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**Towards a doubly reflexive ethnography:
A proposal from the anthropology of interculturality**

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SUMMARY:

Starting from the contemporary debate on ethnographic methodology in anthropology, this paper analyses how new methodological options arise throughout processes of educational interculturality and how these can nourish, rejuvenate and decolonize classical anthropological ethnography. The contrast between a postmodern anthropology and activist ethnography reveals possibilities for fruitfully complement social and political engagement with the classical canon of ethnography, which is here illustrated for the sphere of Intercultural Studies and the emerging field of what may be called an anthropology of interculturality. The resulting, “doubly reflexive ethnography” completes the contrast of emic and etic approaches through a emic-etic dialectical, structure-oriented perspective, which is particularly suitable for studying institutions and organizations whose actors co-reflect on the same research process as the anthropologist her/himself. This proposal is finally summed up in a three-dimensional heuristic research model, which combines semantic, pragmatic and syntactic dimensions of ethnography and which is particularly suited for “inter-cultural”, “inter-lingual” and “inter-actor” diversity contexts.

KEY WORDS:

Reflexive ethnography, activist research, anthropology of interculturality.

**HACIA UNA ETNOGRAFÍA DOBLEMENTE REFLEXIVA:
UNA PROPUESTA DESDE LA ANTROPOLOGÍA DE LA INTERCULTURALIDAD.**

RESUMEN:

Partiendo del debate actual sobre la metodología etnográfica en antropología, este trabajo analiza cómo en el proceso de interculturalización educativa surgen nuevas opciones metodológicas y cómo estas pueden retroalimentar, rejuvenecer y descolonizar la clásica etnografía antropológica. El contraste entre una antropología postmoderna y de tendencia “académica”, por un lado, y una etnografía activista y militante, por otro, revela posibilidades de complementar fructíferamente el compromiso social y político con el canon clásico de la etnografía, lo cual aquí demostramos para el ámbito de los estudios interculturales y lo que se está dando por llamar la naciente antropología de la interculturalidad.

La resultante “etnografía doblemente reflexiva” completa la concatenación de perspectivas emic y etic con una perspectiva dialéctica y estructural emic-etic, que es particularmente aplicable al estudio de instituciones y organizaciones, cuyos actores co-reflexionan sobre el mismo proceso de investigación junto con el/la antropólogo/a. Esta propuesta desemboca por último en un modelo heurístico tridimensional que concatena dimensiones semánticas, pragmáticas y sintácticas del quehacer etnográfico y que es particularmente útil en contextos “inter-culturales”, “inter-lingües” e “inter-actorales”.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Etnografía reflexiva, investigación activista, antropología de la interculturalidad.

Introducción

From the world of applied anthropology within the contexts of “development cooperation”, to the action-research carried out together with social movements and political figures (Hale 2006a, 2008, Speed 2006), criticisms arise against an ethnography that, although liberated from its objects and traditional limitations, has yet to entail a process of “methodological emancipation” as such. These critiques are coupled, however, with a successful, although at times excessive, return to ethnography as usable methodology outside the anthropological disciplines. As such, in the past few decades, anthropological and ethnographic work face a yet unresolved paradox: while within the discipline today the conceptual and methodological consequences of the so-called “crisis of ethnographic representation” of the eighties are visible, outside the discipline there has been a seemingly successful and almost excessive proliferation of both its conceptual baggage—the “culturalization” and later “multi-“ and “interculturalization” of the social sciences and humanities—and its central disciplinary methodologies—the “ethnografication” of qualitative and participatory research methodologies.

For those of us who work from the margins of the anthropological discipline and at times in close communication with other social and educational sciences, as in the case of the emerging field of intercultural studies, this paradox becomes ever more pressing, given that the “migration” of concepts like culture, ethnicity, diversity, and interculturality (Mateos Cortés 2009) from anthropology to other disciplines often reifies and essentializes the concepts to the point that they become openly counterproductive both for academic analysis as well as in partnership with processes of social or educational transformation. In this sense, the anthropological notion of cultural diversity is changing as it transitions through the social sciences and is translated into the language of public politics from its widespread stigma as a “problem”—with little integration and/or articulation, yielding an essentialist and functionalist notion of culture—to its re-appropriation as a “right”—of minorities, of native peoples or even of all of humanity, as in the case of the “Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity” (UNESCO 2002)—and finally to its anthropological-pedagogical proclamation as a “resource”—for intercultural education, for the management of diversity, and for the development of competencies—pivotal to a knowledge society (García Canclini 2004). This gradual transition reflects a sometimes critical welcome, sometimes selective and biased, on the part of “neoliberal multiculturalism” (Hale 2006b), one of the primary actors of the development of diversity, not so

much for the conceptual canons of anthropology, but for its professional practices in programs dedicated to the “interculturalization” of educational and sociocultural institutions and those that provision social services (Dietz 2009).

