Roadblocks to intercultural mobility: Indigenous students' journeys in Colombian universities[1]

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Abstract

Every year, students from different indigenous communities in Colombia set out on a journey to higher education. Although previous research has looked into students' challenges at university, there is still the need to understand indigenous students' mobility trajectories in terms of how they come to grips with the new material, semiotic, and symbolic realities they face upon leaving their reservations. In this conceptual paper, we provide a discussion of research in mobility, critical intercultural dialogue, and critical pedagogy to answer the question, "How can conceptualizations of mobility and critical interculturality shed light on our understanding of indigenous students' experiences at public universities?" We combine the concept of mobility with elements from a decolonial, critical intercultural view, and critical intercultural pedagogies. We conclude that mobility trajectories are highly marked by placed-based identities that connect students to their territories. Students contest processes of symbolic deterritorialization and deculturation by engaging in forms of re-contextualization and material and symbolic rearrangements of university sites which allows them to embody and enact their identities. We end the article with principles and strategies proposed in culturally sustaining pedagogies and other critical intercultural pedagogies which have significant potential to facilitate indigenous students' intercultural mobility on university campuses.

Keywords: Mobility, intercultural dialogue, decolonization, culturally sustaining pedagogy, social justice, indigenous students

"We need spaces to spread, revitalize, promote critical discussion, to express that there are other knowledges (…) we question the university, its directionality. Philosophy is only written, it is only Greek, religion is only the official one, that's being essentialist and our essentialism is something else: It is in the territory (…) What we defend is the territories and the communities… We propose and defend the thinking that is in the communities… We defend it with the word."

Diego Tupaz[3] (Castañeda 2011/2020, p.159)

Introduction

Since the earliest times of human civilization, mobility has been a central source for exploration, discovery, and development at the material and symbolic levels. As an area of inquiry, mobility draws on knowledge from various disciplines, including anthropology, geography, migration studies, cultural studies, sociology, science and technology studies, tourism, and transport studies (Sheller & Urry, 2006). More recently, the field of education has explored the concept at the K-12 level in connection to characteristics and motivations for urban and regional mobility (Navin *et al.*, 2012) or the relationship between student mobility and performance and achievement (Doyle & Prout, 2012). In higher education, research has focused on transnational mobility and its characteristics (Lysgård & Rye, 2017) and mobility practices and their meanings (Holdsworth, 2009). Most research on mobility in educational and applied linguistics has focused on university students' study abroad, in particular the impact of the sojourning experience on language learning and identity (Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2009) and intercultural development (Byram, & Feng, 2006; Jackson, 2010). This spate of publications on mobility, however, has granted little attention to one particular population: university indigenous students (IS).

While there is evidence that international students, compared to local students, experience increased discrimination on and off campus (Hanassab, 2006), research on the participation of IS in higher education shows that compared to majority group members, indigenous communities have to navigate through a constellation of inequalities. Research conducted in different countries such as the US (Shotton *et al.*, 2013), Australia (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2013), Canada (Parent, 2017) and different Latin American countries (Chávez, 2008; Mato, 2018a; Simmonds, 2010; Zapata, 2009) indicate that even though enrollment of IS in postsecondary education has increased, they remain underrepresented at levels commensurate to the population and suffer from higher attrition rates and the lowest graduation statistics compared to other populations (Chávez, 2008; Simmonds, 2010; Zapata, 2009). Different aspects contribute to the current state of affairs. Parent (2017) points to the failure of universities to capture IS transition pathways, explaining that "most of the limited research that has been done on transitions tends to focus on the point when Aboriginal learners enter university, rather than viewing the multiple pathways and complex circumstances that shape their decisions to pursue higher education" (p. 155). Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson (2013) and Mato (2018a) highlight racist undertones surrounding educational policy that overtly and covertly promote longstanding mobility and immobility practices that result in perpetuating existing inequality, by protecting and maintaining the majority group privilege. Other studies report that the collision between universities' cultural practices and IS's values impact their willingness and motivation to stay in school (Bustamante *et al.*, 2004; Mazabel, 2018; Parent, 2017; Rosado-May & Osorio Vázquez, 2014; Simmonds, 2010). This paper contributes to this ongoing discussion and calls for stakeholders to reflect on the need to make universities intercultural spaces and consequently understand and facilitate IS processes and practices of material, symbolic, and intercultural mobility.

