There is no 'universal' knowledge, intercultural collaboration is indispensable

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Within some significant circles, where hegemonic representations of the idea of 'science' are produced, certain orientations of scientific research are carried out, and science and higher education policies are made and applied, references to the alleged existence of two kinds of knowledge, one of which would have 'universal' validity, and 'the other' (in fact the several others) would not, are frequent and do have crucial effects over our academic work. Although some outstanding authors within the very Western tradition have criticized from varied perspectives such universalist ambitions/assumptions, and although many colleagues have reached convergent conclusions from diverse kinds of practices and experiences, such hegemonic representations of the idea of science are still current. The acknowledgment of this situation calls for a deep debate. This article responds to such a purpose by attempting to integrate into the debate a reflection on the shortcomings of hegemonic academic knowledge to understand social processes profoundly marked by cultural differences, historical conflicts and inequalities, as well as significant perspectives formulated by some outstanding intellectuals who self-identify as indigenous, and the experiences of some indigenous intercultural universities from several Latin American countries.

Keywords: science; knowledge; politics of knowledge; indigenous peoples; intercultural collaboration

The proposition that serves as the title to this article may seem obvious to most readers of this journal.[1] It is not the case, however, for many other researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and even less for those in the so-called Experimental and Natural Sciences, or for most policy makers and administrators of science and higher education institutions. Moreover, in some of those other socio-communicational circuits – where hegemonic representations of the idea of 'science' are produced, science policies are formulated and applied, and/or scientific research and teaching are performed – the references to two types of knowledge, only one of which would have 'universal' validity while the other (inwardly diverse) would not, are frequent and has an impact on our scholarly work.

The idea of thinking about the production and validity of knowledge as divided into two worlds, one of which holds 'universal' truths while the other offers only 'local' truths, is as old as the belief in the superiority of 'Western civilization', which is customarily the one deemed to generate and posses an allegedly 'universal'

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knowledge. Western knowledge is not universal, it is a product of the western culture and worldview, in that sense is 'local'.

The encounters, conflicts and negotiations between that purportedly 'universal' knowledge and the so considered 'local' ones have become more frequent in the last few decades due to the growing breadth and depth of relations between social actors who conduct their practices on a planetary scale – or in some cases on a continental or regional scale – and those who carry them out on more 'local' scales, be these national, provincial, municipal or communal. For these reasons, the discussion of the limitations and consequences of the belief in the existence of a purportedly 'universal' knowledge and others of a scarcely 'local' validity is not only increasingly vital, but also increasingly feasible. This latter thanks to the growing importance of the exchanges between social agents whose ways of viewing the world, producing knowledge, and acting in society, are shaped in many different contexts and result in very diverse types of knowledge. Therefore, intercultural collaboration in the production of knowledge is increasingly necessary and also more practicable.

Nevertheless, even at this particular historical juncture and despite the not so recent arguments set forth by some well-known Western scholars (for example, Bourdieu, 1988, 2001; Foucault, 1966, 1979; Habermas, 1971; Kuhn, 1971, 1987), it is evident that the practices and discourses of many researchers, research and teaching institutions, and science policymaking bodies are based, at least implicitly, on the idea that both 'science' as a mode of knowledge production, and 'scientific knowledge' as the accumulation of 'scientifically' produced knowledge have 'universal' validity. In other words, they would be true and applicable at any point in time and in any place. Within the framework of this worldview, the other type would encompass a broad variety of kinds of knowledge – that is, the modes of knowledge production and their results – that, in contrast to the 'universal' validity of scientific, are usually characterized as 'ethnic' or 'local', or, in any case, as 'particular' knowledge, that are specifically 'not-universal'.

