

ARTICLE

Horizons of decolonization in marketing: a proposal based on the critique of coloniality of the globalization of markets theory

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Abstract

The most recognized theories in marketing were mostly written by authors from the Global North, who were revered within the field for their ideals. Among these, one that deserves to be highlighted is Theodore Levitt, with the theory of globalization of markets, which is considered relevant to this day. However, when analyzing the theory of globalization of markets and the interpretations made about it through a decolonial perspective from Latin America, one can see how much it reproduces coloniality. Therefore, this article analyzed, from the decolonial perspective, with particular attention to the concept of coloniality of power – and its derivations, the coloniality of knowledge, and the coloniality of being – how coloniality is present in the theory of globalization of markets developed by Theodore Levitt. This theory stands for a racial asymmetry between peoples, positions itself as a superior epistemological perspective, and promotes a convergence toward ways of Being associated with the Eurocentric world. However, knowing that this is just one of the theories that make up marketing and reverberate the same colonial logic, the decolonization of marketing in Brazil is proposed. We suggest incorporating the thoughts of authors such as Lélia Gonzalez and Ailton Krenak, who critically debate issues related to globalization, capitalism, and markets. The use of subaltern knowledge outside the area is a theoretical dare necessary to construct a marketing discipline that is less asymmetrical and more consciously oriented to deal with the complexities and challenges of this context.

Keywords: Decolonialism. Globalization of markets. Coloniality of power. Coloniality of knowledge. Coloniality of being.

Horizontes de decolonização em marketing: uma proposta com base na crítica à colonialidade da teoria da globalização de mercados

Resumo

As teorias mais reconhecidas em marketing foram, em sua maioria, escritas por autores do norte global, que foram reverenciados na área por seus ideais. Entre estes, um que merece destaque é Theodore Levitt, com a teoria da globalização de mercados, que é considerada relevante até os dias atuais. Todavia, ao analisar essa teoria e as interpretações feitas a seu respeito por meio de uma perspectiva decolonial da América Latina, percebe-se o quanto ela reproduz a colonialidade. Assim, este artigo buscou analisar, segundo a perspectiva decolonial, com particular atenção ao conceito de colonialidade do poder – e suas derivações, a colonialidade do saber e a colonialidade do ser –, como a colonialidade se faz presente na teoria da globalização de mercados desenvolvida por Theodore Levitt. Tal teoria reitera uma assimetria racial entre povos, posiciona-se como uma perspectiva epistemológica superior e universal e promove uma convergência para formas de Ser associadas ao mundo eurocêntrico. Contudo, sabendo que esta é apenas uma entre outras teorias que compõem o marketing e que reverberam a mesma lógica colonial, propõe-se aqui uma descolonização do marketing no Brasil. Para tanto, sugere-se a incorporação dos pensamentos de autores como Lélia Gonzalez e Ailton Krenak, que debatem criticamente questões relacionadas com a globalização, o capitalismo e mercados. A utilização de conhecimentos subalternizados exteriores à área é uma ousadia teórica necessária para construir uma disciplina do marketing menos assimétrica e mais conscientemente orientada para lidar com as complexidades e os desafios desse contexto.

Palavras-chave: Decolonialismo. Globalização de mercados. Colonialidade do poder. Colonialidade do saber. Colonialidade do ser.

Horizontes de descolonización en el marketing: una propuesta desde la crítica de la colonialidad en la teoría de la globalización de los mercados

Resumen

Las teorías más reconocidas en marketing fueron escritas en su mayoría por autores del norte global. Entre estos, uno que merece ser destacado es Theodore Levitt, con la teoría de la globalización de los mercados, considerada relevante hasta hoy. Sin embargo, al analizar dicha teoría y sus interpretaciones desde una perspectiva decolonial de América Latina, se puede ver cuánto reproduce la colonialidad. De esta forma, el presente artículo buscó analizar, desde la perspectiva decolonial –con especial atención al concepto de colonialidad del poder y sus derivaciones, de colonialidad del saber y de colonialidad del ser– cómo la colonialidad está presente en la teoría de la globalización de mercados desarrollada por Theodore Levitt. Dicha teoría reitera una asimetría racial entre los pueblos, se posiciona como una perspectiva epistemológica superior e universal y promueve una convergencia hacia modos de Ser asociados al mundo eurocéntrico. Sin embargo, sabiendo que esta es sólo una entre otras teorías que componen el marketing y que resuenan en la misma lógica colonial, aquí se propone una descolonización del marketing en Brasil. Para ello, se sugiere incorporar el pensamiento de autores como Lélia Gonzalez y Ailton Krenak, quienes debaten críticamente temas relacionados con la globalización, el capitalismo y los mercados. El uso de saberes subalternos fuera del área es una osadía teórica necesaria para construir una disciplina de marketing menos asimétrica y más conscientemente orientada a enfrentar las complejidades y desafíos de este contexto.

Palabras clave: Decolonialismo. Globalización de los mercados. Colonialidad del poder. Colonialidad del saber. Colonialidad del ser.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic production in Brazil, especially in marketing, is marked by the adoption of knowledge from developed countries, mainly from the United States of America (USA). After all, it is from these hegemonic contexts that marketing supposedly originated and where most of its influential thinkers and main theories and concepts come from (Wilkie & Moore, 2003).

One of the great marketing theorists, recognized for the impact of his works in the area, is the American Theodore Levitt. Among his works there is one that deserves special merit "The Globalization of Markets", in which the author theorizes about how market practices should expand globally, thus allowing big companies to internationalize through the use of standardized operational and marketing practices in countries where they market their products (Levitt, 1983). Since its publication, the article has been cited more than 8,000 times (Google Scholar, 2022) and continues to be recommended reading in marketing disciplines in both the global north and global south (Open Syllabus, 2022).

