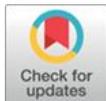


## The presence of indigenous people in higher education: curricular reinterpretations



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### Abstract

**Introduction.** The research is based on a group of authors from the post-critical, post-colonial, decoloniality, and Southern epistemologies fields. It aims to analyze how the presence of indigenous people in higher education causes curricular reinterpretations, either by questioning stereotypes and principles of Western/colonial epistemology or by including indigenous knowledge and epistemologies. **Methodology.** This is a qualitative research study with a comprehensive and interpretive analysis approach. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with indigenous students in undergraduate programs, and three theses and three dissertations written by indigenous students in graduate programs in education between 2020 and 2024 were analyzed. **Results and discussion.** The analysis indicates that the curricula, although marked by coloniality, are being modified, and it can be concluded that indigenous people have produced curricular reinterpretations in the courses they attend.

### Keywords

coloniality; curriculum; higher education.

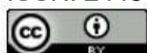
### A presença de indígenas na educação superior: ressignificações curriculares

### Resumo

**Introdução.** A pesquisa apoia-se em um conjunto de autores dos campos pós-críticos, pós-coloniais, da decolonialidade e das epistemologias do Sul. Objetiva analisar como a presença de indígenas na educação superior provoca ressignificações curriculares, seja por meio do questionamento dos estereótipos e dos princípios da epistemologia ocidental/colonial, seja pela inclusão de conhecimentos e epistemologias indígenas. **Metodologia.** Trata-se de pesquisa com abordagem qualitativa, de análise compreensiva e interpretativa. Foram feitas 12 entrevistas semiestruturadas com estudantes indígenas de licenciaturas e analisadas três teses e três dissertações realizadas por indígenas em programas de pós-graduação em Educação no período 2020-2024. **Resultados e discussão.** A análise indica que os currículos, embora marcados pela colonialidade, estão sendo modificados, podendo-se concluir que os indígenas têm produzido ressignificações curriculares nos cursos que frequentam.

### Palavras-chave

colonialidade; currículo; educação superior.



## La presencia de indígenas en la educación superior: resignificaciones curriculares

### Resumen

**Introducción.** La investigación se apoya en un conjunto de autores de los campos poscríticos, poscoloniales, de la decolonialidad y de las epistemologías del Sur. El objetivo es analizar de qué manera la presencia de indígenas en la educación superior provoca resignificaciones curriculares, ya sea a través del cuestionamiento de los estereotipos y de los principios de la epistemología occidental/colonial, ya sea a través de la inclusión de conocimientos y epistemologías indígenas. **Metodología.** se trata de una investigación con enfoque cualitativo, de análisis comprensivo e interpretativo. Se realizaron 12 entrevistas semiestructuradas con estudiantes indígenas de licenciaturas y se analizaron tres tesis y tres disertaciones realizadas por indígenas en programas de posgrado en Educación en el período 2020-2024. **Resultados y discusión.** El análisis indica que los planes de estudios, además de estar marcados por la colonialidad, están siendo modificados, lo que permite concluir que los indígenas han producido resignificaciones curriculares en los cursos que frecuentan.

### Palabras clave

colonialidad; plan de estudios; educación superior.

## 1 Introduction

Curricula are not fixed or finished documents. Regardless of efforts to stabilize them, they are continuously shaped by processes of re-signification forged through a multiplicity of subjects and contexts at all levels of education. While recognizing this multiplicity, this article focuses on indigenous peoples in higher education, whether in undergraduate courses or in *stricto sensu* graduate programs in education. In Brazilian education, as we will argue, these processes of reframing occur in curricular contexts marked by colonial/Western epistemology.

Considering this context, the current study aims to analyze how the presence of indigenous people in higher education has led to curricular reinterpretations, among other things, by questioning stereotypes and the principles of Western/colonial epistemology and by including indigenous knowledge and epistemologies. To achieve this objective, we conducted semi-structured interviews with indigenous students enrolled in undergraduate programs; we also analyzed theses and dissertations written by indigenous students in graduate programs in education.