In Latin America, these pedagogical-anthropological programs that proclaim a supposed “end to indigenosity” have highlighted the urgency to arrange the now secular national traditions of “indigenous education” on a basic level with this multi- or intercultural whirlwind of education politics and its extension into the level of higher education. Therefore, in close collaboration with the applied anthropology of post- or neo-indigenity, new institutions of higher learning have been created, some explicitly geared towards indigenous peoples such as with the “indigenous universities”, while others like the “intercultural universities” (Casillas Muñoz & Santini Villar 2006) look to society as a whole as they focus on “interculturality for everyone” (Schmelkes 2009).

This article analyzes how in the aforementioned process of educational interculturality new methodological options surface and how these can nourish, rejuvenate, and decolonize classical ethnographic anthropology. These processes of interculturality are innovating new channels to diversify universal and academic “Knowledge” in order to relate them to local knowledge, such as subaltern “ethnoscience” and alternative knowledge, and create a mutual hybridity that constructs new diversified canons of “intertwined” and “glocalized” understandings (Mignolo 2000, Escobar 2004, Aparicio & Blaser 2008). We argue that this initial “dialogue of understandings” (De Sousa Santos 2006, Mato 2007), involving “inter-cultural” and “interlingual” dimensions with “inter-actors”, simultaneously force academic anthropology to rethink its basic theoretical concepts as well as its methodological practices, which are still too monological and monolingual.

Crisis?, what crisis?

Ever since 1986 when the two, now paradigmatic, landmarks of meta-ethnographic reflexivity were published—*Anthropology as a Cultural Critique* (Marcus & Fisher 1986) and *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, eds. 1986)—, the discussion concerning the basis of anthropological research has now come to a juncture, split into two diametrically opposed directions: on the one hand, towards an experimental and self-referential ethnography that is supposedly “postmodern”, and on the other hand, towards a militant anthropology that presumes to “libera-

te” or at least “fortify”—in the sense of *empowerment*—those whom it studies. Nevertheless, since the point is to contradict these two lines of thinking, we maintain that both have failed in their endeavors to react methodologically to the growing self-consciousness and reflexivity of social actors and/or ethnic contemporaries¹.

Together the processes of decolonization and administrative independence from what has been termed the *Third World* and the surfacing of ethnic movements within the context of the new Nation-State trigger a crisis of the “disciplinary identity” of anthropology. Defined according to its Malinowskian canonization as “classic” ethnographic research, stationary and carried out in foreign territories, the “colonial experience” (Grillo 1985) has in turn become a problematic legacy. This is a critique now lodged by emergent social actors *in situ* against those who suspiciously “nose-around” their communities and regions (Huizer 1973).

In this context, the methodological canon of “ethnographic realism” - based on objective data, the integrity of the commentary and the ubiquitous monopolization of the interlocutor (Marcus & Cushman 1982) - is challenged by a scientific “object” that begins to move and transform into a political “subject”. Vulnerable to demands that are increasingly heterogeneous, the ethnographer, whom at this time is almost exclusively male, accustomed to translating the “foreign” into the “familiar”, suffers a “crisis of representation” (Marcus & Fisher 1986) during which he loses the unidirectional focus of his research (Albert 1997).

The first consequence resulting from these mounting critiques “from the field” consist, ironically, in the expansion of the very “field” of study. Spurred on by the loss of its interpretative monopoly to emerging new actors, anthropology turns its sights onto more “local” contexts. The methodological importance of this move towards the study of so-called “complex societies” –not only the prototypical Western industrialized nation, but “all state organized societies, socially differentiated and frequently multi-ethnic” (Jensen 1995:3)-is found in its methodical impact. The perspective on otherness, on alterity begins to get decolonized from its original exoticizing contexts in order to be readapted as a methodical resource that de-essentializes the distinction between the “familiar” and the “foreign”. This distinction becomes a relative category that drives the opposition between *emic* and *etic* views².

1. By *reflexivity* we use Giddens’ definition of “the regular use of understanding over the circumstances of social life as a constitutive element over its organization and transformation” (1991:20)

2. For the debate between the dichotomy *emic/etic* and its origins, cfr. Narayan (1993), González Echeverría (2009) and Díaz Rada (2010).

