Mexico is not for beginners: a postscript to ‘Intercultural Universities’[[1]](#footnote-1)

In November 2013 I published an article in the *Journal of Latin American Studies* (Lehmann 2013) which contained an account of interviews I conducted at various times between 2006 and 2010 with teaching staff at Mexico’s Intercultural Universities (UIs). The focus of the article was on ‘what they thought they were doing’, and above all what they understood by ‘interculturalidad’. During my conversations I had been forcibly struck by the seriousness and the inquiring mindset with which my interlocutors approached the subject and the idea: the article claims that side-by-side with the intercultural agenda or discourse, these individuals were inspired by the dissident counter-tradition of popular education carried forward in Latin America by the *basista* church under the influence of Liberation Theology (Lehmann 1990, Levine 2012), by numerous NGO projects and by educators in the school of Paulo Freire, and in Mexico by a string of projects and political movements inspired by existing and former clergy, notably Jesuits.

In October 2014 I went to Xalapa to take part in a ‘Foro’ of the Intercultural Universities (*Tercer Foro: Investigación Vinculada en las Universidades Interculturales*, 10-12 October 2014). I also had the opportunity to read a new PhD thesis from CIESAS (the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social – Mexico’s multi-sited Centre for graduate studies and research in history and the social sciences) by Karla Vivar (Vivar Quiroz 2014) and to receive comments from Lourdes Casillas, long-time Director of Educación Media Superior y Superior at the CGEIB (Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe) the body which developed the model of intercultural higher education and which advises both the UIs themselves and the Education Ministry (SEP – Secretaría de Educación Pública) on the subject.

On reading Karla Vivar’s thesis and listening to Lourdes Casillas’ comments on the Spanish version of my paper I came to realize that the article’s omission of the political context in which the UIs operate seriously undermines its reliability as a source for the description of what they are doing as educators and for the interpretation of their role in the improvement of the socio-economic condition of indigenous Mexicans and in the politics of recognition of indigenous cultures. As an analysis of the discourse it may still stand, but that precisely illustrates the limitations of an excessive focus on discourse in conducting and reporting ethnographic research.

*The relationships between the Intercultural Universities, the CGEIB, and the Secretaría de Educación*

The first specific mistake in the article was to omit the consultations which had been undertaken from 2002 by the CGEIB with indigenous communities prior to the development of its *Modelo Educativo* (Loncón Antileo 2006a, Loncón Antileo 2006b, Loncón Antileo 2006c, Loncón Antileo 2006d)*.* It thus gave the impression that the Model had been developed within the state exclusively. In fact the CGEIB had conducted consultations in communities and these are described in extensive reports which have been languishing in storerooms, printed but not distributed, since the early 2000s and accessible on the web but not through the CGEIB’s own website.[[2]](#footnote-2) If they did not consult with an organized indigenous movement, this is not surprising since the only such would have been the Zapatistas who would not engage with the state apparatus. The last national indigenous organization was attached to the PRI but because of dissidences was dissolved by President López Portillo in 1981 and there has been nothing at even regional level since.[[3]](#footnote-3) The consultations were organized by a Chilean educator and anthropologist Elena Loncón Antileo, who now lives and works in Chile, and agreed to be interviewed by me on Skype in late 2014 about the consultations which had occurred more than ten years earlier. For example the report on Chihuahua was based on ‘Foros’ (Forums) lasting four days to which community leaders, men and women with knowledge of traditions, histories, music and ‘saberes’ (knowledge of plants for example); the CDI had created a ‘Consejo de Pueblos Indígenas’ and brought it into the process, participants received funding for travel and so on. The Foros took place in a pleasant, isolated location. Elena Loncón describes the atmosphere as positive and even merry (‘mucha alegría’) and contrasts it with similar events currently undertaken in Chile where there is much bitterness and conflict among different indigenous currents. She hired groups of students who recorded and transcribed the proceedings, and she then used the transcriptions to develop a study curriculum or syllabus which provided a ‘platform’ for the development of Bilingual and Intercultural Education (not only higher education). She describes the exercise as a ‘primer aterrizaje’ (literally ‘a first landing’) in the approximation to a new type of school or schooling for intercultural education covering primary, secondary and higher levels.

At this early stage there seems to have been much enthusiasm for intercultural education in the CGEIB, as one might expect from an institution newly founded as a result of a presidential initiative, and its advocates felt they had support in the state, so they ‘took on’ the apparatus of the SEP, organizing week-long residential training seminars in which they trained, or tried to train (*capacitar*), the SEP técnicos in the mysteries of interculturalidad.[[4]](#footnote-4) It was a struggle (‘batallamos mucho’): the SEP staff, from the Ministry’s own Indigenous education apparatus, whose ethos was utterly different from that of interculturalidad, would argue the toss at every turn, even querying the way the seminar leaders dressed. Their habits (‘códigos’) were different: in Elena Loncón’s words they were in need of ‘re-education’ and it was hard (’costaba mucho’). In the eyes of the SEP people the culture of indigenous peoples was ‘subjective’.

The resulting reports could be regarded as anthropologically untutored. Written according to a fixed schema, they are organized in a standardized sequence of themes and much of the background and methodological material is repeated word for word from one report to the other. But lengthy passages are devoted to descriptions of customs related to farming, to the ways in which knowledge is passed from one generation to the next, to the practices of *curanderos* (indigenous healers) and myths of origin (*cosmovisión*). Frequently these descriptions finish with (perhaps not unprompted) expressions of nostalgia and regret that traditions and languages are being lost, that young people are no longer interested and that neither society nor the state were interested either . There is also the recurrent call to accord dignity to the knowledge of colonized peoples, which has been denigrated by colonialism and also by the Church as superstition, ‘satanic’ or ‘heretical’. Thus for example the account of the nahuatl ‘cosmovision’ comprises a conception of the person which involves beliefs about life, sickness and death; it classifies and systematizes and produces a botany which, intertwined with the conception of the person, makes up an entire medical system (Loncón Antileo 2006c: 75-6).[[5]](#footnote-5)

This exercise merits comment because in the previous article I expressed dissent from the idea of ‘epistemic diversification’ and from the view that ‘knowledges’ exist in the plural, as if people from non-Western cultures have different modes of thought or different cognitive apparatuses from those transmitted by Western culture. Now in that context I was criticizing anthropologists who, it seems to me, should ‘know better’. That is to say, it is one thing to redress generations of exclusion and contempt on the part of the state and others, by listening, consulting, and redressing the maltreatment, and, as in this case, by dispatching teams to consult and listen to the opinions of indigenous office-holders in connection with the development of intercultural education. This is the state treating people as human beings, as valid interlocutors, as citizens in something approaching the full sense. But it is quite another thing to then confer scientific status on belief systems founded on conceptions of the supernatural: in any case there is no sign of a demand for this on the part of the interested parties, and it is no more defensible than treating other religious beliefs as scientific. These consultations were exercises as much in democracy as they were in interculturalidad – and the thrust of my interpretation of the UIs follows similar lines.

