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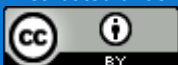
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Provocations to Give New Meanings and Decolonize the University: an Analysis of the Indigenous Students From the UFFS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The indigenous presence in higher education has been among the current guidelines of academic discussions. Despite being a recent theme, it shows that we need to research and connect with the educational, cultural, social and political challenges of our time, not only to understand the world we live in, but, above all, to create possibilities for its new meanings. **Objective:** This text aims to problematize the university, prejudice, discrimination and Eurocentric epistemological hegemony from the experiences of indigenous students at the Federal University of Fronteira Sul (UFFS). **Methodology:** The purpose is to contribute to reflections about access, permanence, experience at the university and the meaning of this schooling for indigenous peoples, taking the decolonial perspective as the articulator of the analysis. We seek to problematize the possibilities that indigenous people, an ethnic group victim of genocide, epistemicide and ethnocide, have to contribute to the transformation and new meanings of the university by being present in this space. **Result/Conclusion:** We realize that the indigenous students still face difficult situations, which are colonial relationships and the suffering generated by them, and that it is necessary to break paradigms and build possibilities to break the cycle of violence that is still going on.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous. Higher education. Decolonial perspective.

Provocações para Ressignificar e Descolonizar a Universidade: uma Análise da Experiência de Estudantes Indígenas da UFFS

RESUMO

Introdução: A presença indígena na educação superior tem se apresentado dentre as pautas atuais das discussões acadêmicas. Apesar de ser uma temática recente, evidencia que precisamos pesquisar e nos conectar com os desafios educacionais, culturais, sociais e políticos do nosso tempo, para não apenas compreendermos o mundo em que vivemos, mas, sobretudo, para criarmos possibilidades de sua ressignificação. **Objetivo:** Este texto tem como objetivo problematizar a universidade, o preconceito, a discriminação e a hegemonia epistemológica eurocêntrica a partir das experiências de estudantes indígenas da Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul (UFFS). **Metodologia:** O intuito é contribuir nas reflexões sobre o acesso, a permanência, a vivência na universidade e o significado dessa escolarização para os povos indígenas, tomando a perspectiva decolonial como articuladora da análise. Procuramos problematizar as possibilidades que os indígenas, grupo étnico vítima de genocídio, epistemicídio e etnocídio, têm de contribuir para a transformação e ressignificação da universidade ao se fazerem presentes nesse espaço. **Resultado/Conclusão:** Percebemos que os estudantes indígenas ainda enfrentam situações difíceis, que são as relações coloniais e o sofrimento por elas gerado, e que é necessário quebrar paradigmas e construir possibilidades para romper o ciclo de violências ainda em curso.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Indígenas. Educação superior. Perspectiva decolonial.

Provocaciones para Resignificar y Descolonizar la Universidad: un Análisis de la Experiencia de los Estudiantes Indígenas en la UFFS

RESUMEN

Introducción: La presencia indígena en la educación superior se ha presentado entre las agendas actuales de las discusiones académicas. Aunque es un tema reciente, demuestra que es necesario investigar y conectar con los retos educativos, culturales, sociales y políticos de nuestro tiempo, no sólo para entender el mundo en el que vivimos, sino sobre todo para crear posibilidades de resignificación de este. **Objetivo:** Este texto pretende problematizar la universidad, el prejuicio, la discriminación y la hegemonía epistemológica eurocéntrica a partir de las experiencias de los estudiantes indígenas de la Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul (UFFS). **Metodología:** El objetivo es contribuir a las reflexiones sobre el acceso, la permanencia, la experiencia en la universidad y el significado de esta escolarización para los pueblos indígenas, tomando la perspectiva decolonial como articuladora del análisis. Buscamos problematizar las posibilidades que tienen los indígenas, grupo étnico víctima de genocidio, epistemicidio y etnocidio, de contribuir a la transformación y resignificación de la universidad al estar presentes en este espacio. **Resultado/Conclusión:** Nos damos cuenta de que los estudiantes indígenas todavía se enfrentan a situaciones difíciles, que son las relaciones coloniales y el sufrimiento generado por ellas, y que es necesario romper paradigmas y construir posibilidades para romper el ciclo de la violencia todavía en curso.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Indígena. Educación superior. Perspectiva decolonial.

