
Restaurando Conocimientos Indígenas: ¿pueden ser usadas en Chile las lecciones, esfuerzos y perspectivas actuales del contexto internacional?

Restoring Indigenous knowledge: can current international efforts, lessons and perspectives be applied in Chile?

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Resumen: Basándose en una gama de fuentes geográficamente diversas, este ensayo tiene como objetivo, en primer lugar, proporcionar una descripción contextualizada de qué es la colonización lingüística y cómo ha dado forma a las relaciones de poder en las áreas que fueron sometidas a ella. Luego explorará cómo el eurocentrismo ha impactado el lenguaje y las formas de conocimiento indígenas, proporcionará diferentes perspectivas desde una mirada intercultural y, finalmente, detallará los esfuerzos que se están realizando en diferentes rincones del mundo para restaurar los idiomas y los conocimientos indígenas dentro de comunidades específicas. A partir de estos esfuerzos, este artículo termina analizando sus posibles implicaciones tanto en la teoría como en la práctica en contextos educativos, focalizándose particularmente en Chile.

Palabras clave: interculturalidad, descolonización, conocimiento indígena, relaciones de poder, eurocentrismo.

Abstract. Drawing on a range of geographically diverse sources, this essay aims at first providing a contextualized overview of what linguistic colonization is, and how it has shaped power relations in areas that were subjected to it. It will explore how Eurocentrism has impacted Indigenous languages, provide different perspectives on interculturality and *interculturalidad* and finally, detail current efforts to restore Indigenous languages within specific communities. From these efforts, this paper ends by looking at their possible implications in both theory and practice in educational contexts, with a specific focus in Chile.

Keywords: interculturality, decolonization, Indigenous knowledge, power relations, Eurocentrism

1. Introduction

The story of Ladislaus Semali, as told by himself in his 1999 book “*What is indigenous knowledge? Voices from the academy?*” illustrates the impact of colonialism in the negation of indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems. Semali was born in Tanzania in 1946. He belonged to the Chagga people, spoke Kichagga as a native tongue and grew up in a large peasant family, working the fields and listening to his elders explaining how different plants could be used to treat certain conditions, or telling stories full of symbolism in which nature and animals were protagonists. The stories containing humans were mostly the ones about being colonized and avoiding becoming a slave (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999). What is most telling about Semali’s story, however, is his next chapter as it so adequately captures the realities of other indigenous people around the world and how their language, traditions and belief systems have become subordinate to predominantly Western epistemologies. As he started going to school, he witnessed how his native Kichagga was replaced by English as he studied Greek philosophers, Mark Twain and Dickens, and how the content he had to learn was about “drinking tea in an English garden, taking train rides, sailing in open seas, and walking the streets of town”. (p.9). Innocuous as that might sound, the implications had devastating effects: whereas local people relied on the tradition of oral literacy for the transmission of knowledge on issues as diverse as inheritance rights, the laws of the land and cultural norms, and used their own language as a means to convey meaning through riddles, proverbs, tales and songs, the colonial language became the yardstick by which achievement in, intelligence of and ability with Western-based scientific and humanistic knowledge was measured. Kichagga became a subject taught once a week and speaking the language beyond its allotted time a punishable offence. And over the years, as Semali summons, it was colonial knowledge the one which determined future economic prospects and political possibilities. This is confirmed by Joe Kincheloe, co-author of the book, who chronicles his field trips in Tennessee along his friend Larry, a small child well-versed in the medicinal uses of different herbs and plants but who, having been raised in an oral tradition of knowledge transmission and unfamiliar with the written language used in modern schools, struggled in that environment and was often labelled as ‘unintelligent’.

This story, unfolding oceans apart from us, is reflective of the unromanticized realities of colonialism and linguistic imperialism¹ that took place in India, Africa, Aotearoa New Zealand, Latin and North America, and otherwise any other location where the colonizer brought their religion, their language, their cultural constructs and sought to forcefully impose them in the local communities. This cultural and linguistic imposition has in turn created a power relation that slowly over time, as decolonial movements began blooming in different regions of the world, has begun to fracture. This paper is guided by the question as to whether current efforts on this issue might be extrapolated to Chile, and to what extent. It will first illustrate the nature of the power relations I have mentioned and how they have shaped the decolonial efforts in education; it will then explore recent efforts to deepen that fracture by revitalising local knowledges, and it will end with a discussion concerning the question that has prompted this essay.

