

# Decoloniality of knowledge: Scientific dissemination of indigenous women productions.

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**Abstract.** This study analyzed theses and master's dissertations of indigenous women in public universities of Brazil. The history of the colonization in Brazil left traces of a power dynamic that devalued indigenous culture. With this, the monopolization of knowledge and communication was established by people who reinforce the Eurocentric production of knowledge. We outlined a study that crossed the lines of indigenous women's productions with the discussions already produced by researchers of the decoloniality in human sciences. We faced the silencing processes that these women went through during their studies. We identified the difficulties of dissemination of these important works and the impacts generated by the new dynamics of those who were once objects of study and slowly occupy their spaces in a claim for their place of speech. Therefore, we highlighted the need for direct action by universities to encourage and better disseminate the counter-hegemonic productions of indigenous women.

**Keywords.** Indigenous women, decoloniality, colonisation, dissertations

## 1. Introduction

Since the Portuguese colonization, the Brazilian indigenous communities have experienced intense processes of violence, they were removed from their lands and enslaved, while their exploitation culminated in resistance and struggle for rights<sup>[1]</sup>. This resistance, based on a claim for the preservation of their cultures and communities, is growing and gaining new spaces. With the promulgation of the actual Brazilian Constitution in 1988, new relations were created between the State and the original peoples, building legal bases for the elaboration of basic rights to such communities. Among these rights, it includes the necessity of a differentiated education to indigenous communities, aiming to recognize and create spaces for their distinct forms of cultural expressions and organizations<sup>[2]</sup>. Emerged already in the context of colonization, the indigenous schooling focused on catechesis and literacy in the Portuguese language, under the discourse of "salvation of the savages". Without the necessary appreciation of their cultural processes, it was oriented to indigenous assimilation and acculturation, through the action of members of religious orders who disseminated a repressive education with the purpose of "civilizing" these people<sup>[3]</sup>.

In the same perspective of a progressive integration of indigenous people in the State, in 1910, the Indigenous Protection Service (SPI) was created. This was a government agency dedicated to the prerogative of a protection and guardianship of indigenous people. However, ruled according to a progressive integration of indigenous people in the State and of the expansion of the economic frontier on their lands, it reinforced violent processes against those it was supposed to protect. Due to a series of scandals of corruption and violence, it was ended in 1967 and substituted by the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI). Despite the new approach based on the idea of a self-determination for indigenous people, FUNAI is still facing their silencing and lack of representativeness in political decisions and their effective policies' implementation<sup>[3]</sup>.

It was only in the 1970s and 1980s that social struggles began to gain space on the national scene during the process of redemocratisation after the military dictatorship. Verdum<sup>[4]</sup> highlights the role of indigenous women in claiming rights in relation to the state government, as they established themselves as important voices in the fight movement. Even though they were considered invisible in the society, their forces of and in social

protests demonstrated their resistance to the silencing and violence imposed on them. They were responsible for the creation of the Association of Indigenous Women of the Upper Rio Negro (Amarn), the Department of Indigenous Women (DMI), the Association of Sateré Mawé Indigenous Women (Amism), as well as many others that promoted an open dialogue in the communities towards governmental organisations.

In this context of demanding rights, it was just in the last 20 years that indigenous peoples conquered a new space, the academic one. The pioneering approval of State Law No. 13,134 of 18/04/2001, for the first time in the history of Brazil, defined three additional vacancies in each of the state universities for indigenous peoples in the state of Paraná<sup>[5]</sup>. Thus, the first step was taken towards what would be established in 2012 as the "Quotas Law" (Federal Law No. 12.711/2012), which guaranteed the reservation of vacancies in public universities in the country to indigenous, brown (*pardo*) and black people<sup>[6]</sup>. A right conquered through the fight of the indigenous peoples and other previously invisibilized and marginalized sectors of Brazilian society. In this fight, many indigenous women were and are protagonists.

Having as a starting point this panorama, this study aims at discussing some academic sing academic productions of indigenous women in the last 15 years. The objective is to recognise common points in their research, seeking to identify what their particularized perspectives, as indigenous women, contributed to the establishment of new academic paradigms. We focus on the recognition of voices silenced by the colonization process that were heretofore objects of study in the academic world, and that now, assuming a new position as academics, these voices claim the production of knowledge for themselves. The discussion will provoke a reflection on the coloniality of knowledge, in other words, the production of Eurocentric knowledge that strengthens works of men approved by the colonizer<sup>[7]</sup>. We will base ourselves on the concept of "decolonisation" as discussed by Frantz Fanon<sup>[8]</sup>, a Martinican psychiatrist and political philosopher who revolutionized postcolonial studies.