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Introduction

[...] our time is experiencing significant changes in education because social conditions, cultural relations, and rationalities have changed. Spaces, policies, social movements, and inequalities have changed. Distances, geographies, identities, and differences have also changed. Strategies of “colonizing,” of educating, and governing have changed. The thoughts, the reasoning, the ways of “decolonizing”, the cultural maps have changed. [...] Our questions and the things of the world have changed. The “others” have changed, and we have changed. (PARAÍSO, 2012, p. 26)

The challenge to reflect on the university and the indigenous presence in this institution stems from a long process of cultural and educational transformation of society, as well as from the understanding that it is time to promote the effective insertion of these individuals in spaces that represent the guarantee of rights, such as the right to education.

Since Brazil was colonized, the indigenous peoples have suffered from massacres and discriminatory and excluding processes. Under the colonialist logic, their culture, knowledge, territories, and their very existence have been and continue to be threatened. This process, which has lasted more than 500 years, has resulted in ethnocide and epistemicide. Named by Espinosa (2007, p. 274) as “cultural genocide”, the author defines ethnocide as a process that “does not refer simply to mass murders, but, above all, to the act of eliminating the existence of a people and silencing their interpretation of the world”. In other words, “ethnocide translates into an extermination of the cultural traits of a people, which may cause its extinction as a human group – practiced mainly against indigenous or Afro-descendant communities in the processes of colonialism” (VIEIRA, 2011, p. 44).

The San José Declaration, promulgated in 1981 in Costa Rica, calls attention to the problem of the loss of cultural identity of the indigenous population of Latin America, and explains that ethnocide is a complex process, which has historical, social, political and economic roots. Regarding the definition expressed in the document:

Ethnocide means that an ethnic group, collectively or individually, is denied its right to enjoy, develop and transmit its own culture and language. This implies an extreme form of massive violation of human rights, particularly of the right of ethnic groups to respect their cultural identity (UNESCO, 1981, p. 1).

Associated with the practice of colonization, Vieira (2011) highlights that the intention of ethnocide is to impose a specific worldview and, to this end, it physically, psychically and culturally dominates the populations of certain areas of expansion designed by modern man, judging them as a savage, subhuman, ignorant, uncivilized and backward society. With this domination, there is the establishment of a relationship of “power through the control and destruction of the body, aiming at the extermination of cultural traits responsible for the perpetuation of a human group, which can lead to the extinction of an ethnic group” (VIERIA, 2011, p. 39).

Epistemicide, on the other hand, according to Santos (2019) is the removal and invalidation of the construction of non-white peoples’ knowledge. This happens when one

culture overlaps with another, creating forms of political and ideological domination to disqualify the knowledge of the other. This domination inferiorizes this knowledge to the point of shattering the self-esteem of its original holders and even changing their way of thinking. With this process, which can be called colonization, the knowledge produced by other cultures is perceived as something lesser, and these subjects feel inferior for thinking the way they do. Also according to the author, epistemicide can be understood as an attack on the thought systems and knowledge of certain populations, which are seen as primitive, backward, heretical, and immoral.

For Santos (2007), popular, peasant, or indigenous knowledge is not considered relevant knowledge because it is beyond the universe of true and false. This knowledge is imagined to be beliefs, opinions, intuitive or subjective understandings, and that, at best, it can become the object or raw material of scientific investigations. And so, both the knowledge and its actors become invisible.

The epistemicide has left deep marks, which can be perceived in the way the preservation of indigenous peoples' knowledge and ways of life has or has not taken place. According to Baniwa (2019), when indigenous peoples were forbidden to use their own languages within their territories or when they were forced to learn techniques aimed at transforming them into rural workers, there was a colonization strategy that used the State, churches, and capitalism to promote the epistemicide of indigenous peoples' knowledge and traditions in Brazil.

