

Is the interculturalisation of Chile's universities a real possibility?

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Abstract

Knowledge deemed worthy of classification as 'truth' is not produced only in classic positivist research, or research recognised by the official state accreditation system, it is also produced by research–action, research + development, experimentation and systematisation. One of the most basic aspects of academic work is epistemological reflection on the justification of the research field and the method by which the hidden meaning of reality is discovered. This paper expresses interculturality polyphonically from the Latin American perspective; from the hopes shared with indigenous peoples and the poor; with social, religious and political activists and committed intellectuals; people who act and think honestly. A transversal theme of this text is the nature and condition of the academic reflection on interculturality carried out in universities, in supposedly intercultural contexts. The discussion here is based on educational development projects, research and the author's own experience of government and university management actions.

Keywords

Chile, higher education, indigenous peoples, interculturality, modernity

Introduction

Writing on interculturality from the angle of the ideal would require us to write on all the knowledge in the world, on the world and its diversity, on all human relations, on the history of the earth, on humanity and thought – all at the same moment; in other words, we would be obliged to address every theme with a dialectical ordering of thought in an attempt to define broad categories to explain the particularities that cannot be explained by the world's subjective and spiritual dimensions.

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Indigenous and intercultural issues cannot be fully understood without the inclusion of the sacred dimension, the spirituality of these cultures. If we do not believe in gifts and miracles, in the supernatural, we cannot fully understand the machi, the saint's mother, the catholic priest and the religious syncretism so deeply rooted in Latin America. Of course we can interpret dreams according to Freudian or Jungian psychoanalysis, but it is questionable whether all the senses of the Mapuche 'pewma'¹ can be explained by this psychological trend, or in a language other than Mapudungun: is its premonitory nature comprehensible in the terms of modern science? This is one axis for reflection: the whole significance of interculturality cannot be addressed – even by the academic world – since it contains a component that is unknowable and without which it cannot be defined: that which is beyond the grasp of reason, the profoundly subjective, the sacred, the spiritual. At least if we are talking about interculturality involving indigenous peoples or migrants from rural or religious cultures, or cultures strongly rooted in tradition, it is nature that holds a dialogue with interculturality, with the sacred, with education and with human political and social existence; the human being as nature and a part of nature.

Analysis of our present epoch shows us a moment of generalised crisis, which however holds out the hope of a better world for everyone, whoever they may be, for the world. In the words of the singer Silvio Rodríguez, 'the age is giving birth to a heart/it is at its last gasp, it is dying of pain/and we must run to help/because the future is collapsing'. This is a time of uncertainties, the end of an era – when rational indicators are few; great doubts exist on the positivist and positive trend of progress, people feel deeply insecure about human existence and the fate of the planet. It is not only epistemological doubt that generates uncertainties for us, it is the everyday meaning of existence. But at the same time there is hope among the poor, among indigenous peoples and basic communities; civil society is becoming organised to resist oppression; new human and natural values are being constructed.

The object is to reflect on whether a historical possibility exists for interculturality in education, specifically higher education, based on reflections from a variety of fields where some say it is possible, others that it is impossible, others hover in doubt and others again pursue permanent construction. The question we address is: Is intercultural education possible in today's university with the model of higher education as it exists in Chile? Our position is that the doubt existing in the context of Chilean universities today is not synonymous with despair.

Higher education and interculturality

There is broad, varied provision of higher education in Chile, distributed as follows: in total (2008) there are 61 universities (state or private with direct government support; private created since 1981 with no direct support); 45 professional institutes (private institutions, either profit making or not); 90 technical training centres (private institutions, either profit making or not) and

16 institutions belonging to different branches of the Armed Forces (academies and training schools). There are 25 universities in the grouping known as the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Chilenas – CRUCH). This group was created by law and includes all the 16 state universities (formed as a result of the reform of the University of Chile and the State Technical University in 1980), and 9 traditional private universities (6 created before the 1980 reform and 3 catholic universities established in 1991 from regional campuses of the Catholic University of Chile).² There are also 31 private universities.³ The number of undergraduate students matriculated has grown from 165,000 at the beginning of the 1980s to more than 1 million in 2012. This growth has implied a net increase in coverage from 27.9% in 2007 to 36.3% in 2011⁴; however, nearly 40% of students drop out before graduation.⁵

