health, their mortality is higher than in the rest of the population, and children's heights are lower, reflecting nutritional deficiency (INEGI, 2015). A high proportion of households are supported by informal employment, and in geographic terms, the poorest municipalities in Mexico are Indigenous; 70% of the Indigenous municipalities consist of people living in poverty, and over 40% –of that 70%– consist of people living in extreme poverty (INEGI, 2015). Five years later, the situation has not changed, and has even worsen. Based on the measurement of poverty in Mexico carried out in 2020 by the Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL, National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy), around eight out of ten people who speak an Indigenous language were living in poverty (76.8%), a figure significantly higher than that of the population that does not speak an indigenous language (41.5%). Regarding social deprivation, 80.9% do not have social security and 67.4% do not have basic housing services (CONEVAL, 2022, p. 10)

In terms of education, two in three children between 6 and 14 years old who are not in school are Indigenous. The illiteracy rate of the speaking population of some Indigenous languages decreased between 2005 and 2010 from a third to a quarter (34% to 27%); nevertheless, it was still five times greater than the illiteracy of the non-Indigenous population of the same age group (5.4%) (INEGI, 2010). Among youth 15 years or older who speak an Indigenous language, just more than a quarter (28%) had not completed primary education; this applies to a small

1. Estimates of numbers of Indigenous people vary according to the criteria and methodology used to define the Indigenous population. The 2010 census (INEGI, 2010) was based on the numbers of speakers of Indigenous languages added to the numbers of those living in households where at least one parent speaks an Indigenous language. For the 2015 inter-census survey (INEGI, 2015), the category of 'self-adscription' was included, doubling the numbers. This implied two relevant aspects, on the one hand, a criterion beyond language to recognise ethnic identity, on the other, the repositioning of the Indigenous peoples through the self-recognition of their identities.

percentage (6%) of the non-Indigenous population of the same age group (INEGI, 2010). Indigenous and rural basic education is a third (35%) of private education (SEGOB, 2013). Only a half (53%) of Indigenous students between 12 and 14 have completed primary or basic education and a third (37%) youth between 15 and 17 have completed lower secondary, compared with two thirds (60%) overall in Mexico (SEGOB, 2013, p. 8). Indigenous children are more likely to drop out of school due to a lack of money, irrelevant cultural content, and linguistic barriers (Schmelkes, 2009, p. 6).

By 2020, the numbers are still worrying: the illiteracy rate is two in ten people who speaking an Indigenous languages (19.8%). Compared to 2010, the school-age population among Indigenous youth decreased 10.7%, going from 2.6 million in 2010 to 2.3 million in 2020. Preschool attendance was the most affected, with a contraction of 13.1%; followed by primary and secondary education, whose reduction was 11.9% and, finally, the group of upper secondary and higher education, which decreased by 8.5%12 (CONEVAL, 2022, p. 23)

Telesecondaries[2] and upper secondary schools in rural areas where most Indigenous communities live have poor education facilities, and higher education institutions are far away from Indigenous settlements. Additionally, most Indigenous children and youth contribute their labour to their households while studying, and many have to withdraw after finishing the compulsory primary or secondary levels to complement the family income with full-time activities or jobs (Schmelkes, 2009, p. 6). In the 2010 national census, only 0.25% had reached a graduate level, compared to 0.83% of the population (INEGI, 2010). In 2020, of the total of indigenous youth between 6 and 22 years old who speak an Indigenous language, 1.2 million (61.3%) attend school. In other words, 4 out of 10 Indigenous people of school age do not go to school. At the primary level, 93.6% of indigenous children between the ages of 6 and 11 go school. For adolescents from 12 to 17 years old, it decreases to 66.0% (secondary and upper secondary); and for young people from 18 to 22 it barely reaches 17.2% (higher education), being the most backward group (CONEVAL, 2022, p. 25).

2. Telesecondaries are an education project that started in the 1960s in which a specific subject is transmitted via television and students follow and complete a guide based on the lesson watched; a teacher monitors student's work. Is still a common way of teaching in rural and remote areas, although an inefficient electricity system can be a considerable problem.

Therefore, the percentage of learners who reach higher education is very low, and students who achieve graduate degrees are few. This structural imbalance represents a significant challenge for Indigenous learners, and those who can continue towards university must pass admission exams and compete for contested spaces, scholarships, and grants that obstruct their academic path (Schmelkes, 2009, p. 6). The marginalisation of the Indigenous groups is linked to social, economic, and geographic exclusions, and the educational system has not, so far, the institutional capacity to tackle the inequalities. On the contrary, the policies that structured the national education system since the beginning of the 20th century were directed to promote mestizaje (miscegenation), erasing Indigenous peoples' diversity who were seen as dragging down the nation's journey to modernity (Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado, 2010).

Exclusion through education

In Mexico, the national education system was set up as a centralised public institution and is key for transmitting ideologies to shape and define the country's social and political projects. These projects followed the liberal and positivist logic of the 19th century and aimed to take the country along the path of progress. Since the creation in 1841 of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Industry, the education system followed a logic in which the Indigenous peoples were the groups that would fade away for the construction of a homogeneous mestizo modern society. This structural foundation reproduced colonial inequalities and racism due to the exclusion of Indigenous students and teachers and other world views, languages, and ways of knowledge production (Mato, 2015a, p. 19).

From the mid-19th century, the mestizo identity was promoted as the embodied and metaphoric representation of a unified (homogenised) and modern society:

> *After the Revolution, the official discourse promoted the idea of a nation-state, defined mainly in cultural terms, as the axis of a strategy to recover and reinterpret the Indigenous past to use it in the construction of the revolutionary and modern identity of the Mexican nation. The State's educational*

policy became the most powerful tool for the advancement of this purpose (Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado, 2010, p. 510).

Public policies pointed towards the goal of building a culturally homogeneous Mexico, and through a centralised, trickle-down model (Schmelkes, 2009, p. 6) this homogenised identity and the use of Spanish as the only official language were extended and reproduced throughout the country.

During the 20th century and until recently, the universal curricula did not consider the social and cultural range of the Indigenous communities, most of whom live in remote areas and speak several languages with multiple variations. Post-development scholar Esteva (2014) has written about how the education systems, in general, have been blind to diversity, including the denial of class, gender, and race variances. In terms of Mexico, he points out that "as in many other countries, the educational system was born in Mexico with the explicit purpose of de-Indianising the Indians, that is, of dissolving their cultures and incorporating them, through the school, into the cultural forms and norms of the nation. Millions of Indigenous people ceased to be after passing through the school mill" (Esteva, 2014).

Since the 1970s, the educational policy began a new reformist phase. Throughout the decade and thereafter, the country faced political and economic crises that forced the government to negotiate with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This meant the submission of the national economic policy to the scheme designed by the IMF that led to a liberal economic policy in the 1980s, resulting in a wave of privatisations that also implied greater dependence on international economics and relations. Mexico gradually abandoned the multilateral approach that characterised its foreign policy for 20 years and moved its Latin American "preference" to a policy orientated towards the United States (Neves, 2007, p. 5). The indigenist policy focused on promoting regional development as the way to "elevate" the condition of the Indigenous peoples. The objective was to "raise their situation to co-participate in the national life affairs for the production and benefits of the national development" (INI-CDI, 2012, p. 11). In 1978, the Dirección General de Educación Indígenas (DGEI; Office of Indigenous Education) was created for elaborating plans, projects, programmes, methodologies, techni-

ques and professional training for Indigenous children who, due to the conditions need special attention (Martínez Buenabad, 2013).

In the 1980s, when the world was experiencing the tensions of the Cold War between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, a series of measures that promoted the free market, privatisation, and globalisation defined the bases of the neoliberal economy that shaped the economic and political relations worldwide. In Mexico, this new economic model that resulted in the dismantling of the so-called "benefactor State" was considered to be an effective exit from the crises (Neves, 2007: 5). In terms of the indigenist policy, the aim was to "achieve a balance between access to economic modernity, respect for cultural diversity and participation, and the strengthening of national identity" (INI-CDI, 2012, p. 15). In 1983, the theoretical approaches to Indigenous education were formulated generating a new model of education called Indigenous Bilingual Bicultural Education. The project had many opponents – mainly the teachers from the union who disagreed with the proposal – and thus the model was not implemented. Ten years later, in 1993, the General Law of Education recognised the importance of promoting education in Indigenous languages. However, the programme lacked an academic project that systematised the methodological and curricular aspects (Martínez Buenabad, 2013).

It was only in 1992, in the context of the 500th anniversary of the 'encounter of two worlds' – or the 'discovery of the Americas'[3]–that Mexico was acknowledged as a pluricultural nation. The anniversary was a watershed to revisit Indigenous peoples' rights and, two years later, on January 1, 1994, the same day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) among the United States, Mexico, and Canada came into force as part of the neoliberal world reconfiguration, the Zapatista rebellion took place. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) demanded the recognition of the original peoples' existence, claiming for voice and inclusion in all national affairs (Enlace Zapatista, 1996). From this point onwards, the country's multicultural character was officially recognised, and the extensive social, economic, legal, and political inequalities faced by the Indigenous peoples were made more visible.

3. Since 1958, the Mexican historian O'Gorman has argued that the idea of 'discovering' America implied in itself the possibility of extending the Western civilisation towards a different socio-political reality, thus making it more relevant phrase it as the 'encounter of two worlds' (O'Gorman, 1958).

Until 2001, a constitutional reform approved Indigenous peoples' free determination and autonomy,[4] and different policies were implemented. In terms of education, also in 2001, the Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingue (CGEIB; Office of Intercultural and Bilingual Education) was created to promote, coordinate, advise, and evaluate that respect for cultural and linguistic diversity is present in educational policies and proposals for all types, levels, services, and educational modalities (CGEIB, 2015). In 2003, the General Law on the Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples was published, supporting their right to be taught in their own languages and committing to promote, through education, the knowledge of the linguistic plurality of the country (Diario Oficial de la Federación, 2007). The main education policies for Indigenous peoples launched since 2003 are the following:[5]

- From 2003 and as part of the CGEIB, 12 intercultural universities were established. They were built in remote regions among a high density of Indigenous populations to increase access by marginalised youth and incorporate culturally pertinent content into the curricula. The intercultural universities fulfil three basic Indigenous people's demands about education: access to bilingual and relevant education; promotion of their cultures and knowledges at the national level; and autonomy to decide about their own education system (Schmelkes, 2009, p. 9). The education programmes consider language, cultural, and geographic intersections, so are defined on specific needs and characteristics of each region, but in relation with five clustered areas: language and culture, intercultural management, intercultural communication, sustainable development, and ecotourism offering an option of geographical proximity and access. In 2019,

4. The constitutional reform was contested by the CNI and the EZLN since the agreements signed in 1996 between the EZLN and the Mexican government were not respected. The so-called San Andrés Accords were joint commitments and proposals that the federal government made with the EZLN to guarantee a new relationship between the country's Indigenous peoples, society, and the State (CNI, 2017).
5. According to Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado (2010), the education policies particularly directed at Indigenous people corresponded to four stages of the country's national construction. The first three moments are central of the overall education system promoted throughout the 20th century: 1) The evolutionary-positivist perspective that privileged the teaching of Spanish, 2) The bicultural, bilingual model that accompanied the creation of the DGEI in 1978, 3) The bilingual intercultural model from the 2000s, and 4) The efforts made in the last decades to implement an intercultural perspective of education considering Indigenous peoples' needs, contexts, and worldviews.

almost 130,000 students attended intercultural universities between 2006 and 2018 (Lloyd, 2019).

- In 2004, the University Programme for the Study of Cultural Diversity and Interculturalism as part of the UNAM (PUIC-UNAM) was developed to link and foster intellectual, methodological, and technical efforts related to Indigenous diversity (PUIC-UNAM, 2014). Academic tutoring and scholarships (approximately €100) for Indigenous students registered on the UNAM system, from high school to graduate levels, are also granted. After eight years of implementation, 970 Indigenous and Afro-descendant students have received scholarships, of which 514 (53%) are women (PUIC-UNAM, 2014).
- Since 2000, two initiatives financed by the Ford Foundation have been launched:

  - Pathway to Higher Education (PAEIIES) aimed to increase the access, permanence, and graduation of Indigenous students at the undergraduate level through individual counselling, academic courses, and medical and psychological support (within the universities' structures). Until 2009, the programme operated in 24 universities and served more than 11,000 students; from 2002 to 2009, more than 3,000 Indigenous students registered and 1,281 graduated (Didou Aupetit & Remedi, 2009). During 2010 and 2011, the programme worked with complementary support from the World Bank, but from 2012, each university assumed full responsibility for the programme, significantly affecting its performance. Although the programme continues, it lacks the strength, articulation, and coordination it had years ago (Gallart & Navarrete, 2016).

- The IFP was the first initiative to foster the inclusion of Indigenous people in graduate studies. Due to its design and operation, it was a 'non-conventional' programme (Navarrete 2013), which developed specific strategies and procedures to 1) Recruit and select students based on their conditions of exclusion and marginalisation, 2) Orient them in the selection of the most appropriate graduate programme and university considering their academic profile and professional interests, 3) Strengthen the student's academic skills and knowledge before starting their graduate studies, and 4) Provide them with support during and after

the completion of their degrees. The programme benefited 226 Indigenous people from different ethnic groups, of which 87 were women (Gallart & Navarrete, 2016, p. 3).

- From 2013, when the IFP came to an end, the project continued to be financed by CONACYT as 'Probepi'. One year before, the Senate Chamber earmarked resources through CONACYT to develop and operate an initiative to exclusively foster Indigenous women's participation in graduate education. In 2012, the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI),[6] another governmental institution, had a surplus budget for allocation. It was through that door, through an institutional coalition, that the Probepi took place.

Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado (2010) recognise the relevance of promoting a real intercultural perspective of education. However, they have also identified that "the educational policies of modernity and the incipient models of postmodernity that have regulated education for Indigenous groups have not, to date, contributed substantially to autonomous development or to strengthen projects of effective consolidation of language, culture, and identity of [Indigenous] peoples in Mexico" (Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado, 2010, p. 512). Mato (2015a) agrees with this position, based on the report on higher education in Latin America, and points out that identifying that all the reforms, laws, and overall policy changes, although valuable, are still "insufficient to repair the effects of aggression, centuries of racism and ignorance about history". The "naturalisation" or indifference to inequality, local and international economic interests, and Eurocentrism are barriers that prevent reforms and policies from being put into concrete action, although it has been in education where the most significant improvements have been made (Mato, 2015a, p. 20).

6. CDI was created in 2003 to vanish the earliest agency for Indigenous matters, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI; National Indigenous Institute). INI was founded in 1948 to "coordinated government strategies for the assimilation and the integration of Indigenous groups into the national society" (Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado, 2010, p. 515), thus homogenizing Indigenous peoples diversity into mestizaje. In December 2018, CDI was restructured and renamed as the Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INPI; National Institute of Indigenous Peoples), a decentralised public institution with the objective "to define, regulate, design, establish, execute, guide, coordinate, promote, monitor, and evaluate policies, programmes, projects, strategies, and public actions, to guarantee the exercise and implementation of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples rights, as well as for their integral and sustainable development, and the strengthening of their cultures and identities" (Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INPI), 2023).

Ford Foundation IFP-Mexico and Probepi

In 2000, the Ford Foundation (FF) announced the largest grant so far for the fellowship programme for 'disadvantaged college graduates': the International Fellowships Program (IFP). The investment of USD 420,000 million between 2001 and 2013 provided 4,305 scholarships for 'emerging social justice leaders' in 22 countries focusing on promoting social change in the developing world. "IFP's underlying assumption was that, given the right tools, emerging leaders from disadvantaged communities could excel in postgraduate studies and return home to improve conditions in their communities" (Brown Murga & Martel, 2017). Fellows were selected from social groups that traditionally lacked access to higher education and who had demonstrated academic and leadership potential, as well as a commitment to social causes. The IFP theory of change hypothesised that by supporting social justice leaders in their contexts, the impact of the acquisition of knowledge and skills through higher education would lead, in turn, to social change beyond the individual sphere of influence (Martel & Bhandari, 2016).

Each country defined its selection criteria considering the academic performance of the candidates, but more importantly, their leadership potential and their commitment to community service and social justice (Navarrete Gómez, 2013). In Mexico, the IFP was directed towards Indigenous or original peoples. In an interview with Pablo Farías, Mexico's FF director at the time IFP was launched, the decision to focus on Indigenous people was taken after several meetings with different academic and governmental institutions such as the CIESAS, the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES), the current Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INPI; National Institute of Indigenous Peoples), and with representatives of various Indigenous peoples (Farías, 2020). CIESAS was the local institution selected to operate the programme due to its structure and history as a well-known research centre. The Institute of International Education (IIE) helped as they had experience with international students and selection processes. A small team of five people was gathered to start the initiative.

The IFP-Mexico objective, in particular, was "to promote the individual and collective development of the original peoples of Mexico through training researchers and professionals with high academic standards. Based on the knowle-

dge and experiences acquired during their studies, they are expected to become leaders in their respective areas of expertise, promote equality and contribute to local, regional, and national development" (Navarrete Gómez, 2013). The degrees could be in multiple areas, either in national universities or abroad. After 12 years of operation, the official results reported that 226 fellows were supported, of which 87 (40%) were women. They were from 38 Indigenous groups of 68; a third (39%) studied in Mexico, while the two thirds (61%) studied primarily in Spain and Chile, but also in other countries of Latin America, France, The Netherlands, and the United States (Martel & Bhandari, 2016). One of Mexico's successes beyond these numbers is that it was the only country among the 22 in which the IFP took place that continued afterwards with government/public funds. In 2012, CONACYT took over and launched Probepi after more than one year of lobbying and negotiations by CIESAS and the IFP coordination with various institutions (public and private universities, intercultural institutions of higher education, state local governments, and private stakeholders). Probepi is still operating and has allocated resources until 2023. In February 2023, 166 scholarships were granted: 38 students were still doing their master's, while 127 obtained their degrees; another group of 57 were selected between 2021 and 2022 and were waiting to be accepted into an academic programme, thus formalising their scholarship (Gallart, 2023)

There is literature on the IFP global project (Dassin et al., 2014; Dassin & Navarrete, 2017; Volkman et al., 2009), as well as in the particular case of Mexico – or some aspects of it (Leyva, 2010; Navarrete Gómez, 2011, 2012, 2013). There is literature on resilience during the vulnerable school trajectories of some IFP alums: a master's thesis by IFP alum Gracida Gracida (2012), literature on Indigenous identity through reviewing the IFP objectives and processes (Becerro Xixitla, 2018), and literature on the way higher education is strengthening Indigenous identities and ethnic commitments through specific programmes such as IFP (Didou Aupetit, 2014). However, there is no qualitative information on the challenges and profiles of Indigenous women with degrees (Gallart, 2021).

There are not information systematized in terms of the specific professional activities of IFP-Probepi women alums. A report by Gallart & Navarrete (2016) states that as for the IFP women alums, 20 of the 87 who finished their degrees work as professors and researchers in higher education institutions. Another ten

alums work in the Ministry of Education (SEP) or basic or secondary education institutions; two are civil servants at the state level, and the rest are directors of schools or group teachers in their communities. At least 21 work in non-academic fields: four are in the business sector, and 17 are in various institutions or social development programmes, either public, private, or self-managed. Two state they are activists in groups formed from the social struggle, and another two have participated in electoral and political processes. Three work in artistic environments or topics and at least two more are in their communities caring for their elderly and sick parents (Gallart & Navarrete, 2016).

Therefore, this research contributes to providing perspectives in this regard, by sharing narratives related to the enfleshed activities and reflections of some professional Indigenous women granted by these initiatives. Although it does not present numbers and statistics, this thesis looks to expose the way in which graduate education and IFP-Probepi were relevant to weave knowledges, identities, and political enunciations.

CHAPTER III

Threads to be connected:
Weaving transversal axes

The thesis is about relationality among contributors, and also about relationality with epistemic justice (Leyva Solano, 2021). Thus, the following theoretical and conceptual frames have been helpful in cultivating those political and epistemic threads and enunciations. Each chapter has a different intake/approach using different theoretical perspectives, and in each, the reader will find a better or deeper analysis of those approaches.

Critical Feminisms: Indigenous/communitarian/*territorial* (territory-body), descolonial, decolonial, Black intersectional

I talk about critical feminisms in the plural as multiple and diverse enunciations and meeting points with the Indigenous women I worked with, which allowed me/us to discuss the various understandings of those 'geo-genealogies' of thought[1] from where to unweave violence and inequalities resulting from the intersections of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and body ableness (Harcourt, 2016). Feminisms that allow us to "world"-travel while we share the commitment to demonstrate, and at the same time to vindicate, the contributions of diverse women who weave their enunciations and political struggles together with men, with the territory, against patriarchy and oppression. Although not all the women I worked with identify themselves as feminists, I dare say that, because of those vindications, we all live a feminist life (Ahmed, 2017) understood as actively enfleshing and practising feminist principles and values in everyday life, challenging, and resisting patriarchal norms and structures while advocating for gender equality and social justice.

1. Vázquez (2014) highlights the significance of geo-genealogies in the context of decolonial critique, emphasising the importance of recognising the position from which ideas are articulated. According to him, a geo-genealogy is a genealogy that acknowledges its specific situatedness, indicating a connection to a particular geographic location of origin (Vazquez, 2014, p. 178)

Furthermore, from the multiple conversations and exchanges of ideas, most of the women I worked with relate to Indigenous/communitarian/territorial feminisms, whether they called them as such or not. The relevance of these feminisms is that they make visible the contributions of Indigenous women's resistances and rescue pluralities that lie hidden under the single modern/colonial narrative that imposes gender and/or patriarchy as quasi-eternal categories (Icaza 2019). The women have reflected on the interconnectedness of patriarchy in the reproduction of exclusions and inequalities, for what the colonised encounter represented a "meeting of patriarchies" between the "original ancestral patriarchy" and the white-Western-European (Paredes, 2008). For some time already, Mexican-left feminisms have exposed the rooted Catholic double standard that affects women's lives and their relationship with men regarding sexuality, family work, or in the social and political realms (Marcos, 2010). Mexican-left feminisms have made visible two aspects of a colonised country: on the one hand, the patriarchal structures that define the roles of submission and dependence assigned to women, and on the other, the reproduction of the imperialist norms that banish and oppress the most disadvantaged groups (Millán, 2014). Therefore, the feminisms in Mexico were "born under the sign of plurality, forced, so to speak, to collect multiple, diverse and sometimes contradictory positions in their demands" (Millán, 2014, p. 16).

The Zapatista women repositioned Indigenous women's demands against capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal structures within and outside their communities. Their claims were – and have been – for autonomy and equality based on their worldviews and cultural identities; they criticised traditional and modern practices that violate their integrity and basic rights to a dignified life (Hernández Castillo, 2014). "As poor women, interwoven in collectives, with Mayan ancestral affiliations and exposed to feminist proposals, they recognise the contributions to gender justice, but they also […] conceive an 'Indigenous' feminism that, by extension, revitalises those expressions of urban, theoretical, complex but a

desterritorializado[2] feminism, which appears as poor in its own cultural roots" (Marcos, 2014, p. 23).

The Women's Revolutionary Law[3] was written by Zapatista women in 1992. The law was a watershed in making visible the participation of Indigenous women in the resignification of their individual and collective rights (Hernández Castillo & Sierra, 2005). Together with basic demands for education, health, respect, non-violence, and leadership positions, among others, they raised a rooted Indigenous principle not necessarily considered in other feminisms: complementarity, duality, and parity (Favela, 2014; Marcos, 2014). That is to say, the importance of their relationships with men in the community as part of their collective identity, "not from hierarchical positions, as has happened up to now, but from a parallel construction" (Cumes, 2009a, p. 49), as well as the relation with the land, with the territory.

Therefore, Indigenous/communitarian/territorial feminists highlight the interconnection between the struggle for women's liberation and the struggle for social justice with the autonomy of the Indigenous communities. For Guatemalan Xinca-Maya Lorena Cabnal (2012, 2019), for instance, the feminist transformation must be rooted in the reality and the needs of the communities, recognising and valuing the ancestral knowledge and practices of Indigenous women. Her approach also addresses the systematic violence Indigenous women face, including sexual violence, structural violence, and economic exploitation. Hence, the community is a space of resistance and empowerment for women (Cabnal, 2012). She understands the territory as the land in which to live and grow, where the ancestors are buried, and as our bodies. We are 'territory-body' ('cuerpo-territorio'), a space of enunciation" (Cabnal, 2019). Similarly, the Maya-Kaqchikel Aura Cumes (2017) recognises that "Indigenous women do not fight only as women. We fight to defend water, territory, land, and culture […] we are defending the collective intellectual property of Indigenous textiles, defending midwives, as carriers, trainers and protectors of life" (Cumes, 2017).

2. *Desterritorializado* could be translated as landless or unrooted, although it implies a more complex meaning due the profound relation with the territorio (territory). The terrotorio is not only a pice of land, but a living being where food is grown and the ancestral are buried. The territory is history, life, resistance, food, water, air.
3. See: Appendix II.

Similarly to the Indigenous and communitarian feminisms, the descolonial feminists, a group of mainly women from Latin America, most of them academics,[4] who created the Red de Feminismos Descoloniales (RFD) (Descolonial Feminisms Network), challenged "the feminist project, requesting a critical reflection on itself and a process of internal descolonisation" (Millán, 2014, p. 9). Calling themselves 'descolonial', differing from the decolonial perspective of scholars, such as Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2011), for being a "self-absorbed and monological academia" (Millán, 2014, p. 10), the RFD questions and exposes the articulation between gender and race in close link with racism, imperialism and patriarchal practices and ideologies (Red IINPIM, 2013). Descolonial feminism combines critical and decolonial feminisms with the paradigms claimed by the Zapatista women, arguing for the recognition of another way to understand gender relations. The members of the RFD "entangled" their various, diverse, and multiple positions to descolonise their own feminisms, that being:

> *[To] reflect and analyse the meaning of equity between Indigenous men and women in a context of struggles and resistance as peoples. […] In addition, make visible the participation of Indigenous women in the processes of historical resistance of their peoples, in their proposals, strategies and forms of struggle together with men and their organisations to transform subordination as women and as original peoples* (Red IINPIM, 2013, p. 13).

Therefore, the descolonial and the Indigenous/communitarian/territorial (territory-body) feminists share: the need for and importance of the community and the collective, the territory to understand and transform gender relations, and the conditions of exclusion and inequality of original peoples in general. Furthermore, they challenge the mind-body divide (Cabnal, 2019).

The decolonial feminisms (Icaza, 2017, 2019; Icaza et al., 2018; Lugones, 2003, 2010, 2016) have brought to the table how colonialism has shaped gender relations and hierarchies because the Eurocentric norms, values, and ideals are based on white/heterosexual men. The systemic power imbalances and epistemic

4. Several IFP alums were part of this initiative, such as Georgina Méndez Torres, Carmen Osorio Hernández, Juan López Intzín, Judith Bautista Pérez, Alicia Lemus Jiménez.

injustices resulting from colonialism and coloniality (Icaza, 2017) have been nodal to critically examine the power dynamics embedded in colonial histories and structures, aiming to dismantle oppressive systems and envision alternative ways of being and knowing that are rooted in Indigenous and non-Western epistemologies.

For Lugones (Lugones, 2003, 2010, 2016), gender is a mechanism of colonial domination over non-Western racialised bodies. She sees the colonial encounter as a specific, located historical moment in which the specific system of sex/gender became a form of subjugation, a concrete mechanism of transformation and control of all forms of life through the control of the bodies and subjectivities of people who had been colonised (Icaza, 2019; Lugones, 2010, 2016). According to Lugones (Lugones, 2010), in the colonial encounter, the other did not have a gender because this was a characteristic of "humanity": "only the civilised is a man or a woman". She argues that the coloniality of gender is intertwined with control by territory, capital, and subjectivities, which has profound implications for concrete lives today. Although there are differences between the decolonial and Indigenous/communitarian/territorial feminists –for instance, for the former, patriarchy began in the colonial encounter and, in contrast, for the latter there was already an "original ancestral patriarchy" (Paredes, 2008)– they coincide and have all highlighted the connections between the personal and the political, as well as theory and activism in a commitment to praxis (Icaza et al., 2018, p. 2). Principles also shared with the descolonial feminists.

Another important feminist perspective in this research is the Black intersectional intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015) from which to look at the interconnected nature of our various social identities that create unique experiences of oppression and privilege and where the political subject is defined as a minority that coincides and makes coalitions with other minorities. That is to say, that the political proposal is based on constructing a social movement sensitive to all types of oppressions, exclusions, and marginalisations without prioritising any, but based on specific contexts and situations. Although Crenshaw (1989) initially raised the term as contextual and practical to analyse concrete omissions and inequalities, other scholars have opened up the theoretical as well as analytical and practical possibilities of the term. For example, Hill

Collins (2000) was the first to posit an analytical duality between intersectionality as an articulation of unequal social oppressions in individual lives that occur in microsocial processes and what he calls "interlocking systems of oppressions" as macrosocial phenomena in which power systems are involved in the production, organisation, and maintenance of inequalities.

For Viveros Vigoya (2016), the concept of intersectionality in Latin America has not reached the "hegemonic status" of Europe and the United States. Instead, I resonated with the work of Mohanty (2021) on the discursive coloniality of the material and historical diversity of Latin American women seen from hegemonic feminisms and with the decolonial perspective of Lugones (2003, 2010, 2016). Mohanty (2021) highlights the importance of recognising the diversity of women's experiences across various geopolitical contexts and emphasises the need for a more nuanced understanding of the intersections of race, class, and gender in feminist analysis, arguing that the oversimplified and essentialised experiences of women in the Global South reinforced the Western feminist notion of superiority and cultural superiority. On the other hand, for Lugones (2016), it is essential to consider the coloniality of gender to reveal how colonialism and its associated power dynamics shape and perpetuate gender hierarchies, particularly in the context of racialised and postcolonial societies. Furthermore, she proposes the logic of fusions and coalitions as a possibility of resistance to multiple oppressions. Similarly, hooks (2015) raised the need for alliances and solidarity with other social movements that defend the interests of minority groups.