The church doubted that indigenous people had souls. Therefore, it could kill and enslave them. The state claimed that the lands occupied by indigenous people did not really belong to them, and capitalism created the view that these lands were unproductive places because the indigenous people were, or still are, considered lazy and unproductive. Therefore, it was fair to take them, exemplifies Baniwa (2006). All these arguments were used to justify the massacres and the destruction of millenary knowledge. The epistemicide is true and still happens today. The rights of indigenous peoples were won less than 40 years ago, and there are still recurring attacks against them, adds Baniwa.

According to Grosfoguel (2007), racism in the social, political, and economic spheres is widely recognized, but the epistemic racism is "one of the most invisible racisms in the capitalist/patriarchal/modern/colonial world-system" (GROSFOGUEL, 2007, p. 32). It acts by privileging the Western white male tradition of thought as the "only legitimate one for the production of knowledge and as the only one with the capacity to access universality and truth, inferiorizing all 'other' traditions as barbaric, primitive, and underdeveloped" (GROSFOGUEL, 2007, p. 32). Moreover, according to the author, for more than 500 years, white male bodies have "disallowed the critical voices coming from thinkers from inferiorized subaltern groups" (GROSFOGUEL, 2007, p. 32) and strengthened the epistemic privilege of Eurocentered white identities to the point of invisibilization as hegemonic.

In Brazil, we have a history of exclusion, violence, torture, and forced labor that led to the destruction of many indigenous communities. Only with the enactment of the 1988 Federal Constitution that: “Indians are recognized their social organization, customs, languages, beliefs and traditions, and the original rights over the lands they traditionally occupy, being incumbent upon the Union to demarcate them, protect and enforce respect for all their assets” (BRASIL, 1988, art. 231). With this, the struggles for the guarantee of their rights have been strengthened, among which that of education, in all levels of teaching.

Regarding the access to higher education for indigenous people, this theme has gained emphasis in recent educational policies, including affirmative action policies. Such policies legally guarantee that access to education is a right for all people, enabling us to have new subjects disputing space in the university and pressuring the Brazilian State to take responsibility for developing actions to reduce inequalities between whites, blacks, and indigenous people. According to Silva (2018), this has promoted a process of conquests of rights historically denied to these populations, and the university starts to be perceived as a strategic space for training racially discriminated and impoverished populations.

With the entrance of black, indigenous and quilombola people in universities, Silva (2018) highlights the need for epistemological changes, because, with the presence of these subjects, the agenda of decolonization of academic knowledge opens and then begins a process of building respect for differences from a diversity of narratives, logics and epistemologies.

With the access of indigenous peoples to higher education, it is necessary that institutions recognize that

are faced with other forms of knowledge, equally relevant, that must be respected and valued if a dialogue between knowledges and cultures is to be established. If the epistemological, ontological, and cosmological dimension of indigenous knowledge is not considered, the issue becomes a mere procedural, administrative, and bureaucratic problem. The reception of indigenous scholars should consider not only their urgent material demands, but also, and especially, their worldviews, their cosmologies, and the subjective challenges that these young indigenous people experience when they enter university institutions. (BANIWA, 2019, p.186)

The epistemological challenge consists, according to Ribeiro and Beretta (2020), in recognizing the existence of other worldviews, the validity of other knowledges and other forms of knowledge. From this encounter, a new dynamic must emerge in order to transform the historically built structures and work on the decolonization of knowledge. However, the participation of these subjects in the construction of the academic pedagogical process itself is a necessary condition for the colonizing processes not to be perpetuated, and for affirmative policies to be truly transformative of the reality found in their premises.

With this new reality, the meanings of education, knowledge, students, teachers, teaching, learning, cultural groups, need to be analyzed, questioned and problematized,

“because we can show ‘how the discourses became true,’ what were the power relations waged, what strategies were used, what other discourses were excluded so that these could be authorized and disseminated” (PARAÍSO, 2012, p. 28). From this, new discourses and new meanings may be disseminated in educational institutions and spaces, by other people.

