

# The Peoples' Web and the university: agroecology, insurgent traditional knowledge and epistemic decolonization

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**Abstract:** Based on the relationship between the Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia (UFSB) and the Teia dos Povos (Peoples' Web) – network of traditional communities and urban and peasant movements –, the text suggests reflections about the meeting of traditional and academic knowledge as a reference of a decolonizing education, both in the public university and in the Teia's territories. Through meetings with students, task forces and workshops, followed by the action-research method, the Teia allows us to advance in understanding the possible relationships between agroecology and a decolonial education project. This proposal by the Teia, which dialogues with the concept of ecology of knowledges and is integrated with the strategy of agroecological transition and the construction of communitarian autonomy, provides us with subsidies to discuss how the questions established within the scope of political ecology are connected to epistemic decolonization within the scope of an emancipatory struggle strategy.

**Keywords:** Peoples' Web; agroecology; political ecology; epistemic decolonization; Meeting of Knowledges.

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## Introduction

The complex crisis that industrial capitalism is going through since the 1960s, due to the intrinsic unsustainability of its logic towards the environment, gave rise to the field of reflections known as political ecology. Alimonda (2015) and Souza (2019) demonstrate how, in different academic traditions, the term has involved diverse configurations, variations, emphases. As a kind of motto that dialogues with – and seeks to surpass – the term “political economy”, what stands out here, in synthesis, is the unavoidable need to take into account nature, as it is called, or natural resources when discussing our economic and social inequalities.

In Brazil, in the last 15 years, studies on the so-called “environmental conflicts” have stood out in dialogue with this field. Acselrad (2004) shows how examples of social movements, with actions that resonate with this theoretical proposal, are spreading throughout Latin America, calling attention to the need for non-separation between nature and economy – in opposition to what many governments, companies, and other actors in the continent sought and still seek to do.

Porto-Gonçalves pointed out, at the time, one of the consequences of this new scenario, in which social and environmental issues are no longer opposed, but become correlated: “Thus, we can no longer think of the indigenous or the peasants, or of Afro-descendant communities in their palenques and quilombos as a backwardness to be overcome” (2006, p. 458). Thus, such communities are no longer seen as groups alienated from the debate of the urban environment, from where, according to the Marxist tradition, would come the protagonists of social changes, the “grave-diggers” of the bourgeoisie.

This development happens in parallel with another – the growing inclusion of these sectors in schooling and academic life. In Brazil, specifically, the 2000-2015 period was marked by the expansion of opportunities for black and indigenous people, both in public universities and private institutions – whether through the creation of racial and social quotas, the expansion of scholarships through programs such as Universidade para todos (University for all), know as ProUni, student permanence allowances, or even student financing.

It is, therefore, in this scenario that the experience described below is developed. The challenge of creating a new federal public university in a region that is home to immense socio-biodiversity, but has historically been deprived of public investments, such as Southern Bahia, is also the challenge to confront the “academic epistemicide” to which the black and indigenous populations have been subjected for decades by traditional higher education, in the words of Santos e Santos (2020, p. 75).

As it has been identified at the Federal University of Southern Bahia, as well as in different other contexts, whether related to new universities or to innovative projects in older institutions, this challenge is considered, in itself, part of a broader project of “decolonization”: epistemic, methodological (CRUZ, 2021), or even institutional (TUGNY; GONÇALVES, 2020, p. 10).

In addition to the extensive review presented by Quintero et al. (op. cit), we high-

light, in this sense, the considerations of Rivera Cusicanqui (2018, p. 26-7): the discussion about “decolonization” – including in the intellectual/epistemic sense – effectively goes back to the African and Asian anti-colonial movements in the post-war period, and has in Frantz Fanon a fundamental reference. In Latin America, such reflections arrive as early as the 1960s, with the contributions of thinkers such as Fausto Reinaga and Pablo González Casanova, among others.

Having among its founders several researchers associated with the Center for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, UFSB adopted as a reference on the subject in several internal documents the “ecology of knowledges” proposal, a term associated with sociologist Boaventura de Souza Santos (2007). Another proposal also connected to this thematic field is that of transforming the university into a place of “meeting of knowledges” – developed, in the last 10 years, by a network articulated by the anthropologist José Jorge de Carvalho, and also composed of several researchers who founded UFSB. In this context, this article establishes a dialogue with these ideas, recognizing them as two possible expressions within a much broader and earlier set of reflections on the “decolonization” of the university, so to speak. There were, after all, numerous initiatives over the last decade concerning epistemic decolonization in practice across the country, including, for example, the indigenous intercultural licensure programs, courses dedicated to teaching ethnic-racial relations, or the rural pedagogies, etc.