One of the reasons why the article is influential in marketing is because references to its theorization have been mentioned in several debates (e.g., Boddewyn, Soehl, & Picard, 1986; Cunningham & Ferrell, 2015; Dixon & Sybrandy, 2015; Douglas & Wind, 1987; Kotler, 1986; Tedlow & Abdelal, 2004). Such debates in marketing which contribute to the criticism and discussion of the globalization of markets start from the same epistemic framework and Eurocentric origin as that of Levitt's, in a way that disregards its coloniality- a pertinent aspect regarding this theory initially developed by the author. Thus, in this article we present an analysis of the coloniality present in Levitt's discourse based on three constitutive dimensions: power, knowledge and being (Lander, 2005; Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Quijano, 2000).

The coloniality of power was the term used by Quijano (2000) to designate the established standard of power in the modern world, which began with the colonization process that took place in Latin America, leaving behind a legacy of social inequalities and injustices. One of the fundamental characteristics of this new standard of coloniality is the fact that it gained traction thanks to the articulation between race and capitalism. According to Quijano (2000), it was from the racist division of work and the exploitation of labor during the colonization of the continent that modern capitalism and the Eurocentric standard of world power emerged and was sustained. Furthermore, based on this historical event the idea of race came to be used to rank the world population in this new hierarchical power structure, which delimits social roles, limits resources, and designates the type of work that individuals should perform and so forth (Quijano, 2000).

Together with the colonial organization of power, the crystallization of a cosmivision associated with the idea of modernity came about. Besides producing meta-reports around the notion of progress (associated with liberal industrial societies), it did not consider the production of knowledge valid if it was not based on a universalized historical logic, grounded in the European experience (Lander, 2005). Such a process is framed as the coloniality of knowledge (Lander, 2005; Quijano, 2000), which is also evident in the elaboration of categories and concepts used to analyze different realities, without consideration for the complexities inherent in specific socio-historical contexts.

The coloniality of being refers to a process of discrimination against certain ways of existing in the world. However, it is not a generalized ontological violence aimed at just any being, it is directed towards the colonized being, whose existence is a product of modernity/ coloniality – developed from the differentiation of the colonial and the logic of coloniality rather than from the ideas of an author or philosopher (Maldonado-Torres, 2008). Historical examples of the coloniality of being were the Christian civilizing missions, which used the justification of bringing "civility" to native peoples by undermining their subjectivity, in order to legitimize colonial exploitation, through the imposition of beliefs, cultures, and Eurocentric customs (Mignolo, 2011), giving rise to a growing erasure of autochthonous traditions.

It is worth noting that the process of controlling subjectivities is part of a framework that is parallel and complementary to the means of controlling knowledge, since the coloniality of knowledge is also used as a powerful normative instrument to impose ways of being on all human beings. Such "knowledge thus becomes the standard used to analyze and detect the needs, delays, restraints and perverse impacts considered products of the primitive or traditional in all *other* societies" (Lander, 2005, p. 13, author's emphasis). In this way, "a control of subjectivity takes place through the control of knowledge" (Mignolo & Casas, 2005, p. 27), which serves the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000).

From a Latin American decolonial perspective, on analyzing the theorization in marketing raised by Levitt, one is able to perceive elements relating to the concept of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) and its derivations the coloniality

of knowledge (Lander, 2005), and the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2008). Thus, the theorization of market globalization proffered by Levitt is an example of how knowledge from the social sciences and its liberal worldview (Lander, 2005) of the naturalization and universalization of ontological regions, corroborates dichotomous hierarchies – those of the global north/south, the modern/pre-modern, and the developed/underdeveloped, hence reinforcing the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000). Levitt, by promoting such knowledge as superior, universalizes it, therefore offering convenient explanations of global phenomena on markets in realities of both the global north and global south, further reiterating the coloniality of knowledge (Lander, 2005) by disregarding that these realities could be better analyzed by using existing non-universal worldviews. One can see, therefore, how such narratives value certain forms of existence, particularly those originating in the Eurocentric world, strengthening the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2008) to the detriment of those experienced in non-Eurocentric worlds.

When marketing authors debate Levitt's theory they do so by pointing out: the lack of empirical data to support the presuppositions (Dixon & Sybrandy, 2015; Salles, 1993); the inconsistency of the plan to standardize operations and the marketing of international markets – as it would go against the discipline's ideals of meeting consumers' needs and desires (Tedlow & Abdelal, 2004); the possibility of large companies obtaining cost reduction through technological advances helping them set globally competitive prices, without it being done at the expense of product standardization (Douglas & Wind, 1987); and the heterogeneity of worldwide consumer tastes, given significant cultural differences (Cunningham & Ferrell, 2015; Kotler, 1986), among other reasons. However, the presence of coloniality in Levitt's theory, as pointed out here, is ignored in such debates.

Therefore, because coloniality is present in marketing in the theory of globalization of markets developed by Theodore Levitt, this article which is from a decolonial perspective aims to analyze and give special attention to the concept of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) and its derivations the coloniality of knowledge (Lander, 2005) and the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2008).

Following the introductory comments, the article is divided into three topics as well as the final considerations. The first is about Levitt's theory of the globalization of markets and how marketing thinkers interpret this perspective. The second topic is an analysis of Levitt's theory based on the Latin American decolonial perspective, focusing on the concept of coloniality of power and its derivations the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being. The third one is a discussion in favor of decolonization in marketing, and lastly, the final considerations.

GLOBALIZATION OF MARKETS ACCORDING TO LEVITT AND INTERPRETERS

Theodore Levitt introduced the theory of market globalization in the 1980s. However, even before his text was published in the prestigious *Harvard Business Review*, Levitt was already a theorist with significant works on marketing (Salles, 1993) one of them being the article "Marketing Myopia" (Levitt, 1960), also published in the aforementioned academic journal, which revolutionized the way of practicing marketing, and still remains relevant today (Ng, 2016).