We adopt a critical perspective in that we consider mobility as a phenomenon that intersects with

processes of socio-spatial exclusion and inclusion in places, such as the city, and institutions, such as universities. Specifically, we make the case that Colombian IS who leave their territories to pursue a college degree and engage in different opportunities of mobility face several challenges. While some of these challenges have been reported, for example, experiencing different language practices, ways of knowing, ways of being, and adjusting to campus and city life (Bustamante *et al.*, 2004; Mayorga, 2012; Sierra, 2005), we posit that institutionalized deficit-based views of the IS's cultures and languages as well as their educational backgrounds stand in the way of adopting "measures in favor of groups which are discriminated against or marginalized" and promoting "the conditions necessary in order that equality may be real and effective" (Political Constitution of Colombian, 1991, Article 7–authors' translation). We propose a theoretical discussion that combines the concept of mobility with elements from a decolonial (Guilherme, 2019; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 1992; De Sousa Santos, 2008) and critical intercultural view (Walsh, 2009) to answer the question, "How can conceptualizations of mobility and critical interculturality shed light on our understanding of indigenous students' experiences at public universities in Colombia?" In the discussion section we consider how lessons from applications of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Alim & Paris, 2017), intercultural dialogue (Byram, 1997, 2008), and intellectual and cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998) could provide ways to move forward.

Context

Colombia is a multilingual and multicultural nation with a total population of 43,835,324, of which 4.31% are identified as indigenous (National Administrative Department of Statistics [DANE], 2020). The latest national census reports 1.9 million indigenous people distributed in 115 pueblos (DANE, 2019) and speaking 63 languages (Arango & Sánchez, 2004). Through the various periods of aggressive colonization, ethnic segregation, and epistemological and cognitive injustice, Colombian indigenous people have strived to preserve their languages, knowledges, cultural practices, and territories. Only starting in 1971 were indigenous organizations able to make great strides in proposing indigenous education (Bustamante *et al.*, 2004; see also Rojas Curieux, 2019). However, it was later in 1978 that the Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN) issued Decree 1142 that formalized the creation of bilingual programs and the beginning of the program "etnoeducación' (ethnic education) in 1984 (Resolución 3454). Finally, with the modification of the Political Constitution in 1991 (articles 7, 8, 10, 19, 68 & 72) and the General Law of Education (1994; also Decree 804/1995), the state endorsed and strengthened ethnic education with the purpose of respecting and maintaining ethnic language, culture, and values.

While advances concerning ethnic education at the K-12 level have been made, efforts to expand access to higher education for IS remain ineffective (Mato, 2018b; Mazabel, 2018). Entering state-funded universities in Colombia is a challenge. Universities draw on a meritocratic system in which students are admitted based on the scores obtained in the national evaluation test for entering higher education (Prueba Saber) or their own admission test. Although, in general, many IS's educational trajectories combine ethnic education and conventional education, when taking the Prueba Saber and applying to a conventional university students are at a disadvantage compared to the mestizo population who has been schooled in the western forms of knowledge, with teachers who normally have access to more professional development, different materials, and technological resources (Bustamante *et al.*, 2004; Castañeda, 2011; Mazabel, 2018; Simmonds, 2010).

In order to facilitate IS's access to conventional universities, the state has promoted different policies of affirmative action (Ministry of Culture, 2013; Ministry of Education, 1995; Political Constitution of Colombian, 1991) such as "El Fondo Álvao Olcué Chocué," and has provided funding for universities to open satellite campuses in distant regions and ethnic education degrees in teacher

education programs (Mazabel, 2018). State-funded universities have allocated admission quotas for students with indigenous backgrounds (Mora *et al.*, 2019) and created policies that allow them to carry out cultural and political activities on campus. However, these policies fail to address the complexities of the challenges experienced by IS in their mobility at universities.