Within that West*ernist* worldview, these 'other' forms of knowledge would have only 'local' validity and applicability, at least until they are validated through proper 'scientific' methods. For instance, let's take the evaluation and validation of 'ethnic' and other kinds of 'local' knowledge regarding therapeutic uses of different vegetal species. Interestingly, when they are validated through 'scientific' methods, it is in order to be appropriated and patented by Western 'scientific' institutions and/or pharmaceutical laboratories. Such a practical outcome of this division cannot be ignored. We cannot disregard either the fact that research and teaching at universities about, for instance, medicine, law, political and economic institutions, belonging to those 'other' human groups, are usually confined to the departments of anthropology. Only in exceptional cases they become matters for research and teaching in departments or schools of medicine, law, political science, or economics, or any other relevant to the type of knowledge at hand.

In several Latin American countries there has lately been some progress in this regard. On the one hand, some agents within the realm of higher education have begun to argue that, in order to build more *inclusive* societies, universities should *include* teaching on those other kinds of 'knowledge'. Nevertheless, this position is usually advanced as a sort of concession to those 'other' human groups. This condescending position misses the fact that intercultural collaboration is essential both for those of us who are part of the institutions that produce knowledge whose

value is allegedly 'universal' (universities and other 'scientific' institutions), and for those who conduct their practices in other types of institutional and social frameworks, producing knowledge that is customarily described as 'local' or 'particular'. On the other hand, some other sectors of the higher education realm have begun to create new programs and institutions based on ideas of interculturality, and still others are beginning to claim that in order to be truly 'universalistic' the whole higher education system should be intercultural (Mato, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009).

An interesting and significant fact is that in recent years in Latin America several indigenous organizations have created universities that they characterize as intercultural. In some cases the term 'intercultural' is an integral part of the institution's name, and in others, while it is not an explicit part of the name, it is an essential element of the institution's philosophy. For example, there is the Amawtay Wasi Intercultural University (UIAW) created by a sector of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Sarango, 2009; UIAW, 2004), the Autonomous Indigenous Intercultural University created by the Regional Indigenous Council of the Cauca (Bolaños, Tattay & Pancho, 2009), the Amazonic Center of Indigenous Education created by the Coordinating body of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (Flores, 2009), the Kawsay Indigenous Intercultural University, created by the Tinku Intercultural Network, which acts as a forum for grassroots and national indigenous organizations from Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia (Cerruto, 2009), or the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast created by local indigenous and Afro-descendant leaders (Hooker, 2009). In other cases, instead of building their own universities, other organizations have forged alliances with universities and other institutions of higher education of, shall we say, a more 'conventional' character, which is the case of the Indigenous Organization of Antioquía (Cáisamo & García, 2008), and of the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle (Trapnell, 2008; Rodríguez, Valdes & Reátegui, 2010).

All knowledge bears the mark of the institutional and social context in which it is produced

As we know, the idea that 'science' constitutes a type of knowledge of 'universal' validity is directly associated to the historical process that began with the military and commercial expansion of some European monarchies and trade companies – with their world views and legal, economic and political institutions – throughout the rest of the planet. This European expansion gave place to the establishment of relationships between peoples that for centuries has had a colonial character. The rupture of colonial relationships and the foundation of the republics did not completely eradicate the forms of subordination of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, nor those of the contingents of African peoples who were brought as slaves to the Americas and their descendants. The hierarchical relationship between two types of knowledge, one purportedly 'universal' and the other just 'local', is part of this history. The dismissal of these indigenous and Afro-descendant modes of knowledge production and the accumulation of their results is part of the colonial legacy.

This colonial legacy also includes a certain system of values and beliefs that has constituted the ground for the construction and reproduction of relationships of subordination between Latin American scientific and higher education institutions and professional communities and their counterparts in the United States and a few Western European societies. I will not go deeper into this matter as it is not the focus of this paper, but it has at least to be pointed out that the dismissal of non-scholarly forms of knowledge on the part of important sectors of Latin American academia is associated to their subordination to the formerly mentioned system of values and beliefs, which constitutes the ground of a certain episteme. It has also to be at the very least mentioned that scholarly publishing industries, as well as graduate programs, along with public policy on science and technology, play significant roles herein (Mato, 2002).

