

## Memories of Kaingang students: the place of the school in the affirmation of identity

Memórias de estudantes Kaingang: o lugar da escola na afirmação da identidade

Memorias de estudiantes Kaingang: el lugar de la escuela en la afirmación de la identidad

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### Abstract

This study deals with the trajectories of indigenous Kaingang university students from communities located in the Alto Uruguai region, on the border between the Brazilian states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. Methodologically, it carries out a theoretical discussion based on decolonial literature (hooks, Fanon, Quijano, Sousa Santos, Spivak, Walsh) and on the philosophy of alterity (Biesta, Gur-Ze'ev, Larrosa, Levinas, Masschelein, Simons) on the western-centric epistemological hegemony in the educational processes and on the place at school based on reports of school experiences of indigenous young people enrolled in undergraduate courses at the Chapecó Campus of the Federal University of Fronteira Sul. It concludes on the importance of the school, as long as it is taken from a decolonial epistemological perspective, as a space-time to create and experience other and alteritarian ways of being and living with the other, as a time-space of hospitality, care and affirmation of the indigenous identity and to the construction of a more democratic and pluralistic society.

**Keywords:** School; Kaingang; Western-centrism; Identity; Care.

### Resumo

Este estudo trata das trajetórias de estudantes universitários indígenas Kaingang oriundos de comunidades localizadas na região do Alto Uruguai, na divisa entre os estados brasileiros do Rio Grande do Sul e de Santa Catarina. Metodologicamente, realiza uma discussão teórica sustentada na literatura descolonial (hooks, Fanon, Quijano, Sousa Santos, Spivak, Walsh) e na filosofia da alteridade (Biesta, Gur-Ze'ev, Larrosa, Levinas, Masschelein, Simons) sobre a hegemonia da epistemologia ocidentalocêntrica nos processos educativos e sobre o lugar da escola a partir de relatos de experiências escolares de jovens indígenas matriculados em cursos de graduação do Campus Chapecó da Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul. Conclui sobre a importância da escola, desde que tomada de uma perspectiva epistemológica descolonial, como espaço-tempo para criar e experimentar formas outras e alteritárias de ser e conviver com o outro, como um tempo-espaço de acolhimento, cuidado e afirmação da identidade indígena e para a construção de uma sociedade mais democrática e pluralista.

**Palavras-chave:** Escola; Kaingang; Ocidentalocentrismo; Identidade; Cuidado.

### Resumen

Este estudio aborda las trayectorias de estudiantes universitarios indígenas Kaingang de comunidades ubicadas en la región del Alto Uruguai, en la frontera entre los estados brasileños de Rio Grande do Sul y Santa Catarina. Metodológicamente, realiza una discusión teórica a partir de la literatura descolonial (hooks, Fanon, Quijano, Sousa Santos, Spivak, Walsh) y de la filosofía de la alteridad (Biesta, Gur-Ze'ev, Larrosa, Levinas, Masschelein, Simons) sobre la hegemonía de la epistemología “occidentalocéntrica” en los procesos educativos y sobre el lugar en la escuela a partir de relatos de experiencias escolares de jóvenes indígenas matriculados en cursos de graduación en el Campus Chapecó de la Universidad Federal de la Fronteira Sur. Se concluye sobre la importancia de la escuela, desde que tomada desde una perspectiva epistemológica descolonial, como un espacio-tiempo para crear y experimentar otras y alteritarias formas de ser y convivir con el otro, como un tiempo-espacio de hospitalidad, cuidado y afirmación de la identidad indígena ya la construcción de una sociedad más democrática y pluralista.

**Palabras clave:** Escuela; Kaingang; “Occidentalocentrismo”; Identidad; Cuidado.

## 1. Introduction

Education, as an exclusively human activity has a double aspect: on the one hand it needs to present the world to children and young people, and on the other hand it needs to protect children and young people from the pressures and violence of the world. It can be said that education needs to take care of the world and take care of the young, of the child at the same time (Arendt, 2016; Biesta, 2017; Larrosa, 2021; Masschelein & Simons, 2021). School is the institution created so that education, with its dual function, can occur (Arendt, 2016), that is, school is the institution that cares for and helps children and young people to enter the world and at the same time for the world to be a possibility for the insertion of children and young people. The world is understood here as the space in which human beings live in the plural form (Arendt, 2017), that is, as the space of the plurality of what is human. This does not mean that school is a place free from interference and political, ideological, epistemic pressures, as well as a space immune to the violence present in the world. On the contrary, it is precisely because of these pressures and lack of security, common in the world, that the school is necessary as an educational institution: it is a safe place to make mistakes and learn from them in the sense of trying to build another, more hospitable and democratic world. It can be said that school is, then, an institution dedicated to care and protection. In this sense, we would like to register the following definition for school, according to Masschelein and Simons (2021), “a specific form of free or non-productive, indefinite time to which one does not otherwise have access outside the school” (p. 28). Free time as time of freedom to experience ethically and responsibly.

