

DECOLONIAL MOVEMENTS IN RURAL TEACHERS' TRAINING: RESISTANCE TO THE SEGREGATED KNOWLEDGE PATTERN

MOVIMENTOS DECOLONIAIS NA FORMAÇÃO DE PROFESSORES DO CAMPO: RESISTÊNCIA AO PADRÃO DE CONHECIMENTO SEGREGADO

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ABSTRACT: The year of 2020 is the milestone of a decade since the implementation of the Rural Education Policy, also known as Procampo, which was enacted through Decree n. 7.352, from November 4, 2010. This policy, as victory of social movements, is changing university *spacetimes*, territorialities and the daily lives of rural communities. Therefore, it summarizes the counter-hegemonic struggle for different

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educational rights, for the emancipation of teaching practices and for schools and communities' autonomy. Based on such elements, the aim of the present article is to present autobiographical narratives according to which students and teachers rescue different *decolonial movements* observed in academic training as the very outcome of experiences built on Interdisciplinary Degree in Rural Education at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). The narratives highlight that Rural Education breaks up with the Eurocentric view of knowledge in order to acknowledge the richness of different knowledge fields, identities, and students' historical and epistemic place with a colonial scene that denies differences to the detriment of submission practices. In order to face such reality, the narratives point out that the Rural Education proposes *decolonial movements* – as prevailing feature in teachers' training – focused on coping with, as well as on resisting and repairing historical violence imposed by the *coloniality*.

Keywords: Rural Education; Rural Teachers' Training; University; Decoloniality.

RESUMO: O ano de 2020 marca uma década da implementação da Política de Educação do Campo, também conhecida como Procampo, que foi reconhecida pelo Decreto n. 7.352 de 4 de novembro de 2010. Essa política, como uma vitória dos movimentos sociais, está mudando o espaço-tempo da universidade, a territorialidade e o cotidiano de comunidades rurais. Trata-se da síntese de uma luta contra-hegemônica por diferentes direitos educacionais, pela emancipação das práticas docentes e pela autonomia de escolas e comunidades. A partir desses elementos, este artigo apresenta narrativas auto-biográficas nas quais estudantes e professores retomam diferentes movimentos decoloniais observados na formação acadêmica como resultado das experiências da graduação interdisciplinar em Educação do Campo na Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF). As narrativas realçam que a educação do campo rompe com a visão eurocêntrica do conhecimento a fim de abarcar a riqueza dos diferentes campos, identidades e lugares históricos e epistêmicos de estudantes em um contexto colonial que renega as diferenças em relação às práticas de sujeição. A fim de enfrentar essa realidade, as narrativas afirmam que a educação do campo propõe movimentos decoloniais - como marcas principais da formação de professores - focados em lidar, resistir e reparar a violência histórica imposta pela colonialidade.

Palavras-chave: Educação do campo; Formação de professores do campo; Universidade; Decolonialidade.

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Decree n. 7.352, from November 4, 2010 – which provides on the Rural Education Policy (Procampo) and on the National Agrarian Reform Education Program (PRONERA) – completed its first decade. The institutionalization of this decree in Brazil emerged as a symbolic and physical victory of struggles for the right to territory, which, historically, have been on the hands of social movements. The Rural Education Policy advocates for the right

of racial and cultural plurality to exist, since they reinforce and differentiate the ways of life of rural, extractive, riverside, *quilombola* and indigenous communities, among others that produce their own material conditions to exist based on farming and on their coexistence relationship with nature (BRASIL, 2010). However, the year of 2020 was a milestone in the history of mankind as the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought along the brutal exposure of racist and fascist scenarios that threaten democracy, human rights and nature. Accordingly, the short history of Rural Education Policy's institutionalization has to be broadly defended, mainly when it is used to the:

Amplification and qualification of basic and higher education offer to rural populations, and it will be developed by the Federal Government in collaboration to States, Federal District and Municipalities, based on guidelines and targets found in the National Education Plan and provided in the present Decree (BRASIL, 2010).

After more than one decade of Decree n. 7.352/2010, the political-pedagogical proposition to Rural Education has been changing universities' *spacetime*, territoriality, and the daily life in schools and rural communities; therefore, it summarizes the counter-hegemonic struggles for different educational rights by emancipating schools' pedagogical practices and by communities' autonomy and self-management. With respect to the higher education scope, Rural Education challenges the traditional discipline-matrix model, which is mainly organized from the Napoleonic university model; in other words, State prevalence in documents, guidelines and in the very basis of education, in order to maintain the current social structure. (RIBEIRO, 1975; SAVIANI, 2009).

In the view of Silveira and Bianchetti (2016), the Napoleonic university model replaced the old medieval university with a system centered on the Imperial University, organized for theological-juridical and humanist training. This new model added other values, as a result of the development of technique, science and technology of the Industrial Revolution. Thus, the Napoleonic university began to build the upper stratum of the French educational system, forming the ruling class and preserving the current social

structure. On the other hand, the rest of the population was destined for primary and secondary education, with little possibility of subverting the processes of social exclusion. Such exclusion is also perceived in Latin American universities today, whose Napoleonic model reproduces the interests of the State, in the process of unification and standardization of training curricula, leaving little room for negotiation and subversion of the social structure.