In Santos’ proposal for a new university, the monoculture of modern science would be counterposed by an “ecology of knowledges”, founded on the recognition of the plurality of heterogeneous forms of knowledge (modern science being one of them) and in sustainable interactions and dynamics between them, without compromising their autonomy (SANTOS, 2007, p. 85).

On the other hand, the Meeting of Knowledges (MK) emerged in the scope of the National Institute of Science and Technology of Inclusion in Teaching and Research (INCTI), which brings together dozens of researchers from universities across the country. Initially dedicated to monitoring the implementation of affirmative actions in higher education institutions, the institute has been developing the MK approach in different universities since 2011, aiming to promote “systematic dialogues between academic knowledge and the knowledge of indigenous people, quilombolas and other communities”, articulating to officially include “masters that represent the rich epistemological diversity of the country” as teachers in the universities (CARVALHO; ÁGUAS, 2015, p. 1018). “When different theoretical and political trends are included, there’s no guarantee of prior agreement or priority”, the authors note. The “decolonizing turn”, we are reminded, based on MK experience, exposes “mutual axiological and ideological incommensurabilities” (idem, p. 1020).

The path that led to these meetings was followed with action-research as the main methodological reference in hand <sup>1</sup>. The two authors worked in cooperation with actors

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1 - We assume greater proximity with the methodological reference of participative action-research, as originally proposed by Fals Borda and Rahman (1991). The work also includes elements resulting from ethnographic research, with Latour (2012) as the main methodological reference.

from the Teia dos Povos (Peoples' Web) even before arriving at UFSB, between 2014 and 2015, and were not only present but often acted as co-protagonists, working with other actors from Teia and UFSB in many of the processes here described. As in every experience of action-research, it is, simultaneously, an interested study and intervention, in which the intentionality of the subjects is an intrinsic part, a constituent of the process. Our common interest resonates with the letter of foundation and principles of UFSB and consists of building an emancipatory education project that contributes to the autonomous transition processes under construction in traditional and popular territories – and in the academy – in Southern Bahia.

The “embracing of differences” proposed in projects such as MK is not, as we will try to demonstrate, a “happy end” per se – it is just the beginning of a series of other challenges for the University. In this sense, the experience of the encounter between Teia dos Povos and UFSB seems to be a rich opportunity to better understand the dimension of the necessary journey towards an emancipatory horizon, with regard to the relationship between the public university and movements concerned with themes such as the environment, sustainability, autonomy, and decolonization, with the search for a liberating education as one of its main instruments.

### Web of ideas

The Teia dos Povos (Peoples' Web) and the Federal University of Southern Bahia emerged and met at the same time and space in the South of Bahia, both gestated around the year 2012. The Teia was created as an articulation of traditional communities, workers, social movements, and organizations that gathered to carry out the I Jornada de Agroecologia da Bahia (1st Bahian Agroecology Meeting), from November 16th to December 1st, 2012, at the Terra Vista Settlement of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), in Arataca (BA), in the heart of the cocoa zone. The agroecological production of cocoa and chocolate in Terra Vista, on top of being a well-known forest recovery process, is also a factor that draws the attention of a public interested in agroecology to this area (cf. OLIVEIRA, 2017; SANTOS, 2016).

With the theme Agroecology – A proposal of sovereignty of Bahia's territory, the Meeting was attended by the Tupinambá, Pataxó and Pataxó Hã-hã-hãe peoples, quilombolas and fishing communities, representatives of rural settlements and other peasant communities, rural and urban movements and organizations, in addition to having attracted the attention of the university public from the start. The alliance was created with the goal of promoting the “union of peoples and knowledges” around the fight for land and territory, aligned with the agroecology principles, for the construction of a good living<sup>2</sup>. The 2012 Meeting had the presence of Ana Maria Primavesi, agronomist which is a reference for agroecology in Brazil, and was inspired by the Paraná's Agroecology

2 - The “good living” referred to here is an interpretation of the Andean principle of *sumak kawsay*, that arrives in the Teia from the indigenous people of the area and from entities such as the Missionary Indigenous Council (Cimi).