However, the school institution in Brazil is historically formatted for individuals considered “universal”, that is, their material and immaterial structures are thought of based on the knowledge of white Western cultures, with an emphasis on the image of the colonizer, who deny or erase identities, diversities and knowledge of those considered to be others, such as indigenous and black populations. The other, as analyzed by Butler (2016), based on conditions at war (life and death), helps us to understand the colonizers’ non-recognition of indigenous peoples:

To say that a life is injurable, for instance, or that it can be lost, destroyed, or systematically neglected to the point of death, is to underscore not only the finitude of a life (that death is certain) but also its precariousness (that life requires various social and economic conditions to be met in order to be sustained as a life). Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. (Butler, 2016, p. 31).

This universality reproduces the precariousness, the dichotomy between inferiors and superiors, but above all, those “in place” – bodies that can speak, and those “out of place” – bodies prohibited from speaking (Kilomba, 2019; Spivak, 2010). Here, we focus on the porosity of the school institution and on the resignifications and resistance of the racialized bodies of Kaingang indigenous children and adolescents from southern Brazil to remain in these institutions. More than that, they found in the porosity, in the occupation of this institution, the possibility of establishing indigenous schools in Indigenous Lands. Thus, it is necessary to think about the epistemological disputes that involve education, the school and the place of the other, and the option we make to understand the importance of educational processes in the education of indigenous children and adolescents in order to resist oppression and, at the same time, positively experience their ancestry, identity, culture and territory.

Considering the school as a free-space-time, a space-time of protection, we ask: In regular, non-indigenous school, is there care and protection for indigenous children and young people who are victims of oppression and cultural and physical violence? Also: Is it possible for an ethnic group victim of epistemicide and genocide to appropriate this institution (school) and, in doing so, move towards transforming it into a place of “free time”, protection, care and overcoming western-centric hegemony as a place of decolonization?

We intend to answer this question starting with the experience reports of indigenous students of the Kaingang

ethnicity, whose school trajectories were partly in non-indigenous schools and partly in indigenous schools. We structured the text intertwined in three parts, having as conducting wires education, school and territory in connection with the narratives of indigenous Kaingang students and the understanding that other epistemologies, decolonials and criticisms, presented here, help us to propose democratic spaces, of plurality and otherness.

## **2. Methodology**

This is a qualitative research of Decolonial and Critical Discourse Analysis (Magalhães, 2001; Quijano, 2019; Plá, 2022). The memories mobilized and discussed here were written by students of the Kaingang ethnicity during the elective course of History and Ethnic-Racial Education offered in the 2020/01 semester at the Federal University of Fronteira Sul (UFFS), Chapecó. This course was offered to students from the Program for Access and Permanence of Indigenous Peoples (PIN), an institutional program that offers places in higher education at UFFS since 2014, and 48 students from different undergraduate courses at the UFFS Chapecó participated in it.

The narratives are from students who entered the Federal University of Fronteira Sul (UFFS), on Chapecó Campus, in the city of Chapecó, state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, through the Program for Access and Permanence of Indigenous Peoples (PIN). The PIN is a program created at UFFS in 2014 with a special selection process for indigenous students and which aims, as stated by Resolution no. 33/2013 of the UFFS University Council, “promote democratic values, respect for socio-economic and ethnic-racial differences and diversity, through the adoption of a policy to expand the access to its undergraduate and graduate courses, also aiming at stimulating culture, teaching, research, extension and permanence at the University”. Most of the students who performed the selective processes in the PIN modality were from the Kaingang ethnicity and lived in Indigenous Lands in the west of Santa Catarina and northwest of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. As we stated earlier, the narratives presented in this text utilize memories about the school experiences of these students in indigenous schools and in non-indigenous schools. To preserve their identities, it was decided to use only the initials, the undergraduate course they attended to at UFFS and the Indigenous Land in which they lived.

## **3. Genocide and Exclusion: Kaingang Resistance and Territoriality in Southern Brazil**

Historically, the experiences of indigenous communities in Brazil are marked by the uninterrupted defense of life, land, territory, nature and of citizenship. Historically, they are also the target of public policies and actions taken against the law that promote a systematic persecution and violation of their rights. This process, which has lasted for over 500 years, results in the ethnicicide and epistemicide of indigenous populations and cultures (Carneiro da Cunha & Barbosa, 2018). The 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution recognizes, the need for historical reparations due to the oppression suffered by the original populations and defined, in its Art. 231, as one of the principles of the Republic the recognition of original rights over the lands that traditionally indigenous peoples occupy. Art. 231 explains that the indigenous peoples are recognized for their social organization, customs, languages, beliefs and traditions, and the original rights over the lands they traditionally occupy, and the Union is responsible for demarcating, protecting and respecting their assets.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2010), there are 37,470 Kaingang people, indicating that they are one of the largest groups originating in Brazil, of which 19,905 people live in indigenous lands. From the second half of the 19th century onwards, the writing of the history of the South Kaingang of Brazil evidences the gaze of the colonizer and the violence suffered by these people. Called “buggers” (Mabilde, 1983), they suffered the offensives of the “civilized” to turn them into settlers through state actions, such as the Indian Protection Service (Serviço de Proteção ao Índio

– SPI – created in 1910) that put them under tutelage and allowed their territories to be the target of the grileiros and, consequently, expropriation (Carini, 2005).