As for the Brazilian context, the structural unification of university discipline matrices based on the Napoleonic model has been thought from a Eurocentric logic; however, it has been inquired by Rural Education (ANDRADE *et al.*, 2019a). This scenario can be mainly observed when social movements claim for presence of the knowledge and cultural practices' diversity of autochthonous, traditional and rural communities in universities.

At this time, these communities will be just object of study, but they will play the role of political actors in the process to question the segregating knowledge pattern. After more than five centuries of invasions, appropriation and violence in Latin America, rural populations, nowadays, understand that the segregating knowledge pattern imposes different oppression types over the working class, as a whole, and to nature (ARROYO, 2012; ANDRADE, 2019). These oppressions are strategies focused on the continuity of temporal colonization landmarks, of domination and submission models imposed to different communities, whose existence is based on different cultures and ancestries that do not comply with interest in the greedy appropriation of nature, in human exploitation and in capital accumulation.

When it comes to Latin America's social and political formation, "not only the power and labor pattern is racist and segregating for several collectivities, but also the knowledge and rationality pattern bring along a segregating function that [ends up] producing diversities as inferiority" (ARROYO, 2012, p. 235). University formation programs based on the Napoleonic model – State prevalence, discipline matrix standardization and unified thinking (SAVIANI, 2009) – reproduce the colonial segregating function in order to keep social and political structures that have been imposed for centuries. According to Quijano (2005), the Eurocentric perspective of knowledge and, along with it the

elaboration of the sense of race, has set the naturalization of knowledge domination colonial relationships. He added that “historically, it meant a new way to legitimize the old ideas and practices of superiority and inferiority relationships between the dominant and dominated ones” (QUIJANO, 2005, p. 107). With respect to the reproduction function of colonial categories in universities, Darcy Ribeiro highlighted that:

Actually, Latin-American universities keep on growing, so far, and the new paces that are imposed to them in decades to come, will soon stop to perform, more and more, their minimal functions, and will start acting as delay factors. More serious than such ineffectiveness will be the deformation universities will suffer from, if they can only oppose naïve spontaneity to the clear-minded one and to the cultural colonization project, that was explicitly formulated, they are the object of (RIBEIRO, 1975, p. 145).

The political-pedagogical proposition of Rural Education gathers and reinforces other knowledge and discipline matrix organization forms in its university formative project to face and resist cultural colonization. One of them refers to the Pedagogy of Alternation, which was thought from the University Time (UT) and Community Time (CT) perspective (CORDEIRO *et al.*, 2011; FERREIRA; MOLINA, 2016; ANDRADE *et al.*, 2019b). Both – UT and CT – aim at integrating “systematized knowledge in the university environment and knowledge historically built by peasants in their labor processes and in the organization of conditions to reproduce life in the countryside, as well as in classes’ organization processes” (SANTOS, 2012, p. 632). The Pedagogy of Alternation, as claim by rural social movements, rises to acknowledge the different struggles set for the historical reconfiguration of the right to life, territory, education, memory, identity and ancestry, which is thought based on the interests of different peasant populations (CORDEIRO *et al.*, 2011; ARROYO, 2012; RIBEIRO, 2013).

Rural peoples, in their plurality, understand that the resistance to “the oppression and the struggles for freedom are multiple [...] because they are aware that historical oppression processes are multiple and reinforce themselves. They are inseparable from the brutal segregation process suffered by the different ones, which persists in our history” (ARROYO, 2012, p. 235).

Thus, by destabilizing the knowledge segregation patterns, the Rural Education suggests *decolonial movements* that unveil the different faces of university teaching, research and extension segments (ANDRADE *et al.*, 2019a). Based on our interpretation, these *decolonial movements*, with emphasis on the rationality of rural social movements, aim at questioning the different forms of oppression set by the colonial logic over the working and peasant class. In other words, the political-pedagogical proposition determined in the Rural Education Policy, mainly in universities, points towards a cultural turning point that challenges the continuity of an academic model substantiated by economic, racial, gender segregation based on expertise and epistemology.

Rural Education, which was built over struggles against oppression and segregation, gathers elements similar to those of the *decolonial thinking*. Such a thinking focuses on a historical view of brutal treats that stigmatize diversity – racial, gender, species and cultural – as discrimination, submission, downgrading category, as well as category focused on dominating everything that goes against the Eurocentric thinking (QUIJANO, 2005; MIGNOLO, 2007). Among these treats, the current article aims to register the trajectories of Interdisciplinary Undergraduates in Rural Education of Fluminense Federal University (UFF) in order to rescue different *decolonial movements* observed in academic training. The herein referred register aims at repairing an epistemic debt found in the very core of current disputes; in other words, the acknowledgment of brutal treats and violence imposed by the colonial logic, mainly when it comes to the process to produce knowledge. Therefore, the biographic narratives focus on reporting the subordination existence conditions and the consequent reinforcement of students' identities by them in order to set other knowledge forms in the university environment.

RURAL EDUCATION AND THE DECOLONIAL THINKING: ENCOUNTERS AND REINFORCEMENTS?