2. Language and Power

¹ Although deeply connected with one another, when using the terms ‘colonialism’ in this essay I do so meaning “the practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another”, according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/>. Linguistic imperialism, on the other hand, refers to the ‘dominance of one language over another’ (Rose and Conama, 2017, p.385). Consequently, we can see through these definitions how understanding and challenging linguistic imperialism, itself a colonial practice, is key when arguing for the restitution of indigenous languages.

Almost four decades ago, noted French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued in *“Language and Symbolic Power”* (1991) that language is a tool of action and power, and that relationships are shaped by the way this tool is used – what he described as linguistic exchanges; for the acquisition of linguistic capital and the carrying out of these exchanges, he further contended, there must exist social and economic conditions that allow for the procurement of said capital. Of course, it follows that the more privileged one’s social and economic circumstances, the more power and control one has in a given relationship. I contend that the above is a fitting description of the colonial experience in the Americas.

The deep connection between language and power from the perspective of colonization was most eloquently described by Wa Thiong’o in a 1993 essay titled *“Imperialism of Language: English, a language for the world?”*; languages, he argues, are not just a means of communication between peoples. They carry, deeply embedded within them, the collective history and culture belonging to its place of origin. In the historical experience of colonization, however, local and foreign languages did not meet in conditions of independence but rather, in an unequal encounter that was to have lasting effects: one in which there were distinct features of dominance of the latter over the former. It is one thing, Wa Thiong’o elaborates, for people of Scandinavia to use English for communicative purposes than it was for those of African nations to use it as the only recourse for survival lest they chose to be punished or humiliated. This entire process was perhaps best described by Johan Galtung (1969) who delineated how *language and cultural norms* can be used to sustain structures that make violence possible; not only direct violence but the structural violence that occurs when basic human needs are not being met.

Way before Galtung was able to articulate these notions, however, we had linguistic domination in the Americas. It began nearly 500 years ago with the coming of Spanish conquistadors and missionaries, all too ready to determine human intelligence on the basis of skill with and knowledge; such determination, of course, was anchored in the written articulations of the language. This in turn led to a long history of language being used to perpetuate linguistic and cultural inequalities through written tests and script analysis that have, as Semali and Kincheloe (1999) affirm, stigmatized those with lower capital ²by labelling them as mediocre, ignorant or incapable. Bourdieu and Passeron (1991) argue that, in addition to this, different social classes have a unique relationship to language as a result of differing social circumstances: more abstract, formal and intellectual for the more educated class, less refined, cruder and even at times rude for the working class. This has led to the labelling of some as the so-called ‘bad students’: the inevitable result of the students’ social conditions colliding with an environment designed based on distinct linguistic classes such as the example of Joe Kincheloe in Tennessee.

We see then a pattern of hierarchization, which is another way to simply describe the imbalance of power in social relations. Added to the notion of ‘intelligence’, Bourdieu and Passeron (ibid) elaborated on the intrinsic class element of language and how this distinction can preserve inequalities; further to this, in her book *“Linguistic Inequalities and Social Justice”* (2017), Ingrid Piller illustrates the way we use languages denotes the aforementioned hierarchy: while middle-class students in the UK study what has been termed “university Arabic”, for instance, learning language ‘correctness’ through the reading of classic texts and grammar rules, native Arabic speaking people (in a number that exceeds 150,000 in the United Kingdom) speak and use the language in distinctly different ways; this has implications, she explains, as the evaluation of language skills relies more on the identity of the speaker than in their ability. As she puts it:

The language practices of those who are disadvantaged in other ways—because of their legal status, their gender, their race, or their class—are usually the ways of speaking that

² In his oft-quoted paper “The Forms of Capital” (1986), Bourdieu defines capital broadly as the accumulation of goods, networks, relationships, wealth and knowledge that determine not only a person’s social position but their ability to achieve social mobility. Source accessed here: https://home.iitk.ac.in/~amman/soc748/bourdieu_forms_of_capital.pdf

are least valued, and language thus becomes one aspect of cumulative disadvantage in diverse societies (p.14)