In the Northwest of Rio Grande do Sul and the West of Santa Catarina, state and private colonization fronts introduced the shredding of lands as they considered them “vacant lands” or “empty spaces” for their commercialization to white colonizers (Vicenzi, 2008). With the commercialization, the clearing of the territory was intensified with the extraction of vegetal cover and the systematic expulsion, not without resistance, of indigenous families and communities. According to Joziléia Daniza Kaingang (2020), who experienced the dynamics of expropriation in the Indigenous Land Serrinha, Rio Grande do Sul, the Indigenous Land was gradually invaded and occupied by settlers who arrived in their region over a long period of time, by the 1960s it was completely divided up and sold to immigrants. During this period, the indigenous families were removed and forced to live in other areas, such as the villages of Nonoai, Guarita, Ligeiro and Carreteiro (p. 44).

With bodies immersed in resistance, existence, links with ancestry and the maintenance of their cultures, these peoples survived and dispersed, settling in other villages and also remaining destitute. The return and retaking of territories began in the 1970s, as a result of the constant Kaingang struggle: According to Kaingang (2020), from the 1970s onwards, the struggle and self-demarcation of Indigenous Lands in the South, in the Nonoai Indigenous Land, was followed by the repossession of land that was invaded by the settlers, a movement made by the Kaingang (p. 51).

The history of the repossession of the land is present in the memory of the Kofá (an older person, an elder) – O. F.; Curso de Letras IL Pinhalzinho-RS, his father gathered all his older brothers and told them that when the whites invaded, they arrived and shot at children and women, and whoever managed to escape into the woods fled to another nearby village. It was like that a long time, but there was a time when the Indians were tired of running away and all the men got together and began to plan a way to expel the whites from their lands.

Whites want land and territory for themselves, with the historical legacy of superiority, they activate their privileges (symbolic resources) and materialize them with weapons, violence and death. What was left for the indigenous was to live on the run and be sheltered by their relatives. However, historical processes have shown that freedom and the defense of life in expropriated bodies, meaning that the silence and traumas of violence would be transposed into strategies for returning to live in the territory. Stories told and retold are moments of learning and valuing those who have gone through the process of recovery.

The experience of violence, exclusion and epistemicide meant that the repossession of lands was not seen as just an access to traditional territory, although this is, without doubt, an essential condition. With the land, the perspective of retaking traditions, values and knowledge also emerges, not as restoration, but as repair and resignification. In the process of struggle, new knowledge emerges, forged in the struggle itself (Sousa Santos, 2019), which demand a broader reorganization than “just” access to their land. In the student’s narrative that follows, there is an indication that the retaking of the territory was accompanied by discussions around the institution of school and the schooling of indigenous children. According to E.N., of the History course, from Serrinha Indigenous Land, Rio Grande do Sul, on November 6, 1996, her family moved to retake the Serrinha Indigenous Land. During the retake, which was not friendly, as the retake was in November, the parents felt the need for their children to study, so they sought help from the National Indian Foundation (Fundação Nacional do Índio – FUNAI) to take action in the matter of education for the indigenous people who were in the camp in Alto Recreio, municipality of Ronda Alta, Rio Grande do Sul, in order to find a space at the closest school to where the indigenous people were camped.

The retaking of the territory was/is conflicting, indigenous versus settlers (Tedesco, 2015) and, even with the demarcation of the Indigenous Lands being partially carried out, there is the desire and the perception of the need for children to attend school. The contact initially took place with FUNAI, an institutional body, created in 1967, with the duty of representing and defending indigenous peoples who, at that time, mediated the demarcation of the Indigenous Lands and could

activate educational institutions with the perspective of the entry of children into schools. The concern of indigenous leaders with children and their schooling processes is visible, perhaps this was one of the paths to inclusion and cultural maintenance. At first, children began to attend regular schools mostly attended by whites, close to their homes. In the process of establishing the Indigenous Lands, through requests and mobilizations, existing schools were transformed into indigenous schools and the creation of new ones with this profile (Brighenti, 2014).

With more than five centuries of exclusions and violations, indigenous peoples have resisted, and according to indigenous historian Diádiney Helena de Almeida (2020), they continue existing and resisting so that many can also walk their paths; honor those who came before them and continue making stories (p. 102). Guided by the understanding of the existence and resistance through the access and permanence of indigenous children in formal indigenous and non-indigenous schools, and envisioning the circulation and appropriation of knowledge to strengthen the fight against the injustices to which these populations are subjected, we analyze narratives of Kaingang students about their school trajectory.