Considering that we are the result of languages, discourses, texts, representations, enunciations and modes of subjectivation, it is essential to understand that in educational institutions, curricula, textbooks, established links and the most diverse artifacts, power relations of different kinds are present. Therefore, it is time to establish other ways of thinking, researching, writing, meaning, producing and disseminating education (PARAÍSO, 2012).

Taking the university as a privileged space for dialogue, not only of ideas, but, above all, of cultures, civilizations, and cosmovisions, Baniwa (2019) highlights the need to strengthen the much-needed dialogue between cultures and civilizations. For the author, knowing what whites think about indigenous people and how they relate to this way of thinking of whites about them will allow, in the medium term, to seek ways to bring closer the understanding of different rationalities and ways of life that are still very distant. Still according to Baniwa, the indigenous people expect to acquire new and significant knowledge at the university, but they are concerned that their culture and knowledge are not valued in the academic sphere.

In this scenario, the following questions are fundamental: Is it possible to transform the university into a place of overcoming hegemony and coloniality, starting from the indigenous presence in higher education? What possibilities do these ethnic groups, victims of genocide, ethnocide and epistemicide, have to occupy the academic space? We intend to problematize these questions through narratives of indigenous students’ experiences in higher education, in dialogue with decolonial literature.

The narratives presented throughout the text come from students who entered the Federal University of the South Border (UFFS) through the Program of Access and Permanence for Indigenous Peoples (PIN). Created in 2013, PIN aims to

[...] promote democratic values, respect for difference and socioeconomic and ethno-racial diversity, by adopting a policy of expanding access to its undergraduate and graduate courses and stimulating culture, teaching, research, extension and permanence in the University (UFFS, Resolution No. 33/2013 - CONSUNI, p. 2).

The PIN provides for differentiated forms of admission for indigenous people to the undergraduate and graduate courses offered at the UFFS. At the undergraduate level, it establishes three forms: I - through Enem/SiSU, a process in which spaces are offered in the groups that declare themselves to be PPI (Black, Brown or Indigenous) and in the A2 group, with one space per course reserved for indigenous students; II - through an Exclusive Indigenous Selective Process, in which two additional spaces are offered per course, except

for those in which the university does not have the autonomy to offer additional spaces; and III - through a Special Selective Process to meet specific needs. In graduate studies, two places in each of the *sensu lato* and *sensu stricto* courses offered by the UFFS are reserved for self-declared indigenous candidates who are classified in the selection process. It also provides that if there are no indigenous candidates to fill these vacancies, they will be filled by other candidates in the order of their ranking (UFFS, Resolution No. 33/2013 - CONSUNI). It is important to clarify that in this text we are specifically dealing with undergraduate programs.

In 2014, the first exclusive indigenous selection process was held for admission to undergraduate courses in 2015. It covered five of the six campuses: Cerro Largo and Erechim, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul; Laranjeiras do Sul and Realeza, in the state of Paraná; and Chapecó, in the state of Santa Catarina, the exclusive selection process offered more than 600 places, exceeding the number of 2,300 candidates enrolled and 385 registrations in the various undergraduate courses. In addition, in the same period (2015 - 2022), another 163 self-identified indigenous candidates enrolled through the Unified Selection System (SISU). In 2022, there will be 458 indigenous people actively enrolled and attending undergraduate courses in the institution.

It is also important to mention that the NIP foresees a series of actions to guarantee the permanence of indigenous students in the university. Among them, we can mention: academic support (specific teaching monitoring, psycho-socio-pedagogical monitoring); promotion of education on ethno-racial relations through training courses; financial support/offer of scholarships and grants; availability of a permanent physical reference space suitable for the guidance, monitoring, development of educational activities and socialization of indigenous students and offer of curricular components intended exclusively for indigenous students, especially in the first two semesters, according to the demand of each campus (UFFS, Resolution No. 33/2013 - CONSUNI).

