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THEMATIC SECTION: EXPERIENCES OF
ALTERNATIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

Does Brazil Observe Indigenous Peoples' Right to Higher Education? Demand, supply and alternative initiatives in São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Amazonas

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ABSTRACT – Does Brazil Observe Indigenous Peoples' Right to Higher Education? Demand, supply and alternative initiatives in São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Amazonas. This article addresses the indigenous demand for higher education in Brazil, a right desired but not recognized by law and public opinion. Interpreting it in the light of a universal right to lifelong education, and under a decolonial take guided by contemporary indigenous intellectual protagonism, we trace an exploratory panorama of higher education opportunities for indigenous populations in São Gabriel da Cachoeira (northwest Brazilian Amazon) and describe two teacher training courses with alternative practices. The access of indigenous people poses incipient tension to mainstream university models, even though the supply, confirming our hypothesis, does not correspond to the demographic and political relevance of the indigenous peoples' demand.
Keywords: **Higher Education. Right to Education. Indigenous Schooling. Decoloniality. Interculturality.**

RESUMO – O Brasil Respeita o Direito dos Povos Indígenas à Educação Superior? Demanda, oferta e ensaios alternativos em São Gabriel da Cachoeira/AM. Abordamos a reivindicação indígena por educação superior no Brasil, um direito ambicionado mas de reconhecimento ausente na lei e na opinião pública. Interpretando essa demanda à luz do direito humano à educação ao longo da vida e na perspectiva da descolonização orientada pelo protagonismo intelectual indígena contemporâneo, traçamos um panorama exploratório das oportunidades de educação superior em São

Gabriel da Cachoeira (noroeste amazônico), detendo-nos sobre duas licenciaturas que ensaiam modelos alternativos. Apontamos como o acesso de indígenas gradualmente tensiona a universidade hegemônica, ainda que a oferta, confirmando nossa hipótese, não esteja à altura da significância demográfica e política da demanda dos povos originários.
Palavras-chave: **Educação Superior. Direito à Educação. Educação Escolar Indígena. Decolonialidade. Interculturalidade.**

UMBEUSAWA MIRIM – Brasil Urespetari Upitasuka sá Maku Tayara Tayunbueramã Turusu? Tapurandusa, mayewasa tawa supe[1]. Yambeusara kua maku tapurandu sa takuasa rese turusuwa Brasil upé, tarikuwa direito mã tiwa yamã lei upé. Kua yaputaisa yande direito mira ita yakuasawa maye aiku maye yamanduari yande makuita kuiri wara ita, yamukamem maita uiku akuasa turusuwa ike tawa upé (noroeste amazônico), mukui licenciatura resewara aikue ike. Yamukamem maita maku ita tawike merupi universidade takiti amu rupi waitate tiwa tamunhã maye yande maku ita yaputaiwa yawe.
Yupinimã sá: **Turusuwa Ukuasa. Yapuderisá Yayunbué. Educação Escolar Indígena. Amúrupisa. Interculturalidade.**

WEREKAHSARO – Brasil Di'tá Wiôpehsa Yã'ti Po'terikharã Naã Bu'emhʉãnʉkãsere? Naã ʉa'sé, naã bu'esé, naã bu'ewãkatisé Yãpã wi'í khãse[2]. A'tore u'kuno po'teri khãra naã bu'emhʉãnʉkãse khãsere a'ti Brasil di'tare, naã ʉhpʉtʉ ʉa'se ni'sa mheõ duhtiri pũrĩpʉ thonikã mahsãre tʉo'kãre yã'mahsĩ heõnʉ'kõña marĩse ni'kã. Thonikãre mahsʉ̃ kʉ'ʉ̃ kahtiro põteorõ bu'ewãkãmahsĩse khãsere thonikã naã poterikhãrã bahsi bu'emhʉãnʉkã tʉo'mahsĩ duhtimhʉãkãsere yõ'kãre, a'te pahka bu'ese licenciatura wãmetisere yã'kahsano Yãpã wi'ípʉre pehkasãye poterikhãrãye merã mi'põtoekõ bue'wãkasere. A'tiro naã yã'kahsanʉko wekãre, po'terikhãra pahkase bu'emhʉanʉkã werã a'te pahkase buese wi'íseripʉre diásaro wa'kã wesamã naã u'kũ nʉ'kãhase, naã mahsã ku'rari mahsĩse sã'tisa.
Ni'buhtiasé: **Bu'emhʉãnʉkãse. Ni'petirã Bu'e Mahsisãma. Educação Escolar Indígena. Duhtinʉkãhasé. Interculturalidade.**

HATHAMETSA – Brasil Itañeeta Namakaa Nhaa Nawikinai Ikadzeetaakakhetti Nako Naikanami Dalipheena? Lipirikanaa, liodzawaaka nakadaali, nawali matsiadali phaa nalhio Hiipanako, AM[3]. Wakapa lhie namakaa nhaaha nawikinai ikadzeekatakakhettiapani naka naikanamidali pheenawahipaiteriko, naamakaa tha,metsa karoka naakeeta naanhekani lipirikanaaliko lhiehe ittalikanattiapani riko. Nakaiteka linako lhiapepe matsiadalikani nalhio nhaa nawikinai ikadzeekataakakhettiriko lidoromeka neemaka, wadee namakadawalitaka lhiehe neemakaa,nanhekaa nheette nawapiñeetakaa oophittetsa. Wadzeekata apada wakapakaro ikadzeekataakakhetti rikhitte nakaanamidalipheena Hiipanako, nanakhitte nhaaha dzamada licenciatura kadzoperiaha naamakapidzo. Nattaitakaro nakadzeekataakakawa nhaaha nawikinai hanipapheena namakapidzo nanheekherikhittetsa, likathinaatakaro phaa yaanhekhetti kanakaidali phaa nheette lipirikanaa kadzo nanheekadzo.
Yaakottinai kanakaiperi: **Ikadzeetaakakhetti Nako Naikanami Dalipheena. Naamakaa Ikadzeekataakakhetti. Educação Escolar Indígena. Karokaro Apaana Ipiiriri Nanako. Interculturalidade.**

The line of work that gives rise to this text is dedicated to addressing the following root problem: Do the contemporary experiments of Brazilian indigenous peoples in the field of formal education overcome the colonialist character of the schooling historically imposed on indigenous people in Brazil? The motto of overcoming the colonial paradigms – and the queries about the best, or the possible, ways to do it – can be heard since the 1970s in the very classrooms that were once implanted in the indigenous lands as a spearhead of the Portuguese (and then Brazilian) colonization enterprise. Since those years, a movement of appropriation and re-creation of schools by collectives of indigenous teachers and leaders took force, supported by civil society allies, facing continuous adversity, limitations, and contradictions, but also originating a body of practice and thought with a potential to confront the core of the conventional schooling model more strongly. In the line of research on Indigenous School Education of Ceunir (the *University Center for Research in Educational Innovation, Reform and Change of the School of Education, University of São Paulo)* – in whose broader program these reflections are inserted – we have examined daring experiments towards effecting community school management (Abbonizio, 2013), taking into consideration indigenous languages, customs and calendars (Vieira, 2018), making school knowledge compatible with endogenous aspirations for the future (Ghanem; Abbonizio, 2012; Pellegrini, 2014), affirming communities' autonomy in the face of homogenizing state bureaucracies (Pellegrini et al., 2019; Pellegrini; Ghanem; Góes Neto, 2020), and renovating pedagogical and epistemological practices, especially in view of the progressive occupation of teaching and (incipiently) management posts by the indigenous thinkers themselves.

