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Indigenous higher education in Mexico and Brazil: between redistribution and recognition

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous groups in Latin America face a double exclusion from higher education, with low levels of access to institutions and little acknowledgement of their distinctive cultural and epistemological traditions within the curriculum. This article assesses current policies in Mexico and Brazil towards indigenous populations in higher education, considering the various responses to the challenge, including affirmative action programmes in mainstream universities, intercultural courses and autonomous institutions. These policies and initiatives are analysed using the theoretical frames of redistribution and recognition, focusing on demands for formal equality and material wellbeing on the one hand, and a distinctive cultural and educational space on the other. While state-sponsored policies focus primarily on the redistributive element, initiatives based on recognition come largely from autonomous organisations, raising a series of dilemmas and tensions around educational justice for indigenous populations in the region.

KEYWORDS

Affirmative action; Brazil; higher education policy; indigenous education; Mexico

1. Introduction

The question of whether marginalised groups in society should have access to mainstream or differentiated provision is a long-standing – perhaps a perennial – concern of educational policy and practice. On the one hand, it is argued that the curriculum in the mainstream school system is culturally specific and reflects the knowledge traditions and interests of dominant groups in society. Simply inserting non-dominant groups into this context would, therefore, serve to undermine their distinctive traditions and likely lead to their failure according to conventional criteria. Theorists such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015) have proposed instead an approach based on 'ecology of knowledges' or, in Andreotti's (2011) terms 'learning to read the world through other eyes', to acknowledge these diverse and equally valid forms of knowing. On the other hand there are those (e.g. Clegg 2011; Wheelahan 2007; Young 2008) who argue that justice requires that marginalised populations have access to the mainstream curriculum, characterised as 'powerful' or 'context independent' knowledge. According to this latter thesis, differentiated curricula simply lock peripheral social groups into a cycle of disadvantage, as they are then unable

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to access valued opportunities in society without mainstream scientific knowledge and conventional qualifications.

This article aims to explore this tension in the context of indigenous groups in the region of Latin America. Indigenous groups around the world are strongly bound up in the complex debate about equality and difference (Aikman 1997). Defined alternately as original populations marginalised in the context of colonisation and settlement, or as a national minority with a significantly distinct culture at risk from a majority population, they face a range of challenges in the education system. Having a distinct culture and particular knowledge traditions, and in many cases a different language, there are threats posed to the integrity and continuity of those traditions if young people are attending formal educational institutions. Yet many communities see the need for formal educational experiences and qualifications in order to strengthen their ability to negotiate their survival and prosperity within mainstream society (May 1999; Spring 2000).

Latin America is a region in which issues of indigeneity are particularly prominent. Spanish and Portuguese colonisation from the sixteenth century onwards had a catastrophic impact on the existing inhabitants of the region, with widespread loss of life through slaughter and illness, and a progressive loss of culture and identity through deliberate suppression of cultural forms by the Church and state, as well as through the more subtle, but no less pernicious, influence of mainstream media, art, fashion and patterns of consumption. In a few countries there are still large indigenous communities, particularly the Quechua and Aymara in the Andes, the Guarani in Paraguay and adjacent countries and the Maya in Mesoamerica. In the cases of Bolivia, Peru and Guatemala, indigenous groups are close to being a majority of the population. However, the question of indigeneity has been made significantly more complex by the extensive miscegenation in the region over the last five centuries, leading to significant *mestizo* (mixed race) populations and the emergence of *mestizo* culture and national identity. Indigeneity does not always equate to ancestry, with large proportions of those with indigenous heritage not self-identifying as indigenous, particularly if they are first language Spanish or Portuguese speakers.

As elsewhere in the world, indigenous people in Latin America are significantly disadvantaged in the area of education. While across this large region there are inevitable differences between national contexts and specific indigenous groups, in all contexts indigenous people have lower rates of access to formal education, and where it is possible to gauge, worse learning outcomes (see Cueto et al. 2009; Cueto et al. 2011 for the case of Peru). Yet it is not only an issue of neglect, there is also contestation (within as well as outside indigenous communities) over which forms of education are most appropriate. The most common dimension has been that of language, with debates stretching back decades over the use of indigenous languages in schools, either exclusively or as part of bilingual education programmes (Ames 2012; Hornberger 1988; Skutnabb-Kangas et al. 2009). There have also been more radical calls for the decolonisation of the curriculum (most prominently in Bolivia in the administration of Evo Morales) and the inclusion of indigenous history and knowledge traditions (Howard 2009; Lopes Cardozo 2012). In some cases separate indigenous schools have emerged, yet these initiatives are still far from attending either to the quantitative gap in terms of access to formal education or the problems associated with quality.