The decolonial thinking, as element questioning the social and epistemic structures imposed by modernity/coloniality, has been built “by different scholars, environmentalists, leaders of social movements and by other actors

who, since the 20th century, have been promoting analytical and utopic renovations and pressure, mainly in the Latin-American Social Sciences' (ANDRADE *et al.*, 2019a, p. 5). However, when we analyze its rising, from the historical perspective, we once more find different knowledge and the resistance of both different indigenous nations and Afro-diasporic peoples due to their right to exist as decoloniality landmark – assumingly, the most significant one. It is so, because of the systematic genocide and violent practices against indigenous nations, Afro-diasporic peoples and nature after more than 500 years of what was conventionally called 'colonization' – this practice was institutionalized in the Latin-American imaginary (ANDRADE, 2019).

Confronting this reality means rethinking the mismatches and processes that deny diversity as colonization's structuring element, according to which, "the new historical identities about the sense of race were associated with the very nature of the roles and places in the new global structure of labor control" (QUIJANO, 2005, p. 108). Based on such new global structure, the segregating pattern of knowledge ranks an outstanding position within different subordination mechanisms. This pattern represents the mischaracterization, hiding and erasing of the main identities of indigenous nations and Afro-diasporic peoples, to the detriment of the approximation to the other – in this case, the European identity. Thus, the segregating pattern has been historically keeping its hegemony through different strategies, mainly in processes involving the school education scope. Rural Education has been promoting other analytical possibilities to understand, interpret and act in reality, since "its practices acknowledge and seek to work with the social and human richness of its subjects' diversity: labor, root and cultural production forms, forms of struggle, resistance, organization, political understanding, of ways of life" (CALDART, 2012, p. 264).

Rural Education embodies the Pedagogy of Alternation as element prioritizing human formation associated with labor in the social and human richness agenda (RIBEIRO, 2013). Thus, "the Pedagogy of Alternation has been working as reference for other educational experiences that are made

effective by covering public education systems and universities” (CORDEIRO et al., 2011, p. 119). The Pedagogy of Alternation taught at the Interdisciplinary Graduation in Rural Education of Fluminense Federal University (UFF) is in compliance with determinations in the Rural Education Policy and in other normative frameworks that define the discipline matrix approach accounting for 70% of the course’s University Time (UT) workload and for 30% of the Community Time (CT). Accordingly, “teachers’ training could be conducted in parallel to professional action, based on the proper methodology, including the Pedagogy of Alternation, and without the loss of other [methodologies] that fulfil the specificities of rural education” (BRASIL, 2010). The Community Time in the aforementioned graduation course...

[It] potentiates knowledge, learning and skills thought in social spaces that are historically marginalized by the logic of knowledge/power modernity, such as: settlements, *quilombos*, rural workers’ unions, social movements, rural schools and life in the countryside itself. Thus, it shines light on how a laboratory of social, political and environmental experiences challenges and destabilizes, in different ways, the coloniality/modernity project that rules the national territory (ANDRADE *et al.*, 2019a, p. 25-26).

Community time associated with University Time, as laboratory of social experiences, allowed us to build different experiences, which have broadened our understanding of reality and identity reinforcement, itself (ANDRADE *et al.*, 2019b). Such experiences lived in *decolonial movements* will be introduced as biographic narratives; therefore, they will rescue facts, events, ideas, concepts and notions that marked/mark the academic trajectory of four students in the Interdisciplinary Graduation in Rural Education of UFF. The encounter of these students with University Time (UT) took place in the second half of 2015, when they started college. With respect to Community Time (CT), such an encounter happened in 2016, due to individual interests in working with the following thematic axis; “Education and Sustainability: pedagogical and community practices”. This axis approaches the political-pedagogical proposition below:

Discussing and giving meaning to sustainability education concept and practices in and outside schools. Conducting pedagogical and community practices that dialogue with the

concepts of sustainability associated with social experiences built within different historical and geographic contexts, mainly in the rural scope, by approximating the academic knowledge to rural practices and knowledge (ANDRADE *et al.*, 2019a, p. 10).

The most significant experiences lived in the thematic axis known as “Education and Sustainability: pedagogical and community practices”, and in practices that go beyond them, will be introduced in autobiographical narratives format. Such a methodological approach brings along several meanings, because “the biographic notion invites us to share the meaning socially built over relationships with Nature and shared with the community they belong to, over political positions and citizen acting” (ANDRADE, 2014, p. 5). From a *decolonial* viewpoint, the narratives highlight the existential circumstances, in the ideological sense, that marked/mark the imaginary relationship of our identity concept. Such a concept was re-signified and reinforced when four students accepted to share their personal and academic trajectory and, therefore, to rescue the symbolic elements that define their reading of the world the historical marks imposed by the colonization experience. Therefore, the narratives introduced as autobiographies can be herein understood as:

An attempt to narrate our presence in the world (graphy) and the existential, professional and political relationships (bio) to seek radical changes that can build, through social and daily pedagogical practices of a fair, sustainable and democratic society that (auto)identify as subjects of history (REIGOTA, 2008, p. 12).

This methodological approach – autobiographical narratives – goes beyond the reinforcement of students as subjects of history, it means rescuing the *decolonial movements* found in rural teachers’ training. Similarly, highlighting the contribution by the Pedagogy of Alternation to “reality transformation processes, according to which, the power of action-reflection about social practices in territories – geographic and epistemological – of Rural Education triggers actions to reinforce citizenship and the organization of social struggles” (ANDRADE *et al.*, 2019a, p. 27). The autobiographical narratives, as methodological strategy (in this article), point towards elements that question the segregating pattern of knowledge. Students’ social and political experiences – which are articulated to Rural Education political-pedagogical project - stood

out among these elements. Several aspects of the *decolonial thinking* emerged as constant in these experiences, such as political and historical awareness, identity reinforcement, understanding of inequality and injustice, social activism, academic empowerment, among others.