Having this accumulation as our reference point, the present exploration extends to the field of higher education in Brazil our investigation on indigenous peoples' efforts towards decolonizing school practices. We substantiate the defense of an indigenous learners' and collectives' right to access meaningful and relevant opportunities for professional training and advanced studies, and gather useful elements to ask, in an Amazonian context, the question: how is this right being fulfilled?

Is there a right of indigenous peoples to higher education?

While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights posits that "Everyone has the right to education", it prescribes only for "the elementary and fundamental stages" that it should be of free and general provision. If the availability of educational opportunities is a necessary condition to the observance of this human right, the concept of a universal right seems not to extend to higher education, as, for this level, the Declaration recommends only that it shall be accessible on non-discriminatory bases, but not that it should be made "generally available", as should basic and technical levels. Even though, more recently, the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990) and the interna-

tional documents that followed all endorsed the perspective by which education begins at birth and lasts throughout life, this principle has not yet been fully absorbed by international law, nor is it sedimented in public opinion. Brazilian national legislation echoes this conceptual limitation, and does not include the acknowledgment of access to higher studies being a part of the realization of the right to education[4].

Such a debate is carried out by McCowan (2015), for whom the validity of a right can be a moral question that does not depend on (and may precede) legal recognition. The conceiving of a right to higher education as being, within those premises, covered (among other advanced study options) by the human right to lifelong education can be a provocative position, since it reframes the justification for any access criteria (apart from minimum requirements) to arbitrarily limited sets of places[5], and raises questions about adequate correspondence of the supply to pertinent traits, needs and purposes of all learners.

In terms of access, such a reframing shifts the focus of efforts in public management towards the conception of systems with a greatly diverse and widely available offering, flexible in size and operation, so as to expand or contract following the oscillations of the number of people who wish to attend (McCowan, 2015, p. 179). Regarding pertinence, it calls for the acknowledgment that the mere existence of places does not fulfill the right to education, as it requires educational opportunities to be suitable not only in "availability" (sufficient places) and "accessibility" (admission and attendance under non-discriminatory mechanisms), but also in the "acceptability" of relevant and respectful curricula, and "adaptability" of pedagogical, managerial and institutional practices in accordance with the learners' needs. These four criteria – proposed as indicators of the observance of the human right to education by Katarina Tomasevski (2004) – pose the crucial question of *who* the learners are, and how they formulate their own educational needs.

These considerations take place against a backdrop of accelerated global expansion of higher education enrolment rates (Schofer; Meyer, 2005), however conditioned, within national scenarios, to local inequalities, leaving behind the most peripheral regions and disempowered social groups. In Brazil, as in wider Latin American realities, issues of unequal access and adequacy are even more acute with respect to indigenous peoples. This is also because, even after the formal independence of the countries in the region, coloniality as an epistemological frame was not eliminated, defining still the life of institutions, social relations, education, science, and thought.

Decolonial theorists shed light on this reality, proposing the operation of a crucial "decolonial turn" in Latin American thought (Ballestrin, 2013). Amid those authors' contributions, the discussion of pertinent higher education access for indigenous people might draw on Catherine Walsh's suggestion of a "critical" take on the concept of interculturality (Walsh, 2012), conferring centrality to the unveiling of racism as an organizer of meaning under coloniality, and thus overcoming

the limited conceptions of symmetry or intercultural neutrality that seem to be implicit in notions such as "tolerance" or "multiculturalism", in search for more intellectually subversive guidelines for the task of decolonizing "power, knowledge, being, and living". In demanding for thorough epistemological symmetry, this take poses precisely the challenge of admitting the very limit of the non-indigenous enunciation of practical options, however radical they might aim to be: the learners and intellectuals "on the other side" of intercultural dialogue increasingly speak for themselves and steer the continuously needed criticism of coloniality, in higher education as in other areas. Francineia Fontes, an anthropologist from the Baniwa people, ponders:

> The indigenous presence in universities is a subject that generates many discussions and studies, raising 'hopes' in several areas of knowledge. The indigenous intellectual tradition of seeing, thinking, organizing, perceiving the world, relating, grasping changes in time and society, is the reverse of the knowledge policy at the university, as it is anchored in another epistemology that is not the one we learn in conventional schools and universities. Like science, indigenous knowledge systems are complex, with cosmology and cosmopolitics as the conducting wires. They are transmitted in an organized way as theories of knowledge in their specific space and time. Yet, despite the load of knowledge learned within our societies, we indigenous students, in the universe of universities, are often treated as subjects with a 'blank slate', always at the apprentices' side, lacking concepts and without an epistemology of our own (Fontes, 2019, p. 222-223, free translation).

By interpreting the indigenous demand for higher studies in light of the intersection of premises retraced so far, and thus describing and assessing the local offer of higher education courses in São Gabriel da Cachoeira (located in the Upper Rio Negro basin, north-western Brazilian Amazon, and known as "the most indigenous city in Brazil"), we intend to contribute to the expansion of knowledge about contemporary indigenous peoples' conquering of access to tertiary education places, and their consequent contribution to gradually challenging the hegemonic models of university.

Why address this research question?

The presence of Ceunir in São Gabriel dates back to 2008, mainly conducting educational research[6] involving indigenous basic schools. The succession of works in the region has taken the form of a broader research program, based on the aforementioned fundamental problem of self-directed overcoming of coloniality in schooling among indigenous peoples. Fieldwork is carried out mainly in communities in the indigenous lands, many days away by boat from the urban area. Localities there have achieved reasonable coverage of state-funded, state-managed[7] intercultural basic schools, but remain physically and symboli-

cally distant from local sources of information about universities and other advanced study options. Nevertheless, residents' demands for higher education opportunities for their children who go to school or have freshly graduated are recurrent and strong.

Feeling the need to initiate an exploratory approach to regional scenarios concerning higher education, we set out to gather information for an initial characterization of local supply. We expected to find a landscape with insufficient advanced educational opportunities in comparison to the size, quality, intensity and peculiarities of local demand, with a high predominance (as in other Brazilian regions) of teacher training courses among the options offered. We also assumed we could detect marginal although promising initiatives towards alternative models of action in higher education, as would be the incorporation of innovative educational practices and more radically intercultural epistemological frameworks.

If the 2015-2016 student protests in South African university campuses made unpostponable the agenda for the decolonization of curricular proposals, pedagogical practices, and knowledge conceptions in higher education worldwide, the challenging fulfillment of this task across different local contexts[8] demands the composition of multiple repertoires of empirical research and reflection. An examination of mobilizations towards the indigenous appropriation of higher education in São Gabriel aims to problematize and inform attempts to respect the right of these groups to higher education at the regional and national level, while also contributing with efforts in the same direction that are present in many other countries.

