

THEMATIC SECTION: EXPERIENCES OF  
ALTERNATIVE HIGHER EDUCATION



## **Inside or Outside the University? Experiences of alternative higher education: a dialogue between Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Luis Fernando Cuji Llugna**

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**Tristan McCowan (Moderator):** We are very grateful for your collaboration in this project. We will begin addressing the current situation of international higher education, which has undergone a period of extraordinary growth over the last 30 years. Nowadays, more than one-third of the world's youth population attends to some kind of tertiary education, and this rate is growing very quickly. The institution of higher education of European origin – the university – is 900 years old. It seems to be a very strong institution, with a very marked continuity. So, why is it necessary to change, to reform? Why look for alternatives to this conventional, traditional model of higher education?

First, I will invite Luis Fernando to speak.

**Luis Fernando:** Thank you, Tristan. Many thanks to Professor Boaventura for this opportunity. I have had the pleasure of comparing Boaventura's reflections with the actions of a set of initiatives that are being carried out to show alternatives of higher education, which are not disconnected from alternatives of society, of perspectives of seeing the world and of seeing society. In this process, the professor's reflections are very stimulating and I think there are at least four things to understand. The first is the reflection on the agents involved in this interaction, which are not only individual, but also collective. The second is the issue of interacting knowledge, which is no longer only the knowledge legitimized from one place, but also other subaltern knowledges. Next, institutional arrangements generated and modified in conventional higher education. Finally, the purposes of these alternatives for higher education, which are being modified in the process. So, I would love to talk to Professor Boaventura about, first, this classification: to see higher education from this way of classifying experiences, which could help us to think about why societies, members of society, both academics and non-academics, consider the need to change, not to sustain or to generate nuances in higher education that we traditionally understand as conventional.

**Boaventura:** Very good, Luis Fernando, thank you very much for the reference to my work. I would say that the four themes basically fulfill everything we should be thinking about in higher education today. I would like, above all, to comment on the context in which we do it now, because these topics are exhaustive. If we look at the period leading up to the pandemic, there were two movements affecting the university and demanding contradictory changes. I would say there was a top-down movement, which had two phases. On the one hand is the phase of university capitalism, that is, subjecting public or private education to a mercantile, capitalist logic of diploma production, proletarianization of professors, standardization of courses, so that they could eventually be marketed worldwide as educational services. That is to say the university management was oriented by capitalist productivity objectives, which in some countries is tied to underfunding, a crisis of systematic cuts to the public university, favoring the private university. On the other hand, there is a second axis of this top-down movement in some countries, as in the cases of Brazil and India; it is the pressure of a conservatism, sometimes religious, sometimes political, conservative-secular, which has different nuances. A movement that I also notice in the United States, since I have been affiliated, for 35 years, with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and I have lived, during these 35 years, half the year in the United States, and I have also experienced this pressure there.

In Brazil there is an evangelical conservatism, for example, which has created a very strong movement, a movement called 'school without party,' which, in fact, is a highly ideological school, a criticism of leftist ideologies in universities – which, now, with Bolsonaro, they call *cultural Marxism*, a designation used by the Nazis to demonize the Jewish

intelligentsia in universities. So, there were these two movements, but there was also another movement, contradictory, from below, which was mainly the pressure from students to decolonize the university, affirmative actions, change the curricula, allow access to the popular classes, indigenous diversity. In other words, two contradictory movements were moving the university and receiving different responses in different countries. And this was before the pandemic.

Now it seems to me that things have changed and are going to change a lot. I have just written a book, Luis Fernando – which I hope will be available in Ecuador, because it was published in Spain, by Akal – called *The future begins now: From pandemic to utopia (El futuro comienza ahora: De la pandemia a la utopía)*. In this book, I argue that the pandemic will stay with us. The acute phase will end with vaccines, but we are going to enter a period of intermittent pandemic, with new variants, new viruses, because the development model we have is a model that leads to more destabilization in the habitats of wild animals, which sometimes pass the viruses to humans and we humans have no immunity. So, it seems to me we will enter a more dangerous period. What was the first impact of the pandemic? The first impact was on health. You have a fatal experience in Ecuador – and I want to present my personal condolences to all my Ecuadorian friends and to Luis Fernando – because there were many deaths in all countries, but Ecuador was very martyred by the deaths of the pandemic. Now, I think the impact goes from health to school, in general, to education, in particular, and to higher education. One of the impacts of this is distance learning, online, via the Internet, which today basically sustains universities in many countries. Here in Portugal, for example, the university is still closed and even though we are trying to reopen, most of the things are done online, the same has happened in England and in many countries. So, I think this is a change because what I see is that some of the movements changed a lot.