DECOLONIALITY IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES: OTHER FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Exhaustively thinking of decoloniality among all scenarios emphasized by the COVID-19 pandemic – when it comes to ecocide, genocide of Afro-Brazilian populations and of indigenous nations and other rural populations that find themselves in the edge of vulnerability – demands a change of attitude from different perspectives, including knowledge production. It is so, because the *decolonial* thinking consists in “*un proyecto de transformación sistemática y global de las presuposiciones e implicaciones de modernidad, asumido por una variedad de sujetos en diálogo*” (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2007, p. 160). By building this dialogue, we shone light over the biographical narratives of four students from the Interdisciplinarity Graduation in Rural Education of UFF in order to rescue and register their *decolonial* experiences that frame knowledge construction at epistemic systematization level, including memoirs, identities and social struggles. Accordingly, we have prioritized the systematic transformation perspective according to which, from the anti-racist and anti-fascist fight viewpoint, black and indigenous lives matters. The narratives subtly and wisely address *decoloniality* by inviting readers to a deep and in-time reflection to confront their own “scars”, which were left by the colonial experience.

A pathway to University

Going to college is part of the life goals of many people, including of my own. Although I was not sure about the major I was interest in, I intended to finish high school and go to college. Several reasons had triggered my interest in having a major degree, from getting better job opportunities to acquiring new

knowledge. This last reason - acquiring new knowledge – may have been the one truly driving me, mainly in the last two years in high school. It is so, because, in the sophomore years I had the first contact with Fluminense Federal University (UFF) through the Young Science Talents Program. This scientific pre-initiation program, which is developed by FAPERJ (*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*) and CNPq (*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico*), aims at students from the state education public network enrolled in high school.

Back in 2013, I attended the program's selection process and was granted with its scholarship. After my selection to it, I chose to join the Environmental Education project name "Adopt a tree: strategy to recover and conserve the riparian forest"¹. From this moment on, I started attending UFF on a weekly basis, although I was not yet an effective student in it. By working in this project, I could get to know the environmental issues observed in Santo Antônio de Pádua County and to participate in study groups and field work. Activities such as field visitations allowed me to meet small rural producers from Pádua region who have taught us some organic planting techniques and who shared their knowledge on herbs' medical properties.

I learned more with each one of these activities, a whole new repertoire of knowledge was unveiled to me. At the end of two years in the project, I was delighted with what I had learned and curious for all the knowledge I could still access; therefore, I decided that I would return to the university, but, at this time, as a student. And so it was, in the second half of 2015, I returned to the university as student enrolled in the Interdisciplinary Graduation in Rural Education. I had access to knowledge in the History, Sociology, Philosophy, Environmental Education, Agro-ecology, Geography and Rural Peoples knowledge fields; all of them were approached in an interdisciplinary way by both students and professors. I knew that by studying in a university I would find out new things, but the Rural Education course provided me with a broader horizon than I could ever dream of. This course made me see that not just the

¹ The project was coordinated by Professor Célia Januzzi, who introduced me to the scientific research world and encouraged me with my studies. I herein register my gratitude to her.

university was the source of knowledge to be acquired, but that students also had knowledge that could be used by it.

Such a perception derives from the fact that the Rural Education course pays close attention to its students' training, since it seeks to "build strategies that involve the learning processes and value their knowledge in order to provide them with scientific knowledge" (MOLINA, 2017, p. 605). In other words, the knowledge we produce or access during our rural teachers' training are built along with scientific knowledge and the knowledge we carry from our experiences and communities. Therefore, it is interesting observing how the Rural Education field somehow seeks to destabilize the "epistemological legacy of Eurocentrism that stops us from understanding the world from the very world we live in and from the epistemes characteristic to it" (PORTO-GONÇALVES, 2005, p. 3). Besides this dialogue between scientific knowledge and general knowledge that comes with our own experiences, the Rural Education course, which is represented by its students and professors, have encouraged us to share our research, experiences and produced knowledge with the academic community.

The outspread of research carried out by students and professors of this course takes place through lectures, conferences, articles and through other scientific outspread means. At this point, it is worth highlighting that one of the main features of Rural Education formation lies on building "collectives of producers-researchers of knowledge on the very formation practices either in courses, research, and community time or in the social, political, cultural and rural pedagogy dynamics" (ARROYO, 2012, p. 364). We aim at encouraging the valorization of knowledge built by rural peoples in our research, since, as explains Quijano (2005, p. 110), we understand that "as part of a new world power standard, Europe also concentrated its hegemony on controlling all sorts of subjectivity and culture control, mainly on control over knowledge and knowledge production". The result of such hegemony of the unique knowledge was the fact that rural peoples were alienated from their knowledge, since they were downgraded. Thus, in order to contribute to reverse the sense of downgrading the knowledge of peasant peoples, mainly in the university, we

aimed at outspreading works and research carried out throughout our academic training.