Do indigenous people want to go to university? Brazil and Upper Rio Negro scenarios

São Gabriel da Cachoeira is located 852 km from the state capital, Manaus, on the left bank of the Negro river, the largest tributary of the Amazon. In its upper course, the Negro river basin is covered by extensive and contiguous demarcated indigenous lands, which in São Gabriel alone represent 80% of the 109,000 km^2 municipal territory. This is one of the Brazilian cities with the largest proportion of indigenous population, from 23 ethnic groups, speaking 19 languages from 4 linguistic trunks (Cabalzar; Ricardo, 2006). Among the non-indigenous, most are traders, military personnel, and civil servants, living with their families in the urban core. But even this zone is largely inhabited by indigenous people, who make up more than 76% of the total 46,000 municipal residents (IBGE, 2020). About half of this number live in over 700 communities scattered throughout the forest, mostly along the banks of rivers, but also in deep-forest settlements connected to the main fluvial courses by extensive networks of trails.

Yet, being called "the most indigenous city in Brazil" comes not only from a demographic profile but from the striking traits of what Amerindian Ethnology names as the Upper Rio Negro region, a complex

regional system (Ribeiro, 1995) by which the aforementioned variety of peoples configures refined networks of relationships and exchanges (cultural, economic, matrimonial, linguistic, ecological, social, cosmological) whose ancestry in terms of "lineages, elaborated intellectual and sacerdotal traditions, explicit formulations of hierarchy, [and] complex architecture" was at the basis of a suggestion by Stephen Hugh-Jones for the use of the concept of "Amazonian civilizations" (Lasmar; Gordon, 2015).

São Gabriel da Cachoeira operates as a micro-regional capital for the dwellers of the indigenous lands, as for those of urban and indigenous zones of the two adjacent municipalities, Barcelos and Santa Isabel do Rio Negro, also comprised in the upper Negro basin. There, some of the most vigorous indigenous rights' movements in Brazil were formed[9], participating in the struggles to inscribe those rights in the 1988 Constitution[10].

Land demarcation and better living conditions followed. Existing basic schools, once controlled by churches and State tutelage organs, were issued to the responsibility of local governments, and legally bound to respect cultural diversity and community decisions. This required the increasing professional development and certification of indigenous teachers, often resorting to in-service training. Thus, the pressure for specific access to higher education in this context arises even before there are significant contingents of indigenous people who have completed compulsory basic schooling: it was motivated by the need to qualify indigenous teachers in order to develop autonomous, intercultural schooling projects, along with conceiving comprehensive future projects with their peoples. This was not a singular scenario at the time: the same situation was recurrent in several other Brazilian regions that, since the 1970s, saw the emergence of the first intercultural indigenous teacher training courses, *licenciaturas interculturais indígenas*.

However, on the Upper Rio Negro, this access did not start as a result of planned institutional actions, but due to circumstantial factors. It was only through the personal initiative of two professors that the first options were brought to the city, as an advisor from the indigenous movement at the time reported:

> The first two degrees that were made available to São Gabriel da Cachoeira for higher education, this was in the late 80s, [early] 90s, and they were Philosophy and Mathematics. Why these two? Because the professors of the Philosophy and of the Mathematics departments were the ones willing to travel to São Gabriel da Cachoeira: just because of that. I know, because I attended all the meetings. [...] So the indigenous leaders took these first two courses that took place. The [...] director of FOIRN took Mathematics, then [another leader] took Philosophy... Anyway, it was these two[11].

These were courses offered in stages, obeying the annual schedules for the displacement of teachers from the headquarters of the

Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), in Manaus, to São Gabriel da Cachoeira. This format, where itinerant teaching teams carry out the course in stages that take place in smaller cities or in the indigenous lands, was later consolidated in the exemplary experiences of the University of the State of Mato Grosso (UNEMAT) from 2001 onwards. It established itself as a strong outline of intercultural training for indigenous teachers, and prevailed among the possibilities for indigenous access to higher education.

Souza (2003, p. 41) found that, in 2003, 75% of indigenous students in higher education were in courses linked to the teaching area, whether "differentiated" or regular. The author explains this predominance by stating that "teacher training is an old demand of indigenous peoples" (authors' translation).

Alongside this modality of access, indigenous individuals continued to take the initiative to compete for general vacancies, and managed to obtain the resources to fund their studies on their own. According to Lima and Barroso (2013, p. 75), the National Indian Foundation estimated the number of indigenous people enroled in higher education in 2004 at around 1,300, generally in "very dubious quality" for-profit higher education institutions (p. 64).

Despite these exceptions – teachers, and few individual pioneers in other areas – access to higher education remained in general distant to indigenous peoples. Larger scale advances in this field only came in the decade of 2000, whether by the creation of intercultural courses in areas other than teaching or by the wider inclusion of indigenous people in the already existent tertiary education places (Estudantes..., 2018)[12]. A milestone was the approval of Law n. 13,134/2001 in the State of Paraná, a nationally pioneering case of direct allocation of university places for indigenous people, widely examined in the work organized by Amaral, Fraga and Rodrigues (2016).

In 2012, Law 12,711 (known as "Lei de Cotas") obliged federal universities to reserve places for indigenous and black people, in proportion to the number of people of each ethnic classification residing in the state where the campus is located. In 2013, the Brazilian Ministry of Education estimated at 8,000 the number of indigenous people attending higher education, and registered 26 active intercultural teacher training courses.

Since this period, new laws instituted affirmative action in federal universities, which included specific admission processes for indigenous people and public funding calls for the implementation of intercultural degrees. However, these provisions stood in place for only a short period of time, preceding the recent inauguration of more anti-indigenous governments in the country. The number of indigenous students enroled in undergraduate courses has multiplied at a fast pace in those years, reaching more than 56,000 in 2019 – however maintaining regional inequalities and, recently, tending to stabilization[13].

Seeking to preserve and extend these incipient achievements, both the creation of differentiated courses and the access to regular courses

are claimed by indigenous movements as complementary paths to attaining the strategic purpose of forming an "indigenous *intelligentsia*" (Lima, 2013), with adequate intercultural development.

Establishing a demand for higher education in São Gabriel

The vast majority of the approximately 250 basic education establishments in São Gabriel da Cachoeira are indigenous schools located in the demarcated lands (while the minority are the units in the urban area, less than 10%). In 2018, basic level enrolments totaled 16,833.

In 2010, among residents aged 10 and over, 4,384 people had an elementary education degree and 4,354 had completed secondary school, adding up to 31% of those in this age range. Only 740 residents had higher-level degrees. These schooling rates, dated from 10 years ago, have not been updated since, due to the federal government's decision not to carry out the 2020 Population Census. There are strong indications that these numbers have grown significantly in the last decade: more recent data from school administrations attest, for instance, the jump from 1,194 people enrolled in the 16 secondary schools in 2017 to 2,707 enroled in 2018 (Azevedo; Souza, 2020; INEP, 2018).The decision not to carry out the 2020 Census contributed to the invisibility of the strong current demographic growth of the indigenous population in Brazilian territory, of over 800,000 individuals in 2010, having passed by now the 1,000,000-mark (Corte…, 2021). The ten-year historical series that allowed the detection and analysis of this evolution, including the increase in years of study, were interrupted. Indigenous peoples in Brazil have today broad-based age pyramids, reflecting a rapid demographic recovery that began in the 1970s (after centuries of extermination and population depletion) and has intensified since the 1980s, resulting in demographic profiles in which up to 50% of the population is under 18 years old. The horizon, therefore, is one of increasing pressure for access to higher education by populations that grow in absolute numbers and will need qualified personnel for autonomous, creative territorial management under growing anthropic pressure on their environments[14].

