

---

Special issue: *Belonging and home-making in the internationalised campus*

Research article

# Narratives of home-making on a Colombian intercultural campus

Alexánder Ramírez Espinosa<sup>1,\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, University of Valle, Cali, Colombia

\* Correspondence: alexander.ramirez.espinosa@correounivalle.edu.co

Submission date: 31 October 2022; Acceptance date: 24 August 2023; Publication date:  
4 October 2023

## How to cite

Ramírez Espinosa, A. (2023) 'Narratives of home-making on a Colombian intercultural campus'. *London Review of Education*, 21 (1), 34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.21.1.34>.

## Peer review

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-anonymous peer-review process, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

## Copyright

2023, Alexánder Ramírez Espinosa. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.21.1.34>.

## Open access

*London Review of Education* is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

---

## Abstract

In an increasingly globalised society, the internationalisation of higher education has become a prime goal for many universities, which seek to promote the development of intercultural competencies and insert their actors in dynamics of academic cooperation, knowledge construction and negotiation of meanings in an environment of respect. What is sometimes overlooked, however, is the fact that university campuses are already intercultural spaces by nature, even in the absence of internationalisation initiatives; in other words, university campuses are places where diversity abounds, making it possible to experience intercultural encounters, leading to the development of intercultural competencies. This article presents the narratives of four students and their home-making experiences at a Colombian university. Through their stories, these students give us a glimpse of the intercultural challenges they face when they try to create a sense of belonging while developing, constraining or reaffirming their identities on campus. The article analyses the student narratives through the lenses of new materialism, social

semiotics, intersectionality and intercultural communication to understand the complexity of building a home with others amid diversity and, sometimes, adversity.

**Keywords** diversity; home-making; intercultural communication; narrative inquiry; new materialism; meaning-making

## Introduction

Colombia is a multilingual and multicultural country in Latin America that displays a rich and complex landscape of diversity: Indigenous, Black and *mestizo* (the word *mestizo* refers to the population of mixed race, especially the Colombians who have Spanish, African and Indigenous descent) communities cohabit a territory that includes more than 62 Indigenous languages, 2 Creole languages, Spanish as the official language and Colombian Sign Language. In addition, a recent peace agreement between the government and a guerrilla group has ushered in a post-conflict era in which political differences are more evident. Similarly, other phenomena, such as the migratory wave from neighbouring Venezuela and the struggle of minoritised communities for the recognition of their rights, make Colombia a melting pot that bubbles not only with colourful diversity, but also with a tendency to conflict. Against this background, the universities in Colombia, and especially the campuses of state-funded universities, offer a small-scale view of the wide and complexly diverse panorama of the country.

With this in mind, this article explores the experiences of four students from the University of Valle, in Cali, Colombia, and their narratives of home-making on campus. These participants are pre-service teachers or recently graduated foreign-language teachers who were, at some point, the author's students. The voices are those of an Indigenous student, a transgender male student, a blind student and a deaf student. Together they merge to expose the intercultural challenges they have overcome to develop their individual identities while engaging in processes of home-making and building a sense of belonging on campus. Here, the concept of home 'certainly is not limited to just geographical, physical, or architectural, but also includes relevant personal, interpersonal, or sociopolitical spaces, and also includes cultural, linguistic, ethnic, racial, historical, psychological, spiritual, and other spaces in relation to various relevant contexts' (Papadopoulos, 2021: 110).

The article begins with an overview of the main theoretical tenets of home-making, and the intertwining of intersectionalities, new materialism, and intercultural communication as fields of study that can contribute to understanding home-making processes on a university campus. After some theoretical considerations, it then presents a study of the narratives of the author's four former students. Finally, it shows how universities can promote intercultural understanding as the cornerstone for making the campus a hospitable place to belong.

## Defining home, home-making processes and intercultural relationships

For the purpose of this article, the concept of home is understood from the definition proposed by Papadopoulos (2018: 55) as 'the dynamic archetypal system, a systemic hub, a network, a cluster, a container of complex interactions between (a) space, (b) time and (c) relationships'. In the same vein, Bahun and Petrić (2018: 1) assert that the notion of home operates 'simultaneously as a concept, an experience, a discourse, an emotion and a (real or imagined) physical site'. From these perspectives, home is not limited to a physical space, but extends to a psychological and experiential construction of well-being, of 'refuge, rest and satisfaction' (Papadopoulos, 2021: 105).