For example, the student movement that was very strong in European universities, England, is a good example. I was recently discussing this point with Cambridge University, for a big education journal they have in Cambridge, and the idea was that – I had been in Glasgow and in Bristol – it seemed that the movement to decolonize the university had disappeared a little bit, that it was suspended, because the students were in their countries, at home, so there is no mobility, there is no presence in the university. Now the movement of university capitalism is strong. On the one hand, there are companies – I see it quite a lot in the United States – thinking that this is a great opportunity to change higher education, because it has been demonstrated the capacity of these platforms to deliver online courses and that, obviously, it is much cheaper. And it is much more effective, for example, to avoid protest: students cannot protest if they are at home. On the other hand, we have a university where a large percentage of professors have precarious contracts, that is, they may be hired for one, two, three years. So, for example, if the professor organizes a course and it is transmitted online, the university retains ownership of the course and can continue to offer it even if the

professor is no longer there. And this, I think, makes everything much easier.

Of course, it will be a slower period because we have just started; a period where there is no opposition, but there will be. For example, with college registration fees people are starting to organize themselves to say 'we can't pay this value to a university where everything is online'. This seems to me a move that leads us to a first reflection that I would like to have with you, Luis: in this condition of today, we are in a situation that we have to criticize and look for alternatives to higher education and, at the same time, defend it, because there are also people who want to destroy education. I think what university capitalism and secular religious conservatism want is to end the institutions where free, plural, critical and independent knowledge is produced. Ideally, this would be the university. It is not, we know, but it should be our challenge. So, I think the challenge is, on the one hand, to produce alternatives and, on the other hand, to defend institutionality. I don't know what you think about it.

**Luis Fernando:** I want to take this double movement of modification of higher education in this context precisely with the example of health. This movement from below, in the case of Latin America, which had many collective actors from indigenous peoples and nationalities, was against broad capitalism and university capitalism. Precisely because of the relationship of society, of the university, with the environment. So, this social group, this collective, which is not only indigenous or Afro-descendant, demanded to maintain a different relationship with nature and required that the university should incorporate this change in the purpose of higher education, not only the extractivist purpose, the purpose of exploitation, but a purpose that would allow us to reconcile with nature to avoid what we are now experiencing as an effect of the pandemic, when the limits with nature have placed us in a defenseless health situation. And in the social movements, in the case of Latin America, this knowledge is also claimed. That is, we can probably have a capitalist solution around vaccines for the pandemic, but we can also have a comprehensive solution regarding the relationship we are going to have with society. Knowledge that is not commoditized can help us. And if we have the university as a space for the production and reproduction of that knowledge, we can generate an alternative for society and a more comprehensive solution to the pandemic. I believe that this dimension of the purposes should help us, in this context, not only to perceive the benefit of the expansion of access through the Internet, but also to reflect on the purposes that the university should seek.

**Boaventura:** I totally agree. However, this issue of the advantages of the internet also hides the great inequalities in society due to access. If we look at the latest OECD reports on education, because of the impact of the pandemic, the tele-school, that is, the online school or the closed school has a devastating impact in Africa because a large part of the children, I cannot specify the number, but I think in Congo, for example, 60% of the children left the school system. And I think that at the

level of higher education, this increase that Tristan has referred to of the lower classes entering university, I think that their homes, many times, do not have the conditions of silence, nor connection, nor computers, etcetera; because a family can have a computer, but there is not one for each member of the family. There are inequalities here, but I agree with you that we should use the crisis as an opportunity. The root of the word *crisis*, in Greek, is this, a disease, but it is also an opportunity and I think yes, we should use it and see how we are going to do it, since the problem is participation.