Attention to the future of the territories and younger generations is often mobilized as an argument in favor of the strong requests for study opportunities. This is illustrated by the insistent, vehement calls we received on the subject of admission to universities, during our visits (2018-2020) to schools and communities of the Baniwa and Koripako people of the Içana River, an important affluent of the Negro, as seen in these field notes:

> [A father of a student] asked if there was a plan for the entry of "youth from the villages in universities" and if USP, for example, could come to the village: "maybe an extension course in Rio Negro? Or do we propose for young people to go there [to São Paulo]?".
>
> [A teacher] asked how he can make students go to university in São Paulo. I replied that, first, they have to study to pass the exam. The captain [...] and the elder [...] were present throughout the meeting.

> [A teacher speaks:] "[...] we need public policies to train [people] at universities and bring them here. For example, health".
>
> [A teacher speaks:] "I want to continue studying at the university, in São Paulo or Manaus. Last September, in São Gabriel, I took an entrance exam for Unicamp. [It was] the dry river season, you can't go down alone. [It is] distant, you need to buy 50 liters of gasoline".
>
> [A graduate from the school] said that she finished high school in 2017, has children, is married, and wants to get a job and improve her way of living with others. She said it was difficult to own resources to live and travel to other locations: "There would have to be a course in the nearby communities for me to continue my studies".

Other situations showed this remarkable appreciation for the subject. In 2019, a conversation was added to the schedule previously agreed with the community called Canadá, in the Içana's tributary Ayari River, about the options available that year for university studies in São Gabriel and cities further away, and the ways of preparing for the entrance exams. In the same year, the teaching teams in four localities signed letters requiring special indigenous admission to the University of São Paulo's School of Education graduate program. In 2020, groups of young people and their families prepared documents addressed to the presidency of the same university demanding measures for an indigenous entrance exam.

The existence of local opportunities is particularly important because these peoples live in remote areas, requiring arduous travel to reach even the urban core of São Gabriel. Lima and Barroso (2013) highlighted these displacements as a recurring situation, often over interstate distances and involving entire families.

Besides geographic and demographic features, local peculiarities concerning educational demand also relate to indigenous groups' histories, needs, preferences, and intentions. An alternative project which came to be conceived in the Upper Rio Negro through a six-year process tried to model higher-level degrees that answered to those aspects, but it was never carried out, due to the discontinuing of negotiations on the part of the federal government. As it was to be funded by the Ministries of Education and Technology, but managed by the indigenous representatives and partner organizations, the proposal – tentatively called by several names, mainly *Instituto dos Conhecimentos Indígenas e Pesquisa do Rio Negro* (Rio Negro Institute of Indigenous Knowledge and Research) and, afterward, simply *Universidade Indígena do Rio Negro*, UIRN (Rio Negro Indigenous University) – was described by McCowan (2016, p. 212-214) as the exemplar case for a "liminal" institutional solution in higher education offer, the type seeking to reconcile the advantages of official recognition and stable funding, enjoyed by experiences located "within the mainstream system", with those of autonomy and local relevance, that distinguish initiatives that made the "exodus from the mainstream".

Even though the dramatic changes in the Brazilian political scenario since 2015 impeded the creation of the Rio Negro Indigenous

University, the detailed state of its planning, based on a regional participatory process between 2009 and 2014, bequeathed bold guidelines describing a regional demand for higher education, intensely informed by the region's earlier experience in experimenting with intercultural, autonomous basic schooling projects throughout the demarcated lands' communities.

Collective decisions were compiled in the form of two brief lists: "What do we want" and "What we do not want". According to the document, they wanted "autonomous" higher education, with wide regional coverage, allowing graduates to work in their own communities in order to improve living conditions and manage local resources in a sustainable manner; also balanced intercultural dialogue and combination of indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge; interdisciplinary, research-centered learning; open and flexible institutional design; micro-regional suitable calendars; partnership and exchanges with conventional universities; official certification; attention to the areas of education, health, and environment. What they didn't want were bureaucratic structures; monolingual courses with a predominance of "scientific knowledge;" replication of recurrent higher education courses; and competing with other alternatives for indigenous access, such as intercultural degrees and specific entrance exams[15].

Can an indigenous person go to university in São Gabriel da Cachoeira?

How has the demand exposed so far been met? Although Mato (2015, p. 36-37) proposed other classification angles for the broad Latin American scenario, we examine here the common distribution by which recent Brazilian literature identifies the three modalities that the presence of indigenous people in higher education has assumed in the country:

> a) Legal, administrative and political devices for the inclusion of individuals, or "affirmative action": quotas for existing vacancies or additional vacancies in regular courses, accessible by specific admission exams and accompanied by scholarship programs and student-support policies. The entrance of indigenous students in the higher education institutions occurs with few adaptations, but their presence causes the micro-challenging of hegemonic formats.
>
> b) Intercultural courses in the form of special programs at existing universities, generally following the pioneering and still predominant model of intercultural teacher training, including: community or student influence in their design and operation; intercultural and interdisciplinary curricular proposals, commonly research-based, project-based, theme-based, or problem-based; modular calendars, suited to local seasonalities; faculty members with intercultural sensitivity and a respectful, flexible attitude; and institutional formats "carried out within the mainstream

system", like the courses in the first modality – but stimulating more innovation and causing a greater deal of disruption to the model. In this format, courses in areas other than teacher training are still rare: good examples come from the Insikiran Institute for Higher Indigenous Training, active since 2001 at the Federal University of Roraima, which offers three intercultural degrees (in addition to Teacher Training, there are courses on Indigenous Territorial Management and Management in Indigenous Collective Health).

c) Indigenous institutes or universities, ideated and managed by indigenous collectives with the support of allies, either adopting "liminal" formats in respect to the higher education system, such as the Forest University[16] and the Rio Negro Indigenous University did, or radically apart from this system, as did the Intercultural Indigenous University of Maracanã Village, in Rio de Janeiro (McCowan, 2016, p. 208-209). They have so far shown fragile prospects of survival, which does not diminish the importance of assessing the learnings, derived materials, and mobilization legacies left by these "instructive failures"[17], nor reduces the pertinence of future new initiatives.

Even in the first modality, without directly proposing alternative models, we claim the indigenous presence in the university has ripple effects which cumulatively press to "advance in transformations of universities and other conventional HEIs towards the incorporation of knowledge, languages, teachers, and students from indigenous peoples (which is often called the *interculturalization of higher education*)" (Mato, 2015, p. 36, free translation). The advancing of different solutions for promoting access of indigenous people to undergraduate and graduate[18] courses in Brazil, as well as their incipient admission to teaching and management positions, have led to innovative pedagogical experiments, and changes in some circumscribed administrative aspects. Oliveira (2020) reports how, in Amajari, Roraima (Brazilian Amazon, 750 km northeast of São Gabriel), the mere receiving of the city-resident Macuxi young people into the facilities and institutional sphere of the Federal Institute of Education led to initial revisions of common use areas, management procedures, knowledge practices, and personal relations. Measures taken by sensitive staff under the imperative of respecting and supporting indigenous students' particularities in order to complete their degrees progressively challenge colonial continuities marking the university model.