The issue is that all of these affect not only the populations of indigenous and Afro-descendant origin in Latin American societies, as it is sometimes recognized, but also each and every one of the respective national societies in their entirety, including the populations of European origin, those characterized as 'mestizo', those that have achieved positions of privilege and power, and those that have not. The conscious or unconscious denial of the pluricultural condition of all Latin American societies is an historically heavy baggage that constitutes a significant burden because of what it means in terms of our ignorance about ourselves. Such baggage affects the possibility not only of building more just and inclusive societies, but also that each one of these societies be able to use all the diverse kinds of knowledge and talents available to them to build their present and future. The current situation regarding these problems varies greatly from one Latin American society to the next, but in all of them this conflict does affect knowledge production, circulation and appropriation.

The chances to develop effective forms of intercultural collaboration are presently favored by the fact that from the very heart of the Western academy there are now some currents of thought that are reflecting critically about the Western presumption of its civilization superiority as well as its institutions, including 'science' as a means of knowledge production. Nevertheless, those mentioned values and beliefs, as expressed and reproduced in the practices of scientific and higher education institutions, still pose many obstacles to achieving the necessary changes.

Let us briefly consider, for instance, the claim of the objectivity of scientific knowledge and the neutrality of researchers' values. The adoption of this belief, constitutive of the 'natural sciences', by the 'social sciences' leads us to ignore how both our context of action and our subjectivity are constitutive of our research. The pretense of objectivity supposes, above all, to play a blind eye to at least some forms of subjectivity that in any other way would be visible – for instance, those that necessarily affect the positing of a problem, the formulation of research questions, and the establishment of both an analytical perspective and a certain kind of relationship with the people whose practices we 'study'. In no way can any of this be 'objective', and even less so in the so-called social sciences. All of it depends on a few simple yet crucial questions: from 'where' we conduct research, why we do it and what we think may be done with the results. Yet we do not always pose these questions. Rather, research tends to operate in a compulsive manner, without much thought regarding these fundamental questions. The answers are givens that pre-exist the research with the 'naturalness' of a creed, in such a way that the topics and perspectives seem to come about 'naturally', not consciously regarding their

relationships with the viewpoints of the journals in which we aspire to publish, or the institutions that award research funds, or university tenure and promotion.

Results are thus marked by a naïve illusion of objectivism according to which – and in order to ensure this objectivism – it is advisable to maintain a certain distance vis-à-vis the social processes being studied. This 'distance' factor is the origin of an important difference between 'scientific' knowledge and the one that, for instance, many indigenous intellectuals produce. This is not at all related to their blood or DNA. On the contrary it is related to the fact that most of them maintain some type of relationship with the communities and/or indigenous organizations, which inevitably informs the questions and viewpoints from which they produce knowledge; this fact, however, does not necessarily make it 'more truthful', it is just a kind of knowledge different from that one produced from 'science'.

The issue is that all knowledge at the very least in the fields usually concerning the humanities and social sciences, be it scientific or of any other type, is marked by the social and institutional contexts in which it is produced. This is why the interpretation of the results of any form of knowledge production must be done taking into account those conditions of production. There is no 'universal' knowledge; none that is, at the very least, in those mentioned fields. All knowledge is relative to the conditions in which it is produced. That is why the exchange and collaboration among different forms of knowledge are indispensable. We may find that in some cases they are complementary, while in others they may be in conflict. Intercultural collaboration in knowledge production is not a panacea; but if knowledge conflicts exist, it is best to identify them, analyze them, and find ways of dealing with them. Nevertheless, this is not what generally happens in our universities.