Why is this important? Because, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1991) note, our linguistic capital (measured by this yardstick of correctness, be it our own native tongue or a second language) has been a key factor in determining our social and 'market' standing; in other words, the more we fit within that measurement of correctness the greater the access to the labour market. This is what they called the 'educationally profitable linguistic capital' (p.116) which remains deeply unequal depending on our personal circumstances and reinforced social constructs that separate rather than unite. Take the example of Chile, for instance, where *parlance* denotes if not social class at the very least our socio-cultural background with ensuing consequences of discrimination on the basis of class and impact in education and job opportunities: exactly what Galtung (1969) and Butler (2020) describe as structural violence and inequality. In fact, my own personal experiences as a student in Chile are filled with memories in which others were laughed at or made fun of because of the way people spoke, usually accompanied by a class label.

These approaches and actions then tend to benefit those who are of course more familiar with the more complex linguistic articulations through reading, storytelling, visits to museums or other cultural activities, for instance, thus widening not only the achievement gap but also the social divide in the classroom as learners from lower-income backgrounds, unaware of this invisible social disadvantage, tend to look at their underperformance as a sign of intellectual inadequacy and inferiority when compared to their peers (Goudeau and Croizet, 2017). As Bourdieu and Passeron (1991) expound, we can see in the above examples a perpetuation of the power structures put and maintained in place by an unequal distribution of cultural capital.

How does this connect to the revitalization of indigenous languages, central issue to this paper? Because, as Nigerian sociolinguist Tape Omoniyi (2017) argues in his own analysis of Bourdieu's theories within the Sub-Saharan context, the lack of development programs within indigenous communities produces the same level of exclusion, marginalization and disadvantage I have described connected with the element of social class; as these communities are faced with the needs of market economies, so they are faced with the inequality embedded in Eurocentric linguistic practices and thus, with the subsequent lack of capital they require. Harrison (2009) described this as *linguistic othering*; or, as Kaur (2013) expounds: "the process whereby individuals who are seen to lack the necessary linguistic skills may face social marginalisation or be denied access to social institutions, resources or national territory" (p.6)

Chile is a place that presents a clear example of this in relation to its indigenous communities; as Elisa Loncon (2021) notes and the most recent report by the International Group Work for Indigenous Affairs (2022) confirms, there are in Chile ten Indigenous peoples, all of whom possess their own native tongues, which have been historically ignored in the school curriculum in favour of the dominant colonial language; in fact, as of February 2021, the Ministry of Education had determined that in order for one of these native languages to be taught ³simply as a subject and not even as a language of instruction, it required signed permission from parents or guardians, something not required for Spanish or English. This example sheds some light on how certain languages and forms of knowledge are enforced to the detriment of local ones. The next section will explore this issue more in depth in various geographical contexts.

³ As noted later on this paper, only four of these languages are currently being taught, though this is still not nation-wide: these are Mapuzungún, Quechua, Aymará and Rapa Naui – see page 11.

3. Eurocentrism and silenced knowledges

Bolisani and Bratianu (2018) argue the defining knowledge is an extremely difficult task, and an agreed-upon definition of knowledge remains elusive; it is one thing for a Western philosopher to define it based on Plato's notion that knowledge is the result of reasoning, and another for someone anchored in the Japanese traditions, where, as Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) claim, knowledge is viewed as : "(1) oneness of humanity and nature; (2) oneness of body and mind; and (3) oneness of self and other. These traits have formed the foundation of the Japanese view toward knowledge as well as the Japanese approach toward management practices" (p.27). Despite these examples, it bears mentioning that even within Western and non-Western traditions there isn't a single, homogenized form of knowledge and these are constantly evolving.

Therefore, for the purpose of this paper I will be using the definitions of knowledge I believe to be the most pertinent; on the one hand we have the Western idea of knowledge, broadly defined as that which "relies on the established laws through the application of the scientific method to the phenomena. Its method begins with an observation and is followed by a prediction or hypothesis that has to be tested" (Ngulube, 2017). Bruchac (2014), on the other hand, defines traditional indigenous knowledge as "a network of knowledges, beliefs, and traditions intended to preserve, communicate, and contextualize Indigenous relationships with culture and landscape over time" (p.3814). Broad as they are, these definitions provide an inkling into the main trends they navigate towards: one in the direction of evidence-based data, and the other in the direction of ways to interact with nature and each other.