When Levitt put forward the concept of globalization of markets, it did not take long for his ideas to be debated in academic and managerial environments (Boddeyn et al., 1986; Salles, 1993). The author defended the inevitability of global markets as a new commercial reality, and that technology and globalization would be the vectors to construct the world (Levitt, 1983). Such vectors, according to the author, would be responsible for the "irrevocable homogenization" (Levitt, 1983, p. 4) of the needs and desires of consumers around the world. If organizations were to force down costs and improve the quality and reliability of products, consumers would be willing to give up their local preferences. The disappearance of age-old differences in consumer tastes and choices would culminate not only in the standardization of products, but also in the standardization of production and commercial institutions (Levitt, 1983).

The target of Levitt's criticism was multinational corporations, which, according to him, was based on an obsolete model, since it promoted product adjustments and/or practices in each of the active markets. According to Levitt (1983), operating along the lines of a multinational corporation would be unviable in the new world of globalized markets, as the costs related

to products would increase too much, and operations would not allow for the scaling up of the economy which is something that global corporations do in order to act consistently in all global markets.

When the concept of the globalization of markets emerged, it was considered controversial (Salles, 1993). Although Levitt recognized his own exaggeration in the work, he expected his readers to use common sense on implementing his ideas (Levitt, 1983), this did not exempt him from criticism by other theorists in the field who questioned the applicability of the globalization of markets concept (Douglas & Wind, 1987; Kotler, 1986). His criticisms highlighted the fact that Levitt is opinionated in the article, without citing adequate sources or data to support his arguments (Dixon & Sybrandy, 2015). Thus, it is difficult to recognize where philosophy, politics, and reality begin or end (Boddewyn et al., 1986). However, there were interpreters of the work who recognized the merits of the author's thinking – even decades after the publication of the famous article, on considering the advances that global markets provided for capitalist interest (Quelch & Deshpande, 2004; Tedlow & Abdelal, 2004).

Despite the theory of globalization of markets having been refuted or embraced in marketing, these interpretations have remained in the area of marketing management, international marketing and even international business. These critical appraisals and limited analyses, however, did not cover a broader geopolitical perspective on the theory, the discourse of which included the colonialist power structure in relation to modernity (Quijano, 2000, 2007), being promised on a global scale.

COLONIALITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE THEORY OF GLOBALIZATION OF MARKETS

The text “The Globalization of Markets” by Levitt was published at a time when the world was experiencing the third phase of modernity, led by the USA (Mignolo, 2011), marked by a tense global political-economic-ideological period aligned with the Cold War. At the time it was a world polarized between two opposing models of development: US capitalism, and Soviet communism that represented a threat to US capitalist hegemony plans (Alcadipani & Bertero, 2012). One of the various strategies used by the US was the invention of a discourse associated with development, promoted globally as the parameter for the evaluation of all countries (Escobar, 1999). This normative discourse, widely disseminated after the Second World War, established Western development as an ideal, whose base and guidelines were science and technology. The premise that governed the discourse was that the search for modernization was an inevitable evolutionary condition for countries that aspired to a developed *status*. Furthermore, the idea that some peoples of the newly created Third World were underdeveloped, contributed to the fact that the knowledge produced from their realities was not only considered dispensable but also an obstacle to development (Escobar, 1999).

Levitt's article fits this context, creating a marketing narrative that the globalization of markets would lead companies to help international economies develop (Levitt, 1983). In addition, Levitt's theory was part of a process of coloniality in the global north (Quijano, 2000) the ideals of which persist to this day.

The fact Levitt's argument considers the peoples cited in his examples as strangers to his western view, and that they need to be reached by modernity because they present some kind of backwardness, shows how the author's discourse is imbued by the logic of a racial hierarchy inherent to the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000). The arguments, and the critique of these in marketing, along with our decolonial critique are discussed later.

We will also show how the alleged superiority with which Levitt viewed his own premises in relation to alternative premises and/or his attempt to universalize his knowledge to fit other contexts, is a distinctive feature of the coloniality of knowledge (Lander, 2005). We will also illustrate how such a theory was conceived theoretically and in practice, and how we interpret it from a decolonial perspective.

Finally, in defending the homogenization of markets, of a supposed convergence of consumer tastes and desires, Levitt reinforces the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2008), as it presupposes that such homogenization will overshadow tastes and preferences based on ancestries and local traditions to the detriment of modern consumer desires. The coloniality of being in Levitt's discourse, as well as the comments by marketing theorists about the homogenization of markets and decolonial criticism are discussed in-depth in another section.

Coloniality of power according to the theory of market globalization: racial asymmetry between peoples

According to Quijano (2000) a colonial power device came about with the colonization of the Americas, which was based on two fundamental criteria. The first being all forms of work, production and exploitation of labor, which already operated around the axis of capital, began to occur simultaneously in the colonies and under extreme control, to ensure the supply of world market demands. The second was the idea of race, which was used for the first time in human history, to structurally, biologically and hierarchically differentiate between conquerors and the conquered.

The articulation between race and capitalism made up this new standard of coloniality of power, affecting the way that modern capitalism and the Eurocentric world power standards were constructed and maintained thanks to the racist distribution of work and exploitation of human labor during the colonization of the American continent (Mignolo, 2021). The social classification of the world population emerged with this historic event, hence the idea of race was used to rank the world population, through the delimitation of social roles, the limitation of resources and the imposition of the type of work that individuals should perform (Quijano, 2007).

The theory of globalization of markets promoted by Levitt reinforces the racist structures between Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric peoples, discussed in the theory of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), nurtures racial hierarchy between societies. For example, in order to defend global corporations, and how they should standardize their operations and marketing in international markets – given that they would offer better business to their overseas consumers, Levitt (1983) made way for the use of racist definitions for “other” peoples, putting them in a position of inferiority in relation to his Eurocentric ideal. If these peoples are in a “backward” situation compared to those in developed countries, the offer of something which brings them closer to the race of their Eurocentric peers would then be beneficial to them.