This article focuses on initiatives relating to indigenous groups at the level of higher education. This level demonstrates both the severe constraints on access for these groups and the even greater barriers in terms of differentiation of the curriculum than those at school

level. It aims to assess the responses that have been made by governments (often reacting to the pressures placed on them by social movements) to address these injustices and to understand how these responses have been located in relation to the above-mentioned tensions around inclusion. As outlined in greater detail below, the article conceptualises the debate in relation to the binary of *redistribution* and *recognition*, as debated in the work of Fraser, Honneth and others. To a large extent the redistribution position corresponds to the emphasis on access to powerful knowledge outlined above, and recognition to differentiated provision and multiple knowledges. This frame is used to categorise and also to problematise higher education policies and initiatives relating to indigenous people in Latin America. It is acknowledged that – like all binaries – this one is somewhat reductive, and real-life phenomena cannot be easily placed into one or other of the boxes. The limitations of using a frame emerging from Western philosophy and politics for analysing indigenous issues is also fully acknowledged. Nevertheless, the theoretical frame is considered to be generative in terms of opening up our understanding of the possibilities and trade-offs of different forms of educational intervention for social justice.

Given the challenges in characterising the whole of such an extensive and diverse region, the article will focus on two specific countries, Mexico and Brazil. These have been chosen, first, because they are the two largest countries in Latin America in terms of population, and in consequence exert a significant economic, political and cultural influence on the region; and, second, because they illustrate well the challenges and contradictions of indigenous higher education. As will be explored further below, both Brazil and Mexico have to a large extent adopted an approach of equal rights to accessing mainstream institutions, while allowing for some differentiation of provision, in particular Mexico with the innovative 'intercultural universities'. In focusing on these two countries, it is recognised that they do not in any way 'stand for' the experience of the entire region, while at the same time demonstrating some trends that can be identified across many countries. The article is primarily theoretical and exploratory and does not present newly collected empirical data: it utilises secondary literature as well as primary documentation in some cases in order to draw out the implications of each of the contexts and the diverse experiences within each. The analysis is also informed by the authors' experience of participation in educational initiatives and research projects in the two countries in question, and elsewhere in Latin America, over many years.

There will first be an outline of the theoretical discussions around redistribution and recognition, before applying these ideas to the two cases of Mexico and Brazil. Finally, implications of these cases are drawn out for our understandings of indigenous higher education around the world.

2. Justice as redistribution or recognition?

This section will address in turn the notions of equality and difference, their two corollaries, redistribution and recognition, and the processes entailed in addressing injustice associated with each.

2.1. Equality and redistribution

The equality principle is related to the politics of redistribution, a philosophical perspective that states that the main problem of social injustice is inequality, so its political objective

or solution is focused on redistributing among the disadvantaged. The argument is based primarily on *economic* inequality and *economic* redistribution, and the corresponding policies are commonly illustrated in liberal states through economic redistribution from tax collection, with higher taxes from wealthier individuals or companies redistributed among disadvantaged populations. That logic is materialised in particular redistributive policies, such as subsidy policies, which, for instance, are found in certain housing policies that give economic support to disadvantaged families in order to acquire their own house. But redistributive policies can also adopt strategies to reinforce equality principles or objectives, without being based on money or material transfers. An example can be found in affirmative action policies in education, in which, for instance, students from disadvantaged backgrounds receive special support in order to equalise their situation with the rest of the students. In this last case, even if the support is academic, the motive and purpose of the policy is economic, from the assumption that socioeconomic disadvantage has led to academic difficulties.

The origins of this theoretical perspective come mainly from the liberal tradition and the theory of justice presented by its foremost exponent in the twentieth century, John Rawls. Beyond that, Nancy Fraser (1995) also locates the origins of the redistribution paradigm in the socialist imaginary of equality and redistribution under the premises of class interests and class exploitation. Given that the social problem of inequality is seen to be 'rooted in the economic structure of society' (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 13), this vision of society is structured by a notion of social class:

> To say that a society has a class structure is to say that it institutionalizes economic mechanisms that systematically deny some of its members the means and opportunities they need in order to participate on a par with others in social life. (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 48–49)

In terms of social oppression, the equality/redistributive perspective sees that certain social groups are oppressed by class structures, which deprive them of equal access to different fields of society, in contrast to the politics of recognition, which understands oppression in terms of hegemonic cultural discourses, which make invisible certain cultural identities. Even though Fraser acknowledges issues around culture and identity in problems of inequality – as Honneth does with economic ones in his politics of recognition – the emphasis lies on economic factors, where injustice and inequality are rooted, and from there can be found the principal policies to respond to these problems: policies of redistribution. As may be inferred, this theoretical standpoint is criticised for being excessively based in materialist arguments, leaving aside cultural issues that nowadays seem to be increasing in importance regarding the understandings of social injustice.

2.2. The politics of recognition

The second perspective to consider is the recognition approach originally proposed by the philosophers Charles Taylor (1994) and later by Axel Honneth (1992, 2004), among others, an approach that problematises the notion of recognition in modern multicultural societies. In short, the authors analyse the concept of recognition as the basis of the development of individual and collective identity. In a multicultural world, the idea of equality is not sufficient to safeguard human dignity, the subsequent step then is to recognise the other, not only in their fundamental rights shared by everyone – from which it is possible to establish the notion of equality – but in their particularities, identities and even precarities.

An example can be found in tensions with indigenous people and their quest for political and constitutional recognition in which the idea of equality is not enough, as the problem lies precisely in the lack of understanding of their ethnic-cultural particularity.