Grounding Concepts

Mobility

Under the "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller & Urry, 2006) different aspects of social and cultural life and political participation, such as indigenous experience of entering college, have been reconfigured as forms of performance through mobility. This new perspective has "focused on unveiling the mobility of people and things and identifying the particulars of the mobile subject as social, gendered, aged, and ethnic" (Christensen & Cortés-Morales, 2017, p. 16). Nevertheless, different definitions of mobility seem to pay less attention to the semiotic and symbolic movement of cultural resources (CR) inherent in mobility. For example, in social science fields, the term *mobilities* is "used in a broad-ranging generic sense, embracing physical movement such as walking and climbing to movement enhanced by technologies, bikes and buses, cars and trains, ships and planes" (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 212). Ferreira *et al.* (2012) take issue with current definitions of mobility that focus on physical movement and space and propose an expanded view that includes other forms of mobility that take place at the intellectual level. These scholars define mobility as "a relational concept characterized by the overcoming of physical, mental, conceptual or other types of distance, or by the transgression of a state or condition" (p. 690). Mobility thus includes "(1) physical travel of people; (2) physical movement of objects; (3) imaginative forms of travelling, using images, films, and memories; (4) virtual travelling using information technologies; (5) communicative travel through person-to-person messages such as letters and postcards" (p. 689); and (6) "the crossing of boundaries imposed by classical disciplinary views" (p. 689).

In line with Ferreira and colleagues' (2012) definition, we conceive of mobility as a movement of material, semiotic, and symbolic CR within different geographical and mental scales. This movement implies at the same time the *encounter* with other material, semiotic, and symbolic CR that may lead to 'transgression' or 'overcoming distance'. We see IS's mobility to university as an encounter between their material, symbolic and CR and those of the other communities they meet. This encounter, however, may not necessarily lead to 'overcoming of physical, mental, conceptual distance'. In their study about understanding native students in higher education, Shotton *et al.* (2013) show that Native Americans find it difficult to adjust to their new life in college because they "often feel isolated and perceive campuses at NNCUs [non-Native colleges or universities] as hostile, pointing to experiences with both active and passive racism" (p. 21; see also Jackson *et al.*, 2003). Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson (2013) report that within Australia there has been significant opposition to affirmative action initiatives intended to facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility to higher education which has racist consequences. In the Latin American context, Mato (2018b) concludes that even though the provisions for indigenous groups to access higher education are in place, their application is deficient and in part informed by the structural racism inherited from the colonial past.

Critical interculturality and intercultural communication

In this study, we adopt an intercultural perspective of the concept of mobility, which highlights the cultural, semiotic, and symbolic movement that unfolds when individuals move within and between physical or mental spaces. In line with this perspective, culture is defined as "an open and dynamic repertoire of semiotic resources (material bodily originated or artifacts, and non-material discourses,

ideologies, ideas, beliefs), produced, embodied, enacted, and reshaped in social inter-action and communication" (Álvarez Valencia, in press). CR are appropriated in processes of socialization and are in constant shaping and reshaping by virtue of the different mobility processes and intercultural encounters of individuals. Thus, intercultural communication between members of different social groups (e.g. indigenous people and the mestizo population) constitutes an encounter between their different cultural semiotic and symbolic resources. As such, individuals' repertoires of semiotic resources (SR) (e.g., such as languages, cultural practices, and cosmogonies) configure their subjectivity and identity traits. However, one critical aspect of SR is that they have different exchange values (Stein, 2004). While some SR are highly valued and therefore naturalized, others with low exchange value are unrecognized and marginalized (Álvarez Valencia, in press). The dynamics of exchange value granted to individuals' SR become sources of discrimination. As an illustration, in the case of indigenous communities, the lack of recognition of the value of SR such as their languages, narratives of origin, and rituals originates in the belief of superiority of the languages, epistemic matrices, and forms of social organization of western cultures.