In the middle of the Cold War, Levitt describes how residents of the Soviet city of Krasnoyarsk where “the streets are not paved and news is censored”, would “stealthily” approach “Western travelers” in order to offer them “cigarettes, digital watches and even the clothes they are wearing” (Levitt, 1983, p. 3). Levitt even demeans societies that have capitalist principles whose origins are not Eurocentric (therefore, are not of a “superior” race), such as the Japanese society, when he claims that it originates “from a small cluster of islands, poor in resources, having a totally alien culture and an almost impenetrably complex language” (Levitt, 1983, p. 14). Similarly, the author also reinforces the racial “inferiority” of Brazilian peoples when he states that in Brazil “thousands of people go daily from the pre-industrial Bahian darkness to explosive coastal cities, to install televisions in overcrowded cardboard shacks” next to dented Volkswagens” (Levitt, 1983, p. 3).

According to the author the inferiority of races would also be reflected in the religions adopted by the people referred to by Levitt as being “exotic” or “mystical”, and considered backward in religious terms (thus, consistent with the state of mind of their followers). He states as examples the Brazilian “offerings of fruit and freshly slaughtered chickens made to “Macumba” spirits by candlelight” (Levitt, 1983, p. 3), and those religions that arouse anger among their devotees. He writes, “Who can forget the scenes televised during the 1979 Iranian uprisings of young people in elegant French-cut pants and silk shirts, wielding modern weapons, thirsty for blood in the name of Islamic fundamentalism?” (Levitt, 1983, p. 3).

These colonialist elements of Levitt’s theory tend to be ignored by those who debate his article. Quelch and Deshpande (2004, pp. 5-6), for example, analyze that the globalization of markets allowed global corporations led by Eurocentric individuals to provide economic growth in certain countries, but admit that it also increased world economic asymmetries. This fact, therefore, led political leaders in emerging economies to condemn this form of globalization, as it did not bring them the expected gains. For the authors, such reactions were nothing more than the search for “a scapegoat” to cover up “their own failures to provide economic progress for their citizens”. If these countries were not able to reach the same level of development as the developed ones this was due to bad public management, or the alleged superiority of corporations that took advantage of the advances of the markets globally but were being hindered by the backwardness of non-Eurocentric peoples.

Tedlow and Abdelal (2004), in turn, recognized that there are gaps in Levitt's arguments, mainly concerning the fact that there is cultural resistance to such globalization, and that markets in their entirety are not really transformed. However, they praise the seminal thinker's awareness of the cited realities and the differences in relation to his own, being of a Eurocentric nature, but do not oppose the colonialist narrative used by Levitt when referring to other peoples:

Levitt is a man of the world, well aware of the conflicts that mark him. He references the 1979 Iranian uprising that resulted in the overthrow of the Shah, the Nigerian Biafran civil war, life in Bahia in Brazil and Krasnoyarsk in Siberia. But while beliefs may differ markedly from one nation or region to another, consumption patterns were converging (Tedlow & Abdelal, 2004, p. 13).

Still, it is worth noting how Ramaparu, Timmerman, and Ramaparu (1999, p. 98) defend how Levitt was misinterpreted, as he "never promoted globalization at all costs or in all cases". The authors follow Levitt's line of thinking when they mention how the adoption of standardization/adaptation strategies in global markets would be influenced by the "degree of consumer sophistication" around the world (Ramaparu et al., 1999, p. 101). Thus, the further away from the ideal of western economic development, the less sophisticated a society would be and, therefore, less susceptible to the consumption of standardized products.

The thinking of Levitt and colleagues in the field of marketing establishes the differentiation made by peoples that always inferiorize the "others" – non-Eurocentric, based on their criterion of racial superiority. In his view, the asymmetry between societies results from the "backwardness" of those whose origin is different from his own. Therefore, it is natural to accept the idea that bringing modernity to these peoples is a way of helping them out of their backward situations, arguing that the globalizing of markets is the best way to achieve global development.

However, to imagine that people considered backward need help from the Eurocentric world results in violence, as it delegitimizes who they are, as well as their cultures and thinking (Dussel, 2000). Proposing changes in the way these peoples have historically developed forces them to displace their realities as if this were the best thing for them. However, when this happens, they lose their identities as they cannot be like Eurocentrics, nor do people of such origin accept them as equals. Their dehumanization is therefore, their undoing, as they become beings without reason or function, with histories and cultures that are unimportant in the modern world (Fanon, 1965).

Levitt's ideals, backed by his colleagues, represent those of the dominating white man of the global north. He who sees others who differ from his racial profile as "barbaric" and who need eliminating because they represent a threat to society or his existence, or that they must be indoctrinated, since they do not know what the "correct" form of humanity is (Mignolo, 2021). In this case, Levitt's proposal "eliminates" peoples who do not adhere to the market logic, as it suggests that they would naturally be isolated in the world, without access to the benefits that this form of development would provide them along with the indoctrination. Thus, this emphasizes the inadequacy of certain behaviors of non-Eurocentric peoples and seeks to "correct" them, pointing out how their lives can be improved (or even "saved") by associating themselves with the globalization of markets.

The coloniality of knowledge associated to the theory of globalization of markets: the superiority of Eurocentric knowledge

The colonization process and the subsequent establishing of a modern world system occurred at the expense and oppression of the thinking of colonized populations (mainly in Latin America), by a movement of erasure of locally produced knowledge, thus establishing the coloniality of knowledge (Lander, 2005). These peoples were impelled to learn what was deemed necessary to the Eurocentric culture, allowing the colonizer to exercise control and power over their way of interpreting the world. As a result, forms of knowledge production by the colonized, patterns of production of meanings and ways of expressing and objectifying subjectivity were repressed (Quijano, 2007).

A new and hegemonic perspective of knowledge was produced systematically and formally, based on the evolutionary idea of the human species. Europeans began to judge their knowledge as evolved/modern in relation to that created by other peoples throughout the world which was considered inferior and outdated (Quijano, 2000). Thus, several dichotomies were created from the Eurocentric epistemological perspective, such as primitive-civilized, mythical-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern to differentiate the different forms of global knowledge (Castro-Goméz, 2021).