Fundamental to the understanding of home are the notions of identity and belonging. For Papadopoulos (2021: 123), identity is both 'a construction and an outcome of very concrete realities', which can be either pleasant or harsh, but in both cases extremely defining. The author asserts that if realities are welcoming and gratifying, identities are reaffirmed, developed or positively reshaped, and hence a sense of belonging is boosted in the individual. If, on the contrary, realities are harsh, individuals may experience dislocation, which is the opposite of a sense of belonging. In other words, either dislocation or home-making processes determine who we are, as 'home [or lack thereof] shapes our personal identities, and informs our thinking, willing and judging' (Bahun and Petrić, 2018: 1). From this

perspective, the context of university life could be the appropriate space–time to build (or not) a home and a sense of belonging, given the myriad of potential relationships that can be built on campus. In the words of Papadopoulos (2018: 55), ‘The experience of home emerges whenever specific relationships are established over a period of time and within the context of a particular space.’ In a similar fashion, Álvarez Valencia and Wagner (2021: 6) point out that life on campus, and the plethora of relationships that the place begets, makes ‘Students contest processes of symbolic deterritorialisation and deculturation [or dislocation, in Papadopoulos’s terms] by engaging in forms of re-contextualisation and material and symbolic rearrangements of university sites which allows them to embody and enact their identities.’ Therefore, specific relationships within a university campus have the potential to shift the focus ‘from the self/other binary in intercultural communication to one of agency, creativity and becoming; the spaces [such as the campus] also allow multiple subject positions, embodiment, and the messiness and complexity of real-life encounters between intercultural subjects’ (Holmes and Corbett, 2022: 8).

## Intersectional identities and posthumanism

In the social sciences, there seems to be a consensus about the multilayered and plural nature of identity, and therefore the concept of intersectionality has gained currency to refer to the ‘overlapping and interlinked social dimensions’ (Block, 2014: 69) that underlie the unique identity constitution of each human being. More than a mere collection of individual identities, intersectionality has to do with a complex intertwining of identity expressions that can be independent, sometimes opposed, but always complementary in the personal construction of each individual.

In trying to understand the complexity of identity multiplicity, Newfield (2018) draws on the philosophic concept of *assemblages* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013) and the quantum physics concept of *entanglements* (Barad, 2010) to show the intricacy of something as ethereal as the multipartite nature of identity. However, this is not only about an internal complexity in the intimate and psychological realm of human beings, but also about a series of relationships with the physical space, the historical context and the material world that surrounds them. Hence, currents of thought such as posthumanism and new materialism arise, which seek to decentre the role of human beings (Newfield, 2018) to understand them as part of a larger entanglement, of which the surrounding material reality also makes up a part. In a similar fashion, de Freitas and Curinga (2015: 249) assert that ‘Identity can be studied as an assemblage that does not begin or end in the individual, but partakes of a dynamic affective force field luring posthuman subjects into activity.’ Posthumanism is therefore a critical stance that explores plausible non-human agencies beyond human agency. Non-human here refers to both organic and inorganic beings, and even entities such as artificial intelligence, which exert agency in the world around us, although they may not be aware of, or be responsible for, those actions, as we – humans – are.

Leonard (2020: 2) defines posthuman theory as an anti-anthropocentric perspective in which ‘human aims and goals are decentred, allowing for other interpretations regarding the ontology, epistemology, and ethics of matter’. Similarly, new materialism is understood as ‘a specific domain within posthumanism that gives special attention to matter by avoiding binary understandings such as mind-body and human-nonhuman’ (Leonard, 2020: 2). Thus, understanding identity from a posthumanist and new materialistic perspectives implies accepting that material reality exerts agency on who we are, and on our entanglements of multiple identities, while we exert agency on the surrounding matter, in a symbiotic, cyclical and interdependent relationship; put differently, ‘matter is co-constituting and the world is dynamic, in the constant process of intra-activity and materialization’ (Leonard, 2020: 3).

## New materialism and intercultural communication

The perspective of new materialism compels us to reformulate phenomena that are considered exclusively inherent to and centred on the human being, such as culture, language and communication. Thus, from this vantage point, it is worth asking questions such as: How do we establish cultural and interpersonal relationships with others? How do we communicate to express and negotiate the multiplicity of our identity constitution? How do we build meaning in a complex system of networks and relationships between entanglements, which are at once hyperconnected to other entanglements that exert constant agency on and through them? Although responding to each question would be materially impossible within the limits of this article, it is worth outlining a first attempt at an answer, drawing on the definitions of culture and intercultural communication proposed by Álvarez Valencia

(2021). For Álvarez Valencia (2021: 46), culture is defined as ‘an open and dynamic repertoire of semiotic resources (material, bodily originated or artifacts, and non-material – discourses, ideologies, ideas, beliefs) produced, embodied, enacted, and reshaped in social interaction’. This definition is in dialogue with the postulates of new materialism by evoking not only the importance of the material realm, but also the dynamic and ever-changing nature of culture and human behaviour. But, more importantly, Álvarez Valencia (2021) decentres the role of language in communication, thus moving away from what he calls a *verbocentric* perspective of communication. By the same token, Holmes et al. (2022: 120) point out that ‘by decentring language as the main form of communication, new materialism creates a space for knowing differently in higher education, not through linguistically based knowledge systems, but performatively and through material embodied experiences’.