From this recognition standpoint, the centrality lies in matters of culture rather than political economy, as 'cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice' (Fraser 1998, 430), and in the struggles distinctive of the post-socialist society and its political frame, 'group identity supplants class interests as the chief medium of political mobilization' (Fraser 1998, 430). Being a matter of culture, the politics of recognition look for 'cultural and symbolic change' (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 13), rather than an economic solution, as a response to the problem of social injustice. This symbolic feature is understood as 'patterns of representation, interpretation and communication' (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 13), patterns that hegemonise certain discourses over others and, within them, certain social codes of validation over others, because to assert that:

> … a society has a status hierarchy is to say that it institutionalizes patterns of cultural value that pervasively deny some members the recognition they need in order to be full, participating partners in social interaction. (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 49)

So, the recognition paradigm can also be referred to as the politics of identity or difference, because its postulates are based in the need of reaffirm differences instead of erasing them. The collective and common nature of recognition is linked to community, which has led Taylor to identify political communitarianism as one of its main philosophical backgrounds (Friedman 1994) – but also nowadays politics of recognition are applied by the analysis of emerging social movements – indigenous, feminist, gay, among others – which make explicit the need for social and even legal or constitutional recognition in order to respond to their claims.

It is this 'new' type of post-socialist injustice that explains the claim for recognition, with social movements that replace the workers' movement as the contemporary voices denouncing the new forms of injustice plotted in practices of misrecognition (Touraine 2002). The fundamental conceptual ingredient in this alternative is the political recognition of the uniqueness and authenticity of each individual or collective subjectivity in the context of a pluralist society.

A final contribution must be mentioned in relation to the theoretical perspectives outlined: namely, the critique from indigenous decolonialist theorists towards Western political frameworks in their pretension of encompassing demands and conflicts from indigenous populations (Coulthard 2014) and inability to reach the profundity and complexity of such historical struggles (Watson 2005). These critiques assert that the Western eye cannot perceive the worldview of indigenous thinking – and thus the real nature of their historical demands and subsequent possible political solutions. Intercultural and inclusive policies in education, therefore, fail in integrating the indigenous 'episteme' into the educational field (Kuokkanen 2007), as these efforts tend to include indigenous culture as 'the other' in an unequal position in relation to Western culture. These critical standpoints will be addressed in the discussion section, and will complement the theories presented.

Having the above discussion as framework of analysis, there now follows an outline of the current status and key trends in higher education relating to indigenous populations in Mexico and Brazil, leading to an application of these notions of redistribution and recognition.

3. Higher education and the indigenous population in Mexico

It is estimated that 10% of the total population of Mexico of 119 million are indigenous – understood as people in a household where at least one person speaks an indigenous language. The percentage increases to 21.5% when people are counted by self-ascription to an indigenous group (CDI 2016).[1] There are 68 linguistic groups and 364 language variations (DOF 2008). The indigenous population is spread across the territory, but is especially concentrated in the southern states where some municipalities have up to 100% of indigenous households (CDI 2016). International and national studies show that indigenous people have the lowest indicators in terms of social development. Overall, 95% of them were considered poor or vulnerable, in contrast with the 43.2% of the rest of the population (UNICEF/INEE 2016, 9). Although the access of indigenous people to basic education is almost universal at the primary level (97.6%), in the 15–17 age group only 50% of the indigenous adolescents attend school, compared to the 74.8% in the general population. For the 18–24 age group the percentage drops to 20% for indigenous youth attending some type of education and to 13.6% for those that only speak an indigenous language (CDI 2016).

There is no concrete information regarding the quantity of indigenous young people in higher education since most public universities do not register the ethnicity of their students, although it is estimated that only 1–3% of indigenous youth participate at this level (Schmelkes 2009, 6). The lack of ethnic differentiation is a common trend in Mexican society: ethnicity is rarely recorded in everyday and official processes, a fact that can be attributed to the national construction of identity based on the *mestizo* ideal, the combination of both Spanish and Indigenous heritage (Mateos Cortés and Dietz 2011). This national construction plays an important part in the history of indigenous education in Mexico, which aimed first to assimilate indigenous people into the general society and used Spanish as the main vehicle. Later the emphasis was placed on integrating them into the national and regional strategies of development. In the 1970s, social demands for a recognition of the pluri-ethnic composition of the country promoted the creation of a bilingual and bicultural education system, but the use of indigenous languages mostly had the objective of providing a better initiation into the dominant culture. In the 1990s, new approaches recognising the specific characteristics and claims of the indigenous groups were demanded and some modifications were made to normative instruments (e.g. articles in the Constitution and the General Education Law). These combined with general policies of inclusion and improvement of access conditions for targeted minority groups have opened up some options of higher education for indigenous students (Badillo Guzmán, Casillas Alvarado, and Ortiz Méndez 2008; SEP-CGEIB 2004; Tapia Guerrero 2016). Following the classification made by Bertely Busquets (2011) of the different institutions for indigenous or intercultural higher education, three general options or types of programmes can be identified.