This thesis sees bell hooks' (1995) invitation and concept to "talk race" as a political position that exposes racialised women's own experiences. The concept has been nodal and is specifically addressed in Chapter V. The relevance of Indigenous women identifying, naming, and exposing the oppressions and discriminations faced is a personal and collective stance that speaks of active engagement in dismantling social inequalities. hooks (1994) also advocates for the importance of education and critical consciousness, arguing that it can help individuals recognise and resist how dominant cultural narratives shape our thinking and behaviour, thus redefining and changing power.

Although these feminist traditions of thought and theoretical perspectives are not necessarily discussed in every chapter, they inform and frame the overall thesis because they foreground the contributions of marginalised women's resistances

and their pluralities that have been erased under the monolithic modern/colonial narratives. Feminist traditions of thought and theory also make evident the need to challenge dominant knowledge structures to reconfigure how knowledge is produced and valued. Therefore, while the Indigenous/communitarian/*territorial* feminisms underscore the conditions, needs, and resistances of the original peoples connected to the communities and the territory, the descolonial brings to the table a more practical, action-based perspective. Decolonial feminism takes the colonial encounter at the moment of the emergence of the modern colonial gender system; and Black intersectionality highlights the importance of acknowledging and analysing multiple intersecting layers of oppression and identities.

Post development

As a critical theory, the post-development has been an umbrella from which I have framed the historical discourses of modernisation and development that have shaped structural differences together with a decolonial perspective.

The post-development conceptual foundations coincide with Black intersectional feminism on the need to recognise and value the diverse experiences, perspectives, and knowledges of marginalised groups (Harcourt, 2016, 2019). However, post-development focuses the critiques on mainstream development practices and promotes alternative approaches. As a critical theory, post-development challenges the dominant Western-centric notion of development, highlighting its inherent biases, Eurocentrism, and the perpetuation of power imbalances. Escobar's (1995) critique of the single model of progress and growth on the rest of the world has been the foundation from which to look at the exclusions and the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in development projects. As a theoretical foundation, it has also been helpful to look critically at the education systems and imagine other possibilities (Esteva, 2014), focusing on how higher education has been exclusionary for reproducing certain knowledge that denies other cultural systems (Mato, 2015a, p. 13). On the other hand, the post-development approach has also been inspiring for reimagining education practices that recognise diverse ways of knowing, being, and learning; and also for advocating for an education

system that is locally grounded, culturally relevant, and inclusive of multiple knowledge systems, to imagine a pluriverse (Escobar, 2012, 2014).

Pluriverse

I develop this concept further in Chapter VI. Thus, it is relevant to frame it here so the reader can start looking at the multiple epistemic and ontological positions and contributions of the Indigenous women as necessary to cultivate knowledge. A pluriverse (or pluriversal understandings, approaches, and positions) also speak to the principles of communality, responsibility, accountability, and relationality (Wilson, 2008), as well as of interculturality.

The pluriverse is also a concept highlighted by Escobar (2012, 2014) but based on the Indigenous worldview as woven from multiple interconnected and inseparable dimensions, including human and non-human elements. The pluriverse encompasses the material, spiritual, physical, and temporal realms. It is based on the principles of balance and reciprocity, which are rooted in the interconnections of multiple visions, thoughts, and realities. The pluriverse is about what the Zapatistas called "a world where many worlds fit" (Enlace Zapatista, 1996). Although Indigenous peoples have not used the term pluriverse (Méndez Torres, 2019b), it has been a way to think further about how Indigenous ontologies are ways of looking at reality in contrast with the assumption of the Western ontology of the "One-World" (Escobar, 2014, p. 145) where life is seen as progressive and linear.

Therefore, in this thesis, pluriversality is an epistemic and an ontological proposal, a possibility from where to embrace multiple, co-existing ways of being, and of thinking. A possibility from where to weave intercultural understandings.

Flourishing

The concept of flourishing, which post-development scholars have used in recent texts (Kothari et al., 2019), was discussed in our reflective conversations and online meetings with Cruz Cruz (2019), Chan Dzul (2019), and Bautista Pérez (2019). According to Cruz Cruz (2019), who was a counsellor at the CIG, 'flourishing' as describe by the CNI, challenges the "projects of death of capitalism" that "was born from the blood of our peoples and kept feeding from it" (CNI,

2017). It represents the moment in which the Indigenous peoples of Mexico – and from Latin America – are joining efforts to articulate a 'project of life' which represents a different kind of society based on the principles of autonomy, self-determination, and respect for Indigenous cultures, traditions, and territories. The project recognises the ongoing violence, dispossession, and exploitation, as well as the destructive impacts of capitalism and neoliberalism on the environment and human societies.

Flourishing proposes an alternative path towards a society that prioritises social justice, collective well-being, and ecological sustainability based on Indigenous knowledge, practices, and values. To make it happen, solidarity and alliances across various social movements and struggles from where to build a broad-based movement for systemic change are essential (CNI, 2017). Flourishing represents life as an organic process of existence also linked to Indigenous worldviews, in which life, and everything that goes with it, is conceived as cyclical and is the most beautiful stage in the natural process of life (Cruz Cruz, 2019).

Therefore, flourishing is used to challenge the Western notion of development, simultaneously offering the possibilities of different understandings and grammars to name processes of life, of knowledge cultivation, of relationships. Flourishing is another concrete ontological and epistemic contribution that could be inspiring for imagining other ways of being and relating. I have also linked it to Shilliam's (2015) "knowledge cultivation", since I see both as active concepts referring to the "grounding" process of growth, not to accumulate but to root; and to Escobar's (2012, 2014) notion of the pluriverse as an organic, interconnected way to embrace that world where many worlds fit.

In conclusion, the post-development perspective began questioning the legacy of colonialism and the need to dismantle colonial structures, knowledge systems, and epistemologies that continue to shape societies, a task the decolonial perspective does more deeply. While post-development challenges the existing development paradigm from an intersectional and global historical perspective, decoloniality delves more profoundly into its colonial roots and calls for a radical transformation of social relations to foster emancipation and justice. Therefore, by complementing both approaches, I have been able to redefine my own perspective of development by centring Indigenous knowledges as a possibility for other narratives and for enfleshed experiences as sources of knowledge.

Decoloniality

The decolonial theoretical foundations (Icaza, 2017; Lugones, 2016; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2014) name the colonial divide that has created and deepened structural inequalities. According to Quijano (2000), colonialism created a system of power relations based on racial categories, with Europeans considered superior superior and 'the rest' or 'the others', such as the Indigenous peoples, were considered inferior. This system of power, the coloniality, operates through various mechanisms, such as institutional racism, the imposition of Eurocentric norms and values, and the suppression of alternative knowledges and practices. Indigenous peoples have been particularly affected by the coloniality of power, as their cultures, languages, and ways of life have been systematically devalued and marginalised. The coloniality of power also plays a significant role in the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands and resources, as well as the persistence of social and economic inequality.

From this perspective, racism is deeply rooted in the legacies of colonialism. Thus, it is important to address systemic and structural change presented in Chapter III on racism in higher education. This approach is a different angle from the scholars that look at racism in Mexico and Latin America (Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2015; Navarrete, 2016; Wade, 2022b). The scholars focus more on the cultural dimensions and how individuals and groups construct and maintain racial hierarchies through discursive practices and symbolic systems. Anthropological and sociological perspectives on racism examine the intersectionality of race, class, and gender, as well as how these various forms of social stratification interact to produce and reproduce inequality. They focus on the micro-level dynamics of racism in everyday interactions and cultural practices – but they do not explicitly link racism to broader critiques of capitalism or modernity. Quijano (2000), by contrast, argues that racism is not just about skin colour or cultural practices but about how certain groups have historically been able to exercise power and domination over others based on invented racialised categories. He also argues that the capitalist world system is built on the exploitation of non-European peoples and their lands, and that this system reproduces racial inequality as a necessary condition for its functioning.

Olivia Rutazibwa (2018) echoes how colonialism has fragmented knowledge production, affecting the way the world has been discursively constructed and moulded to sustain and propel only one side of the story. According to Icaza (2022), coloniality informs epistemic injustices in higher education from where epistemic racism (Grosfoguel, 2011a), epistemic dispossession (Leyva Solano, 2021), or erasures (Patel, 2015) have affected and denied Indigenous knowledges and ontologies. Walsh (Walsh, 2013b) also highlights the importance of centring Indigenous knowledges and practices in decolonial processes, recognising their critical role in building alternative visions of society and ways of being. The coloniality of gender has also been addressed by other authors who look at how coloniality is experienced differently by racialised women (Icaza, 2017; Icaza et al., 2018; Lugones, 2003, 2010; Mohanty, 2021). Two important concepts by Lugones (2003) which I have already frequently referred to are "world"-travelling and deep coalitions. These are explained in detail in Chapter III. I hope the reader can perceive their meaning and importance throughout this thesis.

"World"-travelling and deep coalitions

When reading Lugones (2003) to comprehend the coloniality of gender, I came across these two concepts that helped me to go deeper and justify part of my own decolonisation processes, identify my "arrogant perception" and transform it into a "loving perception" to self-identify with the women with whom I have been working. I was also shaken by the love and beauty with which she reflects on them. "World"-travelling refers to the ability to move between and to understand different worlds of senses, as well as multiple cultural and social contexts, without erasing one's own particular identity or history. For Lugones (2003, p. 17), "all people who have been subordinated, exploited, and enslaved have been forced to travel to "worlds" in which they animate subordinates being. […] It is only men of certain class and race who are in a position to exercise their mobility without restriction".

"World"-travelling is an exercise of resistance and is partly constitutive of cross-cultural, cross-racial loving necessary for achieving meaningful solidarity across various social groups – especially among women of colour or any who

are not the norm, that is, white Western men. "World"-travelling encompasses the capacity to engage with diverse – other than dominant – worlds of senses and worldviews, challenging mainstream paradigms and opening up spaces for alternative ways of knowing and being. This involves a plural ontology, which is different from the dominant Western ontology based on a singular sense of self, thus representing an epistemic shift (Lugones, 2003, p. 12). For Lugones (2003, p. 21), "the notion of a world enables me to understand social heterogeneity, in both its oppressive and resistant forms".

To "world"-travel is a matter of survival and is subversive in itself. It implies constant and permanent moving among those multiple selves we (and those others outside the norm) are or represent. "World"-travel is intentional because we pay attention to our own worlds of senses, contexts, and histories but also to the worlds of other people. We should travel as a "skilful, creative, rich, enriching, and, given certain circumstances, loving way of being and living" shift (Lugones, 2003, p. 77). Travelling is the shift from being one person to being a different person. This "might not be wilful or even conscious, and one may be completely unaware of being different in a different 'world', and may not recognise that one is in a different 'world' shift (Lugones, 2003, p. 89).

Travel is not acting or performing, but rather is an act of love within our plural selves and to others' plural selves, who can also travel to our plural selves, because "travelling to each other's 'worlds' would enable us to be through loving each other" (Lugones, 2003, p. 86). This act of love is necessary to transform the "arrogant perception" that all women of colour have experienced:[5]

> *By travelling to other people's "worlds", we discover that there are "worlds" in which those who are victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable* (Lugones, 2003, p. 97).

5. For Lugones (Lugones, 2003, p. 80) "all (women) are subjects to both: be perceived and perceive arrogantly".

Lugones (2003) uses Frye's (1983) notion of "arrogant perception" in relation to men's disregard of women as dependent beings. For Frye, men see everything organised with reference to themselves and in relation to their interests. Thus, women are perceived with pity. Lugones (2003) adds that both men and women are taught to perceive others arrogantly, especially towards others, due to a sense of superiority and dominance of some groups over others, creating a kind of "pity" about "vulnerable" groups. For her, the "arrogant perception" is closely linked to an inability to truly love others. Thus, she suggests that it is necessary to identify with people to perceive them with love, and this identification requires engaging in "world"-travelling. Furthermore, although "world"-travelling happens mostly out of necessity, we should practice it, Lugones (2003) suggests, as an exercise animated with a "playful attitude". Playfulness is not frivolous fun, but rather it is about "to cross, to go through, in uncertainty, open to risk one's own ground, including one's own understanding. An openness to uncertainty, which includes a vocation not to be bound by the meanings and norms that constitutes one's ground" (Lugones, 2003, p. 26); it is about "finding ambiguity and double edges as a source of wisdom and delight" (Lugones, 2003, p. 96).

Finally, to "world"-travel is to travel to other's worlds of senses and be open and vulnerable – loving – for others to travel to our worlds, create collective understandings and deep coalitions. These coalitions are based on differences grounded not in coincidences of individual or group interests but in multiple understandings of oppressions and resistances. Deep coalitions are a means of transformative solidarity and resistance against oppressive structures. The deep coalitions go beyond superficial alliances or temporary collaborations, aim to challenge and dismantle the underlying systems of domination, and require a willingness to engage in empathetic understanding, active listening, and collective action across differences. By cultivating a sense of shared struggle and recognising the interconnections of various forms of oppression, deep coalitions strive for profound social change and liberation for all individuals and communities involved. For Lugones (2003), it is important to recognise and address intersecting forms of oppression, including gender, race, class, and other axes of power, within these coalitions.

Therefore, in this thesis, "world"-travelling and deep coalitions are ontological, epistemic, and methodological points of departure and encounters. They have shaped my own plural selves, the relations to cultivate this work from where to thread the whole thesis. Both concepts have been inspiring to reflect on how to dismantle oppressive structures, foster inclusive communities, and cultivate transformative praxis within social and political contexts.

Coloniality of seeing

A final concept that emerged in Chapter VI is related to the "coloniality of seeing" (Barriendos, 2011; Zárate Moedano et al., 2019), which recognises the dominant audiovisual media, such as cinema, television and video on demand, and are cultural products created from positions of power that reproduce systems of thought that legitimise social relations of domination. These audiovisual productions disseminated by the large media conglomerates reflect perspectives based on ideologies of domination such as coloniality, racism, and patriarchy. As a result, inequalities are reproduced in the access to social recognition of various individuals and groups based on physical, cultural, and identity characteristics, ethnic or geographical origin, language, religion, social or economic condition, or a combination of these.

Enfleshed experiences and narratives

I decided to use the concepts of "enfleshed" instead of embodied because even though both are related to the physical presence and experience of the body, enfleshed refers to a deeper, more holistic understanding that also includes the social, cultural, historical, contextual, and spiritual dimensions. So, it expands our views of the body beyond its materiality or physical presence and connects to shared intergenerational stories of oppression, trauma, and resistance (Mack & Na'puti, 2019). Ahmed (2014) says, "The body is not just a container for a pre-given self but is rather the very means through which selves are formed and mediated in relation to others. The body is a site of enfleshment: a lived, fleshy, and material process through which we come to inhabit the world in particular ways" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 22). For Lugones (2003), the enfleshed experiences are

always interpreted and may give direction for a critical and transformative work of theory. Therefore, for her, as well as for Leyva Solano (2021), Motta (2021, 2022b, 2022a), and Motta & Bermudez (2019), enfleshed experiences are the site of theory: "The ways in which we can enflesh decolonising encounters that rupture the hegemonic temporal subjectivities that imprison possibility and instead, nurture enfleshed communion with the ancestral body of the commons" (Motta & Bermudez, 2019) imply a way of inhabiting and creating the world/subject as a way of knowing the world/subject (Motta, 2021, 2022b).

Enfleshment has been a point of departures and of encounters from where this thesis is woven and cultivated, recognising that our bodies are not just biological objects but a site of meaning, of subjectivities, and intergenerational lived experiences. The stories our bodies incarnate are stories that live, resist, and/or negotiate values, dominant norms, and violence (Icaza, 2019, p. 27). From our stories, we have "world"-travelled, reflected, and looked at each other. From that enfleshment, I decolonise myself.

Indigenous principles in research

Indigenous principles are translated into Indigenous conceptualisations and methodologies by Maori scholar Linda Smith Tuhiwai (2012) and by Opaskwayak Cree Nation Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson (2008), who have been ethical and practical guides in cultivating this collaborative work. They are also decolonial ways to look critically at processes of knowledge cultivation, but I separate them to pinpoint the relevance of Indigenous worldviews in this regard. Wilson (2008), for instance, argues that research is not merely a methodological process but a sacred act of knowledge creation that embodies the values and worldviews of the researcher and the communities. For him, the research paradigm should be grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, prioritising relationships, respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. His perspective is opposite to the dominant Western research paradigm for its individualistic, reductionist, and exploitative tendencies. Wilson (2008) proposes an alternative approach that is collaborative, participatory, and community-driven and also serves the needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples.

Like Wilson (2008), Smith (2012) calls for decolonisation of research methods and practices, which involves recognising and respecting the epistemological and ontological differences between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and centring Indigenous perspectives and experiences in the research process. She also advocates for a research practice that is collaborative, participatory, and accountable to Indigenous communities. However, her approach is more political and acknowledges the ongoing effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems. She argues that research has been used as a tool of colonialism, extracting knowledge and resources from the communities while reinforcing Western hegemony and subjugating Indigenous knowledge systems.

Indigenous scholars in Latin America (Cruz Cruz, 2020b) have also reclaimed Indigenous worldviews and practices as research principles to shift power dynamics in which original peoples have always been the objects of study and hardly ever the producers of knowledge. These positions open the possibilities for intercultural dialogues as pluriversal spaces.

Intercultural dialogue

Interculturality, as conceptualisation and practice among the Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, is a vital continuum of knowledges, practices, perspectives, visions, and learnings linked to the land and to a collective as a community. From this root and its "being", the relationality implied in and constitutive of interculturality, takes place (Walsh, 2014). Dietz (2017) has extensively reflected on the intercultural education project in Mexico, particularly that of the intercultural universities, and refers to interculturality as a "transformative strategy to reveal, question and transform historically rooted inequalities within society" (Dietz, 2017, p. 194). He argues that to transform relations of inequality is not enough to empower discriminated-against groups but to "alter the perceptions of the majority and promote reciprocal identification processes between groups that have been privileged and those that have been historically excluded" (Dietz, 2017, p. 195). For Walsh (2007), interculturality should be based on the principles of dialogical encounter, mutual respect, and recognition of difference rather than on assimilating Indigenous peoples into the dominant society.

Walsh (2010) distinguished the "functional interculturality" linked to the dominant system and thus to the "global designs of power, capital and the market" that became trendy from the 1990s, from "critical interculturality" as a political project of decolonisation, transformation, and creation. For her, interculturality – intercultural education in particular – will only have meaning, impact, and value when it is assumed critically as a pedagogical-political act that seeks to intervene in the refounding of societies (Walsh, 2010). She also differentiates interculturality from multiculturalism, as the former does not seek to be included in the dominant knowledge but to question and interfere in it (Walsh, 2007).

On the other hand, or better said, together with interculturality, dialogue is an act that requires attentive listening because it is an active process of intervention that represents mutual learning. To dialogue among diverse peoples "is to learn to perceive again, to establish a relationship of pairs and horizontality with the Original peoples […]. It is necessary to interrelate to the borders and cross the limit of the social relations that were imposed on us" (Red IINPIM & RFD, 2013, p. 16). This definition resulted from a group of Indigenous scholars –some of which have contributed to this research– who organised in 2010 in Mexico the above mentioned *First Latin-American Assembly of the voices of the Indigenous peoples: The other bicentenary*. This assembly was a space of intercultural dialogue among diverse people to discuss the various paths and views of Original peoples, their routes, experiences, struggles, and visions of the future, as well as their contributions to the construction of a project of political commonality (Red IINPIM & RFD, 2013, p. 12).

For me, dialogue from diversity is also to foster open and inclusive spaces for the recognition and inclusion of multiple perspectives. It encourages the decolonisation of epistemologies and the exploration of alternative ways of knowing, rooting knowledge in enfleshed experiences and personal yet collective wisdoms. Through dialogue, we can reflect critically and share our enunciations, biases, privileges, and past and present histories. We talk and think, we write and deepen. Moreover, to dialogue nurtures collaboration and collective action, enabling the co-creation of knowledge that acknowledges and respects various worldviews. In this way, to dialogue becomes a transformative force, challenging dominant narratives.

Therefore, intercultural dialogue in this thesis implies a way to challenge dominant knowledges, weaving diverse cultural and epistemic systems as alternative ways for the decolonisation of knowledge cultivation and for building epistemic alliances (Walsh, 2007, 2010). Intercultural dialogue creates a space for encounters of respect, accountability, and recognition of difference from where to playfully "world"-travel and strengthen deep coalitions. It is an epistemic and a methodological frame for exercising epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009).

Theoretical and conceptual threads to be woven

As a conclusion of this section: to bridge, weave, and move across the diverse theoretical foundations and specific concepts presented here has been a way to question, challenge, and disrupt dominant systems of knowledge production and epistemic authority while trying to subvert oppressive knowledge systems, and foster alternative epistemic practices that reflect plural perspectives. I see this exercise as a space of multiple interpretations, "failures", inconsistencies, and tensions that are productive rather than avoiding or hiding (Icaza et al., 2018; Motta, 2022b). The way these overall approaches have transversally woven this thesis is part of its contributions and will be discussed in the conclusions.

Holding spaces: Storytelling, narratives and translations

Oral storytelling is an ancestral practice for Indigenous peoples to share and preserve their worldviews (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Storytelling is vital to how original peoples have preserved and conveyed their cultural heritage, knowledges, and worldviews across generations. It goes beyond mere entertainment because it is a profound educational tool encompassing history, values, and spirituality. Wilson (2008) emphasises the interconnectedness of Indigenous storytelling with land, community, and identity, and Smith (2012) further underscores the transformative and decolonising potential of storytelling by centring Indigenous voices and perspectives.

Storytelling also challenges dominant narratives, prioritising community engagement and experiential learning, while fostering collective wisdom and solidarity. Through storytelling, Indigenous peoples assert resilience, resistance, and ongoing contributions (Brown & Strega, 2005). For example, in Mexico, the work by Nahua poet Natalio Hernández (1998, 2002) or work by scholar Montemayor (Montemayor, 1999, 2001, 2004) are inspiring materials from which to look at and learn about Indigenous narratives and storytelling. Therefore, storytelling is about ontologies and epistemics (Cairo, 2022; Lugones, 2003; Motta, 2021; Wilson, 2008). According to Lugones (2003), concrete, open-ended stories give texture to research and concretise research without over-determining stories to one particular point. What matters and is innovative for her is the articulation of what the story reveals through the meanderings and moves of the investigation; the logic of the story – its inner works; the unfolded storyline; the revealing of its intricacies; and, through dwelling, its meanings (Lugones 2003: 28). A story can tell unbroken stories of women who want their unbrokenness to be seen while showing the many separate, unconnected fragments (Lugones, 2003, p. 43) : Indigenous, professional, agronomist, daughter, professor, woman, sister, poet, light-skinned, bilingual, feminist, wife, friend, urban, migrant, doctor.

For me, storytelling has also responded to my own writing style, from where I have found the fluidity, the wording, the feeling-thinking to transmit personal reflections. Also, on a personal level, storytelling has implied a permanent process of decolonisation and decolonial reflectivity (Moosavi, 2022), unpacking meanings and forms and searching for the right way to convey the stories to be told. More often than not, I found myself confronting my thinking on how the people involve themsevles in the narrative and would feel or think when reading the situation or contexts I was describing or analysing. It was a constant re-focus of languages and perspectives, taking care of representations, romanticism, erasures, and denials. I am aware that inconsistencies and tensions were created even by the paying of attention. However, rather than looking to resolve them, I acknowledge them as productive (Icaza et al., 2018), and as failures (Motta, 2022a) from where to continue learning.

Therefore, through storytelling, I sought to connect reflections and personal and enfleshed experiences with common problems and recognise the various voices from which these stories were generated. Black feminist and Indigenous prin-

ciples also inspire Cairo (2022). Cairo (2022, p. 21) recognises that "stories can stir something deep within us and plant a seed for change that will sprout when the time is right". Telling and reflecting on our personal and collective stories is not only important to our well-being, but also to identify how they are interwoven with those of others: "Our lived stories are shaped by the interconnectedness with other people's stories. People's stories affect us and ours affect theirs" (Cairo, 2022, pp. 22–23).

These techniques were also a device to weave the narratives and enfleshed experiences shared. I understand narratives as the frameworks and interpretations from which we individually or collectively give meaning and shape those experiences. Narratives in this research mean a space of reflection and political interpretation, of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009), shaping collective understandings, and constructing identities and social realities. A narrative style that is "the geography and the particular chronology of an experience […] rooted in the singularity, in the sinuosity of a region, in the movement of a tempo" (Ripamonti, 2017, p. 84). I am also aware that narratives can create disconnections when they fail to fully capture or accurately convey the richness and complexity of the enfleshed experiences, thus a critical engagement to identify, and, when possible, bridge the gaps was important. Furthermore, the limitation of the narratives and the storytelling is also part of the limitations of our own interpretations and can be elements of extractive practices. However, this research has been used as a way to connect our collective writings, making the process of sharing and reflecting together more engaging and grounding for all.

Therefore, in this thesis, inspired by Cairo's work (2022), telling stories has been a way to hold spaces (Cairo 2021). That is to say, our collective encounters, the individual, the contextual, and at the same time the common, the repeated stories – of struggle and resistance, of our daily lives, our past experiences, and future dreams – have been ways to take care of each other, to heal and to create deep coalitions. Cabnal (2010), for instance, refers to the need for healing through sharing stories. To hold spaces is a practice that means to be physically, mentally, and emotionally present for someone and put the focus on that someone to support them, but to hold spaces is also to tell the "stories that are normally overlooked, silenced, marginalised, or dismissed", looking to normalise them as part of the larger multi-storied mosaic (Cairo, 2022, p. 23).

Another holding space has been the permanent and challenging translation process between Spanish and English, especially for Chapters IV, V and VI, revised or co-written with other women and published in English. The common language of the Indigenous women I worked with is Spanish, and for some, it is their second language after their mother tongue. All were schooled in Spanish. The enduring remnants of colonialism are evident in educational systems that have excluded Indigenous students and teachers in the classrooms and marginalised their languages (Mato, 2015a), and thus excluded their perspectives, histories, knowledge, and learning methods. That is to say, "the modern/colonial world-system consists of making subjects [who] are socially located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference, to think epistemically like the ones in the dominant positions" (Grosfoguel, 2011b, p. 6) for which language is nodal. In general, they do not speak English.

In Spanish, we discussed and made corrections, revisions, and adjustments. I have done the translations into English. The technicalities of finding the right wording, considering that "terms and concepts are not only historically and discursively contingent, [but] they are also relational" (Salaymeh, 2021, pp. 252–253), and thus are difficult to isolate from contexts and meanings, has implied to move forward and backwards on our own ideas. I recognise, following Hermans (2003), that the translation is the inevitable "companion and instrument of cross-temporal, cross-lingual, and cross-cultural interpretation" (Hermans, 2003, p. 382) and a way to deal with these crossings in the most ethical way possible has been to share, revisit, rethink, reframe, rewrite as many times as necessary to portray in the best way possible our personal yet common understandings.

I also recognise that was a complex process, as the meaning, contexts, and nuances may not always be accurately conveyed. Furthermore, certain linguistic and cultural concepts do not have direct equivalents, which became difficult to capture the full essence of the story/experience told. With this, I do not pretend to advocate the exotification, miscomprehension, miscommunication, and inaccessibility as consequences (intended or not) of not-translations or partial translations (Salaymeh, 2021). On the contrary, the problem resides in that non-colonial languages must always be translated to colonial, dominant logics, such as Spanish, English, and French, among others, and the translation never happens from non-colonial language to colonial language. Therefore, it is difficult for colonial

logics to make sense of various languages and thus of various worldviews, resulting in epistemic dispossession (Leyva Solano, 2021) and erasures (Patel, 2015).

On the other hand, the translation process has been an enriching way to weave our "world"-travelling and to foster deep coalitions. Following Asad (2018), "every translation from one natural language to another – or even within one language – is, in ways both trivial and profound, also a transformation" (Asad, 2018, p. 6). Translating was a process that made us accountable among ourselves while considering the various audiences for each text. Personally, it was a creative way to think deeper, to use other ways beyond the academic jargon to bridge, weave, and make sense of those personal and collective meanings.

Therefore, the process of weaving this thesis has been about spaces in which we hold for each other and disrupt mainstream narratives while creating new, different ones that encourage radical change. Not necessarily in the larger dominant sphere, as Cairo (2022) proposes, but in the smaller spaces and personal relations in front of us. To use storytelling techniques was a way to challenge the conventional academic forms by exemplifying that empirical knowledge is not in conflict with theory or other forms of expression (Cairo, 2022), resonating with the enfleshed experiences as sources of theory (Ahmed, 2014; Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2003; Motta, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Motta & Bermudez, 2019).

Positionality considerations

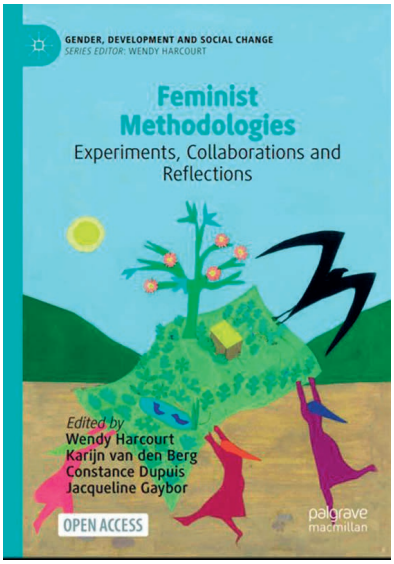
Both in this introduction and in each chapter, the reader will be able to unravel elements of my plural political enunciations, in which my feminisms and my processes of decolonisation are permanent dialogues that cross and have built each section of this thesis. Personal and collective dialogues that inform from where I am weaving my/our arguments. However, I would like to point out some aspects that might not be spoken out loud or clearly transmitted. In one aspect, and following Icaza (2015), I recognise "the horizon of possibilities imposed on us as female academics from the 'south' and 'educated' by the academia of core countries in the geopolitics of knowledge […] condemned to deny our origin and relationship to those 'other' women, for many of us to be desenraizada (un-rooted) became a sign of emancipation and freedom" (Icaza, 2015, p. 5).