I do not think it is possible to imagine a distance higher education. I accept that the Internet is used a lot in university teaching, but it will never dispense the professor's leading position, especially because it is not simply teaching, it is the living together. In other words, the university is a system of copresence, of coexistence, of teaching citizenship, where you can find people who have a different vision from yours, from your ethnic group, from your religion, from your family, from your region. This is very important to create citizenship and I think it may be at risk if we do not find a way to return to universities, to spaces where students can socialize. Above all, because we know from studies on the sociology of education that the official university curriculum and syllabus is as important as the informal curriculum, which is what students learn from each other, in the university space and in living together. This formation has an enormous value; we did not eliminate the official curriculum to be online, but we eliminated the part of the informal curriculum of teaching by coexistence and I think this is also a problem.

**Luis Fernando:** I agree, let's say that behind it there is a great risk that is not towards the future, but that we are living in a situation of maximization of the exclusion of some groups for reasons of poverty, for reasons of access to technology, for reasons of distance and, probably, this risk is maximized because the state policy or university policies choose only one option. So, we are in a pandemic, and we will do everything online. Probably, in spaces where this kind of access doesn't exist, initiatives may arise, taking care of the biosecurity that is now so fashionable, generating spaces for socialization, even outside the larger, more urbanized structure, having this characteristic of normalizing a lifestyle, a type of learning, especially to rescue some knowledge that was not being legitimated to be transmitted in the universities. I start thinking about our country, about the peasant way of life that recovered the fact that you could produce much of what you consumed; and that, with the lockdown measures, the more rural educational spaces could promote this kind of knowledge in institutionalized spaces, like schools, like the university, which is closer to these spaces. I fully agree that if we do not reveal the existing exclusions, we will not allow states and universities to generate, at the same time, parallel solutions, because the pandemic affects citizens differently. What experiences do you have, professor, of this kind of thing now, right in the pandemic?

**Boaventura:** Yes, you are really right, Luis Fernando, they got worse. In this book I dedicate an entire chapter to the deepening of social in-

equalities because the virus –I wrote a little book, which is free, called *The cruel pedagogy of the virus (La cruel pedagogía del virus)* – is teaching us things, in a cruel way because it teaches by killing, but it is a teaching of Mother Earth in the sense that we cannot continue with this model of development, because human life represents 0.01% of the total life of the planet and, despite this, we throw ourselves into the Anthropocene to destroy the life of the planet. So, maybe the planet is not at risk, but human life on the planet may be.

Our indigenous brothers have shown us the future, not the past, but the future. Everything that is in the constitution of Ecuador is also in the constitution of Bolivia. In Ecuador, in a very striking way, the rights of Nature, the Pachamama, Mother Earth, are lines of the future that could defend us. But there are two points: on the one hand, these inequalities have become much worse because you notice that, for example, Brazil, at this moment, is a health catastrophe because it has a president who, in my opinion, is a genocidal, because he has a policy – which some people think is intentional – of carrying out what we call social Darwinism, that is, taking advantage of the pandemic to liquidate the poor and the black people of the country. We have more than three hundred thousand deaths and it is estimated that by the end of 2021 they may reach five hundred thousand, half a million people, when they were avoidable, in a country that could produce vaccines. There is a very harsh logic here and it is clear that the populations already *made vulnerable* by previous crises (hunger, unemployment, precarious work, gender violence, police brutality) are suffering the most in the pandemic. Refugees, migrants, etcetera, and the poor people, obviously, the impoverished people living in informal settlements, shantytowns, slums. Therefore, it is clear that the crisis deepens inequalities in a brutal way.

The other phenomenon this: I, for example, have been in my village for a year, in the rural world, thirty kilometers from Coimbra. In the past, people who wanted to defend themselves from pandemics, in the 14th century, took refuge in the countryside, because the countryside is safer, more biosecure, has more possibilities for agricultural and other autonomies. For example, Boccaccio wrote the Decameron in a small town; he left Florence, because if he stayed, he would die with his parents, who died during the pandemic, called the Black Death. So, we go to the countryside to protect ourselves. Here in this field, I have the local commerce very close, healthy food. In addition, I produce, on small plots of land, potatoes, various vegetables, etc. In other words, our development model has focused on the cities and has abandoned the countryside. The universities were a great agent of urbanization, but now we are in a moment in which we have to *deurbanize*, let's say, in the good sense, and create new conditions that allow them to *ruralize themselves*. In this book, in the part of the alternatives, I talk about the fact that we should rethink the relationship between city and countryside.