Similarly, this article adheres to the definition of intercultural communication proposed by Álvarez Valencia (2021: 47) that corresponds to a ‘process of meaning making, meaning exchange or meaning negotiation between members of distinct social groups and their identity affiliations’. Álvarez Valencia’s (2021) view of intercultural communication builds on the framework of multimodal social semiotics, understood as ‘a form of semiotics which situates sign-making in the social and emphasises the multiple modes and materials used’ (Newfield, 2018: 209). Under this lens, the complex nature of identity is manifested and communicated by each individual through the use of several semiotic resources. Newfield (2018), for instance, demonstrates how people can manifest one of their identity affiliations through movement, for example, while preferring to express another identity by utilising a particular object, or by articulating a determined utterance.

Thus, the encounter between individuals who bear different repertoires of cultural and multimodal semiotic resources sets the context for intercultural communication, for the expression, negotiation and (re)configuration of their identities and for processes of home-making. In other words, and considering the campus setting that concerns us in this article, students bring to the university a vast array of semiotic chains (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 7), which are ‘like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural and cognitive’. From this perspective, the rich diversity on campus can potentially foster the development of intercultural encounters and intercultural competencies, by means of the intricate interactions between diverse members of the campus community. Such complex interactions, which hold the power to fuel or to discourage home-making processes in the students, can occur in the form of speech acts, movement, use of artefacts or any other semiotic resource that enables them to embody and enact their identities. In this sense, the vision of intercultural encounters here is compatible with the new materialism perspective, which decentres language from the spotlight of studies and treats it as just another form of material expression (de Freitas and Curinga, 2015).

## Method

This study followed a narrative inquiry approach (Barkhuizen, 2013; Barkhuizen et al., 2014), in which stories are used as a source of data for research, and those who tell their stories are legitimate voices to portray their own experiences (Colmenares, 2010). Denzin (2003: xi) explains that, because the individual experiences of people are intimate and unique, ‘we can only study experience through its representations, through the ways stories are told’. In that sense, ‘Our stories are privileged, legitimate, and authorised sources to account for our own reality’ (Colmenares, 2010: 96). Block and Corona (2017: 510) assert that studying identities ‘requires a narrative-based approach to research, as there is a need to listen to the stories of individuals’. Thus, the narrative inquiry approach has been a fundamental ally in this particular study that merges performative identities, intercultural communication and home-making processes on campus, because ‘narratives of the self, as temporal constructions, are anchored in local institutional cultures and their interpretive practices’ (Denzin, 2003: xii).

All four participants in this study were, at some point, students of the author. They were invited to participate in the study due to their close relationship with their former professor, and to the fact that they had previously shared several details of their journey navigating life on campus. Each narrative was elicited by means of a semi-structured, face-to-face interview that started with a single question: ‘Do you think you managed to build a home on the university campus during your time at university?’

After the free narratives of each participant, new questions arose about the challenges they faced to build a sense of belonging, to develop their identities and to establish relationships of diversity

while embracing their own diversity. After the interviews, some participants would recall chunks of stories that they deemed important to be included in their narratives, and some of them continued to share excerpts of their stories and later memories with the author through WhatsApp messages. All participants authorised the use of their interviews and messages by signing an informed consent. Due to the sensitivity of certain topics shared by the participants, and to preserve their identities, their names have been changed. All the narratives and audio messages were transcribed in their entirety and analysed in light of the postulates of new materialism. Below are the profiles of the four participants, based on their own stories, and retold by the author.

### **Artemis comes to the big city**

Artemis is an Indigenous woman, who is about to graduate as a foreign-languages teacher. Coming from an Indigenous territory with a peasant context, Artemis asserts that she faced several challenges in learning how to navigate the context of the city. Her home-making process took place mainly at the university Indigenous council and at the Indigenous temporary residence, a space where Indigenous students welcome their fellows who arrive in the city for the first time, feeling out of place and in need of a helping hand to guide them through their new life. There, Artemis's first intercultural encounters and challenges took place with Indigenous people from other communities and other languages, through relationships that arose easily because they all shared the same need to make a home away from home. Relationships with her *mestizo* classmates, however, were not as easily established, neither in the classroom, nor in other spaces on campus. Artemis says that life on campus, coupled with episodes of discrimination and people's questioning her ethnicity, encouraged her to learn more about her Indigenous origins, with the aim of teaching others about her heritage and history. Towards the end of her studies, and thanks to the strengthening of her identity that her university life and her studies in foreign languages allowed, Artemis became a bailiff of the Indigenous council, and she walks around the campus, proudly carrying her traditional *mochila* (a bag woven out of natural fibres) and her *bastón de mando* (a wooden baton with colourful ribbons symbolising her authority).