3.1. Teacher training programmes for indigenous people in and for intercultural contexts

This option groups together different university-level programmes aimed at training indigenous teachers who will ideally work in intercultural settings. Historically these programmes have been the most prominent in Mexico, with a Bachelor's degree in Primary Education for Indigenous Contexts, for example, created in the 1980s (Martínez Casas 2011). Currently

these programmes are offered mostly by the *National Pedagogic University* that has teaching units across the country. Student teachers can also attend the *Normales,* the official teacher training universities, and can be certified while in service as well (Bertely Busquets 2011, 69). This higher education option is probably the most common for indigenous students, with Carnoy et al. (2002, 38) asserting in a 2002 study that most indigenous professionals were employees of the educational system.

3.2. University-level programmes where indigenous students participate

3.2.1. General public and private universities

Indigenous students are also enrolled in the general public universities as regular students. It is important to point out that there is not a quota system in Mexico to foster the access of indigenous students to higher education. The universities are usually in the main urban centres, including cities in regions with a high percentage of indigenous population. In 24 general universities indigenous students are supported by the affirmative action programme *Pathways to Higher Education*. Funded by the Ford Foundation until 2008, and later continued by the Universities and Higher Education Institutions Association with funding from the universities themselves, the World Bank and Mexican Public Education Secretariat (Alcántara Santuario and Navarrete Cazales 2014; ANUIES 2007; Didou Aupetit and Remedi 2006; Didou-Aupetit 2013; Flores-Crespo and Barrón Pastor 2006; Schmelkes 2013), *Pathways* provides academic support, mentorship spaces, teacher seminars about interculturality, and aids the students in accessing resources through scholarships, grants and food, housing and networking services (Alcántara Santuario and Navarrete Cazales 2014, 229). The students in this programme, as in the intercultural universities described below, can apply for a scholarship for low-income students called PRONABES (CNBS-SEP 2016). In the case of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the largest university in Mexico, indigenous students have since 2004 also been able to apply for a scholarship as part of the University Programme of Cultural Diversity and Interculturality (UNAM 2014). These programmes seem to acknowledge the need for support of indigenous students as a disadvantaged minority, placing less emphasis on their cultural and identity demands and characteristics. A study carried out by Schmelkes (2013) found that:

> … in universities, being indigenous is synonymous with being poor and having poor educational background, [universities] saw their role with respect to Indigenous students as 'helping them out' to surmount these difficulties. Indigenous students are culturally rich, though they might be and generally are economically poor. Universities see their economic poverty, not their cultural wealth. (144)

3.2.2. Intercultural universities

There are currently 12 intercultural universities (IU) created by the Mexican Government, plus another five autonomously created that have been officially recognised (Mateos Cortés and Dietz 2016). These universities, which started to operate in 2003, are not exclusive to the indigenous population (Schmelkes 2009), but, in contrast with the occidental urban-centric and classist university tradition in Mexico, they are located in indigenous regions, in cultural settings characterised by high economic exclusion and infrastructural marginalisation (Mateos Cortés and Dietz 2016). By being situated in such regions the main purposes of these universities are to increase the proportion of indigenous students in higher education,

to educate professionals engaged with regional development and to form links with the communities in which they are located (Schmelkes 2008).

The IU project was generated by the convergence of the goals of social policy (aimed at fighting poverty), higher education policy oriented towards an increase in coverage, the formation of human capital and the intercultural agenda, promoted by the national and international indigenous movement (Tapia Guerrero 2016). Although there seems to be an inclusion of both redistribution and recognition components in the IU model, there is an inherent tension between state aims of economic development and poverty reduction, and the demands historically made by the indigenous groups. Schmelkes (2009) states that these are mainly three: access to bilingual and culturally pertinent education; better national knowledge and appreciation of indigenous culture; and freedom to decide about their own educational systems (with the necessary resources to plan, execute and evaluate them). For Schmelkes, IUs 'are clearly an answer to the first of these demands. In time, they should become a main instrument for the gradual fulfilment of the other two' (8–9). Other analyses challenge the possibility of addressing these demands, since IUs have been subordinated to the national public policy and to a particular model of understanding intercultural relations (e.g. Tapia Guerrero 2016), positioning this system more as a case of affirmative action (Lehmann 2015). The way the intercultural approach is portrayed in the academic model of the university (de Casillas Muñoz and Santini Villar 2006) seems to respond to a liberal view of multiculturalism that fails to problematise the systemic differences and power relations.

3.3. Autonomous and semi-autonomous options

These programmes group 'autonomous and semi-autonomous options in political, normative and pedagogical terms, which are generated in highly politicized, militarized and conflictual regions where the indigenous movement has taken roots' (Bertely Busquets 2011, 70). Some of these grassroots initiatives are in permanent negotiation or struggle for official recognition (for example the experiences of UNISUR Guerrero and UESA-LEIC presented by Rojas-Cortés and González-Apodaca 2016). Others reject the official and Westernised system and provide autonomous options, as is the case of UNITIERRA, the University of the Earth, in the state of Oaxaca whose purpose is to 'provide a tertiary learning space, supporting and complementing existing non-formal, autonomous community education initiatives' (Khoo and Walsh 2016). This 'university' defines its processes by exploring the needs of the communities and the kind of learning they want from their young people (Barrón-Pastor 2010) and is tied to the work and demands of indigenous and social movements in the country (UNITIERRA n.d.). For Rojas-Cortés and González-Apodaca (2016) these initiatives are based on:

> the positive claim of their 'own' identity and culture, the critique of the hegemonic ways of knowledge and wisdom, the legitimacy of 'other' wisdom tied to the cultural and political praxis of the actors, and the defence of territory and collective resources. (74, authors' translation)

The authors argue that these educational understandings are not reflected in the governmental agendas for intercultural education, but seem to be a constitutive element of the autonomous types of higher education institutions.