Within this system, discussion on the interculturalisation of universities has concentrated mainly on the universities of the CRUCH, which are organised according to a more public conception of education. In the case of the 31 private universities, this is a fairly remote discussion, since their participation in knowledge production is proportionally lower (with some exceptions) and their main thrust is teaching; only a few private universities are becoming involved in this discussion with some members of the CRUCH group. But even in these, interculturality is not a common axis of their mission for public education; those which recognise this theme, at least partially, are those located in territories with a significant indigenous proportion among the population and where there are academic staff who are concerned about this issue. Concern about interculturality is focused in a few universities and/or specific academics in these institutions.

Consequently when we talk of higher education and interculturality, we are talking of a small group of universities within a large universe of higher education institutions (including Technical Training Centres and Professional Institutes). We are talking of those which have a public vocation; however, within many of them there is no significant concern; and if there is, it is not necessarily a dimension that involves the whole community, institution and curriculum. This then is the first, historical, difficulty with interculturality in the university system: today this is a concern for only a minority of institutions, and few or very few people within them. Institutional cover of this issue in the higher education system is minimal, and there is no prospect of widespread introduction of the principle of intercultural relations in education.

It should be noted that higher education includes higher technical training, which has been little considered in reflections on interculturality. Discussion is limited to universities, not higher education as a whole, especially as this concept tends to be assimilated to university. The subject is not considered in higher technical education, except in the case of a very few experiences – also in areas with a significant indigenous population, associated with student assistance. Technical Training Centres and Professional Institutes are all private, in the hands of profit-making companies. This means that the decision to incorporate interculturality into their institutions and curricula is optional for the owners, or is stimulated

by financial incentives. Interculturality still has a long way to go in these institutions, and if it becomes possible it will be as the result of promotion or introduction by an external force.

Intercultural education has been fiercely debated in the Chilean academic world and has had an impact on the debate over higher education (Huerta et al., 2011; Silva, 2008; Varas and Díaz-Romero, 2013; Williamson, 2011). However, its real structural impact has been slight. Some academics have focussed on classic research projects, often associated with the ‘high impact’ indexed publications market, while others have concentrated on competitively funded research associated with these publications or on specific groups of indigenous intellectuals with no real links to the universities. Other experiments have been carried out with the support of international cooperation (Williamson and Navarrete, 2014), although it is uncertain whether they have been driven by genuine and generous institutional interest. There are academics who have reported experiments with indigenous peoples or governments as an individual commitment or that of small, socially or politically committed groups. The experience of academics in a large number of universities, which make up the Inter-university Network for Education and Interculturality (Red Interuniversitaria de Educación e Interculturalidad) is used to analyse the still slight impact of their efforts on the curricula, teaching and objectives of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in their universities (2014). The provision of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in intercultural education is very scarce in Chile. Only the Catholic University of Temuco and the Iquique campus of the Arturo Prat University have developed courses in Intercultural Primary Teacher Training, with total or partial financing from the Ministry of Education, while the University of Santiago de Chile offers a Doctorate in Education with mention in interculturality. Until the middle of the decade 2000–2010, indigenous university students were highly mobilised on the subjects of grants, special access, hostels and residences and incorporation of indigenous culture into course curricula; more recently they have obtained participation in academic contexts. There have been experiments with early practical voluntary work for indigenous secondary school pupils in hostels and secondary schools, but the participation of university students has fallen progressively. Interculturality in universities is predominantly a question of their institutional or academic discourse; conversations in networks, which are expressed in congresses, seminars or other events, mainly focused on individual committed academics or small groups. These are not able to substantially influence intercultural activities, definitions or even conflicts within their universities. The rationalist logics of the Chilean model of higher education – the logics of the neoliberal market and of private financing for higher education (even state-owned) – results in pressure to limit the progress achieved to an academicist logic of knowledge production and dissemination, with the exception of certain individuals or academic groups: despite their discourse and their intentions, Chilean universities are not intercultural.