On the contrary, while cultivating this thesis, my academic process has been to identify the horizon of possibilities that make coalitions possible. Identifying these was instrumental in developing spaces of emancipation and freedom. Discussing, sharing, reflecting, and feeling with diverse women, recognising myself – my privileges, my 'un-rootedness', our coincidences – also through the intersectional, decolonial, and Indigenous/community feminist literature has led me to deeply review the implications of this process, assuming the inconsistencies and tensions as points of departure (Icaza et al., 2018). For me, the inconsistencies, tensions, and even the uncertainties that are naming myself, positioning myself, and stating my intentions in this research process – changing, inconsistent – have been processes of permanent self-critical reflexivity as failure (Motta, 2022b). That is to say, a self-reflexivity that is not a linear or flawless process but rather involves moments of uncertainty, discomfort, and the potential for mistakes. Embracing failure, Motta (2022) suggests, is essential in challenging dominant power structures and engaging in transformative praxis, as it allows for critical examination of one's own biases and complicity in oppressive systems. Acknowledging and learning from failures can lead to deeper self-awareness, humility, and a more authentic engagement with social justice struggles.

Therefore, for me, critical, constant, kind reflexivity has become a constant practice beyond this research. From there, I question the way I inhabit the world, how I relate and with whom, how I understand myself based on my history and my context; how I "world"-travel and which worlds transform me; which worlds I also transform – intentionally and unintentionally. How am I contributing to more responsible and respectful relational understandings and practices (Wilson, 2008)? These questions have also led me to think of this thesis as grounding, as rooting in the political struggles that inspire and in maintaining connections between action and reflection in praxis (Icaza et al., 2018).

CHAPTER IV

Methodologies for collaborative, respectful, and caring research: Conversations with Professional Indigenous Women from Mexico



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Point of departure

This text resulted from many encounters and journeys – physical, intellectual, and emotional. This text began in a feminist-academic retreat among friends and colleagues who met in Bolsena, Italy, in 2020 to reflect on our work collectively. We spent a few days sharing thoughts and perspectives of what we do as women, as researchers. Connecting and shaping our places of enunciation, we share time, stories, wine, food, walks, and swims in the lake. We explored together. We valued our work together. We wrote together. It was a watershed for me due to the support from which I felt safe navigating academia. Feeling safe in what I say and how I say it. It was a care space that inspired me to reflect and write about care as part of the methodological process in my research.

From those days, this text was cultivated. I present two of the 17 encounters I had with professional Indigenous women during my fieldwork in the Spring

of 2019. Our common points of departure (the IFP, to study outside Mexico, and the relevance – or irrelevance – of doing a degree) led us to, and constantly criss-crossed during our reflective conversations: the experiences we shared as students abroad, the thoughts about the meaning of having a degree, about being decisive women challenging stereotypes, about our feminisms.

Writing this text gave me the opportunity to reflect on the value that care can signify as a source of knowledge that, I believe, is always collaborative and relational. The freedom to use my narrative and my own reflective process allowed me to exchange ideas and share ourselves from those multiple yet same selves from ten to 15 years ago. I wrote in Spanish. This helped me to let go/release my writing from the academic structure to tell my *senti-pensar* (Méndez Torres et al., 2013). However, it was also necessary to share the drafts with the two protagonists and discuss them. To do the translation to English to include the text in the book and the revision process represented a challenge but also a space for transformation (Asad, 2018) that will be addressed in the chapter.

Research question

This chapter answers the main question about how graduate education has informed Indigenous women's professional trajectories and how they have contributed to the position of other narratives about Indigenous women through the reflections and enfleshed experiences of Marcela and Miriam. Marcela is a Zapotec agricultural promoter from Oaxaca and an expert in organic certification. She contributes to her community of origin, and more broadly in the region, by producing coffee, developing new coffee variations, and managing and linking institutions and communities. For her, the opportunities derived from her master's studies in Chile gave her knowledge, skills as an agronomist, and abilities for writing proposals and for projects to obtain economic resources for her community. The master's studies also broadened her job opportunities and networks. As for the barriers faced, when she returned, she was questioned in her community and the region because she was challenging women's roles. However, she earned respect and recognition over time by dismantling the idea of the professional.

On the other hand, Miriam, a Maya from Yucatán, reflects on how the master's degree in audiovisual communications was less valuable for her professional

development than she expected. Nepotism, racism, and pre-established contacts/networks define management positions in Mexico. Studying in Spain, in a city like Deusto, made her feel alienated and racialised; the gazes of scrutiny from the people in the public transport or when walking in the streets did hurt her feelings. She did not feel welcome (matters also discussed in Chapter V). For her, the opportunities derived from having a degree took her to be a professor at a state university in Yucatán – which she did not expect. It turned out to be a space for professional development that gave her economic stability and recognition. She teaches and works with (Maya) students and promotes the Maya language and culture among them.

Frames and shifts

As mentioned, this text introduces part of the methodological process of this the sis as an exercise to reflect on how to generate knowledge that considers multiple standpoints (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991) that are anti-oppressive (Brown & Strega, 2005), collaborative, and caring. It is based on feminist, Indigenous, decolonial, and transformative methodologies for framing collaboration and caring practices (Brown & Strega, 2005; Icaza, 2017; Lugones, 2003; Motta, 2022b; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). This text also shows my personal process of constant self-reflectivity (Rose, 1997) and a narrative that was shaped through time, exposing temporalities and contexts that are not fixed, yet are connected (Willemse, 2014). I shared some ethical and epistemic challenges as tenets that nourish how the methodology and the research were initially built. Conceptually, this chapter also reflects on care, collaboration, diverse narratives, and enfleshed experiences that here were framed considering the literature I was revising at the time. There are shifts in the feminist thinking I engaged in then from those introduced in the previous section. These shifts represent my academic journey.

For instance, I use the idea of what Willemse (2014) calls "texts-in-contexts" as narratives that represent and happen at certain times and spaces but also imply changing positions due to political, social, economic, and/or religious variations of the places where research takes place, and also due to the people, and the researcher's own journeys. Changes that lead us to reflect and see differently. Later when reading Lugones (2003), I moved from this perspective to look at the

deeper, enfleshed "adaptations" that especially women of colour must perform to "belong" rather than only the "external" contexts. However, Willemse's (2014) analysis worked to refer to the various texts, narrative styles, contents, extensions, and analytical elements from where I narrated the encounters presented.

I am also aware of the inconsistencies between the standpoint theory (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991) used here and the decolonial perspectives. Standpoint theory highlights the significance of marginalised perspectives and argues that social positions and experiences shape knowledge and understanding. Similarly, decoloniality foregrounds the need to decolonise knowledge and challenge Western-centric epistemologies. Both frameworks recognise the importance of engaging with diverse perspectives and resisting oppressive systems of knowledge production. However, a disconnection arises in the limited attention given to the specific socio-historical and cultural contexts of marginalised communities within standpoint theory. At the same time, decoloniality explicitly centres colonial legacies and calls for dismantling colonial structures.

Likewise, I have reflected further on self-reflexivity (Rose, 1997) framed in this chapter, looking at Motta's (2022b) recognition of "failure", highlighting how dominant discourses of self-reflexivity often reinforce oppressive power structures, hinder genuine transformative change, or reproduce the European gaze. Icaza (2017) made me think about how to handle the complexities and the possibilities of our plural positionalities as researchers, resonating with Lugones' (2003) plural selves. The enfleshed concept of "world"-travelling here, although not discussed, could be perceived as a way to recognise the multiple inner selves with which to navigate oppressive systems and, from that plurality, recognise in the "others" – also plural – the opportunity to articulate ideas of justice and liberation (Lugones, 2003).

These are lively conversations, enfleshed experiences framed by care and respect, happening in unexpected spaces and weaving bonds that go beyond research, are closer to the realities we live in and want to transform. Encounters that took me to reflect on their contributions as professional Indigenous women and on my role as a researcher, as well as reflect on the way I transmit their stories – and my own stories within theirs. I hope the reader can feel this in the next text.

Introduction. Setting common ground

In this chapter, I share the methodological process I have followed throughout my doctoral research. The process focuses on learning about and reflecting on the expectations related to graduate education and the consequent professional and community journeys of a group of Indigenous women from Mexico.[1] I met them several years ago when they obtained a scholarship to carry out master's and doctoral studies in the first initiative to allow original people[2] to pursue graduate degrees. From 2001 to 2012, I worked for the Ford Foundation in the International Fellowships Program (IFP) and from 2013 onwards for the federal government in the Graduate Scholarship Programme for Indigenous People (Probepi).[3] Although the grants were for both men and women, my interest has focused on the stories and experiences of the latter because of the deeper exclusions they undergo due to the intersections of race, gender, and class.

At IFP-Probepi, my responsibilities, first as a programme officer and later as an executive coordinator, required involvement in the entire operational process, interacting with candidates who became selected fellows, degree students, and alums. The small work team was five members. We were all familiar with the whole implementation as most of us worked there from the beginning to the end of IFP and changes were made since 2013. This process included designing dissemination campaigns, organising selection committees, and setting up pre-academic courses. We worked with the fellows to find master's and doctoral programmes and universities that suited their professional interests in monitoring students' performances and organising alum workshops and activities. During that decade of interacting with hundreds of Indigenous women, a series of concerns – discomforts – arose in me, resulting from first-hand knowledge of the

1. My doctoral research was undertaken at the International Institute of Social Studies of the Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS-EUR) in The Netherlands.
2. I will use the term "Indigenous" or "original peoples" interchangeably as both are equally used by the research participants.
3. Probepi has been sponsored by the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT). Both programmes have been administered and executed by the Centre for Research and Higher Education in Social Anthropology (CIESAS).

stories of those who applied for a scholarship. These were stories from women who had been the first in their families or in their communities to go to university; women who as girls had to attend primary schools in boarding schools far from home, in other regions, in other states. Women's stories were sometimes products of collective efforts, and sometimes solitary struggles, generally painful, complex processes.

For the Indigenous women who applied for scholarships, the dream of completing a degree meant an opportunity and a multi-pronged challenge. On the one hand, the academic world presented them with the difficulty of meeting standards higher than the educational system had offered them throughout their schooling. Challenges continued with discrimination by taking up room, or "invading", according to Puwar (2004), university spaces unaccustomed to Indigenous bodies, knowledges, and methodologies. On the other hand, pursuing education also meant breaking with 'obligations' of their communities – marrying, having children, and making tortillas.[4] What would happen to them when they returned from completing their masters and doctorates? In a country like Mexico, wounded by its colonial history (Mignolo, 2011), inherently racist, sexist, and classist, would having a solid academic career make a difference? Would they be accepted in their communities – women breaking stereotypes? Would they find more or better opportunities for professional development – women historically excluded from the system?

To answer these questions, as a feminist researcher, I thought that the most appropriate thing to do was to ask them directly. Talk it over. I had met them at an important stage in their lives. Perhaps I got to know them in one of the programme's dissemination talks, in the workshops to apply for the IFP-Probepi scholarships, or during the interview process. Surely I met them during their three or four-year journey as students, as alums and some as members of

4. According to many of the stories shared by IFP-Probepi fellows, knowing how to make them is a symbol of femininity and family bonding as corn tortillas are the main product in a Mexican households' meal.

the programme's selection committees.[5] Surveys and interviews would not be enough or even adequate. I believe in methodological approaches that are anti-oppressive (Brown & Strega, 2005), based on "other practices" that challenge Western knowledge production (Smith, 2012), and that seek to promote relationships of reciprocity, collaboration and mutual recognition (Wilson, 2008). Therefore, using only conventional methods (surveys and interviews) would be incongruous, even disrespectful, with what I understand as feminist ways of knowledge production. By this, I mean positioned practices that recognise and assume the individual and collective responsibilities implied. Reflective and narrative practices are not exempt from inconsistencies in the representations produced but which, when assumed, locate the arguments from that imperfection, depicting complex realities and intricate power relations in the production of knowledge.

To talk about feminist methodologies is, for me, to recognise that thought is collective and contextual, in time, in space, and in the circumstances. Thought is also about sharing. It is about time. Time to dialogue – with the participants and collaborators, with oneself – to digest, to marinate the ideas and perspectives from where to reflect, question, and transform the social problem we are exploring. Hence, my methodological journey has entailed a constant exercise of reflection – confrontational and questioning – on the implications that producing knowledge implies. It has required paying attention to the forms, substance, background, contexts, personal and collective interests, and temporalities (the ephemerality of an encounter and the permanency of memory; to the vulnerability of shared emotions). My methodological journey required fluency. It required care. Caring, not as frailty, and quite the opposite. Caring to generate partial and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991) that contribute with strength, conviction, and clarity to the methodological and epistemic mosaic that intersec-

5. IFP-Probepi offers a series of supports and activities that involve a long and consistent collaboration between fellows and administrative staff. In addition to financial resources to cover university fees and living expenses, IFP-Probepi considers up to one year of academic courses prior to the start of the graduate programmes. IFP-Probepi also provides advice and management to identify and apply to universities and programmes related to the interests of the selected fellows. During the studies, a close, individualised monitoring is done to accompany the scholarship holder until they obtain their degrees. Follow-up activities, professional reintegration workshops, and academic forums have been organised for graduates. Several alums have been part of the programme's selection committees. All these processes imply a close and long-term relationship between all the parties involved, from administrative and executive staff to the students and alums themselves.

tional feminist proposals (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015) and Indigenous and decolonial (Brown & Strega, 2005; Smith, 2012; Walsh et al., 2002; Wilson, 2008) have inspired.

That is why, looking to find common ground with the participants of the research, I used what I have called reflective conversations,[6] which are discussions and encounters that depart from common and mutual understandings of the IFP-Probepi but also the graduate studies or our diverse feminisms; understandings through which we find and examine ourselves at multiple times and in multiple spaces. Through conversation, I was looking for a link beyond obtaining information, systematising it and presenting it as a final and individual product. I wanted us to look at each other, to recognise who we were and who we are; that they knew me both as the programme officer and the executive coordinator of IFP-Probepi with whom they worked on logistical issues and as a researcher interested in understanding and shedding light on their struggles and resistances.

The research was the initial motivation to contact them again. The process required several meeting points: first, by e-mail and other electronic means to share my objectives; later, in personal encounters in their communities or places of residence. Afterwards, in virtual group meetings, I shared the preliminary findings from those face-to-face conversations: individual talks that resulted in some – unexpected – coincidences that I thought were worthy of discussion in groups. Furthermore, finally, an ongoing, permanent process of sharing texts produced with the protagonists involved. This last process has implied that I write in Spanish (our common language), receive feedback, adjust their suggestions, and have their approval to publish, among others. It has been a feminist, collaborative approach that has required time, trust, and care.

After considering an initial framing to develop my research, I contacted 36 IFP-Probepi alums who completed their graduate studies between 2002 and 2014 (71 had completed by 2015), explaining the objectives, scope, and implications of my doctoral project. Intending to have a diverse group, I invited women from various Indigenous groups and states, as well as those with diverse academic

6. I have not found much literature that deepens or describes this method. In *Beyond method: Strategies for social research*, Gareth Morgan (1983) mentions the importance of conducting critical conversations between researchers and participants as an epistemic and methodological basis for the "scientific method", from which plural perspectives are promoted.

interests and understandings of community belonging. Such understandings vary depending on multiple circumstances, such as if they had to migrate from their villages, towns or regions of origin; or those whose parents are from two Indigenous groups, among others. The final group was made up of 17 Indigenous women: three Maya women from Yucatan, one Nu Savi woman (Mixteca), six Zapotec women, one Huave woman from Oaxaca, two Nahua women from Veracruz, one Chol woman, one Tseltal woman, one Tsotsil woman from Chiapas, and one Rarámuri woman from Chihuhua. Their areas of specialisation are sociology, gender, law, anthropology, education, agronomy, and rural development, among others. Some completed their degrees more than ten years ago, and the most recent woman did so in 2014. Their current age ranges vary between 25 and 57 years, and the age range when they completed their degrees was between 24 and 40 years; two of them were mothers then, and four others had children later on (six of the 17 are currently mothers).[7] Two pursued doctoral degrees, and 15 pursued master's degrees. The majority studied outside of Mexico, and those that stayed in the country moved outside their states or regions of origin. Three did not complete their master's degrees. Their inclusion in the group was deliberate to know and understand their motives, as well as the implications on a personal and professional level. They are fundamental stories to look at and to disentangle the intersections between race, gender, and class that should inform educational policies directed at racialised women.

While working at IFP -Probepi, I was closer with some of the Indigenous women granted with an scholarships than others. I would dare say that in general there was mutual respect, and in some cases, mutual affection and care. Therefore, the methodological process of the research started from those bonds of respect, affection, and care. In this chapter, I will describe how respect, caring, and collaboration played a valuable methodological role. These elements allowed me to understand their paths in a much clearer way, the importance of the IFP-Probepi for their journey, and to address my research questions while building knowledge

7. Motherhood and/or the formation of a family is an important aspect to mention, since it is part of the tensions that several participants mentioned. The dynamics of professional development, the expectations that their communities and families have about them as women, and "the lack of candidates [potential partners] who are not afraid of me" as one of them said, is an equation not easy to solve for most women in Mexico.

that goes beyond the mere objective of writing a doctoral thesis and thus is more closely linked to the reality we want to transform.

I present two encounters that, on the one hand, reflect these three elements – respect, affection, and caring – in the process of building my research, and on the other, these elements are a sample of diverse narratives or "texts-in-context" (Willemse, 2014) resulting from the same methodological process. These are narratives that represent and happen at a certain time and in a certain space. The narratives imply changing positions, due to the political, social, economic, and religious variations of a place that are modified and modify us (Willemse, 2014) and also due to our own individual journeys that lead us to reflect or see differently. The two encounters took place in the cities of residence of each participant – one in Oaxaca city and the other in Valladolid, in the State of Yucatan. Meeting in the cities was important to talk in spaces familiar to them and in which they felt confident, as well as for me to understand and contextualise some of their professional and personal dynamics. Although neither live directly in their communities of origin, they reside in the same state and region. The meaning and the sense of belonging travel; they are not fixed; they are wide but concrete (Aguilar Gil, 2020b).

Before going into the stories, I would like to pinpoint something about my narrative inspired by the recognition that Wilson (2008) makes of the relationship between his own research as a Canadian Indigenous person and his readers. He speaks of the difficulty of finding a middle ground between those who do not know the contexts, meanings, or backgrounds portrayed (for which it is necessary to dedicate more time and describe in greater detail what is intended) and those for whom too many explanations or details could be seen as a lack of respect for their intelligence (Wilson, 2008, p. 7). My own writing process in these pages has straddled these same tensions. When I write, I think of the participants with whom I have shared the drafts and for whom so much contextual clarification is unnecessary. I also think of international readers who do not know the reality I seek to describe. I apologise for the inconsistencies that this entails. I hope the balance is respectful to everyone.

The texts I am sharing are brief and different in terms of what they narrate, but also in their rhythms, their contents, their extensions, the analytical elements

they offer, and even the times they were written. Their form is an example and a reflection of our conversations and of my own process of critical reflexivity (Rose, 1997) from which I assume the uncontrollable effect of the incongruences, absences, and failures implied. At the beginning of each one, I explain how and when I wrote them and reflect on my motivation for writing. At the end of the two stories, I try to weave some of those elements together that are valuable in a methodological process that seeks care and respect as central to the production of knowledge. The reflections are shared and collective, and the narrative is mine.

The narratives

Marcela: The food and the microbus[8]

After having lunch at a restaurant near Marcela's work in Oaxaca city, where we began our conversation, we went together by micro[9] to our respective destinations. She went home to prepare for the next day's trip to the neighbouring State of Chiapas as an inspector of organic products in rural communities. I was at the hotel where I had come to meet other IFP-Probepi alums to discuss my research. Our route, up to a point, was the same. We accompany each other. We take care of each other. The food was a preamble to talk a little about everything and nothing about our health, food, and sexism in Mexico. Despite the differences that separate us, the dissimilar stories that have forged us, we also have coincidences and empathies that unite us: the difficult journey of graduate studies, our diverse feminisms, and our anti-racist positions. Furthermore, it is from there that our conversation was built.

8. The quotes in this narrative correspond to the reflective conversation with Marcela Avella Cruz (Avella Cruz, 2019).
9. *Peseros* or *colectivos* (microbuses) in Mexico are the most used public transport, generally characterised by their poor condition, and the careless driving of the drivers. They cost between MXN $3 and MXN $10 (USD 0.15 to USD 0.50) depending on the region and the distance travelled.

The restaurant where we met was close to Marcela's work. I suggested it, but she knew it well. A simple *fonda*[10] run by Doña Luz,[11] a Tehuana woman[12] who, while cooking, served us and continuously interrupted our conversation – in a very casual, friendly way – to tell a little about each dish, about her colourful clothing, and about her personal history. At one point, she sat down with us and joined our reflections. We were commenting on some of the problems in Marcela's community when Doña Luz referred to the Indigenous people of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec with distance and with a certain condescension and a patronising tone. Marcela and I looked at each other with complicity, saying nothing. We silently understood the complexities of the sense of identity.

Tehuanas like Doña Luz are Zapotec, 'Indigenous' if we use one of the official terms to name and group the original peoples.[13] However, she did not identify as such. That moment, that comment, our crossed gazes, led Marcela and me to reflect on the subject later. The place mattered. The physical space of our encounter helped contextualise the conversation, for the ideas to flow, and for us to find various references to bridge and connect our ideas.

During the trip in the micro, having already addressed all the issues related to my research, I turned the recorder off.[14] Our hearts met in memories that were also part of that present and other reflections arose. In the brief story I share below, I reflect on the transition between ideas and spaces that allowed us to talk loosely, deeply, and respectfully. The text weaves my narrative with Marcela's stories and words. It provides some analytical elements around topics such as the relevance of graduate education and identity tensions that are valuable for discussing the intersections in higher education between gender, race, and class,

10. *Fondas* are local restaurants characterised by homemade food, normally prepared by the owners who also attend the customers.
11. I use a pseudonym to respect the anonymity of the women involved in the narrative.
12. Tehuana is originally from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a Zapotec region known, among other things, for the strong presence of merchant women, who proudly wear beautiful petticoats and colourful huipiles (embellished blouses or dresses).
13. Mexico has 68 groups that represent 20% of the population (more than 25 million people). Although the Indigenous people live throughout the country, the southeast region has the highest concentration. Almost 30% of the Indigenous population live only between Oaxaca and Chiapas. Oaxaca is the state with the most groups: 16 groups representing 14.4% of the Indigenous population (El Economista, 2018).
14. At the beginning of each of the 17 conversations, I asked for permission to record them and explained the importance for my reflective process. To do so, I followed the ISS-EUR ethical protocols (International Institute of Social Studies-Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS-EUR), 2019).

but are not the reason for this chapter. I wrote the text immediately after meeting Marcela, inspired and excited to have spent a warm afternoon with her (physically and emotionally speaking). It was a meeting that kept us close.

Oaxaca, 19 November 2019

Microbus conversations

At age 11, Marcela was looking for the moon from the window of the room she shared with many other girls at the boarding school she went to in Puebla, 460 kms away from Tanetze de Zaragoza, her hometown in Oaxaca. She asked for or was assigned the farthest bed, the one in the corner, the one that overlooked that window that allowed her to look at her parents through the moon. Every night she looked at it for a long time, whether full, waning, or new. For her, the moon was a convex reflector that transported her to her village, where she imagined her parents also looking up at it. She portrayed them mirroring her lying on the bed, scared, and they comforted her by talking in silence. It was not a cliché. Neither she nor her parents, as in a novel, had agreed to meet on the moon to close the distance. For Marcela, this was a concrete fact, a practice that ran in her Zapotec blood, and at that moment, she used it to find love and care. It was a way of feeling accompanied and making sense of the need to study so far away from home.

When she was interviewed for the IFP scholarship in 2002 to do graduate studies in rural development, the selection committee members asked her if she thought she had leadership skills. Marcela said she would be the first woman in her town to get a master's degree if she got the scholarship. She did not know if they would understand and translate what that meant if they had the faintest idea about her academic trajectory. She was unsure if that was a good answer, but that was the only thing that passed through her mind.

With the first sip of coffee that Doña Luz served us, Marcela immediately recognised that it had cardamom. "How can you tell?" I asked, surprised and embarrassed by my lack of palate. I am a producer and coffee taster. It is my personal project with my mom and dad. We even have our own strain! Coffee allowed us to become commoners with hearts of small landowners (she laughed

here), although our family project has influenced the community. Several families have resumed planting and selling coffees lost due to a lack of resources. I have helped the families manage support from the government and other institutions to get grain and machinery (Avella Cruz, 2019).

Although Marcela lives in Oaxaca city, where she works as an inspector of organic products, her family-personal-community project is in Tanetze, with her coffee plantations: "I dream of selling coffee in my town and that tourists go there, get to know the region and learn from the people. That they enjoy our coffee" (Avella Cruz, 2019).

While the micro took us from the Yunenisa restaurant, where Doña Luz's food triggered contextualised reflective discussions, to the centre of Oaxaca city, Marcela delved into what could be interpreted as leadership. She wondered what it meant for an 11-year-old girl to agree to go to a boarding school in another state, 460 kms away, to continue with secondary school. I think she had not seen it so clearly until then. There we were, sharing memories in the old and dilapidated micro with broken and open windows allowing the air to reduce the heat, with reggaeton at full volume, a ventriloquist doing his act looking to get some pesos, and the potholes that shook us in all directions. It was there that she realised and accepted that since she was a child, she has had a fierce spirit: "I was always like that, decisive" (Avella Cruz, 2019). She laughs. We laugh.

I recognised myself as also decisive and shared with her personal experiences that led us to discuss how, in a patriarchal society like Mexico, to be determined is not a very feminine characteristic – quite the opposite. We laughed, I think, recognising our transgression. Proud of it, acknowledging the implied tensions. Although her parents visited her three months after she left, a little because she had chickenpox and a lot because they wanted her back, she decided to stay. Her heart broke too, but she imagined some family members saying, "Obviously, you couldn't make it", and her pride gave her the strength to send her parents back, confused and devastated. That was, she realised while we were conversing, the beginning of her strong and decisive spirit. The one that has always accompanied her, the one that the selection committee members probably saw and with which she takes advantage of the opportunities she finds and the ones that she creates.

She smiles complicity when she tells me how men – and women – are amazed when they see her driving. She knows well that by taking the steering wheel of

the *vocho*[15] that she bought with the earnings from her job, she breaks with all the stereotypes imposed on her: those of her people and other communities in the region and according to whom she should be at home with her husband and children; and those that come out of *mestizo* and white people's looks, for whom, in addition to being at home surrounded by children, it is assumed it would be difficult for her to have finished primary school – therefore being able to know how to drive or to have the economic means to buy a car: "I have a vehicle, degrees and I participate in the local assembly, and with those three I have enough so that they do not accept me" (Avella Cruz, 2019). The laughter intensifies – hers, mine. Our connection continues to grow. I feel sexism is the same in my own trajectory as a middle-class, urban woman. The details are different.

We said goodbye in the micro. She got off before me. I stayed with the reggaeton, the shaking, and the immense satisfaction of having met her again, of having shared valuable reflections to understand the complexities and tensions that being a professional Indigenous woman means. However, above all, I was pleased to have confirmed that we are women looking to promote dynamics and spaces of inclusion, respect, and equality. In some way, we agreed, even without naming it as such, that we live what writer Sarah Ahmed (2017) calls "a feminist life". That is, in our daily actions, in the way we understand and relate with others and within our own surroundings, we challenge and discuss the structural sexism that still oppresses.

How do I link this narrative to my understanding of a feminist methodology? In one sense, I think that it was an encounter of sharing, caring, bonding, and thinking together. A space, a moment where we coincided and reflected on topics I was interested in for my research but that Marcela said she thinks about all the time. She told me she was happy to find someone with whom to discuss, lean on, complain, and laugh about those thoughts and her experiences. She was happy to remember part of who she is and recognise the value of her professional trajectory: important reflections for self-esteem.

On the other hand, the narrative and the possibility of publishing a chapter that includes our encounter became an excuse to continue discussing the text at a dis-

15. A *vocho* is a Volkswagen sedan model and was the most accessible vehicle in Mexico until 2003, when it was discontinued.

tance, as I am back in The Netherlands. Some of the writing has been done while drinking Marcela's coffee BI'AVELLA that I brought from my last trip to Mexico at the end of 2020. Some academic processes go beyond doing research and are more connected to the reality in which we live, which we question, which we want to transform through relationships and processes built from and with care.

Miriam: The market and the cenote[16]

I am writing this text in April 2020, six months after seeing Miriam. We are in the middle of the Covid-19 crisis that spilled over several weeks ago. I am in The Hague, in The Netherlands, locked up at home, working. The most fluid and inspiring way to review the conversations with my research participants is to listen to them while walking in the woods close to where I live. I review the audio recordings and return to the exact moment of our encounter. I think about the value of alternative methodologies – feminists, intersectional, Indigenous, decolonial, anti-oppressive – as helpful to situate multiple representations that qualitative research requires and for promoting innovative dynamics to interact with the various actors involved during the process to produce knowledge, including our own reflexivity.

As I walk, I listen, remember, feel, and look at the space where each meeting took place. The emotions triggered, the discussions opened. I listen and confirm the importance of widely exposing the stories of the Indigenous women I talked with. Our encounters, our differences, and our commonalities. They must be known. I listen to the deep reflections that emerge from casual conversations, dialogued from similar understandings that somehow weave us together. I also recognise how malleable our perceptions could be, making sense of the changing and fluid positions Willemse (2014) writes about.

I listen to the conversation with Miriam. It took place in Valladolid, Merida, while we were eating in the market and walking through the city in a spontaneous and unforeseen "walkshop" (Leach, 2014; Wickson et al., 2015). It was a walk

16. The quotes in this narrative correspond to the reflective conversation with Miriam Uitz May (Uitz May, 2019).

that allowed us to interact, get inspired, let ideas flow more freely, and diminish hierarchies (Leach, 2014). The walk extended our time together, contextualising and stimulating our reflections. The conversation gave meaning to Miriam's arguments about the complexities of the Mayan identity; so present and so denied. Her struggle and contributions seek to reposition her mother tongue and culture (Maya) within the university space, where she started working ten years ago because it is in academia, she said, where graduate studies really count (Uitz May, 2019). The master's degree gave her a contract as a full-time teacher at the Universidad de Occidente (UNO), a job that, as she will narrate, she never thought she would be doing.