The first part of the article presents the analysis, bringing together a group of authors from the fields of post-critical (Paraíso, 2023), postcolonial (Bhabha, 1998; Hall,

2016), decoloniality (Grosfoguel, 2016; Quijano, 2005), and epistemologies of the South (Santos, 2008). We learn from indigenous peoples that differences between epistemological fields do not need to be hierarchized and disqualified and that they can be a source of complementarity and collaboration between knowledge systems. Based on these authors, we understand that the curriculum is a territory of struggle and political dispute and that current curricula are marked by coloniality, but even so, they can and are being reinterpreted. In the second part, we present the methodology and analysis, based on two studies. In the final considerations, we return to some reflections and reaffirm the political power that indigenous peoples have to redefine curricula.

## 2 Situating the analysis

Since the colonization process, the indigenous peoples of Brazil have resisted the imposition of Western culture. In the field of education, although schools have been used for centuries as a privileged space for imposing Western values, thanks to the struggle, organization, and resistance of indigenous peoples, they have changed their role in indigenous communities. In terms of curriculum, we can say that, historically, they have always opposed the idea of a single, universal curriculum based exclusively on colonial/Western knowledge. This struggle, although it has always existed on the part of indigenous peoples, began to gain more visibility, especially for non-indigenous peoples, in the 1970s:

The call to overcome colonialist paradigms in school education—and questions about how to achieve this—began to be heard in the 1970s, in the same classrooms that had once been established on indigenous lands as a central strategy of the Portuguese and later Brazilian colonization project (Pellegrini; Ghanem; Góes Neto, 2021, p. 3).

It was this struggle that led to the 1988 Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988) recognizing the right of indigenous peoples to a bilingual, differentiated, and intercultural indigenous school. As a result, school curricula in indigenous communities have increasingly taken on these characteristics. Indigenous people, in becoming protagonists in the construction of their schools' curricula, do not do so without initial training.

Thus, in recent years, there has been an increase in both the creation of intercultural courses and the presence of indigenous people in higher education, with an emphasis on teacher training courses. “Facing continuous adversities, limitations, and contradictions, this front of action has also given rise to a body of practices and thinking with the potential to challenge common school models” (Pellegrini; Ghanem; Góes Neto, 2021, p. 3), as well as common university models. According to the census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2022), there was a 374% increase in indigenous people in higher education, that is, from 2011 to 2021, the number rose from 9,764 to 46,252, respectively, showing that the struggle of indigenous people against exclusion in higher education is having an effect.

Bonin (2022, p. 8) points out that there are two forms of exclusion of indigenous people from university: one related to difficulties in admission, which often mean impossibility of access; and the second linked to exclusion:

[...] of knowledge, worldviews, languages, future projects, and perspectives on life constructed by these individuals who, in the academic environment, are considered other subjects, whose perspectives are not constitutive, but rather, at most, peripheral.

The author also points out that, although there has been an increase in access policies via affirmative action, which has led to an increase in the number of indigenous people in universities, these policies have been insufficient to ensure that indigenous people remain in higher education. Above all, universities need to rethink their Eurocentric curricula, which limit the presence and constrain indigenous people who enter, remain, and complete courses.

Despite this historical exclusion and the curricular barriers that still exist, indigenous people are increasing their presence in universities, including with higher quality, according to the National Higher Education Assessment System (Sinaes) (Brazil, 2004). In addition, they are present in several graduate programs in Brazil, including programs considered to be of academic excellence, that is, programs evaluated by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) (2021) with a score of 6 or 7.

They also enter university to question the strategies of imposing Western culture and disqualifying indigenous knowledge, ways of being, and ways of living ( ). Indigenous

people have been treated as inferior, incapable beings who, as such, should undergo a process of colonization/civilization, according to Western logic. In this logic, schools, along with the Church and the military (Bhabha, 1998), were seen as central institutions for the success of the colonial project.

Similarly, universities were built by circulating Western knowledge and disqualifying the knowledge of other regions of the world. Grosfoguel (2016, p. 27) argues that the humanities in Western universities are based on knowledge produced by men from five countries (Italy, France, England, Germany, and the United States). The theories of these men "[...] are supposedly sufficient to explain the socio-historical realities of the rest of the world." Thus, universities have a racist/sexist structure that has its origins in the "[...] genocide/epistemicide implemented by the colonial and patriarchal project of the 16th century" (Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 46).