In defending the theory of globalization of markets, Levitt (1983) establishes a type of knowledge originating in the global north that has become dominant in marketing. His approach to marketing and markets with development on a global scale allowed the author to establish a way of thinking within the area based on a capitalist vision of the USA, which stood out, making it difficult for the emergence of other knowledge in marketing, especially in non-Eurocentric contexts that challenged certain neoliberal principles (Kravets & Sandıkçı, 2013). When criticisms were made about this way of thinking, they too were carried out within the epistemic framework fostered by Levitt, only varying in the way they perceived that marketing activities in global markets would promote development (Boddewyn et al., 1986; Douglas & Wind, 1987; Kotler, 1986; Ramaparu et al., 1999). After all, as Levitt argues, the globalization of markets “has made isolated and impoverished places desire the charms of modernity” (Levitt, 1983, p. 1), a fact that supposedly “proves” how much his theory “holds” (Levitt, 1983, p. 1). Levitt, 1983, p. 6).

Levitt (1983) establishes the superiority of his thinking in marketing as being the most appropriate to respond to the challenges of the globalized world, stating that large companies in the global north have effectively standardized their offers in international markets to the joy, pleasure, and benefit of its consumers around the world. According to the author:

The Japanese have repeatedly adopted this theory, as has Henry Ford with the Model T. More importantly, their imitators have also followed suit, including companies in South Korea (for television sets and heavy construction), Malaysia (for personal calculators and microcomputers), Brazil (auto parts and tools), Colombia (clothing), Singapore (optical equipment) and, yes, even the United States (office copiers, computers, bicycles, castings). Western Europe (for automatic washing machines), Romania (for household items), Hungary (clothing), Yugoslavia (furniture), and Israel (paging equipment) (Levitt, 1983, p. 6).

Such is the supposed epistemological superiority of Levitt’s proposal that its universalization is to be more than expected, with evidence even, around the world successfully “proving” how “correct” the thinker was. Companies that did not adhere to this way of thinking would then be in danger of being overtaken by rivals more committed to the standardization of operations and marketing (Levitt, 1983). This thinking both dominated the marketing literature (Dixon & Sybrandy, 2015) and guided the behavior of top managements of multinationals into adopting the market standardization strategy, since this would restore control to the headquarters in the countries of origin (Quelsh & Deshpande, 2004).

However, the fact that Levitt’s article was written in a provocative way aroused polarized reactions in the various media in which it circulated (Quelsh & Deshpande, 2004; Tedlow & Abdelal, 2004). According to Levitt himself:

The article managed to inspire many comments. It happened of its own accord. I was just outside. The audience was creating quite a noise. The audience was spreading what I had said, more than I had. There were newspaper articles, seminars, meetings. It had almost become fashionable to talk about it. The New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal ran articles on the subject over the course of a week. They created a lot of furor because they lay emphasis on the idea of globalization as opposed to multinational corporations, which tried to design their products, distribution and communications systems according to special characteristics of certain countries and markets (Greyser, 2004, p. 34).

Levitt’s ideas had an impact both in academia and in business (Salles, 1993), and were interpreted as an attempt to reorient American corporate thinking towards the global market at a time when business in the country was not strong in the international market. (Cunningham & Ferrell, 2015). According to Quelsh and Deshpande (2004, p. 34), Levitt was successful in expanding this theory, having already revolutionized marketing practices by endorsing any thoughts on pro-homogenization of markets:

In the corporate boardroom, his 1983 article fundamentally changed the way marketing was discussed. Before Levitt, the onus invariably fell on managers who advocated standardized products or marketing programs to prove their case. After Levitt, the onus fell on those who advocated the adaption of marketing to show how the extra expense of customization would result in extra profitability. Changing the way a question is asked can have a profound effect on practice. This was perhaps the biggest impact of Levitt’s 1983 paper.

Thus, despite the fact that there are controversies about the content of Levitt's article, either because it contradicts previous concepts coined by the author himself (Dixon & Sybrandy, 2015, p. 375) or, because his arguments are based on common sense (Salles, 1993). These ideas continue to be widely disseminated in several business-oriented courses almost 40 years later (Open Syllabus, 2022).

These debates on Levitt's theory do not consider, however, that the foundation of a particular episteme in marketing conceived by the author and based on a capitalist vision of the globalization of markets as being superior to any others, is understood as a form of coloniality of knowledge (Lander, 2005). By arguing in favor of his epistemological perspective and disregarding the questioning of others (especially from non-Eurocentric contexts) regarding the expansion of markets on a global scale, Levitt puts forward his own as the only one capable of adequately explaining such a phenomenon. Therefore, it would also be the only one that could be adopted globally in marketing, which would make it "universalizable".

Therefore, peoples of the global south would only be exposed to this modernist/colonialist marketing episteme and would not imagine that other discussions about the globalization of markets could exist (in the global south) and be contrary to its logic. For the debates in marketing from Levitt's perspective also reinforce the argument that markets are indeed the best path to development (Cunningham & Ferrel, 2015; Kotler, 1986). This would lead these peoples to reproduce the argument led by Levitt, only to reinforce its "validity" and its historical and present-day value.

However, universalizing a form of thought originating from a specific context – especially Eurocentric, to another with different characteristics, is problematic, given that knowledge is formed by the individual based on his *locus* (that is, the environment in which he is inserted) (Castro-Goméz, 2021). Naturally, there will be biases in one's perception, because this is how they occur in one's reality, but they do not necessarily present themselves in the same way in others. The views of the dominator regarding the dominated are different from those of the subaltern regarding their oppressors (Fanon, 1965) especially when the different *loci* have power relations, such as those of the global north with the global south.