Valladolid city is small and little more than 1000 km2, inhabited by about 75,000 people, of whom more than 55,000 speak Maya (INEGI, 2020). The Mexican syncretism, characterised by the cultural mix of the original peoples and the Spanish colony, has the shape of cenotes, a central plaza with a church and an archaeological zone, summarising the historical condensation of an Indigenous region on which the colonial structure was imposed. It is an overlap that is noticeable in its streets, in the urban layout, in the denial of its inhabitants by their origin. However, it is the power of that denied culture that is imposed on the faces and bodies that walked through it – their clothing, the food that is consumed – which defines it. The materiality of the landscape was a reference that facilitated the reflection (Wickson et al., 2015, p. 245). Walking it, feeling it, and knowing it at the hand of Miriam allowed me to contextualise her frustrations and the dimensions of her struggles.

Valladolid, 9 October 2019

Walking conversation

I arrived in Valladolid with another participant from my research with whom I had spent most of the previous day in Merida. Breakfast turned into lunch, and between our talks, I told her that I would see Miriam. As they knew each other from IFP-Probepi, she proposed coming with me and convinced a friend to take us. The journey from Merida was around one and a half hours, during which we continued the conversation that extended our meeting: the topic was racism wi-

thin the higher education system. We could not talk much during the trip because it was better to have the windows open and let our voices disappear with the air than to be suffocated by the humidity of the Yucatecan tropics. The car was old, and the air conditioning did not work.

We met Miriam on a corner on the outskirts of the city. She parked her car, and we hugged each other fondly before she got out. We have had a good connection since she applied for a scholarship in 2004 to study visual communication. Miriam drives and owns a car, just like Marcela. In her case, perhaps she breaks less with the imaginary of what being Indigenous Mayan means. We did not talk about it, but in addition to being originally from a more urban community, she is now a professor at a university. Different contexts, different circumstances; similar exclusions, similar discriminations, like the racism and sexism they experience. We went to the market to have lunch. A solid and roofed warehouse opened at its ends, which prevented a greenhouse effect. Miriam and I sat at a separate table from the other two companions so we could talk calmly.

The place was less than suitable. The openings in the warehouse and the naturally noisy movement of a market prevented us from speaking with that expected calm. However, as soon as we sat down, the *tambora*[17] started. I turned on my cell phone recorder. Miriam took it and placed it next to her, a gesture that demonstrated her experience as a communicator. While we ate, we talked briefly about her experience finishing her master's degree at the University of Deusto in Spain. Since we had to shout and sit close to each other, we decided to get out of there. We went for a walk.

We went to the cenote that is in the middle of the city. It is a majestic expression of nature and the sacred power of the Indigenous cosmogony: holistic and rooted in the earth. It is also an expression of the privatisation projects that manipulate symbols and traditions for the commercialisation of tourism. We talked while we walked, and we had a sustained intellectual discussion grounded in context (Wickson et al., 2015). The words were connected by the surroundings, by other passersby, by the buildings, by the humid 'fresh' air, according to Miriam and our other two companions. The noise and urban movement, the cars, the

17. The tambora is an instrument (drum and cymbals) and a type of music from the north of the country characterised by its percussion sound.

pedestrians and the irregular sidewalks interrupted the rhythm of our ideas. Cut out and in pieces, our ideas still became deep and solid reflections on the troubles of her professional trajectory.

On the one hand, Miriam pursuing graduate studies meant leaving Yucatan and learning about other realities and other struggles that helped her to reference her own. She learned from the Basques to defend her identity daily: by using the language, eating the food, and taking care of her territory. However, her professional development after the master's degree took her in a different direction. She could not return to the job where she had been promised a place. She was hired for a time in the same organisation but as part of the institution's language catalogue (Uitz May, 2019). She speaks with anger and disappointment:

> *They did not recognise my knowledge and skills as an audiovisual producer or as a communicator, but only as a Mayan-speaking woman. Institutions that call themselves intercultural or inclusive value only the Indigenous belonging, not the Indigenous professional* (Uitz May, 2019).

She told me that her dreams fell apart because she did not have the right networks and because, she said, "I was nobody's daughter". She added, "There is no graduate degree that compares with networks. Neither the title, nor the experience, nor the social commitment could challenge the institutional interests and favouritism" (Uitz May, 2019). She moved to the academy. A foreign world that she never thought to work in but that has allowed her to do what she loves most: audiovisual and radio production in Mayan, by Mayans, and for Mayan people. The academic environment recognised her capacities and gave value to her studies. We probably both concluded that universities are a business that produces and feeds on itself.

After the walk, we stopped to buy pastries and local products. Miriam invited us to her home to meet her family – her husband and two little ones. She seemed proud of her family project but also of the physical space that she and her husband built. We had a glass of water and headed back to Merida, it was already dark, and we still had almost two hours of driving. Opening the doors of her home was a caress to the heart, a bridge of affection that has no return.

A year later, while walking through the woods in The Netherlands, I again considered the complexities of a highly educated Indigenous Mayan woman like Miriam. Successful and with some professional and economic stability, her journey has been painful due to the structural discrimination imposed by a racist system that, despite its discourses of inclusion and diversity, deepens inequalities. Nonetheless, her strategies to strengthen her language and culture begin at home with her children and are extended to her students and the university where she teaches. The effect is manifold. However, her strategies do not erase the pain and frustration that results from the racism and tokenism[18] rooted in many 'intercultural' institutions in Mexico. Her shared experience has made me question the questions of my doctoral research regarding Indigenous women's expectations about graduate education used to overcome exclusions.

The story could go the way it went only by having a face-to-face reflective conversation, with a contextual walk, and honestly trying to bridge those who we were in 2004 when we first met and those who we are now. We continue developing projects together because of sharing, caring, and connecting.[19] Thanks to being inspired by our walking in Valladolid, I decided to do a similar exercise to think about all those encounters that happened as part of my research, which seemed so far away during the Covid-19 pandemic. I realised then, also walking, that I have been using and developing what in academia would be considered an alternative methodology, which I consider as grounded in my feminist perspective of life.

18. Making superficial or symbolic efforts to represent people from under-represented groups in spaces and policies, among other issues, in order to give the impression of sexual or racial inclusion and equality.
19. At the end of 2020, we participated alongside other women who have collaborated in my doctoral research in a Campaign of Actions on the Internet against racism that was sponsored by Cátedra UNESCO in Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro- descendant Peoples in Latin America. As a result of that coalition and with the help of the Professor Rosalba Icaza, ISS-EUR granted us funds to create a blog and write a book about racism and sexism in higher education. The Mujeres y Resistencias blog (2021) was launched in March 2021 and the book at the end of 2023.

Adjusting the research, placing care at the centre

I hope these narratives were inspiring enough to see some aspects I would like to discuss further. They are different in their extension, the analytical elements offered, and the times and emotions with which they were written. Selecting the narratives to be included in this chapter – among the 17 narratives – implied thinking about why these and not others. What did I want to convey?

I chose these narratives for two main reasons and a consideration. The first reason was that they are the most evocative for the purpose of this chapter, which is about sharing what I consider a feminist methodology centred on caring. The second reason was because they represent the mentioned changing and fluid positions in/of the research process. The former leans on descriptive details of the encounters – the contexts, the gazes, the food, the decisions taken, and the emotions triggered – as key elements to frame a thoughtful process of knowledge production. The latter reflects my inspirations stimulated differently – one immediately after a gathering, the other months later, in various settings, moved by other emotions. I must admit that not all of the 17 encounters and the related reflections were so evocative and inspirational. The consideration was that it is important to take into account the closeness, trust, and availability/willingness of the protagonists to read, comment, and give feedback on the text. They were interested in discussing the chapter. They wanted to collaborate. Without their approval, I would not have included them here because my understanding of feminist and Indigenous approaches, as shared here, considers reciprocal, ethical, relational responsibility, and respect (Wilson, 2008).

Marcela and Miriam allowed me to use their stories. We agreed that they would be recognised, without pseudonyms, as part of the relational responsibility of collaborative knowledge production and also to position them as the protagonists of those stories (Wilson, 2008, p. 10). As a *mestiza* (white) woman in coalition with Indigenous women, we are revealing together exclusions, inequalities, injustices. We are exposing resistances and resignifications. They, as Indigenous women professionals, are using this (international) space to expose those exclusions, inequalities, and injustices, to position themselves, and to share their critical perspectives.

Before writing the first draft of this chapter, I sent them, separately, the texts I wrote about our encounters. I wanted them to know how I felt, what our conversations triggered in me and the relevance of our discussions for my research – not for the methodology but as food for thought. I asked them afterwards if I could use their texts to write this chapter. They both agreed. The texts were in Spanish, that besides being our common language, is the one in which I think, feel, and dream. The need to share the following drafts with them was an excuse and has become an opportunity to keep writing in my mother tongue.[20] I have discovered how comfortable the writing process could be and how meaningful the words are when coming from the heart. This exercise has been crucial to developing a collective text and finding my voice as a researcher. The processes of critical reflexivity (Rose, 1997) from which to position ourselves are constant, permanent, collective, and individual. My own reflective exercise, I realise now, started in 2001. However, over time, with the doctoral journey specifically, I have found words to name and express my concerns to set and contextualise the problem.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, the initial objective of my research was to know the stories and perspectives regarding the graduate education of a group of professional Indigenous women and to expose the structural barriers (racism, sexism, and classism) they have faced despite their academic education. Situated, contextual, intersectional research based on feminist methodologies of care and collaboration have been key to the framing and developing and the being coherent in representations I seek to make. Undoubtedly, the women's experiences, ideas, indignations, resistances, struggles, and resignifications have been the substance of my work. It was with them that I spoke; it was from their gazes that I built the central arguments. The need to show the exclusions of the colonial and patriarchal system that persists in Mexico inspired me to do this work. This research is about them because they, and their voices, and their trajectories must be recognised as producers of debates, actions, and social changes.

However, this initial objective is a product of my personal intentions that have been adjusted and complemented as part of the methodology used, that of which knowledge is produced from within, from shared concerns. The centre has moved from exclusively addressing their difficulties (exclusions, oppressions) to looking

20. The language in which I am writing my doctoral thesis is English.

into their resistances: “We don’t want to be the victims of our own stories”, and several agreed. On the contrary, as a coalition, we would like to challenge what, according to Wilson (2008), Western academia tends to replicate: research focused on the problems of Indigenous populations [on disease rather than health] that serve to impose external solutions and reproduce negative stereotypes (Wilson, 2008, p. 16).

Therefore, as part of the collaborative, respectful, and caring methodological processes that I believe in and have developed, I have adjusted my centre to their centre and created a common one. One that, while exposing the inequalities and structural exclusions of Mexico, makes visible Indigenous women’s roles as political and social actors in the new narratives about women. It is their path that holds resistances, transformations, and repositionings as women, as Indigenous people, and as professionals. While promoting their own, they question it. While resisting “the normative”, the Western, the patriarchy, and the oppressive, they use methodological processes to rethink the local and the community. In my experience, then, to shift the centre of a study is necessary to be flexible and humble about our limitations as researchers. It is also necessary to listen, pay attention, and care about our academic objective, the people involved, and the processes triggered.

What does collaboration and caring mean in academia, a world where knowledge is generally produced from the ‘objective’ (meaning exclusive and superior) view of the researcher? Caring was part of looking at my research as a “ceremony” (Wilson, 2008), which is part of a collective dynamic that, as in a ceremony, seeks to produce and bond relationships responsible for themselves and among themselves (Wilson, 2008, pp. 7–8). In its attempt to be honest and attach as much as possible to the multiple representations that it entails, the research was not free from inconsistencies and errors. That intention also led me to validate each text, story, and representation with the protagonists and produce something that, even though it is my responsibility, was shaped by the participants.

Throughout my methodological reflections about caring, I also came across nuances that I consider important to differentiate here. One has to do with the forms of producing knowledge and its translation into academic language, and the other has to do with the substance, with those concerns – discomforts – that

drive us to look more deeply at a social problem. Caring in terms of forms refers, I consider, to the written production and the process that it entails: the importance of respecting the ideas of the collaborators, as well as recognising – naming – the bodies, the stories, the contexts that build the collaborators. The forms consider paying attention to ethical aspects of confidentiality and security of each participant and follow institutional regulations to guarantee the proper use of the information generated.[21]

As for caring in terms of substance, I mean the foundation, the origin that leads us to carry out an investigation and that has to do with that social problem we are interested in exposing, questioning, and solving. This ground must be linked or shared with those who are part of the research and from where to seek a meeting point to reflect together. In other words, what is important in the research process is what motivates it and how that curiosity, that discomfort, dissatisfaction, or that social concern arises and is echoed among researchers and (potential) collaborators or participants.

Although my research began with a specific personal objective, the methodological process has taken me much further. On the one hand, I think that my research has been a valuable contribution to, among other things, promoting what hooks (2015) calls "talk race". That is to say, a political struggle to expose and position the perspectives and voices of Indigenous women as a contribution to a still missing body (or a body still under construction, I would say) of social and political criticism of racialised women regarding racism (hooks, 2015) and other exclusions. On the other hand, and more important methodologically speaking, has contributed to build from the collective, recognizing our individualities within the set of voices that we are and openly share the reflective processes that we deal with. It is about constructing knowledge that roots and shapes us as conscious social beings, critical of a reality that we must transform so that we all have a worthy place in it.

To talk about collaboration, care, and respect as the backbone of my research is talking about everybody, them, me, and us. It has been about sharing, taking

21. As an example of the proper use of generated information: after having systematised the conversations with the 17 participants, I organised three online conversations to present preliminary results and reflections. Their suggestions, comments, and opinions were useful to rethink and adjust some of the ideas or concepts raised.

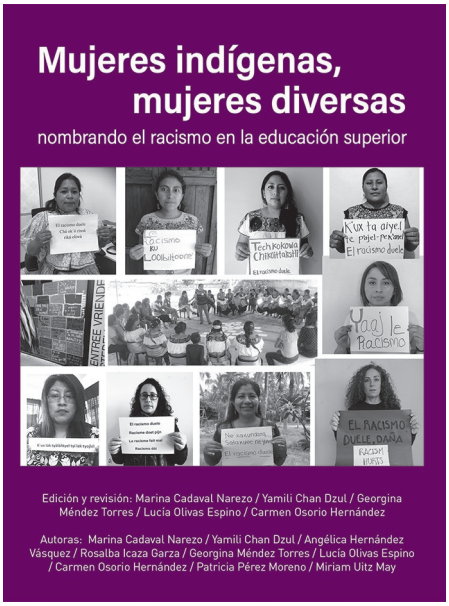
individual and collective decisions, and interpreting silences and complicities. The talk has been about putting ourselves as women at the centre: various, diverse, opposed, partisan, and in coalition. It has been an exercise of imbalances and inconsistencies, but by identifying and naming the imbalances and inconsistencies, I have tried to recognize them. Thinking about the possibility of producing knowledge based on these three principles has been encouraging. The principles are values that emerge from feminist approaches in manifold ways. The approaches teach us to look at and recognise privileges, work with them, look at the pains and take care of them, look at ourselves, and value our contributions. I am learning to think from all of these aspects. From there, I am sharing my experience, hoping to continue challenging and transforming conventional methodologies and the exclusions they entail.

Acknowledgements

I want to deeply thank Miriam Uitz and Marcela Avella for having helped me to build this text. They gave me the encounters that I described and without which my arguments would not make sense. They are enough for me to look at life differently. They have also been generous in reviewing my ideas and clarifying some of their inconsistencies. Above all, I thank them for allowing me to stay close. Marce shares her photos of those coffee seeds turned into 'little soldiers' and 'butterflies', so years later, I will reach for a cup of BI'AVELLA. That Miri tells me about her family entrepreneurship and makes me crave the fried bananas (Don Ja'as) they distribute around Valladolid. I can share with them how my children are growing, what The Netherlands is like. I thank them simply for being a part of my life.

CHAPTER V

Weaving words and reflecting on racism from the collective



Rocío Calderón (2023), Book cover.

This chapter was published as the introduction of the book coauthored by Cadaval Narezo, M., Chan Dzul, Y., Hernández Vásquez, A. Icaza Garza, R., Méndez Torres, G., Olivas Espino, L., Osorio Hernández, C., Pérez Moreno, P. & Uitz May, M. (2023). *Mujeres indígenas, mujeres diversas nombrando el racismo en la educación superior* (Indigenous women, diverse women naming racism in higher education). ISS/EUR - U Yich Lu'um-RETOS-CLACSO.

Point of departure

This chapter was co-written by nine authors – seven Indigenous women from six groups and two mestiza women. As the introductory text, it tells the story of why, how and from where the book was written. This chapter includes a contextual and conceptual approach to racism, particularly in Mexico. The book shows the interweaving of racism with the higher education system, from where we ground and frame our enfleshed narratives. We also present some of our collective discussions about our own experiences of racism and the strategies of resistance, which were indistinctly addressed in the five chapters of the book, each written by various authors – and resumed in this text. As part of our active engagement in the topic, concrete proposals to stop racist practices in higher education institu-

tions are also included. The final section reflects on the relevance of this chapter and the overall book.

The reflections and experiences shared around our racial identities were part of the exercises of positionality and enunciation necessary to unravel that racism that is alive, penetrative, and denying. If, as Segato (2010, p. 32) says, we recognise that race is "a historically informed reading" of signs that are both biological and socially and historically constructed, then we must accept the "variable character of the traces that constitute 'race' as we move contexts". Segato (2010, p. 22) further relates that "[Race is the] fingerprint of dispossessed peoples and now in re-emergence. Race as a travelling, changing track [...] of imprecise character". Race and *mestizaje* is a denied identity that has reproduced racism (Moreno Figueroa, 2016a, 2016b) and from where to question and dismantle structures: if the mestizaje from the 19th century looked to the imperial north for whitening and Eurocentric modernisation, the current discussions should be "an instrument to fracture with that politically anodyne and concealing ethnocidal *mestizaje*" (Segato, 2010, p. 22).

Therefore, this chapter seeks to contribute to the discussions about racism, including *mestizaje* as "ethnocide", as "cancellation of original genealogies" and of "the memory of the non-white" (Segato, 2010, pp. 20, 26), as well as to contribute about race. We focus on practices happening in higher education. The issue of racism in higher education has been widely addressed in the Latin American contexts, for example, through a project of the Cátedra UNESCO and the Universidad Nacional Tres de Febrero (Untref): Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America.[1] However, contextualised reflections arising from Indigenous women's enfleshments and enunciations are still missing. For the authors of the chapter to talk about races, about racism, about the unnameable, about the indefinite, "implies starting a new era in political proposals, which will have to be about amendment, about retying lost lineages, about returning historical consciousness to those from whom was expropriated from it and that today they live in a kind of genealogical orphanage" (Segato, 2010, pp. 21–22). This chapter and the book it introduces contribute by talking about race.

1. See UNESCO-Untref (2018).

Writing this text and being able to use it as part of my thesis is a privilege that took me by surprise. This text was the result of an unexpected process. I never imagined that an individual and solitary doctoral project would become a process of collective reflections. Co-writing with women who have guided my thinking and acting for over 20 years is a privilege because we could spend time reflecting on this text and cultivating this text together. The several online meetings that took place over a year to discuss, write, revise, and comment on the arguments presented here became spaces from which to share and create networks and coalitions. Therefore, this is a collective initiative based on "other practices" different from Western knowledge production (Smith 2012), as we seek the creation and the strengthening of relational bonds among us as participants – and the communities we are part of (Wilson, 2008). This text is a decolonisation project (Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2016) in the way we promote, cultivate, and share our knowledge and who we are.

When I asked them if I could use the text as part of my thesis as a statement itself on the contributions of Indigenous thinkers of collective alliances, they all agreed. This represents a responsibility to extend our work to various spaces. Therefore, this text is more action than theory – I hope the whole thesis is. Although we developed a conceptual section on racism in Mexico as a context to understand our enunciations (Walsh, 2013b), the book aims to expose the thinking and acting of Indigenous women as political actors. Two aspects were essential in carrying out the entire project that resulted in this book: how we (all the participants) committed to work, which was not an equation of percentages and equitable responsibilities, but rather in accompaniments from the possibilities of time, energy, dedication, knowledge, that each one could contribute along the way. It was the care and coalitional acting-thinking that guided the process. The conversations were intimate, respectful, and empathetic; the commitment was to solidarity and to relational accountability. The responsibilities were distributed among all of us: if someone was missing or could not complete the task assumed, someone would take over.

Research question

This chapter answers the main question about how graduate education has informed Indigenous women's professional trajectories and how these women have contributed to positioning other narratives about Indigenous women through enfleshed experiences and collective reflections about racism in higher education. I believe that their contribution is multiple: openly sharing their stories as those places of enunciation from which to be empathetic and caring, accompanying other racialised women, actively contributing to writing proposals, coordinating projects, moderating forums, engaging in social media as political spaces, and engaging in writing, revising, and commenting on academic texts. This process is laid out in bell hooks' (1995) invitation to "talk race".

The chapter offers concrete examples of how professional Indigenous women reflect on and act on the opportunities and barriers they face. We also reflect on how education has been one more link in our professional, political, social, and cultural training. Education has given us tools and language to position ourselves, to contextualise and name barriers such as racism, sexism, and other discriminations. These barriers have also been spaces for contestation, resistance, and enunciation from where to demonstrate, act, and propose. Postgraduate degrees are moments to learn from others and ourselves, obtain vocabulary and concepts to name situations, and build ideas. We have connected, written, and developed all the materials together because we understand how academia works and how we can be part of it while challenging it. Therefore, this chapter also exposes the epistemic injustice in higher education (Icaza, 2022) today that takes many forms, such as epistemic racism, epistemic dispossession, or erasures. For this article, these links are related to the discussions on race. However, in the overall thesis, these links are also present as connections that are not happening in the discussions about Indigenous scholars' presence in and contributions to the education system.

Frames and shifts

The objective of this chapter and of the book is to generate dialogues that display the concrete ways in which structural racism operates within higher education

institutions, as well as to expose the "micro-racisms" (Mamani & Castelli, 2022) experienced in everyday life situations. The shared stories expose the barriers and show the strategies developed by each author as examples of navigating and facing racial discrimination. For us, to name and unravel them are enunciations on race (hooks, 1995) that contribute to positioning ourselves as political actors.

Throughout the text, we justify the use of feminist methodologies (Harcourt et al., 2022) based on collaboration, respect, solidarity, and care (Cadaval Narezo, 2022), as well as on how the book has been a collective initiative based on "other practices" that are different from the Western knowledge production (Smith, 2012), as we created and strengthened relational bonds (Wilson, 2008). We also framed the text as a decolonisation project (Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2016; Shilliam, 2015) by promoting, cultivating, and sharing our knowledge and enfleshed experiences. In methodological terms, the book proposes the experiences as the basis of complex social understandings and, in particular, the experience of visibility of the Indigenous women as sources of reflection and knowledge, not as anecdotes (Leyva Solano, 2021) or subjects of research (E. Cruz Cruz, 2020b). In theoretical terms, the text links visions of race and racism in Mexico with theories that view the colonial encounter as foundational (Lugones, 2003, 2016; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000), and that these foundation-acknowledging theories are starting to be present in the dialogues on racism within Mexico (Segato, 2010; Wade, 2002, 2022b). The text also connects intersectional Black feminist critical theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; Hooks, 2015) with communitarian and descolonial feminisms (Hernández Castillo, 2014; Marcos, 2014; Méndez Torres et al., 2013; Millán, 2014).

The path travelled. Introduction

Racism is discrimination, exclusion, invisibility, devaluation, denial, and pain. It is expressed in specific practices that affect and stigmatise certain bodies because of their physical appearance – because of the colour of our skin, our features, and the way we dress – as well as also for speaking a non-colonial language, for having an accent.

In Mexico, racism is anchored in its history as a nation-state project, reproducing contempt, and disdain for those who are darker-skinned and poorer, mainly Indigenous and Afro-descendant (Flores & Telles, 2012; Martínez Casas et al., 2014; Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2015; Navarrete, 2016; Telles, 2014). Hidden under a homogenising mestizaje (miscegenation) that oppresses and denies, racism has been and continues to be deep, structural, constant, and of everydayness. Racism is alive and affects all the people and sectors of Mexican society, although in specific and differentiated ways. It is a look of contempt, an indifferent gesture, a malicious phrase, a meaningless joke. Racism is also a lack – of opportunities, access to health services, and information. Racism is a differentiated, low-quality, exclusive education with a single perspective – Western, mestizo, white. Racism denies other knowledges, and other forms of knowledge production.

In this text and throughout this book, we seek to answer the question of how professional Indigenous[2] and diverse women[3] of Mexico have lived and responded to racism, particularly in higher education. To do so, we reflect on our own stories, understanding racism as a series of practices, attitudes, and ideas about the value assigned to people based on the belief that the colour of our skin, our ethnic origin, the lines of our faces, the way we talk, or dress makes us better or worse human beings (Moreno Figueroa, n.d.). These beliefs, generated and imposed from and through Mexico's colonial history and the subsequent process of mestizaje, have resulted in systemic racism that permeates structures, social institutions, and daily life practices (Quijano, 2000). Racism manifests as both 'subtle', laconic, and forceful.

2. Although we prefer to be identified in relation to our original peoples, we accept the term 'Indigenous' for practical reasons and as a political position that "allows us to name a series of struggles and circumstances that unite different Indigenous peoples with each other" (Aguilar Gil, 2018b). In this text, the term Indigenous is used to define the original peoples of the territory today known as Mexico (although it is equally valid for other Latin American groups). Currently, there are 68 linguistic groups that inhabit the country and represent 20% of the population (INEGI, 2015). Regarding the term 'professionals', here it refers to women who have obtained a specialisation through higher education, specifically, through master's or doctoral studies.
3. 'Diverse' refers to *mestiza* women and women who identify as part of seven original peoples. We will use these categories indistinctly for practical reasons and are aware of the inconsistencies derived from the *mestizaje* as a colonial construction, which we look at critically, but which we also recognise as part of our identities. The term *mestizaje* will be presented and discuss in the section on racism and (higher) education in Mexico.

The question about the way in which we have lived and responded to racism along our higher education paths is addressed individually in each chapter of the co-edited book and introduced and summarised here. Our objective is to generate dialogues that show the structural racism within higher education institutions and to expose the "micro-racisms" (Mamani & Castelli, 2022) that are more difficult to identify and name and are therefore difficult to describe and unravel: the excessive efforts to achieve a degree, the daily violence both verbal and non-verbal that underestimates racialised bodies, the insecurities stemming from unfounded stereotypes, but also the "arrogant perception" (Lugones, 2003) that holds a sense of superiority and dominance of some groups over others, creating a kind of 'pity' about Indigenous women, in this case, as 'vulnerable', 'defenceless', and 'apolitical'. However, our stories expose the challenges and barriers and also propose strategies to face those challenges and barriers. In this way, we talk about the networks and spaces we have generated to unravel and name racism.

The authors are professional women from various Indigenous peoples of Mexico, including Ch'ol, Maya, Nahua, Ñuu Savi (Mixteca), Rarámuri, Tseltal, Zapotec – and *mestiza* women. The authors have shared personal stories as a way to position themselves and to talk race (hooks, 1995), to expose racialised women's own perspectives about racism and other exclusions as a political stance against discrimination. Through conversations and online meetings from 2020 through 2022, the group developed "personal enunciations" as epistemic, political, and ethical places (Walsh, 2013b) from where we have recognised, agreed, and discussed how our bodies and stories had been historically racialised. Our enunciations are positions that arise from our corporality, from our situated contexts, and from our trajectories and reflective processes.

Throughout and with our cultural, political, community, academic, and even religious or spiritual beliefs, we "world"-travel (Lugones, 2003)to resist and question how coloniality has marked us as racially differentiated people (Quijano, 2000), and particularly as women (Lugones, 2010). We recognise how the coloniality of gender, following Lugones (2016), has shaped and continues to shape gender relations and norms in hierarchical ways, particularly affecting ra-

cialised women.[4] Therefore, we understand "world"-travel as a way to recognise that women of colour have multiple inner selves developed to navigate oppressive systems and how, from that plurality, it is possible to recognise in the "others" – also plural – the opportunity to articulate ideas of justice and liberation (Lugones, 2003). To "world"-travel is a skill developed by challenging the arrogant perception.

A distinctive filter frames the analysis of our shared experiences: we all have completed graduate and postgraduate studies. Our stories about accessing education are as diverse as we are. The social, geographical, familial, and economic contexts we come from are very different too. Nevertheless, we all agree that in our academic journeys and currently, as professionals, the structural barriers of both the educational system and other spaces for professional development remind us that Indigenous people, and women in particular, have to double or triple the effort to reach standards established with and by parameters of the Western white man (Hernández Castillo, 2002; Icaza, 2012; Olivera Bustamante, 2007). In the narratives, we illustrate these various nuances of discrimination.

As mentioned, what matters the most for us, is to make visible the strategies of resistance and resilience we have developed. Resistance means us facing a colonial history that has tried to diminish and erase the original peoples, but that we challenge with our political struggles, not as a final objective but as a beginning, as a possibility (Lugones, 2010), as "the active state from which to seek collectivity and coalition" (Lugones, 2003, p. 2). Resilience is how we have transformed discrimination into the re-dignifying of our identities and communities. With resilience and collectivity, we heal wounds because healing is an act of communion (hooks, 1990). Therefore, we position ourselves as critical women, as political and social actors acting together, from our personal and collective *senti-pensares* (feeling-thinking) (Méndez Torres et al., 2013) , from our various contexts and multiple histories, from "world"-travelling to generate awareness. Only by recognising the exclusions, by naming and evidencing discriminatory practices, will we be able to build ways to stop and reverse those practices.

In this introductory text, we begin presenting the journey to write this book: how

4 For María Lugones (2003), those people who have been subordinated, exploited, and enslaved were forced to "world"-travel in worlds in which they are animated subordinate beings. Only men of a certain class and race are in a position to exercise their mobility without restrictions.

we met, and how we reunited, as well as the various actions we have undertaken together. Subsequently, we contextualise and conceptualise racism and its interweaving with the Mexican higher education system to ground and frame our narratives. We continue presenting some of our collective discussions in the next two sections. In the first section, we present the stories of racism and the strategies of resistance. Concrete proposals to stop racist practices in higher education institutions are then exposed afterwards. In this section, we reflect on the relevance of this text and this book.