The increasingly complex signifiers and readers of the anthropological field (Brettell 1993) instigate a “reduction of complexity” process on the part of the ethnographer. Since the end of the sixties and the beginning of the eighties, “ethnographic strategies” have been polarizing, on the one hand, down a slope dedicated to the testimonial narrative of the ethnographic experience and on the other hand, down another slope that pretends to be useful to the object-subjects whom it researches.

The “experimental ethnography” (Marcus & Cushman 1982) devoid of the political demands set by its “objects of study” centers on decolonizing not fieldwork as it were, nor its external asymmetrical conditioners, but rather its position as a backdrop to the ethnographic narrative. The new job of an anthropology that is self-proclaimed “post-modern” (Marcus 1995) consists in deconstructing and revealing the conventional ethnographic genres as rhetorical narratives whose function is only to convince us “of having really ‘been there’, one way or another” (Geertz 1989:14). In order to overcome this kind of “asseverational prose and literary innocence” (Geertz 1989:34), the focus of attention is on the fieldwork itself in a quasi-testimonial style, in order to substitute the usual “analogous” narrative for a “dialogical” discourse (Tedlock 1979).

In the re-implantation of ethnography as a dialogue testimonial, fieldwork limits itself as a self-reflexive hermeneutic enterprise against the experience of the other (Crapanzano 1977, Marcus & Cushman 1982). The classical mode of participant observation is reinterpreted as a “dialectic between experience and interpretation” (Clifford 1983) and figures as a “utopia of plural authorship” (1983:140) in the ethnographic narrative. Here we see the methodological limits of the “aesthetic turn” that seeks to create an experimental anthropology: even its proponents concede that as much as the narrative results in being dialogical, the relationships in the field are far from symmetrical (Dwyer 1979). As a result, due to these asymmetries in external “reality”, its proclivity for self-reflection can transform into “self-obsession” (Kearney 1996).

In order to avoid the politics that could surface in field-work, the author-ethnographers end up limiting their academic audience to the reader-ethnographers. By means of this strategy, experimental anthropology resolves its crisis of ethnographic representation, transforming itself into an academic self-referential field. Instead of making the “authority” of the ethnographer relative—characteristic of the history of anthropology from its inception (Clifford 1983)—the result is a strengthening and immunizing effect against any critique outside of the academy (Grimshaw & Hart 1994). Therefore, while the narrative of the ethnographic experience becomes increasingly sophisticated, the practice of fieldwork is

increasingly invalidated: “If the focus is upon the experience of the ethnographer, the native may enquire why ethnography should serve as an exotic accompaniment to the psychotherapy of the Western self” (Kuper 1994:543).

As a result of this critique which is frequently echoed by “Southern” anthropologists (Gordon 1991) from previously colonized countries, some proponents of the experimental wave have reacted by changing their “field” and object of study. In moving the ethnographic work to one’s own society or even one’s own social class, the need to “‘give a voice’ to subjugated or marginalized” groups is abated (Rabinow 1985). And yet, the effort to seek refuge in less compromising and more benign terms and “objects” does not in any way do away with the asymmetrical character of field relationships. Such relationships can only be redefined if the anthropologist “positions” herself in one form or another face to face with the demands of and “obligations” to the object-subject of study³.

Empowering through ethnography?

Reflecting upon this premise, the opposite side to literary experimentation and anthropological style insists on the need to decolonize not only ethnographic representation but also the manner in which the so-called “imperialist domination” (Harrison 1991b) has been acquiring and utilizing knowledge through anthropology since its nineteenth century origins (Smith 1999). Given that anthropological work has since been political due to *antonomasia*, “liberation anthropology” (Huizer 1979a) then goes against both the self-referential voluntarism of the experimental wave as well as the focus on “humanitarian conservationism” (Bodley 1981) that predominates in the applied anthropology of development aid politics. Contrary to experimental ethnography which shrinks away from drawing implications “in the field”, liberation anthropology, on the other hand, opts to make those same implications its central focus. Ethnographic fieldwork is re-conceptualized and explicitly utilized as political activism: “An emphasis on activism-on the instrumentalization of liberating intellectual production-is the crucial feature on which separates a merely decolonized anthropology from an anthropology of liberation” (Gordon 1991:155).