What we have noticed is that the inclusion of indigenous people in the university is a gradual process that requires cultural, curricular, epistemological and interpersonal changes. For the effective inclusion of these students, it is necessary to promote and maintain policies of equity, as well as to make the professionals involved and the other students aware that education is a right and that everyone can contribute to its realization.

The narratives that will be presented in this text were written by the indigenous students, in the year 2021, for the preparation of the second evaluation report of the NIP. The data collection was done through an online questionnaire, using Google Forms, sent by email to 200 indigenous students actively enrolled in undergraduate courses at the UFFS. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the students' perceptions regarding the selection processes for admission, integration into the university, persistence policies, academic performance, in addition to raising suggestions for the qualification of the indigenous policy of the institution. The questionnaire was answered by 90 indigenous people enrolled in seventeen different courses - Administration, Agronomy, Computer Science, Biological

Sciences, Social Sciences, Nursing, Environmental Engineering, Philosophy, Geography, History, Interdisciplinary in Field Education: Social Sciences and Humanities, Interdisciplinary Field Education: Natural Sciences, Languages: Portuguese and Spanish, Mathematics, Medicine, Nutrition and Education - at the six campuses of the UFFS. It is worth mentioning that the narratives mobilize memories of the experiences lived by these students at the University. In order to preserve their identity, we use the name “student” and a number to identify each narrative.

We would like to emphasize that this text is the result of studies and reflections carried out in the Study Group on Public Educational Policies of the UFFS (GEPPEU), coordinated by the authors of this article, and of their experience as technical staff of the UFFS, working in the implementation of the PIN, the reception and the monitoring of indigenous students in the institution.

The text is divided into three parts: the university, the narratives of the indigenous students, and the understanding that other epistemologies can contribute to the proposal of democratic educational spaces that strengthen the plurality and otherness of the subjects.

Let's Hear It from the Students!

When thinking about the university, it is necessary to consider that its history and its agents have a cultural capital based on a Eurocentric and racist world view. However, the entry of indigenous peoples into higher education has changed some of the dynamics of the institutions and has promoted the debate on how this presence has been experienced and how it can contribute to the transformation and re-signification of the academic space.

The model of education that was implemented in Brazil during the colonization period, and that continues to this day, is designed to

individuals considered as “universal”, that is, their material and immaterial structures are thought of from the knowledge of white western cultures, in the Enlightenment standard of “being human”, with emphasis on the image of the colonizer, which deny or invisibilize identities, diversities and knowledge of those who are the “others”, such as indigenous and black populations. (VICENZI; PICOLLI, 2022, p. 7)

The “others”, as analyzed by Butler (2015), was a thought used by colonizers to not recognize indigenous or black people, so they understood that the lives of these subjects could be harmed, destroyed or neglected to death. This understanding, according to the author, reproduced not only the precarious social and economic conditions, but also the dichotomy between inferiors and superiors.

For Vicenzi and Picolli (2022), the indigenous people feel the injustices that their group and, consequently, they, individually, suffer. They live together on a daily basis,

with diverse manifestations of violence: stigmatization, prejudice, devaluation of their worldview and traditional knowledge (epistemicide), physical violence, dehumanization and even genocide. For being indigenous they are, all the time, called and called to stop being, to assume the Eurocentric culture as their own. (VICENZI; PICOLLI, 2022, p. 10)

Since teaching and learning processes do not take place independently, without the interference of social relations already established in society, the university, although it guarantees differentiated access for this public, still does not value their culture, way of life and knowledge. It also seems not to believe in the potential of the indigenous peoples as a political, social, cultural and rights group, which is why it continues to develop prejudiced attitudes. However, the indigenous peoples are betting on the occupation of the university as a possibility to resist the indifference and the different forms of oppression that they still suffer. Oppression that, as Santos (2010) points out, is not natural but historically constituted.