In general, interculturality is addressed in universities in two ways: one is theoretical, with long, complex, rich, founded conceptual discussion leading to varied

discussion in events and academic publications devoted to the concepts of interculturality, pluri-culturalism, multiculturalism and transculturality in the complex field of definitions, which make up the field of intercultural education (Dietz, 2012; Williamson, 2004); the other is pragmatic, in which 'interculturality' is assumed as a field for actions associated with a sort of practical concept allowing dialogue and action in the mediating relationship between higher education, the state and indigenous peoples. The first version circulates in the academic and scientific worlds with impacts on public policy; the second circulates in the educational, political and social worlds generating impacts on public projects and programmes, with or without the mediation of indigenous organisations. Clearly the above description presents extremes, and in reality there are dynamics between them of various degrees and types. The reflections in this article are based on educational development projects, research and actual experience of government and university management actions.⁶

There has been progress in the incorporation of indigenous students into higher education since the return of democracy. This shows that the greater the strength of democratic principles in governments and programmes, the greater the possibilities of conquering better spaces for interculturality; nevertheless, important challenges and debts remain.

While in the 1990s, the emphasis was on access to primary education, today discussion reaches right up to postgraduate degrees, although the unresolved issues affecting cultural and intercultural significates and contents are most visible in primary and especially secondary schools. This trend towards higher and postgraduate education puts critical discussion of intercultural epistemologies and worldviews in the limelight, as we will analyse below. For the moment we will review some concrete data on the impact of postgraduate education on knowledge production and the training of high-level experts and specialists.

The Equitas Foundation, in its ISEES newsletter (ISEES, 2011), reports that the 2009 Casen survey estimated the number of indigenous persons who completed postgraduate studies in Chile between 2000 and 2009 at around 2000, a tiny figure in proportion to the reported 140,000 nonindigenous individuals; however, this figure is high when compared to the data available for other countries in the region. The great majority belongs to the Mapuche ethnic group and lives in urban areas: 26% in the Santiago Metropolitan Region and 74% mainly in the Bío Bío, Araucanía and Los Lagos Regions; 53% are women and 47% men. If the change over the period 1996–2009 is analysed, the proportion of indigenous students completing postgraduate studies (students and/or graduates) presents a slight increase: in 1996 only 0.1% of Mapuche aged over 18 reached this level, whereas by 2009, the figure had increased to 0.3%. This is still a very low percentage compared to their nonindigenous peers, and is evidence of a gap in participation, which has widened in recent years – from 0.3 percentage points in 1996 to 0.9 percentage points in 2009. Another important trend is the increased participation in postgraduate studies by indigenous students from homes with low education levels: in 2000, only 1% of indigenous individuals with postgraduate degrees came

from homes where the head of the household had not received higher education; by 2009, this figure had risen to 14%. From this it may be concluded that the educational level of the head of the household is becoming less significant in determining the likelihood of an indigenous student being able to take a postgraduate course – as is also observed in nonindigenous households (ISEES, 2011). This shows that there has been progress as the result of a set of affirmative action policies that have had a positive impact on indigenous students' access to higher education, and in some cases, their completion of the course and graduation. Nevertheless, inequalities persist since opportunities have increased across the whole system, and the issue has shifted to effective interculturalisation of higher education.