In order to transform participant observation into a kind of *militant participation*, the methodology utilized by this wave reabsorbs and com-

3. Cfr. Grimshaw & Hart (1994), Hale (2006a) y Leyva & Speed (2008).

bines elements of two different foci from separate origins, and intertwines them in practice: the “sociological intervention”, on the one hand, and the “participative investigative-action” (PIA), on the other. Given that activist-anthropologists will always look to collaborate closely with a specific social and/or political movement, they often revert to the method of “sociological intervention” developed by Touraine (1981) for research and academic support of new social movements. Although Touraine insists that his methodological theory is designed to prove “theoretical hypothesis” and not to “unite with the movement” (1981:144), in practice the researcher continuously ends up wavering between this “clinical attitude” of external observation and a “missionary attitude” of actively supporting—like a “midwife”—the emergence or consolidation of the movement she studies.

The second methodological focus that in more general terms postulates a liberation anthropology, comes from a pedagogical atmosphere and more concretely from the education of adults within the context of socioeconomic marginalization in countries of the Third World. The “education of the masses”, developed by Freire (1973) which promotes educating people on the causes of their marginalization and their capacity for liberation, should result in social movements capable of impacting the structural conditions that generate said marginalization (Bengoa 1988). Thus, a pedagogical-political methodology that speaks to the “class consciousness” of the marginalized is needed (Jara 1989).

Similarly, the PIA⁴ methodology requires not only a direct taking of sides, but a prolonged militancy in a specific group that one wishes to mobilize (Huizer 1979b). This mobilization is carried out through “awareness surveys” and group “self-diagnostics” (Schutter 1986), meant to develop and support leaders for future social and/or political movements (Jara 1989). Here we see the main problem that surfaces in this type of methodology, at least in terms of how it is expressing itself in the “first generation” of experiences with its application on militant research projects: in said projects, the direction of the intended change was many times determined in an external manner, since it was the external educator-anthropologist whom, as a western “expert”, imparted strategic knowledge unto his target audience. Ironically, liberation pedagogy as well as liberation anthropology depended upon the persistence of a colonial situation in its field relationships: even though the focus was to put the research “at the service of suppressed groups and classes, subjugated and exploited” (Mies 1984:12), the militant-researcher could

4. Cfr. Fals Borda (1988), Villasante (2006, 2007), Rappaport (2005), Rappaport & Ramos Pacho (2005) and Vasco Uribe (2007).

never disavow his external privileged origin nor his protagonist role of “assessor” in order to be useful. As evidenced by the outcome of many movements and organizations led by external assessor-researchers in the classic decades of the sixties and eighties at the height of the PIA (cf. Dietz 1999), the supposed transfer of knowledge either does not come to fruition at all or is only embodied as a knee-jerk reaction given the circumstances of the moment, during which the group maintains its dependency upon the assessor.

The frequently proposed solution found in the methodology of participation to this persistent colonial situation consists of substituting the external anthropologist for a native anthropologist from the given group. Revisiting models of feminist research, in which the asymmetrical relationship in the field is “corrected” with the variable of “woman” shared between the mobilizer-researcher and the mobilized-researched person (Mies 1984), there is an attempt to decolonize the continuous asymmetry between the ethnographic subject and ethnographic object in anthropological work by partaking in the “organic cohesion” that exists between the minority-anthropologist and the minority-subject-object of study⁵.

This attempt to compare a supposed “native” anthropology to the decolonization of the anthropological discipline, however, fails to acknowledge the proper (neo)colonial origins of the protagonists in this new anthropology. As I have argued elsewhere in the case of the purhépecha (Dietz 1999), the growth of a native *intelligentsia per se* does not lead to the unraveling of a process of decolonization. The *indigenosness* practiced in various Latin American countries—that from its inception resorts to anthropologists as the “voice” of the indigenous (Arizpe 1988)—generates an indigenous elite charged with promoting and prolonging an *indirect rule* over his communities. Consequently, the increasingly more vigorous “southern anthropologies” that are developing in countries previously colonized are not by definition counter-hegemonic nor can they be conceptualized as necessarily opposed to “northern anthropology”, within the contexts in which the anthropological sciences were originally instituted and disciplined.⁶

The notion of substituting the “personal” protagonist in the discipline-changing the foraging anthropologists for native anthropologists—results in newly simplifying and essentializing the “objects” of research and with them the basic concepts of anthropology: so enters the “Indigenous-anthropologist” specializing in researching “the indigenous”. The stra-

5. Cfr. for details Harrison (1991b), Smith (1999), Rappaport and Ramos Pacho (2005), Hale (2006a) and Leyva and Speed (2008).