#### **4. Educational Processes: Education, School and the Issue of the Other**

Based on the brief definition that we dedicated to school and education, we assume that the most important issue for education (and for life) is how we can respond responsibly to who is the Other (Biesta, 2017), to their call, which is manifested not only in their voice, but also in their suffering (Levinas, 2009). The way we respond to this call makes all the difference, it is the very possibility of resisting the indifference to the appeal that emanates from the faces of those who suffer from the various forms of oppression in our time. Oppression that is not natural, but historically constituted (Quijano, 2019; Spivak, 2010). This “free time” needs to be the place of “encounter”. To Biesta (2018, p. 28), such encounters are always interruptions – in the way one is, in the desires, in the questions about those desires, that is, if what is desired is desirable. Raising this question, facing it, giving it a place, answering it, is less a matter of learning and, perhaps, more of an encounter with teaching, with the experience of being taught, of being approached by what is outside of oneself and not built by oneself.

In societies marked by ethnic-racial and religious diversity, as is the case in Brazil, school education plays a significant and even irreplaceable role in the presentation of the world. In Brazil, the plurality that marks the world (inhabited by human beings, in the plural form) often takes the form of violence, oppression and privileges that cannot be neglected. To make it clear, we do not want to state here that the encounter with the Other is something that happens without conflicts; on the contrary, it is degradable, full of traps, interferences and misunderstandings. The encounter is always tense, insecure and unstable and, for this very reason, it poses a certain threat to everyone involved in education. This tense contact, which seeks to communicate with the Other, overcomes the idea of tolerance, in the sense of trying to build understanding, a form of mutual comprehension.

If the school must present the world, one of the ways the school fails in this task is the assumption, consciously or not, of epistemological perspectives that naturalize or justify historically constituted inequalities and deny the validity of forms of elaboration and validation of knowledge, as well as the meaning of the real, other than the hegemonic, Eurocentric or Western-centric ones (Quijano, 2019; Sousa Santos, 2019). If the world is the place of plurality, it is also the place of pluriversity, of the plurality of ways of giving meaning to the world, of the plurality of ways of being a human being. It is always important not to lose sight of the fact that the modern school is also a Western creation and greatly served colonial interests, not just colonialism in the economic sense, but coloniality, the colonization of the imagination – which affects both the dominant and oppressed, albeit in very different ways from one another – who survived the end of colonial political systems. Thus, instead of being a place of protection, hospitality and experiencing the world, school becomes a place of symbolic and physical violence, oppression and a seal of this oppression. School can thus become an accomplice of epistemicide (Spivak, 2010).

Given this scenario, thematizing diversity incurs the dehumanization of the Other, in its subversion into mere content.

The Other's otherness, what makes the Other what he/she is, may be incomprehensible. Responding responsibly to the Other and to otherness is to accept the challenge of the unknowable without trying to fit it into rational, knowable criteria, because to respond to the Other is not to know the Other. An education that seeks to know the Other can lead to the annulment of otherness, that is, it does not take on the problem of responding to the Other because it absorbs and mutilates it. Knowing everything, fitting everything into rationality criteria, is one of the presuppositions of the hegemonic cognitive paradigm (Sousa Santos, 2019), of modern, Eurocentric/Western-centric rationality (Quijano, 2019).

What is meant by the above paragraphs is that, if, on the one hand, it is very important for students to have access to knowledge (through school themes/content) about ethno-racial groups who are victims of oppression, epistemicide and genocide, that this can greatly contribute to the recognition and appreciation of plurality and to the self-esteem of individuals who are part of these groups; on the other hand, this is not enough. The mutilation and dehumanization of the Other can occur if, in addition to the treated content, attention is not paid, in the educational process (in the presentation of the world), to the epistemological presuppositions of elaboration and validation of knowledge. Knowing the Other can be a starting point for the difficult work of decolonizing the imaginary (both those who enjoy privileges and those who suffer oppression), but this implies a necessary epistemological turn (an issue that we will return to later on).

We want to affirm that there is a dangerous dimension in education, a type of danger that is characteristic of the "encounter", a danger that is even a condition for education. The danger of getting involved in education implies being subject to a specific type of violence, which Biesta (2017) calls transcendental. It is a type of violence that causes people to leave an epistemic comfort zone: it may be that in this encounter with the Other they learn something they would not like to learn, something about the injustices they are victims of or something about the privileges they enjoy because of injustices committed against the Other. In this sense, school is the institution that enables the dangers of education to be experienced with a certain margin of safety, because, as we stated previously, its task is to ensure that children and young people can grow and insert themselves in a responsible way into the world (which initiates another dimension of care in education/school: the care so that the world still exists).

Nevertheless, here, we are faced with a serious problem: some individuals, even as children and young people, are already very aware, because they feel in their skin the injustices that their group and, consequently, they individually suffer. Indigenous children and youth, for example, already live with different manifestations of violence on a daily basis: stigmatization, prejudice, devaluation of their worldview and their traditional knowledge (epistemicide), physical violence, dehumanization and even genocide. Because they are indigenous, they are, all the time, called to stop being, to assume the Eurocentric culture as their own. They also need this transcendental violence, since they are not the executioners and, at the same time, they are called to abandon their culture, they are reminded all the time, in different ways of who they are. It makes more sense, in these cases, for the school to be another space for protection (a school in fact, free from external pressures and external violence) and for unlearning what has been learned from the violence of colonization and coloniality.