Through the colonial experience, the idea that Western knowledge and culture are somehow the core of a 'universal knowledge' and yet very much 'remaining the history of the West,' according to Tuhiwai-Smith (2012, p.66), has existed for centuries. In fact, she explains, the colonized cultures and their forms of knowledge were historically repositioned in a way that would allow for the validation of colonial domination and authority by being labeled as 'oriental' or 'outsider' by colonial powers. In line with this, Mitova (2020) defines the decolonization of knowledge as the necessity to *undo* our way of thinking about knowledge and to *reconstruct* it by learning anew and in new ways rather than those imposed on people, institutions or nations through the process of colonization (Mitova, 2020; Wiredu, 2002).

Because Eurocentrism has succeeded in creating the idea of universal knowledge, Mignolo (2009), encourages us to ask ourselves: who and when, how and where is knowledge generated? Grosfoguel (2013) argues (in a description that matches my own experience as a doctoral student in the UK) that the social theory canon in Western universities has become dominated by a few men from five countries: Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA; to this, I will further add that on a personal level, 80% of my Social Theory classes not only involved men from only two of those five countries (Germany and France) and but also that that they were all white, adding a further element to the self-arrogated intellectual (and sexist) domination: what Grosfoguel (2012) called epistemic racism. I am not arguing that every one of those social theorists was either sexist or racist, newsbut the recognition of their work should not come at the cost of the institutional eradication of other forms of knowledge that, especially since the 1980s, have begun to reshape and re-inform other intellectual traditions: feminist social epistemology, Eastern, African, Africana, Latin American and 'Continental' (Mitova, 2020)

Further elaborating on this, I will use an example from Hamid Dabashi's "*Can non-Europeans think?*" (2015); the book begins with an illustrative phrase found in an article published by Al-Jazeera newspaper: "There are many important active philosophers today". It then proceeds to give the names of eight Western philosophers (all North American or European) before concluding: "not to mention others working in Brazil, Australia and China" (Dabashi, 2015, p.57) This succinct description is striking in that none of the philosophers from the last three locations seems worthy of having their name mentioned. Mignolo himself reminds us that still for much of

⁴ I use the terms 'Eurocentric' throughout this essay as one referring to a worldview that revolves around Western civilization as we have come to learn it, the knowledge of which, though spread to other parts of the world, such as Canada, the USA and Australia, centers around Eurocentric views and has historically come from Western European thinkers (Hobson, 2012).

the Western world we are not only divided in the geo-political concepts of first, second and third world, but that there are implications of this on how each of these divisions is perceived: “As we know: the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science” (Mignolo, 2009, p.160)

Of course, the issue here is not the number, quality or contributions of Eurocentric philosophers; as Dabashi elaborates, the question is not how Eurocentric Europeans are, but rather how European thinking has continued to reach a level of universality that has come to the detriment of non-European visions. Even renown Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, who in 1993 announced that he would cease writing in English and thereafter switched to his Gikuyu, and who has devoted much of life to the decolonial struggle, acknowledges the linguistic and cultural richness that European writers and thinkers have left behind. Along these lines, it is important to understand that the struggle does not mean the *elimination* of one culture or language over the imposition of another; in a speech to the Irish Assembly in 1892, Douglas Hyde seemed to encapsulate the notion that seems as applicable to today as it was then, and applied to any form of cultural and linguistic imperialism:

When we speak of 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising the Irish Nation', we mean it, not as a protest against imitating what is best in the English people, for that would be absurd, but rather to show the folly of neglecting what is Irish, and hastening to adopt, pell-mell, and indiscriminately, everything that is English, simply because it is English⁵

Extrapolating from this, the same could be said of French, Portuguese or Spanish: it would be absurd to negate the richness that writers and scholars from those languages have left behind, but it has become equally absurd to accept European cultural influence simply because it is European. What I offer here is that, as it has been argued and widely demonstrated (de Sousa Santos, 2001, 2014, 2018; Smith, 2012; Apple, 2011, 2012, 2013; Semali and Kincheloe, 1999) there is no one single source of knowledge, not one single knowledge pursuit and not one single, linear development of knowledge. This means understanding that we live in world of great diversity where what is needed is inclusiveness rather than separateness, and a restitution within the academic spaces of the voices that for so long have been silenced.