## 2. Methods

As an initial part of the research, we developed a bibliographical survey to map the academic productions of indigenous women through the institutional repositories of public universities in Brazil. The repositories are virtual environments responsible for the storage, organization, dissemination and preservation of the scientific productions of each institution. In order to better delimit the search, we decided to select only doctoral theses and master's dissertations. Instead of focusing on a wide quantitative description, we opted for developing a qualitative study of some

selected works. This approach enables us to understand which common points could be observed in the academic work of indigenous women who were seeking a new level in their studies.

During the first searches within the repositories, using the specific searching tools in these platforms, it was difficult to determine which productions were or were not done by indigenous women., The information about their ethnic self-identification is not declared alongside their productions. We did not find any system that promotes and disseminates indigenous academic works separately from the others. In this way, their productions get lost in the midst of many others already published or stored in the repositories. To solve this obstacle, we explored news portals some universities are creating about their indigenous communities. Through these we found the works of Geni Núñez<sup>[9]</sup> and Célia Nunes Correa<sup>[10]</sup>. Giving continuity to this search, the first author received an indication from her colleagues about Edilaise Santos Vieira<sup>[11]</sup> Master's dissertation. This work has been extremely relevant in the composition of the first three texts included, already suggesting a line of thought for the research. We found sites such as the Centre of Indigenous Cultures of UFSCAR<sup>[12]</sup>, Ikamiaba - *Aldeia dos Saberes*<sup>[13]</sup>, GRUMIN<sup>[14]</sup>, among others. These enabled access to the productions of Fernanda Sant'Anna<sup>[15]</sup> and Núbia Batista da Silva<sup>[16]</sup>. When searching on Google, we realized that also other platforms, such as Escavador could contribute to the task, since it is a site that collects, organizes and stores informations directly from the official public sources. Thus, in some cases, it is possible to find specifications on the ethnicity and career of the people registered there. In a search within this portal with the word "indigenous", we were able to find most of the productions included in this essay.

Furthermore, we had difficulty in finding productions from different regions of the country. It has been more frequent to find indigenous women researchers in the North region, due to the overall greater presence of indigenous people both in the demography and in the academic communities when compared with other regions of Brazil. Interestingly, the region with the greatest difficulty for the identification of indigenous women academics was the Northeast, despite this being a region with a pervasive presence of indigenous population. Our focus was to include productions from different regions of the country, in an attempt to represent the panorama from different perspectives of each place in this vast and diverse country.

## 3. Considerations

For the elaboration of this work, we selected a total of 3 doctoral theses and 13 master's dissertations. Of these, 6 were from the North Region of Brazil, 5 from the Centre-West, 3 from the Southeast, 2 from

the South and 1 from the Northeast. We also opted to include works from diverse disciplinary areas, to access possible innovative interdisciplinary connections related with the indigenous women approaches to academic work. We included 6 works from the area of Anthropology, 2 from Education, 2 from Literature, 2 from Sustainable Development, 1 from History, 1 from Geography, 1 from Law and 1 from Psychology.

We identified a first and pervasive common point of the diverse works in the ethnic insertion of the authors as a part of their research. 14 of the 16 productions reinforced their "*lugar de fala*"<sup>[17]</sup> as indigenous researchers by highlighting their implicated conditions that guide their methodological and thematic choices. Geni Núñez<sup>[9]</sup>, one of the authors selected for this study, discusses the "*lugar de fala*" as the "naturalised" space reserved to the cisgender heterosexual white male holder of knowledge, a position that now is required as a rightful place for the silenced voices of society's marginalised people. A claim of voice indicated as an act of resistance:

Perhaps due to the condition of being implicated, for belonging to an ethnic group - Potiguara from Crateús - my reflections were conducted primarily to the political-symbolic reach of such acts of resistance and confrontation of adverse situations, something very dear to ethnic groups in their processes of identity affirmation.<sup>[18; p.18]</sup>

Differently, both Lucia Fernanda Inácio Belford<sup>[19]</sup> and Geni Daniela Núñez Longhini<sup>[9]</sup> chose not to portray their ethnic intertwining in their works. However, the first addresses the legislation of the preservation and conservation of biodiversity and traditional knowledge, focusing on the struggle and actions of indigenous peoples. The second, by her own, discusses her practice as a psychologist, woman, lesbian and mestiza researcher, approaching her experiences within the problematics of living openly as LBT (lesbian, bisexual and transsexual) woman.

Edilaise Santos Vieira<sup>[11]</sup> is a psychologist and indigenous Tuxá. She developed her research in the field of Anthropology, focusing on the study of the experiences of health agents who are acting as mental health caregivers for indigenous peoples. She portrays the scenario of weaknesses of the public mental health system in Brazil, in order to recognize the vulnerabilities and potentialities of the communities in a reflection on the "good living" of the indigenous people. In a similar perspective of pointing out the failures of the public health system, Eliene dos Santos Rodrigues<sup>[20]</sup> brings out her grandmother's stories who suffered with cervical cancer and died of cancer in the rectum. Her work is dedicated to the evaluation of the occurrence of cervical cancer in indigenous women, with the purpose of promoting public policies of prevention aimed at this population.