*High-level political support dwindles*

The favourable environment lasted only through the Fox administration: when Calderón took office in 2007 the dynamic women who had led the CDI (Xochitl Galvez) and the CGEIB (Sylvia Schmelkes, educator and protégé of Pablo Latapí, of whom more below) were replaced. Also Rodolfo Tuirán, the Sub-Secretario de Educación Superior (Deputy Minister in charge of Higher Education) under Fox, was moved to new responsibilities in charge of the ‘Preparatorias’ (see below) and Tecnológicos, as Subsecretario de Educación Media Superior. In this context the UIs were isolated without a committed supporter in the Higher Education Subsecretariat.

The new head of the CDI under Calderón, the octogenarian Luis H. Alvarez, (born 1919), had somewhat ambiguous qualifications for the job. He had led the PAN party in the 1970s and 1980s, and although he had been appointed Fox’s representative to the negotiations with the Zapatistas, he apparently never established contact with them.[[6]](#footnote-6) The new Coordinador of the CGEIB was a respected anthropologist, Fernando Salmerón, who has been reappointed by Peña Nieto, but has had to suffer repeated cuts to the Commission’s budget; Lourdes Casillas, Director of Higher and ‘Higher Intermediary’ Intercultural Education has occupied that position from the beginning. In 2013 Peña Nieto appointed Federal Deputy Nuvia Mayorga, an accountant with no record of involvement in indigenous issues, to head the CDI.

The implications of these financial and political cutbacks of the CGEIB for the Intercultural Universities are more qualitative than quantitative: the CGEIB is not an executive agency and has only an advisory and coordinating function, as its name suggests. Wile it had Presidential backing, under Fox, it could still exercise influence on the universities then being formed, but that influence has been recently reduced by a deepening of the reach of the SEP’s regulatory apparatus into the UIs. The capacity of the UIs to admit students and hire staff is governed largely by decisions of state governors, but their status as universities, and the eventual status of the qualifications they offer, has recently been brought within the SEP’s quality improvement programme (Programa de Fortalecimiento de la Calidad en Instituciones Educativas - PROFOCIE) which requires each of them to produce a Programa de Fortalecimiento de la Calidad Educativa (Programme for Educational Strengthening – a new name for the PIFI - Programa Integral de Fortalecimiento Institucional). At the Foro in Xalapa the host institution complained bitterly that the SEP refuses to acknowledge that the UIs have a different vocation and different requirements and objectives from those of conventional universities and that they frame their research programmes differently – integrating them with teaching in the context of *vinculación –* the insertion of research into undergraduate courses at every level. In other words the SEP, for whatever reason, is looking to reduce the distinctiveness of the Intercultural Universities, which are the principal legacy of the early dynamic years of the CGEIB and its staff. Certainly the Intercultural Universities, whose student numbers and budgets are a minuscule part of the country’s higher education system, do not have a dedicated section in the Subsecretariat for Higher Education to argue their case, while the CGEIB has lost political ‘clout’.

This neutering also weakens the CGEIB staff and their academic advice and guidance which has to compete with the pressures of state and local politics. The SEP seems to determine the CGEIB’s ability to undertake or support curriculum and staff development. Thus, for example, a hitherto annual meeting (another ‘Foro’) for academics in UIs (three or four delegates from each) at which they discuss curriculum issues, was due to take place in October 2014 but had to be cancelled due to the withdrawal or non-availability of SEP funding for travel and subsistence. I was told that it might be rescheduled but with reduced funding and thus reduced participation. (The UIs themselves do not pay for their staff to attend to such events.)

Apart from the political context, the emergence over UIs has to be set in the context of the history of ‘post-secondary-pre-higher’ education in post-revolutionary Mexico, whose highly politicized character has been intertwined with the equally politicized history of the teaching profession and teacher training in the country.[[7]](#footnote-7) The period since the 1930s has seen the creation of the Escuelas Preparatorias (or ‘Prepas’ as they are known), of Escuelas Normales Rurales, and of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN), all involved in different ways in teacher training and offering a ‘bachillerato’ qualification which is required for university entrance. Recent catastrophic events in Ayotzinapan (Guerrero) in which 43 students from an Escuela Normal noted for its tradition of militancy appear to have been summarily executed on the orders of a narco-political boss in conjunction with the local political authorities, have reminded us of the highly politicized character of the Escuelas Normales. But these and to an even greater extent the UIs themselves are dwarfed by the development of a vast national system of technological institutes which has grown since the mid-twentieth century to 263 institutions with 521,000 students.

To some extent the UIs, although described as universities, are similar to these other institutions since they admit students at the same stage of their educational progression (though often older than the average) who for the most part do not qualify for conventional universities, and they offer vocational courses: their distinctive features are, obviously, the intercultural component as well as the *vinculación* emphasised in my 2013 paper. These elements which to an outsider unfamiliar with the context of Mexico’s gargantuan educational system seemed to be distinctive features of the UIs, have been taken up by the bachilleratos interculturales first developed in 2002 by the CGEIB and also by the development of an intercultural component in the mainstream bachillerato known as ‘Bachillerato general con Enfoque Intercultural’ (‘General bachillerato with an Intercultural Approach) which seems to converge with the stand-alone Bachillerato intercultural: this is either a teacher training qualification earned by students at the ‘Prepas’, or a course required prior to entry to university. Preparatorias Interculturales exist in certain states: the one in Tabasco has produced seven generations of graduates since 2005; there are three establishments in Chihuahua, one each in Sinaloa and Yucatan and three in Guerrero. In Chiapas it was discontinued for political reasons, alluded to also in my 2013 article.[[8]](#footnote-8) The bachillerato intercultural in Sinaloa is an interesting case because it exists to provide for the children of migrant workers from the south of the country who have settled permanently but continue to ‘feel’ indigenous, in the words of my informant at the CGEIB. Vinculación, for its part, has at least formally been fully incorporated in the national Sistema de Institutos Superiores Tecnológicos, but it refers more to links with enterprises than to projects in communities, and is not an intercultural initiative. So perhaps its use by the UIs reflects the practical labour market dimension of their model, criticized as ‘neo-indigenist’ by those like Genner Llanes Ortiz who would prefer them to be institutions for the recovery and legitimation of indigenous cultures and *saberes* (‘knowledges’).[[9]](#footnote-9)

This further administrative context shows what a minuscule item the UIs are in the vast apparatus of what in Mexico is called ‘educación media superior’ (perhaps translatable as ‘post-secondary education’), with 4.3 million students in the ‘prepas’ and Technology Institutes,[[10]](#footnote-10) without a separate Directorate or even a distinct administrative unit to attend to their own specific characteristics, are such as that which oversees the ‘Tecnológicos’ within the SEP. At the Foro in Xalapa there were complaints about the subsumption of the UIs within the Subsecretaria de Educación Superior since their problems and their vocation are orientation of the academic staff, many of whom have Masters and occasionally doctoral degrees. Furthermore, as Gunther Dietz has pointed out to me, they are overseen simultaneously – but not jointly - by the CGEIB which oversees the content of the education they offer, and the Subsecretaría which provides their funding.