Cultural SR are deployed and negotiated in intercultural communication. Achieving the acceptable levels of openness, acceptance, and recognition of diversity in the process of negotiation and co-construction of SR has been the goal of Intercultural Citizenship (ICIT) (Byram, 2008), which in essence means applying intercultural communicative competence (ICC) to solve a problem with those from a different background (Byram *et al.*, 2016). Critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997) can be enriched by critical intercultural views that draw on decolonial theories. A critical decolonial perspective has the potential to expand ICC by targeting sources of discrimination that impinge on communicative encounters, mainly epistemic, ethnic, racial, sexual, gender, age, linguistic, political, regional, and religious. With respect to the lives, experiences, and social movements of indigenous people in Latin America, a critical intercultural perspective represents a political project that according to Walsh (2009) "is built hand in hand with decoloniality, as a tool to make power devices visible, and as a strategy that intends to build radically different relations with knowledge, being, power and life itself" (Walsh, 2009, p. 14). Walsh, along with other decolonial thinkers, (e.g., Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 1992;) denounce that SR such as indigenous people's sense of identity, agency, racial and ethnic identification, languages, ancestral knowledges, and cultural practices are invisibilized and rejected through the hegemonic forces enacted by members of the majority group that still uphold a colonial mentality. Walsh explains that the current colonial matrix operates in four ways: by maintaining the status of Anglo-European knowledge and forms of knowledge production as the only legitimate ways of epistemic development (coloniality of knowledge; Mignolo, 2000); by perpetuating racial, political, and social hierarchical orders prescribed by colonialist and imperial powers (coloniality of power; Quijano, 1992); by continuing to accept mental, emotional, and cognitive inferiority implanted by former colonizers (coloniality of being; Maldonado-Torres, 2007); and by being complicit with anthropocentric views (Haraway, 2016) that position nature as subordinated to humans' regimes of resource exploitation, consumption, and accumulation (coloniality of mother nature; Walsh, 2009).

Álvarez Valencia (in press) posits that a major task of the critical intercultural perspective is to problematize and re-signify all hegemonic discourses and ideologies underlying how certain SR are represented in communication. Citing Stein (2004), the author uses the term *re-sourcing resources* to "refer to the process of recognition, re-articulation or recovery of students' lost or silent voices and ways of knowing or being" (Álvarez Valencia, in press). If SR, such as indigenous students' languages or rituals, have been silenced by the politics of ethnic and racial discrimination subservient to the coloniality of knowledge, a great effort needs to be made by society in order to re-source these SR and thereby redress the balance of power between majority and minoritized groups. As mentioned above, research about higher education and indigenous students' mobility (Bodkin-

Andrews & Carlson, 2013; Ferreira *et al.*, 2012; Mazabel, 2018; Mato, 2018a; Shotton *et al.*, 2013) illustrates the different manifestations of the colonial matrix that not only operates in Latin American countries, but also in other countries with a colonial past. At the ideological and political level, the principles of a critical intercultural perspective shed new light on the phenomenon of coloniality. We now turn our attention to the practical level where principles and strategies proposed in culturally sustaining pedagogies and other critical intercultural pedagogies have significant potential to facilitate indigenous students' intercultural mobility on university campuses.

Critical intercultural pedagogies

Among others, Wagner *et al.* (2019) point to the strong connections between teaching for Intercultural Citizenship (Byram, 2008) and Social Justice Education (e.g., Osborn, 2006) by building on Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and developing teachers' and students' sensitivity and awareness of social, cultural, political, economic, linguistic, gender, ethnic, and racial dynamics of power in educational contexts. Here we also draw from Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) (Alim & Paris, 2017) which expands on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) introduced over 20 years ago by Ladson-Billings. Both perspectives emphasize the necessity to welcome and re-source minoritized students' cultural SR, countering the longstanding premise that minoritized students must assimilate to the dominant culture and language. Alim and Paris, in asking about the purpose of schooling, state that:

> The purpose of state-sanctioned schooling has been to forward the largely assimilationist and often violent White imperial project, with students and families being asked to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve in schools… this saga of cultural and linguistic assault had and continues to have devastating effects on the access, achievement, and well-being of students of color in public schools. (2017, p. 1)

Viewing "cultural dexterity as a necessary good" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1), CSP seeks to sustain the lifeways of minoritized students' communities and thereby disrupt anti-Indigeneity and other types of racism and discrimination. Importantly, CSP views students' linguistic and CR as a dynamic and crucial asset to draw from for their education and for sustaining all parts of their identities. The often uncontended notion that minoritized students need to assimilate or be integrated is considered harmful and through CSP students acquire a critical consciousness to recognize patterns and systems of oppression. In the following section, we reflect on these concepts on the basis of the literature about indigenous students' experiences in higher education.