It is also true that such efforts can backfire. In a case study looking into the applications of Freirian theories with Indigenous communities in Nicaragua and Guinea-Bassau, for instance, Kee and Carr-Chellman (2019) revealed a telling paradox: the works of someone like Paulo Freire, who spent his life advocating for literacy campaigns amongst peasant populations and raising critical consciousness had failed to acknowledge the vast richness of indigenous oral traditions for transmission of knowledge; this meant, Kee and Carr-Chellman noted, that in spite of the project’s good intentions, what was achieved was the perpetuation of the colonial method of knowledge production: one that is based on the articulations and uses of the alphabetic language.

For many, the colonial experience as far as language is concerned meant to encounter their mother tongue later in life and almost as an accident; renown Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explained in a now famous talk called “*The Danger of a Single Story*”⁶ how her first reading experiences were in English, with stories not unlike the ones I have described in the introduction. The most salient point of her talk, however, is how important it is to understand that each individual and their social groups are the result of a multiplicity of stories and that the decolonization of the mind arises from bringing those often-untold stories to the forefront.

⁵ From “The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland”, retrieved here: <http://www.gaeilge.org/deanglicising.html>

⁶ TED talk retrieved here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg&t=495s>

As we know, for centuries what has been at that forefront has been this single story Ngozi Adichie spoke of: the one that has positioned Eurocentric knowledge in a place of privilege to the detriment of local knowledges and languages. And yet, as Wa Thiong'o establishes in "Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom" (1993) : "*In terms of structures of domination, subordination and resistance, a common global experience is emerging. Gradually, a vocabulary of concepts of domination and revolt become part of a shared intellectual tradition*" (p.13). Therefore, this paper argues that what is needed is an idea of language revitalization that moves away from the domination / subjugation elements present in *colonial* models, and more towards an intercultural perspective anchored in *decolonial*⁷ ones. In the next sections, I will look more in depth at what this might look like.

1. Intercultural perspectives and indigeneity

This brings us to the role of interculturality in the process of restoring and revitalizing indigenous languages. To begin with, La Barna (1997) lists out six barriers that prevent intercultural communication: anxiety, assuming similarity instead of difference, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice, nonverbal misinterpretations, and language (in Jandt, 2014, p.109). In looking over the theoretical framework I have presented here, we can see that all these barriers are either present or can potentially arise within the context of Indigenous communities. Given the above, this section explores the alternatives and possibilities that intercultural studies present us by looking at two strands which I explain below.

In analysing research on the topic of interculturality, it is important to first make a distinction between interculturality and its Spanish translation, *interculturalidad*, as the latter has taken on a somewhat different connotation which is of relevance for this project. Geographically, as Aman (2015) points out, the term *interculturality* stems from the shifting demographics in Europe, where it has become a dominating element in current research and debate, and has been described as 'a linguistic characteristic of union' (p.1). However, in intercultural research within Latin America, in addition to being the translation of an English term, it has come to represent the Indigenous peoples' endeavor towards decolonization and it is more widely represented in current literature by its Spanish translation (Aman, 2015, 2017). Further to this, Gutierrez-Pezo (2020) points to the fact that when it comes to interculturality in Latin America we need not only to acknowledge diversity but also the colonial and racial structures that have historically subordinated indigenous people and those with African ancestry.

In fact, most intercultural studies in Latin America have attempted to integrate indigenous knowledge into the curriculum and create a deeper consciousness in regards to inclusiveness (Aman, 2019; Gutierrez-Pezo, 2020). In Chile in particular there has been a documented effort from different governments since the 1990s to address issues of interculturality, mostly from the perspective described earlier by Aman and focusing on schools with over 20% of indigenous students (Gutierrez-Pezo, 2020). She further describes how these efforts have been expanded into higher education and social groups, while also acknowledging that as of 2019 most of these efforts had been limited to adding elements of indigenous culture into the school or university curriculum without really addressing the ethnocentrism present in Chilean education, and admittedly, those efforts to introduce curricular changes have not been successful. This failure could be partly attributed to the fact, as Gutierrez-Pezo contends, that such changes have not really been aimed at *decolonizing* the curriculum but rather to bridge the achievement and access gap between indigenous and non-indigenous groups (in other words, a preservation of the existing neoliberal model) and to mitigate the long ongoing tension between indigenous communities and the government. There has been some success in the implementation of bilingual programs at elementary schools, where four specific languages are being taught to students from 1st to 4th grade: Mapuzungun (the Mapuche and Huilliche language from southern