*Interculturalidad*

The apparently unlimited penetration of the logic of administrative Control is also reflected in the practice of intercultural education, that’s clashing with its dissident agenda. Llane is hardly an extreme multiculturalist, and at the end of his article on the failures of interculturalidad he clearly states that he sees interculturalidad as a dialogue, and as a dialogue requiring equal respect, perhaps reflecting his research focused on educational work with adults.[[11]](#footnote-11) His doctoral thesis [[12]](#footnote-12) submitted in 2009, contains one of the most incisive analyses I have read about grounded interculturalidad – that is, about the interaction between *promotores* and students in the design and establishment of courses, in encouraging students to ‘stay the course’. The tensions he describes seem to show what happens when intercultural education becomes a formula rather than an exercise questioning standard styles of teaching, and his criticisms could easily have been written by disciples of Vygotsky, Bruner or Paulo Freire – the dissident educational theorists whose ideas I found to be highly influential in the UIs. The tensions described by Llanes oppose the agenda of organizers and teachers to those of students both when the former want to promote Maya rites and cosmovisions – packaging formulas of Mayan knowledge to impart them to Maya students in classrooms - and also when they hold tightly to their own ideas about ‘organization’ and ‘sustainability’, or when they are over-concerned with instilling ‘cognitive skills’ and ‘critical thinking’ (p. 124) at the expense of traditional forms of learning through social relationships. For him the intercultural dimension education is expressed in the pedagogical relationship itself as much as in the content of what is learnt. But his case study is not, as he readily admits, really one of a university – rather it is of a venture in adult education encouraging the development of local leaders, so the relationships and expectations, as compared with the UIs, are very different. When students are people of a certain age, experienced as farmers and organizers, and following a tailored course of study (in this case an 18-month Diploma) rather than younger people living away from home and studying full time for a university qualification which they hope will lead to a decent job, the relationship has to be different. Llanes is a good, though perhaps selfconscious, representative of a dilemma: he is committed to the propagation (I hesitate to use the word ‘teaching’) of other knowledges, yet he is also suspicious of those who would make them into ready-made packages, and he is critical of the facilitators who do not call into question their own assumptions, even while challenging those of their audience.[[13]](#footnote-13) His underlying commitment, in my reading, is to an education which listens and does not impose ready-made cultural constructions – least of all when they are constructions of a world and of perhaps belief systems which belong to the students rather than to the teachers. The two words which therefore come to mind in labelling his approach are ‘democratic;’ and ‘universalist’.

*Anthropology and the UIs*

It is strange to observe that in spite of their commitment to the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in their curricula, the relationship between the state-sponsored intercultural project and the Mexican anthropological profession is so distant as to be almost non-existent. The Mexican anthropological profession was in effect a department of the government until the early 1970s, operating in the vast apparatus of the INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, (currently responsible for ‘187 archaeological sites throughout the country’) and its offshoot the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (ENAH, a higher education institution devoted to archaeology and anthropology). In the wake of the student uprising of 1968 (culminating in the massacre of Tlatelolco and a further one, the Corpus Christi massacre, in 1971), and in the context of worldwide shift in the culture of anthropology and the social sciences during that period, Mexican anthropology also took a turn, led by a group of dissidents who came to be known as the ‘Four Horsemen’, in reference to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Angel Palerm, Guillermo Bonfil, Arturo Warman and Rodolfo Stavenhagen. Out of this ferment, or perhaps in response to it, the government created in 1973 a Centre for Historical Research within the INAH (CIS-INAH, Centro de Investigaciones Superiores del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia), directed first by Palerm and then by Bonfil, which later became independent in 1980 as CIESAS,[[14]](#footnote-14) an entirely state-funded postgraduate teaching and research institution which employs most of the country’s leading anthropologists, and is quite separate from the universities where the subject is curiously under-represented. [[15]](#footnote-15)

Stated in very summary form, the consensus of Mexican anthropology on indigenous issues since then has been marked by a critique first of official indigenism, and later of what has become known as neo-indigenism, supposedly the offspring of neoliberalism[[16]](#footnote-16) as expressed in the edited volume quoted in my 2013 article.[[17]](#footnote-17) It is therefore not entirely surprising that, apart from Andrés Fábregas, founding Rector of the UNICH in Chiapas, and Gunther Dietz, a prominent figure internationally in intercultural education, who was Director of the UVI for a period in 2013-14, and continues to be closely involved there, so few members of the profession have taken part in the intercultural project, and that a recently qualified Chilean anthropologist was employed by the CGEIB to coordinate preliminary field research. Nor is it surprising that whereas legal issues and the representation of identity have been extremely prominent in Mexican anthropology, the subject of education has been largely, though not entirely, absent.[[18]](#footnote-18) Indeed, it could be said that while anthropologists had been influential in the INI – the Instituto Nacional Indígena, predecessor of the CDI – they gave way to the educators of the CGEIB who worked with the head of the CDI to get this project under way.

*Political uses and abuses of interculturalidad.*

Llanes describes how a senior official from the CGEIB had come to a meeting which was discussing how intercultural elements could be injected into a project to establish a university in the town of Valladolid in the Yucatan. The meeting was planned for NGOs, indigenous representatives and the CGEIB official, but was destabilized by the arrival, uninvited, of a senior state government official, the Director de Educación Media y Media Superior. Apart from creating an uneasy atmosphere, this led to a confrontation between an intercultural model, in which the needs of the population and their language were prominent, and the state’s proposal, which seemed already to have reached quite an advanced stage of development, for the establishment of a university. The Director seems also to have caused some offense by talking of the need to raise the region to higher standards of living (‘mejores estadios de vida’) and questioning how far they should go in defending Maya culture. In the event the university (Universidad del Oriente) was created a few months later, in September 2005, with suitably practical courses in Tourism Development and Gastronomy (fitting the state’s own agenda) as well as Maya Culture and Language. [[19]](#footnote-19)

But Llanes’ main political concern is less with the blatant intervention of the state government than with the warning from the CGEIB official against the politicization of interculturalidad. She was quick to explain, when challenged, that she was referring to ‘politics in the bad sense’, meaning political manipulation by governments and parties,[[20]](#footnote-20) but Llanes sees this as secondary: for him the real problem is the developmentalist character of official interculturalidad itself, which reifies ‘cultures’ and its search for quality in education – ‘quality’ being sarcastically placed in quotes in the original. For him cultures do not exist as objects or blocks, and the essentialization of indigenous cultures is a device to depoliticize or neutralize indigenous actors with specific political interests. When the authorities pronounce on what is good and bad politics and what is the correct type of interculturalidad, they are adopting the same old colonial position. He would rather speak of ‘portadores de culturas’, individuals who produce and reproduce cultural orientations which do not always fit stereotypes and idealized versions.[[21]](#footnote-21) In this, it seems to me, his aversion to authoritarian imposition and developmentalism has in the end brought him round to a liberal position similar to that of, say Anthony Appiah or Seyla Benhabib,[[22]](#footnote-22) or indeed Mexican opponents of indigenism like Juan Pedro Viqueira and Roger Bartra.