Discussion

Mobility and immobility on campus

As described above, despite affirmative actions to favor minoritized students' access to higher education, the conditions for students to benefit from these policies are insufficient (Caicedo & Castillo, 2008; Mato, 2018a; Mazabel, 2018; Simmonds, 2010) due to roadblocks in students' aspirations for educational mobility. For example, students indicate that distant indigenous territories do not receive information about higher education opportunities or prospective candidates receive little or no guidance on how to submit an application or decide what academic program to choose (Castañeda, 2011). Additionally, most universities are far away from indigenous reservations and it becomes a financial challenge to move to the city and afford living expenses (Castañeda, 2011; Mazabel, 2018). IS enter university and face the systemic and structural colonial resonances latent in the campus climate and stakeholders' minds as well as the bureaucratic organization of universities

that perpetuate covert discrimination, invisibilization, acculturation, and marginalization (Martínez, 2015). Students' feelings mirror the results of studies (Mato, 2008; 2018a) indicating that regulations about inclusion and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity and access to higher education in Colombia as well as other Latin American countries are very well established; nevertheless, their implementation is deficient due to "conditions of inferiority, subordination, marginality and attack to which "indigenous" and "afro-Colombian" societies are subjected" (Rojas Curieux, 2019, p. 18– authors' translation). In different ways, universities perform a regulatory function of mobility or immobility that in the long run contributes to the reproduction of social stagnation and discrimination, and that maintains limitations of social and spatial mobilities, since, as Cresswell (2010) pinpoints "mobility is a resource that is differentially accessed… and is infused with power and its distribution" (p. 21).

For most IS who leave their families to attend university, several mobilities are involved: they face new geographic, social, and cultural contexts which expose them to new social spaces and relations (Sierra, 2004). For example, one student explains that "[o]ne of the biggest indigenous conflicts in the city is the use of public space, since it is configured as a totally wild and hostile place different from yours; in this field everything seems strange, noisy, difficult to handle and to access" (Chepe, 2004, p. 219–authors' translation, 2020). The embodied connection IS have with smells, sounds, habitual practices, and spatial organization of their territories configure emotional geographies that are at odds with the geographic sites of the city and the forms of life they orchestrate. As IS move away from the social and symbolic spaces constructed within their communities, they mobilize their place-based identities (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983) that in front of alienating environments create feelings of dislocation, displacement, and disjuncture (Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Although IS's move to campus life offers multiple opportunities for intercultural exchange, IS face multiple barriers. For instance, members of the indigenous council in universities constantly denounce and fight against administrative and academic practices of inequality that disregard SR that make up their ethnic, sociocultural, political, and multilingual heritage (Simmonds, 2010). Their voices evoke experiences of other IS from private and public universities in Colombia (Bustamante *et al.*, 2004; Londoño, 2017; Usma *et al.*, 2018) which highlight that their encounter with university life faces them with the practices of a monolingual and monocultural society, framed within an educational academicist, transmissionist, assimilationist model. In turn, such an educational model is alien to indigenous students' own cosmogonies, ontologies, learning practices, epistemic views, and life projects. Most students need to deal with barriers such as the adjustment to the Spanish academic register that for many is their L2, and as such the language of their colonizer and oppressor, and the need to assimilate to western epistemological and ontological practices of knowing and being in the world (Caicedo & Castillo, 2008; Mayorga, 2012; Martínez, 2015; Usma *et al.*, 2018). For these students, the dominant matrix of thought that proclaims universality of Anglo-Eurocentric epistemologies, verbocentric, and anthropocentric narratives opposes their own meaning-making systems that draw on pluri-versal views, highlighting the recognition of other epistemological genealogies, other SR, and other intersubjectivities and biocentric narratives (Mignolo, 2007; Walsh, 2009). While the different social, cultural, pedagogical, and academic practices that students experience foster symbolic, cultural, and material mobility, other practices on and off campus— whether they are evident to students or not— reinforce immobilities. *Immobility* thus connotes covert and overt attitudes and actions that materialize ethnic, racial, epistemic, and linguistic exclusion and that stall students' social, political, economic, intellectual, and cultural mobilities. However, one way that students resist politics of immobility and enhance their own mobility trajectories is through actions of symbolic re-territorialization and re-existence.