The second aspect I wanted to talk about is television. Every day, in several countries, they talk about modern science, applied, applied to health. At least now, it is no longer the economists, always the econo-

mists were in the news. Now are the scientists, medical infectologists, epidemiologists, virologists, etcetera, and it gives the illusion that, finally, science is the only valid knowledge. And people ask me a lot: professor, what is this about the epistemologies of the south, about the ecology of knowledge? And it is not because I am anti-science, absolutely not, I am a social scientist, but I think science is not the only valid knowledge, because there is another valid knowledge as well: indigenous, rural, peasant knowledge, etcetera, this is what we have to bring. What I call a process of sociology of absences is taking place, that is, these things are being made invisible. When in my work for this book I went to study what was happening with the indigenous communities. I do not have concrete information from Ecuador, but I do from Colombia, where I work now quite a lot. In southern Colombia, for example, the indigenous peoples have recently published small recipes of their traditional medicine because traditional indigenous medicine, obviously, is not good to face an acute crisis because they do not have vaccines, but it increases the body's immunity to face the most harmful effects of the pandemic and the World Health Organization recognizes this, somehow. So, they published these little books promoting traditional medicine so that people could defend themselves. And you don't need gel or alcohol, but specific herbs that, when handled with your hands, disinfect them. This diversity is present; the problem is that it is not visible.

I think in some countries we are advancing towards what I call an ecology of knowledge, in other worlds, bringing into the university intercultural and popular knowledge, etcetera. In Brazil, for example, there are universities where they could receive the so-called teachers of notable knowledge, that is, teachers of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian knowledge who could talk to the students. If it were in the medical university, for example, they would bring traditional physicians. All this seems to me to be lost for now and I am a bit worried because the potential is there, but I perceive there is a certain stagnation of this whole movement.

**Luis Fernando:** In fact, professor, I started to think about how to support the development of this possibility of making alternative knowledge visible, and here two things that seem very important to me come into play. The positions of power that the actors or we have in the world of conventional higher education. The voice of an academic with the legitimate credentials to express his opinion places him in a position of power with respect to this alternative knowledge and makes it possible for him to hinder or encourage this knowledge to its enter the university. And I think there are three criteria in dispute and I feel the academic community is not totally decided; an internal dispute that is epistemological, political and axiological. That is, the criteria of truth, if the criteria of truth are situated from the start in what we conventionally know as science and we underestimate, we just exclude this knowledge. The axiological criteria of the good, of what is good, also impede us institutionally and here my belief is that it does not have to do so much with the states, but with the university field. And a criterion that can be

understood as very capitalist, but that, in the context of the pandemic, clearly exceeds a capitalist society, is the criterion of efficiency. We now have the dispute about the efficacy of vaccines, but there is a bigger dispute about the efficacy of our solutions to the pandemic problem. I believe that these three criteria, within the university field, must undergo a serious examination to make it possible for knowledge and the holders of that knowledge to enter this field and it seems to me that this is not a direct dispute of the state, but of the university field, of the agents of the system. What do you think, professor?

**Boaventura:** Luis, you are absolutely right, I am glad that you put these three criteria so clearly, because it seems to me it helps us to manage the topic. Starting with the first, it is curious that these criteria are one thing in the theory that has defined them, but another thing when they are applied, above all, by agents not only administrative, but also professors, presidents, etc., because there are pressures. For example, let's start with the truth. Of course, all of us who have been writing against the positivist paradigm of science since the eighties know that there is no truth in science, only the search for truth. Science is a constant search because if there were truth in science, truth, once defined, would be the same forever. On the contrary, what is true today is not true tomorrow. So, it is clear that what was true at that time is not true now. There is a search for truth and it has nothing to do with relativism; on the contrary, the idea is that in good faith you use the methods, the methodologies, in order to obtain the best results. Now, this gives us an opening to understand that there may be other criteria for the search for truth not used by us, other methods, other methodologies. In my experiences of being with an indigenous community, in a jungle, they talk to me about this plant, this one and that one. What is the methodology? There are different methodologies, or experiences, or wisdoms, ancestral knowledge, processes and elements of spirituality, of privileged contact with the ancestors. They are very complex things that do not fit in, but I have to respect them because they are also a search for truth and for them it has efficacy within their territories.