Meetings, which reached its 18th edition in 2019 (cf. TEIXEIRA et al., 2018b). In its first public statement, the Peoples' Web made clear its ambition to link its political struggle to a different education model:

We affirm, thus, our ability of resilience, showing with our lives and our efforts, in a daily learning process, another form of development based on the agroecology model and on a liberating education, capable of building another model of thinking, producing, exchanging, and marketing quality food, without pesticides, strengthening organization, association, respecting ethnic, gender, and generation differences, valuing the culture and the art of our people (TEIA DOS POVOS, 2012).

The first Bahian Agroecology Meeting was followed by five others, in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017, and 2019, with a growing presence of individuals, movements, and social organizations gathered together with indigenous peoples and traditional and rural communities from the area. Until 2015, the events took place in Assentamento Terra Vista. In 2017, the 5th Meeting was held in Porto Seguro, and, in 2019, in the Payaya people territory, in Utinga (BA), in the region known as Chapada Diamantina. At the end of each meeting, the Peoples' Web issues a statement, in the form of a letter, providing us with a set of documents that can serve as a roadmap to understand the alliance's evolution and expansion.

The 2nd Meeting took place in December 2013, still at the Terra Vista settlement, with the theme Agroecology: uniting peoples and knowledges. The letter issued at the end of the event <sup>3</sup> defends the popular origins and traditional principles of Agroecology and criticizes the State, agribusiness, and science itself. It also explains its goal of working for the communities' "political and financial autonomy", through "strengthening agroecological experiences in each territory that makes part of the Web, seeking self-management and self-financing".

The rural production system imposed by capitalism, the agribusiness, violates us every day and doesn't stop, it accumulates a record of cultural and territorial extermination, confiscating our knowledge, our science, and our culture to dominate us. The [...] Network of Agroecology of the Peoples of Cabruca and Atlântic Forest <sup>4</sup> [...] acts like] a network that rebuilds solidarity between Afro-Brazilians, indigenous peoples, settlers, youth and children and gives a broader sense to agroecology, a theme much distorted by the excess of academicism, theoreticisms and lack of practice. We, from the Web, break with dangerous technicism to defend an agroecology that unites peoples and knowledges to ensure the health of foods, soils, and water, the health of our social relations, our cultural identity, spirituality, and

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3 - The reports and letters from the Agroecology Meetings can be found at: <http://teiadospovos.org>. Access in: Jan 21st, 2022.

4 - First name of the alliance, later synthesized as the Peoples' Web, the name they use today.

ancestry (TEIA DOS POVOS, 2013).

The 3rd Bahian Agroecology Meeting, held in December, 2014, was attended by 1200 individuals, according to the Web, that came “[...] from everywhere, rattling their maracas, playing their drums and atabaques, striking their berimbaus and caxixis, strumming their guitars and accordions and blowing their flutes and harmonicas [...]” (TEIA DOS POVOS, 2014). With the theme Seeds, science, and agroecology technology to change the realities of rural and urban communities, and the presence of higher education institutions (such as UESC, UNEB, UFRB and UFBA, among others), the event had roundtables and thematic workshops, native seed exchange, minicourses, practical activities, and celebrations.

In a year marked by violent conflicts in the Tupinambá de Olivença’s Indigenous Territory, a few kilometers from the Terra Vista settlement, the Peoples’ Web, then called “Agroecological Web”, participated in March, in a manifestation in support of the Tupinambá people from Serra do Padeiro, a protest that brought together more than 40 national and international entities<sup>5</sup>. The letter from that year’s meeting reflects the moment marked by threats and aggressions against indigenous peoples, defends vehemently the processes of demarcation of indigenous lands and other traditional territories, along with the fight for agrarian reform and the principles of agroecology.

The expansion of the alliances promoted by the Web is also reflected in the letter with the incorporation of themes such as urban reform, feminism, Afro-Brazilian and indigenous spiritualities, the fight against the so-called “green capitalism”, among others. The document specifically mentions the theme of decoloniality: “We will always fight for a decolonial, non-patriarchal, anti-racist and liberating education, which will lead us to realize our Good Living” (TEIA DOS POVOS, 2014).

Later, between 2015 and 2019, the Peoples’ Web continues to associate the themes of decolonization with education and agroecology and the fight for territory. Symbolically, in 2017, the network organizes the 5th Meeting in Porto Seguro, with the theme Land and Territory – Nature, Education, and Good Living. “Here we are to say it loud and clear: this is not the Discovery Coast, it is the Invasion Coast! These lands had and have owners”, states the letter from the event (TEIA DOS POVOS, 2017).