Symbolic deterritorialization, re-territorialization and re-existence

Moving to university may also lead IS to undergo processes of deterriorialization (García Canclini, 1990; Hernández, 2006) and deculturation (Roy, 2013). Deterritorialization and deculturation consist of a type of cultural distancing and weakening of the ties between students' cosmogonies, languages, traditions, and their 'social and geographic territories' (García Canclini, 1990). Some students see higher education as an opportunity to leave their territories with the intention of social mobility within the mainstream cultural group. The decision to stay in urban centers is usually the product of harsh conditions of poverty, socioeconomic inequality, historical discrimination, displacement, and violence that their communities suffer (Martínez, 2015). Little by little, students assimilate to the ways of living and being of western societies and after graduation they do not return to their reservations, as expressed by Abadio Green from the Pueblo Tule: "when one is on academia they teach us to be individualistic, so we become individualistic and that is why some indigenous partners that finish university do not return to the communities anymore that finishes university does not return anymore to the communities" (Sierra & Klaus, 2004, p. 558–authors' translation, 2020). Some students also express that there are fewer possibilities of exercising their profession in their territories because there is no application of the profession or their indigenous authorities do not support those professional practices (Bustamante *et al.*, 2004; Castañeda, 2011). Interestingly, students' diasporic lives in the city and at university do not only follow paths of deterritorialization and deculturation, they also engage in processes of re-territorialization (García Canclini, 1990; Hernández, 2006) and production of new spaces of belonging (Horner & Dailey-O'Cain, 2019) within the new inhabited sites and social spaces.

In public universities like Universidad del Valle, located in the Southwest of Colombia, IS engage in compensatory processes of re-territorialization. Students from several pueblos (e.g., Pastos, Misak, Nasa, Yanacona) joined together to create the Cabildo Indígena Universitario (CIU), a university indigenous government with representatives of different pueblos. CIU has led different initiatives to preserve indigenous cultures, create ties among indigenous pueblos, and strengthen processes of political, educational, and cultural resistance (Agencia de Noticias Univalle, 2019). Its main purpose is to help students with the process of admission, retention, relevance of education they receive, and the return to their territories (Agencia de Noticias Univalle, 2019). Through the work of the CIU, the university has incorporated in its academic offer four courses, including an indigenous language class and one class about ethnic knowledge and research methodologies. The University has worked with the CIU to maintain a 'Temporal Student Residence' (Casa de Paso) where new students can stay during their first weeks of adaptation to college and city life. The CIU has also obtained permission to carry out political and cultural events where students share their initiatives, languages, cultural practices, and cosmogonies.

The Inauguration Ceremony of the CIU (Ceremonia de Possession del Cabildo Indígena Universitario) which recreates the cultural and political event that takes place in many ancestral territories when indigenous officials (e.g., governors, mayors) are sworn into office and the agricultural work on the *chagra,* or space settled to cultivate on campus, with the purpose of maintaining students' connection with nature and ancestral medicine are additional examples of events that enhance IS's diverse mobility trajectories. For the Ticuna community, "more than cultivated to eat, the chagra is cultivated to live; this is the perfect place that the indigenous people use to heal the soul, the spirit and the body. It is the place where all the sorrows and joys are released, energies are sterilized so that day by day they are the best and are not contaminated negatively" (Amazonicasur, 2011,–authors' translation). The CIU also organizes Friday's Tulpa (Tulpa de los Viernes) wherein students invite the campus community to participate in "Círculos de Palabra," "Mingas de Pensamiento," and traditional dance. While "Círculos de Palabra" are ceremonies that

aim at preserving indigenous knowledge through oral tradition, "Mingas de Pensamiento" represent a social, cultural, and political activity where different parties (e.g., communities, sectors) join together to construct, reflect, and collectively work for a common objective (López Cortés, 2018).

These activities involve forms of re-contextualization and material and symbolic rearrangements of the university sites and represent practices of re-territorialization (Hernández, 2006), because they allow IS to keep the connection to the practices of their territories and visibilize their cultural SR, including their languages, rituals, and traditions. This creation of spaces of belonging (Horner & Dailey-O'Cain, 2019) within the university campus helps students both to sustain practices and belief systems and build closer ties with the university. Overall, this counterhegemonic reconfiguration of spaces is decolonial (Mignolo, 2007) as it enables symbolic restitution, self-affirmation, cultural sustainability, and the transgression of hegemonic and homogenizing politics of universities. As José Chicangana, an indigenous ex-governor, argues, indigenous students' presence in universities is an act of "social re-existence." He describes the term as the "existential and spiritual manifestation of the indigenous movement in the university context" (José Chicangana, October 2009; as cited in Simmonds, 2010; p. 72–authors' translation) wherein indigenous youth must resist the oppressive forces of academic hegemony through their 'life plans, creativity and spiritual presence' (Simmonds, 2010, p. 72).