Nowadays, what is happening, because of the pandemic, is a talk about applied science, vaccines, that is, science is good for producing vaccines. Applied science, that is, technology, is totally different from basic science. The latter is the one that seeks and accepts the idea of the search for truth because it seeks the unexpected, the unknown, and is almost never complete, because it always goes on. Applied, technological science creates results to transform them into instruments or drugs or vaccines. So, positivism is coming back with enormous force. For example, here, the European Union is going to spend millions of euros on science, but it is not for basic science; it is for applied science, science-innovation, science at the service of industry. I have nothing against this, but it is not basic science, it is another thing. And this is what creates the asymmetry, because when multilateral agencies impose on Ecuador or Brazil or Portugal that they must promote applied science, but not basic science, what happens is that the disparity between the global north



and the global south increases, because the more developed countries have already done a lot of basic science and now they are applying it. They did not start with applied science; they started with basic science. So, what I see is that science institutes can look for funding to do simply innovation, but the basics are still missing. This, on the one hand, seems very important to me.

On the other hand, the criterion of efficiency, which is a policy criterion for society, is also a criterion for the profession of the professor, of the higher university researcher. With this movement of capitalist productivity in universities, professors are driven to publish as much as possible in journals that are almost entirely in English. So, you are in a Spanish or Portuguese or Chinese speaking country, or whatever, but you have to publish in English, otherwise your career, your development, will not advance. In other words, the social responsibility that we as academics have with our societies disappears a little, because we are speaking in a language that people do not even understand. It seems to me that it would be fundamental, for change even within conventional universities, to expand community engagement departments. University community engagement is something very specific to Latin America, which comes from the movement of the students of Cordoba, Argentina, in 1918, to increase the social responsibility of the university with the work with the community, not with the work with the companies, but with the communities, in general, with the people, with the city. This is not being promoted because professors are under enormous pressure to publish, especially in English. And this has repercussions on the axiological criterion because the cultural variables of which effective and applied knowledge can be found are narrowed. Then, the space of interculturality, which would be very important, is a little lost.

The challenges in this are very great at the moment. I see students of mine, for example, who did their PhD here at my center who are now professors at several universities. Right now, I have two PhD students from Ecuador, who are working here with us. Two of them, also Ecuadorians, finished their PhD here in my center, and sometimes they tell me they have difficulties to continue with the idea of including science in a broader set of knowledge because they are discouraged and because, at the same time, the students are not interested. Because the idea created is that having a diploma is not for learning, but for getting a job. I find this worrying, but I think your three criteria cover things very well.

**Tristan:** Professor, thank you. Based on the reflections you made on the pandemic and the current situation of higher education, science, the search for truth, etcetera, we now turn our attention to the current experiences of alternatives, be they of the pluriversity type, initiatives within conventional universities, or intercultural or indigenous universities, and experiences on the margins of the systems, of the subversity type. How do you see these experiences today, their achievements so far and the challenges they face?

**Luis Fernando:** I would like to share with the professor an experience and some reflections that I receive about this experience. In Ecuador, the indigenous movement presented, many years ago, an alternative to the university that began as a non-institutional alternative. But, by decision of the movement, it implied institutionalizing it in a university that has the name of Amawtay Wasi Intercultural University. There came a time when this university was closed due to quality criteria, and then the dynamics of Ecuador made it possible for it to reopen and transform it: from a private community university to a public community university. This produced a movement and, consequently, the actors who had initiated it could no longer continue, because some criteria were requested for their participation in this initiative. For example, the obtaining of certifications. Therefore, the dynamics of these initiatives with the possibility of the state imposing certain criteria may distort part of their purpose.

Now we have an intercultural institution, of the peoples and nationalities, whose authorities are PhDs who identify themselves as indigenous or Afro-descendants. However, the movements lost something. There is always the possibility to ask if what is lost is just what is most needed from the experiences and how we can enable a better relationship, knowing that there is this difference in power between the initiatives and the relationship of the state. There goes my question and I shared with you this experience we had in Ecuador and, as far as I know, in Latin America there are similar experiences of the relationship between the state and social initiative movements, indigenous movements.