In my opinion, be part of this movement, which argues *coloniality* in the production of a unique knowledge of rural peoples, is something noble and challenging. It is something that fills me with hope. When I first started college, while I was still in the high school, I did not think that I would be part of such a thing. Nowadays, when I look at my trajectory here, I can also see how my participation in the Young Talents project was important for me to get to the Rural Education course. This statement reinforces the importance of affirmative public policies and of university-access programs, mainly for students coming from the least favored classes in our society. These policies became object of interest of my Course Completion Work (CCW), named “Formation territories in Interdisciplinary Graduation in Rural Education of UFF: indigenous stories, knowledge and cultures as *decolonial* practice”. This research allowed me to get to know the indigenous representativeness in the course’s formative matrix and consequently, the importance of inclusive educational policies so that these peoples have the right to a different school education.

Let’s occupy the knowledge latifundium

According to Professor Miguel Arroyo, in his book “*Outros Sujeitos, Outras Pedagogias*” (2014), the sentence “lets’ occupy the knowledge latifundium” has been driving other collectivities to reinforce themselves within this homogenized field called knowledge. I move myself in the academic world as part of these subjects in order to occupy previously denied spaces and, then, to put pressure over changes in these spaces dominated by the capitalist-colonial logic. Accordingly, the narrative I try to recreate is a not so far trajectory. However, it is full of changes triggered by the process of getting aware of the political conscience, as stated by Maria Paula Meneses (2008, p. 7), “one of the most important political battles of the 21st century, which is fought, no doubt about it, around knowledge”. Thus, due to the power relationships set in Latin America – since its colonization and that remain to

present times -, which go beyond the historical social inequalities, there is an Eurocentric episteme working as the only producer of the truth that has occupy my cognitive system; in other words, it made me incapable of producing knowledge.

The occupation of knowledge production places started in self-knowledge as knowledge producer; i.e., my epistemic place and, to accomplish it, I had to find out where I speak from, my history, origin and identity, because a University was not always a concrete reality in my ideas. Briefly, I am part of a disfavored social class, I am black and I had to work and study since the age of 13 years. I dropped out school at the end of high school, besides being a kid of a divorced couple. I only had my mother to provide all household resources for a long time². Years later, as I had the idea of finishing Basic Education, I enrolled in the Education Center for Youngsters and Adults, also known as CEJA, when I found out, through friends, that it was possible graduating through the National High School Learning Test, also known as ENEM. I graduated in high school through this test, and I also got good scores to enter the University.

Starting college at that moment was an unusual reality for me, because, even with all the advancements in public policies, I did not have much knowledge about them, such as information about the Affirmative Action Policies. However, other public policies were essential for my enrollment in college, although I did not even have any idea about them at that moment, such as the case of the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities (REUNI). The implementation of a Public University in my home town was the barrier disrupted for me to get a seat in places of knowledge. My economic condition did not allow me to attend a private university, and I could also not afford living in another city to attend a public university. Accordingly, the Fluminense Northeast Higher Education (INFES), as hinterland campus of Fluminense Federal University (UFF), was the gateway to University, through the Interdisciplinary Graduation in Rural Education.

² One of the features of the patriarchal societies as colonial logic inheritance. Family formation, in these societies, in many cases, is led by women, whose fathers' of their kids abandon their affective, social and economic responsibility as the reflex of an accomplice State.

As I got to know Rural Education political-pedagogical proposition – as popular demand -, as well as the Pedagogy of Alternation, professors and the disciplines, I got aware of the political reality, and I felt like part of the teaching/learning *movement*. This movement “did not develop [in Rural Education] apart from students’ reality. The main fundamental of the pedagogical work must lie on students’ real-life materiality, based on which, the possibility of re-signifying scientific knowledge is open” (MOLINA; SÁ, 2012, p. 331). According to Paulo Freire (2005, p. 79), “nobody educates anybody, as anyone educates itself: men get educated by communion, by being mediated by the world”. The Pedagogy of Alternation, in this *movement*, acts as bridge between theory and practice” (ANDRADE *et al.*, 2019a), since it articulates daily doses of awareness about the political, social and epistemic reality by potentiating the experience of an empowering *praxis*.

It is done by taking empowering from the Freirean sense – the one that takes place from the collective action to change reality -, in other words, “if you are not capable of using your recent freedom to help others to get freed through society’s transformation, then you are exercising an individualist attitude towards empowerment and freedom” (FREIRE; SHOR, 1986, p. 135). I recall once when a professor told me that academic production is not a bunch of articles and books we use to fill the Lattes CV, but theoretical and practical experiences that, whenever shared, help other people who we likely do not know to change their own realities. Accordingly, along with other students and teachers of the course, I published the practical and political experience of the battle we have fought against the closing of the rural school in Santo Antônio de Pádua County – RJ³. The aim of this publication was to bring these experiences to the academic space as knowledge production and, thus, to document the contemporary history of struggles by subordinated classes and to potentiate their history in order to put pressure over the State to force its action and to make it respect territories’ cultural differences.

³ Article presented at V CEDUCE (*Colóquio Internacional Educação, Cidadania e Exclusão*, from June 2018 at Fluminense Federal University (UFF), Niterói City – Rio de Janeiro State, Brazil. This article was also published as chapter in the book “Cultura, cidadania e políticas públicas” v.4. Ponta Grossa (PR): Atena Editora, 2019.