This unlearning, this liberation from coloniality, comprises the specific dimension of the transcendental violence of education for oppressed groups: recognizing and taking pride in themselves, their history and their culture is very difficult and painful for those who have been taught that their traditions should be abandoned because they were inferior. The school institution itself is an interference of Western culture. But this does not mean the end of school here. Quite the contrary, an appropriation (not in a capitalist sense) is proposed, a redefinition of the school in the sense of transforming an institution that was an important part of the epistemicide into a real school, in order to protect the possibilities that there are still indigenous cultures. The school, in this way, constitutes a space of protection, of valuing other forms of knowledge and experiences, of raising self-esteem through an epistemological turn that embraces decolonial approaches against a society that colonially devalues and disregards what is not its own reflection.

## 5. Indigenous Students: Knowledge and Experiences

Just as the territory was and is a place of disputes between indigenous and non-indigenous, schools of whites and for whites also are, and there the denial of the permanence of indigenous children is felt in colonialist attitudes, postures and institutional norms. According to G. F., student of the Language and its Literature course, from Letters, the Serrinha Indigenous Land, they won the right to study together with whites at the Tancredo Neves School in the late 1990s. The student remembers that the school principal was not very sociable, she made them pray every day before starting the classes, but, as they did not know how to pray, she scolded them.

Five years after the beginning of the Portuguese colonialist process, Kaingang children suffer the imposition of the Eurocentric-Christian culture to “save their souls” in a public school that should be guided by secular education and which denies the provisions of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, endorsed by the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law – Law no. 9.394, of December 20, 1996: the right of indigenous peoples to live in accordance with their own cultures. According to Ferreira (2020, p. 75), throughout history the “school for the Indian” has fostered the extinction of peoples with different cultures, languages, traditions, knowledge and values were denied by the school. The persecuted indigenous sages and their knowledge denied.

Reports of exclusion are present in the memories of indigenous students when attending non-indigenous schools, which mark a past/present immersed in prejudice, as Z. A., a student of the Pedagogy course, from the Indigenous Land of Toldo Pinhal, Santa Catarina, pointed out when she affirmed that she went to school in the village until the 4th grade, from the 5th grade to High School she went to a non-indigenous school. In this distance from school life outside the village, she pointed out the learning of the Kaingang language, the mother tongue of a people born to the heirs of stubbornness, was lost, starting to study what non-Indians studied. As she stated, at the school where they, indigenous people, studied, they were a minority going through painful moments that were remembered until that day, with a lot of pain they suffered from prejudice.

The non-existence of dialog, of alterity, nullifies the possibility of inclusion of children and the knowledge of their ethnic belonging, such as language. By studying only visions of Eurocentric universality, or pedagogical processes exclusively for non-Indians, the colonizer’s culture is valued, and the culture of the natives is rejected. The memory of school life outside the Village causes pain, suffering, and what is the most plausible explanation of why this occurred: being born indigenous in a country of white privileges, forged by racial democracy and with its structures and its daily life marked by racism and prejudice. According to Edson Kayapó (2019, p. 59), the various forms of discrimination, silencing and concealment of historical violence against the indigenous are expressed in the composition of memories or in the oblivion to which such people were condemned.

The student in the above report, Z. A., attended school outside the village in a period after the promulgations of the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution and Law no. 9.394/1996, and she points out that the white school does not carry out integrated projects to enhance and affirm the identity, language and history of indigenous societies as provided for in legislation. The student emphasizes her ancestry as a support to give new meaning to painful moments, through resistance in the memory of struggle. To Ferreira (2020, p. 106), the worldview, *Ûn si ag tũ pẽ*, characteristic of the Kaingang, brings the memories of the elderly to show the behavior in this world, which is based on relationships with the other, this other represented in the set of elements, artifacts of the people, their territories, their affective relationships with nature.

The narratives of being an indigenous student outside the village, in general, recall negative and painful experiences. However, the memories of being a student in schools located in the Indigenous Lands are healthy and positive, as stated by K. T, a student of the Administration course, from the Indigenous Land of Nonoai, Rio Grande do Sul, when she affirmed that she always studied in the indigenous community and learned a lot from her indigenous and non-indigenous teachers. She declared that when there was a presentation at school, there was always a student who did it in Portuguese and Kaingang, there was

always a cultural food day. She remembered that sometimes they looked for fuá and kumi with the teachers and prepared with them and helped to clean and check how it was done, because it could not be done carelessly.