**Boaventura:** Yes, Luis, I am glad you raised this case because I know about it too. Years ago, I was very close to the Amawtay Wasi and I accompanied this whole process, during the government of Rafael Correa, because I went to impart a new seminar, invited, at that time, by Luis Macas. And it was very nice because many indigenous organizations, young people, who came from various parts, gathered together and we discussed again this question of the epistemologies of the south, with different people with different backgrounds. It was very interesting, for example, to compare concepts of nature, Cartesian Eurocentric nature and Mother Earth, the concepts of spirituality, the idea of community and individuals, all this that is part of my work. It was a very interesting debate. Afterwards, the university informed me of the government's attempt to recognize them, but following quality parameters that included academic degrees, which the indigenous leaders obviously did not have. I even wrote to the government in defense of maintaining the autonomy of the Amawtay Wasi through one or another articulation with the CONAIE [*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* - Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador], because it seemed to me that subjecting an intercultural university to monocultural criteria is not valid, for example, forcing professors to have a PhD. This is not like this for the wise men of the communities, who may be illiterate, but have an ancestral wisdom absolutely valuable for the community, for all of us. Then, after many incidents, they said the idea was not to close it, but to create a public community university, which in

itself is good, it is a new type of university, but the criteria continued to be largely monocultural. Moreover, since it was a public university, despite being in a country with a constitution for a plurinational state, CONAIE, for example, was not allowed to control the quality of the university autonomously. As you know, in Ecuador, indigenous organizations controlled, for a long time, bilingual education.

I was very supportive of the past government, in many aspects, and I was critical, in others. I was critical of the Yasuní, I was critical of intercultural education and, for this reason, I was critical of the Amawtay Wasi. I think much has been lost, Luis Fernando, precisely because I know that the indigenous community, the organizations, are very distant from the Amawtay Wasi now, they see it as a foreign body, so to speak, and they are in search of rebuilding their own autonomous processes, but outside the state.

So, you have to look at other models. In my experience, I know three. One is that of Amawtay Wasi, as we saw, and there are two others: one is the intercultural, indigenous universities, for example, which are totally autonomous from the state, or which were for a long time and continue to be managed and administered autonomously. I am referring to the Intercultural Indigenous University of Popayán, in Colombia, which emerged as an initiative of the CRIC [Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca], one of the very strong indigenous Cauca organizations. They founded this university, where I was and participated in some seminars, and what happened was that they created some subjects that were not in conventional universities. For example, 'local development agents', young people who could be very well prepared to talk to the people, to the villages, decide what their problems are and things like that, which was not in the university curriculum. They created a career that was not recognized by the state. And, a couple of years ago, the government of Colombia, which is a right-wing government, officially recognized this career. The Minister of Education went to Popayán to say: from now on, the local development agents trained by the Intercultural Indigenous University are recognized by the state, by the municipalities, for their functions. This is a great articulation, I say, much more plurinational than that of Ecuador, despite the fact that Colombia has a right-wing government, which has nothing to do with plurinationality. It was very interesting to see it.

The other experience, a little difficult to evaluate now because of everything that has happened in Bolivia, refers to the three indigenous intercultural universities that Evo decided to create: one Guaraní, one Aymara and one Quechua. Therefore, the three great languages of Amazon and Sierra, but with very strong indigenous authorities and in the only country that has an indigenous majority. But, of course, they are regulated by the state. I think we have conflicts there; there are problems because the state has a monocultural logic. I think Ecuador went a little too far, too far in this monoculturality. But, in general, all the states always try to see a general, universal law that applies to the whole country and the differences are lost there. There is another university; I would

say it is the fourth model, the Unitierra [Universidad de la Tierra – University of the Land] in Chiapas. Although perhaps the most important now is that in Oaxaca, whose president is a great friend of mine, a great community intellectual, Gustavo Esteva. This university does not want to be associated with the state; it teaches peasant, indigenous, local and emergency knowledge. So, it seems to me that there is an enormous variety, and we are only talking about the indigenous people.

I have two students who are finishing their theses on popular universities, so there are many popular universities, of different types in Argentina, the Florestan Fernandes School in Brazil. There are many other popular universities, and not only in Latin America. In Canada they are very strong, in the United States, and even in Europe there are popular universities with other origins; as there are also in Latin America some popular universities that come, above all, from the communist parties of the twenties, which created those popular universities that had nothing of interculturality, nothing of ecology of knowledge, they were to disseminate scientific knowledge to the workers. The more progressive, left-wing professors, at the end of the afternoon, went to the local unions, went to the cultural spaces of the working-class community, and there they taught science, biology, philosophy, etc., because the workers did not have access to the university. India also has a great tradition of popular education, Gandhian and other distinctions; I have worked with some of them, and they are enormously rich. So, there is a very large panorama. What I think is that all these universities have face-to-face classes, most of them, and they can use computers, but the teaching is not online because the presence, the copresence is fundamental. That is why we cannot discuss this issue without seeing that there is an elephant in the room, which is the virus, which is going to affect all of us in the future.