Indigenous peoples, however, resist and affirm their cultures and identities even in the colonial context and in the context of coloniality. As Quijano (2005) points out, racialization was invented in the context of colonization as a criterion for classifying human groups. Race became "[...] the first fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world's population into levels, places, and roles in the power structure of the new society. In other words, in the basic mode of universal social classification of the world population" (Quijano, 2005, p. 118). With the end of colonization, the criterion remains and is updated, giving rise to coloniality, through which indigenous peoples continue to be classified as less than human.

Santos (2008) states that colonialism and global capitalism created abysmal conditions of power. Indigenous peoples, however, have not bowed and do not bow to colonial logic. More than not bowing, they are occupying Western institutions, showing their way of knowing, living, being, and coexisting (Walsh, 2012), fighting to end the stereotypes attributed to them.

As we have already pointed out, one of these spaces being occupied by indigenous peoples is the university. The university, a space in which historically only Western knowledge circulates, is being occupied by indigenous peoples who bring with them their knowledge, their ways of being, living, and coexisting, provoking curricular transformations: "There are still non-Western epistemic perspectives that maintain a

relative exteriority to Eurocentric modernity. They were affected by genocide/epistemicide, but they were not completely destroyed" (Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 44). These epistemic perspectives give new meaning to the curricula.

When we say that indigenous peoples are re-signifying the curriculum, we do so because the curriculum is understood beyond the disciplinary content that is present. The curriculum is also a space/time for the production of subjects, identities, and differences. The curriculum is not a closed and finished document. The curriculum is "[...] a contested field; it is a territory of political and cultural struggle; it is an artifact of fundamental importance in our lives because it is an active participant in the production of who we are, who we want to be, and who we will be" (Paraíso, 2023, p. 91).

While we know that current curriculum policies are based on a neo-pragmatic and neo-conservative model that "[...] can result in graduates arriving at schools without the ability to recognize the cultural, social, and economic specificities of their students, limiting their impact as agents of social change" (Albino; Rodrigues; Dutra-Pereira, 2024, p. 16), we also recognize that the curriculum in the context of practice undergoes various "[...] relationships of differences and similarities that articulate and transform merely descriptive practices into conditions of performativity and other constitutions of curricular practices, subject to various shifts" (Almeida; Silva, J.; Silva, E, 2024, p. 3).

After all, the subjects who go through a curriculum affect it, transform it, and redefine it. With the presence of indigenous peoples, meanings slip, slide, skid, and are redirected: "New meanings are grafted onto the old ones. Words and images carry connotations that are not fully controlled by anyone, and [...] marginal or submerged meanings come to the surface and allow different meanings to be constructed, different things to be shown and said" (Hall, 2016, p. 211).

The research, conducted over three years with support from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), showed that the presence of indigenous people in different teacher training courses has effectively produced new meanings in these curricula (Backes, 2024; Pavan, 2021). Similarly, the research being carried out by the National Center for the Study of Indigenous Cultures ( ) based on the knowledge produced in theses and dissertations written by indigenous people in the field of education, also with support from CNPq, shows that the curricula of these programs

are also being reinterpreted (Backes, 2024; Pavan, 2021). We will discuss some of these reinterpretations below.

### 3 Indigenous presence in higher education and curricular reinterpretations

As already mentioned, this article is the result of two studies conducted with the support of CNPq. In the first, now completed, field research was conducted in the second half of 2021 through semi-structured interviews with indigenous students enrolled in teaching degree programs at a university located in the Midwest of the country. We emphasize that the research was approved by the Ethics Committee, Opinion No. 4,701,312. To preserve anonymity, we will not identify the name of the university, nor will we characterize the indigenous people, informing only their ethnicity.

It is understood that the interviews “[...] are imbued with the discourses of their time, the situation experienced, and the truths established for the social groups of the group members” (Silveira, 2002, p. 130). Twelve interviews were conducted, but we will refer to three statements by indigenous people, one for each recurrence observed in the analysis of all interviews, namely: a) the university as a space for questioning indigenous stereotypes; b) the importance of disciplines involving cultural diversity; c) the possibility for indigenous people to show their history, culture, and identity at the university. The statements were analyzed based on the authors who support the argument.