Historically, the Kaingang people have in their economic organization the gathering, hunting, cultivation, and crafts as a means of survival, whether collectively or individually, and maintain in their ethnic identity the link between nature and man. The link between the school and customs, tradition, the construction of knowledge involved in the daily lives of children is evidenced, enabling the recognition of the existence of knowledge historically produced by this people. Thus, as said by Ferreira (2020, p. 119), Kaingang knowledge needs to be present in the school, prominently or, at least, under equal conditions. In this sense, K.T still reveals moments beyond the classroom, when she states that during the cultural weeks, they could take some typical food from home to share with the others, there were presentations and competitions, in the parades the girls had to participate in pairs and the vote would go to the couple that was better characterized. According to K. T., there were games with corn and beans to show how they used to play, there was also target practice with archery, and students from other schools came to participate as well. The student pointed out that some parents brought dreamcatchers to sell, and there was also an exhibition of handicrafts, some beautiful wooden animals.

Indigenous school education, based on the narrated experiences, permeates our thinking about the decolonization of the Eurocentric curriculum, which is permeated by the episteme of subordination of communities, languages and knowledge. It means advancing and transgressing the epistemological borders of the colonizer and colonialism towards an education with pedagogical actions for diversity, education of racial relations and interculturality that includes knowledge, traditional wisdom and the social dynamics of each culture. As pointed out by Walsh (2007), when studying the Andean indigenous peoples, the “epistemological turn” associated with the concept of interculturality must occur. This concept starts from the place of enunciation of the indigenous social movement/struggle, namely: an epistemological field built on realities and structures of the past and present. To Walsh (2007, p. 51), it is through this knowledge that “another” knowledge is generated. “Another” thought that guides the program of the movement in the political, social and cultural spheres, while operating affecting (and decolonizing) both the dominant structures and paradigms and the cultural standardization that builds the “universal” knowledge of the West.

When we talk about an “epistemological turn”, we are not affirming the creation of a worldview, of truth and validation of the credible diametrically opposed to the Eurocentric epistemology. Sousa Santos (2019) states that the “epistemologies of the South”, that is, the forms of conception of the world and of life itself that emerge from and in the struggle against the oppressions of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy, “occupy” the hegemonic conceptions of epistemology (the epistemologies of the North). According to the author, Southern epistemologies refer to the production and validation of knowledge anchored in the experiences of resistance of all social groups that have been systematically victims of injustice, oppression and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. Sousa Santos (2019) calls the vast and very diverse scope of these experiences the “anti-imperial South”. It is an epistemological, non-geographic South, composed of many epistemological souths that have in common the fact that they are knowledge born in struggles against capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. They are produced wherever these struggles take place, both in the geographic North and the geographic South. The aim of Southern epistemologies is to allow oppressed social groups to represent the world as theirs and on their own terms, for only in this way will they be able to transform it according to their own aspirations (Sousa Santos, 2019, p. 17).

Southern epistemologies, as counter-hegemonic, do not offer a utopia in the traditional molds: as a path to be followed. Before that, they constitute an illumination in the face of the permanent crisis of capitalism, that is, they indicate possible paths, or even witness the possibility of paths other than epistemicide and the annulment of the Other. The testimony of the possibility of fighting the meaningless violence of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy comprises a manifestation of a



politically situated form of love, which is at the same time a love for the world as a space for the plurality of what is human (Arendt, 2017) and a love for the Other, which Freire (2005, p. 40) reiterates in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “my faith in men and women, and in the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love”.

To Sousa Santos (2019), Southern epistemologies imply at least two levels of challenges to hegemonic epistemologies. In the first, they seek to identify and discuss the validity of “non-existent” knowledge, or rather, of knowledge that is disregarded from a western-centric viewpoint. This knowledge is considered as such (non-existent) because it is the product of methods different from those of modern science or because it is produced by “absent” subjects, conceived as incapable of producing knowledge. In the second, it is due to the fact that, many times, this subject is collective and the knowledge produced is experienced in a performative way. This, on the one hand, alters the traditional conception of “authorship” and, on the other hand, rejects the separation between mind and body, senses and intellect. It is knowledge that is formed, produced, reproduced, invented and reinvented in the fight against oppression and incorporated in social, cultural, religious practices, in the relationship with nature and with the Other of different subjects. In other words, Southern epistemologies denounce Eurocentric epistemologies and provoke counter-hegemonic alternatives.

According to Quijano (2019), it is no coincidence that the postulates of the Enlightenment and European humanism developed and became the hegemonic perspective in Western thought in the same period in which the colonial project was underway. It is possible to affirm that Enlightenment humanism offered theoretical support for colonial expansion, and, after the processes of political emancipation, for the colonial mentality (Fanon, 2008; Memmi, 2016). European culture was raised to the status of a universal cultural model. What was not European was “exotic”. As stated by Quijano (2019, p. 110), consequently, other cultures are different in the sense of being unequal, indeed inferior, by nature. They can only be “objects” of knowledge or practices of domination. In this perspective, the relationship between European culture and other cultures was established and since then has remained as a relationship between “subject” and “object”.

In the field of arts, for example, the “exotic” was admitted as a starting point or as an inspiring source, and not as a specific form of human artistic expression as the object. This form of approximation with the Other takes place in a capitalist way, as appropriation of the Other, which is, as Quijano (2019) reminds us, a colonial perspective.