In a further discussion, other authors deepened different perspectives on the construction of indigenous identities, with the same idea of a valorization and construction of indigenous communities.

Francineia Bittencourt Fontes<sup>[21]</sup> focused on the analyses of the most important myths of the Baniwa culture. Built from her living as an indigenous author, the research is crossed by the reality of her family, being its main source the stories told by her father.

Márcia da Silva<sup>[22]</sup>, also known as Márcia Kambeba, works on understanding the process of territoriality of the Omágua/Kambeba people and identifies the cultural elements that were intertwined with the historical path they taken. Thus, she verifies specific territorial relations that directly influence the community's identity resignification processes.

Célia Nunes Correa<sup>[10]</sup> understands the knowledge and skills of the Xacriabá about their territory, analyzing them on the basis of the pedagogical experiences in schools. According to a territorialized education, she emphasizes the school-community interaction. She also highlights the production of indigenous knowledge in the academic environment by recognizing the need to contribute to the process of decolonization of what she defines as "bodies-territories".

Rita Gomes do Nascimento<sup>[18]</sup> defends the proposal that the rituals established in the Tapebas indigenous schools are symbolic expressions of their responses to a social drama experienced by the community. Thus, the dilemmas, conflicts and prejudices are core elements in the construction of the identity by those indigenous peoples, and she asserts that the rituals are crucial forms of resistance.

Ilma Fernandes Neri<sup>[23]</sup> addresses the invisibilization of indigenous agricultural production. By implicating herself in the self-recognition as a Piratapua, she reinforces the need for an analysis based on the experience of the people within the places where they live. Focusing on the set of knowledge, practices, techniques, products, objects, food and other associated manifestations that involve cultivated spaces and plants, she seeks alternatives for valuing and generating income for indigenous families in this region.

While also conversing with and about indigenous struggles, other authors seek to leverage counter-hegemonic debates also within their other different fields.

Fernanda Vieira Sant'Anna<sup>[15]</sup> wrote a doctoral thesis in linguistics at the Rio de Janeiro State University that focused on indigenous literary productions highlighting the important rupture in the colonial hegemonic discourse offered by the possibility of a

new reconstruction of indigenous identities, now with the perspective of the native peoples themselves.

Núbia Batista da Silva<sup>[16]</sup> elaborated her dissertation in linguistics at the University of Brasilia discussing the presence and permanence of indigenous students in undergraduate and post-graduate studies, imbued by different forms of discrimination lived in the academic environment. She highlights her experiences in professional education and incites the occupation of these academic places by indigenous people.

Inara do Nascimento Tavares<sup>[24]</sup> studied the Indigenous Project Managers Training Course of the Central Amazonian Corridor, detailing the technical, political and cultural matters involved. She traces a configuration of indigenist policies that raises the debate on the institutionalization of the movement. Thus, she emphasizes how that course is a reflection of the demands of the indigenous movement in relation to public policies.

Joziléia Daniza Jagso Inacio Jacodsen Schild<sup>[25]</sup> graduated in Geography from the Community University of the Chapecó Region - Unochapecó and she is an indigenous Kaingang. Her anthropological dissertation emphasizes the path and action of Kaingang women in the struggles for rights and in indigenous policies. Starting from her own experience as a Kaingang woman, she includes a reflection on the networks of support formed among them which encourage their permanence in public spaces.

Dalila Luiz<sup>[26]</sup> studies the statements given by Terena teachers who work in the Polo General Rondon Indigenous Municipal School of Bananal Village, on the use of "Generating Themes". These are educational methodological strategies emancipatory and transformative, manifested from the experiences of students<sup>[27]</sup>. Throughout the work, she highlights the importance of valorising the mother tongue of indigenous peoples during their schooling.

Aline do Carmo Rochedo<sup>[28]</sup> is a historian, writer and illustrator, and a member of the Puri people. She seeks to register a history of silencing of women in the national rock music scene through bibliographical research and testimonials from 10 Brazilian artists. Parallel to the searches for recognition in the artistic scene, she also pays attention to the feminist struggles in other spheres, with the claims for gender equality.

The last work we selected is the one by Rosilene Fonseca Pereira<sup>[29]</sup>, in which she presents and analyses of the processes involved in raising children (between 0 and 12 years old) in the Upper Rio Negro region. She is an indigenous Piratapuia, activist, poet, scientist and former director of the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio

Negro - FOIRN. In her work, she highlights the conflict of knowledge she experienced during her school trajectory, as she perceives how formal teaching acts invalidating indigenous traditions and forms of life.