The second investigation, currently in progress, uses documents as research sources. In this article, the time frame is the period 2020-2024. To construct the article, two programs were chosen, one located in southern Brazil, at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), and another in the southeast, at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), as these are the regions of Brazil with the most programs of excellence (there is only one in the Northeast; the North and Midwest have none), with three theses and three dissertations being considered. In accordance with the principle of saturation problematized by Minayo (2017), the analysis of the six productions proved sufficient to meet the objective of the article. Recognizing that in qualitative research it is not possible to specify *a priori* or *a posteriori* the number of subjects—in our case, the number of theses and dissertations—the author points out that: “[...] what needs to prevail

is the researcher's certainty that, even provisionally, they have found the internal logic of their object of study – which is also the subject – in all its connections and interconnections” (Minayo, 2017, p. 10). Below is a table with the theses and dissertations analyzed.

**Table 1 – Theses and dissertations analyzed**

Title	Year	D/T	Author	Ethnicity
Ūn si ag tū pē ki vēnh kajrānrān fā the role of schools in Kaingang communities	2020	T	Bruno Ferreira	Kaingang
Kubai, the enchanted one: indigenous children's literature in focus	2021	D	Raquel de Cássia Rodrigues Ramos	Kubeo
Aakene töwecchojo je ye'kwana nijummaanä fajeeda ai woowanoomanä? [manuscript] / what do the ye'kwana want from school?	2022	D	Reinaldo Wadeyuna Luiz Rocha	Ye'kwana
A different kind of indigenous school: the revival of Xokleng education	2023	D	Woie Kriri Sobrinho Patté	Xokleng
Tracing paths: the life story of Andila Kaingáng	2023	T	Susana Andréa Inácio Belfort	Kaingang
Arandu: the Guarani pedagogy of beautiful words	2024	T	Isael da Silva Pinheiro	Guarani

Source: Own work (2024).

Theses and dissertations are seen as very important documents, as they record the knowledge produced by indigenous people in their respective courses, through which it is possible, in accordance with the objective of the article, to identify curricular reinterpretations. In addition, it is necessary to pay attention to how the documents dialogue with the theoretical field. In this sense, the authors were chosen because they are critical of modern/Western science as the only way to produce valid knowledge, because they are critical of a curriculum based solely on Western knowledge, and because they recognize the importance of methodological, epistemological, and curricular plurality. In short, these are authors who question the processes of indigenous subalternization and are committed to valuing indigenous epistemologies and experiences as one of the ways to eradicate curricular, epistemic, cognitive, and social injustices. They are authors, therefore, who produce knowledge using the expression common among indigenous peoples, who are seen from the perspective of complementarity, learning together, in an effort to build knowledge *with* indigenous peoples, and not *about* them.

Based on these two studies, we highlight the reinterpretations that are occurring in higher education curricula due to the presence of indigenous people in courses. We begin

by pointing out that the presence of indigenous people provokes non-indigenous students to question their stereotypical and discriminatory views.

As Bhabha (1998, p. 116) teaches, one of the effective strategies of colonization and subalternization is the production of stereotypes about colonized peoples; the “[...] stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ based as much on domination and pleasure as on anxiety and defense, as it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and refusal of it [sic].” Through stereotypes, the other is invented in a fixed and frozen way, so that what these other do, think, and says will always be situated in the realm of bestiality, inhumanity, and lack of civility.

During the interviews, indigenous students referred to many stereotypes that were produced during the colonial period and still circulate in society and in the university, such as the idea of primitive, lazy, backward, savage, “animal,” but their presence in the university context contributes to these stereotypes being questioned. As the indigenous person from the Boé-Bororo ethnic group says:

*We have a humanities class that also works a lot with indigenous issues. This class, which talks about us, indigenous people, is essential because students learn a lot. When it starts to stray from a context that I know is not us, we interrupt the class a little and start talking: 'Look! That's how it was in the past, but now we are different. Such and such happened, we changed; we use cell phones. [...] We are in the city, we wear clothes; if we have cell phones, we are still indigenous. We need to explain that it is not like they say.'*