In addition to the involvement of the Web’s participants with education – many work formally as teachers in their communities, others are masters of traditional knowledge, and some, as the Pataxó Hã-hã-hãe teacher Maria Muniz or the members of Terreiro Caxuté, from Valença, exert both roles –, since 2016, several participants of the Peoples’ Web have published articles or monographs in dialogue with the network’s formation experience. Some of these works (VIANA, 2017, for example) demonstrate the awareness of the Web’s members that the events carried out by the network are, in themselves, part of a process of non-formal education.

In this sense, we’re going to see how the Peoples’ Web was integrated into the

5 - <http://www.global.org.br/blog/carta-final-da-marcha-dos-povos-da-cabruca-e-da-mata-atlantica-em-defesa-das-terras-sagradas-dos-tupinamba/> . Access in: May 7th, 2020.

process of creation of a federal university, UFSB, and how it brought its principles to the new institution.

### The good encounter

A few days after the 1st Agroecology Meeting promoted by the Web, on December 17th, 2012, the first version of UFSB's Strategic Plan was published, as a result of a first round of academic planning seminars in the state and federal institutes and public universities that existed at the time in the South and Extreme South of Bahia <sup>6</sup>. The following year, in June 2013, UFSB was founded with, among other proposals, the goal of facing the ambiguities of the higher education system in Brasil, by declaring itself a "traditional and innovative, elitist and emancipatory" university (UFSB, 2014, p. 28) and by firming an ethical commitment with the territory it was in, with basic education, and with the diversity of peoples and knowledges of the region, through educational principles that brought it – potentially – close to what the Peoples' Web promulgated at the moment.

"UFSB understands education as a primordial civilizatory and emancipatory task, that at the same time forms and transforms human being", declares its Strategic Plan (UFSB, 2014, p. 6). The document also explains the theoretical connection with the "ecology of knowledges" and the commitment with an "epistemological revolution", promoting a "reversed extension program" by bringing knowledge from the outside into the university, without imposing to the owners of other kinds of knowledge a "subordinated and exclusively apprentice" position.

The ecology of knowledges, methodologically, implies a deepening of the concept of action-research. [...] It comprises, ultimately, the promotion of dialogue between scientific or humanistic knowledge produced by the university, and lay, popular, traditional, urban, rural, slum, originated in non-western cultures (indigenous, African, eastern etc.) knowledges [...] (UFSB, 2014, p. 25)

Even before the inaugural lecture at UFSB, in September 2014, by professor Boaventura de Souza Santos, one of the authors that form the theoretical framework of the University <sup>7</sup>, a delegation composed of the pro-tempore dean of UFSB, professor Naomar de Almeida Filho, and a team of professors and researchers traveled the territory of the new university to establish contact with the peoples, communities and social movements and organizations of the South and Extreme South of Bahia. In addition to presenting the new university, the delegation sought to establish preliminary guidelines to act in conjunction with the society in the region, presenting a first draft of the Social Strategic Council (CES, in Portuguese), anticipated by the university's Statute.

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6 - Then, the project also incorporated contributions collected in an open public consultation on the Internet and in public meetings held in the city halls of the three host cities, Itabuna, Porto Seguro, and Teixeira de Freitas (UFSB, 2014, p. 15).

7 - UFSB's Strategic Plan also includes references to authors such as Anísio Teixeira, Paulo Freire, Milton Santos and Pierre Lévy (UFSB, 2014, p. 20).

The CES and the University Council (Consuni) were conceived as the two statutory Higher Councils of UFSB, with the first acting as “advisory body [...of] the University to discuss its general policies and plans to expand education, research, creation, innovation and extension” (UFSB, 2013, p. 12). Its first composition, *pro tempore*, included members appointed by the rector – representatives from urban and rural social movements, traditional peoples and communities, rectors of public institutes and public universities from the area, mayors of host cities, and partner social organizations. In addition to this advisory function, the CES would appoint a member to Consuni, and act as co-responsible for the organization of the 1st UFSB’s Social Forum. This forum was designed as a great meeting of peoples and social segments of Southern Bahia, with the goal of establishing priorities and consolidating guidelines for joint action between the university and society.