Besides these scientific communication processes – the production of articles, book chapters, and publications in conference proceedings – I also had the opportunity to study abroad in 2019. This experience was only possible because of inclusive affirmative public policies, which granted me with this scholarship⁴. Two choices were given to me, first the Maputo Pedagogical University, in Mozambique – Africa, and Porto University, in Portugal – Europe-, as second option. The options I made to apply to the selection process are part of a series of relevance and possibilities, among them, one finds: language. Based on the order of options, the Pedagogical University of Maputo, in Mozambique, was my first choice, due to cultural identity and memory – or to lack of it -, rather than to academic relationships themselves.

Being a black youngster in Brazil – black and brown – oftentimes means not knowing your own origins and ancestry. Thus, choosing Mozambique as first option might have been a frivolous decision within the apparent possibilities. But, for me, at that moment, it represented something bigger than a non-sense race to Universities with higher academic prestige. Choosing Mozambique meant choosing the identity and ancestry denied by the world history, by historical and daily assaults, by the cruel racism and colonialism we face on a daily basis, even in the academia. Therefore, besides the fact that the academic meaning of Mozambique represented a turning point, although not for sure, it also meant to as closer as possible of an ancestral place for the black color I carry on my skin. I was approved for my first option, and my experience in the exchange program brought along very important reflections about the racial, identity and self-declaration identity.

Living and studying in Mozambique for five months was the opportunity to have theoretical discussions, based on practice, that were previously approached as the sense of belonging to an identity, mainly to the racial one – it happens in a different way, based on territory and on its historical context. According to Kabengele (1999, p. 14), “this identity, which is always a process and never a finished good, will not be built on a void, because its elements are chosen among elements that are common to group members; language,

⁴ International Mobility Program of Fluminense Federal University, call 12/2018.

history, territory, culture, religion, social condition, among others”. Perceiving the racial identity differences in Brazil and in Mozambique – in Brazil I am seen as brown, mulatto, mestizo, among others, but never as white; in Mozambique most of the time I was considered white – made me deepen in colonizing racial issues that have always pressured Brazilian mestizos to do not embody their black background and forced them to accept the ambiguity of favors in two spaces. Thus, self-declare in Brazil, in my opinion, is a *decolonial* political, ideological and epistemological action against the whitening process that accounts for the ethnocide, and black and indigenous genocide resulting from the miscegenation ideology.

A new meeting with my rural roots

Experiences are part of life and they have the kind peculiarity of giving us something unique that sometimes mark and change us. While I was still in high school I had the opportunity to experience something that would change my life completely. I was selected to participate in the Young Talents Program, which is a scientific initiation program funded by FAPERJ; its target public are high school students from the state public network. After I joined the program, I chose the project “Adopt a tree”, which aims at sensitizing people about the environmental cause and about changes in habits that are harming to nature. My participation in the project gave me opportunity to have the first contact with the academic environment and it soon made me very interested in overall sciences, in scientific knowledge. Thus, having the opportunity to experience the scientific initiation, still in high school, encouraged me to go on with research in higher education. However, beyond that, this opportunity had an even greater meaning to me, if one takes into account that we live in a country that supports itself from inequality – socioeconomic, ethnic-racial and gender – such as Brazil; studying is, no doubt, a way to ensure the logic of the system and to reinforce the fight for the right to education.

The exercise of right to education plays an important role, since it becomes the “constitutive basis of individuals’ formation, as well as helps

defending and promoting other rights” (HADDAD, 2012, p. 216). In other words, education “enables and potentiates the guarantee of other rights, either in the sense of demanding them or in that of enjoying them” (HADDAD, 2012, p. 216). When I finished high school and, consequently, my participation in the project “Adopt a tree”, I decided to attend ENEM in order to get to the university. I had in mind options of courses that would give me good salaries in the labor market. Most of all, I aimed at a chance to “grow” in life and to break the bonds with the city I live in – Santo Antônio de Pádua. Nevertheless, many things happened between ENEM and my enrollment in college, among them, my grandfather died and, at first, I started thinking about going to college in a different city. Even if I made the choice to change course in the future. When it was possible applying to SISU, in August 2015, I realized that the only option available was Rural Education. At first, I was a little worried, because I did not know for sure what it was about, but my mother said that I should get my seat because she did not want me to “loose” one more semester studying at home. Thus, I applied to the seat in this course and I was selected to it.

The first semester was a complete turning point. If, before, I did not see any reason to be in this course, after a while I identified myself with it and with its political philosophy. The Rural Education course taught me the relevance of reconnecting myself with the location and of valuing my roots. It was so, because my kin, mainly my grandfather, are people who have even lived in and from the country. Family income came from farming in small lands. However, besides ensuring the family’s subsistence, it was in the farm that I recorded my most memorable weekends. Grandpa taught us how to plant and fish, he used to tell stories and, nowadays, these are the memories I keep deep in my heart. Accordingly, being part of the Rural Education course made me live again the love my grandpa had for the land and made me understand other forms of knowledge and how essential it is to make them legitimate. Rural Education aims at “copping the epistemological hegemony of knowledge inoculated by the capitalist science (MOLINA; SÁ, 2012, p. 327). Thus, semester after semester, I got to realize that my personal experiences were somehow in compliance with

the courses' ideology. This coincidence made me even surer about the decision of being a rural teacher.