⁷ Zavala (2016) best described decolonial education as a "series of methods / strategies that take place within education projects" (p.1); such methods seek to reposition not only knowledge but the sense of self-determination of people within the communities. However, Zavala notes, these practices will differ from one community to another as the colonial experience itself will have differed.

Chile), Aymara and Quechua in the northern regions, and Rapa Nui in Easter Island (Núñez, 2017). Once again is worth pointing out that not all of these efforts have not translated into higher education.

While this perspective is indeed key to this paper, Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2019) provide us with what I find to be a more intersectional definition that crosses geographical boundaries and is not limited to a specific location or group. In this definition, interculturality is “the symbolic exchange⁸ process whereby individuals from two or more different cultural communities attempt to negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation and in a larger sociocultural-macro environment” (p.22). The authors expand on this by exploring issues of identity construction and negotiation, developing intergroup communication rooted in mindfulness and using the increased intercultural understanding in conflict resolution (ibid). So, while I believe it is key to approach interculturality from a decolonial perspective of emancipation of the Indigenous communities (in other words, *interculturalidad*) it also important to consider the wider perspective that expands beyond this, especially taking into account the existing challenges present in Chile at the moment: social segmentation, gender and social violence, and educational segregation.

A study by Núñez (2017) provides us with some historical background on how some Chilean universities have sought to tackle the issue of interculturality within their elementary teacher training programs by taking actions that have met with different degrees of success and longevity, beginning in 2008. For instance, the Universidad Católica de Temuco offers a degree called “Elementary Intercultural Pedagogy⁹ in the Mapuche Context”, and previously experimented by offering a program titled “Pedagogical Experience in Intercultural Approaches” between 1998 and 2007, geared towards increasing sociocultural Mapuche knowledge amongst graduate students in Education. The intercultural content was integrated into graduate courses, and although the number of students enrolled in the different classes varied over the years, the enrollment figures showed an increase not only on the total numbers of students but more importantly in the number of indigenous students enlisted, which increased from about 5 to more than 20 - although the exact figures vary depending on the course offered (Duran, Berho and Carrasco, 2008). The program did not continue partly due to lack of funding (something the authors highlight in their analysis and recommendations) as well as the unfeasibility of integrating this content into the mainstream curriculum offered by the university.

There are other higher education institutions that have offered or currently offer a variety of programs with some element of interculturality added to them, some aimed at graduate students (including a doctoral program on Educational Sciences at the University of Santiago) and others to the general public; some have added specific classes, such as intercultural / multicultural seminars, public policies regarding indigenous people and colonial / decolonial thought. However, as Núñez points out, these programs and classes have been a response from and have originated within academic institutions themselves in order to redress the historical segregation indigenous people have experienced, and though they are in fact an attempt at redressing wrongs, their ‘epistemic substance has a Western trademark’ (p.85),¹⁰ and thus they fail to fully integrate indigenous visions and knowledge systems (Núñez, 2017). Furthermore, they have all focused exclusively on Mapuche people and have neglected other indigenous communities, such as Atacameños, Aymarás and Rapa-Nuis, as well as migrant communities or other minority groups, thus also falling short in their efforts towards inclusiveness.

Burman (2016) offers a somewhat similar example from his experience in Bolivia, though with different results. While conducting research within an Aymara community there, he was able to talk to a number of indigenous activists who remained deeply sceptical of Evo Morales,¹¹

⁸ They further refer to the idea of ‘symbolic exchange’ as the use of verbal or non-verbal cues between individuals in order to convey and understand meaning (ibid).

⁹ In Chile the word ‘pedagogía’ is used to name all education programs offered at undergraduate levels. Thus, Elementary Education is “Pedagogía en Educación Básica”.