6. Cfr. Krotz (1997, 2005) and Restrepo & Escobar (2004).

tegy of “empowerment”, of supporting subaltern groups, marginalized or simply culturally differentiated to accelerate their process of “decolonization”, runs the risk of falling into a trap of ethnocentrism. Before identifying the group marked for said empowerment, it is necessary to analyze the existing unequal distribution of power, in the first instance, within the marked group, on the second instance, between the group and its surrounding community, and lastly, between the group being researched and the protagonist of said research.

Towards a double reflexivity

In order for a “decolonizing and decolonized anthropology” to grow (Harrison 1991a), it is vital to break from the blatant acceptance of asymmetrical and dialectical relationships that exist on varying levels (Dietz 2009):

- between the researcher-as-person, the science-as-institution and the research group, such as with the society or societies-of the north or south-that constitute the socio-political frame that defines the relationships between these three variables (Antweiler 1986, Krotz 2005);
- between the subject researcher, research subject and the aforementioned surrounding structures that condition and “objectify” in a dialectical form the inter-subjective relationship of the field (Leyva & Speed 2008);
- between the research as is and its varying signifiers and audiences, that interact like “validation communities” (Kvale 1996) and the application of scientific knowledge;
- between Western and hegemonic anthropological knowledge, centered on the subject that carries out the research, and other forms of counter-hegemonic knowledge, centered on research subjects (Escobar 1992, 1993, Restrepo & Escobar 2004);
- and, consequently, between the *etic* focus-necessarily incomplete, that only reflects an external view and the structure of the researched phenomenon-and an *emic* focus-also incomplete, centered on an internal view and the action of the same phenomenon.

In an attempt to overcome both the self-referential reductionism of experimental anthropology as well as the reactionary simplification of liberation anthropology, we propose a methodological strategy that is necessarily hybridized that maintains the complexity of the aforementioned asymmetrical relationships. The work of all critical and self-critical anthropology, the “transcendence of the inherent dualism of subject and object” (Scholte 1981:160), does not amount to negating the differences and inequalities—in our case—between the external anthropologist and the group researched, on the one hand, and the public and indigenous leaders, on the other. Given the situational and intentional nature of the different understandings that come together in this “ethnographic encounter”, it is vital to stand before the social subject whom is the object of study and spell out the “normative dimension” (Scholte 1981) of the anthropological work itself against that which is supposedly “free from judgment” (Thomas 1993, Hale 2006a).

While postmodern ethnography only cultivates the reflexivity of the author-anthropologist and its possible academic audience, liberation anthropology dedicates itself solely to generating self-reflexive social actors that result in social movements, positioning itself face to face with the research subject and thus formulating a part of what we here argue are two different reflexive processes. The social actor, on the one hand, that constantly reflects upon his everyday activities, and the meta-everyday activity of the social investigator, on the other hand, interacting in a “double hermeneutic”:

The sociologist due to his training has pre-conceived ideas about social phenomena. The condition in order to “enter” into his field-site is to come to know what he already knows—and has to know—he must act and “be with” the everyday activities of a social life. The concepts invented by sociological observers are “second order” because they assume certain conceptual capacities of the actors whose behavior they study. But in the nature of social science there can be “first order” concepts if they are drawn from those who appropriate the same social life. What is “hermeneutic” in this double hermeneutic? The accurateness of the term derives from the process of double translation or comprehension that is involved (Giddens 1995: 310).

The growing penetration of scientific knowledge into the world of contemporary life disseminates anthropological knowledge not only in the Western societies whom generated the discipline, but also in the nascent national societies of the south and within the groups researched by anthropology. In this context, the “identity politics” of actual social movements find, in the appropriation or re-appropriation of scientific understanding, an avenue to strengthen group identity (Dietz 2009). In studies of new

indigenous movements, this self-reflexivity of the social actor⁷ has to be faced and taken on by the designated anthropologist. Nevertheless, as this commitment with the actor studied does not imply full identification with his/her objectives, the task of a “double hermeneutics” broadens the study of the actor to include the uses that this actor makes of anthropological knowledge (Albert 1997, Plows 2008).

