

The presence of popular and traditional knowledge has the potential to transform the university

18 de setembro de 2023

Diversity | Course and discipline initiatives promote the inclusion of subjects from diverse ethnic-racial territories and create tension in the academic environment

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*First published September 6, 2023

*Photo: Marília Stein (Personal Archive)

"The ambition is to transform the university into a place of multiple knowledge and expertise, a place of sharing: you not only teach, but you also learn. This has been the experience of the course. We have learned a great deal with each class that starts."

This perspective is presented to us by Uivira Domingues, a Xacriabá indigenous person and professor at the Faculty of Ethniversity of the Federal University of Pará (Universidade Federal do Pará – UFPA). Before getting to know her experience as a professor, teaching a course aimed at traditional peoples and communities, let's go through other experiences in the South, Southeast, and Center-West of the country.

The idea is to discuss and present diverse ways in which popular and traditional knowledge circulates in the university environment. As a result of the efforts of journalists associated with federal institutions of higher education, this report is a partnership between the JU, Jornal Beira do Rio (UFPA), Jornal UFG, and UFJF Notícias.

Knowledges that converge

When subjects from different territories and ethnic-racial affiliations enter the university environment not as objects of research, but as teachers, opportunities arise for academia to rethink and transform itself. This chance bet is at the heart core of a project called Meeting of Knowledges (Encontro de Saberes). The original model for this proposal was an initiative of a public notice of the Research Support Foundation of the State of Minas Gerais (Fapemig). The funding will be used to ensure the participation of masters, as well as mapping trips, workshops, and exchange initiatives. In Governador Valadares, 40 vacancies are available for undergraduate students. At the headquarters, there are 350 vacancies, 250 for undergraduates, 50 for postgraduate students, and another 50 for the external community.

In the Advanced Campus, there are already actions in partnership with the communities surrounding the Doce River Valley (Vale do Rio Doce), especially through the Agroecology Center (Nagô), which includes the Watu Pluriversity Project, a name that honors the sacred entity that the Doce River represents to the Krenak people. In addition, there is advisory work to indigenous, quilombola, and peasant organizations in the territory of the middle Rio Doce.



Reinaldo Duque believes that the decolonization of academic thought is only possible through dialogue with traditional and other forms of knowledge (Photo: Personal Archive).

The coordinator of extension projects, UFJF professor Reinaldo Duque, believes that the decolonization of academic thinking is only possible through dialogue with traditional knowledge and other forms of knowledge. Thus, promoting this space of intercultural education helps to correct the educational process distortions.

"We have a very limited education, with several gaps in knowledge and learning about indigenous history and culture, which we carry from school to higher education, with professionals trained without this knowledge, often still hostages of a distorted, prejudiced, and pejorative view of traditional peoples."

— Reinaldo Duque

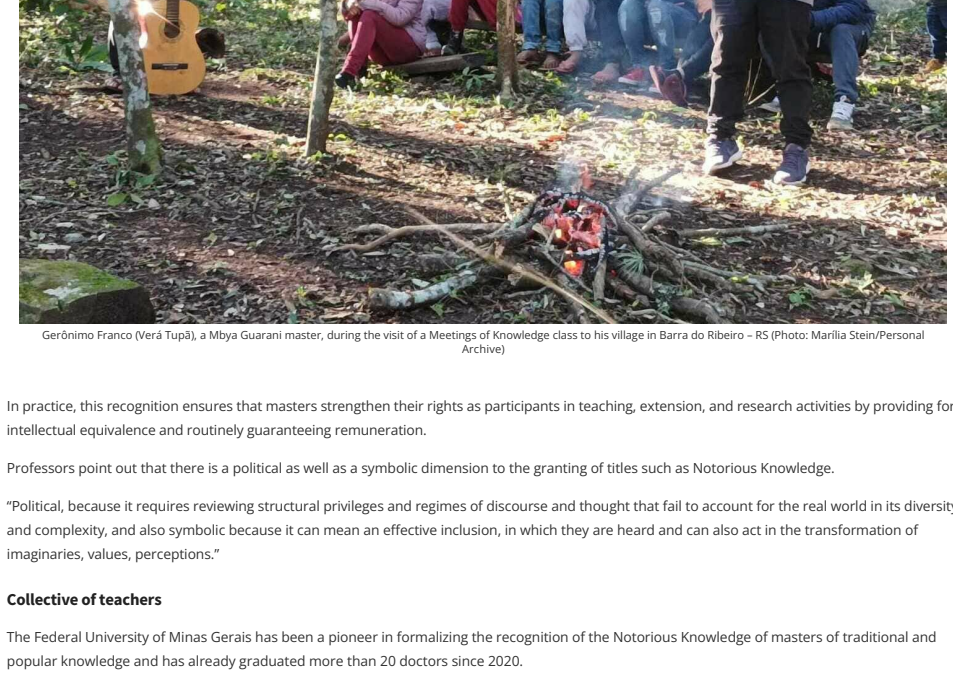
Notorious Knowledge

Since 2016, UFRGS has offered the subject Meetings of Knowledge (Encontro de Saberes) for all undergraduate courses. Since 2016, about 40 masters have passed through it. Although its protagonism is guaranteed in classroom space, outside of it the recognition of its contribution participation still encounters obstacles in the administrative structure of the University, such as issues related to registration, payment, and validation of the contributions of these participants.