**Luis Fernando:** Professor here I have two questions and I hope they are not so far from each other. The first is about the conceptual limitation that we sometimes have in our apparatus on this almost dichotomous thinking between left and right, or the subaltern and the hegemonic. Because as you showed, it is sometimes paradoxical that the diversity of the lefts produces these spaces of disputes within the left making it possible that what we understand rather as right allows these initiatives to take place, to be legitimized and to begin to be inside. This makes me concerned because it put under discussion the unity in the social struggles around justice that these initiatives have and that sometimes find their greatest opponent in the same place of the left. And the second thing, regarding the last thing you said, has to do with the importance of languages. All the platforms, all the initiatives that are launched probably start with English, they manage to be in Spanish, but this has a strong impact on the issue of knowledge because of the language in which they are expressed, because of the language that allows them to operate everything from the zoom platform to the texts. These two dimensions can significantly affect the development of these initiatives and their coherence, I think.

**Boaventura:** These are great questions, of course, Luis Fernando. And look, it is going to be published now also in Ecuador, finally, a little book I wrote, in Spanish, in Portuguese, but I never published it in English, it is called *Lefts of the world, unite (Izquierdas del mundo uníos)*. I have the concern, as I do the ecologies of knowledge and epistemologies of the South, I have seen a lot of divergence – we see it in the World Social Forum – between different knowledge of women, indigenous people, peasants, etcetera. And that’s why I founded the popular university of social movements, which we didn’t talk about (Alice-ES, 2020). I have written a lot about the popular university because it is my first attempt to move from pluriversity to subversity, because it is an autonomous popular university, but with a political intention of transformation, of unity among social movements, of unity among knowledge, scientific, academic, popular knowledge. If you go to the university’s website, you will see how we have organized workshops all over the world, more in Latin America, in Africa and in Mumbai, India. Not the same in Europe, we organized only two or three there; we are going to organize more when the pandemic is over. We will organize one next year in the Basque Country, in the Spanish State. The idea is to have one third of academics, two thirds of leaders of different social movements – they cannot be the same because we want interconnection between the movements – for two days. And it is very productive because it is an informal environment, where no one can speak for more than three minutes, five minutes, in each intervention, where there is conviviality, dancing, eating, drinking, in a non-university space. The last one we did, just before the pandemic, was in Caruaru, in the northeast of Brazil, at the Paulo Freire Cultural Center, which is a cultural center of the Landless movement and its settlement in Caruaru. It was nice, two days of reflection on popular struggles today, and it was face-to-face, of course. For me, the experience I have of subversity is this.

It led me later to think that what we tried to do in the popular university with the social movements, we could also do with the left parties. And I looked for how it would be possible to overcome dogmatism, sectarianism, the monoculturality of the lefts, with an intercultural left, and this is the different part and my total failure because it is really very difficult to enter this. Let’s see how the book is received in Ecuador. My position is that the left-right distinction will continue, obviously, and that there is hegemonic and counter-hegemonic knowledge, but it is necessary to reconstruct the concepts, it is necessary to reconstruct, above all, the part of the lefts when the extreme right is gaining so much, and more and more, space. But at the same time, it has created the idea that the governments in Latin America, which were later called ‘progressivist’ – and remember, Luis Fernando, the word progressivism was invented by some left-wing activist intellectuals to say that these governments were not left-wing. I am talking about Evo, I am talking about Rafael Correa. And in some places in Latin America if they call you progressivist it’s almost like calling you fascist. So, it is a total subversion, because I think we are at a point where we should understand what is going on, what I

call in my work the transition theory. We cannot move from a Cartesian model of nature to a Pachamama model suddenly. There must be a historical transition, over decades. This seems problematic to me. Of course, in Colombia the explanation is not necessarily due to the sensitivity of the indigenous people, it is a government that does not want to commit itself too much to the protection of the indigenous people and decided to give some visibility to something that is quite secondary, but it was a good attitude, which I supported and appreciated a lot. Language, this is the problem, Luis Fernando, it is the worst, the most damaging, in my opinion. Now I coined the term 'epistemicide', the death and destruction of knowledges, what we do, many times, in the universities. In other words, there is a lot of destruction of languages, which are dying now. There is a very strong problem, and we will have to face it. In Ecuador, there was a nice tradition of bilingual education and I think it would be interesting, but it has to be controlled by the indigenous communities.