One of the main articulators of the Peoples’ Web, the coordinator of the Terra Vista settlement of MST, Joelson Ferreira de Oliveira, representative of rural workers at the CES, was appointed by other councilors to Consuni. There, he set out to act in defense of a democratic public university rooted in the territory, which would seek to act for the benefit of sectors that were historically excluded from academic life. On the one hand, he asked UFSB’s researchers and projects to assume a strong commitment with traditional territories and popular movements, and not only with corporations and capitalism, a very common situation in several public universities, according to his criticism. On the other hand, not only the students from traditional communities and popular sectors should have access and support to stay in the university, but also the traditional and popular knowledges of these communities should have their space, by the participation of its masters of knowledge in academic activities. In the inaugural lecture he gave in 2017 in UFSB, Oliveira returned to this point:

We all pay to have a knowledge that is social, universal, for all, but the public university has become increasingly private. It is at the service of private interests, at the service of alienation. [...] Here we have to study knowledge techniques, to return to our place, to where we came from, and transform this into strength, into true knowledge, and test it to see if it is true, if the knowledge works. [...] We need to start the dialogue with the elders, learning from our ancestors. [...] We were here for 12 thousand years, and the foreigners arrived and found a paradise, a beauty, something extraordinary. These people that were here, they didn’t have science? These people didn’t have knowledge? (OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 160)

In line with this proposal, already in its first year of effective action, the new university hosted the project Meeting of Knowledges at UFSB, with the support of INCTI. The years of 2014 and 2015 were of intense mobilization of professors from the three UFSB campuses to identify masters of traditional knowledge in the university’s territory. From that movement, 14 masters from the most diverse arrays of knowledge<sup>8</sup> were invited

8 - The list of professors included masters from indigenous, quilombolas and fishing communities of the region, among others. For a complete list and analysis of the experience, see Tugny (2020).

to teach classes, in 2015, to the first year of the interdisciplinary courses, receiving the same payment as substitute professors with Ph.D. titles. While this first project was being developed, the UFSB University Council approved a resolution that allows the recognition of masters of traditional and popular knowledge with the title of “Notório Saber” (i.e. reputed for their knowledge).

This first movement of rooting the new university in its territory served as the basis for a leap, in 2015, with the realization of the 1st Social Forum of UFSB. The event gathered more than two thousand people in three regional stages, held in Itabuna, Porto Seguro and Teixeira de Freitas, with 18 social segments represented, including indigenous people; *terreiro's* people, quilombolas and Afro-descendants; fishing communities; rural workers; in addition to other urban categories<sup>9</sup>.

In these regional stages, the participants indicated priorities for the University's activities, elected delegates, or spokespersons, who would participate in the General Meeting, held in September 2015, in Porto Seguro. In the General Meeting, the approximately 300 delegates/spokespersons were responsible for consolidating the lines of joint action of the University, and also for the definition of the new CES composition and the election of its new members. Elected and sworn in, the Council began to fulfill the role of consolidating this work through the co-construction of teaching, research, and extension programs of interest to the social segments it represented. Many participants of the Social Forum and some councilors elected to the CES were also key actors of the Peoples' Web, attentive to UFSB's potential.

The creation of CES meant, in a way, the goodwill of the region's movements towards the arrival of the new University and the willingness to occupy and dispute it. Between 2015 and 2019, there were numerous classes, lectures, and mutual visits between UFSB groups and communities in the area. Masters of traditional knowledge were responsible for several activities and were paid for it. Afro-Brazilian and indigenous students also conquered spaces to develop their research and extension projects – highlighting the creation of the Post-Graduate Program in Education on Ethnic-Racial Relations (PPGER), in 2016, in addition to the profuse occupation of these spaces by those actors.

Benincá and Neves (2020), in tune with agroecology movements in the region, were responsible for the integration between the classes given to all 1st-year students on the Teixeira de Freitas campus (in the so-called “general training”, which integrates the curricula of all undergraduate courses) and a weekly agroecological market on the campus, in a development that later led to the creation of a specialization course.

As already mentioned, events such as the Peoples' Web Agroecology Meetings are claimed as a space of training by the social movements (VIANA, 2017). Several communities linked to the Peoples' Web have in common the creation of events denominated as reflection spaces in dispute with the academic environment. This is the case of the Carurus of Ibeji and the Pedagogingas, an annual series of events held by Casa do Boneco

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9 - The full list can be seen in UFSB (2015).

of Itacaré <sup>10</sup>, or the different activities to welcome students and researchers carried out by communities such as the Terra Vista settlement and Terreiro Caxuté (from Valença).