Llanes’ position, which I highlight here because he is almost the only anthropologist in Mexico (except for Gunther Dietz, who is a prominent UI insider) to have confronted these questions in the context of the UIs, is not inconsistent analytically, but it suffers from a lack of appreciation of the bargains which have to be struck if the state is to become involved in issues of ethnicity and cultural rebirth and legitimation. The CGEIB official – whose goodwill he repeatedly recognizes – was not talking about theoretical or ideological correctness. By ‘bad politics’ she meant what Americans call ‘pork’: the real political pressures which arise when the government arrives bearing gifts – and indeed that is what the intervention of the state official was largely about: the town of Valladolid and the Education Secretariat wanted an institution largely, maybe even exclusively, because of the jobs and contracts it would bring. It is this politics which affects the operation of the UIs at the state and local level where it really matters.

The mention of ’pork’ brings us to the issues of the involvement of State Governors in the UIs’ staffing and through the staffing their curriculum.

My article stated that the UIs operated with ‘little academic (as opposed to budgetary) interference from governors’. State governors, I wrote, ‘appointed the Rectors of the UIs, as “puestos de confianza” no doubt with political considerations in mind in many cases, but no one claimed during my interviews that the Governors had any particular agenda as far as the content of interculturalidad is concerned’. In this way I put to one side the prickly question of non-academic, political and bureaucratic interference, since that had not been the subject of my research and I did not have reliable information about it. Omitting this subject saved me from navigating the waters of Mexican politics, notoriously treacherous at every level from the Presidency down to the remotest hamlet in the remotest *municipio*, throughout the vast apparatuses of education and trade unionism, penetrating even the livelihoods of the humblest street-sellers and informal parking attendants.[[23]](#footnote-23) But it is now clear to me – as it was no doubt to my informants from the outset - that it screened out central problems in their own and their colleagues’ professional and personal lives.

The article stated that half of the capital costs of the UI buildings came from the CDI, but in fact the percentage varied a lot and the funds came not only from the CDI but also from SEP or other parts of the federal government. The article did not grasp the advantage to Governors of this arrangement since they had the power to designate Rectors and thus influence the political colour of the staff, without having to fund the operation out of their own budgets.

For her research, conducted as of 2009, Karla Vivar conducted extensive interviews with 26 students in four official and one unofficial UI, and also recorded conversations with Rectors and teachers. She drew on her own prior experience as a teacher in the UIEM (Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México) and also on her knowledge of background stories. Her thesis is not principally about the politics of the UIs, but that is the aspect which concerns me here. She describes how Enrique Peña Nieto, then Governor of the State of Mexico (later President of the Republic) ensured the appointment of Rectors and teachers who would be politically useful to him, and how students were mobilized to dig trenches on a possible site for the university (which was eventually not used), while other sources have told me that students were sent off to do electoral propaganda for him. She also describes a surreal (but far from surprising) inauguration of the university’s very striking premises (see illustration[[24]](#footnote-24)) in which the Rector was not allowed to speak, the Governor was presented as the source of the funds of which in fact 80 per cent had come from the federal government, and a student representative’s speech was censored twice. After a welcome of orchestrated hurrahs and floating banners, the Governor proclaimed a long list of public works quite apart from the one he was inaugurating, and then underwent a ritual cleansing with copal incense (‘una limpia con copal e incienso’). The Mayor (‘Presidente Municipal’) of the town where the university is located, San Felipe del Progreso, played his part by singing his praises as of the ‘hermano mayor de los pueblos indígenas’. (‘elder brother of the indigenous peoples’). While the assembled crowd moved on to festivities with food, music and dancing, the Governor was taken on a tour and shown a class where a teacher pretended to speak in an indigenous language.

At the UIEM only one person, the head of language teaching, was appointed by the Rector – the coordinators of the other courses (*carreras*) were imposed by local politics, described by Vivar as ‘cacicazgos comunitarios’ linked to the PRI, (power brokers in indigenous community politics) (p. 143) reminiscent of Jan Rus’ well-known phrase ‘la comunidad revolucionaria institucional’. (Rus 1995).

The location of premises and the allocation of jobs have been very important subjects of decision-making in relation to – but not always inside - the UIs. The Intercultural University of Guerrero (UIG) was the scene of fierce conflicts over its location and also over the control of appointments. The losing faction, said to be close to the Zapatista EZLN, established a parallel operation called UNISUR which ran some courses provided by politically sympathetic volunteers from UNAM and other institutions. A well placed source also claimed that the UNISUR promoters charged people for the course, even though the volunteer teachers worked for free. Although the UIG found itself with premises but no water supply in an extremely remote part of the state, the local community supported the effort, providing canteen and other services.

The Guerrero conflict highlights a recurrent theme in Vivar’s thesis, namely the pressure from communities and small towns for the location of these institutions as a matter of economic benefit and perhaps also of prestige. While the curriculum teaches the general principles of Regional and Sustainable Development the institutions themselves contribute in quite mundane ways to a revival of economic life in their localities even if the students are themselves living on extremely meagre study grants – as my original article noted in the case of the Intercultural University (UAIM) in Mochicahui, Sinaloa. While for the designers of the ‘Modelo’ and for the ethnographer the principal interest of the UIs is their intercultural vocation, for those more directly involved job opportunities and other economic benefits were prominent considerations, feeding in to local and state-level political interests.

At the Intercultural University of Chiapas (UNICH) the founding Rector, anthropologist Andrés Fábregas, one of only three Rectors of UIs who to my knowledge have had an academic career, was appointed in 2004 and later reappointed for a second term, but in September 2011 a new State Governor removed him and replaced him[[25]](#footnote-25) with a former student of the political scientist and leading multiculturalist Will Kymlicka, who instituted a procedure unheard of in the UIs: the election of the teaching coordinator (‘Secretario Académico’) by the teaching staff. They elected an academically qualified indigenous person, who spoke several indigenous and other languages. But then yet another Rector was appointed - the former Secretario de Educación of Chiapas - and he brought in a new Secretario Académico: this is linked apparently to conflicts and disputes in the teachers’ union, which in turn is linked to the power struggles surrounding the fate of Elba Esther Gordillo, longtime leader of Mexico’s National Teachers’ Union (the CNTE), currently under rather luxurious arrest in Mexico City pending an eventual trial. According to a well placed source, as of October 2014, this new Secretario was setting aside the intercultural teaching programme because he had no understanding of interculturalidad – having worked in another, conventional, Chiapas university. The UNICH Language Centre (Centro de Lenguas) which was the only such resource in any UI, was closed in late 2014. Another source claimed that students at UNICH wanted to demonstrate against Fábregas’ removal but he pleaded with them not to because it would put his own person in danger, and preferred to describe his departure as a resignation for health reasons.