In general, knowledge production – expressed as the number of theses in the areas of social sciences and humanities (in the case of research-based masters' degrees, which are steadily being replaced by professional masters' degrees and doctorates) – is occurring in the framework of quantitative and qualitative research, which meets the classic, positive criteria. Other methods such as participative action research or systematised experimental studies are not generally considered as peer-validated 'scientific' knowledge production. The preferred languages are Spanish and English. Indigenous languages, except in a few very specific cases, are not accepted as scientific languages. This is another limiting factor that casts doubt on the possibility of interculturalising the university system: the methods of producing validated knowledge, the fact that academic and peer recognition is restricted to these methods, and, very often, the dominant conceptions of truth and knowledge in institutional and academic ideology. Indigenous knowledge has become an object of research, and people have become expressions of otherness with no political capability or power within the university system. Exceptions occur when they meet academics or gaps in the educational system, its institutions or curricula, which permit the creation of significant cultural contents or epistemological and methodological focuses, and these exceptions become alternatives to the dominant conceptions in the multiple focuses of academic discourse.

Uncertain times for interculturality

Let us reflect on another aspect of interculturality, namely the uncertain times shared by people and cultures, in different ways and with different focuses: conceptual and methodological, of meaning and of existence.

Ernesto Cardenal in 'Ciudades Perdidas' (Lost Cities) (Cardenal, 2009: 94) reflects on these uncertain times for indigenous peoples:

Time was sacred. Days used to be gods. / Past and future blended in their songs. / They spoke of the past and the future with the same *katuns*, / because they believed that time repeats itself / as they saw the motions of the stars repeat themselves. / But the time that they worshipped suddenly stood still.

This time that they worshipped, without an independent past and future, suddenly stood still; and today those who were amazed to feel time stop and those who stopped it are struggling – we hope not in vain – to find one another in territorial space and in the same historical time.

For the purposes of this work, we accept the following general definition of culture:

The set of responses developed by a given social group to satisfy its needs. It is moreover the manner of feeling, thinking and acting of the members of a group, who construct their worldview and thus their personal and collective identity on the basis of their culture. What are these needs that the group satisfies through cultural responses? All of them, be they material or symbolic (Cabral, 2002: 73).

If we make an irrational, unprejudiced analysis – by which I mean without scientific and rational prejudice, not ideological and cultural – of the manifestation of knowledge through persons who are integrated with the natural and cultural world, we are forced to recognise the limits of our understanding of reality and consequently our need to understand that interculturality is a construction composed of irrational dimensions that escape complete definition. It is a field for dialogue, tension, contradiction, communal living or coexistence of practices between subjects, be they individual or social, brought up principally – although not exclusively – in a cultural matrix with an identity and with a basic cosmogonic concept and worldview installed in their traditional historical memory. On the basis of these, consciously or implicitly, they order and practice their personal and social life to construct a particular identity in their relations with others, with nature and with the sacred.

We may understand

interculturality as starting from knowledge of one's own culture and gradually incorporating other knowledge from elsewhere. The practice of interculturality is strictly political, since it seeks to create the conditions for the establishment of horizontal relations between different parties. In other words interculturality includes relations generated and experienced from the perspective of appreciation and respect for the other, in the pursuit of equality based on difference (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, 2009: 123).

This perspective sets up irrational dimensions in particular, not necessarily generic, contexts to construct dialogue from self to the other, for example in the area of health:

Some African peoples have a kind of traditional medicine, practised by non medical therapists, which consists of a set of knowledge and powers associated with the sacred and the forces of nature. Today, this knowledge is undeniably concentrated to a high degree in the territory of *candomblé* (Prefeitura Municipal do Salvador et al., 2008: 4).