A recently released volume (TUGNY e GONÇALVES, 2020) collects a series of testimonies and analysis from professors, students, and technicians who lived the first years of UFSB. The work brings their impressions on the reaches and limits of the project, regarding the so-called “decolonization of the university”. As can be seen especially in the testimony of students and former students of the institution, the recognition of the effectively innovative character of the project does not exempt it from criticism (for example, MIRANDA and BELIZÁRIO, 2020; PIMENTEL et al., 2020).

In 2015, the Social Strategic Council consolidated, after the Social Forum, the following synthesis, with 16 proposals for action to be built together with society, to which were added 11 actions already in the process of implementation <sup>11</sup>:

**Chart 1 – Proposals of the Social Forum synthesized by the UFSB Social Strategic Council**

Proposals to be built with society		Proposed lines of action already in progress	
1.	Expansion of communication and access possibilities for students from traditional, rural and peripheral communities	1.	Specific quotas for students from public schools in the region (55% by national selection on campuses; 85% by regional selection in university colleges)
2.	University Colleges, with complete education cycles, in rural settlements and traditional territories, with differentiated selection and education systems (“alternation pedagogies” – rural education, water, forests, indigenous and quilombola educations)	2.	Expansion of quotas for indigenous students (33 supernumerary vacancies).
3.	Certification of traditional knowledge, continuously titling and hiring masters in all courses.	3.	System to support the permanence of students in situation of social vulnerability.
4.	Support for demarcation of territories of traditional peoples and communities, publicly stating its position in cases of conflict.	4.	Curricular innovation with the inclusion of teaching and learning processes based on abilities and skills.
		5.	Regulation of the titling processes and incorporation of masters of traditional knowledge in UFSB courses.

10 - The event had its 19th edition in 2020 held online due to the pandemic. “Pedagoginga” is an Afro-descendant concept that disputes/problematises the Western concept of pedagogy, questioning the Cartesian division between mind and body (cf. ROSA, 2013).

11 - For details of this institutional process, as well as the complete results of the Social Forum, see: UFSB, 2015; MENEZES; GOES, 2020.

5.	Continued training through interdisciplinary and intercultural graduate courses for education, culture and health professionals, public agents in office and social-environmental organizations coordinators, without overlapping with other institutions.	6.	Integration with the public sector for the continued training of basic education teachers and a shared and participative management system.
6.	Internship/residency/volunteer programs in public institutions, collegiate/councils, and cultural and third sector organizations.	7.	Integration with other higher education institutions to optimize the offer of courses and avoid overlapping in the region.
7.	Encouragement of entrepreneurship at the University: selection of faculty members with market experience and a permanent evaluation system for the applicability of studies and research.	8.	Integration with the public sector to train professionals and qualify the public health system.
8.	Undergraduate and graduate degrees in Brazilian sign language, specific quotas for deaf students, quotas for deaf teachers in all areas.	9.	Residencies in public health and public education.
9.	Strengthening of the permanence support system for students from traditional, rural, and peripheral communities: daycare and early childhood education, housing and social rent, food, mobility and accessibility.	10.	Hiring deaf instructors and professionals as employees in UFSB.
10.	Mapping and development of agroecological supply chains / socio-productive networks of the Atlantic Forest and Waters / seeds network / food sovereignty / cultures and knowledge.	11.	Agreements and partnerships between UFSB and public and private institutions.
11.	Management and administration plans, permanent tutorial extension, enterprise impact studies, technical support for demarcation and exchange in traditional territories, natural reserves and rural settlements.		

12.	Dialogue forums / study nuclei / databank / observatories: youth and culture, affirmative action, gender and sexual diversity, ethno-racial relations and fighting racism, ethnic groups and traditional peoples, urban mobility and accessibility, respect and religious tolerance, socio-environmental context, regional economy and sustainability.
13.	Extension programs in art, culture, sports, health, and Farmácia Viva (Living Pharmacy) network.
14.	Technology Hubs and health poles of excellence at the headquarters
15.	Inclusion of prison population / homeless / socially vulnerable in higher education
16.	Residencies and rural extension.

Extrated from: MENEZES; GOES, 2020, Appendix, item 7

The path of approximation between UFSB and the Peoples' Web came to result, in 2017, in a technical and scientific cooperation agreement between the University and the Web, represented by the Associação Regional de Agroecologia dos Povos da Cabruca e da Mata Atlântica (Regional Association of Agroecology of the Peoples of Cabruca and Atlantic Forest) (UFSB, 2017).