On the other hand, it was also in this course that I observed the essential role of fighting for the rights of rural populations to a different education system, as claimed by rural social movements. Beyond that, such a right must be fully effective. Such a fact makes me recall my first Community Time, when rural schools were threatened by a school-closing policy – it was put in place later on, since two of the schools we had visited were closed. The rural-school closing process, as phenomenon covering the whole Brazilian territory, has been getting faster on a yearly basis. More recent data of the School Census⁵ show the outrageous number of approximately 4 thousand rural schools closed per year. Luther and Gerhardt (2008, p. 304) point out “that from 2000 to 2011, 40,935 education facilities in the rural zone stopped their operations”. Accordingly, the “explanations for closing [schools] have been outspread for decades: infrastructure issues, insufficient professional qualification and small number of youngsters living in locations outside the city” (LUTHER; GERHARDT, 2018, p. 304). However, such continuous closing of schools has been taking peasant children, adolescents and youngsters from their most basic fundamental right: access to education.

However, this policy is not recent, because my father, when he was young and lived in the rural zone, was a victim of this criminal practice so common in the country. After all, his school was closed and it accounts for his school dropout status. Thus, as the year went by, he noticed the lack of schooling in his life, because he was illiterate. After my parents moved to the city, my mother encouraged him to go back to school, to the EJA modality, and he did so. Nowadays, I realize that, unwillingly, this episode made me choose the topic of my Course Conclusion Work (CCW), namely: “Precariousness as strategy to close rural schools: analysis of infrastructure in three schools in Northeastern Rio de Janeiro State”. Somehow, I realize that we are not exposed to randomness, but we actually follow our own path.

⁵ School Census <http://portal.inep.gov.br/web/guest/educacao-basica/censo-escolar/mapa-da-coleta>

Yet, throughout my scholar trajectory, one of my greatest deeds lied on being granted with the academic mobility scholarship to study Spanish in Salamanca University – Spain – for three weeks. Since I was a child I dreamed of big things... big discoveries... big conquests... and knowing other countries was always among my dreams. However, until being able to cross the Atlantic Ocean I had to cross a long path. There were many barriers for it, but, what really matters is that professors were always by my side – Marli, Fabio, Silvio and the course's coordinator, Ana Paula – in order to make my academic mobility feasible. I must say that the differential in this course is the fact that professors are always available, from the coordination group to professors; they are always willing to do their best for the students. Providing high-quality teaching is not enough, professors always wish the whole collectivity to be able to make the best conquests.

Throughout my short staying in Spain I had the opportunity to get to know a new culture, to make new friends and also to practice a new language: Spanish. Moreover, this experience added huge value and knowledge to my academic life, if one has in mind that I could get in contact with a different education model and teaching professionals. I can also say that this mobility emerged as a remarkable differential in my resume; in the future, it may open new professional doors to me. However, beyond that, I tell myself that the personal development process was the most relevant outcome of this whole experience I have been through, since I was forced to leave my comfort zone and become a more independent and mature person.

Being part of the Rural Education course was not just a matter of studying, or of simply graduating and getting a diploma, as it happens with most students. In this course I had amazing experiences, I lived things I will never forget, I set tight friendship bonds and most of all, I became a better person. This course put me through a process of full human transformation; in other words, I was encouraged to the scholar universe by publishing the scientific works and articles carried out with my professors, as well as to be autonomous, to have critical-analytical ability and to accomplish human development linked to

knowledge, to labor, cultural, scientific, societal and environmental relationships.

No matter where you go, never forget your “backyard”

Suddenly, I faced a sentence, I do not recall where I read it, or if I simply listened to somebody say it: “no matter where you go, never forget your backyard”. These words are stamped on my heart, they always take me to my first steps, to my first inquires, to affection locations and to too much learning; thus, they drove changes in me and boosted by search for a transformation that was professional, at first. The first choice concerning my “transformation” after finishing high school would be applying for college and going against a reality that prevails in my community, to be the first family member to try to attend college. After setting this target, I tried to be accepted in several faculties in the private sector, but I never succeeded, because of economic issues and of the distance from the faculty’s facility. Because I lived in a community in the rural zone, all the money I made was to help providing the needs of my family: my mother and two brothers.

In 2015, due to ENEM and other affirmative policies, I got to enter a public university and, therefore, to mitigate some damage I suffered throughout the history of knowledge colonization. This colonization type always segregated our knowledge production – as peasant community – by exercising the political authoritarianism aimed at putting us apart from political rights. “The use of affirmative action [in the struggle against segregation] aims at correcting this frame by including individuals who belong to discriminated social segments in the most diverse scopes of society. Consequently, it works to build a diversified society that respects differences and makes equality effective” (LIMA, p. 106, 2010). Accordingly, I enrolled in the Interdisciplinary Graduation in Rural Education at Fluminense Federal University (UFF), Santo Antônio de Pádua campus – RJ. The first philosophy class was about my epistemic place, then I started to study based on the sentence that is always in my mind.

During the last conversations I had with my professors at the University (UT) and Community times (CT) in the Rural Education course, I realized that the hard time getting to college result from social inequalities and injustice against poor, black and indigenous people who live on the edge of society. In my case, in particular, I am talking about those who face prejudice for being a rural-school student – a person who will always carry thoughts, ideas and cultures that are not in the mainstream of the Western thinking and of capitalist relationships. I understand that rural populations are not the core of life philosophies, but we have our own culture and I may keep on being erased by a system that was thought not to be restructured from ourselves, but to be imposed over us, based on the sense of political power superiority and centrality, which allows and drives segregation.