Stereotypical views still circulate in the university, but the presence of indigenous people causes these to be questioned, because it is the experiential knowledge of the indigenous person that is there before the Western subject, showing that their culture is not stuck in the past, but is updated, hybridized, and *interculturalized*. Their presence contributes to the perception of their culture as dynamic, deconstructing prejudices and breaking “[...] with the colonialist view that sees indigenous people as strange and primitive” (Silva; Diniz; Alencar; 2021, p. 5). Our research is similar to the results of the research by Pellegrini, Ghanem, and Góes Neto (2021, p. 21) , who, when analyzing the entry of indigenous people into higher education in Brazil and, specifically, in São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Amazonas, highlight that access is still limited, that curricula are still heavily marked by coloniality, but that, despite this, “[...] the incipient entry of indigenous agendas and students themselves

into the educational environment had the potential to disrupt crystallized modes of conception and operation.”

Indeed, the presence of indigenous people has affected university curricula. The issue of stereotypes is also present in graduate studies and is brought into theses as something important to be combated. There is a need to continue fighting against the stereotype of indigenous people as primitive, animals, "beasts," not recognized as human beings, as the Kaingang indigenous woman writes in her thesis:

For more than 520 years, the denial of the right to life and the status of being human has been used as a strategy of colonization, justifying the annihilation and mass destruction of the original peoples who lived here, in addition to the expropriation of their territories, considered no man's land: *res nullius*. Colonialist practices continued with the denial and exclusion of the rights of indigenous peoples in the context of the creation of the nation-state (Belfort, 2023, p. 110).

In her thesis, the indigenous woman refers to 520 years, highlighting that doubts about the humanity of indigenous peoples persist in the non-indigenous imagination, and therefore the need to fight against this stereotype continues. This need is due to the force that Western/colonial logic has on the process of constructing what it means to be indigenous, an understanding that is also present in the curriculum. Ramos (2021, p. 29), a Kubeo indigenous person, in his master's thesis narrates the difficulties he faced in graduate school, from leaving Amazonas to arriving in Porto Alegre to pursue his master's degree, as well as during the course: "I emphasize how important it is to consider how much colonization imposed the stigma of 'primitive' on indigenous peoples, and even today, we are confronted with narratives that define indigenous people as incapable." She points out that completing her master's degree is a criticism "[...] of those who dare to speak for us" (Ramos, 2021, p. 30) and those who disrespect our own knowledge and epistemologies.

According to Grosfoguel (2016), Western knowledge, by disqualifying and dehumanizing non-European/Christian subjects and knowledge, created the conditions to impose itself as unique and universal. This was only possible after four genocides/epistemicides:

1. Against Muslims and Jews in the conquest of Al-Andalus in the name of 'blood purity';
2. Against the indigenous peoples of the American continent, first, and then against the aborigines in Asia;
3. Against Africans imprisoned in their

territory and later enslaved on the American continent; and 4. Against women who practiced and transmitted Indo-European knowledge in Europe, who were burned alive on charges of being witches (Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 31).

The persecution and disqualification of Muslims and Jews occurred on the grounds that they believed in false gods and also possessed false knowledge, hence the practice of burning their libraries. If they accepted the true god, they would escape genocide, but epistemicide was inevitable. The colonization of America and African slavery, on the other hand, were based on an even more tragic criterion: whether or not they had souls, that is, whether or not they were human.

Bhabha (1998), in his analysis, shows us that Europeans, by questioning the humanity of Africans and indigenous peoples, opened up two possibilities, both involving cruelty, violence, and massacre, with the ultimate result being genocide/epistemicide: if they concluded that they were not human, the path to annihilation would be clear, without any remorse; if they concluded that humanity was possible (it was already clear to Europeans that they were not as human as they were), all sorts of physical and symbolic violence would be justifiable to transform them into humans, through a process of salvation and civilization. In relation to the genocide/epistemicide of women, their bodies and knowledge were burned at the stake during the Inquisition.