In general terms, the agreement foresees the support for joint activities, as well as the “development and implementation of programs, projects and exchange in the educational, scientific, technological and research fields” (UFSB, 2017, p.1). Among the planned lines of action, there is the support to the Web's events, the accreditation of masters of traditional and popular knowledge, the articulation of graduate programs to be executed in traditional and rural territories and communities, as well as the elaboration of projects associated with sustainable local development – covering topics as agroecology and forest-based activities –, in addition to foster “social mobilization in the region to consolidate UFSB's social integration policy, in defense of its popular, republican, inclusive, interdisciplinary and multiepistemic character” (UFSB, 2017, p. 6).

Between 2017 and 2018 UFSB went through a transition in its administration. The agreement signed with Teia remains in force until 2022. The university gave limited support to the 5th Agroecology Meeting, in Porto Seguro, in 2017, which included the participation of students as monitors. In the 6th Meeting, in 2019, it managed, at the last minute, due to contingencies imposed by the federal government, to provide minimum

support for a students committee. Teachers mobilized themselves to participate in the event with their own resources. As mentioned, an inter-institutional specialization course in Agroecology and Rural Education was launched in 2019, on the Paulo Freire campus, in Teixeira de Freitas, in partnership with some movements in the region, but it has not yet reached the institutional design suggested in the 2017 agreement.

In parallel, the Web maintains partnerships with other universities in the region, but with the understanding that they maintain an inadequate structure for a fuller decolonization process – limiting eventual partnerships to specific groups within these institutions. On the other hand, the UFSB itself, today, does not maintain the support initially outlined for the CES, not even for the holding of the 2nd Social Forum, when there would be a renewal of this Council, as well as the indication of its new representative in the University Council. Contrary to the guiding principles of the first years of the UFSB, today there is no representation of the society in its administration system, and it is up to the initiative of research groups and groups of professors and students to continue the cooperation with the Peoples' Web.

### Conclusions

The experience of the encounter between the Peoples' Web and UFSB offers a series of elements that help us understand, in fact, the full extent of the challenge implied by the ideal of “decolonization” of the university. As shown by dialogue exercises such as the UFSB Social Forum, the effective decolonization of the university is conditioned, in a very evident way, for the most different social actors, to a significant contribution of material resources originated from public financing, without which no “epistemic transition” can take place.

The obstacles, both for students and for potential teachers from black and indigenous communities in a region like Southern Bahia, which has historically been excluded from public investment, are inescapably linked to the need for support to enable their bodies and voices to be present in universities. In this sense, the budget cuts suffered by public universities since 2016 become a difficult obstacle to overcome.

In November 2017, during a strike at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, after delays in salaries and funding due to a violent budget squeeze that the state of Rio de Janeiro was undergoing at the time, Boaventura de Souza Santos sent a video message to the institution's workers and students, in which he summarized the drama experienced by universities at that historic moment. For him, public universities, originally created to form the elite's youth, stopped to fulfill this function throughout the 20th century, due to the internationalization of the ruling classes resulting from neoliberal globalization. Now that they have been freed from this role, they have started to be treated with less and less priority and, in the last few years, they have even become a nuisance, because they produce free and critical knowledge. They live, then, the following challenge:

The universities have lost the privileges they had because of their contacts with the elites, and this is the drama of public universities.

Since they have lost the support of the elites, they have to rebuild other supports, and these supports can only come from the middle and popular classes. Public universities have to fight for other alliances. And the public universities for a long time were arrogant towards these popular classes, because they considered them ignorant for not having scientific knowledge [...]. We need to decolonize the universities<sup>12</sup>.

Such is our current paradox: how to make these alliances if, in order to include students and teachers from the communities, both in big cities and in regions like the Southern Bahia, we are faced with the need to seek financial support which, today, we can barely count on for the basic maintenance of the institutions?

At the moment, priority is being given to work on fronts that are less dependent on financial resources. Even so, the process of including masters of traditional knowledge continues at a slow rate at UFSB: to date, no title of Notório Saber has been approved by the university. Since 2019, the Web members have also participated in new actions of the Meeting of Knowleges project, and at least four dossiers made by masters participating in the Web's network are currently produced within the UFSB.

Efforts to include students from rural and traditional communities are still hindered by cuts in student support programs and in research and extension scholarships. The opening of new University Colleges has been delayed, and the future of these spaces is currently unknown. In 2019, UFSB gained national attention as the federal institution of higher education that suffered the largest funding cuts, proportionally to its budget<sup>13</sup>. The "epistemic transition" predicted years ago in the UFSB Strategic Plan is thus compromised.