The Michoacán UI (UIIM) has according to Karla Vivar and others also been through a chequered history, with barely 4 people completing their degrees (‘titulados’) in its entire ten-year life. Apparently one of the Rectors – who is quoted by Karla Vivar with an impressive command of multicultural jargon – appointed several of his mistresses to positions – an abuse of power which then rebounded, leading to student revolt and his removal. The thesis describes endless conflicts, demonstrations and notes the presence of a cocaine processing plant next door to the university.

The incidents can be multiplied, but it would be unfair to generalize them and wrong to jump to the conclusion that the UIs are a failure or a nest of corruption. It would also be wrong not to mention the widely held view that the conventional state universities in Mexico are also riddled with corruption – and they are the vast majority of universities apart from the UNAM, the UPN, the Politécnico and the private institutions like the Iberoamericana and the Tecnológico de Monerrey. But the examples do point to their insecure institutional basis: my article betrayed nothing of this because I took it for granted that they had at least a core of stable employees, but it turns out that they have no secure employees at all: everyone is on a one year contract at most, even administrative staff and even those employed by the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) which, uniquely, is ensconced within the autonomous Universidad Veracruzana – a conventional, or mainstream, university. But in any case, despite the apparent protection offered by university autonomy, the UVI is also vulnerable, as illustrated by the fate of an allocation of 1.5 million pesos in 2014 from the Federal Government which, according to reliable source, was waylaid by the State Governor and directed elsewhere.

It would be impossible for a person with my background not to experience the academic events at the UIs with the reflexes deriving from his professional background. At the ‘Foro’ which I attended in Xalapa in 2014 some 50 papers were given by teaching staff from five institutions in ten separate panels. The tone was one of commitment and enthusiasm for interculturalidad and especially for ‘vinculación’, the grassroots research in communities, which is so central to the teaching in all the institutions, and was the theme of the meeting. No one spoke of the struggles for employment and position which pepper Karla Vivar’s thesis, but they did speak of the difficulties faced in convincing the Ministry of Education (the SEP) that they were not the same as conventional universities and should be submitted to inspection, quality assessment or research standards more suited to their purpose and to the educational background of their student constituency.

*The meaning and resonance of ‘intercultural’*

Further indications of the intellectual ferment surrounding the UIs, or simply the presence of the intercultural project, can be found among the interviews reproduced in Karla Vivar’s thesis. She describes students from remote areas such as that where the Guerrero UI is located, who speak with remarkable eloquence and commitment to their education – while others, to be sure, express disappointment with the dysfunctional aspects of the UIs where they have studied, or where they began to study. One feature which does emerge from her interviews is that for students often the word interculturalidad refers to the institutions as a whole, to the mere fact of their existence, as much as to the intercultural vocation or dimension as manifested in the teaching content. For them the word ‘intercultural’ meant an opportunity to study and they sometimes spoke of it as entailing not merely the chance to get a job but to some extent an entitlement to a job. Hence the campaign to get the government of Chiapas to allow the UNICH graduates to compete for school teaching positions even though these positions were normally reserved for graduates of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN).

Nevertheless Lourdes Casillas confirmed the main thrust of the argument of my paper, namely that the practice of interculturalidad, in addition to the philosophy or ethos of interculturalidad which is the subject of so much anguished debate, owed much to the dissident educational tradition of Paulo Freire and the Jesuits inspired by Pablo Latapí’s Centro de Estudios Educativos in Mexico City, many of whom, like Latapí himself, left holy orders but continued to be involved with the causes they had espoused when fully committed members of the Society. Some had become close to the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Latapí, as it turns out, had advised President Fox to introduce change in the education system and had recommended his student Sylvia Schmelkes to be the first leader of the CGEIB. Fox appointed him Ambassador to UNESCO in 2006. The thesis by Genner Llanes, which contains a detailed analysis of an intercultural project in Yucatan, also confirms the influence of this circle of priests, former-priests and left-wing militants active in rural areas.[[26]](#footnote-26)

*Interculturalidad revised: beyond false dichotomies*

In a short article based largely on her experience dong research at pre-university level, Erica Gonzalez Apodaca argues for a distinction between ‘the school as a project of identity and the school as a project of interculturalism’.[[27]](#footnote-27) This can serve as a starting point for the following discussion in which I use the work of Gunther Dietz and Laura Selene Mateos to disentangle (once again) the various levels, agendas and spheres to which it is applied and to show that they too, like Genner Llanes, have an underlying universalist position.

One point of controversy raised in their book and many others is the idea that knowledge is culture-bound. This could mean that knowledge developed in one particular culture can be irrelevant or harmful outside that sphere. But in fact the literature does not mean ‘any culture’ but quite specifically, albeit implicitly, refers to indigenous cultures in contrast to the cultures of those who rule over them, or simply ‘Western culture’. The vagueness of these terms is enough to sow doubt as about such claims since cultures do not have identifiable boundaries, as Dietz and Llanes and Appiah and many others repeatedly insist, but in addition to that, claims of this sort cast doubt on whether the criteria of truth and verifiability in science can ever be detached from the tradition in which they have been developed. Such doubts mean that there will always be a basis for questioning scientific findings on the grounds that they are biased at their very root, to which it is added that the bias is not accidental but designed to favour certain interests. A further claim would be that the epistemologies prevailing in different cultures – again ‘the West’ versus indigenous traditions not, say, Western European culture versus Russian culture - are different and should be equally respected.

Although I do not claim to be a philosopher, my understanding is that epistemology lays the basis for philosophical reasoning, and tries to answer the question ‘on what grounds can you say that you know what you claim to know?’ Evidently if someone says that they learnt from their grandparents and that is enough, then it will be hard for them to persuade others who do not share their presuppositions, unless they can show that there is something about grandparenthood which endows them with special expertise. This can well be the case since grandparents have experience which goes with their role, but it is unlikely to be convincing in the case of medical treatment or plant genetics. To put it another way, and in admittedly stereotyped terms: we can easily allow that time-honoured practices honed over generations and centuries may be effective in agriculture and in treating maladies, but that does not mean to say those who use those practices have a different epistemology, or indeed any epistemology at all. It is only by introducing the apparatus of Western epistemology that one can discuss the reasons why those practices work. For people in a stereotypically traditional culture authority lies in the person not in the theory and the inherited practices. Yet we know perfectly well that there is no longer any such thing as an untouched ‘traditional’ society as represented in the stereotype, and therefore we can all share an epistemology: we should be able to discuss rationally the reasons why certain practices work and others do not on a basis other than they have been handed down or have been blessed by a particular person (a Rabbi, a soothsayer or indeed celebrity secular intellectuals). The difference – and it is a very important one – is that in modern global science, there are impersonal institutions which certify expertise and which claim to make decisions free from the biases of tradition, politics and personal relations. Those institutions make mistakes and they are far from perfect – as we can observe in the haphazard operation of ‘peer review’ in the humanities and social sciences, and as we learn from critical social studies of science associated with names like Bruno Latour. But still, these institutions represent a continuous commitment to find rational impersonal and culturally impartial bases for discussion, and they are vulnerable to criticism if they do now persist in that search. The proof, if such were needed, is the proliferation of peer-reviewed scholarship denouncing them and all their works as Western and colonial. We must remember that this radical doubt is itself a product of Western institutions, and has not come from non-Western cultures.