Therefore, the recognition that the inability of the universalization of knowledge coming from the Eurocentric world to the non-Eurocentric world, leads people from this second context to seek their own episteme, in order to interpret the global phenomena that affect them. This is precisely what the notion of universalization tries to prevent, through the creating of an impression shared among different peoples, that it is the only way of looking or is the most "correct" (Lander, 2005). Perhaps, in marketing there is only one accepted episteme about the globalization of markets, but this should not be understood as the only one or the one that best explains this phenomenon, especially among the peoples of the global south.

Coloniality of being according to the theory of globalization of markets: convergence towards a way of life

One of the consequences of the racialization of peoples, which arose from the colonial project, was the homogenization of the identity of different peoples, through the "coloniality of Being" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008) effort. An example of this is how the colonizers simply called the people of different ethnicities "negros" or "blacks", those who were kidnapped from the African diaspora and enslaved in the Americas (Quijano, 2000). Thus, the legacy of colonization subjected these peoples to a denial of their historical identities in a process of homogenization of identity and categorization of subjects, which is a way of removing their subjectivity. This imposition of subjectivity "refers to the process by which common sense and tradition are marked by preferential power dynamics: they discriminate against people and target certain communities" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 96).

One of Levitt's main arguments to defend the standardization of operational and marketing activities of companies that venture into international markets, is his *perception* (highlighted here as a reminder of how the author presents little data in his narrative to prove his interpretation of the facts) that consumer tastes are converging, regardless of their origin or location in the world. "The world's needs and desires have been irrevocably homogenized" (Levitt, 1983, p. 4), where "different cultural preferences, local tastes and standards [...] are vestiges of the past" (Levitt, 1983, p. 8). For this reason, the theorist insists that global companies should not accept cultural differences in markets leniently, stating, "I do not advocate the systematic disregard of local or national differences. Despite a company's sensitivity to these differences, it does not mean that it has to ignore the possibilities of doing things differently or better" (Levitt, 1983, p. 9).

Such homogenization occurs, according to the author, because different societies, especially those in the non-Eurocentric world, with their ancient traditions that existed before Eurocentric modernity, would undergo transformation, and open up to life experiences coming from the developed and modern Eurocentric world. Therefore, these peoples would start looking for the same types of goods and services as their counterparts in the global north, but not as quickly because there are still traditional structures in place that try to maintain their societies in the past:

The same countries that ask the world to recognize and respect the individuality of their cultures insist on the wholesale transfer of goods, services and modern technologies. Modernity is not just a desire but also a widespread practice among those who cling, with unshakable passion or religious fervor, to ancient attitudes and heritages (Levitt, 1983, p. 3).

However, as much as there is still resistance to such transformation and the convergence of peoples to a common, Eurocentric “universal” taste, there is no way to stop this “evolution”, because, after all, “the world is ready and anxious for the benefits of modernity” (Levitt, 1983, p. 7). Also, as these worlds come closer, the more these “ancestral differences and national tastes [...] will disappear” (Levitt, 1983, p. 5). Apparently, this occurrence is accelerating because products and services from the Eurocentric world are well accepted by non-Eurocentric societies, meaning that, even when they are presented for the first time to these peoples, the adoption is immediate, given that their tastes are like those of Eurocentric peoples:

Everywhere, everything becomes more and more like everything else, as the world’s structure of preference is relentlessly homogenized. Consider the cases of Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola, which are globally standardized products, sold everywhere, and welcomed by all. Both successfully cross broad national, regional and ethnic taste buds trained for a variety of deeply ingrained local preferences of flavor, consistency, effervescence [...] both sell well everywhere. Cigarettes too, especially those made in the United States, make global inroads annually into territories previously dominated by other, mostly local mixtures (Levitt, 1983, p. 4).

Debates in marketing on the issue raised by Levitt, that consumer tastes in global markets are converging, argue that this is questionable given the cultural diversity that exists among peoples (Cunningham & Ferrell, 2015) or the fact that there are culturally sensitive products that would therefore be more difficult to standardize (S. Ramaparu et al., 1999). Even among developed nations, there would be a vast diversity in *per capita consumption*, which does not support the argument that tastes, and preferences are converging in global markets (Dixon & Sybrandy, 2015).

Tedlow and Abdelal (2004, pp. 5-6), for example, agree with Levitt when they state, “Although beliefs may differ sharply from one nation or region to another, consumption patterns were converging”. However, they do not use different arguments from those presented by the theorist, as they claim that even those who are against modernity “employ the most modern means to fight against modernity (Tedlow & Abdelal, 2004, pp. 5-6), via the use of aircraft, internet and cell phones. Despite reservations about the market standardization model proposed by Levitt, the premise by Sheth (2020), in an analysis of the influence of social media on international marketing, suggests that with the advent of digital platforms, consumer desires are converging in contemporaneity, making global and domestic markets less delimited. Thus, the premise by Sheth (2020) renews the homogenization of the forms of Being proposed by Levitt (1983), as it is taken for granted that digital platforms are consumed in a standardized way.

Such debates, however, regarding the homogenization of tastes globally do not discuss how Levitt reinforces the coloniality of Being (Maldonado-Torres, 2008) by expressing his thoughts in this way. Thus, they disregard that tastes reflect the different ways of living of peoples, and the convergence of which means erasing past experiences rooted in the places of origin that form these individuals. Any convergence that Levitt advocates and that his interpreters support, is in fact a substitution of endogenous experiences for exogenous others to the constitution of non-Eurocentric peoples, in an attempt to differentiate ways of being that would supposedly be better than others, and therefore, hypothetically more desired than others (Quijano, 2000).

The thinking that non-Eurocentric peoples would want to be equal in taste to their Eurocentric peers refers to the idea that the former would be willing to follow a reference standard of the latter voluntarily, as they understand that this is better than their current, local one. In a way, what this suggests is that these individuals would be imposing a process of self-colonization on themselves (Quijano, 2000), as they see that only by actively seeking to be equal to their Eurocentric peers would they be able to develop and achieve a higher level of being.