## 4. Discussion

With the detailed analysis of the papers, we were able to trace common points that emerge from the decolonial debate proposed in each one of the texts. "*The destiny of the Original peoples is not, contrary to what coloniality proclaims with fervor, hatred and despair, the extinction by forced assimilation*"<sup>[15; p.11]</sup> In the search for the valorisation of the identity construction of indigenous peoples, the productions highlight the traditional knowledge, the cultural conservation, the literary productions, the territoriality and the pedagogical experiences. The authors report that their themes arise from demands observed from within the communities, the actions and claims of indigenous women in struggle movements.

Therefore, Fanon<sup>[8]</sup> established the process of decolonisation as revolutionary in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. The work is about a denunciation of colonial violence that incites direct reaction, that is, the decolonial process has to be violent. "*The native cures himself of colonial neurosis by thrusting out the settler through force of arms.*"<sup>[8; p.21]</sup>. During the construction of this enunciation, Fanon<sup>[8]</sup> establishes that the colony is divided by the power relationship between the european settlers and the colonized. He works on the perspective of the French colonial system he knew. Despite that, we can articulate his thoughts with the colonial system established by Portugal in Brazil. As Martín-Baró<sup>[30]</sup> once said, colonialism works in latin-america by three basic points: a social injustice based on land concentration, social inequality and disrespect to the basic rights; secondly, the revolutionary wars and dictatorships; and last, the loss of national sovereignty.

At this point, decolonization would be the historical process of reordering the world. "*Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men*"<sup>[8; p.36]</sup>. The dissertations and thesis presented here are located in the process of indigenization of knowledge production, in the struggle to end the silencing of voices marginalized by the colonial system. "*If the process of colonization started from our minds, the indigenisation has to be different, it has to start from our hands, practices and all elaboration from our body-territory, until it reaches our minds*"<sup>[10; p.138]</sup>.

We located in their dissertations and theses the need to speak out as the new holders of knowledge about their own culture. As they developed each detail under different perspectives, they had the need to emphasize and to be careful with this new place they were working. A new space of respect within the indigenous communities and inside the

universities. As stated by Rita do Nascimento<sup>[18]</sup>, they carry subjective interpretations as indigenous women that are ideal to understanding the demands and acts of resistance. Since they can be and see from the inside of the problematics they chose to work on.

With these new possibilities of perspectives from within, they give opportunity to different areas to build multi professional studies and activities. Anthropology shouldn't and won't be the only responsible for studying the indigenous peoples. The literature has to change its reductionist view of indigenous people, starting with productions by the indigenous themselves that demonstrate their diversities and cultural realities<sup>[15]</sup>. The same goes to psychology or any other area that chooses to work with these diverse people, in order to amplify the understanding of each area.

Each one of the academic productions goes through the prejudices and experiences that guided the methodological and thematic choices of the authors. They started a long process of opening the doors of universities and minds to a counter-hegemonic discussion. The authors have demonstrated their interest in a transformative social practice and the need to go after public spaces and governments to make a real difference to their communities<sup>[23]</sup>.

While they work on offering novelties to the academic panoramas, it should be a priority to the universities to promote and disseminate indigenous epistemologies and productions. We faced many difficulties to find these dissertations and theses which only reaffirms the assertions in this study. The coloniality works on different levels in the society directly influencing the holders of scientific communication.

Thus, the Brazilian universities should foster websites and platforms that encourage the dissemination of indigenous women's work. Such as *IKAMIABA - Aldeia dos Saberes*<sup>[13]</sup> that focus on sharing searches on Indigenous Literatures. Or even colleges should have specific tabs in their institutional repositories for these productions. With a view to stimulate scientific communication these writers and researchers should be included as important contributors to new epistemologies, and therefore included in the bibliographic base of the courses.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study we shared the claims of these marginalized communities, we sought to understand the main common points they presented. It proved to be of extreme importance to question the epistemologies we have established and to recognize the works of those who were silenced by colonialism. The authors claimed their place as holders of knowledge and highlighted their implicated conditions that guided their methodological and thematic choices.

As we developed the study, we encountered many difficulties in determining which works were done by Indigenous women. Thus, we would like to emphasize the need to promote a greater visibility and prominence to the specific perspectives indigenous women are able to establish from inside-out their communities. In order to break the cycle of only legitimizing white academic productions, and to build a possibility for equality in social sciences and other areas.

By increasing the dissemination of the works of indigenous women, the scientific community and society would have the possibility of reading the perspective of these social actors who live silencing processes resulting from colonialism. Transformations would be observed beyond the walls of the universities. The reductionist image of the "Indian" would be broken and the indigenous peoples could be recognized in their singularities, as an example the Tapebas would no longer be confused and grouped together with the Piratapuias. Therefore, we underline the need for a process of indigenisation of scientific productions that values new epistemologies and opens the possibility for a better dissemination.

"The 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself." <sup>[8; p.37]</sup>

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