The journey of our group: Actions against racism from higher education

In September 2020, a group of ten professional women of Nahua, Zapotec, Maya, Ñuu savi, Tseltal, Tsotsil, Cho'l, Rarámuri, and *mestiza* origin participated in the call opened by the UNESCO Seminar on Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America[5] to propose projects focused on Internet actions to eradicate racism in higher education. The UNESCO initiative aimed to promote debates on the multiple forms of racism, learn from experiences of various countries/contexts, and generate concrete local actions. Before our participation in the campaign, in June of that same year, the group discussed the preliminary findings of Marina Cadaval Narezo's doctoral research about how graduate education has contributed to the trajectory of professional Indigenous women: the opportunities (new, different, and equal) and barriers (the same, others, easier, or more difficult) that they have found. The 17 research participants received a scholarship from the Ford Foundation's International Fellowships Program (IFP) or the Graduate Fellowships Programme for Indigenous Peoples (Probepi) to study for a master's or a doctoral degree between 2004 and 2017.

The methodology developed by Marina Cadaval Narezo (2022), based on feminist (Harcourt et al., 2022) and Indigenous approaches (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2001), was based on collaboration, respect, solidarity, and care (Cadaval Narezo, 2022). As part of her research process, she organised two virtual conversations

5. See: UNESCO-Untref 2018. The group was formed by Angélica Hernández Vásquez (Nahua), Carmen Osorio Hernández (Ñuu Savi), Georgina Méndez Torres (Ch'ol), Miriam Uitz May (Maya), Yamili Chan Dzul (Maya), Lucía Olivas Espino (Rarámuri), Patricia Pérez Moreno (Tseltal), Judith Bautista Pérez (Zapoteca), Flora Gutiérrez Gutiérrez (Zapoteca), and Marina Cadaval Narezo (*mestiza*).

among the participants to discuss her findings and to receive feedback. It was then that the participants of the UNESCO project coincided. Some of us had met before as IFP-Probepi fellows or alums and even collaborated on some projects.[6] Others met for the first time in those virtual sessions. Marina knew all of them because she was part of the operational and executive teams of IFP-Probepi from 2001 to 2015.

Among the themes that emerged (from the aforementioned research) and discussed collectively was the racism faced throughout the academic and professional trajectories. An intersectional analysis of those experiences was required as discrimination is not just a single-layered issue, but a complex interplay of overlapping and intersecting identities and practices of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; Hooks, 2015; Wekker, 2019). The intersectional analysis made the participants realise the multidimensional racism – individual, interpersonal, inter-ethnic, institutional, cultural, systemic – that exists in higher education, as well as how it operates: sometimes blunt, direct, such as the lack of a culturally relevant and quality education. Others, subtle, less visible but as harmful as those "micro-racisms (Mamani & Castelli, 2022) experienced in daily life and seem naturalised, such as the ways to talk about certain bodies, certain features, by assuming hierarchical differences.

Another important topic discussed was the importance for Indigenous women to be recognised as protagonists of their own stories as they have been historically perceived and "used" by "academic experts" as research objects (E. Cruz Cruz, 2020b). Furthermore, few have publicly evidenced and discussed racism. Therefore, working together and joining the UNESCO campaign was a way to follow hooks' (1995) invitation to "talk race" because:

> *When race and racism are the topic in public discourse, the voices that speak are male. There is no large body of social and political critique by women on the topics of race and racism. […] Cultural refusal to listen to and legitimise*

6. For example, Carmen Osorio Hernández, Georgina Méndez Torres, and Judith Bautista Pérez were part of the Red Interdisciplinaria de Investigadores de los Pueblos Indios de México (Interdisciplinary Network of Indian Peoples' Researchers of Mexico (Red IINPIM, 2013), the first network in Mexico that brought together Indigenous men and women with graduate studies.

> *the power of women speaking about the politics of race and racism [...] is a direct reflection of a long tradition of sexist and racist thinking which has always represented race and racism as male turf, as hard politics, a playing field where women do not really belong* (hooks, 1995, p. 1).

This was a way to expose racialised women's perspectives as a political struggle that contributes to a criticism of racism and other exclusions (hooks, 1995). One of the participants, Bertha Pech, a Maya colleague who is part of the UNESCO seminar, shared the call with the group, and ten of the 17 participants in Cadaval Narezo's research decided to partake. The project submitted was titled 'Racism in graduate education: Gazes, reflections and resistances of indigenous women in Mexico'.

The proposal focused on understanding how Indigenous professional women experience and respond to multidimensional and intersectional expressions of racial discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; Hooks, 2015; Wekker, 2019). That is to say, how the historical, interpersonal, interethnic, institutional, cultural, and systemic racism (multidimensional) intersects with individual and collective identities – based on gender, ethnic group, and class – creating different power positions – and therefore, intersects on different levels of privilege and discrimination. This interaction shows the complexity of racism and how it operates and affects in various ways in various spaces and times.

The proposal was supported by the four higher education institutions from which four of the participants collaborated (three in Mexico and one in Europe): the Universidad de Oriente (UNO) in Yucatán where Miriam Uitz May is a professor, the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) in Veracruz where Angélica Hernández Vásquez is a professor, the Centro Profesional Indígena de Asesoría, Defensa y Traducción (CEPIADET, A.C.; Indigenous Professional Center for Counseling, Defense and Translation) in Oaxaca where Judith Bautista Pérez is a member and collaborator, and the International Institute of Social Studies-Erasmus University of Rotterdam (ISS-EUR) in the Netherlands where Marina Cadaval Narezo is a doctoral researcher. The project was positively evaluated and selected from more than 50 applications to be part of the 26 higher education institutions in Latin America that developed a campaign in the last quarter of 2020.

To carry out our proposal, we organised three *conversatorios* in the form of

private virtual meetings among the participants to intimately and in a caring, loving, safe environment, share personal experiences. *Conversatorios* are informal meetings to discuss relevant topics in a relaxed and open atmosphere. In Latin America, they are a valuable way to foster dialogue and exchange of ideas. The responsibilities of the organisation, moderation, time management, resolution of technical problems, and reporting were distributed among the participants. If one of us could not attend or fulfil the assigned task, someone else would replace her. After those three encounters, concrete actions to reverse racist practices in higher education institutions were suggested.

The *conversatorios* took place between September and October 2020. They lasted approximately two hours each. Solidarity and care were at the core of the project. In the sessions, we reflected on three aspects that were the central topic of each encounter. In the first encounter, we shared personal stories about racism in our academic and professional trajectories; in the second, we talked about individual and collective strategies of resistance and resilience; for the third, we concluded with some concrete proposals. Although some sessions were painful, listening to each other and looking into each other's eyes allowed us to feel like accomplices, accompanied, also strong and clear about how our enunciations matter to expose and reverse racist practices. As hooks (1990, p. 215) says, "True resistance begins with people confronting pain, whether if it's theirs or somebody else's, and wanting to do something to change it".

In general, the overall campaign took place between August and November 2020. As part of the commitments to the Cátedra UNESCO, some of us attended regular online meetings with the representatives of the 26 higher education institutions selected to share the processes each initiative carried out. Each higher education institution generated its own contextualised processes and actions, such as seminars, surveys, workshops and virtual courses, conversations, forums, radio and television programmes, audiovisual productions, and awareness campaigns. The results were diverse.[7] At the end of the campaign, four virtual sessions were presented in December on the various projects. We presented on 9 December 2020.[8] We also delivered two reports along with a short video on our proposals.[9]

7. See: Mundo *Untref* (2020)
8. See: UNESCO-Untref (2020).
9. See: Mujeres y resistencias (2021).

The blog and the book

The conversatorios were a source of inspiration to continue gathering and reflecting together. When the UNESCO initiative finished, ISS-EUR and the Civic Innovation (CI) research group granted resources to systematise and share the discussions in other forums. Rosalba Icaza, a Mexican professor at ISS-EUR, was interested and joined the initiative. The new project considered developing a blog and a book – this book. Eight of the ten women participating in the UNESCO campaign continue in this initiative. With Rosalba Icaza, the group comprised nine professional women from Mexico, seven Indigenous and two mestiza women.

The blog

At the beginning of 2021, the virtual encounters began again. The group took a workshop to learn how to create blogs.[10] A committee of three volunteers (Angélica Hernández Vásquez, Georgina Méndez Torres, and Miriam Uitz May) supervised and followed up on the general design. They searched for an accessible and free platform. They chose the structure, and they proposed colours and images. The group met every two weeks to exchange opinions, discuss progress, and define work schedules. It was a collective product where we all participated, decided, and contributed. A few months later, the blog was launched on 29 March 2021 (Figure I). We called it *Resistencias y Mujeres Indígenas Profesionistas. Reflexionamos y luchamos contra la discriminación y el racismo en la educación superior* (Resistances and Indigenous women Professionals: We reflect on and fight against discrimination and racism in higher education).[11]

A weekly text was uploaded in what was promoted as #LunesdeHistoria (#MondayStory) (Figure 2). Every Monday morning, an entry was published and shared on social media so that the impact would be wider. Before each publication, the group commented on each other's texts and rotated the revisions. The final versions were the responsibility of an editorial committee made up of four members (Marina Cadaval Narezo, Rosalba Icaza Garza, Georgina Méndez To-

10. The blog workshop was presented by the Mexican artist and researcher Paulina Trejo Mendez, former student of ISS-EUR.
11. See: Mujeres y resistencias (2021).

rres, and Carmen Osorio Hernández). If any of us could not carry out the task or responsibility assigned, for example, to review a text, upload it, or produce a promotional flyer, someone else would do it. The work's logic and dynamics were always collaborative, collective, and based on trust, respect, and care. The last entry was uploaded on 5 October 2021.

Although the group continued meeting, the blog was no longer storied. Most participants shared their stories. Thus, the objective and commitment were achieved. The blog worked as an archive for over a year until the beginning of 2023 and then was renovated. A detailed and in-depth analysis of its results and impact is still to be done. As of May 2023, the previous blog had 5,816 views: 4,854 correspond to the various stories of racism and 962 to the narratives on resilience and resistance. We have not counted the visits to other sections because the platform does not allow us to obtain this information. In addition, we know that the blog also impacted other platforms. Furthermore, the conversations we had with people who read the texts were important inputs to feed the discussions we had in our regular meetings. Overall, the comments, views, and likes received were encouraging.

In June, the blog was publicly relaunched.[12] In this new version, we seek to include texts from diverse women interested in sharing their stories. The launch was an open invitation to collaborate with professional women from Mexico with whom we want to continue naming racism so that, one day, we can stop doing so.

The book

After the last blog post was published in December 2021, the planning of this book started. Discussions about the kind of material the group wanted to produce took several sessions, whether it would be an academic or more independent, looser style. Terms of reference and a schedule to turn in the drafts of the individual chapters were set. Five of the nine women who wrote for the blog found the time to commit to writing. The dynamics of putting together the materials were similar to that of the creation and revision of the blog. We all gave opinions, proposed, and agreed on the form, editorial rules, and format. The initial drafts were shared

12. See: Mujeres y Resistencias (2021).

Figure 1. Blog launch

Figure 2. #LunesdeHistoria (#MondayStory) is the hashtag under which the stories on the Resistencias y Mujeres Indígenas Profesionistas blog were promoted on social media

and commented on among the participants, even among those who did not submit a chapter. The editorial committee, like the blog, oversaw reviewing the final versions. This has also been a collective product based on collaboration, respect, and trust.

Each chapter is very different in form, arguments, and stories shared. The chapters are examples of our positions, enunciations, and collective stance against the epistemic dispossession of academic productions that limit and shape narratives. By epistemic dispossession, following Leyva Solano (2021), we understand how the academic styles force us to think and write "as if there were a voice-off that tells you what to think, how to express and what to express" (Leyva Solano, 2021, p. 117). These dispossessions kill creativity and dialogue. Nevertheless, as all

the authors did a degree at conventional institutions,[13] the institutions' imprint of an academic language register on the text is part of our current professional (de) formation. Thus, our narratives are conditioned by academic logic and structures. Therefore, even though this book has academic approaches, in reality, it keeps the voices, words, and arguments of our *senti-pensares* (Méndez Torres et al., 2013).

The narratives summarised in this introduction and presented in this book are not anecdotes, raw material, or inputs to be extracted and analysed by 'experts'. Rather, they are knowledges in themselves that offer an open dialogue with others. "[Our] words are situated sentimental reflections that challenge the ways of seeing, speaking, and understanding characteristics of power and the colonial or neo-colonial academy" (Leyva Solano, 2021, p. 125). Our hope is that the readers value and cherish this attempt.

This book and this introduction are the result of individual and collective efforts by women. Some have pursued an academic career, and some have professional activities beyond higher education and the production of academic knowledge. These women have made time, dedicated and prioritised time to reflect and write these texts. It has been a process during which our enfleshed plurals, those various "world"-travellings have guided the path (Lugones, 2003). These worlds are within ourselves, worlds that constitute us and connect us with others to understand their worlds, contexts that we inhabit and inhabit us, malleable and uncertain. We have all moved between various cultural and ideological spaces, shaping our identities and understandings. We have travelled with care and love. The multiple journeys we have undertaken through our own plural worlds while travelling to others' plural worlds made us conscious of how we inhabit those other lives that are not ours but to which we also belong through the others' perceptions. From there, from the crossing of intersecting empathies, we have built deep coalitions based on "differences grounded not in coincidences of individual or group interests but in multiple understandings of oppressions and resistances" (Lugones, 2003, p. 39).

Our processes are well connected to Lugones' (2003) concepts, both of "world"-travelling and deep coalitions, because the former is a way of being

13. We refer to institutions that have not been designed to respond to the demands and educational proposals promoted by Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, following the meaning of Mato (2015a).

and knowing that allows us to identify with others lovingly, embracing the multiple, moving selves we are and from where we cross and bond with others. Those are us. Plural women, travelling within ourselves and among us to continue discovering who we are and who we were. Women who, when dialoguing, rediscovered themselves, mirroring themselves on the realities of others, realities that might seem distant or disconnected but intersect in certain spaces and times. From our multiple geographies and temporalities, we travelled to the world of others to weave our collective. However, each of us has also travelled through her own history to identify and re-dignify herself. Our cross-cultural, cross-racial, cross-identities intersections have been powerful worlds to weave those "deep coalitions that encourage the alignment of one's interests, understandings, and goals with oppressed groups" (Lugones, 2003, p. 26).

This book, therefore, is the result of that uncertain, oscillating, relational, and loving process that began with doctoral research and became a group of women who care for each other. Throughout that process, as mentioned, the writing of this book started with sharing our stories, and afterwards the contextual and conceptual frames were developed to situate the narratives. We theorised from enfleshed experience. In the next section, some discussions about racism are presented, particularly in the context of Mexico. Our approach does not pretend to revise the literature on the matter deeply but to ground those conceptualisations from the prisms of our narratives: tales, knowledges, and *senti-pensares*, which are themselves enfleshed theories (Ahmed, 2014; Leyva Solano, 2021). We aim to contribute to the discussions on racism from our enfleshed stories, as knowledges and as feeling-thinkings that are themselves enfleshed theories.

Racism and (higher) education in Mexico

Racism has been related to a series of practices, attitudes, and ideas about the value of people based on the belief in the existence of various races among human beings (Moreno Figueroa, 2016a, 2016b). Racism is expressed in hatred, fear, rejection, and exclusion of certain bodies stigmatised by reference to their physical appearance, skin colour, ethnic origin and/or the use of a [non-colonial] language (Gall et al., 2021; RedIntegra, 2017). Like most of the definitions of racism that exist in dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and other publications, the ex-

planations start from biological differences that are socially and historically constructed (Quijano, 2000) and scientifically refuted.[14] The definitions have been determining factors in the justifications for social and cultural hierarchies (Moreno Figueroa, 2016a; Quijano, 2000; Wade, 2022a).

According to the decolonial thinker Aníbal Quijano (2000), the idea of race originates in 16th-century European colonialism in Latin America, through and during which racial classification was imposed as the centre of dominance relations. These classifications were conceived, rooted, and expanded together with the capitalist/modern model that led to the configuration of the world from new social identities (Indian, Black, white, and *mestizo*) and geocultural (America, Africa, Far East, Near East, West, and Europe) (Quijano, 2000). Under what Quijano (2000) called the "coloniality of power", the American continent served as the centre of the project for the consolidation of capitalism, and the races worked as new social categories from which the relations and differences were codified – justified, fed, validated – and conquered – as dichotomies between superiors and inferiors, and humans and non-humans.

Although there are critiques of Quijano's (2000) coloniality of power,[15] his argument helps us to recognise that, although races do not exist as a genetic difference, races are historical, social, and cultural constructions. Therefore, they represent a specific reality and have power. Thus, races do not exist, but racism does (Wade, 2022a). On the one hand, one part of the debate about racism suggests avoiding talking about race because words and concepts legitimise discourses and public policies, producing and deepening racism (Gilroy 2004). On the other hand, another part of the debate suggests breaking down and analysing the origin and implications of the construction of races to identify profound racism and then rethink coexistence scenarios (Carlos Fregoso, 2021; Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2015; Navarrete, 2016; Wade, 2022a). For hooks (2003), for instance, recognising racism is significant and necessary to transform the conditions that generate it.

In Mexico, until recently, racism was denied (Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2015; Navarrete, 2016). The denial came from not recognising ourselves

14. For an overview of some of the scientific studies on race, see Wade (2022b).
15. ySee for instance, Pignoli Ocampo (2020).

as racialised subjects but as national subjects (Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2015). The 19th-century liberal state national project represented a political and social change that distanced the newborn, independent country from the yoke of the Spanish empire. The *mestizo* identity was created to unify a society divided into creoles and Indigenous people during the colonial period. The mestizaje (miscegenation) would homogenise the diversity of cultural and social groups and create a "cosmic race" (Vasconcelo, 1925) that would take Mexico to the path of progress.

However, based on Quijano's (2000) perspective, the mestizo identity would be the essence of expanding the colonial/modern capitalist project. Furthermore, as evidenced by the Ayuujk writer and intellectual Yáznaya Aguilar Gil " (2018a), *mestizaje* meant the "de-indigenisation" of the population by the state project. *Mestizaje* was not the product of a racial or cultural mix but a forced de-indigenisation that also defined an ideal of being that was identified as the model to be achieved, while denying the cultural diversity imposed by the creole, white, Europeanised elites. In other words, *mestizaje*, as one of the elements of coloniality posed by Quijano (2000), entailed a promise of whitening (Carlos Fregoso, 2021) that generated a binary opposition between Indigenous and mestizo (Aguilar Gil, 2018a). This opposition was transmitted by the Mexican State throughout the 20th century, particularly through the education system that, according to Icaza (2022), developed a monocultural project of misery and erasure of the non-*mestizo* or creole.

The "raceless" (Goldberg, 2011) identity in Mexico affected the everyday dynamics and allowed the normalisation and reproduction of racism (Carlos Fregoso, 2021; Moreno Figueroa, 2016a). *Mestizaje* made us all equal Mexicans – deracialised national subjects (Moreno Figueroa, 2016a). This resulted in structural, systemic racism, but also in what has been called "micro-racisms": "manifestations of structural racism that appear in attitudes, actions, and expressions that take place in everyday life [and can be] identified in those 'politically correct' messages or in 'tolerant attitudes'. As racial expression does not appear 'obvious', racial stereotypes are naturalised and reproduced (which, in turn, are intertwined with patriarchy, heteronormativity, sexism, classism, and nationalism)" (Mamani 2022: 212).

Less than ten years ago, the denial of the existence of racism in Mexico was reflected in the scarce 66 papers published between 1956 and 2014 (Moreno Figueroa, 2016a). Since 2001, 18 texts have been produced, thus evidencing the relevance of the matter and centring the discussions regarding national identity processes (Iturriaga Acevedo, 2020). Although the study of racism has been approached from an anthropological perspective, recent studies critically explore Indigenous policies and question the denial of the Indigenous and Afro-Mexican social construction, and also the *mestizaje* itself as a "precarious process" (Moreno Figueroa, 2016a) and "encrypted" (Iturriaga Acevedo, 2020). Racial categories linked to whiteness are very fragile and malleable because every person perceives themselves and is perceived by others differently (Carlos Fregoso, 2021; Moreno Figueroa, 2016a; Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2015). Mexicans navigate a wide palette of shades and colours but aspire to light tones within them because whiteness is the social, economic, and cultural reference (Flores & Telles, 2012; Martínez Casas et al., 2014). In this context, *mestizo* people, specially the white-*mestizo*, do not need to identify themselves as racial beings and do not need to be named or justified in front of others. The *mestizo* is the point of reference for other historically named groups, such as Indigenous and Afro-Mexicans (Moreno Figueroa, n.d.).

The study by Telles (2014) about pigmentocracy in Latin American countries has reopened debates about the racism overshadowed by the *mestizaje* ideology, exposing the inequalities, injustices, and prejudices based on racial differences that determine people's life opportunities. Among the findings of Mexico's case, for example, it stands out that the higher the education level, the higher the propensity for individuals to consider themselves *mestizas* regardless of skin tone. On the other hand, racial discrimination is linked to skin darkness, followed by economic status, and the use of an Indigenous language (Torre-Cantalapiedra, 2016).

These studies and debates have been useful to contextualise our experiences of racism, and understand the difficulty and pain of talking about our experiences and sharing them publicly. On the other hand, the discussions on *mestizaje*, whiteness and the palette of colours helped us to situate the privileges of the mestiza women in the group. As a collective, we position ourselves as part of those who rather name and identify racist practices. We agree that racism should

not be defined in terms of individual and isolated discrimination against bodies or cultures but rather as a structural form of domination that diminishes groups and individuals. We have also questioned whether we are pigeonholing ourselves in colonial categories (Indigenous, *mestiza*) by identifying ourselves as racialised women. Although we criticise those colonial categories, using the categories validates them and reproduces differentiating discourses. Probably, but we opted for the inconsistency that naming racism causes. We also want to clarify that, although our stories are crossed by racial discrimination, we do not identify ourselves only as racial beings. We are women, friends, mothers, pedestrians, neighbours, sisters, and colleagues. Our stories and "world"-travels come from all those places: "We want to be seen as unbroken, we want to break cracked mirrors that show us in many separate, unconnected fragments" (Lugones, 2003, p. 43).

Differentiated education: Systemic reproduction of racism

The current educational system was built and developed in the 19th century as part of the project of a liberal nation-state. Therefore, the educational system was – and still is – a powerful apparatus to expand and impose the raceless identity of *mestizaje* (Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado, 2010; Schmelkes, 2009). Like in most Latin American higher education systems, Indigenous peoples and their languages, ancestral knowledges, worldviews, and forms of knowledge were and still are absent (Grosfoguel, 2016; Mato, 2016; Mignolo & Walsh, 2002). All of us, for instance, grew up with textbooks exclusively in Spanish in which Indigenous peoples were not present or were portrayed as a glorious past, as folklore. In this sense, the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Mexico brought some policies of recognition and promotion of the country's pluricultural origin, with which it has sought to reverse the denial and oblivion of the Indigenous and Afro-Mexican populations (Mato, 2015a; Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado, 2010; Schmelkes, 2009).

In terms of higher education, 12 intercultural universities have been implemented since 2000 in various peasant and Indigenous regions, responding to three historical demands by Indigenous peoples: access to bilingual and relevant education, the promotion of Indigenous cultures and knowledges at a national

level, and autonomy to decide about their own educational system (Schmelkes, 2009). Although the project represented a historical effort to decolonise the university system (Dietz, 2012), the results, 20 years later, are not encouraging. Despite the very important generations of Indigenous professionals and scholars that have been formed, the numbers of Indigenous students are still far lower than the numbers of non-Indigenous students.[16] Insufficient or precarious budgets, administrative bureaucracies, and a lack of (Indigenous) professors are among the challenges to overcome (Dietz & Cortés Mateos, 2019). On top of this, from our point of view, the notion of interculturality has been limited to Indigenous matters among Indigenous people without generating an awareness of diversity in a more general and substantive way from which to reverse racist practices.

Nonetheless, beyond the intention and the particular results of the intercultural universities, the general numbers do not lie. The presence of Indigenous students in al higher education continues to be below the rest of the population. A study shows that in 2015, only 7.2% of the Indigenous population older than 15 years had higher education and only 0.8% in the age group 25 years and older had a graduate degree. These indicators for the population are 18.6% and 2.5% (Salazar Núñez et al. in Gallart, 2021). Between 1990 and 2015, the number of Indigenous people aged 18 and over with higher education increased from 2.9% to 7.9%, while in the population, these percentages moved from 8.2% to 20.1%. That is, 25 years later, the Indigenous people have not even reached the levels of coverage that the population had in 1990 (Gallart, 2021).

As for Indigenous women, in 2015, they represented 48.1% of the 590,245 Indigenous people with higher education in Mexico (Gallart, 2021). Although this is almost equal to men's attendance, they have been historically and statistically considered under the general category of 'Indigenous', which assumes that they experience the same exclusions as men. Their specific and differentiated position has led to experiencing at least a triple form of marginalisation that has not been considered: they face exclusions and discrimination for being Indigenous, women and poor. The figures do not reflect the exclusions derived from these intersections.

16. A study by Marion Lloyd (2019) shows that almost 130,000 students attended intercultural universities between 2006 and 2018, compared to the almost 3,650,000 students reported nationally between 2005 and 2016.

Several studies have shown that their limited access to (higher) education is symptomatic of intersectional failures featuring this triple structural exclusion (Hernández Castillo, 2008; INMUJERES, 2006; Olvera Sánchez, 2009), and the triple racism due to physical appearance; the invisible, diminished, and negative value ascribed to Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC); and their 'inferiority' in relations to white people/culture (Gnecco-Lizcano, 2016). According to a Probepi internal report, there is no quantitative information on the profiles and challenges of the Indigenous women who have completed undergraduate or postgraduate degrees (Gallart, 2021). This lack of information already shows a bias about which knowledge has value and is relevant.

IFP alums have published some enfleshed experiences and reflections in the journal *Aquí Estamo*s (Here We Are) (Aparicio Soriano, 2012; Bautista Pérez, 2008; Gallardo Vásquez, 2007; Juan Carlos, 2011; Méndez Torres, 2008; Osorio Hernández, 2011, 2012; Sánchez Gómez, 2009; Velázquez Martínez, 2009). These narratives expose the difficulties of accessing graduate studies and the challenges faced later when Indigenous women insert themselves professionally in their communities and the labour market. The narratives speak, directly or indirectly, of that systemic racism and the micro-racisms that have determined their academic and professional trajectories.

Epistemic injustice: Racisms, dispossessions, and erasures

This context reflects what Icaza (2022) analyses as part of the epistemic injustice in higher education. Today epistemic injustice takes many forms, such as epistemic racism (Grosfoguel, 2011b), and epistemic dispossession or erasures (Leyva Solano, 2021; Patel, 2015). Epistemic racism could be understood as the foundational way of categorising non-Western knowledges – various cultures and their ways of knowing – as inferior, and it is based on essentialist politics of Western male elites, therefore, closely intertwined with epistemic sexism (Grosfoguel, 2011b). Epistemic dispossession is linked to the disdain for other forms of expression using elaborate language that kills the creative possibility of expressing words and things clearly and simply (Leyva Solano, 2021). For us, dispossession also nullifies the expressive richness of other ways to generate and share knowledge, such as poetry and orality.

An example of epistemic dispossession in higher education is the several situations in which the topics, the writing styles, and the personal perspectives we wanted to develop during our degrees were rejected as 'lacking academic relevance or structure'. Some of us had to change and adjust our research objectives and methodologies to fulfil the requirements of a 'proper academic document' to graduate.

Following Patel (2015), the epistemic erasure shows how coloniality manifests itself in contexts of knowledge and meaning making specifically within educational research and formal schooling. That is to say, these forms of institutional exclusion represent the erasure of those knowledges that are considered irrelevant, despise the local perspectives that contest universalised paradigms, imply absences in the curricula and in the pedagogies, and reproduce racialised stereotypes. Following Icaza (2022), institutional exclusion also represents the appropriation and extraction of knowledge for the benefit of some groups and societies that take advantage of their privileged position in the production of knowledge.

This book deals with these racisms, dispossessions, and erasures, and each chapter exposes them. Next, we present these individual texts crossed by the journey and the collective reflections in which they were framed. We first talk about the stories linked to racist practices and about stories linked to resistance and resilience strategies, referring to and introducing the authors who wrote about those practices. The proposals to stop racism in higher education that we put forward later are part of our concrete actions.

Racism in the academic trajectories: Personal stories and collective reflections

Some of the challenges almost all of us face due to structural racism include the academic efforts to level the deficiencies of the educational system, to understand its logic, to study in a language that is not necessarily a mother tongue, to migrate

to be able to go to a university and to live the practices of tokenism.[17] The doubts about our academic performance cross the structural racisms and the so-called "micro-racisms" (Mamani & Castelli, 2022) that we share due to the gazes of contempt, disdain for our bodies or for our clothing, and comments that denote that "arrogant perception" (Lugones, 2003).

For Yamili Chan Dzul, a Maya from Sanahcat in Yucatán, institutional racism manifests itself because she had to leave her community to continue her upper secondary education since there were no schools in the region. Studying in a city led her to realise that she was different. Her classmates bullied her due to her Mayan surnames because "it was evident that I was from a town". During her Master of Development Practices at the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) in Costa Rica, she shared how some students doubted her origins because "Indigenous people don't study graduate courses". For her, the worst experience of institutional racism, a mixture of blatant rejection and tokenism, was when the university authorities of CATIE, an institution that openly received students from Indigenous origins, denied her the possibility of wearing her traditional clothes at the graduation ceremony, as CATIE did not consider her clothes to be suitable 'gala' outfits.

As for tokenism, Miriam Uitz May, a Maya from Kimbil'a, Yucatán, who completed her Master of Audiovisual Communication in the Basque Country in 2004, reflected on the limited – if not null – access for Indigenous women to management positions. In her own experience working for government institutions after her degree, she identifies that her knowledge and professional skills were not taken into account and valued. She was always praised for her work as a master of ceremonies or as a translator at commemorative events. After the "euphoria had passed" (Uitz May 2019), she was not considered to contribute as an audiovisual communicator, for instance, in constructing public policies for the Maya

17. Tokenism is making superficial or token efforts to represent people from underrepresented groups in certain spaces, and policies, among other efforts, in order to give the impression of inclusiveness and sexual or racial equality (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). Tokenism led us to think about what Catherine Walsh (2012a)calls 'functional interculturality' as part of the recognition of diversity and differences. However, that recognition is based on the logic and interests of the capitalist/neoliberal system (its institutions, policies, needs). Another phrasing would be to 'include' marginalised groups in social structures but without a real intention of recognising and validating their knowledge and epistemic contributions.

people or other actions of regional impact in which she was interested. She talks about this in her text and the microracisms she experienced as a child.