Levitt and his colleagues' colonialist vision therefore encourages the asymmetries related to the different forms of Being between the Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric worlds by judging the Eurocentric as the only one to be considered "developed", the main reality with its specific ways of living. In marketing, there is no attempt to recognize other ontologies existing in the world, especially in non-hegemonic contexts, because the dominant logic refers to the idea that its *locus* promotes the best life experiences and, therefore, would be desired by everyone. Thus, those who do not seek such a form of mimicry are "backward" and "underdeveloped", but perhaps their path of personal development is another one, one that has not been given any consideration because it differs from the hegemonic one.

FOR A DECOLONIZATION OF MARKETING REFERENCES IN BRAZIL

The fact that the theory of globalization of markets proposed by Levitt has elements that refer to the coloniality of power is not surprising, as it has been developed within the scope of marketing – an area that, due to its Eurocentric origin and nature is composed of principles associated with capitalism, which brings it closer to colonialist ideals (Varman, 2019). This context results in the discipline being controlled by power structures of the global north, which determine the knowledge of the area, and as such, what the accepted different ways of Being should be. Levitt, therefore, is only one element (albeit an important one) of this larger structure and, as such, a reproducer of such colonialities due to his presentations. Even with such colonialist connotations, this Eurocentric marketing was universalized globally, making Levitt world-renowned as one of its main canons.

In Brazil, when the discipline of marketing was introduced to business courses in universities, its adoption took place in an uncritical way, which meant that its main authors, especially those from the USA, become references on the subject (Boschi, Barros, & Sauerbronn, 2016). Local thinkers assumed that the North Americans had invented something of great value for the advancement of global markets, and that only US academics and practitioners had a "natural ability" to develop this so-called discipline (Richers, 1994). As a result, little thought was given to ways of cultivating marketing based on the Brazilian reality, in other words based on the ontologies and epistemologies of Brazil.

Therefore, in Brazil, in order to develop marketing that contemplates such local onto-epistemologies, which reflect the complex realities of our society and its colonial history, it is necessary to change the references of the discipline in the country, in an effort to make it "turn decolonial" (Grosfoguel, 2007). In practice, this means moving away from the idea that only the canonical Eurocentric authors of marketing (such as Levitt) and their theories (among them, the globalization of markets) should be our sources for the understanding of marketing in Brazil. Instead, knowledge created by those whose voices are silenced by the coloniality of the area should be sought, those whose thoughts can bring us more adequate teachings in order to discuss marketing in the Brazilian context.

The argument here is not that we should turn from American authors to Brazilian marketing authors: although this is an important step for the growth of our area locally, it is not enough to guarantee that we will move our knowledge away from Eurocentric bases. Instead, the argument is that Brazilian thinkers, such as Lélia Gonzalez and Ailton Krenak, who also debate globalization, capitalism and markets emphasizing their harmful effects on our society, serve as inspiration for the researchers and practitioners of marketing in Brazil, so that one can learn from them and reflect on the paths that the area could follow from now on.

Lélia Gonzalez was a black intellectual and feminist, a pioneer in studies on black culture in the country, in which she reflected on the exclusion of women (especially those of color) in Brazilian society (Gonzalez, 2020a). Her thinking, based on multiple theoretical perspectives, explores how the colonialist structures of capitalism formed the Americas, grounded on “a matrix of domination sustained by racism” (Cardoso, 2014, p. 968). Unlike Levitt, who believes that the globalization of capitalist markets could benefit everyone, Gonzalez reflects that, because of such structures associated with capitalism, American societies have been marked by racism. In Brazil, however, according to the author racism is of a “disguised” nature (unlike the USA, for example, where it is on “open display”). Although the miscegenation and assimilation of different races in Brazilian society would supposedly result in “racial democracy”, it is in fact, nothing more than a façade hiding the true barbarities historically committed against blacks in the country (Gonzalez, 2020b). Gonzalez (2020c) argues that, in Brazil there is, in fact, a racist and patriarchal hierarchy which emerged at the beginning of Brazilian society, and which persists until today, determining the social, racial and sexual status of each individual.

Gonzalez warns that, because of such social asymmetry originating in the racist capitalist structures that shaped the Americas, knowledge was also racialized, because the only knowledge considered valid was that of white origin and epistemologically Eurocentric – the same one that serves as the basis for Levitt’s theorizations which he considers superior. Forms of knowledge coming from African origins, which would have great power to explain local phenomena, especially for the black population, were then relegated to oblivion. This caused the black population to have to resort to knowledge that is not applicable when trying to understand the realities of their lives. As a result, the interpretations made, based on such parameters of white knowledge about black culture and black people in Brazil distort who they are, always disqualifying them (Gonzalez, 2020c).

Coming from an onto - epistemology perspective different from that of Gonzalez’s (but still significantly distant from that of Levitt’s), Ailton Krenak, an indigenous leader, environmentalist and intellectual, observes how the capitalist structures in which global society is inserted have occupied the entire planet and infiltrated human life, just as Levitt advocated. However, unlike Levitt, Krenak (2020) believed that this process happened in an uncontrolled way, resulting in man’s alienation from the earth – the organism from which we come and are a part. According to Krenak (2019, p. 49), “when we depersonalize the rivers and the mountains, when we take away their meanings attributed by humans only, we free these places so that they become residues of industrial activity”. Such distance between man and nature resulted in a mistaken understanding that they are separate forms of life, which gives the former the “right” to do what it wants with the latter. In other words, one would be the “owner” rather than a mere element of the earth. The mistreatment of the environment globally by the capitalist world led man to imagine that it could be possible to reverse the situation and generate market growth in a sustainable manner. In Krenak’s opinion, this is nothing more than a “myth of sustainability”, “invented by corporations to justify their assault on our idea of nature” (Krenak, 2019, p. 16).

Any attempt to reintegrate man with the earth would then require the abandoning of the anthropocene capitalist way of seeing the world in order to give value to the cosmological thinking where “everything is nature” (Krenak, 2020, p. 83). However, it is difficult for the author to imagine such a human transformation, as man is shaped by an educational system that feeds the structures of capitalism:

What they call education is, in fact, an offense against freedom of thought, of taking a newly arrived human being and pumping him up with ideas only to release him into the world to destroy it. In my opinion, this is not education, but a factory of madness that people insist on maintaining (Krenak, 2020, pp. 101-102).