Thus, epistemological perspectives that naturalize or justify historically constructed inequalities and deny the validity of forms of elaboration and validation of other knowledge, as well as the meaning of reality, must be replaced by others, alternatives to the hegemonic and Eurocentric (SANTOS, 2010). In this sense, decoloniality presents itself not only as a new epistemological option, but also as an “energy that does not allow itself to be managed by the logic of coloniality, nor does it creep into the fairy tales of the rhetoric of modernity” (MIGNOLO, 2008, p. 250).

For Mignolo (2008), the decolonial perspective opens up to cultures and knowledge that have been colonized and discredited as barbaric, primitive, and mystical, and when used in education, involves the act of thinking and the search for alternatives to build new paths that strengthen other histories that come from different parts of the planet, strengthening learning from the other. The author argues that epistemological decolonization is necessary to give way to a new intercultural communication based on the exchange of experiences and meanings based on other rationalities.

Overcoming the dichotomy between those who “can speak” and those who are “forbidden to speak” (SPIVAK, 2010) is urgent and necessary so that we can strengthen other knowledge, ways of living and thinking in the university space. However, this encounter with the “other”, as Vicenzi and Picolli (2022) point out, causes us to leave an epistemic comfort zone, because in this encounter we can learn something we do not want to learn, for example something about the injustices we are victims of, or something about the privileges we enjoy because of the injustices committed against the other.

Given that the university is a place of conflict between indigenous and non-indigenous people, what experiences have indigenous students had in the university context? Based on these experiences, what other universities are possible?

The denial of the permanence of indigenous students is felt in the attitudes of colleagues, in the attitudes of staff, and in the colonialist institutional norms as expressed by the student:

The discrimination because of being indigenous doesn't make it possible to build a relationship with white colleagues. Besides the prejudice of the colleagues, there is also the prejudice of the professors. The university does not know our context, our reality, our way of life and our knowledge. Every day we suffer racism, we are belittled in front of others and colleagues, and the staff does not accept the quotas for indigenous people. (Student 1)

We realize that we have to unlearn what we have learned from colonization and change our imaginary, denaturalizing the colonialist forms of human relations.

Coloniality continues to be reproduced in Brazilian universities, invisibilizing the knowledge, experiences, perceptions and ways of life of those considered inferior from the perspective of modernity. Indigenous peoples are one of these discriminated segments, who struggle daily to be fully recognized, including in their epistemes (VIANA *et al.*, 2019).

Exclusion, as “a deep structure of the psychic, cognitive, ontological and not only socio-economic order” (SEGATO, 2006, p. 81), is also present and felt daily:

The strange looks from classmates, like, “What are these Indians doing here? It is practically impossible to make friends with your classmates. I have been in the course for four years and only two classmates talk to me. When there is group work, if the professors don't draw lots, I am always alone. When I have doubts and ask the professors, it seems that I'm the only one who doesn't understand, that I'm the stupid one. Language is also a big difficulty we face, because many words spoken in Portuguese do not exist in our Kaingang language. Reading and interpreting the texts and following the teachers' explanations is very difficult. (Student 3)

The lack of dialogue and interaction hinders the possibility of integrating the students and their knowledge into the university environment. And by studying only Eurocentric visions and experiencing pedagogical processes exclusively for non-indigenous people, “the vision of the colonizer, of the white man's society and culture, is naturalized and sacralized in a way that is indifferent to the presence of indigenous students, whose traditions are made invisible (VICENZI; PICOLLI, 2022, p. 11).

We note that the memory of the university experience causes pain and suffering that “has as its cause the fact of being born indigenous in a country of white privilege, shaped by racial democracy, and whose structures and daily life are marked by racism and prejudice” (*idem*, pp. 11-12).

With regard to language, Herbetta and Nazareno (2020) point out that, in most cases, Portuguese is the second language of indigenous students, and since they belong to peoples with an oral tradition, they usually have many difficulties in dealing with writing. However, this fact is not considered by most teachers when dealing with indigenous students.