The resulting ethnographic praxis proposed here is not limited to an aesthetic introspection nor a mobilizing externalization. Depending on the reciprocal negotiation between academic and political interests, it is possible to create a “novel mixture of theory and practice” (Escobar 1993:386) that translates into grades of empirical investigation, academic theorization and transference to political praxis. This transference is not simply an act of awareness, but rather it constitutes an exchange between the two forms of aforementioned understandings: between the knowledge generated in the “first order” by the “experts” in their own point of view, and the anthropological knowledge generated in the “second order” by the academic “expert”. Any possible contradiction that results from the exchange of both perspectives should be integrated by the ethnographer in the same process of investigation, which will oscillate dialectically between identification and distancing, between grades of complete agreement and grades of analytical reflection. The inter-subjective and dialectical relationship that surfaces from this type of “doubly reflexive anthropology” (Dietz 2009) between the subject researcher and the researched actor-subject, maintained from the dialogical interviews and discussion groups to the “inter-knowledgeable” and or “inter-learning” forums (Bertely 2007), of inspiration and debate between activists and academics, generates a continuous and reciprocal critical and self-critical process between either party. This gives way to a double reflexivity, that oscillates between *emic* and *etic* roles, between actor-activist and observer-companion perspectives, that continually challenges the conceptualizations and “implicit theories” of either type of participant. The result is a still emerging, but fruitful “inter-theorization” between the academic-companion gaze and the activist gaze, both equally self-reflexive. As such, this type of dialectic-reflexive research regarding social reality is, in turn, its critic, with which the same ethnographic relationship is converted into political praxis⁸.

7. We leave aside here the debate concerning modern nature, “post-modern” or “late-modern” of the reflexivity of the social actor, while Giddens (1991) and Cohen & Arato (1992) insist on the novelty of the phenomenon, characteristic of a post-traditional society, Escobar (1992) also claims that auto-reflexivity is also present in social movements of the Third World that can, with some difficulty, be classified as post-modern or post-traditional.

8. Cfr. Giddens (1995), Rappaport (2005), Hale (2006a) y Hernández Castillo (2006).

A heuristic model

The recognition of cultural diversity, the development of culturally relevant educational programs and interculturality (by which we mean the capacity to translate and negotiate from positions of complex expressions and links of cultural praxis and pedagogies that respond to underlying logics, like a new way of establishing relationships between cultural, linguistic, and ethnically diverse groups) all conform to the party line of an emerging anthropology of interculturality (Dietz 2009). In this sense, we are developing a collaborative research project that goes along with the processes of education, investigation, and community cohesiveness that in the past five years we have been developing in a new program at the Veracruz Intercultural University⁹. This methodological and ethnographic partnership is yielding a three dimensional process in which the participating actors conceive of interculturality:

- an “inter-cultural” dimension, centered on the complex expressions and sequences of cultural praxis and pedagogies that respond to different cultural logics, such as the communal culture of shared Mesoamerican roots, threatened and suppressed by various waves of globalized colonization, yet still persistent in the regions of the Intercultural University; the organizational culture of the social movements that justify the cultural and/or biological diversity of said regions; and the Western academic culture-amidst a transformation from a rigid, monological, “industrial” and “fordist” paradigm of higher education to one that is more flexible, dialogical, “postindustrial” or “postfordist”, like what is found in contemporary university reforms;
- an “inter-actor” dimension, that values and takes advantage of the norms and channels of negotiations and mutual transference of knowledge between participating academics of the Intercultural UV, that constitute anthropological, pedagogical, sociological, linguistic, historical, agrobiological understandings etc., which are generated in Western epistemic canons; the activists of Indigenous organizations and the NGOs present in those regions, that contribute professional knowledge, contextual and strategic, such as the experts or local leaders, “wise men” and “natural leaders” that hold collective memories, local and contextualized knowledge

9. This program of decentralization and interculturality of higher education is implemented in 4 indigenous regions in the state of Veracruz, Mexico; for details about this program and our project, cf. Dietz (2008) and Mateos Cortés (2009).

about the cultural and biological diversity of their immediate habitat;

- and an “inter-lingual” dimension, that-reflecting the great ethno-linguistic diversity that characterizes the indigenous regions of Veracruz-goes beyond the ancient bilingual focus of classical indigenism and utilizes the competencies, not substantial, but relational that make translation between diverse linguistic and cultural horizons possible; this inter-lingual focus does not pretend to “multilingualize” the set of educational programs from the Intercultural UV, but rather it centers on the development of said communicative and translational competencies of the alumna and professors present in each of the regions.

Given the aforementioned focus on a doubly-reflexive ethnography, we maintain that ethnography cannot be reduced neither to a mere instrument fanning the methods and techniques of the social sciences nor to the simple weapon of liberation on the part of the oppressed. Surpassing the dilemma between academe-be it of positivist or postmodern origins- and transformationism-conservative, integrative, or empowering-we propose to conceive of ethnography and its systematic oscillation between an *emic* and *etic* focus-internal and external-of social reality, as a reflexive discipline that recovers the narrative of the researched social actor from within, and that at the same time contrasts it with its respective habitualized praxis from without. In the case of “co-labor” with social movements, NGOs and/or educational institutions, however, this linking of discourse and praxis occur in contexts that are highly institutionalized and hierarchized.