Adopting therefore the double attitude of sustaining audacious goals at the same time as valuing small tactical advances, we move on to the consideration of the information found on the availability of higher education to indigenous populations in São Gabriel da Cachoeira.

Higher education opportunities in São Gabriel: official and institutional data

The data sought directly from higher education institutions, and the official data curated by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP), both proved difficult to access and validate.

In 2017 and 2018, we contacted the two public universities that were present in São Gabriel da Cachoeira: the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM) and the Amazonas State University (UEA). The responses from UEA informed of four courses: Bachelor in Physical Education, started in 2015; Teaching Degree in Portuguese Language and Teaching Degree in Biological Science, both started in 2016; and Technologist in Commercial Management, started in 2017. They opened 40 annual places each. Only the Biological Science teaching degree was a face-to-face course, carried out in modules.

We have the anecdotal indication of the subsequent increase in the offer of courses by this institution, including the expansion of face-to-face, modular options. We also had repeated notice that UEA had already hosted other initiatives aimed at training teachers, through the National Plan for the Training of Basic Education Teachers (Parfor, led by the Ministry of Education), certifying many of the teachers of Spanish, Mathematics, Arts, Philosophy, etc. who currently work in basic schools.

As for UFAM, the responses at the time only indicated the degree called *Licenciatura Indígena Políticas Educacionais e Desenvolvimento Sustentável* (Indigenous Teacher Training on Educational Policies and Sustainable Development). But our field information also records the existence of the program *Licenciatura Formação de Professores Indígenas* (Indigenous Teachers Training Degree), a format that UFAM has operated since 2007 in other regions of Amazonas state, and brought to São Gabriel in 2015.

We did not obtain any data other than these from the administration of the two university institutions, despite requests for detail on the number and profile of students, as on curricula and discipline programs, minimum activity loads, languages of instruction, actors involved in design and governance, and alumni professional destinations.

Looking for complementation from official sources, we found that the most recent government microdata (INEP, 2021) inform the existence in 2019 of eight higher-level courses based in São Gabriel, supposedly five of which are teacher training ones. Two are named as "intercultural indigenous" programs, but those are not the aforementioned two, since course names and providing institutions do not match: the first is nonspecifically called "Licenciatura Intercultural Indígena"[19], the second is an Intercultural Indigenous Pedagogy course offered by UEA[20]. The other three teacher training courses are Mathematics, Portuguese Language, and Biological Science, also provided by UEA. Aside from these, there is a bachelor's degree in Dentistry at a private for-prof-

it institution and two UEA technologist courses, in Public Management and Commercial Management. The data set displays a record of 494 enrolments in 2019 but reports no enrolments and no admissions for most of the courses listed that year while concentrating 428 of the total enrolments in the private Dentistry course.

Either official data or information provided by the institutions themselves are not entirely consistent with our direct observation, which points to a slight expansion of options in recent years in terms of areas and careers. The meager data allow us, however, to portray the narrowness of available opportunities, as was hypothesized, with little variety of modalities offered and (given the discontinuation of UIRN as a promising counter-hegemonic initiative, furthest from the mainstream standards) the existence of alternative options only of the kind inscribed in conventional institutional models.

Moreover, the territorial dispersion measures that make the arrival of these courses in the city of São Gabriel administratively viable are highly dependent on circumstantial arrangements, and on fluctuations in personnel and financial resources, weaknesses coinciding with those of the federal policies that once boosted indigenous teacher training courses. The arrival of a new course in town does not guarantee, for the years following, the continuous opening of new classes. The prevailing modalities offered consist of non-intercultural, distance learning courses, or modular face-to-face ones obeying the itinerant calendars of teaching staff around several advanced campuses throughout the state of Amazonas. As a result of this high fluctuation in the existing higher education opportunities at any given time, the trajectory of indigenous people willing to study at this educational level ends up being primarily determined not by career plans and choices but rather by the opportunities available at the moment, seen as possibilities to take advantage of. Some of those aspects will be illustrated by interviews with students and former students.

According to an analysis drawing on Tomasevski's criteria for assessing the observance of the right to education, this is a panorama of low availability of courses in number and diversity (with important challenges consistently pointed out in respect to access, as seen below).

However, we did have information, through our acquaintance with many basic school teachers, about alternative initiatives occurring within the two indigenous teacher training courses held by UFAM. In fact, the interviews indicated that they harbor more tendentially innovative and intercultural practices which, although timid, result in significant or high rates of adaptability and acceptability on the part of indigenous students and alumni, as is also explored below. Those could be initial steps towards more subversive appropriations of higher education by the Upper Rio Negro indigenous teachers and intellectuals.

Can the intercultural teacher training courses foster alternative models?

The two teacher training degrees then present in São Gabriel that adhered to the models of Brazilian *licenciaturas interculturais indígenas* (community design and governance, innovative curricula, modular calendars, respect for native languages, interculturally sensitive faculty members, and attempts on greater managerial flexibility) were the Indigenous Teacher Training on Educational Policies and Sustainable Development (*Licenciatura Indígena Políticas Educacionais e Desenvolvimento Sustentável*), offered by UFAM's Institute of Philosophy, Humanities and Social Sciences, IFCHS; and the Indigenous Teachers Training Degree (*Licenciatura Formação de Professores Indígenas*), held by UFAM's Faculty of Education, FACED.

The FACED course (with only one class so far, 2015-2021) took place in the urban core, while the IFCHS course (two classes completed, 2009-2013 and 2014-2018 for the Baniwa hub, with little variation in years for the other two hubs) took place in three "territorial-linguistic hubs" (Baniwa, Tukano, and Yẽgatu[21]) within the indigenous territories.

They both sought to maintain maximum access conditions for students, taking into account geographic and social peculiarities, with funding for transportation and meals, lending of equipment, and some scholarships offered – although achieving limited and intermittent solutions, within the existing resources. For the interviewees, the absence of these conditions in the other course options was a determining reason for their choice to study in these ones.

They thought the content met their needs, except for a vehement observation from the interviewee who graduated the longest time ago, who misses having studied "subjects from the regular degree courses" in addition to the local-themed, research-based curriculum. Respondents also reported the usage of understandable languages and teaching methods.

Both courses, even with distinct linguistic policies, fostered practices that valued native languages, including regular or frequent translation of the explanations that the lecturers gave in Portuguese, in a system by which the bilingual students took turns. Evaluation procedures were considered adequate by the interviewees, transcending the restriction of the usual focus on final measurements of how much information was retained. Flexible and respectful attitudes were reported on the part of the non-indigenous teaching staffs towards the local context, an opinion thus summarized: "In view of this ethnic and linguistic plurality, for teachers, it was a challenge in which they did as much as possible to pass on information, changing teaching methodologies and adapting to the needs of the class".

Indigenous Teacher Training on Educational Policies and Sustainable Development

In our fieldwork in 2018, a teacher who graduated from this course had already stated that the course offered by IFCHS was "one of the achievements of the indigenous movement to value traditional knowledge". Indeed, the initiative was marked since the beginning by the influence of community associations, forming an Advisory and Deliberative University Council for the Course, composed of FOIRN, UFAM, National Indian Foundation, Municipal and State Education Departments, student representatives of the Baniwa, Tukano, and Yẽgatu classes, indigenous coordinators of each class, traditional leaders, and teaching representatives (Curso…, 2021).