The wish is this,

In every subject my culture was respected, and we also learned a little about our knowledge. I miss not having indigenous teachers. They are all white. I would like to have more space to speak and also to show cultural diversity without prejudice. I wish there were a space for us to socialize our knowledge, dances, songs and art so that we Indians can express ourselves and feel better. I would like the university to see us not only as people seeking diplomas, but as people seeking to fulfill their dreams and those of an entire family/community. It is important to promote debates about the diversity of peoples, cultures, knowledge, origins and worldviews in order to break stereotypes and prejudices. (Student 5)

Although the Law of Guidelines and Foundations for Education in Brazil (LDB) - Law Nº 9.394, of December 20, 1996, in its article 78, proposes that the educational systems, in collaboration with the organs of cultural development and assistance to the Indians, develop integrated programs of teaching and research to provide indigenous peoples with the recovery of their historical memories and the reaffirmation of their ethnic identities and the valorization of their languages and sciences, In the previous account, the student highlights that the university does not carry out actions to integrate, valorize and strengthen the identity, culture and history of indigenous societies, as required by the legislation.

The decolonization of the Eurocentric curriculum, permeated by the episteme of subordination of peoples, languages and knowledge, is an urgent and necessary task. It means to move forward and to transcend the epistemological boundaries of the colonizer and colonialism for an education with pedagogical actions for diversity, for an education for ethnic-racial relations and for interculturality that includes the knowledge, the traditional knowledge and the social dynamics of each culture (VICENZI; PICOLLI, 2022).

For Santos (2010), with the epistemicide practiced in the last five centuries, we have wasted an immense number of cognitive experiences, so the challenges accumulate in everyday life and in the classroom experience, because there are a number of non-hegemonic voices that have been silenced and need to be summoned to the debate. According to the author, one way to combat epistemicide is to see the world and its knowledge from a different perspective, keeping in mind that people and groups who are not in a place of dominance should also have their knowledge respected.

The more the right to education is extended, universalizing basic education and democratizing access to higher education, the more subjects, previously invisible or disregarded as subjects of knowledge, enter school spaces. They arrive with their knowledge, political demands, ways and conditions of life, sufferings, victories, questioning the colonized and colonizing curricula and demanding emancipatory proposals (GOMES, 2012).

Regarding the desire to have professors who are indigenous, Figueiredo and Grosfoguel (2007) highlight that an important issue that needs to be urgently addressed in the current context is how to increase the number of black and indigenous professors in Brazilian

public universities, because inclusion is not made in a university where the racial composition of the faculty is so far from the current student body.

The will to be at the university is a driving force to face and resign the moments of suffering:

I fell into a world that was not mine. Everything is very difficult. The distance from the community, the lack of family, the inability to interact with colleagues, the culture, the lack of dialogue between academic knowledge and the knowledge and culture of my people. On a daily basis at the university, everything is Gmail, student portal and moodle. But I still want to stay because I know that what I am learning will help me solve many problems in my community. I am already sharing my knowledge with my family and friends. My children are reading the books I get to study, and it is already helping them to learn new things. (Student 2)

To be at the university, for its social prestige, its intelligence and its potentialities, is also a desire of the so-called excluded. By marking their presence in this space, they begin to react differently, using collective and individual strategies to empower themselves. Therefore, the decolonization of the academic space implies conflict, confrontation, negotiation, but it produces something new. It is part of other larger and deeper processes of decolonization, which is the decolonization of power, being and knowledge. (GOMES, 2012)

Understanding that we live with the possibility that different cultures and knowledge can dialogue in the university space is an important step towards recognizing the inclusion of the “oppressed” and “condemned” in institutions. For Walsh (2009), the struggles that Indigenous and Afro-descendant movements manage to establish contribute to the perspective of constructing pedagogies and practices oriented towards questioning, transforming, intervening, acting and creating radically different conditions of society, humanity, knowledge and life. For the author, thinking from and with the struggles of these groups will make it possible to change the human value of these beings who have been historically marked by their color and their ancestral roots. However, in order to make dialogue real, it is necessary to begin by making the causes of non-dialogue visible. Only then, from processes of (un)learning, invention, intervention and action, will we be able to create new pedagogies.