Dietz and Laura Mateos sometimes seem to take these positions, but then they nuance them substantially. They quote various decolonial authorities (Mignolo, Quijano) in support of a project to decolonize knowledge and to encourage ‘“otra educación”, “educación propia”, and “educación intercultural inductiva”. But it emerges eventually that this does not mean that such an education should be culturally different in any strong sense, but rather that it must take into account all sorts of differences and above all the local circumstances of learning and knowledge transfer in societies deeply divided along many faultlines, of which linguistic and cultural differences are only two.

Placing ideas in the polemical and political context in which they emerge is essential even to discussions of principle, and the historicization of interculturality gets really interesting when their book focuses on the changing social and territorial locations of indigenous people and the changing roles of their intelligentsia. The authors distance themselves from the caricature (which no anthropologist would defend but which much public and policy discourse assumes) assigning indigenous people to remote rural areas and implicitly defining indigenous education as coterminous with bilingual education. They remind us that as a result of what they describe as the neoliberal abandonment of communities, the people who once went off to work as teachers for the state or took up roles as intermediaries and brokers in indigenous agencies and organizations in the expectation of improving their own lot and that of their communities of origin, have been returning to communities and have stimulated a rebirth of indigenous organization under the paradoxically favourable circumstances of state withdrawal. Whether or not this has that much to with neoliberalism and the purported unleashing of market forces in rural areas, it does help us to make better sense of an apparent revival of local indigenous organization, which has taken place independently, without expression at the national level, and separately from the more mediatic Zapatistas. It also fits in with David Recondo’s analysis of the introduction of ‘usos y costumbres’ in Oaxaca.[[28]](#footnote-28) This involved a large scale exercise in the 1990s enabling all of Oaxaca’s 570 municipalities to choose between continuing with ‘party list’ elections or adopting a ‘traditional’ way based on local customs. The fascinating and counter-intuitive outcome was that not only the majority chose the ‘usos y costumbres’ path, but also that, by detaching them – to varying degrees, of course – from the opaque deals of the old single-party system in which the PRI did deals with local notables and there was never more than one candidate – it led to a modernization of the electoral processes, overseen by the Oaxaca state Electoral Commission, with more openness. There have been ‘incidents’, notably over women’s participation, but they have been resolved in favour of the women, and the method is not always based on a one-person-one-vote procedure, but the point is that, unlike before, there is a procedure.

Thus a new ‘disidencia indígena’ is reviving community institutions, and since according to Dietz and Mateos for most indios belonging to a community is far more than important belonging to a 'grupo etnico-linguistico’, this has brought a shift towards *comunalidad* rather than cultural particularism. Despite occasional flurries of cultural romanticism – as in allusions to local cosmovisions, rituals and so on (op. cit. p. 129) – the thrust of their argument is in favour of local democratization, educational methods attuned to and gaining insights from local conditions, and recognition of national and local cultural variation, thus rejecting any kind of cultural essentialism.[[29]](#footnote-29) There is even a nod to the Latin American school of popular education with its universalistic ethos and focus on empowerment and learning from the people, whose influence in the UIs we have already encountered.[[30]](#footnote-30) The authors describe how academics in intercultural higher education navigate between the universal and the ethnic while the practitioners inspired by Latin American popular education question externally driven interculturalidad and promote local empowerment.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Genner Llanes, and some of the authorities he quotes, also take trouble to avoid polarizing or binary opposition: for example Raúl Fornet-Bittencourt, the philosopher most prominently associated with interculturalidad, whom he quotes at length, seems at pains to avoid taking a position on this question. [[32]](#footnote-32) Even Catherine Walsh, a leading decolonial authority, speaks of interculturality as a ‘plural universalism’, and Llanes himself writes of the need to ‘go beyond the essentialist use of the cultural practices and to explore more organic processes of cultural production ...’[[33]](#footnote-33) And when it comes to describing the ideas of a former priest inspired by the ‘theology of inculturation’, who seeks to reinstitute of Maya rites and cosmovision, Llanes expresses a high degree of skepticism.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Thus we end up with an approach to the intercultural which is based on the multiple criss-crossing dividing lines in Mexican society: cultural and linguistic,, to be sure, but also political, territorial, and socio-economic. Indeed, the authors are critical of the 'indigena-no indigena' binary and of the bias of interculturalidad towards indigeneity and its indifference or disinterest in non-indigenous students, as well as critical of its lack of attention to racial discrimination – a subject which is sensitive because it tends to favour universalistic and individualist responses rather than corporatist and collective ones based on some sort of politics of recognition. There is also an implicit recognition that to restrict cultural differences which education should take into account to those identifiable as ethnic and indigenous, is to ignore the longstanding evidence of the cultural chasm between socio-economic groups and its deleterious effects in education, as classically documented by Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu.

One noticeable irony in these debates is the ambiguous response to neoliberalism, because there is no escaping the repeated allusions to the oppressive domination and manipulation of indigeneity and communal institutions in the heyday of the PRI (the ‘comunidad revolucionaria institutional’ again[[35]](#footnote-35)). The ejido was so roundly denounced and dissected by anthropologists as an instrument of domination and also for creating inequality, that some of them such as Arturo Warman[[36]](#footnote-36) even joined in its dismantling during the Salinas regime, thus seeming to betray their marxisant formation.[[37]](#footnote-37) But they were also keeping to the universalist dimension of Marxist thought. It is by no means evident that those practices have completely disappeared (as the events surrounding the inauguration of the Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Mexico described above illustrate) but it is evident that for Dietz and Mateos this weakening of the PRI’s tentacles at the grass roots has at least begun to open up a space for increased local democracy and autonomy. (Unfortunately, as the shocking events of late 2014 reminded us, spaces have also been seized by the dark forces which have penetrated the apparatus of a local government in many states.) This is a quite different sort of argument from that of Charles Hale: that convoluted argument seemed to welcome some sort of pragmatic response on the part of indigenous organizations to the opportunities opened up by a neoliberal order of governance on the basis that although the new system was contributing to injustice and inequality, it produced niches enabling them to obtain a few crumbs from the table.[[38]](#footnote-38) It may also be that the Dietz-Mateos approach offers a way out of the false dilemma posed by those who, understandably critical of the ravages wreaked by market-friendly policies in some parts of the world, seem to advocate a return to the corporatist habits of co-optation and free-riding which have institutionalized illiberal politics in Latin America and elsewhere.