By observing the centralities that operate against the rural populations, I started to struggle for political spaces in a society unthinkable for rural zone residents in collaboration with other students of the Rural Education Graduation Course. These political representativeness spaces started in my community, in the struggle to avoid the closing of our local rural school, which was the only power public representativeness in our community; it was located in Salgueiro District, rural zone of Santo Antônio de Pádua – RJ (NEVES *et al.*, 2019). My political struggle was against social injustice and the denial of different education rights to this population. We inquired the “State” in an articulated manner, since it was scrapping not only one school, but our knowledge production, since it was threatening our very existence, mainly when it denied our rights. The fight for keeping rural schools opened in our county is essential, because it is through Rural Education that discussions about peasant populations rise, as well as about their social relationships, historical contexts and traditional knowledge; therefore, it is possible reaching the understanding that we are not late, but that we live our own time/space.

Our political resistance moved other communities and involved more schools, which got organized to demonstrate in the City Council, in order to claim for our rights. We were successful in our struggles, and we got to keep the schools opened; we produced a documentary and an article about it –

Social Memory and Resistance: Community Organization against Closing Alice do Amaral Peixoto School. Once more, the outcomes from political movements outside the hegemonic powers put us in places that were not occupied by black and poor individuals, or by students from rural schools. Thus, the Rural Education course of Fluminense Federal University (UFF) provided me with a different reading of reality and, with it, I could understand the hegemonic relationships in knowledge construction. The course has taken me to my place of speech, to the beginning of a growing movement in politics for rights and representativeness.

In January 2020, I was inducted to my position as tutelary counselor in my city after a troubled electoral campaign, since we have run against a dominating politics, which aims at keeping the current social structures. It was in this electoral process, with the support from the Rural Education of Fluminense Federal University (UFF) and from my own community – which sees me as a representative in the fight for education – I was elected as the second most voted tutelary counselor in the county, this outcome went against the political hegemony in the city. Accordingly, it is evident that education drives changes when it is liberating and talks about our very reality. Rural Education provides us with it, with the knowledge about the relevance of my “backyard”. This backyard will always be a political space for struggles focused on rights the Eurocentric view takes away from us and stops us from being in places that are not ours. Thus, I cannot forget of “my backyard”, when I look at it I will know who I am, my place in History and where I must be. I will be aware of my freedom, regardless of all other sorts of violence we had suffered.

RURAL EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITY: CONFRONTING, RESISTING AND REPAIRING COLONIAL VIOLENCES

The herein presented autobiographical narratives unveil different perspectives of the students' struggles, facing the challenges and violence imposed by coloniality. The first of these concerns the processes they have taken place/take place before, during and after students go to college. ENEM, itself, which is the main path to access public universities, is substantiated by

knowledge standardization; therefore, it does not cover the diversity of knowledge brought by subjects who are historically alienated from school spaces. The second perspective of these struggles is associated with the ways in which these students confront knowledge segregation and discrimination – be them ethnic, racial and gender-related. In this sense, the narratives signal the educational political process of the universities, especially the affirmative action policies, as the outcome of struggles by popular classes, fight for diversity in the scientific field.

The disputes for a more inclusive and plural university is manifest as one of the perspectives of the social struggles perceived in the students' narratives. In this third perspective, the disputes for a new project of society are evident. Therefore, the physical presence of different social actors – who were previously put apart from school spaces – challenges and pressures the university to rethink the discipline matrix model, which derives from the Eurocentric perspective. All biographies express the approximation and/or enrollment in the university through affirmative actions that work as an important manifesto of affirmative action policies; i.e.: Law of Quotas - Law n. 12.711/2012; b) Reuni – Decree n. 6.096, from April 24, 2007; c) Young Talents Program – Launched by FAPERJ in 1999.

Students' narratives go beyond challenges and barriers; they also highlight Rural Education's contributions to destabilize the knowledge segregation mechanism, mainly in the universities – configuring it as the fourth perspective of social struggles in the university. Therefore, these narratives present themselves as a powerful source of recording, signaling that the political-pedagogical proposition of Rural Education enabled students to promote different *decolonial movements*, in and outside the university. Thus, it broadened their political and historical awareness and drove them to make changes in their communities. In this transformation, the narratives highlight the struggles for the continuity of their communities, from the organized movements that demand political, environmental, territorial, food security, among others, which characterize the main tensions in the current Brazilian scenario.

The autobiographical narratives also point out scientific production as the fifth perspective of the struggles of students. In this way, all narratives highlight the academic empowerment that Rural Education allowed students to occupy spaces, in and outside the university. This production and “occupation” are built by the entanglement of University Time (UT) and Community Time (CT) experiences, according to which, the Pedagogy of Alternation breaks with the Eurocentric view of knowledge in order to get to know the richness of students’ knowledge, identities, historical and epistemic place within a colonial scenario that denies differences to the detriment of subordination practices. In order to face such a reality, the narratives emphasize that Rural Education suggests *decolonial* movements, as prevailing feature in teachers’ training, focused on coping with and repairing the historical assaults posed by coloniality.

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