The two graduates interviewed, both young men from the Baniwa people, respectively members of the first and second class (the only ones so far, as the third class was selected but never started activities), informed that the operation was in stages, always during school holidays (January and July), in order to accommodate the professional calendars of a majority of students who already taught. However, one interviewee considered the duration of the stages insufficient for the topics studied.

The course activities were simultaneously held in three linguistic-territorial hub communities, planned to cover together the extensive indigenous lands of the region. Respondents reported that, in the Baniwa hub (in Tunuí Cachoeira, Içana River) the stages were sometimes transferred to a nearby community, in order to facilitate fluvial transportation during drought periods. Even so, the course still remained far from the communities of origin of certain students, one interviewee said, since those are dispersed over such a large area.

The distribution in hub communities brings unequivocal advantages of familiarity and socialization, and favors the frequency of those who could not afford (or would fear facing) long stays in the city. As a disadvantage, it brings the little opportunity for training Portuguese and learning the non-indigenous world in general, which is also expected. Moreover, infrastructure was precarious, as villages lack internet and electricity (the latter usually depends on diesel-fuelled electric generators, running a few hours a day, usually at nightfall). Computer equipment and training were not provided, even if the activities required its handling. Teachers brought printed material, also creating and printing some on site. Food was provided, but not housing. Those who came from other villages were accommodated at the school, at the church, in empty houses, or by family members.

Portuguese was used alongside each hub's language, and systematic oral translation was performed by self-organized bilingual students[22]. Production in native languages, including videos[23], didactic materials, and research papers, was highly encouraged. Yet, certain students still had difficulty speaking, understanding, and writing in Portuguese, which the interviewees pointed out as a reason for some of their colleagues' wanting to quit.

An innovative "*currículo pós-feito*" scheme was used, by which the actual curricula were retrospectively compiled, after being progressively defined and carried out with each class. The themes were thus chosen from each class's pool of interests, instead of the unilateral, preconceived definition by course organizers, and then approached in terms of "problematics". Evaluation methods were deemed compatible with this perspective, comprising students' self-evaluation. A faculty member informs (Sem aula…, 2019) that the committees judging the students' final work included "indigenous scholars" alongside conventional academics, and such presentations could be held in the students' mother tongues – both consistent measures with the welcoming and valuing of indigenous perspectives and knowledge.

Both respondents considered their course experience satisfactory. They informed positive results in self-esteem, community and family recognition, peer interaction, improvement of professional practice, fun, satisfaction, and usefulness of contributions to their communities[24]. Both mentioned possibilities of placement in the job market, while noting (in one case) how the absence of conventional disciplines limited chances of employment and prevented the enjoyment of their possible contributions to professional practice.

Indigenous Teacher Training Degree

The FACED course was coordinated by one of the pioneering indigenous professors at the university[25]. We interviewed two female students, from the Baré and Tukano peoples, who attended the only class opened so far (2015-2021), although in distinct specializing areas: "Exact and Biological Science", and "Literature and Arts". According to one interviewee, there was an "Implementation Seminar" before classes started in 2015 in which indigenous leaders, government representatives, the course coordination, and partnering institutions participated. The group pledged to look for ways to meet the students' needs and minimize difficulties in studying and attendance.

Classes also followed a modular calendar but, unlike in the IFCHS course, stages were held in the urban area, in facilities lent by the Federal Institute of Education of Amazonas (IFAM). This location favored the many indigenous people who live in town, while still attracting some of those who live in distant communities. As IFAM is not located in the commercial center, the city Department of Education provided transportation by bus. IFAM offered accommodation as well, but an interviewee claimed students preferred to stay with relatives or in rented housing. There was a budget for meals at the beginning, interrupted due to funding cuts. The students were able to use a laptop and a printer, also lent by IFAM. Teachers would provide study handouts for each subject.

Stages were scheduled according to the variable itinerancy calendars of the teaching staff, and the start date of each module was com-

municated with little time in advance, posing obstacles for students who worked in basic schools: they needed to find and pay replacements to cover them when the course weeks coincided with the working hours of the schools where they taught. Classes were in Portuguese, but presentations were often made in indigenous tongues and then translated since linguistic diversity was prominent. Students felt freedom and encouragement to express themselves both in Portuguese and in their mother tongue. A student who speaks only Portuguese said she at first had difficulty communicating, which was soon overcome.

> We did not work with an indigenous language only and specifically, because the group is made up of different peoples (Tukano, Tariano, Piratapuia, Baré, Baniwa, Kubeo, Tuyuka, Werekena, Wanano, Karapanã, Ye'bá-mahsã, Dessano) and the languages mastered in the class are Tukano, Baniwa, Yẽgatu, Tuyuka, Kubeo, and the national language [Portuguese] (Interview with student).

Evaluation procedures were carried out by teachers and students alike at the end of each stage, and included giving opinions on "logistics, content, course coordination, whether culture was valued, whether the studied contents provided community improvement, and making suggestions", revealing concern with some of the aspects that we have been calling here "adaptability" and "acceptability". The final work of one student registered and analyzed activities she and a colleague performed in a public primary education school in town, involving the planning of pedagogical strategies for manipulating local art and natural objects – seeds, baskets, and small wooden oars – as concrete materials in basic math learning among indigenous children.

Significances of the two experiences

In terms of institutional form, the courses described fall into the type of alternative experiences whose format remains "within the mainstream system", insofar as, having been created as special programs at regular universities, they are funded by the federal or the state government and operate within their institutional frameworks. However, public funds destined to indigenous degrees in Brazil, in addition to being insufficient, have not solidified into stable or lasting funding lines, being usually allocated through discontinuous public calls (as is the case for at least one of these two courses) and thus remaining highly dependent on the national political situation – which increasingly adheres to neoliberal guidelines of reducing State presence, and gives growing space to regressive forces with an explicit anti-indigenous program.

The courses' staff and students hence sustain continuous struggles in internal and external institutional spheres to keep each of their innovative visions alive in the face of the "centripetal forces" (McCowan, 2016, p. 217) through which bureaucratic standards and established pedagogical cultures exert pressure to drag these practices back to the "norm".

The IFCHS course faces threats to its very continuation. Its second class completed its activities in 2018 but students are still awaiting the issuance of diplomas since the adoption of a "*pós-feito*" curriculum for each territorial-linguistic hub generated unforeseen incompatibility between the study records and standard certification procedures. The third class, in turn, was enroled in early 2019 but never started, as federal funding was interrupted and the university was unable to absorb the program's costs in its ordinary budget (Sem aula…, 2019).

Both courses include forms of indigenous participation in the formulation or implementation of their proposals and reveal the impetus to innovate on aspects such as valuing conviviality and devising broader, more pertinent modes of evaluation that overcome the excessively limited scope of this concept in the context of schools (Ghanem, 2006).