The marks of these genocides/epistemicides remain present in universities and in the process of knowledge construction. Universities continue to have difficulty recognizing that there are various sciences, various methods, various epistemologies. As Pinheiro (2024, p. 103) points out in his thesis:

It is not a question of denying the importance of scientific knowledge. Far from it, the question is whether or not to accept a single form of interpretation, a single methodology. For we know that maintaining these methodologies as unique means, by hierarchy of power, denying the existence of the coloniality of knowledge.

Indigenous people, in undergraduate and graduate programs in Education, tell us that the curriculum is not universal, but rather a territory of political and cultural struggle. Their presence re-signifies the curricula, challenging as never before the existence of a single, universal epistemology. Indigenous people are intellectuals and researchers: “[...] of their own culture, which brings with it other conceptions of the world, other

epistemologies that are also undervalued. In other words, with this presence, there must be transformative changes in academic spaces” (Pinheiro, 2024, p. 52). They know that the epistemology and methodology to be followed to produce knowledge cannot be Western: “The methodology present in the thesis, therefore, is different, because maintaining the Western methodology predominant in the university means agreeing with the theories of the colonizing center” (Pinheiro, 2024, p. 102). In this sense:

The diverse profile of students, the different collective subjects, and their belongings constitute an intercultural mosaic marked by interactions, conflicts, and disagreements, which materialize on the university grounds, posing challenges to us, teachers and students; but, at the same time, they give us a perspective of infinite learning provided in these dialogical clashes of empowerment, re-signification, (re)construction, and identity affirmations (Parente; Miléo, 2021, p. 8).

Indigenous people, therefore, bring their knowledge and their ways of being and educating into the courses, provoking intercultural and decolonial reflections: “Students and intellectuals ‘on the other side’ of intercultural dialogue speak on their own behalf, thereby also providing guidelines for their non-indigenous allies to carry out the continually necessary critiques of coloniality” (Pellegrini; Ghanem; Góes Neto, 2021, p. 5).

Based on Walsh (2012, p. 62, our translation), we can say that this is a critical interculturality, which, unlike relational and functional interculturality, which does not question the processes of subalternization nor has the construction of social justice as its horizon, is understood “[...] as an action, project, and process that seeks to intervene in the refounding of the structures and orders of society that ly racialize, inferiorize, and dehumanize, that is, in the still-present matrix of the coloniality of power.”

Thus, the access and permanence of indigenous people in teacher training and postgraduate courses does not only mean the presence of other subjects, they bring with them their knowledge, their epistemologies, their worldviews that redefine the curricula, while also criticizing the epistemology present in universities. In his dissertation, the Ye'kwana indigenous scholar recalls his experience in undergraduate studies and points out that, during his master's degree, he was able to reflect more on this and better understand why it happens. He also makes it clear that this reality still marks universities:

[...] the discussion was epistemologically Eurocentric, considered dominant in humanity, which meant that Amerindian knowledge was always considered inferior. This situation continues to this day, which is very painful for us, indigenous people, and for the Earth, which is increasingly sickened by the predatory thinking and actions of white men (Rocha, 2022, p. 36).

This type of reflection, when made by a subject who is based on another worldview and other epistemologies, contributes to the reframing of the curriculum in a more fundamental way than those made by Western subjects, as they are reflections laden with historical struggle and resistance against the violence perpetrated by the assumption of a single, universal epistemology, which, as the indigenous writer notes, leads to the sickness of the earth and produces predatory actions.

From the research carried out with indigenous undergraduate students, it can be observed that it is mainly in subjects focused on diversity that indigenous people speak up to show their knowledge and their ways of living, being, and coexisting. Although there is greater participation in these subjects, the curriculum as a whole is affected. Other knowledge, other epistemologies circulate, as the indigenous woman from the Terena ethnic group said during the interview:

*We had a class on indigenous issues that talked a lot about this. We even discussed the issues that are happening now, about indigenous lands, demarcation... We gave presentations. Those who are truly indigenous did this. We gave a class for those who were watching, our classmates who were watching. We gave a presentation for them to see what our reality is like.*