To Quijano (2019), colonial power structures produced social discriminations that were qualified as “racial”, “ethnic”, “national”, “anthropological”, according to the interests, agents and communities involved. But more than that, to the author, these intersubjective historical constructions were assumed as supposedly scientific and objective categories, offering the legitimizing support of domination itself, both for the colonizers and for the colonized. Education, or rather, schooling played an important role in this enterprise of “colonization of the imaginary” (Fanon, 2008; Memmi, 2016; Quijano, 2019) and of shaping individuals according to the interests of the dominators (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005), especially due to the mystified imposition of European knowledge, knowledge validation and meaning standards. According to Quijano (2019, p. 105), that was the product, at the beginning, of a systematic repression not only of specific beliefs, ideas, images, symbols and knowledge that did not serve for global colonial domination. The repression fell above all, on the ways of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of meaning, on the resources, patterns and instruments of formalized and objectified expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the dominant’s own expression patterns, as well as their beliefs and images referring to the supernatural, which served not only to impede the cultural production of the dominated but also as a very effective means of social and cultural control, when the immediate repression stopped being constant and systematic.

The central issue here is that this idea of education implies that, even before the subjects engage in educational projects, the “product” was already designed: the human being emancipated by achieving rational autonomy. Humanism, therefore, does not admit otherness, that is, other ways of being a human being than those implied in the totalizing “Same”

(Levinas, 1988). It does not promote the question about the meaning of being a human being in its countless manifestations and the very meaning of “experience” because it does not understand the validity of this question, given that it already offers a standardized answer to what it is.

In this sense, it is, within the framework of humanism, possible to question the humanity of the Other. The categories “humanity” and “society” were not extended to non-Europeans, or they were just in a formal way: as aspirants to humanity (Quijano, 2019). Biesta (2017) reminds us that this is not just a theoretical possibility, but a terrifying practical reality: the absurdities of the 20th century, slavery and the indigenous genocide on the American continent that has stretched for more than five centuries were based on an aprioristic definition of what was a human being, the one who should overcome others.

We agree with Biesta (2017, p. 20-21) when he states that the problem of humanism, the motto of its crisis, is not located in these atrocities per se (capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, the annulment of the Other, etc.), but above all with regard to its inability to face these inhumanities, to offer the possibilities of an effectively new response, of offering an alternative. This is because this humanism (European, Enlightenment) is a Northern epistemology. It is necessary to look for alternatives of the alternatives, the question is no longer about a theory of revolution, but about revolutionizing the theory. According to Sousa Santos (2019, p. 27), Southern epistemologies intend to show that what the dominant criteria of valid knowledge in Western modernity are, by not recognizing as valid other types of knowledge beyond those produced by modern science, gave rise to massive epistemicide, that is, the destruction of an immense variety of knowledge.

Thus, these other epistemologies denounce the forms of knowledge construction that favor the silencing of the Other, the silencing of their worldview, and thus, by ignoring subordinates and their ways of knowing, they continue the imperialist project of colonialism (Spivak, 2010, p. 127). However, the Epistemologies of the South are not limited to denunciation as they are constituted as alternatives (of alternatives) for a different world, more hospitable, more careful, in short, more human.

The epistemologies of the South, as a key to reading the world, do not comprise a simple inversion of the epistemologies of the North. Thus, scientific knowledge, methodically produced, and which is a criterion of power and discursive creation of the world, is not rejected. On the contrary, modern science is understood as one of the most important forms of knowledge creation, a form of knowledge that oppressed groups need to appropriate. Modern science, by itself, and this is not unimportant, is not seen as the only form of constitution of knowledge (Souza Santos, 2019).

Not rejecting the Western tradition does not mean not to discuss its “positionality” (Spivak, 2013, p. 92), that is, the relationships it maintains, even if in an undeclared and even unrecognized way, with the colonial perspective. According to Spivak (2013), Indian thinker: “As a postcolonial intellectual, I am influenced by that formation as well. Part of our ‘unlearning project is to articulate that ideological formation – by measuring silences, if necessary – into the object of investigation” (p. 92). To Gur-Ze’ev (2005, p. 160), “unlearning” is even more important than learning: unlearning what we learn with the modeling education that refuses the Other. Quijano (2019) affirms that what there is something very different: liberating the production of knowledge, communication and reflection, from the bumps of European rationality-modernity (p. 114). Thus, we can start the hospitable learning of otherness, the one who does not treat the Other as an object of knowledge, but as a human being, as a companion in the world.

The epistemologies of the South, which largely come from groups that have suffered epistemicide and genocide for centuries, such as American Indian groups, are not intended to erase the differences between North and South, but the hierarchies of power. Differences, on the contrary, are valued. Instead of the abstract unity – of the human being as “intellectually autonomous” in the sense of humanism – the pluriversality of opening to the infinite possibilities of manifesting what is human, of the world as the community of those who have nothing in common (Arendt, 2017; Biesta, 2017; Sousa Santos, 2019).