In Mexico the heterogeneous and contested field of indigenous and intercultural higher education is shaped by the struggle in the relation between meaning and power that runs through it and that intertwines diverse representations of social equity (Rojas-Cortés and

González-Apodaca 2016). The higher education programmes are diverse and the different characteristics of the systems, regions of the country and ethnic groups make it especially challenging to give a brief summative view. It is clear that indigenous participation in education is marked by a homogenising past and a long struggle for cultural and ethnic recognition, and for social and economic dignity and wellbeing. It is also clear that in the first two types of programmes actual participation of indigenous people in the configuration of the higher education system has been marginal and therefore recognition demands become instrumental for an approach much more aligned with redistribution. In contrast, the third type of programme is situated in the recognition approach that aims not just to make difference explicit, but to reshape educational, economic and social relationships at the communal, regional and state level.

4. Challenges of indigenous higher education in Brazil

Higher education in Brazil – as in all aspects of society – is subject to high levels of inequality. Significant expansion of the system in recent years, primarily through relatively low-cost private institutions, has enabled larger numbers of the population to go to university, but there is still significant unmet demand, and disadvantaged students are generally confined to lower quality institutions (McCowan 2016a; Pedrosa et al. 2014). Beyond social class and income inequalities, there are significant racial/ethnic disparities.

The Brazilian population – comprised of the original indigenous population, European settlers, the descendants of African slaves and more recent migrant groups from Asia and other parts of the world – has historically been characterised by high levels of interracial marriage, making it hard to divide society into clear racial/ethnic groups. The Brazilian census, and other statistical analyses, however, do distinguish between White, *Pardo* (mixed race), Black, Indigenous and East Asian. Of these groups, most of the attention has been on the severe disparity in access to higher education between African descendants (often combining black and mixed-race populations) and the White population.

While there are very high numbers of descendants of indigenous peoples in Brazil, most of these have been integrated into mainstream society, speak only Portuguese and do not self-identify as indigenous. There are a total of 230 indigenous communities in the country, speaking 180 different languages (de Lima 2012), although the number of people in Brazil declaring themselves as indigenous according to the 2010 census is 817,963, comprising just 0.43% of the population (IBGE 2012). Given the relatively small numbers, there has been less attention to indigenous peoples than there has for African Brazilians, with the exception of the Amazon region in which a large proportion of indigenous peoples are located. Educational provision for these communities had in the first centuries of European colonisation been provided by missionaries, and then in the twentieth century through the state in a predominantly assimilationist mode (David, Melo, and Malheiro 2013). However, the 1988 Constitution, formed after the end of the military dictatorship, made important guarantees of *alterity* for indigenous groups, while the Law of Directives and Bases of 1996 guaranteed differentiated education, to be determined by indigenous communities.

Broadly speaking, there are two main challenges for indigenous peoples in higher education. First is the very low level of access to the system, with small numbers enrolled in any form of higher education. There have been some significant gains: while in 2004 there were estimated to be only 1300 indigenous students in higher education institutions, the

figure had risen to around 8000 by 2012 (de Lima 2012). Nevertheless, the proportion of all higher education students who are indigenous is only 0.1%, meaning that they are less than a quarter as likely to go to university than the non-indigenous population (David, Melo, and Malheiro 2013). By 2008, only 21% of indigenous upper-primary schoolteachers had a university degree, a qualification required for teaching at this level (INEP 2009). The second challenge relates to the curriculum: indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions are rarely incorporated within universities, and courses very often are not appropriate for the needs of indigenous communities. This 'curricular ethnocentrism' (David, Melo, and Malheiro 2013), therefore, presents practical problems for the communities in terms of managing their day-to-day lives, as well as failing to recognise their epistemological and cultural traditions.

There has been a range of responses to the injustices of indigenous higher education from governments, higher education institutions, non-governmental organisations and social movements. It is possible to categorise responses to these challenges in Brazil in three ways.

4.1. Affirmative action policies within mainstream institutions

Public universities in Brazil (starting with the State University of Rio de Janeiro in 2003) have adopted quotas for specific racial/ethnic groups, normally in combination with criteria on socioeconomic background (i.e. prior attendance at public rather than private school, and income level) (Childs and Stromquist 2015; Norões and Costa 2012). A pioneer in relation to indigenous affirmative action was the State University of Mato Grosso do Sul, which as early as 2003 implemented a quota of 10% for indigenous students, in addition to a 20% quota for African descendants (David, Melo, and Malheiro 2013). The process of mobilisation across the country culminated with the 2012 federal law that mandates all federal universities to allocate 50% of their places to students from public schools, and within this proportion, racial quotas corresponding to the demographic proportions in the state in question (dos Santos 2015). In those states in which there is a significant indigenous population, indigenous people have been able to access federal universities through this scheme.