I for my part am far from convinced, despite the hopes of some and the fears of others, that the days of corporatism are over, as Deborah Yashar gave us to believe.[[39]](#footnote-39) A case can be made that initiatives such as the intercultural universities constitute a corporatist agenda more than a neoliberal one because, whatever the intentions of their founders, they fit in to a schema whereby Latin American governments create niches within the state for leaders of emerging social forces, as occurred notably with the rise of a working class in the inter-war period. In this case, as it happens, Dietz and Mateos describe a contrary movement: the disenchantment of indigenous leaders who have had an experience as state-supported or state-recognized intermediaries and return to community politics to engage in local democratization. But the Intercultural Universities may in the end constitute a co-optative mechanism for them or for others like them. Only time will tell. Nevertheless I do not wish to imply that this corporatist aspect should discredit the whole project: corporatism is so deeply entrenched in the structures of Latin American states that there is no prospect of its extirpation, save perhaps in Chile, and it can be defended as an effort on the part of elites to preserve a modicum of social cohesion.

That, however, is another discussion: my purpose here has been to clarify the debate over interculturalidad and to point out that despite the use of some language which might lead one to think otherwise, the intercultural project in general, and as presented by Dietz and Mateos, does fit with an underlying universalist agenda.

*Methodology*

One reason for writing this post-scriptum is to raise the question of the reliability of ethnographies. The article was reviewed by three perfectly competent and reasonable people, but none of them seemed to know much about the UIs, and they failed to notice quite specific mistakes, such as the statement that the UIs were at the time subject to the same quality oversight system (requiring them to formulate a PIFI programme) as that of other Mexican universities, or the remark that the universities’ certification is a condition for students to receive their small subsistence grants.

But those are matters of detail. The most thorny and embarrassing question is: to what extent can one trust ethnographies, and to what extent can my own ethnography be trusted?

The trustworthiness of my ethnography has to be considered from several points of view: (a) are my quotations and summaries faithful to what actually was said? (b) are they representative of anything except what those individuals said at that time? (c) was I naïve or did I wilfully keep to the safe area of academic discussion of interculturalidad, choosing to avoid the politics?

I did not spend an extended period of time in any of these institutions. Rather my intention was to visit several of them to interview teaching staff, and also to speak with policymakers to gain a sense of the UI project as a whole. This was in the context of a project whose focus was very clearly on the spread of multicultural ideas in Latin America. Indeed, it was only after spending some time in Mexico that I happened upon the UIs and, given the constraints on my time and the risk that the scope of the inquiry would expand uncontrollably, decided that this relatively new experiment offered the prospect of a compact and fruitful case study.

So who did I talk to? In each institution I had to start with the Rector, or Director. He (they were all men) then passed me on to someone else who arranged interviews. Thereafter I would have conversations/interviews with almost anyone who could spare me the time. People I talked to would suggest the names of others who might be of interest. Presumably they would not suggest the names of people they disliked or disagreed strongly with. I did not have the sense that people were feeding me an official line, save in the case of the Rector of the Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México in Sinaloa who, as the article says, had been installed as a reliable longterm PRI *apparatchik*. Of course interviewees expressed their own viewpoints, but this subjective element was moderated by their awareness, and mine, that we were speaking as fellow members of the academic profession, and this did make the conversations different in tone from the brief and more formal conversations I had with the Rectors, and also from conversations I might have had with politicians, say, or with villagers in indigenous communities. Interestingly, the one academically respected rector, Andrés Fábregas, treated me to a magisterial account of his own family history and of his career as a student, researcher and Professor of anthropology, and he made some remarks about the circumstances in which he had broken with an earlier Governor of Chiapas. But I did not quiz him about the deals which may have underlain the creation of his university in Chiapas.

The rare conversations I had with students were framed perhaps more as meetings with a visiting foreign academic than as research interviews, as evidenced by the allusions to Zapatista politics in the meeting I had in San Cristóbal.

So the interviews were coloured by a shared professional ethos, and if this was beneficial for the research, because it created a positive atmosphere for sharing outlooks and experiences, it also created a ‘comfort zone’ or safe area, perhaps biasing the conversations towards more academic subjects and away from political issues. Of the question of representativity I would say that this was not the goal: I was however trying to delineate a mindset, an ethos, which emerged from many of the conversations –as innumerable classic anthropological studies of small-scale societies and communities have done. Nonetheless, I could hardly claim it was a coherent or watertight mindset - what I described was one mindset, with hints of others.[[40]](#footnote-40) In the UIs I was listening for words and sentences which expressed governing principles or ideas in the deployment of interculturalidad as an idea and an educational project. This involved a substantial element of judgment and intuition in teasing out words or phrases which tended to be repeated or to be used as ‘ready-made’ or in ways which alluded to programmatic statements or messages. It was in this way that the prominence of *vinculación*  emerged: a word which – as I later discovered - had simply meant ‘work experience’ or ‘internship’ in the Tecnológicos, now acquired a more politicized or perhaps ‘culturalized’ connotation evoking contact with the grassroots or a renewed contact by students of recent indigenous background with the traditions of their own people.

As a researcher looking for material relevant to *my* project I tended to encourage interviewees to talk about what concerned *me*, not what worried *them*. If I had given a lead on more political subjects I might have lost faith in my project and that in turn would have meant recognizing that I was wasting my time. The incentive for the researcher, once fieldwork has begun, is to persist on the pathwhich has been selected. I may have convinced myself that for the people I spoke to interculturalidad was almost the most important thing in their lives. I did not give them leads to speak about their conditions of employment, their salaries or their professional insecurities – subjects I thought to be irrelevant and too intrusive.

It is also probably the case that if I had tried to dig into the politics of these institutions – the ways in which people were offered jobs, conflicts among staff and with the Rectors - I might have met a wall of silence or evasiveness, while also losing the trust of interviewees, or I might have got into a more or less endless trail of political intrigue, which would have been another subject. And what purpose would it have served? I would have found myself with unverifiable accounts publishable, if at all, only under a cloak of deep anonymity. They would have been just another fable from the murky politics of a country where, in the often-repeated saying, ‘hay que desconfiar hasta de la propia sombra’.