Bringing the issue of indigenous lands into teacher training courses, showing the indigenous perspective, a perspective that lies outside the logic of capitalism and productivism, and learning that there are other ways of relating to the land, to "mother nature," is fundamental for transforming "[...] Western universities into decolonial pluriversities" (Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 46). For indigenous peoples, Western knowledge in the current context is a necessity, but not to follow it, but rather to defend the education of their people. As Patté (2023, p. 43) points out, it is necessary to "[...] know and also share in the education of white people, as a tool of defense, by knowing how to speak Portuguese, in order to dialogue and discuss the indigenous rights that we have already achieved. But it is also to recognize that we have our own education." Similarly, Rocha (2022, p. 47) writes in his dissertation:

The teaching and learning process always starts from the traditional knowledge of our people, carrying out practices in accordance with our culture. Subsequently, we learn about the world and the knowledge of outside society, without losing focus on our fundamental bases. The national language is an important tool for defending our territory and our rights.

From indigenous peoples, we learn the importance of linking education with culture, with the experience and knowledge that individuals carry in their bodies. One issue that can be observed and that has great potential to redefine curricula is the characteristic of indigenous peoples of not seeing knowledge and different epistemologies as antagonistic, but as complementary. This logic of complementarity is observed in the way they conceive their relationship with Western knowledge. Education and curricula can encompass various types of knowledge without the need to hierarchize them, as Patté (2023, p. 76) writes:

For researchers based on Western culture, school education should be based on teaching the knowledge found in books, which represents only Western thought and culture, which originated in Europe and which we see as the invader. However, in Laklãnõ thinking, school can be thought of as complementing each other, which means that different types of knowledge, different ways of learning, and different ways of being in the world can coexist, complementing each other.

By applying the principle of reciprocity and complementarity to the process of knowledge construction in the context of universities, including postgraduate programs in Education of excellence, indigenous peoples introduce other logics and epistemologies, redefining the curricula:

*Designing the thesis gave me a lot to think about!* To do so, I drew on theoretical and methodological references from Collaborative Research, based on the principle of reciprocity and complementarity, based on the Kaingang cosmological relationship Kamê and Kajru, or Ûn si ag tú pê ki vênh kajrân rân fã - ancient ways and those of the elders to learn and learn together. This understanding guided the reflective processes necessary in the construction of the work. With these principles, the reframing of collaborative research fulfills a role of dialogue between the modern Western scientific method and the traditional Kaingang methods anchored in ancestry, in order to construct new knowledge from the Kaingang perspective. Therefore, the methodological procedure makes it possible to bring the Kaingang scientific position into the construction of the work, promoting the relationship between different types of knowledge and wisdom in academic elaboration (Ferreira, 2020, p. 16, emphasis added).

As can be seen, when indigenous people enter Westernized universities, they do not bow to the principles of Western science: “[...] disqualification/selection;

normalization; hierarchization; pyramidal centralization” (Gallo, 2006, p. 557). They deal with reciprocity, complementarity, dialogue, collaboration, and the prospect of learning together. Even in the face of the characteristics of Western science, which ignores the existence of other forms of knowledge, they build bridges and *openings*, thus forging new meanings in the curriculum. With Bhabha (1988, p. 165), we understand that the presence of indigenous people in graduate studies causes “[...] ‘denied’ knowledge to infiltrate the dominant discourse and make the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition—strange.”

Finally, we highlight that the presence of indigenous people in universities encourages some professors to propose methodologies and practices in curricula that take cultural differences into account. The presence of difference in the classroom is one of the most powerful ways to forge differentiated methodologies and practices in curricula. In the case of the presence of indigenous people, due to their historical resistance to the Western way of being and living, it provokes a decentering in teachers that encourages them to think differently about their classes. An indigenous person from the Terena ethnic group reported during the interview that the teacher who taught Indigenous History and Culture said in class that those who knew most about indigenous history and culture were the indigenous people themselves. He encouraged them to speak, participate in class, and present their work:

*The course was very good and important. We presented projects. The teacher asked us to present projects on what indigenous culture was and is like. And I and the other indigenous students, from Education and Biology, presented projects on our culture. I thought it was very good to talk about this so that my classmates could learn.*

Even though this professor could have said the same thing without indigenous students in the classroom, the effect would not have been the same. The fact that indigenous people occupied the university space allowed the professor to make the experience richer and more meaningful. His methodology and practice were redefined, as was the curriculum itself. As Kawakami (2019, p. 11) tells us, although we do not know exactly how much the university is being forced to review its understanding of knowledge, curriculum, and science, we do know that: "The presence [...] daily presence of indigenous students is capable of causing cracks that destabilize the

binaries and the colonial library itself that constitute the Eurocentric matrix of production, validation, and circulation of knowledge in academia." These transformations also occur in *stricto sensu* graduate programs.