Consequently, in order to avoid defaulting to simple reductionism and, in a worst case scenario, apologetics, a reflexive ethnography developed in intercultural situations will necessarily enlarge the analytical horizon of these discursive and practical dimensions towards a third axis of analysis: the specific structural institutions, the product of the role that inequalities play, the hegemonies and power asymmetries in the identity politics of the actor in question and his structural context. We present an accompanying tri-dimensional ethnographic model (Dietz 2009):

- a) a “semantic” dimension, centered on the actor, whose identity discourse is retold-with the use of ethnographic interviews-from an *emic* perspective and analyzed in accordance to its ethnic strategies;

- b) a “pragmatic” dimension, centered on modes of interaction, whose praxis is studied—principally in terms of participant observation—from an *etic* perspective and analyzed in accordance both with its intracultural *habitus* as well as intercultural competencies
- c) a “syntactic” dimension, centered on the institutions that articulate both identity discourses as well as interaction practices, and which is analyzed and condensed in terms of the classics, epistemological windows (Werner & Schoepfle 1987) of fieldwork research, i.e. the contradictions that surface when contrasting ethnographic information of the *emic* type versus the *etic*; said contradictions should be interpreted not as mere incongruities in data, but rather as those “coherent inconsistencies” (Verlot 1999a) that reflect the specific logic of the nation-state represented by the analyzed institution.

In a more illustrative form, the proposed methodology is laid out in Figure 1. Linking the different inter-cultural, inter-lingual, and inter-actor dimensions with this tri-dimensional and reflexive methodology. We are in essence contrasting the *emic* and *etic* focus of the participating actors in terms of the aforementioned workshop-forums. With this, we pursue objectives that are classically “empowering” of the (future) indigenous professionals and their creators as well as “transecting” objectives of key competencies that they would require for their professional and organizational output.

SEMANTIC DIMENSION	PRAGMATIC DIMENSION	SYNTACTIC DIMENSION
Centered on the actor	Centered on the interaction	Centered on the institution
Identity, ethnicity	Culture (intra-cultural/inter-cultural)	Organizational entity/ institutional
= discourse	= praxis	= social structure
Ethnographic interviews	Participant observation	Intercultural workshops/ forums
= emic	= etic	= emic/etic (“epistemological windows”)

FIGURE 1: Dimensions of a reflexive ethnographic methodology (dietz 2009).

Conclusions:

Towards an anthropology of interculturality

The official position as to the right and place of culture in higher education carries with it an intense debate not only concerning whether there is a need to create new “indigenous” and/or “intercultural” universities, but also over the challenge of generating new professional profiles in a dialogical and negotiated manner for these novel institutions and their corresponding new research methodologies. The conventional profiles and professional disciplines created in Western universities do not offer professional fields that speak to the needs of the indigenous youth, but rather have promoted either explicitly or implicitly the emigration and assimilation to urban and mestizo niche areas of work. As such, the new professional profiles with which pilot-projects such as the Intercultural University of Veracruz is experimenting with must respond to a double challenge which institutions of higher learning have yet to face: the challenge of developing flexible, interdisciplinary and professional careers that can also be locally and regionally rooted, useful and pertinent not only for students but also for their communities.

Currently there is a new generation of carriers and articulators of knowledge both academic and communal, equally indigenous and Western, whom in a very near future will have to appropriate their role as “translators” that gesture, apply and generate understandings from diverse worlds, asymmetrical and often antagonistic, but ever more firmly entwined. We maintain that the doubly reflexive ethnography that we offer and illustrate in this article offers us methodological clues to combine the necessary dialogical and collaborative orientation of our research in accordance with the actors and social movements which also necessarily carry the critical and transformative baggage of the practices of these actors, their organizational plans and their institutional place (cfr. Hernández Castillo 2006).

A reflexive ethnography that includes a view towards the syntax of the structures of power thus contributes by accompanying the actors in their agendas of mobilization and discursive claims, but also in an experiential interaction and practical transformation, that situates them in a very heterogeneous manner between cultures, between knowledges and between powers. In the long term with this partnership it is essential to avoid reproducing essentialized notions of diversity and interculturality which could end up reiterating old classifications and ethnic hierarchies of “us” versus “them”. From this ethnographic view, diversity as analytical tool and, at the same time, as a proposed program has to begin

by recognizing and critically deciphering the slope of different collective identities, as well as their demands and discursive claims.