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1. I wish to thank Karla Vivar , Lourdes Casillas and Gunther Dietz for invaluable help in writing this article. The title is an allusion to a phrase attributed to the Brazilian composer and musician Tom Jobim, ‘father’ of the 1960-70s movement known as MPB (Música Popular Brasileira): ‘Brasil não é para principiantes’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. They are accessible on the web by ‘googling’ their titles at the following URLs:

   <http://www2.sepdf.gob.mx/info_dgose/textos_digitales/archivos/cd2/michoacanmemorias.pdf>

   <http://www2.sepdf.gob.mx/info_dgose/textos_digitales/archivos/cd2/nauatl-memorias.pdf>

   <http://www2.sepdf.gob.mx/info_dgose/textos_digitales/archivos/cd2/memoriasveracruz.pdf>

   <http://www2.sepdf.gob.mx/info_dgose/textos_digitales/archivos/cd2/chihuahua_memorias.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (Dietz and Mateos Cortés 2011: pp. 78-9) pp. 78-79 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Although Elena Loncón used the word ‘capacitar’, which is usually translated as ‘training’, maybe ‘sensitize’ would be a better term in English. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ‘Del análisis de la cosmovisión también se desarrolla la percepción de la persona en tanto eje axiológico que se proyecta al cosmos como constructor de esa cosmovisión, de ahí que exista una percepción nauatl de la persona que implica reflexiones sobre la vida, la enfermedad y la muerte. Esta cosmovisión también es un sistema de clasificación y sistematización de la realidad, así aparece igualmente una botánica nauatl que enlazada a la concepción de la persona se ha constituido como un sistema médico, el cual tratamos también como categoría específica en el análisis mencionado.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This is drawn from the Wikipedia entry on Alvarez. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For accounts in English see (Foweraker 1993, Vaughan 1997) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. (Baronnet 2008, Baronnet 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. (Llanes Ortiz 2004, Llanes Ortiz 2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. (Secretaría de Educación Pública 2012: 112) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Llanes Ortiz, op. cit. (2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. (Llanes Ortiz 2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Llanes Ortiz (2009), p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Much of this was told to me in an interview with Andrés Fábregas in 2006, when he was the founding rector of the intercultural university of Chiapas. Later I discovered that he had already written it up in a very approachable and engaging way in (Fábregas 2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In the wake of the student movement and Tlatelolco massacre of 1968 Mexican anthropology also entered into a period of ferment, expressed in part by the publication of a bitterly polemical book entitled ‘De eso que llaman la antropología mexicana’ which denounced the anthropology sponsored and conducted by INAH. Eventually, in a classic example of Latin American and Mexican co-optation politics, there came the creation of CIESAS under the leadership of the most prominent figures in that dissidence, notably Bonfil and Warman. Warman later, in the 1990s, allied with President Salinas in promoting the dismantling of the ejidos which, as he had described in highly influential and approachable studies, were a prime instrument of political control and violence in rural Mexico. Maybe this was a ‘neoliberal’ exercise, but what alternative was there for an ejido system which had for so long been utterly discredited as a cacique’s paradise that? [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The critique focuses on the instrumental or developmentalist aspect criticized by Llanes Ortiz, as well on the view that this new type of policy approach indigenous issues is a product of neoliberalism – in other words a mere updating of classic indigenism which was a project of modernization and *mestizaje*. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. (Hernández, Paz et al. 2004) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For exceptions see the contributions of María Berthely and Erica Gonzalez Apodaca in (Berthely Busquets, Dietz et al. 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. (Llanes Ortiz 2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. ‘política en el mal sentido de la palabra, el aprovechamiento de la educación para fnes politicos específicos, de partidos o de grupos específicos, es el gran enemigo de la calidad’ (op. cit. 2008, p. 59). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. ‘”portadores de cultura” individuos que constantemente producen y reproducen orientaciones culturales que no siempre corresponden a los esterotipos nil as idealizaciones’ (op. cit., 2008, p.60). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. (Benhabib 2002, Appiah 2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cross, J. C. (1998). Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City. Stanford, Stanford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <http://www.davidlehmann.org/adlehmann/2014/11/05/intercultural-universities-in-mexico-modernism-and-intercultural-kitsch/>) [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *El Heraldo de Chiapas,* 23 September 2011 http://www.oem.com.mx/elheraldodechiapas/notas/n2238117.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. (Llanes Ortiz 2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. (Gonzalez Apodaca 2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. (Recondo 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Thus the famous ‘diálogo de saberes’ formula so dear to the vanguard of postcoloniality, is foregrounded, but immediately qualified by the observation that they feed from heterogeneous sources (‘nutriéndose de muy heterogéneas fuentes’ p. 169) etc. and they quote the environmental economist Enrique Leff as follows: ‘El diálogo de saberes … apunta a la producción (más que la generatividad óntico-epistémica-científica-tecnológica) de nuevas formas de comprensión del mundo que emergen de la dialógica del intercambio de saberes y de la disputa de sentidos en la reapropiación social de la naturaleza y de la cultura’. (Leff 2003) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. ‘este diseño carecería de sentido práctico para los miembros de la comunidad en cuestión si no se articulara estrechamente con la intercultura de los recursos exógenos, que pueden ser funcionales y apropiables para los actors locales y provenir de un currículum nacional o de otras “ofertas” culturales proporcionadas por los circuitos globalizados’ (pp. 144-145) [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. La tensión bipolar entre indigenismo y normalismo, entre particularismo étnico y universalismo nacionalista, la superan estos actors [i.e. the academics - DL] mediante la importación de un discurso desesencializado, constructivista y transversalizador de la interculturalidad. Como sinónimo de “diversidad de diversidades”, sus respectivas pantallas reflejan una noción abierta y dinámica de lo intercultural, que se mantiene de forma dialógica, reflexiva y autocrítica más allá de la dicotomía identitaria indígena-mestizo. Por último, los actores que promueven proyectos alternativos y/o “autónomos” de educación intercultural demuestran una cercanía inicial al discurso intercultural proveniente de los académicos influidos por los modelos y debates educativos de origen latinoamericano. Acaban generando discursos alternativos, mucho más críticos con la interculturalidad exógena y más enfocados hacia el empoderamiento de los sujetos subalternos, de las comunidades con las que colaboran. Ello confluye en un interés por nociones dialógicas que partan del reconocimiento de la diversidad no como una estrategia pedagógica “para todos”, sino antes que nada como un derecho de los actores colectivos históricamente excluidos y discriminados. (p. 161-162). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Llanes (2009) pp. 9-10. See also (Fornet-Betancourt)<http://them.polylog.org/1/index-en.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Llanes (2009) p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Llanes (2009) p. 115-116. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. (Rus 1995) [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. (Warman 1976) [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The physical privatization of ejidos has not been universal, but the credit institutions and political machinery which perpetuated the arbitrary power of ejido leaders have gone. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. (Hale 2002) [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. (Yashar 2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. I adopted a similar procedure a few years ago when, with Batia Siebzehner, we published a ‘model’ of ultra-Orthodox Jewish marriage: we obviously could not gather data to build a picture of all the variations in this institution, but on the basis of interviews with a range of people and conversations with reputedly well informed observers, we produced a model depicting the set of principles in relation to which ultra-Orthodox Jews assess their own and other people’s marriage prospects and develop marriage strategies. (Lehmann and Siebzehner 2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-40)