#### 4 Final considerations

As we conclude this article, we recall that post-critical theories of curriculum often point to the 1990s as the moment of their emergence in Brazil. As Paraíso (2023) points out, according to this theory, the curriculum is a field of political and cultural dispute, a contested field, a space for the production of identities of difference. Analyzing the historical struggle of indigenous peoples, first against the imposition of the Western/colonial curriculum and in recent decades for the construction of indigenous, intercultural, and differentiated curricula in basic education and intercultural degrees, and their struggle to access and remain in higher education, including postgraduate programs of excellence, it seems to us that, if we are guided by curricular, cognitive, and epistemological justice, we are forced to recognize that this theorization in the field of curriculum took so long to be recognized because we were overly colonized by Western/colonial epistemology, which does not even admit the possibility of other epistemologies, since it was constructed, as Grosfoguel (2016) points out, on the basis of genocide/epistemicide.

Since the Jesuits imposed the first school in Brazil at the beginning of colonization, indigenous peoples have told us with their lives that the curriculum is a territory of dispute, a space for the construction of identities and differences, that the content of the curriculum is not disinterested, but manufactures subjects. They have been telling us this for more than five centuries, but we, because we have learned that what counts is the knowledge produced in academia, only realized this belatedly, in the 1990s.

We infer that – we finally realize, albeit tenuously – the struggle of indigenous peoples, even if we are not aware of it or do not want to admit it, kept alive the possibilities of thinking about plural curricula, deeply articulated with cultures and differences. After all, it was at that moment that indigenous peoples acquired the constitutional right to have schools according to their cultures and identities. Of course,

there is also the hypothesis – more accepted in the field of curriculum – that this theorization is largely due to studies carried out by Brazilian researchers of French and British authors, which is why, as a result, there are several curricular reinterpretations. This hypothesis, however, is already sufficiently recognized, and it is not necessary to dwell on it.

In making this observation, we are obviously not questioning the importance of post-critical theorization, nor how much it helps us to problematize the hegemonic curriculum, but rather highlighting the epistemological vigilance necessary for us to recognize the importance and, often, the protagonism of subjects who are guided by other epistemologies, such as indigenous peoples, in the process of constructing our theories, so that these, even if they claim to be plural, are not based on the silencing and erasure of struggles, knowledge, and epistemologies; so that these, when they claim to be decolonial, do not contribute to the maintenance of coloniality.

Guided by this vigilance, a vigilance that is exercised not on the basis of our own epistemology, but on the epistemologies of indigenous peoples, we argue that indigenous peoples, in different educational spaces, have been protagonists in the reframing of curricula: indigenous peoples have produced curricular reframings in teacher training courses and in postgraduate programs of excellence, with an emphasis on questioning stereotypes; the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and the indigenous perspective ( ) on their history and culture; the transformation of teachers' practices and methodologies from the perspective of difference. Above all, they have challenged Western/colonial epistemology, which supports the idea of a single, universal curriculum, by introducing their epistemologies into the construction of their dissertations and theses.

Unlike Western/colonial epistemology, which teaches us that difference must be disqualified, hierarchized, and normalized, indigenous epistemologies teach us that different epistemologies suggest complementarity and collaboration, with no room for genocide/epistemicide. In doing so, they not only create openings to reframe curricula, but also gradually break down the walls and trenches that have historically hindered the existence of differences in their multiple dimensions in curricula.

The process of reframing curricula in light of the indigenous presence is therefore taking place, whether we like it or not, whether we perceive it or not, whether we consider

it legitimate or not. Its existence does not depend on recognition, authorization, acceptance, or supposed legitimacy on the part of those who remain tied to the colonial/Western epistemological canon.

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