There are a number of other challenges, which do not fit in the space of this article and are not necessarily linked to the specific demands of the Peoples' Web and associated movements. For example, the adoption of the quota policy at a 75 percent<sup>14</sup> has been challenged in court by students accused of cheating on the policy. Preliminary court injunctions have maintained tension over the vacancies in the Medicine course, the most popular course of the institution, with classes starting in 2018.

It is worth noting, on the other hand, that the movements and communities participating in the Peoples' Web are not inactive and dependent on a benevolent action of public institutions and the Brazilian State. Epistemic decolonization, in this sense, is an active project that emanates from the grassroots of society in a region as socio-diverse as Southern Bahia.

Even with political and economic difficulties, the Peoples' Web maintains a certain volume of actions, such as community projects and training meetings, discussing the need for building an economic base for the autonomy of their territories. In this sense, they have designed and started the implementation of an ambitious project of recovery of productive forests, either for the production of organic cacao in the cabruca system

12 - Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVHCMXvrS0w>. Access in: May 6th, 2020.

13 - From May to October, approximately 54% of the resources for funding and investment were blocked. Cf. <https://bitly.com/RbSbU>. Access in: May 7th, 2020.

14 - The resolution 10/2018 of UFSB University Council formalizes this affirmative action policy.

or in other agroforestry systems, corresponding to the cultural and ecological diversity of these territories, for which they are seeking international investors.

There is also news in the field of communication. Since 2020, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, the Web launched on YouTube the channel Dialogue with the Peoples and started producing live transmissions with some of the masters of traditional and popular knowledge that joined the alliance in recent years.

In 2017, in an interview conducted by one of the authors of this article, master Joelson F. Oliveira summarized his view on this moment of crisis as follows:

If the university closes in on itself and becomes preoccupied with the crisis and doesn't want to solve the crisis, it will enter into a total crisis, and then it will not respond to the dilemmas of the society in the region. [...] But if the university explains the problems that are happening to society and calls the society in, and calls on society to help build the university, I am sure that the university will come out of this process stronger and more robust and with more capacity, and more integrated into society. [...] [The university] has to understand that there is a society of which it has to be at service, and the society at the service of the university. [...] If it closes in on itself, it can die on itself before it is born.

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# A Teia dos Povos e a universidade: agroecologia, saberes tradicionais insurgentes e descolonização epistêmica

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**Resumo:** A partir das relações entre a Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia (UFSB) e a Teia dos Povos — articulação de comunidades tradicionais e movimentos sociais do campo e da cidade —, o texto propõe reflexões sobre o encontro de saberes tradicionais e conhecimentos acadêmicos como referência pedagógica de uma educação descolonizadora, tanto na universidade pública como nos territórios da Teia. Por meio de encontros com estudantes, mutirões e jornadas, acompanhados a partir do método da pesquisa-ação, a Teia dos Povos permite-nos avançar na compreensão das relações possíveis entre a agroecologia e um projeto de educação decolonial. Essa proposta da Teia, que dialoga com o conceito de ecologia dos saberes e se integra à estratégia de transição agroecológica e construção da autonomia em suas comunidades, fornece-nos subsídios para discutir como os questionamentos estabelecidos no âmbito da ecologia política conectam-se à descolonização epistêmica no âmbito de uma estratégia de luta emancipatória.

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**Palavras-chave:** Teia dos Povos; agroecologia; ecologia política; descolonização epistêmica; Encontro de Saberes.

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# La Tela de los Pueblos y la universidad: agroecología, conocimiento tradicional insurgente y descolonización epistémica

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**Resumen:** A partir de la relación entre la Universidad Federal del Sur de Bahía (UFESB) y la Teia dos Povos (Tela de los Pueblos) – articulación de comunidades tradicionales y movimientos sociales del campo y de la ciudad –, el texto propone reflexiones sobre el encuentro entre saberes tradicionales y conocimientos académicos como referencia de una educación descolonizadora, tanto en la universidad pública como en los territorios de la Teia. A través de reuniones con estudiantes, mingas y talleres, seguidos por medio de investigación-acción, buscamos avanzar en la comprensión de posibles relaciones entre la agroecología y un proyecto de educación descolonial. Esta propuesta, que dialoga con el concepto de ecología de saberes y se integra con la estrategia de transición agroecológica y la construcción de autonomía en sus comunidades, nos permite discutir cómo cuestiones establecidas por la ecología política están conectadas con la descolonización epistémica en una estrategia de lucha emancipadora.

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