Science and higher education policies and the exclusion of other forms of knowledge

During the last decades, Latin America has evidenced the advance of certain 'modernizing' discourses coming from 'science' and higher education institutions and policy making bodies seeking to establish rules, as well as to delimit and control intellectual practices in terms of 'productivity', which is measured according to certain very particular indicators, such as the number of publications in peer-reviewed scholarly journals, number of citations, etc. The agents who promote those discourses and policies have instituted certain systems of so-called 'research incentives' whereby funds are granted more or less in proportional relation to those indicators. These systems strengthen certain particular ideas of 'research' and 'knowledge', labeled as 'scientific', which follow the model of the experimental sciences where there is an assumption of an objective and value-free stance.

It is necessary to take into account that even some of those among us (myself included) who criticize this objectivist, value-free image of research have been pressured by circumstances to compete for and accept the funding coming from those systems of incentives. This is due to the fact that such funding is complementary to the increasingly insufficient wages paid to university professors. Moreover, in many cases such funds are the only ones available to sustain our ability to conduct research, or even to buy books or subscribe to journals that usually are not available in most university libraries. For this reason, many of those among us who do not share this exclusionary approach to conceiving research have, in fact,

participated, actively or passively, in the establishment and/or legitimizing of these so-called systems of 'research incentives'. Far from fomenting all sorts of research, these incentives favor only certain types of research that are generally ruled by the values and criteria of the so-called 'hard sciences' (physics, chemistry, biology, etc.).

When we look at these systems of research incentives from the vantage point of the humanities and social sciences, however, the problem is what types of knowledge production tend to be supported and what consequences this has for those intellectual practices that do not produce the kind of knowledge these systems of research incentives consider legitimate. Thus, modes of knowledge production that are not oriented from the very beginning to produce articles to be accepted by scholarly journals are excluded from this model. Such modes would be, for example, the ones in which, instead of writing articles, intellectuals take part in diverse kinds of social processes, in direct communication with other social agents, contributing from their specific kind of knowledge, be they professionals from the humanities and social sciences, and/or other agents involved in the production of other forms of knowledge, including indigenous peoples bearers and producers of knowledge.

These systems of research incentives tend to incentivize the dissociation of scholarly practices from their relationships with the practices of other social agents outside academia. They tend to delegitimize intellectual practices that are not oriented toward the production of peer-reviewed publications. That is, they tend to delegitimize intellectual practices that are not structured from a certain type of logic that is constructed in the image (sometimes deformed and others almost *caricaturesque*) of the so-called 'hard sciences', which are allegedly 'value-free', 'neutral', 'objective', etc. These public policies thus tend to dissociate intellectual work from political and ethical reflection. There is much to be said about the delicate nature of this dissociation, especially in regards to several fields of science, but it will suffice here to mention a couple of examples that are so eloquent that even when touched upon in a broad manner may be particularly thought provoking. These are, for instance, the role that physics played in the development of the atomic bomb, and that of biology and chemistry in the development of biological and chemical weapons. Knowledge production that is disconnected from an ethical and political reflection may be simply horrifying.

Another restrictive consequence of those research policies is that they also leave aside those scholarly practices usually labeled as 'applied' that are an integral part of several disciplines (anthropology, sociology, social psychology, education, social work, etc.), or the ones that are framed by the idea of 'participatory action research' (Fals Borda, 1986), or other orientations that are explicitly interventionist.

It seems that those who promote these systems of incentives which only take into account both peer reviewed publications, and 'patented' developments (a particular sort of research 'product' that could hardly come from the humanities and social sciences) do not understand that both the research questions and the modes of data production depend ultimately on epistemological choices associated with worldviews, as well as with ethical and political stances that, among other things, mold the types of relationships we develop with social agents outside academia. Ethical and political positions are constitutive of the epistemological foundation and theoretical orientation of our research, and of its questions and methods too.