### **Ikarus's flight to freedom**

Ikarus is a transgender man who transitioned in college. His first steps towards transition were adopting a new name and talking about his decision with his closest circle. This implied his first intercultural challenges, in which he lost some relationships and gained experience in how to approach, discuss and negotiate his position on the issue of gender transition in a mainly hetero-cisnormed society. Ikarus talks about the bodily challenges he took on to feel comfortable in his own skin: he got a tattoo on his arm; he would bandage his breasts despite the injuries and burns this caused to his skin; and he would wear a prosthesis to urinate while standing up, which gave him a boost of confidence in the male restrooms on campus. Despite the discomfort of wearing the prosthesis all day, the bulky appearance and the possibility to use a urinal provided Ikarus with a sense of assurance and safety, at a time when his hormonal treatment had not yet begun. After his treatment, the physical changes allowed Ikarus to feel content with his appearance and to put aside the use of the excruciating prosthesis. Many of these behavioural and physical modifications, Ikarus says, were self-imposed from his own preconceptions about what others supposedly expected of him. Little by little, he realised that belonging on campus as a man did not require all the changes that he was willing to undertake, sometimes hastily, and even at the expense of his comfort and health. Towards the end of his narrative, Ikarus comments wistfully that the campus did become his home, and, paradoxically, the house and the family in which he grew up no longer felt like home, as his new body and aesthetics were no longer welcomed. Ikarus graduated dressed in a suit, proudly sporting a short beard, albeit with a female name on his diploma, which he hopes he will be able to change legally.

### **Carya and her invisible friends**

Carya is one of the few blind graduates of the Foreign Language Teacher Education Programme. For Carya, the process of home-making on campus is related to the people who inhabit the campus, and not so much to the places, as these are still sometimes inhospitable and hostile to blind students. We talk while walking on campus, and her guiding stick gets tangled several times in the cracked pavement.

Carya, then, takes advantage of the opportunity to teach me about the different tips that she adapts to her cane to break through. Carya explains that all her relationships are intercultural by nature, since her whole life has revolved around learning about the world of the seers, as well as teaching them about her world without vision. However, Carya says, she would like these mutual learning relationships not to occur with just a few people, but to be more common and prolific, both on campus and in society. Towards the end of her story, Carya returns to the initial question and concludes that, despite the time she spent on campus, she did not manage to build a home within the physical facilities, but that a sense of home and belonging definitely does exist in the relationships she built with her sighted and blind peers, all of them invisible, but real friends nonetheless. Now, as a professional, Carya returns to the campus frequently because she works as a guide helping new blind students to map the campus in their minds and find the most blind-friendly paths.

### **Adonis and his words in movement**

Adonis speaks to me with his hands, and I conduct the interview through a Colombian Sign Language interpreter. He is the only one of my participants who belongs to another academic programme. Adonis is studying to be an interpreter and guide-interpreter for the deafblind. He says that the sense of belonging is only present for him when there are other signers; otherwise, he is always isolated in his world of silence, subject to a few linguistic transactions that he manages to establish, out of necessity, through written Spanish. His signs are fast, as he likes to speak his mind, but he remarks that on campus he has little chance to chat with others, unless he is surrounded by his fellow hearing classmates who are also studying to be interpreters, and who master his sign language. When I ask him about the intercultural challenges he has experienced, Adonis smiles and tells me, almost as in Carya's story, that his entire life has been a constant process of teaching and learning, and comparing the hearing culture with the deaf culture. His anecdotes are humorous and bring up instances in which he has knocked on the door or made a video call by mistake, at times when we listeners value silence the most. For Adonis, home is the place where you can express yourself and be understood, and this is only guaranteed if there is an interpreter with him.

## **Findings and discussion**

Although the interviews were conducted in Spanish, verbatim excerpts have been translated into English, paying close attention to the original tone, register and word choice used by participants.

### **Artefacts and the body in the processes of home-making**

One of the recurring themes for almost all the participants in this study has to do with the way the body and the use of certain artefacts are determining instances in home-making processes. The human body reaches out through sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch to help us apprehend the reality around us, and therefore we engage in meaning-making practices through all our available senses in order to understand the space-time and gauge whether that is where we want to – or are allowed to – belong and make our home. Similarly, we also engage in meaning-making practices by means of the objects and artefacts we use to relate with our surrounding reality. Not only do objects leave prints in the lives of those who utilise them, but they also contribute to shaping our life narratives (Iovino and Oppermann, 2017; Weik von Mossner, 2017). As a case in point, in the interview with Carya, she mentions several modes of communication that she uses to interact with surrounding material spaces on a daily basis:

When I come to campus, I know that I have to be prepared with all the tip ends of my cane, because the ground here is extremely uneven, and sometimes I fear tripping and falling on rocky spaces, or slipping on smooth floors like the one in the library. Oh! And when I'm meeting other blind friends, I use a cane tip that clicks loud against the floor, so the others know I got there first and find me more easily!