Some federal universities – for example the University of Western Pará – have their own targeted quota systems for indigenous students, as do some state universities, while others operate other affirmative action policies such as score bonuses or special entrance exams (*vestibulares*), for example the state universities of Paraná (Cajueiro 2008). Private universities rarely have affirmative action or scholarship schemes, although indigenous students have been able to benefit from the *Prouni* programme, through which private institutions offer free-of-charge access for low-income students in exchange for tax breaks. There are also some affirmative action programmes that provide maintenance grants and other support. These actions were spurred on by the project *Trilhas de Conhecimento*, supported by the Ford Foundation's *Pathways to Higher Education* initiative (as in Mexico), which ran from 2004–2010. According to Paladino (2012), some 70 universities across the country now have some form of affirmative action programme for indigenous people.

4.2. Indigenous courses within mainstream institutions

There are some examples in public universities of courses designed specifically for indigenous students, with differentiated curricula. Most common amongst these are teacher

education courses (*licenciaturas*), equipping teachers who will be returning to schools in indigenous communities – a need that has increased significantly on account of the expansion of access to primary and secondary schools amongst indigenous children (Grupioni 2003). The first of these were the Insikiran Nucleus of the Federal University of Roraima (Carvalho and de Carvalho 2008) and the State University of Mato Grosso (UNEMAT) in 2001 (Januário and Silva 2008). Other examples include the Intercultural Indigenous Faculty, at the Federal University of Grande Dourados, and there are now 26 intercultural teacher education courses across the country (de Lima 2012). An important element of these teacher education courses is that the student teachers spend a significant part of the year in their communities, thus helping to ensure that the link with the community is maintained throughout, and that there is less chance of loss of these professionals to urban schools. While the courses are rooted in indigenous culture and knowledge traditions, one of the challenges is that they include students from many different indigenous groups, and therefore multiple cultures and languages. The course at UNEMAT provides plenary sessions in Portuguese, but students utilise their own languages in group work and in creating pedagogical materials (Januário and Silva 2008). For the most part these courses are restricted to the undergraduate level, although UNEMAT has an *especialização* course (equivalent of a postgraduate certificate).

These actions started as initiatives emerging from the universities themselves, on the basis of their articulation with indigenous movements and support from committed academic staff. Nevertheless, some government support was provided in the form of the Programme of Higher Education and Indigenous Teacher Education, launched in 2005, which emerged from the 2003 Diversity in the University programme (supported by the Inter-American Development Bank).

4.3. Autonomous institutions

Finally, there are rare examples of dedicated institutions for indigenous people. The Amazonian Centre of Indigenous Education (CAFI) was founded in Manaus in 2006 to provide courses in project management and ethno-environmental management for selected representatives of indigenous communities around the country. This is a private institution, supported by the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of Amazonia, without any support from public funds and does not have accreditation as a higher education institution (Flores 2008). As is the case with the intercultural teacher education courses, this institution was designed specifically so that students are not permanently removed from their communities, and return to apply what they have learned there. The University of the Forest, in Acre state, is also a form of indigenous institution, and has provided an important opportunity for non-indigenous students to learn from indigenous professors, although it has suffered with lack of resources and has now been incorporated into the Federal University of Acre.

Most innovative of these autonomous institutions is perhaps the Institute of Indigenous Knowledge in São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Amazonas state, which is currently being established, but has not yet opened its doors to students (Cammarota et al. 2015; McCowan 2016b; Medeiros and Lima 2014). It subscribes to a transformative approach to higher education, abandoning traditional disciplines in favour of courses based on indigenous culture and priorities, and involving community elders as well as professors with academic qualifications.

In summary, of these three types of initiative, the first clearly follows the orientation of *redistribution*, aiming to equalise opportunities to enter mainstream institutions for indigenous people. Here it is assumed that indigenous people will want to engage with the traditional academic curriculum, and open the door to employment opportunities in mainstream society. The second of these types of initiative acknowledges that the cultural and material context of indigenous communities is distinct, and tailors course content to their specific needs – thus incorporating some elements of the *recognition* paradigm. The third of these types is clearly following the recognition approach. However, it is important to emphasise that initiatives of the second and third type are few and far between, and the courses are small: CAFI, for example, provides only 30 places a year. For the most part there are extremely low levels of recognition of difference of indigenous communities and of the need for educational responses in line with their culture and knowledge traditions. Furthermore, much of the emphasis on *alterity* relates to practical issues such as forming professionals for work in communities, negotiating with government authorities and partnering with non-governmental organisations, rather than the more demanding epistemological dimensions. Nevertheless, there are exceptions: the Mato Grosso teacher education course combines the practical elements of alternating between university and community, with an indigenous cosmological element.