Miriam knew that the neighbouring town despised her hometown. As a Mayan speaker, Miriam, like Yamili, had to go to the State capital to continue her education, where she realised that she was different from the girls in the city. She had to work harder to understand the social environment, the academic language, and to communicate. Her appearance and the way she spoke marginalised her at the school, and the economic difference and the lack of access to media (television or pay-television programmes and books) and a lack of transportation made her learning process different to the other students in the city. She also experienced this sense of being different in the Basque Country: looks of scrutiny, of rejection that were more sharp and profound than a verbal insult. She did not understand the gazes until later, when, as part of our collective reflections, she realised the gazes that evaluated her made her feel less.

A difficult feeling to identify and face is that of personal insecurities. Sometimes it is generated and other times it is deepened during the studies, but without a doubt, academic performance is affected. Insecurities are added to poor primary and secondary schooling, and as a result, access to higher education is a mountain difficult to climb. For example, Lucía Olivas Espino, a Rarámuri professor from Norogachi, Chihuahua, shared her reflections on accessing graduate education as part of one of the Indigenous peoples of the country's north. The Rarámuris have been forgotten by social, cultural, and educational policies, as well as in the process of extinction due to their cultural assimilation with the mestizo populations. Few years back the Rarámuris were considered "demographically irrelevant" compared to the groups of the centre and south (Garduño, 2004).

Lucía recounted how in 2008, she was the only candidate from the north selected as an IFP fellow (of the 392 scholarship students selected from 2001 to February 2023 between IFP and Porbepi, only four are Rarámuris – two men and two women).[18] In 2012 with the support of this initiative, she completed her

18. Between 2001 and 2012, the IFP supported 226 Indigenous men and women, including two Rarámuris; while between 2013 and 2023 the Probepi supported 166 people. As of February 2023, in addition to the 166 fellows, another 57 people were selected (13 in 2021 and 44 in 2022), who will be considered fellows once they are accepted and begin their graduate programmes. This information was directly obtained through the Probepi director in February 2023.

Master of Competences for Educational Innovation at the Universidad Iberoamericana, Campus León, in the State of Guanajuato, where she also completed her Doctor of Education between 2016 and 2019. She is currently one of the few Rarámuri women with a doctorate.[19]

In her text, 'Mostrarme como soy, lo que soy: Una mujer Rarámuri' (Show myself as I am, as who I am: A Raramuri woman'), Lucía tells her story about how she got involved in our collective and reflects on feminist movements and the way they have promoted Indigenous women. She also shares how the ignorance about the existence of the Indigenous peoples of the north is still present in her daily life and how using her traditional dresses has led her on several occasions to face discriminatory acts: from denying her access to universities either as a student or as a professor, to the point of questioning her knowledge and ability as a professional in the various institutions in which she has worked.

Another intersecting topic discussed, although not necessarily exposed in the chapters, is how sexism is linked to racist practices in the communities of origin. For instance, the stories about whether to continue higher education are usually framed by hesitation and doubts about women's importance in continuing studies. The main arguments from family or community members – both men and women – questioning the continuation of higher education studies include alienation, losing femininity, and 'women's skills' as wives, cooks, and mothers. On the other hand, once we achieve a degree, the expectations are high and challenging: either they think that we will not be back, or if we do so, we will behave with arrogance, thinking that we are better than them and we will impose other ways of doing things; but they also believe that we earn more. Thus, we must contribute extra. This does not necessarily happen. On the contrary, professional opportunities and wages are lower for women, who must work 51 more days per year to earn the

19. Lucía's status as one of the few doctorate holders among Rarámuri women is based on Lucía's perception and knowledge of her people and region. There is no official information about it. Some articles refer to data on Rarámuri students in higher education (undergraduate) referring to specific case studies, such as one located at the Autonomous University of Chihuahua (UAcH) (N. L. G. Rodríguez, 2016); one related to the Academic Program for Indigenous Students of the Ford Foundation (PAEI), (Tarango et al., 2011), and one at the Faculty of Agrotechnological Sciences at UAcH (Anchondo-Aguilar et al., 2019). Each of these texts speaks of a reduced Rarámuri student population. The study by González Rodríguez is the only one that gives a general overview of Rarámuri students at the UAcH, the most important public and free institution in the State, and states that, in 2015, of the more than 25,000 students registered for undergraduate degrees, only 112 were Rarámuris (0.44%) and half of these (56), were women (0.22% of the university population). This panorama brings us closer to considering the limited presence of Rarámuri women in graduate education.

same as the average salary for men (Aquino 2022), and the opportunities are even fewer for Indigenous women, especially in the communities where although there is much work to do, "the difficult part is getting someone to pay a salary for that job" (Gallardo Vásquez, 2007; INMUJERES, 2006).

Therefore, the experiences of racism, sexism, and classism are interconnected, intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015) and multidimensional. Paradoxically, these same spaces where racism is experienced – academia, the job market, the family, and the community – have been spaces where we have developed strategies to face it. They are strategies from which we transform the false stereotype of passive victims into active political actors and challenge that "arrogant perception" (Lugones, 2003) to show our forms of resistance and resilience, which we discuss next.

Individual and collective strategies of resistance and resilience

Paths, networks, and encounters

The most valuable strategies found or developed included support networks among women, with families or communities of origin, discussions with colleagues, and, especially the individual yet collective positionalities and enunciations reflected on during graduate studies. For example, for Carmen Osorio, a Ñuu Savi from the Oaxacan Mixteca, the power of networking has been the central element from and with which to counteract exclusions. Her active participation in various groups of different types – of rural women and Indigenous professionals – has led her to return to her Mixtec roots. From there, she builds strategies to recognise and claim the individual and collective rights of women. Her doctoral studies at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil (2005 to 2009) were key to positioning herself as a Ñuu Savi woman and valuing her culture. At that time, she experienced racism from close colleagues and some people in the community where she conducted her research – also in Brazil – questioning her origins and 'tribe'. Carmen has identified the waves of feminist movements within which Indigenous women have located their own places of reference, distancing themsel-

ves but using gaps to generate groups of identity re-dignification that strengthen roots through collective work.

For Miriam, her faith has been decisive in confronting and questioning structural exclusions, rethinking, and transforming her reality. As a Maya woman, she has learnt to know herself spiritually and value her family and friends as her main support. For Lucía, on the other hand, wearing her traditional dresses, which she designs and makes herself, has been one of her strategies to strengthen her identity and confront racism: "It gives me confidence, security, I feel myself". For Yamili, the right to identity, and the personal and collective healing work are part of the ways she uses to name and confront racist practices.

For all of us, graduate studies were very important because we distanced ourselves from our own community, region, or country and had to introduce ourselves in front of others, which made us reflect on and value our identities. On the one hand, talking about the 'unknown' Mexico of the original peoples led us to share our specific geographies, the languages we speak in addition to Spanish, and the particular traditions of our communities. Nevertheless, graduate studies have also led us to reflect more deeply on identities and privileges.

For example, Marina Cadaval is a mestiza/white woman from Mexico City who is completing her doctoral studies at ISS-EUR after a MA in Social Development and Global Justice. Her studies led her to reflect on *mestizaje* as a 'precariously' addressed racial category derived from the socio-historical colonial construction of the raceless Mexicans. Since her relationships with Indigenous women through the IFP-Probepi, and throughout our conversations, she identified the privileges with which she accessed and navigated higher education and recognised how graduate studies have been essential for analysing the intersections of exclusion of the Mexican educational system. The doubt about her 'Mexicanness' as she is *mestiza*/white, especially from those in the centre and in the south of Mexico, although it has bothered her, led her to understand that discrimination is not always racism and that racism is always generated from conditions of privilege to conditions of disadvantage and can never happen the other way around.

For us, in general, being part of the IFP-Probepi community, where Indigenous women and men from various groups gathered, was helpful to get to know other realities that were different in context but similar in struggle. Throughout our par-

ticipation as students, alums, and collaborators, we created bonds and networks that expose and strengthen our professional contributions and expertise in certain areas. An example is the Red IIMPIM founded in 2005 by IFP alums. It was then the first network in Mexico that brought together professional men and women from Indigenous peoples with graduate studies.[20] Although it is not active anymore, it was the first of its kind and an important collective initiative developed by, with, and for Indigenous professionals from all over the country.

In conclusion, networking, collective initiatives, mirroring ourselves in others, discussing who we are, where we come from, studying, and reflecting on our contexts, have been the main individual yet common strategies to position ourselves as political actors and face racism and sexism. From there and on our own trajectories, we have been able to identify basic and very general actions that can help to stop exclusionary practices for Indigenous women in higher education. Some proposals we discussed are summarised next.

Concrete proposals to eradicate racism in higher education institutions

As mentioned, one of our most agreed coincidences is the need to openly name, recognise, and talk about racist practices in all the spaces we inhabit, but mainly in higher education institutions. Although it is in the universities where the bridging of the supposed multicultural premise of the Mexican State takes place, it is also where multidimensional exclusion has been fostered by 'subtly' transmitting prejudices and ideologies. Therefore, because the universities are where knowledge is legitimised as truthful and where young adults can critically reflect on their realities and their identities, it is during higher education and graduate degrees where efforts to eradicate racism should focus. Only with recognition and serious, deep analysis at institutions will significant changes take place.

The proposals we systematised are the following:

1. Strengthen spaces for dialogue to recognise, talk about, and denounce racism
2. Stop 'symbolic participation' and superficial concessions (tokenism) and truly include Indigenous and Afro-descendant women in higher education institu-

20. See: Red IINPIM (2013).

tions and other professional fields, recognising their knowledge and skills in addition to their ethnic identity
3. Design intercultural policies and protocols to highlight racist and sexist practices
4. Train teachers and administrative staff not to reproduce discriminatory acts and language, as well as attend and help orientate youths
5. Publish, disseminate, and make visible the academic productions of Indigenous women (and men)
6. Design intercultural actions and programmes to encourage the participation of Indigenous and Afro-descendant women
7. Include forms and knowledge from an intercultural perspective in the university curriculum
8. Raise awareness and promote cultural diversity in conventional higher education institutions.

For us, it is from education, not only the education taught at intercultural institutions but education at all universities, and higher education institutions where diversity can be promoted and recognised. Talking about racism is important if the goal is to stop it from being a taboo, a denial and, above all, a painful experience generally lived in isolation. In this sense, for example, in our conversatorio Judith Bautista Pérez insisted that the racism experienced as a child, although equally experienced by many other people in her hometown was not named or understood as such simply because no one talked about it. Later, she related to these discriminations as a systematic racism, which is now more open to discussion. The new generations are more aware, they reflect about the multiple exclusions they experience and although it is not the solution, it helps not to feel alone.

Conclusion: Relevance and contributions

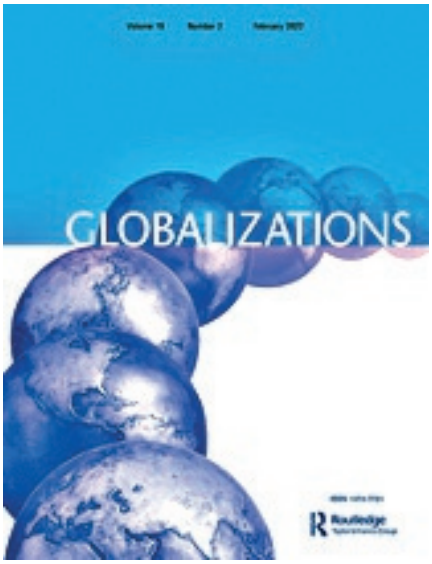
This text exposes the contributions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in generating dialogue towards more open, respectful, and inclusive spaces. This book contributes by connecting cross-cutting themes of diversity, exclusion, and inequality. In theoretical terms, this book links visions of race and racism in Mexi-

co, such as those proposed by Moreno Figueroa (2011, 2016a) and Wade (2002, 2022a), with theories that view the colonial encounter as foundational for racially differentiated and hierarchical social structures (Grosfoguel, 2016; Icaza, 2012, 2019; Leyva Solano, 2019; Leyva Solano et al., 2018; Lugones, 2003; Quijano, 2000) that have not been present enough in dialogues on racism in Mexico. This book also links intersectional Black feminist critical theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015) with Mexican descolonial feminism (Hernández Castillo, 2014; Marcos, 2014; Méndez Torres et al., 2013; Millán, 2014).

In methodological terms, this book proposes experience as the basis of complex social understandings, and in particular the visibility of the experiences of Indigenous women as sources of reflection and conceptualisation – and not as anecdotes – which is the place Indigenous experiences have traditionally been given (Cruz Cruz, 2020b; Leyva Solano, 2021). It is a decolonisation and de-patriarchisation project (Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2003) in the way we have colluded to promote, cultivate, and share our knowledge, who we are. To resist. Finally, this text is about talking race (hooks, 1995): for racialised women to expose and position our own reflections as political and social actors, contributing to identifying, naming, and exposing multiple oppressions and various discriminations. This collective, the synergies, and the deep coalitions created within are concrete actions in themselves. Our struggles and political positions continue because they are not a point of arrival but a way to walk life.

CHAPTER VI

Contributions to the pluriverse from Indigenous women of intercultural univeristies



Presentation

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Point of departure

This chapter responds particularly to the question regarding how Indigenous women as professors at intercultural universities contribute to the studies of the pluriverse and provide elements for the decolonisation of thought. This chapter is based on first-hand enfleshed experiences by two Indigenous professors at two intercultural universities in Mexico. We also reflect on the methodological approach of writing together as an exercise of decolonising academia, creating intercultural coalitions, and fostering intercultural dialogues. Our effort seeks to counteract the underrepresentation of Indigenous women as knowledge producers, particularly in international academic spaces such as the one the *Globalizations* journal offers.

This text has come a long way, with many adjustments in its construction, in the stories it tells, in the voices that give life to the arguments it supports. Like my entire thesis. This text has different starting and ending points, and multiple en-

counters. From the reflective conversations back in 2019, to the online meetings to share the preliminary findings of my research, to personal encounters. One concrete moment was in July 2021 when Angélica Hernández Vásquez, Georgina Méndez Torres, and I presented an initial draft of this text at the conference of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutions (EADI) on the Education and Social Justice in the Pluriverse panel. This participation also considered the commitment to extend the presentation as an article for the Globalizations journal's special issue on education and socio-environmental justice in the pluriverse.

EADI as a starting point also meant the beginning of the methodological and theoretical journey to write the article. At EADI we presented common ideas about what the pluriverse is, and for the article, we shared experiences, reflections, and literature. We delivered a first draft titled 'Professional indigenous women: The use of conventional graduate education to reposition indigenous worldviews and re-think patriarchal practices'.

This draft received extensive feedback. We addressed some comments together and others separately. It took us time because the text had to be restructured. We delivered another version. A month later, we received the same amount or even more comments. It took me time to coordinate and to translate. My doctoral thesis was delayed. Months later, Georgina Méndez Torres asked why we did not pick it up again. The deadline had passed. I wrote to the publishers, and they allowed us to send it. We had a month. We worked on every comment and restructured the text – again we clarified the methodological process and the use of voices – sometimes in the plural and sometimes in the singular – and we clarified the power relations throughout. Our arguments and dialogue were very important among the three of us. However, the conceptual framework and the structure did not quite harmonise. Another delivery. A completely different article. It had been over a year. More comments came back. It hurt. Academia is a process that diminishes any sense of security one has, even in the collective. The doubt hurts; the frustration of not being able to transmit hurts, of not being understood. It reminded me of the unintelligibility of women of colour to the dominant Western-white-male's academic world Lugones (2003).

The translation between Spanish and English and between multiple drafts with the comments by double-blind peer reviewers (three rounds) implied a challenge

and an opportunity, as mentioned in the presentation of Chapter II. Jose Castro was a coordinator of the special issue of *Globalizations* for which we were invited to write. He offered to work with us to make the last modifications because we were not responding fully to some of the comments. His support would be as an academic and editor and not as the issue coordinator. His participation, he acknowledged, did not guarantee the publication of the text. However, he considered that the article was already very close to acceptance and it was a matter of making minor adjustments. His contribution should be acknowledged as a co-author.

Angélica Hernández Vásquez, Georgina Méndez Torres, and I talked about including another author, particularly a male author offering academic expertise. We saw the practical part: untying a knot whose technique we apparently did not know. It hurt me because the triad was breaking. A journey of care and alliances between women was shifting with a forced landing by taking up the offer of expert male academic help. The principles of collectivity, shared responsibility, and relationality were interrupted. It hurt me because talking with friends and academic colleagues later made me reflect on the deeper implications of that fourth author. His inclusion was an oxymoron – or perhaps an example – of what we denounced in the article: the lack of recognition of other knowledge, other forms in a universalising Western academia. It represents the academy generating "hunger" (said one of my colleagues) to be published. His inclusion also speaks about the peer-reviewed publications as a measure of success in detriment to the validation of different, important, necessary contributions from pluriversal perspectives to transgress dominant parameters in contemporary academia and an affirmation of the possibilities of decolonising research grounded on an ethics of care and relationality (Icaza et al., 2018). Angélica Hernández Vásquez, Georgina Méndez Torres, and I have not yet talked about this; it is a pending discussion. I think we chose to focus on the achievement, on the completing and publishing the essay, and that success is not taken from the three women who set out to write together.

Although the academic process has been painful, the opportunity to reflect with Angélica Hernández Vásquez and Georgina Méndez Torres has been very enriching, powerful, and coalitional. Our histories, geographic and cultural contexts, and academic and professional perspectives are so different and yet coincide. I also position myself at those intersections and at their disconnections or absences (Lugones, 2003) so that we can build and dialogue from there.

Research question

This chapter answers the main question about how graduate education has informed Indigenous women's professional trajectories and how Indigenous women have contributed to position other narratives about Indigenous women, by exposing how their trajectories as professors at intercultural universities are bridging academic and local-based knowledges. The three of us reflected together about the pluriverse as an epistemic and ontological space, and discussed how their activities as professors, as Ch'ol and Nahua scholars, as women, are concrete examples to weave those contributions: they train (Indigenous) students based on local, community and intercultural perspectives; they link multiple worlds of value to the pluriverse – Indigenous communities (local and regional), students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), and higher education institutions (intercultural). We positioned some concerns about exclusionary academic practices, questioned the lack of presence (not of existence) of literature by Indigenous scholars and propose possible actions to counteract them.

Frames and shifts

Conceptually, this chapter reflects on intercultural education and the concept of the pluriverse. It explores the fundamental role that graduate education plays in social development, connecting cross-cutting themes on race, gender, class, diversity, and inequality. The chapter also helps to look at how (graduate) education opens opportunities while reproducing inequalities and exclusions. In methodological and epistemic terms, this chapter is an example of ways of researching from non-oppressive practices (Brown & Strega, 2005), producing socially situated knowledges from and with enfleshed experiences (Ahmed, 2014; Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2003; Motta, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Motta & Bermudez, 2019). The chapter shows how decolonial and Indigenous feminisms allowed us to cross paths and contribute as a collective, creating and fostering synergies among women from different backgrounds who could be responsible with each other and foster deep coalitions. The chapter itself is also an example of an intercultural dialogue and represents a possibility to overcome epistemic, language,

ontological distances and create coalitions (Lugones 2003). For us, pluriversal writing is epistemological and political resistance.

Finally, this research could be used as a concrete example in post-development debates about looking at Indigenous peoples' epistemic and ontological perspectives as alternatives to the Western paradigm. This concrete example could provide a space from where to construct various understandings and relations and position intercultural education as a possibility that generates and promotes various ways of being and perceiving the world. In that same sense, this research positions Indigenous communities as generators of knowledge, of life, of possibilities. This research also positions Indigenous women's knowledges and practices as necessary to repair epistemic violence/erasures and to imagine pluralistic worlds in the 'production' of knowledge.

Contributions to the pluriverse from Indigenous women professors of intercultural universities

Abstract: In this article, we share first-hand narratives by two indigenous women professors to show how they contribute to the interconnection of several worlds from and within intercultural universities in Mexico. Their accounts demonstrate how their professional, political, and community trajectories are crucial in the construction and promotion of indigenous knowledges and worldviews, and in building connections between academic theorizations and local practices. Indigenous women's academic contributions support epistemological diversity as foundational to advancing studies of the pluriverse and provide elements for the decolonization of thought. The exercise of writing and thinking about the pluriverse from four different experiences – a Ch'ol, a Nahua, and a Mestiza-, with commentaries by a male Ecuadorian Mestizo scholar – have created a pluriversal space, which is also an exercise of decolonizing academia, bridging alliances, and fostering intercultural dialogue. This effort seeks to counteract the underrepresentation of indigenous women as producers of knowledge in international academic spaces.

Keywords: Epistemological diversity, decolonisation graduate education, intercultural universities, pluriverse, professional indigenous women

Introduction

Indigenous people, and even more so Indigenous women, have been historically absent and excluded from higher education. In 2009, it was estimated that in Mexico, between 1% and 3% of Indigenous youth were enrolled in universities (Schmelkes, 2009, p. 6). In 2015, the intercensal survey showed that 10% of Indigenous men and women between 25 and 64 years old had finished bachelor's degrees, compared to 18.7% of the rest of Mexico's population (Didou Aupetit, 2018). The survey also showed that 5.3% (197,115) of Indigenous women between 20 and 40 had bachelor's degrees. Furthermore, only 0.20% out of that 5.3% (7,400) had a master's degree, and 0.026% (985) had a doctoral degree (INPI. Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2015; Rangel Faz, 2018).

In terms of graduate studies, Indigenous women are a minority. Several studies have shown that their limited access to (higher) education is symptomatic of intersectional failures featuring the structural triple exclusion that they face in terms of race, gender, and class (Hernández Castillo, 2008; INMUJERES, 2006; Olvera Sánchez, 2009), and the triple racism due to physical appearance; the invisible, diminished, and negative value ascribed to Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC); and the inferiority of Indigenous and Black peoples in relation to white people/culture (Gnecco-Lizcano, 2016).

The exclusion also refers to Indigenous worldviews and other forms of knowledge that are absent in most educational systems, particularly in higher education (Grosfoguel & Rosen Velásquez, 2016; Mato, 2016; Walsh, 2005). In this text, we argue that academic spaces must consider Indigenous women's knowledges to repair some of the extensive damage caused by historical epistemic violence and the erasure of minority groups in the production of knowledge. In addition, academic spaces should allow academic and non-academic imaginations of pluralistic worlds where many worlds do fit (Enlace Zapatista, 1996). Indigenous women's professional, political, and community trajectories are intrinsic to their teaching work, from which they contribute to the epistemological diversity and

to the materialisation of the ethical and political projects implicated in the interculturality that the intercultural universities in Mexico seek to promote and foster. Indigenous women's experiences have been crucial in building bridges connecting academic logics and local practices, essential elements for advancing the pluriverse (Escobar, 2012).

We begin this reflective essay by presenting a brief history of intercultural education in Mexico in relation to international trends on interculturality. Then, we approach the idea of the pluriverse in relation to intercultural education to show the inextricable link between international trends. Next, we share the methodological process based on conversations and discussions among three Mexican professionals and include a brief reflection on the collective writing of this piece as an intercultural exercise in itself. Afterwards, we present three elements derived from first-hand narratives of the practices of Indigenous professors[1] in intercultural academic spaces as valuable contributions to epistemological diversity. We conclude with some general reflections on pending issues to consider when constructing a pluriversal world.

Indigenous worldviews and the pluriverse

Indigenous worldviews are constituted by the complementarity of multiple, inseparable, and interconnected human and non-human dimensions where the material, the spiritual, the physical, and the temporal are bound. This cosmological interconnection inspired what Escobar (2012, 2014) calls the pluriverse, a conceptualisation that springs from the Zapatista's (1996) motto of "a world where many worlds fit". Indigenous peoples have not named their reality and their experiences as pluriverse, however, because their own sources of thought are embedded in holistic practices that, as analysed by Tzeltal scholar Patricia Pérez Moreno (2021), centres languages as a philosophy and practice of life's intercon-

1. In Mexico, the term 'professors' refers to all university lecturers, although it is also common to call them 'teachers'. In this article, we decided to use the term 'professors' to position the experience and knowledge of the two Indigenous authors in relation to the English academic language in which 'professor' and 'teacher' differ in institutional affliation and degree, with the former linked to higher education and usually requiring master's or doctoral degrees, while the latter is associated with elementary and secondary education requiring a college degree.

nections of many visions, thoughts, and realities that take up the principles of balance and reciprocity.

These understandings and conceptualisations from Indigenous peoples are at the core of their worldviews in which the land and the territory – and all the elements that are part of it – represent that multiplicity of interconnected spaces, spiritual conceptions, and times where life is generated, food is produced, people breathe and die. For example, the Indigenous peoples in the Ecuadorian Amazon talk about the Kawsak Sacha (Living Forest), which is considered a living being made of other interconnected living selves (the rivers, the lagoons, the trees) who are runa (persons) and communicate with each other. Together, they compose while protecting the forest. The natural world is also a social world (Gualinga, 2016, p. 1). On the other hand, Benjamin Inuca (2017), a Kichwa scholar from Ecuador, proposes the concept of Yachay Tinkuy (confrontation of knowledges) as another element that we identify as central in the conceptualisation of the pluriverse. For him, intercultural knowledge should be recognised as conflictual yet productive in the contact of multiple cultures. Therefore, Indigenous ontologies are "a way of looking at reality that contrasts with the assumption of the 'One-World', that there is a single reality to which multiple cultures, perspectives or subjective representations correspond" (Escobar, 2012, p. 145) This One-World derives from a Western ontology based on individual and separate rationalities where life is seen as progressive and linear (Escobar, 2012).

The pluriverse is the permanent motion of the "worlds and knowledges constructed over the different ontological commitments, epistemic configurations, and practices of being, knowing, and making/doing" (Escobar, 2012, p. 49). This ever-changing network of interrelationships signifies a turn from modern ontology. According to Escobar (2012), this shift challenges the ostensible universal existential assumptions that support individualism, human-centrism, and linear and static conceptions of life and time by embracing relational ontologies in constant movement that consider diversity of forms, knowledges, and positions – including the non-human. For Escobar (2012), an important way to find alternatives to this apparent clash between modern and relational ontologies is Indigenous peoples' worldviews.

Indigenous worldviews are a set of beliefs, values, and systems of knowledge of that encompass a communities' social life, religion, politics, the economy, and

the environment. This articulation is central to sustaining the social fabric and strengthening the sense of belonging. In Mexico, working on la *milpa* (land for the sowing of corn) or celebrating the multiple ceremonies that take place during the year (like the day of the death or the beginning of the harvest season) are two examples of how traditions are vital for intergenerational communication and historical continuity. Despite Mexico's ethnic and linguistic diversity clustered into 68 linguistic groups, Indigenous people share a common worldview with a deep agricultural origin (Zolla & Zolla, 2016). In the Indigenous notion of territory, the division between nature and culture does not exist, as nature and culture are symbolically and materially bonded. Hence, the nature/society and individual/society distinctions are also blurred within the web of relationships that constitute Indigenous territoriality/spirituality (Boege Schmidt, 2006; Castro-Sotomayor, 2020; Rodríguez, 2003; Zolla & Zolla, 2016).

The pluriverse recovers the value of, the collective work on, and the care for the land and the territory as the centre of the family's and community's relations (Gualinga, 2016; Inuca, 2017). 'Community' goes beyond the human realm, as the term assumes that everything – the wind, the mountains, the rainbows, the animals, the people, as well as the books, our houses, the cities – has a corazón-o'tan (heart) in Maya-Tseltal (López Intzín, 2018, p. 184). The principles of the pluriverse – conviviality and relationality – are at the core of Indigenous thinking and ways of being, which have shaped the creation and advancement of intercultural education. The development of intercultural higher education in Mexico is an example of how the inclusion of Indigenous thinking and worldviews offers opportunities to advance the pluriverse.

Intercultural education: The Mexican experience

Western epistemology and ontology shaped and continues to shape most current education systems centred on individual and universalising reasoning, anthropocentric thinking, and the objectification and commodification of nature (De Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015). The uncritical reproduction of these principles has excluded and denied other ways of knowing, thus continuing the epistemic violence and epistemic erasure that marked colonial histories (Grosfoguel, 2016;

Leyva Solano, 2019; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). International agreements have somehow reproduced such violence and erasures. For instance, in 2000, UNESCO's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targeted universal access to education, ensuring that by 2015 boys and girls from all over the world would complete primary education (UN, 2000).

The Millennium Development Goals were not culturally sensitive or inclusive (Herfkens, 2022) because 'access to education' implied doing it through 'conventional systems', which have not been designed to respond to the education demands and proposals furthered by Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, particularly those of higher education (Mato, 2015a, p. 22). While the Millennium Development Goals focus on education in general, the framework introduced by the United Nations helps us understand how the lack of epistemic diversity may also work as a factor that aggravates access to education at the higher level. As Daniel Mato (2015b) states:

> *Colonial survivals are expressed and reproduced in educational systems. Regarding Higher Education, university and non-university, this can be seen not only in the exclusion of students and teachers from Indigenous peoples but also in the exclusion of their worldviews, languages, histories, knowledge, and ways of learning* (Mato, 2015b, p. 7)

Fifteen years later, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) extended the target to equal access to quality tertiary education, emphasising the inclusion of marginalised groups. The idea of inclusion, however, was at the heart of the tensions between an instrumentalist and a rights-based approach to education, bound to reproduce the historical power relations and imbalances between traditional and conventional systems (Wulff, 2020, p. 2). This uncritical notion of inclusion did not lead to substantial changes to address the continuous historical claims made by racialised minorities and other excluded groups regarding the design of a culturally and linguistically relevant education.

Nevertheless, other initiatives are taking place. A recent study by UNESCO, acknowledged the importance of a policy that attends to "the epistemic erasures and active silences, political interests, and interpretive closures of the production and legitimisation of knowledge" (Sriprakash et al., 2020, p. 2). The proposal of

reparative futures endorses and seeks justice for enduring histories of racial and colonial domination and insists on the importance of challenging, rather than reproducing, systems of domination that have denied the "coevalness" of others (Sriprakash et al., 2020). The denial of coevalness (sharing the same time frame or being contemporary with other time frames) has defined educational and technocratic projects and tended to negate or at least radically simplify the Indigenous past.