The bet on a different future is also what motivates indigenous people to want to be at the university:

I think that the university has been a great space not only for us indigenous people to fight, but also of great importance for the construction of a dialogue with society. For me, the knowledge that I am acquiring here contributes so that I can understand the non-indigenous reality. And the knowledge that I share, even if it is only a little, makes it possible for non-Indigenous people to get to know a little more about my people and culture. So, the fact that we are at the university is opening other paths for the new generations, both indigenous and non-indigenous. (Student 4)

We live in a time of many challenges, in which we are daily challenged by the multiple struggles of different groups and by the otherness of the “others” who want to be educated in a way that allows them to live all their troubling experiences. Therefore, it is

important that we join all these “others” and look for ways to find and create languages in the educational field to address their struggles, their knowledge and their experiences, because we know that cultural and social theorizing, social movements, pedagogy and education can no longer be the same (PARAÍSO, 2012).

We conclude that indigenous students encounter aspects of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being on a daily basis, so understanding how they see themselves and how they are seen in the academic world helps to force changes in the normative and epistemic bases of the university. From the experiences presented, we are led to reflect: Where should we act to change this situation? According to Mignolo (2020), we must act in education, in the media, and in all possible spaces where culture becomes a matter of power, domination, and liberation.

Emphasizing that “the other” makes us think and shows us that silence should disturb us, Baniwa (2006) defends that although we are far from building approximations between knowledges, cultures and ways of life, which continue to be separated by rigid boundaries, the indigenous struggles for the daily recognition of their differentiated histories and knowledges, as well as the fight against prejudice, now have the university arena as their main battleground. And that is why they continue to face daily difficulties and grow stronger.

It is possible to see that the presence and participation of indigenous people in universities is causing a “disorder” of homogeneity and, consequently, strengthening the dimension of diversity, changing the academic demography and reformulating the university culture by recognizing different subjects and knowledge.

Final Considerations

Although the theme of indigenous presence in universities is quite new in academic discussions, it has demanded the need for studies and research that connect institutions to the educational, cultural, social and political challenges of our time, not only to understand the world we live in, but, above all, to create possibilities of its resignification.

There is no doubt that there are great challenges to be faced in order for Brazil to overcome the coloniality that remains active in our contemporaneity. Even though universities are adopting policies aimed at increasing the opportunities of access to undergraduate and graduate courses for indigenous people, there is still a great difficulty in making attitudinal, curricular, and epistemological changes that value ethno-racial diversity and contemplate the different cultures, knowledges, doings, and cosmovisions. However, we need to keep in mind that we have another university in the 21st century, differentiated by the recent entrance of a diversity of subjects - blacks, indigenous, quilombolas, people with disabilities - who were historically excluded from this space. And, as a result, the knowledge produced by these people also needs to circulate within it.

The conquest of the insertion of these subjects in this prestigious space that is the university is a decisive step, but not enough to overcome the prejudiced attitudes practiced in everyday university life. Thus, we need to think about the new challenges posed to the university by the presence of a diverse public and build possibilities to decolonize the imaginary, the attitudes, the pedagogies, and the epistemologies.

The experiences, such as those reported in this text, may perhaps open ways for the voices that are not yet recognized, not because they do not exist, but because we are not yet able to hear them, to gradually change the way we look, listen, and read the university space. Perhaps they can also contribute to the valorization of the epistemic, social, political, and cultural wealth that has been wasted for years.

It is necessary that actions such as the PIN of the UFFS be developed and that we advance in the issue of permanence and success of indigenous students, as well as, according to Figueiredo and Grosfoguel (2007), seek the formation of university teaching staff that have indigenous teachers in its composition. In addition, it is necessary to develop studies/research and programs/actions that provide visibility to indigenous students and other historically invisible groups.

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