Neither the research questions nor the methods could be the same if we seek to 'write' purportedly 'objective' inquiries, or, instead, to produce some type of

knowledge that is useful to the interests of any social agent outside academia. The answers to certain questions determine what we research, and also shape the frame of reference within which relationships in the field are built: For what purposes do we conduct a certain particular research? How and with whom we do it? Associated with those questions are important decisions to be made, such as whether the research will end up in a scholarly publication, or in some other 'thing', as for instance a video, a museum exhibition, a program of communicative action, an educational one, a social organizing experience, etc. Choosing what kind of 'thing' to produce also depends on how such a 'thing' could circulate and/or be useful, for whom, and what the potential significance would be of both the results and the experiences.

Along with the considerations mentioned above, I think we also have to take into account some significant current social trends, such as the reduction of public university budgets and the advancement of certain forms of 'professionalization' (differentiation, regulation) of practices that previously were more associated with intellectual activism. Some practices that a few decades ago were markedly political and critical, are nowadays increasingly transformed and codified as 'professional', in the sense of more technical, more instrumental, and seemingly 'apolitical'. Think, for instance, of the work many university graduates undertake in certain spheres of the public sector, including at the municipal level, as well as in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The issue is that the combination of all those trends appears to be resulting in the dwindling number of young colleagues joining universities as full time scholars, and the growing number of them working as 'intellectuals', not in the regulated 'scholarly' version of science and higher education institutions, but as 'professionals' in diverse public agencies (be this at municipal, provincial or national level) and/or in NGOs. These professionals also deploy analytical and interpretative practices, and in many cases also produce new data, and knowledge, even though these practices are not formatted as 'research' according to the model that science institutions have invested to this latter expression.

Furthermore, the production of knowledge by indigenous intellectuals is based on both world views and accumulations of knowledge of millenary traditions, or, at the very least, is strongly marked by dialogues with these views and knowledge. From an epistemological perspective, those other modes of knowledge production are radically different from scientific knowledge. That is the challenge that must be mindfully assumed if, accepting and appreciating that difference, we wish to develop fruitful forms of intercultural collaboration. To do this, we have to be aware that there are radically different worldviews, none of which can be considered as superior to another. 'Science' is just one form of knowledge, just one. As such, it becomes into existence from within certain values, beliefs, and institutions, which both make it possible, and condition its bias, results, and limitations.

Different worldviews, different epistemologies: the problems of *scienc(e)ism*

The recognition that each form of knowledge is strongly marked by a certain worldview is not an insignificant detail. As I argued earlier, the problem that those who embody *scienc(e)ism* ideas do not appear to understand is that both the research questions and the modes of data production depend on epistemological choices that respond to specific worldviews, as well as to ethical positions. Adherents of *scienc(e)ism*, much as the believers of any given creed feel in their credo, that for

them it is just 'natural' to see things in that particular manner, and those among them who are not just believers but also orthodox fundamentalists are incapable of understanding and valuing other worldviews. Of course, as much can be said about other types of fundamentalisms, such as those that romanticize 'the indigenous'. At this point, therefore, it seems appropriate to comment, at least briefly, about the consequences that differences in worldviews have on the associated forms of knowledge production.

As I mentioned before, a truly paradigmatic example of differences in the forms of knowledge production are those that separate orthodox *scienc(e)ism* from most indigenous intellectuals' worldviews. These differences are related to the ethical and epistemological foundations upon which each one is constructed. It is an issue of two radically different worldviews. On the one hand, we have the view of 'science' and 'progress' that historically has separated the ideas of 'nature' and 'man' (with its accompanying male and ethno-centric marks). On the other hand, we have the worldviews of the majority of the indigenous peoples of the Americas that, beyond their differences, consider that all that constitutes our world, including us, the humans, is part of the same whole.