**Tristan:** To conclude, then, a brief reflection from each of us on the future, the prognosis for the coming years and what is needed to move forward with this project of transformation, of building the ecology of knowledge within the universities.

**Luis Fernando:** I would like to reflect on two things in relation to what Tristan is presenting to us. The first thing is that a good part of the decolonization exercise has to do not with decolonizing indigenous peoples, but decolonizing the academic field, we are decolonizing those of us who are more traditional. A significant part of this decolonization also has to do with being critical of the development of the initiatives. Sometimes, as a matter of support, new initiatives become a new dogmatism, when a good part of the decolonization exercise is based on doubt while we are planning the action. I think it is a useful moment; so, to speak, the pandemic crisis invites us to rethink the contents, to rethink the means and to rethink the ends, both in the conventional and in the initiatives, and to be critical and self-critical on this issue. I believe this part, that the academic world has the power to do it, I believe it should not be left it aside and we should not leave it to the state because we run the risk of its instrumentalization. That would be my final reflection.

**Boaventura:** I agree with what Luis Fernando says. I can add that the need, as he says, is decolonize academic knowledge in the institutions because, definitely, in all the universities, since the 16th century – even those that were created later, those that were created by the Spanish people in Latin America – the teaching was Eurocentric knowledge, indigenous knowledge never entered. And that is why they were so colonizing of knowledge, both outside and inside Europe, what I call the epistemologies of the north, they are on one side, and they are on the other side. Therefore, north and south for me is not something geographical, it is epistemic, because there is epistemic south in the north and there is a lot of epistemic north in the south. People who think that there is only science and the epistemologies of the North, who think

that philosophy began with the Greeks and there is nothing of the Egyptians, nothing of Islamic culture, Persian, etc., which are the roots of the diversity of knowledge. So, it seems to me that this is necessary.

Now, for me, the great challenge is that education reflects at every moment the society in which it is and the movements that are in society. We are, in my opinion, in a moment of disempowerment, a moment of historical regression. In some way, the growth of the extreme right in Europe, in the world, is a sign of this disempowering regression. And this obviously is going to have an impact on education. It is quite possible that what we have done with difficulty so far will be even more difficult in the future, especially in this context of an intermittent pandemic. You know, especially in my work, as in the last book *The End of the Cognitive Empire (El fin del imperio cognitivo)*, I make this very clear, that it makes no sense to decolonize the university as if colonialism were the only evil in our society. Our societies are capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal; there are three axes of domination and, therefore, in order to decolonize I need to demercantilize the society, depatriarchalize the society. And you see that violence against young Black people is on the rise, everywhere. In Europe, we also have violence against immigrants, against Muslims. Violence against women is increasing. Capitalism is more and more aggressive for nature and for the workers. More and more, all this precarious work, telework, has fewer and fewer rights. There is a historical regression. I continue, obviously, as a public and re-guard intellectual, I never give up and I am a tragic optimist, I mean, I still think there is hope, but the difficulties are enormous because this pandemic... Look, for example, at the streets. I think if we want to create a decolonizing movement, students have to meet on university campuses, people have to protest in the streets. Who is protesting in the streets today, in the world? The extreme right, right-wing people in some countries, look at the United States, look at Brazil. Left-wingers are afraid of the pandemic, of the virus. The extreme right, because it is a higher class many times, seems not to be afraid. A little crazy, but that's the way it is.

I think that we are going to enter a process where social protest can be brutally repressed and therefore social conquests can be defeated and all these years we had can be lost, although never definitively. That is why we will have to do what I call the sociology of emergencies, that is, everything that in our countries emerges as interesting, new, what I often call the seed-ruins. These things were in ruins and suddenly you see a seed emerging, in this community, a university, an educational initiative ... We must expand it; we must disseminate it. It is the responsibility of educators committed to a more just society.

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