The challenge has been interpreted as one of a difficult choice between affirmative action policies that lead to individual empowerment to the detriment of the collective educational rights demanded by indigenous movements, or alternatively differentiated courses that are limited to the most part to teacher education, thus limiting the choices of the communities.[2] The government of the Workers' Party (PT) – in power from 2003 until the impeachment of Dilma Roussef in 2016 – did in fact support some differentiated provision of this type, for example the innovative federal universities UNILA[3] and UNILAB[4], focusing on Latin American integration and links with Africa, respectively (McCowan 2016b). However, the urban trade union origins of the PT have been associated by some with the relative lack of attention of the government to indigenous issues, and the preference for redistribution over recognition.[5] For the most part, indigenous people in Brazil have been subjected to the tendency across Latin America to convert them into acculturated rural peasants or urban poor (Howard 2009), neither able to live a distinctive lifestyle, nor compete on an equal footing within the mainstream society.

5. Redistribution and recognition in the two cases

This final section will consider the theoretical perspectives of redistribution and recognition in relation to the Mexican and Brazilian cases of higher education and the indigenous population. More than classifying these education policies as one or the other, the analysis reflects the challenges and issues that arise from the application of these principles in the complex and ambivalent cases presented. It is plausible that the Mexican case, even with its own problems, presents a more extensive support system than the hesitant efforts from the Brazilian policy framework; in the same way it is also observable that issues around indigenous population, and the magnitude of this population itself, are wider and more recognisable in the case of Mexico. So different policies respond to different social contexts, contrasts that allow us to consider some problematic issues around indigenous higher education. From this analysis we hope to provide a critical insight into theory and political

practice. Three problematic issues will be addressed: (1) redistribution responses to recognition claims, (2) autonomy as a condition for recognition and (3) equality and the risk of imposing hegemonic discourses.

5.1. Redistribution responses to recognition claims

The analysis shows that initiatives in both countries can to a large extent be understood as affirmative action policies, understood here as politics of redistribution as they pursue the goal of the inclusion of indigenous youth in the general system. While the Brazilian case bases its support mainly in institutional quotas, in Mexico inclusion is aided through specific backings related with monetary and academic supports in the formal tertiary educational system. One can even consider that, in general, the Mexican IUs offer an inclusive path to the national development model because although the traditional affirmative action model is based on targeted and individual support strategies, these IUs can be understood as an institutional affirmative action where the whole university includes indigenous territories and their people into the general development model of the country (Lehmann 2015).

Through looking at these strategies as redistribution policies, it is evident that they provide an acknowledgement of the excluded condition of the indigenous population, but it is an exclusion understood as inequality rather than misrecognition. Even though the affirmative action policies deliver a way of inclusion by including indigenous individuals into the regular higher education and national development path, they fail to address the key demand (recognition) and its fundamental problem (misrecognition). This political mismatch risks imposing a political solution, which through its discourses, investments and practices hides the main problem. This could deepen its social conflicts – the lack of recognition becomes more problematic – or could erase them – as new generations are included in the general system and official development path, so they end up adapting to them.

5.2. Autonomy as a condition for recognition?

In contrast, the autonomous universities' experiences presented in each national case could be understood as located under the recognition approach, since they are derived from claims of difference and autonomy. These experiences allow us to explore the problematic relationship between recognition and conditions of autonomy (as explored in McCowan 2016b); for instance, in Mexico, some autonomous universities (e.g. UNISUR Guerrero and UESA-LEIC) are struggling for official recognition, while others (e.g. UNITIERRA) look to operate regardless of recognition by the state – indeed, they reject any possibility of such recognition. In either case – autonomy that looks for or that rejects official recognition – the question is the relevance of the condition of autonomy in a higher education entity in order to consider such initiatives under the recognition framework. There are two questions here: first, is it possible that the state can provide educational alternatives, which respect and recognise the autonomy of indigenous communities? And, second, can an autonomous institution be recognised if it is not recognised by the state?

In relation to the first issue it can be seen in the two national cases, only the autonomous higher education institutions provide what they are claiming: to educate from their own indigenous knowledge and categories, promoting their own culture. Even the indigenous teaching programmes in regular universities, despite incorporating elements such as

indigenous language, are ultimately adaptations of official curricula to intercultural settings. In logical terms, it is not impossible for an external official body to provide, or at least support, autonomous educational alternatives, for example, through political support, technical advice or economic assistance. This last case may be found in the University of the Forest, which because of its financial troubles was incorporated into the federal university of the region. But from the other experiences presented – UNITIERRA, Institute of Indigenous Knowledge in São Gabriel da Cachoeira – it seems that actual autonomy is more probable when it comes from the indigenous organisations themselves, initially self-organised and only later officially recognised. In sociological terms, there is a need for agency from indigenous populations in order to obtain structural recognition. First exists the organisation self-institutionalised, then the struggle for external recognition.