The above paragraph summarises very well the questions which interculturality asks of the dominant paradigms and the disciplinary content of modern science, from its alternative social views of the world and from other histories and historical memories: 'traditional medicine', 'non medical therapists', 'knowledge and powers', 'the sacred and the forces of nature', 'territory of *candomblé*'. I would like to pause on one of these components of a health practice which is incorporated into state health services: 'knowledge and powers'. How does the official, dominant culture assume this notion of 'healing powers' so dear to traditional cultures and religions? Can intercultural relations be understood without leaving a space for this essential dimension of the other culture? I believe not. By removing the sacred dimension from the cultures of peoples and nations, even if it is syncretic, we remove something essential from their definition, and thus we deny their substance and identity. I value politics – including party politics; I understand that education is political, and that without politics there is no social and structural change. Nevertheless I believe that by politicising intercultural relations, rather than so to speak 'sanctifying' and 'communitising' them, we deny and suppress a substantial part of the collective identity of the people. There is a real risk involved in redefining indigenous people as peasant farmers (reducing the social struggle to the issue of access to land and production), in culturalising the expressions of their way of life (eliminating the deep meanings by which they are organised), and politicising the social struggle (orienting it towards relations with power and overcoming oppression). I think that the hegemony in South America of the Judeo-Christian culture, in all its versions, aspects and institutions, has a much wider effect on thought than simply among believers; it pervades every dimension of scientific thought, even among materialists and among secular and anticlerical minds. Thus, although it is understood that the intercultural relation at the deepest level is in the end defined between beliefs on cosmogony, worldviews and utopias, this dimension tends to be excluded from the conversation, except in so far as it does not affect the bases of the principal beliefs and rites, which are its cornerstone. Alternatively, the other culture is simply denied: it is reduced to its subjective, material expression of forms, rituals, manifestations through life practices in the territories, grammars and the aims of its struggle; and when these are denuded of their spiritual dimension, the culture is judged only from the field of reason. This way of denying the other's culture expresses the difficulty of understanding it with the instruments currently at our disposal for research and for understanding the world. It is difficult to construct this dialogue in our universities based solely on reason, using indicator-guided educational processes and passing mechanically from objectivity to politics. We are likely to end up thinking and acting for others.

And here I must offer a criticism of many high-level researchers and intellectuals involved in the study of intercultural education, who display little confidence in Latin American thought, indigenous thought or systematised popular thought. Many academics in this field use a bibliography that is predominantly European or North American, and only exceptionally Latin American. This may lead them

into the trap of criticising Eurocentrism while basing their thought on European science; of recognising classic research as a valid means of producing knowledge while denying the validity of knowledge resulting from the systematisation of social practice (which is only accepted as a purely descriptive source of experience). It is hard to capture the essence of indigenous thinking by these means. My proposal to them is that we should turn back – without denying foreign thinking about South America – to our own knowledge created from our indigenous and social organisations, the systematisation of our experience. It must be understood that positive research is not the only way of producing knowledge: systematisation, participative research–action and long observation of the world of these peoples are also valid; and so may be an honest but unproductive effort, even if it produces unexpected consequences.

Teilhard de Chardin reflects on the result of European intervention in conquered cultures:

I have received equally curious information on the thinking and way of life of the inhabitants of Yemen and Abyssinia, which serves to reinforce an impression that has hung over me during this trip. To what point, over the last ten centuries, have we really converted others? And to what extent does an insufficiently profound conversion of “pagans” disturb the balance of their souls; in other words, is it not rather a perversion? (de Chardin, 2011: 57).

These words, written in 1926, seem truer than ever when we observe Yemen and Ethiopia nearly 90 years later.

The modern, scientist paradigm, i.e. rational, liberal, materialist, progressive thought, often resolves the problem of reason and faith, of spirituality, the sacred, magic or whatever this unknowable dimension of reality may be called, by removing it to private space, establishing a double field in personal and social life: private and public. The private contains the unknowable, the public the knowable. But what happens in a culture where this distinction is artificial, where the minimal unit of life is public – the family, the tribe, the community – and the concept of private does not exist? What happens when private property does not exist in a community, when everything is public and belongs to the community? Where there is no clear distinction – and if one is made, use dictates that the community will prevail? (e.g. in the Rapa Nui people of Easter Island.) This duality between the public as the space of the knowable and the private as the space of the unknowable takes on a special connotation in the intellectual exercise of knowing ‘reality’. There is a high probability of incomprehension between these two perspectives of the world, of human beings, of the law and institutions, the more so if public education is understood as distinct from community education and if teachers teach the formal curriculum without making a space for community educators to act within the school setting.