¹⁰ In Spanish in the original: ‘*el sustento epistemológico es de impronta occidental*’ (translated by me)

¹¹ Evo Morales, a former farmer and an Aymara person himself, was the president of Bolivia from 2006 to 2019.

policies in regards to decolonization and interculturality, seeing them as a disguised perpetuation of the colonial mode of knowledge production that has existed in Bolivia. Although the Bolivian government did in fact found indigenous universities (something that has not happened in Chile) and introduced reforms into the national educational system, many activists distrustful of these policies, engaged in 'epistemic and ontological disobedience' (ibid, p.20): they opened their own spaces for knowledge creation, such as indigenous universities that function outside the national framework, as well as community sessions and seminars where indigenous people, including intellectuals, are invited to guide debates and deliberations regarding ways to preserve their knowledge and therefore, their social experience. These acts of disobedience are guided, according to Burman, by a defiance to three elements that in his view have become an intrinsic part of Bolivia's intellectual colonization:

...the subjugation of subjectivities ("Be who we want you to be!"); epistemic domination ("Know what we want you to know and in the way we want you to know; create the kind of knowledge we want you to and in the way we want you to!"); and ontological domination ("Live in the one and only world we recognize as real!"). (Burman, 2016, p. 21)

Although the suggestion to create an autonomous indigenous university is beyond the scope of this paper, what Burman's research offers us is not only the perspective that there is a definite space for a historically marginalized community to have and even create their own space of social participation and knowledge creation, but also a view, in looking at the fundamentals of this defiance, that the generation of knowledge and the life experience that comes from it must be rooted outside the boundaries of the culturally hegemonic colonial models. There are certainly efforts we can learn from, such as those made in Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand; for instance, having observed not only the absence of aboriginal students in higher education science programs in Canada but also how the existing curricula was heavily removed from the indigenous way of knowledge, Bartlett et al., (2012) embarked upon a project to reverse this scenario by creating an undergraduate science program they dubbed Integrative Science, rooted in Marshall's earlier notion of "Two-eyed seeing": "To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012, p. 335). In other words, it combined elements of mainstream science and indigenous knowledge systems into a series of compulsory courses, and although the course was mostly aimed at Mi'kmaw aboriginal students, it remained open to anyone wishing to enrol or take some of the classes at different stages. The program successfully graduated twenty-seven Mi'kmaw students, many of whom went on to assume key academic and leadership position within their communities. Their findings translated into eight lessons distilled from their experience, some of which converge with the perspectives I have presented thus far regarding inclusiveness, inter-dependency and decolonization of knowledge:

1. Acknowledge that we need each other and must engage in a co-learning journey
2. Be guided by *Two-Eyed Seeing*
3. View "science" in an inclusive way
4. Do things (rather than "just talk") in a creative, grow forward way
5. Become able to put our values and actions and knowledges in front of us, like an object, for examination and discussion
6. Use visuals
7. Weave back and forth between our worldviews
8. Develop an advisory council of willing, knowledgeable stakeholders, drawing upon individuals both from within the educational institution(s) and within Aboriginal communities

(Bartlett et al., 2012, p.6)

In Aotearoa New Zealand, government efforts in relation to the local aboriginal population have translated into the creation of the Te Kākui Amokura, or “University New Zealand Committee on Maori”, which aims at advancing access, achievement, job prospects and scholarship amongst Maori higher education students. A report by Education Counts, a research organization in New Zealand, details an increase in enrolment, graduation and scholarship output by Maori students, which has raised significantly since 2010. Salahshour (2020) points to four key guiding principles that are intended to ensure those from diverse origins are not only acknowledged but also involved within the national curriculum. Although these actions and statistical outcomes are positive, it is perhaps in the shortcomings revealed in recent research that lessons can also be found; for instance, Salahshour (ibid) also indicates that in spite of being immersed in a *multi-cultural* reality with not only indigenous communities but also immigrants from non-European countries, New Zealand pursues a de facto *bi-cultural* integrational policy that addresses the relationship between Maori and mostly European-derived people (a situation not unlike Chile, as I described earlier). This, she indicates, translates into the educational context as well through mostly bi-cultural curricular practices. Furthermore, she notes that the aforementioned guiding principles focused primarily in the bicultural element thus leaving out members of other minorities.