Carya's testimony is an example of what Pennycook (2018: 51) calls *material anchors*, to refer to the objects that become an extension of our body and help us navigate through 'a process of remaking meaning in different contexts, of the reinscription of different meanings onto different surfaces, but also

of a redistribution of meaning in a physical space, a reorientation of meaning in relation to the body and the physical surroundings'. A similar case is found in the interview with Ikarus, who tells me about the use of a prosthesis at the beginning of his transition:

Before I started my hormone treatment, I wanted to speed up my transition, so I used a prosthesis to urinate standing up in the men's bathroom. It was horrible because it [the prosthesis] was uncomfortable, and I had to secure the prosthesis to my body with straps that lacerated my skin and itched, but I didn't care, I liked the fact that there was a lump between my legs, and I liked feeling like I could use the urinal like any other man. That gave me confidence.

The agency of a prosthesis in Ikarus's body and Ikarus's agency to enact his masculine identity by using the prosthesis are examples of the 'material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings co-shape one another' (Haraway, 2008: 4). In both Carya's and Ikarus's narratives, the use of particular objects modifies their body hexis (Bourdieu, 1977) and exerts agency in their processes of home-making, as well as in their communication strategies to express their identities while inhabiting the campus. The construction of a sense of belonging occurs when Carya uses her cane to walk safely or to communicate her arrival to other blind people, as it occurs for Ikarus when he is able to embody his masculinity in the spaces and during practices shared by other men on campus. In other words, there is agency in the use of objects for home-making, but there is also agency exerted by the objects upon the body and the reality of the users. Pennycook (2018) states that these objects become extensions of the body to transform the way we experience the world. These are multimodal technologies whereby we establish embodiment relationships (Ihde, 1991; Pennycook, 2018) between our body hexis, our surrounding reality and our ways of communicating. In fact, acknowledging the intricacy of agency relations between human and non-human elements implies a shake-up in applied linguistics, so that we can understand communication beyond mutually comprehensible dialogues between two or more relational human subjects (Pennycook, 2018), because communication occurs among, and as a result of, the intertwining of 'the multimodal and multisensory semiotic practice of the everyday [which] include[s] the dynamic relationships between semiotic resources, activities, artefacts and space' (Pennycook, 2018: 16). Consequently, Pennycook (2018: 17) points out, 'no longer ... do we need to think in terms of competence as an individual capacity, of identity as personal, of language as entities we acquire, or of intercultural communication as uniquely human'.

### Mapping our home through our senses

Papadopoulos (2021) states that, in home-making processes, the sensory landscape plays a determining role in how we relate to matter in space-time, as Carya illustrates:

Sometimes when I go to the academic registration office, I realise I am about to get there because there are some trees that smell good, and my classmates are surprised that I can locate myself with my nose because for them it doesn't smell like anything special. For me, the sense of smell has been fundamental for me since childhood because that is how we learn to cook, to notice when someone is near us, and that is how it is.

In this regard, Papadopoulos (2021: 152) explains that 'for people with sensory impairment ... the unaffected senses as well as other elements of the imperceptible cluster of identity would compensate'. Notwithstanding, Pennycook (2018: 57) asserts that 'we often overlook the importance of smell because it has been neglected to a less important position in the human hierarchy of the senses'. Pennycook, building on Plato, speaks of the elevation of the 'higher' senses of sight and hearing as the ones to which we culturally give greater importance. Hence, it is no coincidence that, traditionally, communication and intercultural communication fields have focused on language as an almost exclusive phenomenon of human meaning making. In fact, when there is a deficiency in one of these two senses, especially hearing, there is a tendency to place individuals in an inferior category: 'given that a defining quality of what it means to be human is to have command of a language, if one appears to have a lesser linguistic capacity, one may not be deemed to be a full member of the exclusive category of the human' (Pennycook, 2018: 67). Such elevation of these two senses is best illustrated in Adonis's interview:

There is a lot of ignorance about our deaf culture and about our language. There are always people who think that we only make gestures without meaning or structure, and others think that it is enough to learn the alphabet in signs and spell all the words in Spanish to communicate with me.

Similarly, Pennycook (2018: 67) asserts that 'this has long been a struggle for the Deaf community, not only to encounter the denigration of sign languages as mere gestures, but also to make the case that sign languages are at the very least equal to (and in some ways greater than) spoken languages'. Therefore, we need to advocate for multimodal communication models that decentre verbal language as the only mode for meaning making and relating to others. Put differently, we need 'to think of language, cognition and agency not merely as distributed across different people but rather as distributed beyond human boundaries and as playing an active role in a world that is not limited to human activity alone' (Pennycook, 2018: 54). This means that intercultural relationships ought to be seen through multimodal, multisensory and posthumanist lenses, if we are to understand that intercultural communication is not only established between people, but also occurs in a context, in a reality in which the material has agency over us, and us over the material. Differences in the use of our available senses can reveal long-standing inequalities, as 'the sensory becomes the social when associations are made with social and racial hierarchies' (Pennycook, 2018: 61). Thus, relationships with the other, who retrieves and creates meaning differently, who communicates differently, who learns differently and who relates to the material world in a different way, constitute an invaluable source for us to approach and appreciate otherness and diversity.