The collaborative team of professors who designed and run the discipline recalls that the initiative was "created with the intention of inviting the Public University, as well as society, to effectively promote the inclusion of subjectivities, epistemes, and plural values, rethinking its practices of knowledge production and transmission, and to expanding its social impact."

Therefore, he proposed the inclusion of the recognition of Notorious Knowledge to masters of knowledge of traditional and popular peoples and communities. Last year, the Teaching, Research, and Extension Council adopted a resolution to regulate the process.

Thus, according to the collaborative group, from an institutional perspective, the "legitimacy" of the presence of masters of traditional and popular knowledge, to the extent that they are called 'doctors', acknowledges the specificity of their training and places them in the same hierarchy as people with doctoral degrees.



Gerônimo Franco (Vera Tupã), a Mbya Guarani master, during the visit of a Meetings of Knowledge class to his village in Barra do Ribeiro – RS (Photo: Marília Stein/Personal Archive)

In practice, this recognition ensures that masters strengthen their rights as participants in teaching, extension, and research activities by providing for intellectual equivalence and routinely guaranteeing remuneration.

Professors point out that there is a political as well as a symbolic dimension to the granting of titles such as Notorious Knowledge. "Political, because it requires reviewing structural privileges and regimes of discourse and thought that fail to account for the real world in its diversity and complexity, and also symbolic because it can mean an effective inclusion, in which they are heard and can also act in the transformation of imaginaries, values, perceptions."

Collective of teachers

The Federal University of Minas Gerais has been a pioneer in formalizing the recognition of the Notorious Knowledge of masters of traditional and popular knowledge and has already graduated more than 20 doctors since 2020.

The professors emphasize that those who can live with the masters "recognize the richness, relevance, and complexity of the knowledge, sciences, arts, and ways of life that they can teach to a society that has risen at the expense of their bodies and knowledge, but that refuses to recognize its validity and open itself to a dialogue that includes, converges, and amplifies words."

Carolina Urzúa Talkis, a museology student who attended the Meeting of Knowledge course last semester, reports that while the discipline, confirmed the invisibility that exists about indigenous groups, for example, it also provided the opportunity to meet with these collectives and their struggles. "I was touched and grateful for the opportunity to have this experience."

Intercultural teaching degree

Gilson Ipaxi'awya Tapirapé, from the Apixáwa people (Tapirapé – MT), became the first Indigenous professor to take office at the Federal University of Goiás (Universidade Federal de Goiás – UFG) on February 13, 2023. This historical fact was imagined or even dreamed of by Gilson when, in 2007, he joined the first class of the Intercultural Education course at UFG.

Based on the articulations of indigenous leaders and teachers, the Teaching Degree in Intercultural Education at UFG began to take its first steps, in effect in 2005. That year, Chief Raul Hawakati, from Aldeia Buridina, of the Karajá people, in Aruanã (GO); Aruani Karajá, also from Buridina; teacher Creusa Krahô, from Aldeia Nova, in Goiatins (TO); and Cassiano Soperó Apinajé, from the village of São José (MT), among others, visited Professor Maria do Socorro Pimentel da Silva, Faculty of Letters at UFG and presented their demand for a higher education course for the training of indigenous teachers.

The then Intercultural Degree course, now a degree course in Intercultural Education, was inspired by the pioneering Insikiran Center for Indigenous Higher Education, at the Federal University of Roraima (Universidade Federal de Roraima – UFRR), created in 2001, with which Professor Maria do Socorro had collaborated. The partners were the Federal University of Maranhão (Universidade Federal de Maranhão – UFMA), the Federal University of Tocantins (Universidade Federal de Tocantins – UFT), the National Indian Foundation (Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas – FUNAI), and the Center for Indigenous Work (Centro de Trabalhos Indigenistas – CTI).

After five years of undergraduate studies in Linguistics, Gilson participated in the first edition of the specialization in Intercultural and Transdisciplinary Education: Pedagogical Management, followed by a master's degree in Letters and Linguistics at the Faculty of Letters of UFG. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in the same program. After 16 years of academic studies, the UFG professor does not believe in the union between indigenous and academic knowledge, but in their encounter, in their coexistence.

"Unity is almost impossible, as they constitute different perspectives and worlds. But it is possible to coexist, to discuss the sciences of how the university understands a certain phenomenon and how the indigenous people understand it."

— Gilson Ipaxi'awya Tapirapé

With the access of indigenous students to universities that maintain a bibliographic and epistemic production historically distant from the reality of the original peoples, a change is also expected in the academic environment and the production of scientific knowledge. "Being the first indigenous professor at UFG," says Gilson, "is the result of a great collective struggle. We understand that from then on, the university will have the obligation to create an intercultural environment. We hope that the space for indigenous knowledge will be guaranteed."