Therefore, the world of “a single epistemology is created through the denial of any other observations about the possibility of governments of men being organized in ways different to the established one” (Krenak, 2021, p. 67).

Different authors have been engaging with issues of racism and patriarchy that persist in the area of marketing that result from the capitalist colonialist roots of the discipline (Francis, 2022; Gurrieri, 2021). They warn about the unsustainability of development models associated with capitalism which are conditioned standards for human evolution and the environment (Kemper, Hall, & Ballantine, 2019). Therefore, it is argued that because of the way marketing was formed and has developed it has always prioritized the particular interests of white male elites of the global north, ignoring the needs of other non-hegemonic

demographic populations, therefore, making them invisible. This led to different forms of discrimination and the lack of epistemic alternatives within the discipline. Marketing, therefore, is based on modern ideological assumptions that reinforce the abuse of power and the imposition of Western cosmovisions, so that our societies are guided by values that support consumerism, racism, chauvinism, patriarchy, class rule, and nature as a factor of cumulative production, amongst others.

Considering that the area is sensitive to these themes, and that they were subjects for reflection for Lélia Gonzalez and Ailton Krenak, the development for discussions of this nature in Brazil, is logical. The aim of the discussions being the decolonization of knowledge in the area, by giving priority to the accounts of these important Brazilian intellectuals instead of foreign thinkers. As shown here, their views originating from distinct *loci* different from those of Levitt's, have connections with subaltern realities that Eurocentric marketing knows little about (or accepts).

Therefore, what is being proposed is almost an antithesis of the capitalist Eurocentric marketing defended by Levitt. What is cultivated here is marketing guided by respect for the ethical conditions of human beings (Gonzalez, 2020b), in particular the "innocent victims" of modernity (Dussel, 2006) (and its capacity for self-mediation, without the imposition of exclusive standards of being and knowing). It allows for the life of a society to base itself on its own particularities, to consider its own needs and languages. It also allows for forms of marketing that accept the primacy of nature, and the transformation of our worldview into a more harmonious and plural one, in an integral and constitutive relationship between humanity and the environment (Krenak, 2020; Mignolo, 2019). Furthermore, through education and critique, it enables people to make sense of themselves without consumption being the main source of value, but instead, that of their own collectivity (Freire, 1987). When one thinks about marketing being based on such foundations, it is possible to imagine the development of a less asymmetrical discipline in Brazil, one that is more aware of its mistakes and recognizes how much "other" knowledge (not only that from hegemonic contexts) can be enriching for its development.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Until today Levitt's text on the globalization of markets is a reference in marketing, both in the global north and in the global south, which shows its importance as a fundamental theoretical basis within the area. Although his theory has been used for debate and criticism by other marketing authors (e.g., Dixon & Sybrandy, 2015; Douglas & Wind, 1987; Kotler, 1986; Tedlow & Abdelal, 2004), they have ignored the coloniality in Levitt's work.

It is quite possible that many interpreters in marketing do not understand that there is coloniality in Levitt's theory on the globalization of markets. They may not perceive this because they share the author's view that there are differences between races, knowledge, and ways of being around the world, and that Eurocentric people are seen as superior to non-Eurocentric peoples. Perhaps these authors, like Levitt, are not even able to recognize how much they reproduce coloniality, because they do not understand how much they establish a dominant narrative within the area that excludes onto-epistemic realities outside their hegemonic axes – because they do not suffer the effects that such phenomenon generate in daily lives.

On the contrary, for non-Eurocentric peoples, this type of coloniality is more noticeable, as it is present in their daily lives and is constantly remembered when they are denied the possibility of expressing themselves and seeing themselves through their subaltern reality. Precisely because of this clear presence of coloniality in their life experience, it is up to such "southern" societies to denounce how their Eurocentric counterparts still colonize them, which involves questioning how the canons of the marketing area and their epistemologies relate to the non-hegemonic realities of these peoples. Even today, it is in the interests of the inter-imperial disputes of the global north to maintain a prosperous imperial future at the expense of denying "other histories" in the global south (Faria & Cunha, 2022). Therefore, hegemonic, racist theories are undeniably instruments that prevent the reappropriation of theorization in these contexts.

Considering that the marketing area is associated with the Eurocentric world (Varman, 2018) and that its epistemology is rooted in that reality, it is natural that its canons are mostly white men from the global north and that its main theories are coined in that context, and that the interpretation of the world is based on such parameters. Therefore, it is understood that marketing should follow these standards, and academics from the global south reproduce the same parameters locally, even if these do not fit their reality (Jafari, 2022). As such, they distance themselves from their society, as they do not raise questions, conduct research, or present solutions that would truly help to solve their problems (Varman & Saha, 2009).

Is it not time, therefore, for academics in the global south to think differently about the institution of marketing in the global south? Is it possible to think of an institution of marketing in the global south whose canons are not from the global north? Is it feasible to imagine marketing discussions outside the Eurocentric world that include theories from the decolonial perspective, that more adequately portray the non-Eurocentric reality, raising awareness of the problems present in such contexts and offering possible solutions?

Although these questions refer to changes that still seem distant from our academic reality there are already moves in the area of marketing which seek a basis of discussion originating from the *loci* of enunciation, different from that of the global north (Bádéjo & Gordon, 2022; Rodrigues & Hemais, 2020; Sandikci, 2022, Varman & Saha, 2009). This, therefore, raises the possibility that it is feasible to think about marketing without it being guided by a Eurocentric epistemology.

The present work sought to align itself with these critical discussions in order to reinforce the need for greater autonomy of thought by marketing academics from the global south, with the hope that our contribution aids our institutions of marketing to become more aligned with our reality here in the global south.

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