In her interview, Artemis recalls her challenges with a particular sense while home-making on campus – the sense of time:

It was very difficult for me to learn to measure time in the city. In my territory, time seemed to pass more slowly, and here in the city everything is faster, more accelerated. In the countryside, we plan and do our duties thinking of the parts of a day in big chunks, often marked by the sun, but here in Cali [the city where she lives now], I had to learn to break the day into little pieces so as not to be late, to fit in with the routines and schedules of the city and the university.

Regarding the sense of time, Papadopoulos (2021) argues that this has an impact on our identities, since the perception of time conditions our pace of life and, as a consequence, our identities are modified to embrace (or not) the rhythm of life in a particular context. For Artemis, the construction of her home on campus is conditioned by a change in routines compared to the pace of the life she led in her territory. This, says Artemis, has been the subject of discussion and curiosity among her classmates, which has always allowed her to put into practice intercultural skills such as comparison, mediation and negotiation. All in all, 'sensory differences remain a source of social tensions and social tensions continue to be expressed in terms of sensory difference' (Howes and Classen, 2014: 89).

## **A campus cartography of belonging (or not) with other home-makers**

The definition of home and the processes of home-making depend on a complex dynamism between the dimensions of time, space and relationships (Papadopoulos, 2021). This is why close attention was paid to what the participants in this study had to say about the physical spaces they prefer to inhabit or avoid on campus, and the people they have chosen as their fellow home-makers. For Ikarus, the campus is a welcoming home, except when he needs to run administrative errands:

Restrooms will always be an uncomfortable topic. Now there are gender neutral restrooms on campus, but back in the day, there were not, and therefore I avoided using restrooms at the university that weren't in the building where I took classes. The same thing happened to me at the academic registration office. I hated and avoided going to those offices as much as possible because there was always the issue of my old name ... one feels exposed.

Ikarus's words are a reminder that 'home is never a neutral term, image, or reality; it always evokes feelings often polarised' (Papadopoulos, 2021: 113). Even if an individual has developed a sense of belonging in a place, there might still be certain spots, instances or people that can cause dislocations and self-exiles (Papadopoulos, 2021), places where feelings of well-being, refuge and safety are challenged. Adonis puts it this way:

I feel I belong on campus when I am with my classmates or teachers who know Colombian Sign Language, but I hardly feel at home when I am by myself. It makes me anxious to be alone because a communicative challenge may arise that I cannot solve with written Spanish. The university usually talks about policies of inclusion, but it is still difficult to get interpreters. Going to the registry office is almost impossible if you don't bring your own interpreter, it is outrageous that the university offers an Interpretation Programme, but at the same time, there is no official sign language interpreter for administrative and functional matters on campus.

Adonis illustrates how belonging in a place depends on what Papadopoulos (2021: 259) calls relational factors: 'the various forms of active and potential interactional networks that a person engages with, both positively and negatively'. These communication challenges, as well as the actors involved in them, are invaluable sources of intercultural learning, as they unveil multiple strategies of relationship building, mediation, negotiation of meaning and co-construction of understanding that the participants display when they interact with individuals from other cultural groups on campus. The people around these participants constitute a support system that begets the social capital that Ikarus and Adonis need to develop engagement in social life. Artemis explains it this way:

My Indigenous identity goes with me everywhere, but I definitely feel more appreciated as an Indigenous when I am in the council, or when I am in *la tulpa* [a gazebo for Indigenous congregations on campus]. There, I don't have to explain the symbology of my *mochila* because everyone understands what the *churo cósmico* [cosmic swirl] or the *wiphala* [Indigenous flag] means. I am Indigenous all the time, but especially when I am in a speaking circle, or in an Andean dance, and that only happens in *la tulpa*.

Artemis's words confirm that 'By re-territorializing and engaging in material and symbolic rearrangement of the university campus, indigenous students revitalise their ancestors' cultural semiotic practices and open up spaces for the recognition of their ways of being, thinking, and languaging in multilingual universities' (Álvarez Valencia and Miranda, 2022: 483). However, while the strengthening of the identity of the various cultural groups that coexist on campus is commendable and desirable, Artemis's narrative suggests that said strengthening has occurred internally within her group, but has not necessarily spread externally to allow for intercultural encounters with members of other cultural groups. Thus, the testimonies of these participants suggest that the campus is in the first stage of what Walsh (2009) calls relational interculturality: it is a sort of co-residence on campus where difference is merely acknowledged, but where deep relationships are not fully established beyond the boundaries of each subgroup. In other words, the participants have built a campus cartography of belonging, one in which they have identified the spots on campus where their identities can be enacted on full display, especially because of the social capital they have built with their fellow home-makers.