The Degree in Intercultural Education class visit to the Bõe Bororo village of the Bõe Bororo people (Photo: Ana Paula Purcina Baumann/Personal Archive).

The degree program in Intercultural Education at UFG lasts five years and is divided into three specific matrices: Cultural Sciences, Language Sciences, and Natural Sciences. In the first two years, the participant studies the basic matrix and then chooses the specific matrix to be studied during the following three years. The course structure does not have disciplines but is organized around contextual themes. "The disciplines are their formations, closed box. The contextual themes provide an expanded, broadened, borderless approach, where shared between knowledge and cultures. Enabled a more dialogical approach in the classroom. From this perspective, everything is the subject of the class. If the topic emerges in the debate, it is because it is part of the content of the class," says Mônica Veloso Borges, teacher of the Intercultural Education Course.

During the year, the indigenous academics and the UFG professors distribute their time between the university and the villages. The course is structured in four annual stages: two at the university, usually from January to February, and from July to August; two in the villages, in April or May, and another in September or October. With the presence of thirty 30 indigenous ethnic peoples among its students, the course is organized in committees, which bring together teachers according to their affinity and knowledge acquired of the different ethnic peoples.

Renew ethno-development definitions

The Ethno-development course at UFPA, where Uivira Domingues is a professor, follows the same time-village and time-university logic. A member of the Xacriabá ethnic group, of the Jê language family which lives between Minas Gerais and Bahia, Uivira has lived for almost thirty 30 years with the Asurini of the Xingú, a Tupi group. He worked voluntarily in the village as a nursing technician and teacher when, in 2003, he took an entrance exam for an interval course (with condensed classes) in Pedagogy.

At the end of his studies, Domingues and some of his relatives (a term used to refer to other indigenous people subjects, even if they belong to another ethnicity and regardless of direct blood ties) consanguineous bond) proposed the creation of a specific course for the training of indigenous peoples at UFPA. As part of the university's procedures, it was determined that the course would only be approved if other indigenous ethnic groups were included.

"I was a representative here in the region and I was opposed to studying with these people with whom we were often in dispute over land. The relatives convinced me otherwise. They said we had many things in common that we should hold on to – the most important of which was the way we relate to the land. According to the relatives, these peoples were our 'land brothers.'"

— Uivira Domingues

The teacher reveals that the initiative uses the notion of kinship. "What unites them [the different ethnic groups] is the relationship with the land, the understanding of the land as a mother, as a person with whom we share life," he reflects.



Uivira Domingues, a member of the Xacriabá ethnic group, is a professor of the Ethno-development course, based at the Faculty of Ethniversity, at the Altamira campus of the UFPA. (Photo: Alexandre de Moraes/Ascom UFPA-Archive)

These diverse groups have a wide profile: indigenous people, from different territories and ethnicities, quilombolas, riverside dwellers, traditional fishermen, settlers, peasants, and people from the extractive reserves. These students access the course through a special selection process every two years. This year, two classes were offered, one at the Altamira campus and the other at a flexible location, outside the main campus, in the municipality of São Caetano de Odivelas, in the northeastern region of Pará.

The director of the Faculty of Ethniversity, where the course is located, Márcos Formigosa, observes that these different persons, with a distinct perspective of the world, are now attending the university.

"The way these subjects deal with the world, the relationship they have with the street, which is what they call here, the city is very different. The operating logic of their time is different from the operating logic that the university requires. So, they sometimes adopt, but we also press the institution to make adjustments so that these students have guaranteed success for the successful completion of this course."

— Márcos Formigosa

Some adjustments regarding the calendar of public announcements notices calendar to access benefits, which usually occur outside the period when students are also campus, explains Marcos, who is a riverside resident of Ilha do Marajó and, since 2016, has been a professor of the Rural Education course, as an associated, linked to the college.

He points out that, although the Ethno-development course is a degree and mainly mostly trains teachers, the graduates work on several fronts: in the qualification of their associations and communities, in the construction of ethno-development projects – from the perspective of ethno-educators, who have the opportunity possibility to think of a logic of teaching and learning different from the Cartesian model that we find in elementary school, but a logic of teaching in which the culture, the ways of life of these subjects are inserted into the context of the classroom."

Uivira reports that among the graduates are masters, doctors, councilors, and municipal secretaries of education and health. "This shows that the course has achieved what it was intended to do from the beginning, which was to be a tool for the social emancipation of these collectives."

Regarding the idea of ethno-development, the professor points out that it is not a canonical concept. "It is deconstructed and rebuilt with each new class, according to the characteristics of that class, because the whole process needs to be reheard," he explains.

"The university," Uivira argues, "must be better equipped to dialogue with this ethno-knowledge, because unfortunately, we are still living a colonization process. The native Brazilian has assumed the role of the colonizer of his people. But if the university is willing to listen, it can learn much from this process."

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