However, on second thought, these identities have to be contextualized with respect to the relationships and asymmetries of power in their most extensive forms and contrasted in their inter-relationships, interactions and mutual involvements. The resulting tensions and contradictions—for example, between the generalized identity signifiers vs. ethnifiers—are a font for analyzing the continuous contemporary processes of identification and heterogeneity (Krüger-Potratz 2005). The aforementioned processes can only be analyzed in their multifaceted state if we manage to distinguish in each moment three distinct, but complementary, analytical bases, that when combined form a multidimensional analysis of identities and diversities—i.e. an anthropology of interculturality that links and integrates the concepts of inequality, difference, and diversity (cf. Figure 2):

- Historically, the focus on inequality, centered on the “vertical analysis” of stratifications namely in terms of socioeconomics (Marxist class theory and class conflict), and generics (feminist critique on patriarchy), has resulted in educational responses that are compensatory and frequently assimilating where they identify the origin of the inequality in terms of handicaps and what is lacking with respect to the dominant population. It deals, in a sense, with a universalist focus that reflects its strong foundations both theoretically as well as pragmatically in a habitus that is monolingual and monocultural (Gogolin 1994), classic in the Western tradition of the Nation-state and of “their” social sciences.
- The focus on difference, on the contrary, imparted by the new social movements of “identity politics” specifically, has generated an “horizontal analysis” of the differences in ethnicity, culture, gender, age, and generational differences, sexual orientations and/or (in)capacity, promoting a kind of segregated empowerment of each of the aforementioned minorities. As a result, this incurs a particularist and multicultural focus that on more than a few occasions results in ignoring and/or avoiding socioeconomic inequalities and structural conditions (García Castaño/Granados Martínez/Pulido Moyano 1999).
- Finally, the focus on diversity surfaces as a result of both the critique of assimilative multiculturalism as well as of the multiculturalism that essentializes differences. In contrast to the aforemen-

tioned foci, this focus is part of the plural character. It is multi-situated, contextual and because of this, necessarily a hybrid of cultural identities, ethnicities, classes, gender, etc. that articulate every individual and every collectivity. The corresponding strategic analysis is intercultural, i.e. relational, transversal and “inter-sectional”, having an emphasis on the interaction between the heterogeneous dimensions of identity (Dietz 2009).

While the focus on difference is represented in our proposed ethnography in a semantic dimension, centered on the emic discourses of the very actors we study, the emphasis on diversity corresponds to a pragmatic dimension, focused on the everyday interaction between these actors, observable from an etic point of view; finally, their linking by a syntactic view towards the emic-etic contradictions, that reveal underlying structures, concur with the perspective centered on the inequality and the asymmetries of power. As such, this methodological and conceptual proposal generates a complementary ethnographic gaze towards the contemporary phenomena of interculturality.

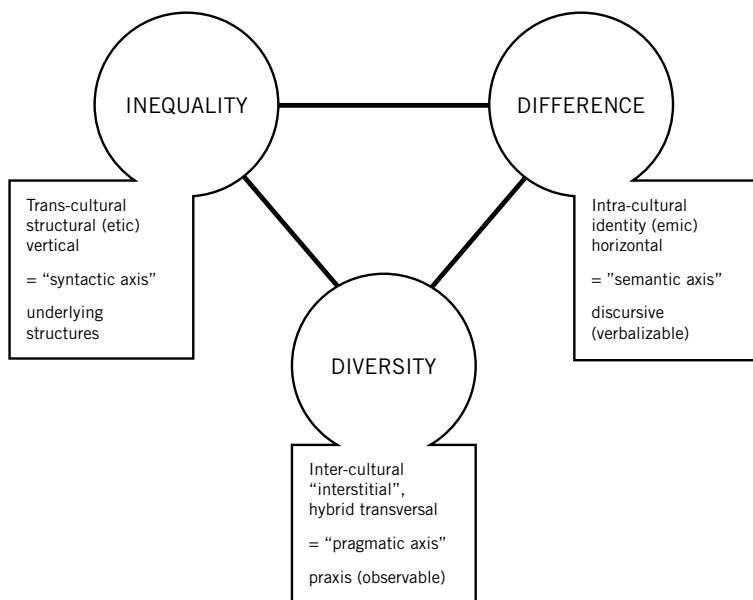


Figure 2: Inequality, difference, and diversity (dietz 2009)

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