These types of worldviews that, albeit with their differences, constitute the ethical and epistemological foundation of the forms of knowledge of the majority of the indigenous peoples in the Americas, are radically different from the 'Western' worldview that opposes humanity to nature. It is not, however, only a problem of outlooks but also of logical and practical consequences. Consistent with its founding opposition between 'man' and 'nature', the 'Western' view develops and uses the idea of 'natural resources', which can be 'exploited' in the name of 'progress', 'development', and/or 'welfare', more often than not related to the handling of material goods. This is so in the 'Western' perspective even though recently, and after so much destruction, we have begun to understand that we must do so in 'sustainable' ways, and also despite having very recently 'discovered' that access and enjoyment of 'nature' is also part of the '*quality of life*' and a 'goal' of '*human development*'. Meanwhile, the worldviews that are not based upon such an opposition do not consider 'Mother Earth' as a source of 'resources', and therefore are not oriented to 'exploit' it, but instead to respect her. From these other worldviews, the keywords are not 'progress' and 'development', but what the intellectuals from various indigenous peoples name in their own languages as '*well living*' ('*bien vivir*' in Spanish).

This difference between these two types of ethical and epistemological foundations also results in the divergence of the categories of thought and analysis, the systems of significant relationships between them, and the ways of examining the possibilities and/or convenience of different forms of human action, as well as of what type of knowledge to produce, for what purpose, how, etc. If we understand these differences, it will not be possible to disregard indigenous peoples' forms of knowledge (a plurality of forms, which are very different from one another), or to idealize or 'romanticize' them, without attempting to understand and value the differences.

The *scientistic* perspective, unfortunately, rarely perceives these differences and their significance, much less understands and values them, and on occasion even mocks or discredits them characterizing them a *priori* as pre-modern. Nevertheless, it is from those other worldviews that much work has been done and continues to be

done that benefits humanity. In order to be able to fully realize its potential benefits, we must develop relationships of intercultural collaboration between academia, the system of science and technology, and the producers of those other forms of knowledge. Regrettably, far from helping to overcome obstacles, *scientistic* policies end up strengthening the ethnocentrism, racism, and ignorance that inform exclusionary attitudes.

Intercultural collaboration, challenges, obstacles and possibilities

Academic*ism* leads to two types of problems within academia. First, it hinders non-scholarly intellectual practices from being duly appreciated and consequently from being carefully articulated in the world of scholarly research and higher education. Second, it ends up affecting the relevance and social legitimacy of science and higher education and practices as it foregoes opportunities for exchange, learning and participation in some social dynamics.

A potentially effective way to counter this process is to question the prevailing 'common sense' of what constitutes an intellectual. Shaped by the modern hegemony of academic institutionalism and the publishing industries, the representation of the concept of 'intellectual' is currently closely associated to writing and the printing press. In response to this writing-centered idea, I believe it is necessary to highlight the importance of the broad variety of forms that intellectuals' practices can assume; that is, what we as intellectuals do, recognizing that we carry out our works in diverse contexts, that this diversity of contexts entails a diversity of practices, and that diverse practices in diverse contexts necessarily yield different types of knowledge. This diversity is not negative but positive if we know how to value it and collaborate from it (Mato, 2002).

I think it important to reassess the relationships that our universities have with different social sectors. There are already other university models and other teaching-learning modes currently under development in some of the universities of a more 'local' character, as well as in some of the indigenous universities that have been created in Latin America in the last few years, for example those already mentioned above, the Amawtay Wasi Intercultural University created by a sector of CONAIE, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Sarango, 2009; UIAW, 2004), the Autonomous Indigenous Intercultural University created by the Regional Indigenous Council of the Cauca (Bolaños et al., 2009), the Amazonic Center of Indigenous Education created by COIAB, the Coordinating body of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (Flores, 2009), the Kawsay Indigenous Intercultural University, created by a network of indigenous organizations from Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia (Cerruto, 2009), or the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast, created by local indigenous and Afro-descendant leaders (Hooker, 2009). Concurrently, there are the experiences of the consortia between certain indigenous peoples' organizations and some institutions of higher education, as those promoted by the Indigenous Organization of Antioquía with three Colombian universities (Cáisamo & García, 2008), and by the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle, AIDESEP, with a university and a higher education institute in Peru (Trapnell, 2008; Rodríguez et al., 2009).