2. Some implications in theory and practice

The examples I have presented here provide, in my view, valuable insight to learn from, beginning with the knowledge that the challenges to intercultural communication and education have unique elements in Latin American in general and in Chile in particular; this is followed by the need to approach interculturality not from a purely bi-cultural perspective but from one that embraces the new realities being faced by Chilean society in terms of migration, indigeneity and social changes, and finally with the understanding of how different approaches to knowledge production fit within the educational model as a whole.

Therefore, I argue, that there must be an epistemic change. In his influential *“Epistemologies of the South”* (2014), Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls for us, all of us, to change our approach and begin caring for those who have been left behind as a result of colonialism and cultural imperialism; this begins with a recognition that the current educational structures need to undergo a radical change; not only from a neoliberal to a more equitable, critical framework that prepares citizens for social participation and not only for the labour market, but also one that goes from one using ‘ventriloquists’, as de Sousa Santos calls them (2014, p.15), or the voices of intellectuals interpreting the needs of others, to one giving genuine space to the voices of local and Indigenous scholars. In other words, what is needed here is emancipation rather than regulation: challenging the status quo by actively engaging in giving visibility to marginalized forms of knowledge instead of blindly following colonial approaches to learning.

Given the above, there is the need for bringing not only local languages into our classrooms, but more importantly, for paying attention to local methods of language use and knowledge transmission; this, in order to provide more equitable access to education and a shifted focus that aligns with my previous point on what that knowledge consists of: why are we still using only written assessment to determine school and university entrance without considering students previous experience, background and knowledge? As Quijano (1988) notes and Stromquist (2019) confirms, Indigenous people all across Latin America had coexisted with nature, applied rationality to exploiting resources sustainably and worked collectively for the betterment of their communities as a whole long before the arrival of colonial powers; thus, an epistemological shift is needed here in order to bring these perspectives back to the forefront.

I will argue here that for that to happen, what is also needed is a dramatic change in the way we relate to one another; Appiah, for instance, suggests in *“Cosmopolitanism”* (2007), that we have gone so far in our identification with specific social groups that we have begun to live more separately; rather, he contends, what is needed is a deeper understanding of each other’s life practices (in this case, ways of living and ways of learning) so we can embrace them in an effort to co-exist in harmony. This begins with shifting our mindset from an individualistic stance as espoused by capitalist ideologies to a collective one that does not focus on the person but on

the community or society as a whole. This unifying vision of a collaborative decolonizing endeavour also involves, I argue, bringing Bartlett's integrative notion of the "Two-Eye Seeing":

...learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing ... and learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all¹².

A final implication I would like to add here concerns the epistemology of *Buen Vivir*, or "live well". Conceived by indigenous communities in South America as an alternative to Western development and exploitation, *Buen Vivir* is a social system anchored in the cosmovision of indigenous people that focuses on community-building, a sustainable relationship with the Earth and its resources, as well as cultural and spiritual decolonization (Gudynas, 2011; Villalba, 2013). Although in current scholarship is common to find *Buen Vivir* presented in a variety of forms that range from political and philosophical to societal and environmental¹³, there is one aspect present in all of its articulations: this is *Buen Vivir*'s opposition to any form of domination, including cultural (Echavarría and Orosz, 2021). The focus of this paper concerns efforts on the restitution of indigenous languages, and while the percentage of people self-identifying as indigenous in Chile at 12.8% is a far cry from Bolivia's 60% (IWGIA, n.d.), the underlying core principles of *Buen Vivir* can still serve as a guideline for moving forward on this point, particularly concerning interculturality: this means the full recognition of one another, and working towards mutual complementation and strengthening, as society as a whole moves towards the emancipation of those who have been oppressed. What this means in practical terms, Stomrquist (2019) contends, is that it requires an across-the-boards top-down effort, from government to regional administration and smaller communities, in order to achieve sustained change. His research provides, I argue, useful insight into the efforts being made to restore Indigenous knowledge and their way of life, and perhaps useful lessons for places like Chile, where indigenous populations, their languages and culture have historically been sidelined.

¹² Retrieved here: <http://www.integrativescience.ca/Principles/TwoEyedSeeing/>

¹³ see Echavarría and Orosz (2021) for a detailed summation

3. References

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