In both cases, the courses sought to confront pillars of the established model for higher education: scientific knowledge delegitimizing traditional and experiential knowledge; fixed curricula, concentrating in canonical, supposedly universal knowledge; authoritative pedagogy excessively based on verbal delivery of information; academic degree as an exclusive criterion of expertise; exclusive focus on teaching, with disregard for personal and community learning needs; extensive hours and fixed schedules; homogenizing bureaucracies, that ignore logistical peculiarities and local preferences. The high status given to indigenous languages and knowledge indicates a willingness to establish more symmetrical inter-epistemological practices.

Shortcomings can be compared with those from other contexts that also grapple with challenges such as the insufficiency or ambiguity of merely adding "indigenous themes" to the curricula[26]; or the unpreparedness felt by teaching and managing staff when conceiving and operationalizing educational innovations and a decolonial pedagogy[27]. In the experience of the intercultural courses in São Gabriel, the desire of teachers to find practical ways of realizing these horizons is detected, and great acceptance is found, by students and communities, of the experimental proposals that emerge in this sense.

Other existing opportunities: private for-profit schools, moving to another city

The interest of the Upper Rio Negro population in higher education does not go unnoticed by the large commercial education conglomerates[28]. Unip (Universidade Paulista) opened a subsidiary in São Gabriel da Cachoeira, offering a large list of semi-presential and distance-learning courses with relatively affordable tuition.

Public institutions have also taken other measures. Attesting to the effective local demand for admission to their courses, the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar) and the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), both located more than 3,200 km away, began in 2019 to conduct admission tests for indigenous people in the urban area of

São Gabriel. That year, 487 candidates applied there for the UFSCar Indigenous Exams – astounding 41% of the national total of indigenous candidates, while all the other 59% indigenous candidates in the country had to concentrate in the capitals Manaus (283 candidates), Recife (246), or São Paulo (167) to take the test (UFSCar, 2019).

Alongside these initiatives, leaving the city in order to pursue further studies[29] is also a possibility. While a Baniwa teacher who had graduated in Brasilia was celebrated in 2012 as pertaining to the pioneering generation, in the following years more young people won places in federal universities under the Quota Law, moving temporarily to cities all over the country. Lately, the local exams for the admission of indigenous people in UFSCar and Unicamp have established a small annual flow of such exits.

Meanwhile, in view of the quantitative insufficiency of the policies implemented, those study trajectories entirely based on networks of solidarity and high personal effort, which initially prevailed in the 1970s, remained common to this day: in 2018, we met in São Paulo a Baniwa man from a very remote community in the Içana basin, that had come on his own to study Nursing at a for-profit college, with some support from the Catholic Church. He brought his wife and daughter, and together they worked to partially cover the 4-year stay in the city, where they had their second child.

Conclusions

What is the best format for fulfilling the indigenous right to access higher education? Although they still sum up to very few vacancies, the existing opportunities vary crucially in form. Attendance to a course taught locally in stages in the villages or very close to them, or immersion in the environment of the bigger cities' university campuses (whether participating in special intercultural programs or occupying regular vacancies through special admission processes), or else the individual search for admission and attendance conditions to pursue conventional studies, not to mention participation in potential courses at autonomous indigenous universities, all imply very different and complementary objectives, paths, and results, corresponding to different and complementary needs, conditions, and purposes of indigenous peoples in Brazil for higher education. The panorama in São Gabriel, which in these aspects is emblematic of the broader national realities, reaffirms the demand for a wide and varied offer, essential for the full realization of the indigenous people's right to this level of studies, and for the meeting of the collective educational aspirations posed by their movements and representative bodies.

The expressive potential and manifest indigenous demand for higher education in the Upper Rio Negro was interpreted within the frame of a human right founded upon its lifelong intrinsic value and accentuated by its strategic instrumental importance for disadvantaged groups. Given this demand, the exploratory panorama of local avail-

ability of higher education indicates that it was narrow, annually fluctuating, and incompatible with the size, quality, intensity, peculiarity, and cultural and political significance of the regional indigenous demand for this level of studies. Nevertheless, the incipient acceptance of native peoples' agendas and the initial presence of indigenous students in higher education institutions had the potential to unbalance crystallized modes of conception and operation. The information collected confirmed the assumption that teacher training courses prevail among the options available, whether conventional or specific. Within the latter, circumscribed initiatives of intercultural action, often clashing with standard procedures, provided practical bases on which to criticize and improve solutions aimed at the decolonization of higher studies.

The aforementioned collective demands compiled around the UIRN project appear far from being met by the provision described, specially the goals of reaching wide regional coverage and creating other degrees (besides teacher training) that allow graduates to work in the communities. Nonetheless, the efforts of the two UFAM *licenciaturas interculturais* towards the aims of practicing intercultural dialogue, combining indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge, instantiating interdisciplinary, research-centered learning, striving for more open and flexible institutional design, and including suitable micro-regional calendars, helped carve the path for future advances on these challenging tasks, especially in view of the long road still ahead in order for there to be what could be called an indigenous "autonomous higher education", a qualification repeatedly postulated in that compilation.

Coming from the same list of demands, the assertion about local indigenous associations not wanting their "specific" university to "replicate common courses" nor to "compete with other alternatives for indigenous access" is taken as an indication that those options are to be maintained as open possibilities, to be complemented and not replaced by the more intercultural ones that are demanded.

Partnering and exchanges with conventional universities, which are also requested in the compilation of demands, were already the reason that brought many higher education courses to the Upper Rio Negro so far, laying hence a promising perspective for conjoint planning, researching, reflection, and experimentation.

Indigenous leaders, as well as their supporters, have predominantly justified the demand of indigenous peoples for higher education based on its importance in training teachers able to promote endogenous basic schooling projects, as in qualifying leaders and professionals for autonomous territorial management and enunciation of collective projects, and in establishing more symmetrical relationships with the dominant cultural and epistemological matrices. In this sense, Lima (2013, p. 24) indicates that interculturally proficient indigenous intellectual generations have been recently forming through reconciling conventional university instruction with the learnings of intense activism in indigenous rights movements, seeking, in academia as in political disputes, to formulate analyses and solutions that root and ex-

pand concepts from within their own thought traditions. The relevant scientific and didactic production of indigenous teachers, leaders and researchers from the Upper Rio Negro, in areas such as education, anthropology, and linguistics, increasingly exemplifies this phenomenon, occurring in the general context of Brazilian and Latin-American indigenous groups. This endeavor calls for intellectual originality, for instance when it comes to the wielding of "scientific mechanisms and methods" by the indigenous thinkers themselves:

> To begin, we indigenous people have to be aware that the school and the university are not proper spaces for the production of indigenous thought and practices. As such, they will not train operators of indigenous thought, such as the shamans, these specialists [who] are vital to indigenous societies, having the role of producing, accumulating, transmitting, and disseminating knowledge to train new specialists. This is the case in the Upper Rio Negro region. On the other hand, the university can make it possible to think indigenous thought, insofar as scientific mechanisms and methods can serve as instruments to understand cosmologies and produce properly "native" concepts, enabling symmetrical dialogue between knowledge models. But for this to happen, it is necessary for us indigenous people to be very aware that simply entering university does not guarantee that our epistemology and ideas will be put on the agenda of the classroom and the graduate programs (Fontes, 2019, p. 223, free translation).