In addition to bringing in dialogue between diverse knowledge traditions (those of several indigenous peoples, Western science, and in some cases those of Afro-descendants), those experiences create fruitful paths to articulate three areas of university life that are customarily institutionally separate in the larger and better-known universities: teaching, research and extension. It could also serve to reconceptualize the idea of 'extension' so as to avoid seeing such a label in an exclusively unidirectional route. As far as the idea of extending academic knowledge outside the university walls is concerned, I believe conventional higher education institutions have a lot to learn from the formerly-mentioned experiences lead by indigenous peoples' organizations. In order to do so we need to learn to develop and practice fruitful forms of intercultural collaboration.

Intercultural collaboration means to establish and sustain dialogues and intercultural relationships of mutual respect and collaboration that constitute a two-way street. Honest and respectful dialogues and collaboration, of mutual interest, that stem from recognizing that there are diverse peoples and cultures, diverse contexts and interests and, therefore, different intellectual practices and knowledges (for further discussion of these ideas see, for example, Bustos, 2003; Dávalos, 2002; Macas, 2001, 2005; ICCI-Rimai, 2000, Amawtay Wasi Intercultural University, 2004).

Intercultural collaboration within universities must not be limited to ensuring space for indigenous and Afro-descendant students and/or professors in 'conventional' monocultural universities, or to the content of what is studied in schools of anthropology. Rather, it must arise from the recognition of the value of the knowledge that different indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples produce, which requires that study programs be reassessed in all academic disciplines.

For example, it is not enough that legal institutions such as the *Putchipúu* (Man of Words), the name of the *wayúu* people's institution (which is from the Guajira Peninsula, currently traversed by the Colombian-Venezuelan international border) that is used for conflict resolution and the preservation of group harmony and cohesion, be objects of study in schools of anthropology. Such institutions must also be included in the programs of study of both political science and law schools. Or that the *Minga*, the economic institution of the aymara and quechua/kichwa peoples that establishes and regulates certain types of collective and solitary work, is studied only in schools of anthropology; it must also be a part of the education in the schools of economics and sociology. Moreover, institutions such as these should not be studied in an isolated manner but as part of their respective worldviews and modes of social organization (ICCI-Rimai, 2000, p. 23; Macas, 2002, 2005).

In such a context, it is necessary for intellectuals who conduct their practices in the academic world, or in governmental and international cooperation agencies, to overcome any homogenizing ideas they may have about indigenous and Afro-descendant intellectuals. We must recognize that the idea of an indigenous intellectual, as well as that of an Afro-descendant intellectual, conceals numerous inner differences. These correspond, at the very least, to the diverse and different indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, and to the diversities and differences associated with particular local experiences which include both the rural and the urban, among others. But the differences do not end there, as there are those indigenous and Afro-descendant intellectuals who operate exclusively in the oral world; and there are also those others who participate more or less actively in the

written world. There is also a growing number among these intellectuals who have some type of university education, including graduate studies, master and doctoral degrees. In most of the cases with which I am familiar, however, a university education does not annul but instead enriches their worldview and heritage of knowledge which is shaped both by their peoples' knowledge, experiences, histories, needs, as well as community life projects, and their personal experiences that are often marked by racism and discrimination.

In my opinion, the most difficult problems to solve in order to develop specific forms and experiences of intercultural collaboration are those related to issues 'of translation'. I am not referring simply to the challenges of translating words and ideas from one language to another. I am speaking rather of translating worldviews, sensibilities, and meaning, which are issues of '*intercultural communication*' that we need to tackle with great care in each case and context.

Note

1. This text is an updated and revised version of an article published in 2008 in the journal *Alteridades* (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa, México City), *18*(35), 101–116.

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