Intercultural mobility

As discussed above, practices of re-territorialization in universities favor students' identity affirmation and processes of adjustment to city and school life, but they also represent contesting actions against forms of coloniality of knowledge and being (Walsh, 2009). Similarly, the new cultural and political spaces created by IS generate opportunities to engage in cultural exchanges with other indigenous groups as well as the wider community of the university, which, in turn, opens up the possibilities for intercultural mobilities. We understand intercultural mobility as the potential that intercultural encounters have to bring together individuals who, by sharing, exchanging, and negotiating their cultural SR, may undergo transformational experiences. Although indigenous communities promote intercultural mobility through political and cultural initiatives, generally mainstream education would prefer indigenous communities to move toward the dominant culture rather than attempt to invest in knowing indigenous' forms of life, and their past and present struggles (Bustamante *et al.*, 2004; Simmonds, 2010). This purview is heightened by institutional policies and academic practices that exclude teaching and learning styles, materials, forms of knowledge, cosmogonies, and histories of IS (Mato, 2018a; Usma *et al.*, 2018).

While it is undeniable that state-funded universities have made important efforts to jump aboard the multicultural train, the structural matrix continues to sustain coloniality of power, knowledge, and being: a sturdy submission to the logocentric and anthropocentric epistemologies of the global north (Guilherme, 2019) have been imposed on the rest of the world through capitalism and imperialism. Despite the laudable affirmative action efforts implemented by higher education institutions, these actions do not address deep seeded structural colonial practices and instead promote "conservative multiculturalism" (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001), an approach that advocates for recognition of diversity, coexistence and tolerance for inclusive purposes, however, falls short of destabilizing the system of colonial power through emancipation and political change.

Beginning thoughts for addressing inequalities

Although it would be naive to believe that there are simple solutions to the problems reported in the literature and in this article, we now attempt to provide initial thoughts on some approaches that could be fruitful in disrupting the harm done during the experience of mobility when IS leave their

territories and go to university. As Usma *et al.* (2018) point out, intercultural dialogue seen through a critical intercultural lens requires criticality on part of all participants. In order for that to happen however, there needs to be a wide awareness of past and current inequalities and a willingness to openly look at their causes and everyone's roles in the harm that is done to IS. This building of awareness can occur through initiatives started by the university administration or in grass-roots movements by faculty and/or students. Examples of such awareness-building initiatives include committee assignments, faculty readings groups or professional learning communities, metanoias, lecture-series, community engagement, and deliberation events, just to name a few. It is important to note that for real change to happen, buy-in needs to occur on multiple levels. Ideally, university administrations include the goal in their mission statements as well as in their academic plans. Institutional research should be reoriented and instead of conducting research 'about ancestral communities', research should be conducted 'with ancestral communities,' including the voices and participation of members of the communities and de-objectifying the researcher-participant interactional dynamic. As mentioned above, universities can support IS initiatives that sustain and celebrate their SR, rather than requiring indigenous students to homogenize, both in curricular and extracurricular activities.