In Latin America, although the intercultural policies implemented since the early 2000s can be read as alternatives to a Western-centric education, the link between interculturality and sustainable development as the central axis of international educational policies is not clear yet (Catarci, 2021). Higher education experiences for, by, and with Latin American Indigenous peoples have been occurring due to different institutional arrangements, resulting in affrmative actions, special programmes within conventional universities, alliances between governmental or private educational institutions with Indigenous organisations, and independent intercultural institutions, among others. These initiatives will continue to diversify and increase collaborative relationships between institutions. However, they will also be a challenge within a neoliberal extractivist logic that standardises education from a Western, market-oriented perspective (Mato, 2016).

In the case of Mexico, Indigenous thought has informed intercultural policies that the government began to design and implement in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The Zapatista movement of 1994 was decisive in recognising the country's pluricultural character, and consequently of the Indigenous peoples' rights to culturally relevant education (Navarrete Gómez, 2013; Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado, 2010; Schmelkes, 2009). Since 2003, 12 intercultural universities (IUs) have been created as a concrete response to the Zapatista call. The policies associated with the creation of these institutions aimed at addressing the lack of access to higher education for young people in rural areas (Mato, 2015a; Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado, 2010; Schmelkes, 2009). The IUs were designed to educate (Indigenous) intellectuals and professionals to assist in the development of Indigenous peoples and regions; furthermore, IUs seek to link students and their communities while incorporating Indigenous cultures into a "dialogue on an equal footing with other cultures" (Schmelkes, 2009, p. 8).

The establishment of IUs is a top-down initiative designed by the Ministry of Education, the State's education authorities, and local-Indigenous and acade-

mic organisations (some of them part of the government structure). Despite the economic and institutional challenges, IUs face low retention and completion rate, high dropouts, and insuffcient funding (Schmelkes, 2009). Dietz and Mateos Cortés (2019) recognise that a positive aspect of the IU has been the emergence of (Indigenous) scholars with a strong community bond. That is, students who are originally from Indigenous groups dwell in the regions where the universities are located and who have rooted relations with their communities. Therefore, Indigenous students' academic and professional interests are often related to and shaped by the communities with whom they share a profound sense of self and belonging. Some graduates have also continued their education by completing master's and doctoral degrees (Dietz & Cortés Mateos, 2019). Some scholarship initiatives, such as the Ford Foundation's International Fellowships Program (IFP) or the Graduate Scholarship Programme for Indigenous Peoples (Probepi), have been central to Indigenous students' degree completion in graduate education. It is necessary to hold a master's or doctoral degree to teach at any university; therefore, these institutional programmes have been an avenue to advance the pluriverse by valuing and incorporating Indigenous worldviews under the umbrella of interculturality.

In 2006, the General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (CGEIB), as part of the Ministry of Education, defined interculturality as:

> *[The] set of complex relationships, negotiations and multi-way cultural exchanges that seek to develop an equitable interrelation between culturally different peoples, persons, knowledge, and practices. [An interaction that] is undoubtedly part of the conflict inherent in multiculturalism, understood as "the coexistence of different cultures in a given territory"* (CGEIB 2006 in Salmerón Castro & Porras Delgado, 2010, p. 530).

In this context, interculturality is an ethical and political project that has yet to materialise. Nonetheless, it responds to the need for an alternative model of the State that is not nation-based (De Sousa Santos, 2007). Interculturality "serves as a frame of reference and stimulates the construction of forms of coexistence" among the various people and worldviews (Tubino, 2005, p. 95). (Higher) education has a fundamental role in advancing the social and political process

and vision of interculturality that seeks fairer and more equitable relations. For instance, the IUs have been innovative in including courses in the curricula that conventional universities never considered before. These unconventional additions have resulted in important structural modifications to the higher education system, opening spaces for Indigenous knowledges and practices.

The intercultural universities function around five common areas: language and culture, intercultural management, intercultural communication, sustainable development, and ecotourism. For example, at Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI), the degree of Intercultural Management for Development includes courses such as Cultural Diversity, National Languages, History Territory and Identity, Knowledge Management and Intervention, as well as an epistemological-intercultural training node. Remarkably, since 2020, UVI has designed and implemented the Master of Nahua Language and Culture. This master's programme is the first graduate education programme taught in an Indigenous language, Nahuatl. The Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas (UNICH; Intercultural University of Chiapas) also offers courses such as Ethnoterritory and Dialogue of Knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge, Gender and Rights, and Gender as Identity. These courses represent an opportunity to link academic practices with local knowledges bridging multiple perspectives necessary to decolonise the production of knowledge and to open spaces for ontological and epistemological diversities (Grosfoguel, 2016; Leyva Solano, 2019; Leyva Solano et al., 2008, 2018; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012; Yang & Wayne, 2012).

However, we would like to contextualise the importance of Indigenous professors at IUs. The responsibilities of teaching at intercultural universities are "to trigger processes in which students reflect, systematise, and capitalise on community experiences that combine their previous knowledge with community and 'scientific' knowledge" (Dietz & Cortés Mateos, 2019). This teaching task has its limitations: most IUs professors do not speak or know any of the Indigenous languages of the regions where the universities are located (Dietz & Cortés Mateos, 2019). In general, the professors get to know interculturality and the logic of the intercultural university as a result of their hiring. They are not trained to work in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity. Rather, they build didactic strategies from their professional experiences when trying to articulate knowledge and

community practices that force them to work in the margins of their disciplines of origin (Dietz & Cortés Mateos, 2019).

While culturally grounded within IUs some non-Indigenous professors' pedagogical approaches still spring mainly from abstract theories not lived or experienced. Although academically related, the examples they use and the tasks they assign are not always culturally relevant to the students' and communities' realities. Within IUs, although educated in conventional universities, the implementation of intercultural higher education policies is a recent historical process – most Indigenous professors are from the regions where the IU are located. Indigenous professors speak one of the local languages, and this motivates them to transform their ways of teaching. Their pedagogies aim to understand the community's cultural dynamics, worldviews, socio-economic challenges, and territory. This lived communal experience allows professors to offer a perspective that potentially generates post-colonial and decolonial discussions, critical reflections, and practical activities among the students.

As our narratives below will demonstrate, we do not underestimate non-Indigenous professors' capabilities and do not discard what they bring to the table as experts in their disciplines. Our autobiographical accounts show how our intellectual labour as academic Indigenous women links different, situated, and multiple contextual and embodied knowledges (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). This leads to merging what is learned or developed through conventional schooling with what is characteristic of Indigenous peoples and regions. Communities are active participants in the teaching-learning processes, including the production of knowledge. Our narratives seek to make visible two aspects of the participation of Indigenous professors in intercultural education. The first aspect is epistemological, as it addresses the value of Indigenous scholars' contribution to a situated epistemic and relational diversity. The second aspect is political, as our narratives demand to recognise and highlight the importance of including more Indigenous professionals in intercultural universities' faculties. Combined, these two dimensions may improve the robust nature of the intercultural project – from which the pluriverse is built.

Connecting geographies, trajectories, and worldviews

This text was co-written by three academics whose origins and professional trajectories are different but converge in our reflections on the relevance of graduate studies in our current academic commitments. Our bond and reflective encounters and conversations began years ago when we met at the Ford Foundation's International Fellowships Program and the Graduate Scholarship Programme for Indigenous Peoples (IFP-Probepi). Georgina Méndez Torres and Angélica Hernández Vásquez completed their master's studies through the IFP scholarship in 2005 and 2012, respectively, and Marina Cadaval Narezo was part of the IFP-Probepi operational staff for 15 years.

Since 2019, we have worked together to highlight racism in higher education and to make visible the contributions of Indigenous women intellectuals. Our shared experiences about the relevance of graduate education have also allowed us to identify ways intercultural teaching aims to interconnect multiple worlds and promotes dialogues about knowledges (De Sousa Santos, 2010).

Méndez Torres is a Ch'ol (Mayan Indigenous people who mainly live in the states of Chiapas and Tabasco) academic. She holds a doctorate in Anthropology and a Master of Gender Studies at FLACSO Ecuador. Méndez Torres is a professor at UNICH at the San Cristóbal de las Casas campus, Chiapas, where she teaches courses such as Political Participation of Indigenous Women and their Methodologies; Gender, Women's Rights; and Indigenous movements. Hernández Vásquez is a Nahua (majority of the Indigenous population in Mexico who live in almost all the country) professor. She holds a Master of Social Communication from the Universidad Católica de Chile. At UVI, at the Sierra de Zongolica campus, State of Veracruz, Hernández Vásquez teaches Audiovisual and Social Communication and is responsible for the Multimedia Laboratory. She studied Intercultural Management for Development at the same UVI and is one of the first graduates to now be a professor. Cadaval Narezo is a Mexican *mestiza* researcher. *Mestiza* is a racial category that defines the normative Mexican identity as 'mixed' between European/Spanish and Indigenous (Moreno Figueroa, 2011). At the moment of writing this piece, she is at the International Institute for Social Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam in The Netherlands. Her work analyses the tensions among gender, race, and class in higher education.

The autoethnographic work that follows results from a year-long reflection on how our personal experiences with higher education and graduate studies are connected to the cultural, the social, and the political (Ellis, 2004). Being part of the IFP-Probepi and studying abroad have been essential to confront our identities and to understand to what extent these programmes have influenced our current teaching pedagogies. Among IFP-Probepi fellows and alums, the discussions about Indigenous struggles, territories, and histories were central to a long and challenging process of identity reconfiguration. At least in the first generations of IFP at the beginning of the 2000s, most of us grew up denying or hiding our Indigenous origins. We never gave up on them, but we could not be proud of them because of the historical denial of our peoples by the *mestizaje* project. It was not until the political revindication by the Zapatismo that Indigenous peoples and our worldviews mattered.

Placing our own experiences at the forefront of our arguments was "a way of seeing and being [that] challenges, contests [and] supports offcial and hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other" (Denzin, 2006, p. 422). Our collaborative work was constructed from the margins (Brown & Strega, 2005) that is, built by, for, and with the voices of those whose knowledge and presence have been traditionally considered objects but rarely as authors of research (Brown & Strega, 2005; Cruz Cruz, 2020a). Our narratives question and contest the connections between how and what knowledges are created and who is entitled to engage in their production (Brown & Strega, 2005). Therefore, this reflexive exercise combines our epistemic and political standpoints to counterbalance the underrepresentation of Indigenous women and present them/us as producers of knowledge. Critically navigating these positionalities is necessary to decolonise academia (Cruz Cruz, 2020b; Martínez Pérez, 2020). We understand our involvement in writing this text as a collaborative and caring process (Cadaval Narezo, 2022) that implies a relational responsibility (Wilson, 2008) between ourselves and with all those who, implicitly and explicitly, were part of the arguments that we present – students, members of the communities, other teachers, supervisors, friends, and colleagues.

Writing this article was challenging in forming a common but individual narrative voice that could express the iterative process between the personal and the groups' reflections. Differentiating our experiences and connecting them is kept

through using a collective voice. By this we mean a general active voice with 'we', which refers to the three of us – although often 'we' refers only to Méndez Torres' and Hernández Vásquez' voices, especially when they present arguments about their teaching experiences at intercultural universities. Méndez Torres' and Hernández Vásquez' personal stories are italicised and narrated in first person. The rest has been co-reflected, co-discussed, and co-constructed between the three. We are aware of the inconsistencies in the exercise, but this is an attempt to bridge and connect intercultural, multi-contextual, and diverse skills.

Another challenge was the constant linguistic translations. The text was originally written in English (by Cadaval Narezo). The collective discussions were in Spanish, as were Méndez Torres' and Hernández Vásquez' written narratives. Therefore, translations between English and Spanish came and went in a year-long iterative process. It was challenging but useful as it allowed us to discuss further how to make meaning across linguistic and ontological differences. We consider our dialogues to be a manifestation of relational responsibility (Wilson, 2008), implying that we do research or generate knowledge for and with Indigenous peoples. Castro-Sotomayor's contribution to the creation of this text is two-fold: he offered comments and questions that help clarify ideas obscured by the translation process, and he edited the manuscript to bring it closer to (Western) academic readers. Our contributions are different, but each could not have given rise to this text without the other.

Epistemic contributions: from intercultural education to the pluriverse

Reflecting on our personal experiences, we identified three major areas of knowledge production that can move education towards the construction of an epistemic pluriversalism in : 1) The relevance of communities in the production of investigación vinculada (engaged research), 2) The importance of the knowledge produced by Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous women in particular, and 3) The contribution of the Indigenous worldview or 'different grammars' as decolonial ways of naming 'other' understanding and knowing of the world. We conceive these areas as essential to advance epistemic diversity towards the pluriverse.

Investigación vinculada (engaged research): Transformation, learning and action

One of the central objectives of intercultural universities is to emphasise the bond between students and their communities to combine what is practical and local (family, community) with academic and "scientific" knowledge (Zuany Mendoza et al., 2019). This combination varies based on the intercultural university. For example, the curricular design at UVI requires that students involve themselves with a community from the first semester. They explore the region, identify problems, and engage with local organisations and leaders. These involvements lead students to their final research topic. By contrast, at UNICH the classes do not implement direct engagement with communities, or student interactions might be reduced to one week during the semester at the most. Additionally, the load of class subjects and other activities does not allow students to be absent to advance their projects, so they base their investigations on what they know and what they have already experienced as members of those communities.

The course subjects relate differently to the way professors develop the investigación vinculada. Méndez Torres: *At UNICH I teach Gender Studies. In this course, I encourage students to look at and question how communities name certain circumstances or problems because terms such as 'gender', 'rights', or 'inequality' are not necessarily used in the Indigenous communities. Students must rethink those concepts from their own native languages and search for the meaning made by their communities. For example, when Indigenous women reflect on their rights, they mention that they seek respect:* ich´el ta muk*, a Maya Tseltal word. They do not talk about 'rights'. Thus, students are compelled to reflect on what respect means in the Indigenous context to comprehend its philosophical content and practical implications. Students have realised that respect is recognising the dignity and greatness of others and valuing their work, voices, and experiences. Much of the knowledge Indigenous students want to produce in academia is diffcult to systematise following Western categorisation as these are practices, situations, understandings that happen or are actively constructed over time. Intercultural universities offer spaces for discussion where different knowledges meet. Students reflect from the community and with the community. Therefore, the community is a source of thought in university spaces.*

Similarly, in the degree seminars, students reflect on Indigenous women's political participation – which previously was not an attractive topic because it was believed that women did not contribute to knowledge, or to the economy, or to the internal politics of the communities. Students contribute to questioning the historical colonial and patriarchal structures that define Indigenous women's roles of submission and dependence – as studied by mestiza scholars (Hernández Castillo, 2014; Marcos, 2014; Millán, 2014)*. I also share my work about the tensions and shifts around gender, race, and identity* (Méndez Torres, 2008, 2013, 2016, 2019a) *and the various methodologies that Indigenous women promote in local organisations* (Méndez Torres, 2011, 2013, 2018, 2020b)*, for example, by organising theatre plays or by creating healing and training workshops.*

Hernández Vásquez: *At UVI, I reflect with students to raise awareness about their contexts and the importance of connecting and combining different epistemologies, methods, and technical abilities. I present my lessons in Nahuatl, my native language. Students who do not speak it must work with those who do, learning together in Nahuatl. This bilingual engagement is paramount because Spanish is the dominant language for teaching and learning at conventional universities. This linguistic imperialism has contributed to normalising racism and discrimination against those who do not speak Spanish fluently. As a Nahua native speaker, I have the responsibility to contest ways of learning. Indigenous people have always been the ones who do the extra effort to understand the meaning of words, and learn other ways of naming, conceptualising, and perceiving reality. Reversing the burden of the intellectual and emotional effort leads to awareness and becomes a way to decolonise academic practices.*

I also use diverse teaching and learning methodologies that acknowledge linguistic plurality. For instance, at the bachelor's level, for the course National Languages, I design Nahuatl-Spanish materials and activities, then students go to Zongolica Sierra bilingual basic education schools to implement them. Also, students help learners with their homework. The student-learner interaction has contributed to fostering learner's awareness of their cultures, which is vital as learners sometimes are ashamed of speaking their mother tongues. Similarly, UVI students confront their unawareness of regional cultural diversity, which is more impactful if they come from urban cities. When urban students go to the communities, they must move out of their comfort zone and learn about other ways of

being, other cultural practices, other understandings of values, such as respect, communality, among others.

As these personal narratives show, in the methodology of intercultural universities, two elements are central: the strengthening of Indigenous languages as a means of communication and the communities of origin as a source of learning. In developing *investigación vinculada*, communities are not considered objects of research but sources of collective learning where identity, common histories, and territory are combined (Méndez Torres, 2020a, p. 38). Students understand the internal dynamics that constitute the community's sociocultural fabric. The sites also force students to reflect their positionality as insiders-outsiders, or "halfies" (Cruz Cruz, 2020a). Students are simultaneously researchers and members of the community; they know they are subjects of criticism by their own people as any other labourer, whether a builder, a peasant, or a carpenter (Tzul Tzul, 2020, p. 8). Academic knowledge neither insulates them from scrutiny nor necessarily ascribes them to a higher rank. Our communities are not abstract places but political spaces of interpretation (Tzul Tzul, 2020). At the centre of the learning process are the community and the life experiences of the students; teachers guide the creation of learning spaces to engage diverse sources of thought and knowledge, the community, and the academy. These iterative processes make the university a space for the confluence of knowledges.

Intellectual contributions of Indigenous women: Let's use and cite our own work!

Recognising the knowledge produced by Indigenous peoples, particularly women, is an element necessary to advance epistemic pluriversalism. To understand and promote different ways of looking, feeling, and thinking through the writing of Indigenous intellectuals is to open doors to those worlds that the Western academy has denied or portrayed as "others", in which the "otherness" is always referred to as lesser, of lower value (Said, 1978). Therefore, as professors, we include in our courses literature by Indigenous thinkers who are currently discussing and conceptualising various topics, such as linguistic diversity (Aguilar Gil, 2016, 2020a); claims and resistance of Indigenous women (Cumes, 2009b; En-

lace Zapatista, 1993); women's community and political participation (Méndez Torres, 2018, 2019a, 2020b; Tzul Tzul, 2015); and academic research practices of Indigenous peoples (Cruz Cruz, 2020b).

As intercultural Indigenous professors, we are responsible for positioning the extensive bibliography that we know and to which we have also contributed. According to studies on the use of academic literature, quotes and conventional citations refer to and apply to publications by predominantly white Western men, which limits research to a dominant demographic and worldview (Baker, 2019; Mott & Cockayne, 2017). Therefore, intercultural professors and teachers at conventional higher education institutions should encourage students to read and use materials by Indigenous peoples not limited to academic work and include literature, poetry, music, films, and documentaries.

Méndez Torres: *I propose readings by Indigenous intellectuals, such as Gladys Tzul Tzul* (2015, 2020), *a Maya Kiche academic who investigates the communal organisation of Indigenous peoples and the processes of organisation of women in Guatemala* (Tzul Tzul, 2015). *Also, texts by Martha Sánchez Néstor* (2005) *analyse the organisation of Indigenous women in Mexico. The work of Patricia Pérez Moreno* (2021) *on 'violence against women in our ways of feeling-thinking-saying-living – speaking Tseltal', is also a liberatory approach to reflect on how the use of some concepts in Indigenous languages has been modified by colonisation. Reading among us, Indigenous scholars, is one specific activity that balances the use of literature in study programmes, especially in the field of Social Sciences.*

Hernández Vásquez: *I constantly refer to and use non-academic materials produced by both community members and students, such as radio broadcasts, audiovisual short films, and video-letters students make to connect and get to know other communities separated by geographical distance* (Ojo de Agua, 2016). *These materials produced at UVI build interculturality and decoloniality perspectives as educational gazes to resist the coloniality of seeing* (Zárate Moedano et al., 2021). *Podcasts and documentaries by Indigenous filmmakers or producers are also part of the materials I use. For instance, the work of Lista Calista Productions* (ListaCalista, n.d.), *by Armando Bautista and Itandehui Jansen, Mixtecs from Oaxaca, show various stories set in Indigenous communities, exposing the communities' multiple dimensions of the life. Also, the filmogra-*

phy by María Sojob (FICM, 2022), *a Tsotsil filmmaker originally from Chenalhó, Chiapas, explores the narratives and aesthetics based on her own cosmology and experiences as an Indigenous woman. Bautista and Sojob are colleagues who also did their master's studies through the IFP scholarship.*

To promote and use the work produced by Indigenous people or other minorities speaks back to the universalised One-World (Escobar, 2014, p. 145) furthered by the colonial thinking that prevails in conventional universities. The purposeful construction and use of others' knowledges opens and encourages spaces for reflection and dialogue from multiple perspectives. Acknowledging the multiplicity of knowledges and their paths of production is a starting point to build ties between various epistemologies that connect and sustain the relational ontologies necessary to consolidate the idea of the pluriverse.

Different grammars: Decolonial ways of naming

The third aspect we identify as essential for epistemic pluralism is what we refer to as the 'different grammars'. While aware it is not ideal, we decided to use 'different' instead of 'other' grammars to question and challenge the Western discourses that create distances and polarise perspectives about how we know. Besides, 'other' to whom? As Indigenous women, what is 'other' from a Western perspective is who we are. Hence, to use the 'other' as an adjective reproduces the "ethics and praxis of intervention and critique that keep as central the intertwined relation of modernity/ coloniality and the subjectivities and epistemologies this relation has intentionally subalternised, ignored, and displaced" (Walsh, 2012b, p. 12). In this sense, the notion of grammar exceeds language as only a phonetic, syntactic, or semantic matter to include the legitimisation of institutions and worldviews and the recognition of the peoples and their places of enunciation from which they construct meaning (Murphy & Castro-Sotomayor, 2021, p. 14).

Some of these grammars are related to concepts of good living: *kualli chanchiwalistli* in Nahuatl, *lekil kuxlelal* in Maya *Tseltal, buen vivir* in Spanish (López Intzín, 2018; Méndez Torres et al., 2013); feeling-thinking, which include *senti-pensares* (López Intzín, 2018; Méndez Torres et al., 2013); and epistemologies of the heart, which include *corazonando* (López Intzín, 2018; Méndez Torres et

al., 2013). The epistemologies of the heart also relate to the idea of feeling-thinking and coms from the word *o'tan* (heart). Therefore, thinking and knowing are heartened (López Intzín, 2018). These conceptualisations of how reality is perceived "make us culturally other, [Indigenous people] are perhaps very different in the construction, naming, and relationship with the cosmos-world" (López Intzín, 2018, p. 184).

Another two examples from Indigenous women from Guatemala are the 'Red de Vida (web of life) and *'Cura de la opresión* (healing from oppression). The former is about the relationships woven with the universe and the species that surround it and the "mutual interactions that exist in all times and spaces, such as planting, giving birth, and to be inseparable beings from biodiversity" (Kaqla, 2010). The latter questions racism and violence and looks to cure sentiments that have affected people's dignity, such as hatred, rancour, and resentment. The healing happens through massage therapies that, together with "theoretical–conceptual reflections", seek to work on personal experiences where the political dimension of traumas and solutions are recognised (Kaqla, 2010).

As intercultural teachers, we encourage using and analysing these different grammars among students by asking them to identify those generated from their own communities and incorporate them into their research topics. That is, from their own languages and worldviews, students name the concepts using their own languages to understand and analyse the concepts. The narratives by local people must be referred to and transcribed as they were compiled – if it was in Tseltal or Náhuatl, it should be in Tseltal or Náhuatl. If necessary, these terms and their grounded definitions could be translated into Spanish or other languages. For instance, we both, Georgina and Angélica, have discussed with our students that the word or concept of 'gender' does not exist in Náhuatl or Ch'ol. In Náhuatl gender has to be framed as *altepechanehkeh* (group of people who live in the same place considering men and women), or *as siwatl/tlakatl, ometitok* (women/men/both). Therefore, the critical and decolonial interpretation of these words has been an interesting exercise because students realise how diffcult it is to define and conceptualise practices and knowledge that go beyond and have been outside Western logic.

As a strategy to decolonise knowledge, these terms open ways to perceive and even alternatively name social, environmental, and political problems that are not included in or may be marginal to conventional academia. However, it is also important to recognise the complexity and sometimes the impossibility of translating some of these concepts to dominant languages such as Spanish or English. For instance, 'good living' as the *vida plena-digna-justa* (full-dignified-fair life) (López Intzín, 2018) means a balance between Mother Earth and those who inhabit Earth. This balance is achieved by building relationships of solidarity and mutual respect among individuals, the territory, the spiritual, and among various communities. *Kualli chanchiwalistli* is a concept whose meaning represents the value of work, of the people, of the community, of the land, and of the environment. Defining it as 'good living' does not encompass the complexity of Nahua worldviews.

Indigenous languages name objects or situations and also conceptualise how those objects or situations are interconnected with multiple elements and plural worlds summoned in our discussion. One of the main barriers to understanding these broad and complex meanings is that translation goes from Indigenous languages to colonial languages, but the reverse never happens. That is, the meaning of Indigenous terms tries to accommodate and adjust to Western grammars and conceptions, narrowing or misinterpreting Indigenous worldviews, ontologies, and epistemologies.

The examples shared in this section demonstrate that Indigenous epistemic contributions are indispensable to valuing and recognising Indigenous worldviews as part of the world's configuration and seeing power and voice in those otherwise philosophies (Walsh, 2012b). These decolonial exercises are paths to challenge "the idea of a single world under the hegemony of certain conceptions of rationality, the individual, science, the market and the economy – towards a true pluriverse of socio-natural worlds" (Escobar, 2012, p. 23).

Performing the pluriverse: Pending issues

In this essay, we have presented a sample of the ways Indigenous women are contributing to a pluriversal education. As our personal accounts show, the theoretical and practical incorporation of the pluriverse as a philosophical principle of life and political commitment continues to be a challenge despite the calls for epistemic diversity and decolonial thought in higher education. A path forward means placing communities in general, and Indigenous communities in particular, as a legitimate source of knowledge production, energising a network of Indigenous women's intellectual work and creating and productively engaging with decolonial grammars. These strategies reject academic extractivism and encourage the production of Indigenous knowledges and methodologies as a concrete contribution to intercultural dialogue.

This essay is an example of the intercultural dialogue we envision. By thinking and writing about the pluriverse, we created a pluriversal space. Our trajectories and training are informed by the locations and ways we engage and navigate our intersectional identities in the communities and academic institutions where we live and work. For Méndez Torres, Cadaval Narezo, and Hernández Vásquez, this essay is a commitment to articulate and foreground Indigenous women's contributions, thoughts, philosophies, and political positions in relation to academic international spaces to which they hardly have access.

Undoubtedly, language works as an initial barrier to overcome, as English is increasingly becoming the dominant language in academic publication; a language in which, consciously or not, scholars search to publish as it is thought, mistakenly, that English academic outlets contain the most innovative and relevant research (Mendieta et al., 2006). English-based academic writing offers challenges and opportunities to produce knowledge. As a fourth author, Castro-Sotomayor embarked in this dialogue as an academic editor and translator who recognised how translating from Spanish to English undermined the power of the statements and claims put forward by the authors. The call to recognise the labour required to perform a kind of epistemological bridging across cultures, languages, and other aspects of difference are central to advancing pluriversal dialogues (for example, Banerjee & Sowards, 2022).

Our reflections became the result of weaving relationships, of bridging intercultural academia with local-based knowledges. Our dialogues emerge from playing, mixing, and blurring ontological and epistemic boundaries that the Western modern ontology, predominant in conventional education institutions, separates and compartmentalises. The process of translating our ideas from Spanish to English entailed overcoming the structures of language and negotiating our epistemological biases and lived experiences that inform our thinking. We are women of different backgrounds and origins, contexts and formations, who also have similarities and common experiences. To respect the centrality of Indigenous women's voices in the narrative, Castro-Sotomayor asked clarifying and guiding questions, constantly checking his positionality as a male Ecuadorian *mestizo*, which informs the engagements and privileges he experienced as a student and as a professor in institutions of higher education in the United States where he incorporates Global South thinkers often unknown by students and colleagues. For Méndez Torres, Cadaval Narezo, and Hernández Vásquez, writing the essay was an opportunity to know and recognise the work that each one does and promotes in their contexts while recognising institutional logics that can foster or hinder collaboration. We wanted to cross our differences and commonalities as an essential exercise in building a pluriverse.

Even if Castro-Sotomayor joined the process, we still feel that writing among women, among diverse women, is fundamental. Learning about the publication process – submissions, revisions, adjustments, and replies to comments – was a challenge, along with coordinating and balancing schedules, connecting geographies and energies while being mindful of the different conditions of each woman. For example, access to reliable internet connection or the urban or rural location of our institutions was part of the labour, making this publication quite an achievement. As Indigenous professionals, Méndez Torres and Hernández Vásquez have various responsibilities and roles to fulfil besides teaching; thus, translating their experiences into writing was encouraging.

Therefore, this essay is an example of the challenges Indigenous thinkers face to incorporate their thoughts, particularly Indigenous women's theoretical perspectives, in academia. In addition, this essay represents the possibility of overcoming the challenges and how the commitment to dialogue, to learn from each other, and to write together are threads and springs that push diverse women to

navigate those challenges. Pluriversal writing, therefore, is epistemological and political resistance as it opens opportunities to create alliances and coalitions that show the empowering effect of intercultural dialogue.

We cannot end this text without a call to cultivate a pluriverse with more Indigenous professors, and especially women professors, who must be included at intercultural and conventional higher education institutions. A world where many worlds fit is only possible if diversity – of knowledges, cultures, languages, positions, bodies, perspectives – becomes transversal and permanent. How, then, can higher education (continue) to build an intercultural education for a pluriverse? Our answer is by 1) Extending an intercultural perspective to conventional institutions, 2) Developing more graduate education policies that consider and challenge the exclusions Indigenous peoples still experience, 3) Recognising and promoting the Indigenous scholars' and other minorities' academic production, and 4) Strengthening intercultural institutions – economically and politically. The road to changing a universe into a pluriverse is still long. Along with our intercultural allies, Indigenous struggles, and resistances, we will continue and thrive.