But even from the perspective of more progressive thought – in which interculturality is pursued as a condition of humanisation – i.e. from the denial of

positivism and the criticism of objectivism, in an affirmation of the everyday in the very existence of human relations, the trap of generalisation slips through unnoticed:

on the plane of knowledge, empiricism is false because science begins only at the moment when the individual fact is subsumed into general thought; thus any naturalist interpretation of a political attitude is erroneous, since politics begins only when mankind aspires to general human values. Entering the realm of politics implies leaving behind one's individual situation, transcending above oneself towards others and transcending above the present towards the future (De Beauvoir, 1985: 59–60).

Of course politics does imply transcending above oneself towards other (subjects), above the present towards the future (historical time), but the search for the general, the common, does not allow recognition of the diversity of values, or of transcendence towards the transcendent, which is as diverse as the number of cosmogonies that exist in the territories that they share and for which they share responsibility. 'But after all, there is only one reality; it is within the world that we think about the world' (De Beauvoir, 1985: 78). Paulo Freire, in the same vein, affirms the historical nature of thought; but the question is, which world? Mine? The other's? Is there a common world or is it an uncertain, developing construction? Is there a popular world? Is there an indigenous world?

In cultures with a religious underpinning, how do I understand the notion of the 'gift' received by priests or priestesses, healers or prophets? Is this concept of 'gift' the same as 'grace'? Can I measure the 'powers' of the *machi*, the saint's mother, the *yatari*? Our mode of thought and our society today are capable of manipulating not only the life and death but even the birth of human beings. It understands them not as events with their own dignity but as a 'good' produced by health systems, in private hands and with the consequences brought on by personal profit. Can such a society understand the notion of 'gift' found in indigenous cultures? Can it recognise and value the recipient of this gift, or understand what he or she means to her communities and peoples?

One of the challenges of our epoch is how the human race relates to nature, to others, to the sacred. Capitalism has spread over almost the whole surface of the globe, to every country, nation and people, predominantly in its neoliberal version associated with the free market, the consumer–citizen and the predatory exploitation of natural resources and the work force; or in its modern liberal version associated with human rights, secularisation, individual liberty, the individual and representative democracy. It has a Judeo-Christian basis which, in a variety of guises and conceptions, some indeed anti- or a-religious, pervades western thinking and the ordering laws of its societies, including education and the conceptions of interculturality.

Is modernity wandering without direction? Is the democracy associated with capitalism spreading over the planet? How should we react to the tensions of globalisation? How can society and politics be reorganised in the context of

interculturality? Is human solidarity possible? What sort of State does the future require? Can the human community exist as a supportive expression of unified diversity with common objectives? How and where can intercultural education be put into practice?

Possible progress towards intercultural education requires first of all recognising that rational or Christian thought cannot be universalised to indigenous communities (be they Afro-descendants or other modern cultural communities); nor can these communities aspire to be universal in their regional territories. There must be agreement between the features common to them all in terms of a shared social and human horizon with certain basic principles, of values, life, development conceptions and objectives, rather than the cultural content of a curriculum. For this to occur the first requirement is to strengthen the community, community life, the sense of a community of life among human beings, nature and the beliefs expressed in territories. It is not about 'returning' to the original community; it is about constructing and living in the community that our historical times permit and require in the territories and in society. Without doubt in South America, this statement is made and understood from a certain rural, peasant viewpoint of social life, with long or ancestral memories of collective life, at a time when in the continent and the whole world the majority of the population lives, or will soon live, in small, medium or large cities or huge megalopolises. Has the country something to teach the city? Can intercultural education exist in this urban territory when it is separated from nature and is strongly rational? If the state (the school) is neutral with respect to all worldviews, including the secular, does this not leave the curriculum, teaching and the social relations of learning devoid of content? What replaces it? And if something does, is it not a new negation of the possibility of interculturality? If it maintains its neutrality, does it not equally deny the possibility that the school can be a field for dialogue and the construction of interculturality?

The world is a cultural construction of mutual contributions. Nevertheless, and despite the differences, something is shared; regardless of our self-signification, we must at least coexist in order to live communally in the same territory, on the same planet. History, the earth, life bring us together to cooperate in mutual survival and to enrich the conditions of our lives. This is by no means easy.