Another crucial factor in addressing inequalities in IS experiences at the university is the development of an awareness of bias. As has been shown in a number of studies (Bustamante *et al.*, 2004; Martínez, 2015; Simmonds, 2010), indigenous students are expected to adopt dominant ways of knowing and learning which has detrimental effects on the development of their identities. Often the harm caused shows itself in achievement gaps. However, we want to emphasize that this forced integration is still oppression even in students who manage to succeed academically because it still means that they had to give up part of their identity in order to fit in and be successful. Therefore, all members of the university community need to investigate their own biases. Members of the dominant group need to have opportunities to become aware of and critically examine their status and their role in the oppression of IS and other minoritized groups. That means that we have to examine our whiteness which is often considered unmarked and our resulting privilege which often goes unnoticed (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). Faculty members need to reflect on what knowledge and what ways of knowing they value and how this disadvantages students with different educational, personal experiences, and SR. Taking a step back and questioning one's own knowledge is one characteristic of intellectual humility which in essence means "owning the limitations of one's knowledge". Both intellectual humility and cultural humility would be helpful constructs that could facilitate the hard work of engaging in critical intercultural dialogue that would facilitate intercultural mobility, especially when there are mechanisms of power that need to be examined and assessed, as is clearly the case in colonial contexts. Cultural humility has been described as "a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, to redressing the power imbalances in the physician-patient dynamic, and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations" (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998, p. 123). Cultural humility explicitly addresses power relationships and has been applied in practice and lends itself especially well as a tool in addition to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that facilitate and enable intercultural dialogue.

Moreover, prior research indicates "that adolescents who use complex notions of ethnic group membership (e.g., abstract concepts of culture, roots, and heritage) may be more adept at negotiating and reconciling contradictory identities and this dexterity perhaps transfers to the way they negotiate dominant structures and institutional systems" (Zarate *et al.*, 2005, p. 112). We conclude that it is especially important for IS to understand and value their own multifaceted identities and to question power patterns that racialize and inferiorize their ways of being to be able to resist oppressive dialogue and disrupt patterns of oppression. At the same time, from studies in social justice

education, intercultural education, and critical human rights education, we know that for students to develop such critical consciousness they need to have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes and the opportunity to apply them (e.g., Byram *et al.*, 2016). We also know that such projects require systematic and intentional planning. We suggest frameworks based on critical pedagogy, such as social justice education, CSP, critical human rights education, and critical intercultural education. Pedagogical tools and educational models used in such teaching approaches can be useful in sustaining and further developing students' complex SR, facilitating their ability to intentionally engage in intercultural mobilities while at the same time resisting harmful discourse of previously unquestioned authorities because they developed their critical consciousness or critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997; Guilherme, 2019). Freire (2020) builds on critical consciousness in the context of dual language learning in the USA and argues that students need to develop political consciousness to transform the nature and contradictions of sociopolitical realities. Empowering students with sociopolitical consciousness can be considered an important step in empowering indigenous students to choose their path in mobility.

Conclusion

To return to our original question, "How can conceptualizations of mobility and critical interculturality shed light on our understanding of indigenous students' experiences at public universities in Colombia?", we understand that, clearly, none of the activities above will bring about immediate change. Oppressive structures are very hard to dismantle. But, we argue that we cannot give up and that we need to find ways to critically examine the ways in which we continue to harm minoritized groups. We need to be critical of our own understandings and be open to questioning the ways in which we support minoritized students and the ways in which we might perpetuate oppression. Theoretical frameworks informed by mobilities, critical interculturality, and decoloniality combined with the philosophy and tools of pedagogical approaches informed by critical pedagogy provide a basis for creating an awareness about indigenous students' mobility trajectories that are often fraught with injustice and colonial oppression. This is dependent on the real commitment by all stakeholders to disrupt the status quo, in ways that affect the institutional systems in place as well as the individual lives of students in real and lasting ways and that go beyond policy documents and empty promises. We need to form alliances with colleagues who are also interested in participating in advocacy and we need to include members of the minoritized groups and listen to them. We need to be able to accept that we will make mistakes and we need to vow to try to do better. We have done a lot of harm. It is time to do the best we can and not stop until intercultural mobility means that students can sustain their identities and make use of their multitude of semiotic and symbolic resources.

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[1] This paper originates in part from the study Construction of Indigenous Students' Sociolinguistic Profile at Universidad del Valle funded by the Vicerectory of Investigation (project code 4397; 2019-2021) of the same university.

[2] Recognizing our positionality and locus of enunciation is an important decolonial practice. Based on critical interculturality and decolonial theory, we are applied linguist scholars located at Public universities; the first one based within the mestizo dominant group and academic community in the southwest of Colombia, while the second is a white, female from European descent located in the United States. This paper reflects our shared interest in examining unequal relationships and oppression in educational contexts and advocating for social justice.

[3] Quoted in Castañeda 2011, p.159. (Authors' translation, 2020).