CHAPTER VII

Final reflections

It is difficult to think of conclusions of "world"-travelling from enfleshed experiences and reflections that are not fixed, that move and adjust, that blur, deepen, clarify, and nuance; it is almost impossible to close spirals and living processes. Thus, I prefer to reflect here on those points of encounter, of arrivals and departures with which I began this thesis and some of the things that remain and change from this academic journey. I think of the meeting points with the women with whom I have developed collective thinking and my personal enunciations. Points of encounter and departure that are permanent: exclusions and structural inequalities – racism, sexism, classism; differentiated education, epistemic injustice (Icaza, 2022); universalising, Western logics, coloniality of power and gender (Icaza, 2017; Lugones, 2016; Quijano, 2000). Permanent is also the resistance and daily struggles from where we developed deep coalitions through care, love, and "worlds"-travelled (Lugones, 2003); permanent is the critical, constant, grounding reflexivity; the relationality, the accountability, the respect, the reciprocity, the collaboration. These are constant meeting points that were starting points: reflective conversations that became a blog, a book, an article, this thesis. They were kaleidoscopic moments and spaces from which to look, sow, harvest, and grow changes and opportunities.

The changes have been sewn and have grown, and the possibilities they bring have given strength to this work and reflect its greatest value. Changing perspectives by exposing the weaving (ideas, experiences, and actions) is a way of contributing by Indigenous and diverse professional women: knowledge cultivators, activists, caregivers, sisters, agronomists, poets, lawyers, sociologists, and communicators. This work is a change in the narratives about Indigenous women; it is a change inside and outside their communities, and these are adjustments that we must recognise and give weight to. They are contributions that are not always valued, exposed, or easy. They have implied and imply questions, enunciations, "world"-travellings to place oneself in multiple forms, in multiple spaces, in various situations. Changes that should not be seen as binary as they happen in

colourful scales. They open, close, and leave doors and windows ajar. They generate movement. That is, the activities and words of the women who participate in this thesis speak of various ontologies and epistemologies from which to learn about pluriverses, interculturality, and empathy.

Reflecting and writing together on concepts such as enfleshment, enunciations, intersectionalities, feminism, gender, racism, resistances, pluriverse, interculturality, and political and community actions, already speaks of how they are contributing to cultivating knowledge otherwise, and how graduate education has informed our trajectories, our personal and professional paths. For me, this work is an answer to that central question of how graduate education has informed the professional trajectories of Indigenous women from Mexico and how they are positioning themselves as political actors. This work discusses struggles for spaces, naming exclusions and exposing the strategies developed. That individual and collective knowledge generated narratives that arose from enfleshed experiences that are in themselves theory (Ahmed, 2014; Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2003; Motta, 2022b, 2022a; Motta & Bermudez, 2019); understanding that our body carries historical scars from which we can reflect. The scars are experiences that transform because they heal and heal because they name shared pains, and by doing so they become *acuerpamientos colectivos de resistencia* (enfleshed collective resistance). Therefore, in this thesis, to playfully "world"-travel has been a point of departure, a loving thread to cultivate this work, and a concrete act of resistance.

Following Lugones (2003), this academic journey has led me to reflect on my plural selves as a woman, distancing and connecting, weaving. The journey took me to see where I could look at and be aware of others, of what I am not (Indigenous, for example) and how I inhabit different other selves; for instance, I see how the Indigenous women I have worked with look at me: the space and meaning I represent in their worlds; how the oppressions that I do not experience are also mine, and how I reproduce those oppressions; how the access to and conclusion of higher education for them was not written on their birth certificate as it was on mine. This work is an invitation to identify our privileges, question them, and act with and from them. We must recognise privileged situations: having a guaranteed education, choosing a career, having transport to school, migrating by choice not necessity, not having to justify the desire to study. Privilege is also,

and above all, being able to write, speak, and communicate in the language with which we look at our parents and grandparents and for which it is not necessary to say a word. We should use those privileges to generate synergies, coalitions, and value, as well as promote diversity as a place of pluriversality: build for and from it. Feed those coalitions that allow us to be many, various, all, separate, unbroken.

As a white/*mestiza* woman, I have been able to understand the unbrokenness of women who have been seriously harmed by racism and appreciate their lives held in communities where culture flourishes through struggle, through empathetic and sympathetic thinking, through the devotion of friendship, and through taking seriously my own participation and self-critical stance as part of an ethnocentric world: "Anyone who is not self-deceiving about racist ethnocentrism can begin to see us unbroken through engaged thinking […] Such thinking requires that she become and think as a self-conscious critical practitioner of her culture and a self-conscious and critical member of the racial state. Furthermore, such thinking is possible because she is a participant in both" (Lugones, 2003, p. 43).

Therefore, and from that critical stance, from that metamorphosis of the self, this thesis also changed from an individual monograph to hybrid material, trying to convey the personal and the collective, challenging the 'I' writing to the 'I/we' to dismantle the binaries between theory and practice, the political interventions from above, and the imposition of a singular sense of understanding (Lugones, 2003); with a collective, relational knowledge cultivation (Shilliam, 2015; Wilson, 2008). Another important contribution has been the use of literature by Indigenous scholars (Mexican, Canadian, New Zealander, Guatemalan), especially in Chapters V and VI but also in the theoretical and conceptual frames in Chapter III.

From Chapter III, it was possible to trace how the thesis is a dialogue among Indigenous/communitarian/territory-body, descolonial, decolonial, intersectional Black feminism and post-development conceptual frames that are not commonly put together. This is a concrete contribution. On the one hand, I have looked at, exposed, and analysed the various layers of oppression that racialised women's experience, and on the other hand, I have reflected on the various identities/enunciations/positionalities, "world"-travelling from where to resist. The storytelling, as ontological and epistemological frames, was also an echo to an otherwise academic language, also following Indigenous peoples' traditional ways of being and of transferring generational knowledge. Narrate to identify and connect in-

dividual stories that are also common – similar and opposite experiences ¬– that allowed us to analyse contexts that are connected. Narrating as an epistemic space of interpretation. Narrate to be, to continue, to resist.

Chapter IV exposed how care could be a methodological point of departure. Care not as frailty but as a collective enterprise that contributes with strength, conviction, and clarity to the methodological and epistemic mosaic that the Black intersectional feminist proposes, as well as the mosaic that Indigenous/communitarian/territorial (territory-body), descolonial, and decolonial perspectives have. This was linked to the enfleshed experiences necessary for a plural, non-universalising epistemology, for which the 'marginalised' or not-recognised voices should be the centre. Chapter IV also presented the concept of reflective conversations as common points of departure from where to weave time and stories, from where to look at those we work with and ourselves: "world"-travellers, plural selves thinking together, connecting. Personally, this was a key text through which I could reflect on the fieldwork experience and the meaning of the methodological process, as well as from where the centre of the research was shifted. The text was a point of arrival and of departure. It continues to be that kaleidoscopic vantage point from where I question academic processes and representations, power relations. I think the text could be encouraging for other researchers to be flexible, to revert narratives, to co-create.

Chapter V is a text that I would dare say is the first or one of the few of its kind. Diverse women wrote it, most of them Indigenous, from various Indigenous groups, and those women shared enfleshed experiences of racism. From those experiences, we theorised. We found out that most of the literature we read was texts from *mestiza* scholars with some references to Indigenous women's experiences. Personally, I think the reflective and writing process was profound. I used adjectives that I never had to use before to introduce myself: female, Mexican, mestiza, white, raised in a city. It was when I questioned myself, why, then, from my perspective, did it seem so natural and easy for Indigenous women, Maya, Nahuas, Ch'oles, Mixes, Mixtecs, Zapotecs, or Rarámuris to name themselves as such? Did they feel or had they felt as uncomfortable, as invaded as I had felt? When discussing with them when reading their texts, I knew that their privacy had also been broken and that it was not pleasant to put labels on ourselves, to define ourselves based on our bodies. To all of us in Latin America, Segato (2010)

says it is difficult to talk about the colour of our skin and our physical features. It made us all uncomfortable. For Indigenous women, I realised for opening painful claim processes; for me, for recognising and trying to place my privileges as part of the ethnocentric state.

My take on this chapter is that I have a personal story with a confession to make. There was a time when I was angry. I felt excluded as a Mexican within Mexico: "Are you Mexican by any chance?" I am constantly asked in the markets, on public transport, when I visit other states of the country – Morelos, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Yucatán, Veracruz, Michoacán, the State of Mexico. I confess that as a child that question made me feel uncomfortable, and as adolescent it offended me, it hurt and made me feel angry. There was a time when it made me feel left out, not accepted. There was a time, not so long ago, I confess, that I called that exclusion racism. What did that question mean but a lack of recognition? What did the scrutiny of glances, those expressions of doubt mean if not a denial, the rejection of my body, of my history, of that mestiza/Mexican woman who does not need to be named? If higher education has been of any use, it has been to critically analyse these and other questions.

Furthermore, discussing and reflecting on these issues with other women has forced me to understand that racism is always, always generated from conditions of privilege to conditions of disadvantage and can never, ever happen the other way around – the oxymoron of inverted racism. If the classification and hierarchization derived from physical and cultural differences is part and is the result of the colonial project –in which the white man, as an ideal to be achieved, has imposed the rules of the game– the effects and results of that classification and hierarchization cannot be inverted to justify a belittlement as an act of racism. In other words, that exclusion, that anger I felt, is more related to being part of a privileged minority that historically defined and imposed power relations than the contempt for a *mestizaje* positioned as an ideal to be achieved. Even if we do not agree with these racial categories and differences, it is up to us to recognise that they exist and that they constantly define us, they label us all. That it is a good principle to reverse them. The work must be done on all fronts.

Chapter VI highlighted the valuable and not always recognised contributions of Indigenous women in advancing pluriversal education. Through personal narratives, we highlighted the ongoing challenge of incorporating the pluriverse as

a guiding principle in both theory and practice, despite the growing recognition of the importance of epistemic diversity and decolonial thought in higher education. The text is an invitation to move forward, and to Indigenous communities as legitimate sources of knowledge. This involves fostering a vibrant network of Indigenous women intellectuals, actively engaging with decolonial frameworks, and rejecting academic extractivism. Doing so makes it possible to encourage Indigenous worldviews and methodologies, making meaningful contributions to intercultural dialogue. Only from diversity without inequalities, from that power to think with and from the heart, will it be possible to build that plural world of which we all feel part and that urgently needs to be fairer, kinder, more respectful, and inclusive, and one of which I want to be a part.

In summary, the theoretical contributions of this work were made by linking various feminisms (Indigenous/communitarian/territorial, descolonial, decolonial, and Black intersectional) to critical development studies. The contributions have been transformative, aiming to challenge the dominant development studies narratives and power dynamics. By incorporating these frameworks, I am contributing to the analysis of the complex interplay between gender, race, class, colonialism, and development processes. The decolonial and intersectional theoretical foundations highlighted the specific experiences and struggles of Indigenous women within development contexts, specifically within higher education, shedding light on how they are disproportionately affected by structural inequalities and marginalisation. This work unveiled diverse knowledge systems, practices, and strategies of resistance employed, offering alternative perspectives and solutions to the conventional development paradigms.

Another contribution of the thesis is how these overall theoretical foundations have transversally been woven to inform each chapter, even if they did not frame them. For example, in Chapter IV, when reflecting on the methodology, Marcela Avella shared how the Western idea of gender equity is breaking communitarian understandings because it does not consider the social and political roles – and the power within – of women in her hometown in Oaxaca. This was a grounded reflection, without naming it as such, from an Indigenous/communitarian feminism. A similar example could be seen in Chapter V, where we exposed structural exclusions in the education system that, beyond the decolonial frame, also touched upon post-development critiques of a universalising education model

contested by pluriversal perspectives (Escobar, 2012, 2014). Furthermore, to use a feminist decolonial perspective, particularly the work of Lugones (Lugones, 2003, 2010, 2016), it was nodal to go beyond Black intersectionality frames that focus on multiple fragments and oppression experienced by racialised women. Leaning on Lugones' (2003) work, I looked instead at Indigenous women's unbrokenness as "world"-travellers. By centring their political acting and voices and their enfleshed experiences, the theoretical integration has been an exercise of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009), exploring our worlds of senses, our bodies – flesh and bones – and historical oppressions as sources of knowledge and theory.

These theoretical foundations also opened possibilities to conceptualise various aspects that should not be considered as 'only' concepts but rather as living practices. We "world"-travel to acknowledge our plural selves, our plural world of senses: ontological and epistemic principles to focus on the unbrokenness, not-fragmented racialised bodies. We build deep coalitions as loving, caring relations to resist and transform from diversity: from, with, towards a critical interculturality that can create pluriversal understandings, plural ways of being, of looking at the reality, and from where to recognise and embrace how to cultivate knowledge. We cultivate from those worlds of senses that have been disregarded by academic spaces, enfleshment experiences crossed by patriarchy, coloniality, erasure.

Therefore, the theoretical and conceptual frames of this thesis unravelled and wove as they informed the methodology and the methods. Through a critical and constant examination of the research process and aiming to challenge and dismantle colonial and Eurocentric knowledge systems, I questioned and disrupted traditional research practices that normally perpetuate power imbalances, epistemic violence, and the marginalisation of Indigenous and non-Western knowledges. My methodological choices prioritised the inclusion of multiple knowledge systems, centring the voices and actions of Indigenous women, promoting care and collective understandings. This centring involved the co-creation of knowledge, using storytelling and individual and collective enfleshed experiences and narratives to reflect about ourselves and about exclusions and resistances, and to share diverse ways of knowing. The translation and interpretation during the co-writing wove in our understandings, enunciations and failures.

In terms of the ethics behind the process to cultivate this work, and hence its contributions, was the focus on care, relationality, accountability for which respect, time and knowing when to let go have been essential. Sharing the uncomfortable, the problematic, the tensions, the uncertainties, and embracing, reflecting, and nuancing what results from that sharing, have all been key for this journey. For my own process of decolonisation. Therefore, this work is a space of multiple interpretations that holds inconsistencies and is incomplete. However, rather than avoid or hide its result, I have seen the inconsistences and incompletions as productive. The edges, the scratches, the cracks, and the holes that have not been identified or filled in are left as ajar spaces to continue the conversations that have been opened.

The general contribution of this thesis to the field of development studies is multiple. On the one hand, it contributes to the literature on post-development theory (Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 2014; Harcourt, 2009, 2016, 2019; Sachs, 2010) that challenges the role of education in legitimising development discourses and policies. The thesis gives concrete examples to advance towards pluriversal (Escobar 2012, 2014) principles of theory and practice. On the other hand, this thesis aims to contribute to the literature in the field of decolonial studies that question the perpetuation of colonial/modern structures and offer alternatives to the hegemonic interpretation of both development and education. This means being actively engaged with frameworks that encourage Indigenous worldviews and methodologies as meaningful contributions to the cultivation of knowledge.

Methodologically, this thesis contributes to feminist decolonial literature (Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2003; Motta, 2021, 2022b, 2022a) and Indigenous/communitarian/*territorial* feminisms (Aguilar Gil, 2018a; Cabnal, 2010, 2019; Cumes, 2009a, 2017; Cumes & Monzón, 2006; Méndez Torres, 2020b; Méndez Torres et al., 2013; Millán, 2014; Paredes, 2008) that are claiming spaces to recognise our bodies-territories and enfleshed experiences as sites of theory and of knowledge. Furthermore, the empirical nature of this research, based on concrete lives, situations, feeling-thinking, and "world"-travellings, has been developed following Indigenous principles (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) of reciprocity, respect, and accountability from where to cultivate tangible knowledge, rooted in daily lives, in territory, in time. This bridging between decolonial, Indigenous/communitarian/*territorial* feminist perspectives, and Indigenous methodologies

is another specific contribution towards critical development studies that are looking for alternatives to universalising/Western paradigms towards pluriversal understandings (Escobar, 2012, 2014). The methods to co-create knowledge through collective reflective conversations and enfleshed experiences also contribute to the literature on decolonial methodologies (Smith, 2012) and to what Shilliam (2015) encourages as a different way to till knowledge, to turn matter, and encourage growth.

The ethical contributions resonate with Indigenous principles and methodologies, such as those linked to accountability, relationality, and respect (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008), as well as to the literature from Indigenous women in Latin America (Cruz Cruz, 2020b). They are calling for (Indigenous) scholars to create their own grammars and to look at the Indigenous communities as sources of knowledge rather than objects of knowledge (Cruz Cruz, 2020a).

Overall, I am offering a panorama of actions that allow us to imagine another development, a flourishing. I placed together these possibilities, collectively, from and with the experiences and reflections of Indigenous professional women who have been neglected or co-opted by the conventional development discourses and the corresponding educational policies. Their resistances show us other paths while reversing colonial constructions that have diminished or devalued them. Their contributions are important and are needed to challenge those perceptions and to build those possibilities.

This work exemplifies interculturality and pluriversality as points of encounters, departures, and arrivals towards collective and diverse flourishing. This work questions how the overwhelming and crushing machinery of development, the gears of which have been the rampant competition towards individual achievements measured by consumer-capitalist logics, has divided, skewed, erased, killed, forgotten. The gears are breaking our connections as human beings, as earth beings. In the previous pages, the reader has been immersed in stories and proposals that should be an example to look and walk differently. (Higher) education, as a space for critical reflections and political enunciations, has also been responsible for perpetuating a universalising modern/colonial model, racist and classist, as well as exclusionary. Development studies must take more seriously how education and educational systems have been complicit in denial and neglect. I hope here to have contributed to that debate. My thesis shows how to

advance in critical development studies by considering more grounded, feminist, decolonial perspectives that can shift how development studies scholars reflect and construct daily lives and cultivate relations and knowledge.

Final words

It is said that doing doctoral research is a lonely and painful process. It is. Especially when reality is critically analysed, when we question power structures and seek answers to injustices, gaps, and inequities, when exclusions are built daily from our bodies, with our stories, with life. It hurts to see that there are things that seem not to change. We continue to fight to reverse and stop racism, sexism, and classism. It also hurts to decolonise and deconstruct the way we think and live, questioning how coloniality, capitalism, and development are an ivy difficult to dry, or cut. How academia has refused to cultivate knowledge from and with other perspectives to generate pluriverses and intercultural dialogues. However, it could also be a very rewarding, exciting process. So that sharing from diversity can teach us other paths. This academic journey has had the playful and loving counterpart of working, of cultivating knowledge by exchanging stories and thoughts with diverse women, of learning from the human perspective, and not only from what is written. Translating, questioning, waiting, failing, reconfiguring, and proposing have been embodied actions from which to walk through life, to write a thesis – another, to co-construct, travel worlds, to share. I hope that this thesis proves to be inspiration to look critically at development studies, examining how we engage in knowledge cultivation, acknowledging the relations we weave, as well as the resistances we fight for, and the realities we can transform. Then this thesis will have fulfilled its purpose.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1:
International Fellowships Program Archive.
Files reviewed. Fieldwork, April 2018.

Columbia University Libraries: Rare Book and Manuscript Library
http://findingaids.cul.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_9489034/dsc/1

201 Butler Libraryu
535 West 114th St, NY 10027
(212) 8547309
Opening hours: Mon 9-19:45/Tue-Fri 9-16:45

Files reviewed

Series I: New York Secretariat, 2000-2013

Series I contains paper records (145 linear feet) and digital records (over 3.5 TB) relating to the administration of IFP as a whole. The records in Series I were created and used by staff members at the IFP New York Secretariat, in partnership with local organisations which managed key aspects of the programme in each local context. The Secretariat was in operation from 2001 through 2013.

Material formats included in Series I are minutes of the Board of Directors, policy records, staff and Fellow handbooks, evaluation and research papers, records of international and regional meetings, staff correspondence (which took place largely by email), and publications issued both by IFP and external organizations. Grant files document grants awarded by IFP to international partners, placement partners, and other organizations involved in carrying out IFP. Financial records include documentation of interactions between the New York Secretariat and its financial advisors – both the internal Finance and Investment Advisory Committee and the external investment groups Northern Trust and Seix Investment Advisors, which managed the programme's funds. They also include documentation of the Secretariat's maintenance of nonprofit status in New York State and the United States, and routine interactions with the Internal Revenue Service and other government entities that occurred as part of IFP's maintaining legal and regulatory compliance. The media library contains photographic and video materials documenting the programme. Secretariat staff members' participation in the broader community of non-profit organizations – especially those concerned with international education – is documented to a lesser extent in these files.

Records created by the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), an IFP partner responsible for conducting programme evaluations for the duration of IFP, are also located in Series I because they were used by the Secretariat staff in administering the programme. Additionally, starting in 2007, a joint survey of alums conducted by CHEPS and IFP was carried out annually. CHEPS digital records consist of data files from the surveys and interviews, as well as periodic summary reports. Copies of the summary reports and Secretariat correspondence with CHEPS are also located in Series I paper records. These files are particularly valuable for summary data on Fellows and for evaluating programme impact.

In several cases, the records of multiple IFP Secretariat staff members are located within the same subseries. This arrangement appears to have been a natural function of the processes through which the Secretariat carried out its work, and as such, no attempt has been made to separate them. Joyce Malombe, Director for Africa and the Middle East, left her position in 2007. Her successor, Damtew Teferra, left in 2009 and was not replaced. The records created by Malombe and Teferra are physically grouped together, though their creators can largely be discerned by the dates of their creation, in addition to identifying evidence within the records themselves. The files of Ashok Gurung, Programme Officer, and Rita Soni, Programme Associate, are also physically grouped together, as both worked on similar projects at the Secretariat. Similarly, records created by Communications Officer Rachel Clift are mixed with those created and maintained by Director of Communications Diana Whitten, and records created by Grants Manager Barbara Wanasek are mixed with those created and maintained by Director of Finance and Administration Robert Oppegard.

The bulk of the digital records of the IFP Secretariat were transferred to the Rare Book and Manuscript Library on a Columbia University Libraries-provided hard drive on September 26, 2013. Additional digital records in the series were transferred from more than 400 digital media carriers received in 2013 and 2014 in shipments of paper records from the IFP Secretariat.

Subseries I.1: International Fellowships Fund Board of Directors, 2001-2013

Subseries I.1 contains the meeting minutes of the International Fellowships Fund Board of Directors. The IFF Board of Directors was the governing body ultimately responsible for policy and financial administration for the Ford Foundation's International Fellowships Program. Ambassador Donald McHenry served as the Board of Directors' chair for the duration of the programme. The Board of Directors met three times per year, usually in January, May, and September, between 2001 and 2013.

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Appendix 2: Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws

Enlace Zapatista (1993), Ley Revolucionaria de las mujeres

As published by the EZLN in Enlace Zapatista (1993).
In their just fight for the liberation of our people, the EZLN incorporates women in the revolutionary struggle regardless of their race, creed, colour or political affiliation, requiring only that they meet the demands of the exploited people and that they commit to the laws and regulations of the revolution. As well as, taking account of the situation of the woman worker in Mexico, the revolution incorporates their just demands of equality and justice in the following Women's Revolutionary Law.
First--Women, regardless of their race, creed, colour or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in any way that their desire and capacity determine.
Second--Women have the right to work and receive a just salary.
Third--Women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for.
Fourth--Women have the right to participate in the matters of the community and have charge if they are free and democratically elected.
Fifth--Women and their children have the right to Primary Attention in their health and nutrition.
Sixth--Women have the right to education.
Seventh--Women have the right to choose their partner and are not obliged to enter into marriage.
Eighth--Women have the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.
Ninth--Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.
Tenth--Women will have all the rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give.

About the author

Marina Cadaval Narezo is a practitioner and scholar focused on inclusion, diversity, and equity policies, particularly in higher education. She concluded her Phd at the International Institute of Social Studies -Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS-EUR) in The Netherlands where she also pursued a master's degree in Social Policies for Development. She obtained a bachelor's degree in History at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Her action-research on the tensions of gender, race and class in education policies derive from her involvement in the first graduate scholarship programs in Mexico aimed at Indigenous people. She is interested in cultivating knowledge and engage in policy design/making from feminist and decolonial perspectives, considering collaboration and care as main values. Her long experience include teaching at graduate level, participation in international conferences, organization of academic and non-academic events at local and international level, and as member of various selection committees. She has also worked as a policy advisor, advocacy consultant and project coordinator.

Publications

Cadaval Narezo, M., Y. Chan Dzul, G. Méndez Torres, L. Olivas Espino, C. Osorio Hernández, (eds.) (2023), *Mujeres indígenas, mujeres diversas. Nombrando el racismo en la educación superior* (Indigenous women, diverse women. Naming racism in higher education). Mexico: ISS/EUR-U Yich Lu'um-RETOS-CLACSO.

Cadaval Narezo, M. (2023), "Mestizaje. La necesidad de nombrarnos para no tener que hacerlo" (Mestizaje. The need to name ourselves so we don't have to do it), in Cadaval Narezo, M., Y. Chan Dzul, G. Méndez Torres, et al. (ed), *Mujeres indígenas, mujeres diversas nombrando el racismo en la* educación superior. Mexico: ISS/EUR-U Yich Lu'um-RETOS-CLACSO.

Cadaval Narezo, M. & A. Gollaz Moran (2023), "Transformative Methodologies: Professional indigenous women acting to transform urban spaces in Mexico: methodological reflections", BLISS BLOG, ISS-EUR

Cadaval Narezo, M., Méndez Torres, G., Hernández Vásquez, A., & Castro-Sotomayor, J. (2023). "Contributions to the pluriverse from indigenous women professors of intercultural universities". *Globalizations*, 20(7): 1144-1162: https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2023.2193546

Cadaval Narezo, M. (2022), "Methodologies for collaborative, respectful and caring research. Conversations with professional indigenous women from Mexico", in W. Harcourt, C. Dupuis, J.

Gaybor & K. van de Berg (Eds.). (2022) *Experiments and Reflections in Feminist Methodologies*, Series: Gender, Development and Social Change, Palgrave.
Blog Resistencias y Mujeres Indígenas Profesionistas (Blog Resistances and Indigenous Professional Women) (2021): www.mujeresyresistencias.com
Cadaval and Icaza (2018), "Epistemic Diversity. "I am where I think": research and the task of epistemic diversity", BLISS BLOG, ISS-EUR

Conferences and presentations

European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) Conference (July 2023). Lisbon, Portugal. Panel: Mind the gap(s)? Political economy of feminist knowledge production in women, gender and development studies across global south/north divides. Presentation: 'Collaboration at the Center of Transformative Methodologies in Development Studies'
Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO) Conference (June 2022) Mexico City. Panel: Pueblos indígenas: plurinacionalidades, saberes, luchas y autonomías: Presentation: 'Aportes de Mujeres Indígenas Profesionistas a la Educación Superior Intercultural. Prácticas para el Pluriverso. (Panel: Indigenous peoples: plurinationalities, knowledge, struggles and autonomy. Presentation: 'Contributions of Professional Indigenous Women to Intercultural Higher Education. Practices for the Pluriverse)
European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) Conference (July 2021). Online.
Panel: Transformative Methodologies for Social Justice. Presentation: 'Shifting Centers. Conversations with professional indigenous women from Mexico. A caring, transformative methodology?'
Panel: Education and Social Justice in the Pluriverse. Presentation: 'Professional Indigenous Women. The Use of Conventional Graduate Education to Reposition Indigenous Worldviews and Rethink Patriarchal Practices'
Transformative Methodologies Project. (May 2021). ISS-EUR. Presentation: "A for collaborative, respectful and caring research. Conversations with professional indigenous women from Mexico": https://vimeo.com/546566226/75b8f9546d
II Congreso Internacional en Políticas Públicas e Interculturalidad (September 2019) (2nd International Congress on Public Policy and Interculturalism), Veracruz, Mexico. Presentation: "Graduate Education, Indigenous Women and Development. Towards an intersectional proposal in the formulation of educational policy".

Academic projects & grants

The Right to the City and Indigenous Women: Mapping Racism (2022-2023). Research Innovation Fund Project (RIF) with Prof. Karin Arts, financed by the International Institute of Social Studies-Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS-EUR)
Indigenous Women Go Virtual: Responding to Racism in Graduate Education in Latin America (#Indigenous&Woman@HE) (2020-2021). Research Innovation Fund Project (RIF) with Prof. Rosalba Icaza, financed by ISS-EUR
'Racism in graduate education. Gazes, reflections and resistances of Indigenous women in Mexico. Online Conversations' (2020). Project selected as part of the Project: 'Proposals for Inter-

net actions to eradicate racism in higher education in Latin America', by Cátedra UNESCO Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America

Teaching experience

Teaching Assistant. MA Course Politics of Modern Development, ISS-EUR (2023, 2022, 2021, 2020)
Guest lecturer, Decolonizing Practices in Research. Erasmus Mundus MA Euroculture, Groningen University (March 2023, 2022)
Guest lecturer, MA Course Qualitative interviews. ISS-EUR (2022)

Professional experience

ECHOs Project. Erasmus+ project, "Changing Our Story", on inclusive education within university settings in Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Netherlands, and Ghana. Co-funded by the European Union. ISS-Phd Representative (2021-2024)
Diversity and Inclusion Team. ISS-EUR, ISS-Phd Representative (2019)
ISS-European Association of Development, Research and Training Institutes (EADI), ISS-PhD Representative (2019-2020)
ISS-Development Dialogues (ISS-DD), ISS-PhD Representative (2019-2020)
Civic Innovation Research Group (ISS-EUR), ISS-PhD representative (2017-2019)
The State of Accountability Conference, Assistant, ISS-EUR (2017)

Special courses/trainings

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Access International Knowledge Week, IDEA Center-EUR (2023)
Phd Supervision Course, Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union (2022)
Basic Didactics Course, Risbo-EUR (2020)
Public Presentation Skills, ISS-EUR (2020)
Q-Methodology, EUR (2020)
Collaborative Filmmaking Workshop, Leiden University-ISS (2018)
Poster Presentation, EUR (2017)
Workshop over racism. Colectivo Copera, A.C. Mexico (2017)

This thesis emerges from personal and collective journeys through several contexts,lives, and times. It represents a living process that started before the academic exercise and will continue beyond it. It is a point of encounters, of arrivals and departures, of changes and permanences, of synergies, coalitions, and disagreements among the many participants who helped me to craft my arguments. It is formed by a series of plural narratives based on my listening, learning, and discussing with a group of Indigenous women from Mexico about how graduate education has informed their professional trajectories and how they are positioning themselves as political actors.

By emerging over time and through a plurality of voices, this work recognises diverse experiences in knowledge cultivation, while challenging the historical marginalisation and erasures that Indigenous women face in academia and other political spaces. The thesis aims to promote inclusivity, social justice, and gender equality by providing examples of how Indigenous women's experiences are relevant to build plural, intercultural understandings and practices, particularly in and for development studies.