Autonomous educational institutions, therefore, may seek social or official recognition, in order to, for instance, get governmental funding or any other assistance. This case can be problematic as being officially recognised can bring requirements applied to the general system, limiting the original indigenous institutional autonomy. However, there are also autonomous indigenous communities that do not look for external official recognition, leading to two possible paths of analysis. The first one is just accepting and respecting the autonomous process of each indigenous institution, so this higher education institution responds to its own rules and its own ways of internal recognition. But as a second issue, given that indigenous populations are still part of a wider (national) society, they constitute a matter of public concern for the state and society. From this standpoint, even in the absence of a demand for recognition from indigenous higher education institutions, the state or society are required to provide social or institutional recognition – they cannot ignore the communities and organisations within the polity. This does not necessarily mean official recognition, there can be different ways of symbolic recognition, but in any of its arrangements it equally represents a form of recognition. But, this can also be problematised in terms of sovereignty, as the Western notion of state differs from the one built from indigenous cultures in their claims for autonomy; there can be opposite understandings regarding issues around dominion and power. In the Australian context, for example, Watson (2005) points out that 'Aboriginal sovereignty is different from [Western] state sovereignty because it embraces diversity, and inclusivity, rather than exclusivity' (43); such ontological tensions can make difficult the possibilities of official recognition of the claims for autonomy of indigenous populations.

5.3. Equality and the risk of imposing hegemonic discourses

This final issue questions if the equality principle applied in the case of higher education, in spite of its search for justice, is ultimately at the service of hegemonic discourses that reinforce the misrecognition of indigenous populations in the countries analysed. As outlined above in relation to questions of 'powerful knowledge', equality of access to mainstream institutions is seen by some as the only way to ensure that marginalised populations are not permanently relegated to a subordinate place in society. However, the equality principle applied in public policies can fall into a problem of imposing a unitary framework – paradoxically – in order to recognise individuals, students, citizens and communities or collectives. Ahenakew (2017) provides an interesting contribution to this matter, by denouncing the fact that institutional efforts for integrating indigenous knowledge in the

official educational sphere fail when they instrumentalise this knowledge to maintain the political asymmetry between the White and the Aboriginal culture, and when they depoliticise it and minimise conflict through its superficial inclusion.

Two hegemonic discourses or technologies (Ball 1994) are then visible here: curricular knowledge and the development discourse. An indigenous higher education policy based on affirmative action inside regular universities does not recognise – and therefore neglects – indigenous knowledge, as long as indigenous students are included in a system that educates under the national/regular curriculum framework. Kuokkanen (2007) argues that the Western university as an institutional result of the dominant *episteme* is unable to integrate indigenous knowledge because a structural asymmetry will always be present. This knowledge also conforms to a particular development model, so it is not only a cultural imposition, but an economic one too. National economic systems in Latin America, as in other regions of the world, are influenced by free market principles (Gwynne and Kay 2000), and the official knowledge imparted by higher education institutions in Brazil and Mexico is influenced by these demands, serving primarily to prepare graduates for the labour market. This situation sidelines both the cultural heritage of indigenous population and their conceptions of 'development'.

6. Conclusion

This article has presented two national cases of indigenous higher education in Latin America, analysing them through the frameworks of theories of redistribution and recognition, with the aim of understanding the possibilities and trade-offs of different forms of educational intervention for social justice. In both of these countries the limited access to higher education of indigenous people has been addressed through particular initiatives and university models that include integration in regular university through policies of affirmative action in the form of a quota system, in the case of Brazil, and financial and academic support in both of the cases. In the case of Mexico, intercultural universities situated in regions with a high percentage of indigenous population have also been created to foster, as part of their aims, the increased participation of indigenous students. Both of these countries also present cases of autonomous institutions that seek to integrate indigenous knowledge systems and demands.

The analysis using the theories of redistribution versus recognition has shown, first, that the majority of initiatives in Mexico and Brazil fall under the redistribution approach, since they understand the condition of indigenous people mostly as a marginalised sector of society that needs to be integrated into the national development path through particular actions to give better opportunities of access and completion. Second, the demand of autonomy in relation to recognition has been problematised, since the autonomous options more connected with this approach reflect a tension between the possibilities of addressing cultural particularities, while at the same time being recognised by an educational or governmental system that, as seen in the previous point, excludes them. Linked to this idea, there is the question of whether initiatives to increase the participation of indigenous students have possibilities of opening spaces for recognition, as some of the programmes and systems aim to do, or if in fact they foster the imposition of hegemonic discourses and therefore reinforce the misrecognition of the indigenous population. It may be that the configuration of higher education systems and programmes based on ideals of equity and

redistribution does in fact block – by integrating and not transforming – cultural, political and social changes of the wider society that would be needed to address these demands.

Furthermore, there are theoretical challenges in relation to the perspectives applied, in terms of asking if those Western paradigms – redistribution and recognition - can actually address the particularities and nuances of such a complex historical issue. This question provokes the consideration of other perspectives, which speak from the indigenous populations themselves, avoiding the appropriation of the indigenous voice by Western discourse and theory.

Notes

1. 2015 was the first year in which people were asked if they self-ascribed to an indigenous group. Before this year, the linguistic criterion was the only one used to estimate the size of the indigenous population.
2. Douglas Santos, personal communication.
3. Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana (Federal University for Latin American Integration)
4. Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira (University for International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony)
5. Marta Azevedo, personal communication.

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