This is a demand for all schools, for all education, not just for indigenous schools, as Souza Santos (2019, p. 33)

points out: The quest for recognition and celebration of the epistemological diversity of the world underlying Southern epistemologies requires that these new repertoires (indeed, ancestral or recently reinvented, in many cases) of human dignity and social emancipation be understood as relevant far beyond the social groups that played a leading role in their emergence from their struggles against oppression or even outside the context of struggle. Far from imprisoning them in identity essentialisms, these repertoires should be seen as contributions to the renewal and diversification of narratives and repertoires of concrete utopias of another possible world, a fairer world (fair in the broadest sense of the term).

In the memories mentioned about childhood and adolescence living in the Indigenous Lands and attending the community's school, there is interaction, exchanges that go beyond school boundaries: knowledge is constructed and discussed in the community, without the excluding dichotomy of who should be the object and who should be subject. This 'other' knowledge provides a place of belonging, of identity with meanings and senses for indigenous children, even when the teachers were not indigenous, as A. F., a Geography student, from the Indigenous Land of Pinhalzinho, Rio Grande do Sul, stated that, at that time, there wasn't even an indigenous teacher who worked at that school, so only this teacher taught from pre-school to 5th grade. From the 6th grade to the 9th grade, A. F. studied at another school, as in school there were only the first grades, so she went to the Escola Estadual Indígena Kaingang de Ensino Médio Cacique Sy Gre (Kaingang Indigenous Cacique Sy Gre State High School), which is, according to her, a great school. When she went to the 6th grade, she had difficulty because she changed teachers very often, a situation that confused her, but there she started reading and writing in the Kaingang language and learned a lot about her culture. In that institution, she learned more, because she was always interested, she liked the classes a lot, she always learned new things in all subjects. She declared that the two schools where she studied were located in Pinhalzinho Village, where, with great effort, a High School was found for her.

The schools with a Western structure, which already existed in the territory before the reappropriation by the Kaingang, remained. However, there was a need for the school and non-indigenous teachers to perceive themselves inserted in a new place, to think and rethink with other visions of men and the world, breaking boundaries with teaching practices that mediate conflicts and recognize otherness. To bell hooks (2014, p. 14), the teacher must participate in the student's growth, in what she called "education as the practice of freedom". According to the author: "To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin".

When classes are taught by Kaingang teachers, their ethnic language is part of learning (writing and reading), expanding their understanding of the world based on their daily lives. To Ferreira (2019, p. 87), children, by incorporating their daily lives, building and transmitting knowledge, become aware of their importance and are not just children, but an effective part of a construction within their culture". It allows them to have a dialog and think about content written by non-indigenous people, but that they feel valued and aware that knowledge can also be understood and narrated/written in their language. Language is the contact with the memories of the Kofá, represents the maintenance of culture and transforms pleasant learning into senses and meanings.

After more than five centuries of violations, the visibility, voice, protagonism of traditional communities without tethers and traps is urgent, but through dialogic interaction, an education for ethnic-racial relations (decolonizing methodologies) as a premise for belonging, solidarity. The epistemological turn is not just a necessity for indigenous schools or other groups oppressed by capitalism, colonization and patriarchy, or for the schools that individuals from these groups attend. Confronting the colonization of the imaginary (coloniality) is a matter of humanization. The epistemological turn is even a condition for the school to be in fact a school, that is, as a time-space free from pressure and violence, time to experiment with other ways of being, of relating, space for dialog, as a place of protection, of hospitality. The assumption of decolonial approaches is even a condition for the type of violence that is characteristic of education, which provokes those involved in the

educational process to the challenges of alterity. However, this cannot come at the expense of children and youth from oppressed groups. For them, the school needs, more than ever, to be a space of hospitality, care, and affirmation. A space-time free of self-recognition of the humanity that they carry.

## 6. Conclusion

Throughout this text, we sought to highlight the influence of school education for indigenous children and adolescents, in the sense of becoming adults who know their past and so that this knowledge still has a future. The challenges of leaving their communities to study in schools of and for white people become difficult, traumatic because, in general, school curricula contribute to the disappearance of the cultures of indigenous peoples. The educational processes, and here specifically, the model of education and schools that follow western-centric curricula are guided by knowledge considered universal, for men/women with a self-view of superiority in relation to the Other. The proposition of an epistemological turn with decolonial narratives and reflections makes it possible to rethink power relations in educational institutions and in the way they produce knowledge.

The desirable school for these students is one that interacts with identity, with culture, which values ancestral knowledge. We know that “universal knowledge” is present and apprehended in the classrooms of indigenous schools, but with approaches that allow for questioning and critical analysis that strengthen and positively affirm their interpretation of themselves and the world. The defense of territories, the preservation of traditional knowledge/wisdom and of those produced from it is not only a task for indigenous communities and schools, but for educators, universities and civil society who defend democracy, plurality, anti-racist education, alterity, diversity and that say no to material and symbolic violence suffered by marginalized communities. As Tavares (2020, p. 80) points out: Listen to the struggle of territorial bodies here since before the world existed. Pay attention to who keeps the firmament.

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