## Conclusions

The narratives in this article are just a few examples of the great diversity that abounds in the university campuses in Colombia. The participants in this study revealed and communicated their ethnic, gender and functional diversities through various semiotic resources, such as the use of objects, their gestures and, of course, their languages. The canvas of their bodies was shaped, tattooed and clothed in multiple ways, and, in doing so, they learned to negotiate positions, viewpoints and power relations with others.

As stated at the start of this article, Colombian campuses are small-scale representations of the country's cultural situation and of the challenges of home-making and, therefore, peace-building amid conflictive diversity. It is worth reflecting, then, on this rich diversity on campus in relation to global – and often market-driven – discourses on the internationalisation of higher education. Although the internationalisation of a campus is desirable, there are often missed opportunities in the local diversity that, if taken advantage of, would constitute a rich source of intercultural practice, of empathy for otherness, of openness to difference and, above all, of knowing how it is that we engage in interaction with a different other. These local intercultural practices would be solid foundations for promoting intercultural relations abroad, based primarily on the recognition of who we are, in order to respect who others are.

Internationalisation does not necessarily produce intercultural competency. It is indeed possible to develop these competencies even without campus internationalisation processes. Internationalisation

endeavours, however important and desirable they may be for the development of institutions, might remain only in experiences of superficial linguistic transactions, as well as the exchange of shallow aspects of culture, which are not necessarily a proxy for actual intercultural capacities. However, the home-making processes experienced by local students allow us to observe the relational challenges they face, as well as the multiple decisions they make for the strategic enactment of their identities, and the emancipatory construction of a sense of belonging. Likewise, students bring to campus unique configurations in cultural terms, and, along with them, come multiple semiotic resources for expressing their identities, which constitutes a needed jolt in understanding communication from a much wider perspective.

We all need a home to belong to, whether it is a physical place, or even our own body as in the case of Ikarus, and in building such a home, students develop, apprehend or adapt a plethora of intercultural moves to navigate the campus; this wealth of intercultural knowledge and competencies that students develop on their own must be studied, strengthened, capitalised on and promoted by the institution, in such a way that they become the bases on which critical intercultural relationships, equity and peace construction are strengthened, even before the advent of possible intercultural relations with foreigners. Put differently, students' narratives unveil ample repositories of intercultural and communicative strategies that can and should be systematised and intentionally fostered through curricula for the benefit of a meaningful and more humanistic education (Liddicoat, 2021; Ramírez Espinosa, 2021).

Thus, we must rethink the objective of the campus, so that it becomes a place of healthy and safe practice to build a home and to cohabit with others. To do this, the university administration can further a multimodal social semiotic perspective on intercultural communication that implies offering spaces, buildings and settings that are welcoming of difference (Álvarez Valencia, 2022). This implies approaching otherness not only in linguistic terms, but also in behavioural, aesthetic stances. Álvarez Valencia (2022) speaks of the need to identify strategies to approach superdiversity in higher education. This concept of superdiversity goes hand in hand with the principle of the ecological thought (Morton, 2010: 47), that everything is interconnected, without forgetting that this 'interconnection implies separateness and difference'. This notion is particularly paramount to understand the concept of *cultures* (in plural) and the intercultural interactions that challenge us on a daily basis: 'If everything is interconnected, there is less of everything. Nothing is complete in itself' (Morton, 2010: 33). It is necessary to take into account, from posthumanist and new materialist perspectives, the different ways to embody meaning making on campus. In the same way, it is essential to examine how campuses are allowing, or not, spaces for interaction of superdiverse ecologies in the construction of home-making.

In certain situations of social tension, the multiplicity of identities tends to shrink into one identity that becomes excessively static (Papadopoulos, 2021), thus producing essentialised and stereotypical identities. This is precisely something that should be avoided in a diverse campus, which should tend towards what Newfield (2018: 211) calls semiotic multiplicity, aligned with a view of 'diversity and difference at the basis of meaning-making and with social justice'; only in this way will we move from a relational interculturality to a desired critical interculturality (Walsh, 2009). Finally, the word for home in Spanish is *hogar*, which shares its etymological root with *hoguera* (bonfire), implying that home is the place of fire. Home is built around the warmth of fire, where food is cooked and shared, where stories are told and appreciated, where points of view are negotiated, all sitting in a democratic circle, at the same level, learning from each other without hierarchies.

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

The author conducted the research reported in this article in accordance with the Interinstitutional Doctorate in Education standards, at the University of Valle.

### Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

## Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

## References

- Álvarez Valencia, J.A. (2021) 'Practical and theoretical articulations between multimodal pedagogy and an intercultural orientation to second/foreign language education'. In J.A. Álvarez Valencia, A. Ramírez and O. Vergara (eds), *Interculturality in Teacher Education: Theoretical and practical considerations*. Valle del Cauca: Programa Editorial UniValle, 41–69.
- Álvarez Valencia, J.A. (2022) 'Trans-semiotizing and re-sourcing resources in language education: Towards a multimodal social semiotic perspective on intercultural communication'. In N. Miranda, A.M. Mejía and S. Valencia (eds), *Language Education in Multilingual Colombia: Critical perspectives and voices from the field*. London: Routledge, 172–87.
- Álvarez Valencia, J.A. and Miranda, N. (2022) 'Indigenous students' agency vis-à-vis the practices of recognition and invisibilization in a multilingual university'. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 27 (4), 470–88. [CrossRef]
- Álvarez Valencia, J.A. and Wagner, M. (2021) 'Roadblocks to intercultural mobility: Indigenous students' journeys in Colombian universities'. *Intercultural Communication Education*, 4 (1), 6–21. [CrossRef]
- Bahun, S. and Petrić, B. (2018) 'Homing in on home'. In S. Bahun and B. Petrić (eds), *Thinking Home: Interdisciplinary dialogues*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1–13.
- Barad, K. (2010) 'Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: Dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come'. *Derrida Today*, 3 (2), 240–68. [CrossRef]
- Barkhuizen, G. (ed.) (2013) *Narrative Research in Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barkhuizen, G., Benson, P. and Chik, A. (eds) (2014) *Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research*. London: Routledge.
- Block, D. (2014) *Social Class in Applied Linguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Block, D. and Corona, V. (2017) 'Intersectionality in language identity and research'. In K. Rajagopalan (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity*. London: Routledge, 507–22.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Colmenares, S. (2010) 'Acceso a una cultura escrita: análisis de veintidós relatos de estudiantes universitarios' [Access to a written culture: Analysis of twenty-two stories from university students]. *Lenguaje*, 38 (1), 93–111. [CrossRef]
- de Freitas, E. and Curinga, M.X. (2015) 'New materialist approaches to the study of language and identity: Assembling the posthuman subject'. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 45 (3), 249–65. [CrossRef]
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2013) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Denzin, N. (2003) 'Foreword: Narrative's moment'. In M. Andrews, S. Sclater, C. Squire and A. Treacher (eds), *Lines of Narrative*. London: Routledge, xi–xiii.
- Haraway, D.J. (2008) *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Holmes, P. and Corbett, J. (2022) 'Introduction: Critical intercultural pedagogies in contexts of conflict and crises'. In P. Holmes and J. Corbett (eds), *Critical Intercultural Pedagogy for Difficult Times: Conflict, crisis, and creativity*. London: Routledge, 1–22.
- Holmes, P., Moskal, M. and Rajab, T. (2022) 'Participation, understanding, and dialogue: Intercultural learning among students in higher education and refugee youths'. In P. Holmes and J. Corbett (eds), *Critical Intercultural Pedagogy for Difficult Times: Conflict, crisis, and creativity*. London: Routledge, 117–38.
- Howes, D. and Classen, C. (2014) *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the senses in society*. London: Routledge.
- Ihde, D. (1991) *Instrumental Realism: The interface between philosophy of science and philosophy of technology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Iovino, S. and Oppermann, S. (2017) *Environmental Humanities*. Lanham, MD: National Book Network International.

- Leonard, N. (2020) 'The arts and new materialism: A call to stewardship through mercy, grace, and hope'. *Humanities*, 9 (3), 1–34. [CrossRef]
- Liddicoat, A.J. (2021) 'Foreword'. In J.A. Álvarez Valencia, A. Ramírez Espinosa and O. Vergara-Luján (eds), *Interculturality in Language Teacher Education: Theoretical and practical considerations*. Cali: Programa Editorial Universidad del Valle, 9–13.
- Morton, T. (2010) *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Newfield, D. (2018) 'Thebuwa and a pedagogy of social justice: Diffracting multimodality through posthumanism'. In V. Bozalek, R. Braidotti, T. Shefer and M. Zembylas (eds), *Socially Just Pedagogies: Posthumanist, feminist and materialist perspectives in higher education*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 209–26.
- Papadopoulos, R.K. (2018) 'Home: Paradoxes, complexities and vital dynamism'. In S. Bahun and B. Petrić (eds), *Thinking Home: Interdisciplinary dialogues*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 54–69.
- Papadopoulos, R.K. (2021) *Involuntary Dislocation: Home, trauma, resilience, and adversity-activated development*. London: Routledge.
- Pennycook, A. (2018) *Posthumanist Applied Linguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Ramírez Espinosa, A. (2021) 'The decolonial option: Implications for the curriculum of foreign language teacher education programs'. *Revista Boletín Redipe*, 10 (12), 102–11. [CrossRef]
- Walsh, C. (2009) *Interculturalidad, estado, sociedad: Luchas (de)coloniales de nuestra época [Interculturality, state, society: (De)colonial struggles of our time]*. Quito: Ediciones ABYA-YALA.
- Weik von Mossner, A. (2017) *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, emotion, and environmental narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.