However, the relations between the dominant society and indigenous peoples are not just relations of culture and power; they are also relations between peasants and indigenous people, political parties and indigenous organisations. Over time, affirmation of identity has established varying positions in the indigenous movement and in nonindigenous political and social organisations with respect to the conquest or denial of power. In particular, it has led to pursuit of participation in the state, depending on how open democratic societies are to the state's ability to negotiate on a horizontal footing with civil or indigenous society.

... the current call to cultural identity is a reaction against the manipulation of popular consciousness by authoritarian power [for example in the case of] the indigenist movements of Latin America. It is true that at times they have been used by non

indigenous revolutionary vanguards . . . and at others they have resorted to defence of their own interests . . . but today they are frequently capable of coordinating defence of their ethnic identity by pursuing democratic participation in the political system (Touraine, 2000: 19).

Conclusions

The possibility for interculturality lies not in politics, but in the community and the learning of specific territories (the cultural, the natural, the spiritual), under a principle of shared responsibility, which must include education in all types of development; this can only be achieved by politics and social struggle. It is hard to see how it can be introduced into the whole higher education system and the universities if it is not first installed in the territories, in the communities where social players actually live. At the same time, interculturality must be established as a principle of modern democracy and of the recurrent legal agreements present in and resulting from the Constitution of Chile – which needs to be updated. Modification of interpersonal relations and relations in the communities, as well as between citizens as expressed in national laws, is a necessary condition for the interculturalisation of the university system and the universities. However, at the level of knowledge and its production and dissemination, the effort must be exceptional, creative and generous. The reality will not even be a formal agreement on what might be the truth; it will simply be a basic agreement on aspects shared by the (dominant) western culture and the local indigenous cultures – and more and more the cultures of international immigrants who bring with them their own cultures, languages and worldviews.

The interculturalisation of universities is not merely a question of access, attendance, graduation and employability, of integrating cultures into the curriculum or of extending or officialising languages. It is, above all, the capacity to generate spaces for dialogue and conversation, which will allow indigenous and nonindigenous, academic and nonacademic to discover common ground, enabling them to construct fields of culture and knowledge, even of shared or common beliefs. This implies profound changes in the attitudes of academics and indigenous sages, as well as in the epistemological and methodological focusses of research. But change is also needed in institutions, to facilitate dialogue with, and integration of, ancestral, traditional or newly arrived cultures – in the curricula and teaching of all courses, and with participative management procedures. This in turn requires legal changes to create a country that is regionalised, multicultural, and which guarantees observance of the formally recognised rights of all the citizens of the country.

Having intercultural universities is an objective of social and political conquest and construction. Making this possible is the collective task of the whole country – indigenous and nonindigenous citizens and international immigrants. But it will not be possible unless the state establishes an obligatory standard for the whole

system based on universally applicable laws. It will not be possible unless there is a profound change in the existing higher education system, which is discriminatory, profit based and conceived as a consumer good, not a human right; unless the systems for academic promotion and development are modified from the concept of productivity (associated with the quantitative rankings, publications and results market) to the concept of scientific production at the service of democracy and the humanisation of peoples and human beings. It will not be possible unless academics freely modify the epistemologies of their knowledge production. And even then we will have to see whether a full expression of interculturality is really possible, or if it will only be real insofar as it is feasible. The spirit of these conclusions is not one of pessimism; it is a historical and critical reflection of reality, which recognises the hegemonic model of higher education established by the military dictatorship in the 1980s, and introduced explicitly into the pragmatic agreements, which have organised the country's academic life since the 1990s. The object of this criticism is to generate reflection and decisions for change from our opening question: Is the interculturalisation of all our universities and academic life possible?

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Notes

1. A Chilean indigenous people; their language is called Mapudungun.
2. <http://www.ceppe.cl/images/stories/recursos/publicaciones/Gonzalo-Zapata/Zapata%20-%20Tejeda,%202009b.pdf>.
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