The slow fulfillment of the right of indigenous learners and collectives to higher education is thus dependent on pedagogic, managerial, and epistemological readjustment of the university models, at the same time as the lessons drawn from concrete experiences are conducive to this very reorientation, deepening indigenous thinkers' contributions to changing the ways of social and cultural relations in society at large. The viability of this project requires valuing, instead of domesticating, that which Fontes called the "transgressive" attitude on the part of indigenous students who enter university, aiming at self-directed translations and enunciations of native thought[30].

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Notes

1 Title and abstract translated into the Yẽgatu language by Maria do Rosário Piloto Martins.

2 Title and abstract translated into the Tukano language by Mirlene Costa Gentil.

3 Title and abstract translated into the Baniwa language by Eliane Claudio Guilherme.

4 Although the current Constitution affirms education as "the right of all and the duty of the State and the family" (article 205), it only discerns the implications of this State duty in the aspects of guaranteeing "compulsory and free

basic education from 4 (four) to 17 (seventeen) years of age". As for "the highest levels of education, research and artistic creation", the law only prescribes (also following the formula of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) that they are occupied "according to the capacity of each person", that is, by non-discriminatory criteria – but remaining compatible with vacancy restriction systems, thus not legally binding the State to assure the general availability of higher education opportunities for all.

5 For instance making affirmative action policies unnecessary, whose design, based on replacing the so-called "meritocratic discrimination" with "positive discrimination" in admission procedures, responds to the paradigm of a system with artificially limited amounts of places that must be somehow made accessible to few selected.

6 Along with what is locally known as *assessoria*: partnering with community-based associations, schools, and other such groups for advisory activities and conjoint intervention (in our case, around teaching and educational policy). During the 2018-2020 fieldtrips, those "advisory" activities included workshops with teaching groups, students, and community residents; collective elaboration of written documents of local interest; and publication of student research. Within this reciprocal collaboration, research-relevant information is also collected, including for this article.

7 The municipal government administers the levels of preschool and elementary school, while the state government of Amazonas manages the secondary school and the second stage of elementary school.

8 Ammon (2019) attests to some of those difficulties through the perspectives of staff and lecturers of the University of the Free State, in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

9 Today, over 90 grassroots indigenous associations in the region compose the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro (FOIRN).

10 Succeeding the constitutional norms of the civil-military dictatorial regime that ruled in Brazil between 1964 and 1985, the Constitution of 1988, at the time of its promulgation, became known as "the Citizen Constitution", for instituting "a Democratic State, destined to ensure the exercise of social and individual rights". Responding to the strong pressures exerted at the time by the indigenous movements and their supporters, it incorporated (in articles 231 and 232) the then unprecedented recognition of the original rights of indigenous peoples that inhabit the national territory since before the nation's foundation.

11 Personal communication, 4 February 2021.

12 Marginally, there were also initiatives to create "indigenous universities". Examples are the Universidade da Floresta (Forest University) experience, in Acre, whose ambitiously counter-hegemonic project started in 2006 but underwent gradual disfigurement, being absorbed as a regular advanced campus of UFAC, the Federal University of Acre (Albuquerque, 2015); and the Rio Negro Indigenous University, discussed below (McCowan, 2016).

13 The number of indigenous people enroled in higher education in Brazil grew 52.5% between 2015 (over 32,000 students) and the following year, reaching 49,000 in 2016. In 2017, the approximate number was 56,700. In 2019, the Higher Education Census registered 56,257 enrolments of indigenous students, representing 1.5% of national enrolments (in the same year, the gross enrolment rate in higher education in Brazil was 37.4%, according to INEP, 2020). Yet, the

state of Amazonas, with an indigenous population of around 170,000, had only 3,803 indigenous enrolments in higher education in 2019, while the state of São Paulo, with an absolute indigenous population four times smaller (around 42,000), in 2019 had twice as much: 7,657 enrolments. The figures come from INEP (2021), Estudantes (2018), and Tokarina (2019). It is estimated that there are currently around 1.3 million indigenous people in Brazil (Corte…, 2021). In the 2010 Census, 896.9 thousand indigenous people were counted.

14 We thank Marta Azevedo for this relevant remark.

15 The information comes from the document "Relatório Formação Avançada Indígena do Rio Negro – 2013". (authored by FOIRN / Instituto Socioambiental), as cited in CGEE (2014, p. 5).

16 See note 12, above.

17 Carneiro da Cunha (2009, p. 13) on the Forest University experience, in which she was greatly involved.

18 For more on the indigenous people's access to post-graduation courses in Brazil, see Fiori et al (2017).

19 The consulted data attribute this course to the Federal Institute of Education of Amazonas (IFAM), but this school only offers secondary and technical level courses. Within an institutional partnership, IFAM lent its excellent facilities to the realization of UFAM's Licenciatura Formação de Professores Indígenas (Indigenous Teachers Training Degree) between 2015 and 2021, as will be seen below; and it is possible that this local arrangement generated the inaccurate official record.

20 In spite of the name leading to associate this degree with the model of the *licenciaturas interculturais indígenas* described above, the available online information depicts a rather standard teacher training course, with an emphasis on indigenous schooling legislation, participative school management, and cultural diversity, retaining no further similarities to the community-based, intercultural initiatives contained in that model.

21 More recently, a Yanomami hub began operating in Santa Isabel (Sem aula…, 2019).

22 Enforcing the language policy defined jointly with the communities, course documents and faculty members' appearances in the media state – perhaps in a somewhat political stance in favor of conferring epistemological symmetric legitimacy to native languages, rather than in an entirely descriptive assertion – that Tukano, Baniwa, and Yẽgatu were "the languages of instruction", although it seems the lecturers were almost all white and non-speakers of those languages.

23 The course has a YouTube channel displaying some of the students' audiovisual production, at https://www.youtube.com/user/licenciaturaindigena/.

24 Adhering to the rich interpretation that Torres (2011) gives to Tomasevski's four indicators, our questions focused on self-esteem, recognition, fun and achievement as aspects of the Acceptability dimension.

25 Gersem dos Santos Luciano, from the Baniwa people, born in São Gabriel and the city's former Secretary of Education, combined a remarkable academic career as a philosopher and anthropologist (Luciano, 2006, 2011) with a reputable trajectory as a leader in the indigenous movement, influencing

national indigenous schooling policies, and being vocal, also as a teacher and intellectual, for the strengthening of original indigenous thought, rooted in traditions and transgressing coloniality.

26 Gallois (2013) warns that distinct knowledge bodies have their own production, learning, and circulation regimes, often utterly incompatible with the crystallized school procedures; and Rodrigues Marqui and Boldrin Beltrame (2017) exemplify how the naive schooling of indigenous practices and content can bring them to a frontier where they become, so to speak, much less "indigenous" and much more "schooled".

27 Both difficulties were also found in the case examined by Ammon (2019).

28 For more on the increased privatization in Brazilian higher education, see for example Carvalho (2013).

29 In past generations, many of the first indigenous people who went to school before there were enough primary schools in the communities did so precisely by leaving their homes, sometimes very young, and staying for a few years in Iauaretê, São Gabriel, Manaus or Colombia, obtaining school instruction, working and buying objects, learning Portuguese, Yẽgatu and Spanish, and learning the ways of the non-indigenous. For an illustrative narrative, see Fontes, 2019, p. 22-24.

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