

## REVIEW

### **The end of the cognitive empire: the affirmation of epistemologies of the South**

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... a Magnanimous and charismatic embrace is an interrelation, promising understanding and creation of possible worlds. (Mário Vitória, 2015)

November 15, 2020, marked the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of teacher and poet Boaventura de Souza Santos. Author of an extensive and intense work, this influential sociologist, doctor in Sociology of Law, is a retired professor at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra, where he created the Center for Social Studies (CES), a prestigious research center of which he is director emeritus and Distinguished Legal Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Law. Boaventura also acts as the scientific coordinator of the Permanent Observatory of Portuguese Justice.

Before starting to review the text itself, some details of the book **The End of the Cognitive Empire** deserve to be highlighted. For example, the elements that compose its cover. Starting with the title, in which Boaventura announces the end of the cognitive empire and the affirmation of the epistemologies of the South. Here begin some concerns that support the reflection on which authority and on what domain human knowledge would be interpreted. Perhaps it is possible to continue to question how the theories of knowledge that are asserting themselves in the perspective of the epistemologies of the South have been produced and validated.

Still on the cover elements, two bodies without heads can be seen in Mário Vitória's painting, called Magnanim@s, from 2015. Both embrace each other under a heart-shaped object, but visually similar to a large rock split into two parts: one external, representing a mountain, and another internal,

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representing terrestrial magma. The block seems to be trying to detach itself, but the upward movement is being prevented by lines that simulate cables through which other bodies are balanced by holding support bars. According to Mário Vitória, “a really magnanimous ‘Hug’ is one that looks at the 36+ million slaves that we currently have in the world”. From this explanation, it is allowed to submerge and absorb the context of affirmation of the epistemologies of the South that Magnanim@s is capable of inspiring.

In **The End of the Cognitive Empire**, Boaventura describes the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical contexts on which the epistemologies of the South are based, a concept elaborated by the author, and which challenges the domain of Eurocentric thought. In the book’s introduction, when developing the concept of what the epistemologies of the South would be, Boaventura is referring

to the production and validation of knowledge anchored in the resistance experiences of all social groups that have been systematically victims of the injustice, oppression and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy (SANTOS, 2019, p. 17).

Thus, for the author, these experiences are found within the scope of the anti-imperial South, an epistemological and non-geographic South, whose knowledge originates in social and political struggles and cannot be separated from them.

Originated in struggles and social movements, this knowledge comes from the experiences of marginalized peoples who actively resist capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, establishing alternative ways of political mobilization and activism. These forms of knowledge, generally discredited, erased and ignored by the dominant cultures of the global North, represent the possibility of a change that guarantees global cognitive justice.

For Boaventura, this epistemological change directly affects oppressed social groups in the sense of establishing a representation of the world according to their own terms, seeking transformation following their own aspirations. At the same time, the author recovers the idea that there are potential alternatives for an epistemological change and recognizes that the struggles against oppression continue to take place in the world. For this, he argues that the world’s transformation and its constant reinterpretation are collective tasks that happen simultaneously and cannot be separated.

In summary, the knowledges and practices rescued by the epistemologies of the South are intrinsic to the practices of resistance and oppression, and knowledges and practices are words that must be understood as synonymous. Another perspective that Boaventura highlights in order to understand what the epistemologies of the South refer to, is in avoiding the belief in the uniqueness of an epistemology of the North and another of the South, as well as in a kind of duality between

them. His arguments indicate that there is no intention to replace epistemologies, nor to place the South in North's place, because "the question is not to erase the differences between north and south, but to erase the hierarchies of power that inhabit them" (SANTOS, 2019, p. 26).

From this interpretation a division of the world into North and South derives from imaginary lines, generating a kind of modern Western epistemic model, classified by the author as an abyssal thought. In this book, Boaventura Souza Santos reveals that experiences, knowledges and social actors are demarcated by an abyssal line that has been suppressing, silencing and marginalizing those knowledges that are on the other side of the line and that do not exist due to the knowledges that is on that side line. According to Santos (2019, p. 28), "especialmente quando resistem às exclusões causadas pelo capitalismo, colonialismo e patriarado".

The problems, questions and epistemological, conceptual, and analytical challenges raised in this book were separated and organized by Boaventura in three parts. In the first, which introduces the post-abyssal epistemologies, he describes the bases of the epistemologies of the South and the problems that arise when confronting the epistemologies of the South with those of the North. In the second part, described as the post-abyssal methodologies, the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual reconstructions resulting from the research carried out in line with the epistemologies of the South are dealt with. Finally, the third part presents the post-abyssal pedagogies that relate to the pedagogical challenges posed by the epistemologies of the South.

To compose the first part of the book, an introduction to post-abyssal epistemologies, Boaventura uses five chapters. In the first, the main instruments of the epistemologies of the South are described by means of key concepts. In this item, the author addresses the abyssal line and the various types of social exclusion created by it, distinguishing between abyssal and non-abyssal exclusions, the sociology of absences and emergencies, the ecologies of knowledge and intercultural translation, the craftsmanship of practices, all understood as paths to the epistemologies of the South.

The answers given to the objections normally raised by Northern epistemologies are dealt with in Chapter 2, based on the concepts of science, relativism, and objectivity. In chapter 3, the questions of knowledge's authorship and written / oral knowledge are analyzed, as well as the epistemological questions specific to the epistemologies of the South. The concepts of struggle and experience, central to the knowledge of the epistemologies of the South, are discussed in chapter 4. Chapter 5 follows, in which Boaventura supports the corporeality or corporeity of knowledge, moving away from the mind / body distinction and advancing the understanding of incorporated knowledge. In this chapter, the embodiment of knowledge can be understood through the dying body, the suffering body, and the joyous body, three experiences of embodiment especially related to the epistemologies of the South. Finally, the author closes this part of the book by discussing the idea of warming up of reason, as he

called the moment when reasons and emotions meet and mobilize the will and the ability to fight against domination and oppression.

In the middle part of the book, four chapters were reserved for Boaventura to review the post-abyssal methodologies, from researches carried out. The main questions regarding the use of research methodologies, in line with the epistemologies of the South and aimed at investigating social struggles, are introduced in chapter 6. In it, the author supports the need to decolonize the social sciences, seeking to use non-extractive methodologies based on subject-subject relations and not subject-object relations. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 complement each other and highlight the existential context in which the guiding methodologies of post-abyssal research must be put into practice, as well as the sensory and emotional dimensions of post-abyssal research and, finally, the forms of ‘desmonumentalização’ of written knowledge.

Boaventura addresses the post-abyssal pedagogies and the pedagogical implications of the epistemologies of the South in the third and last part of his book. Chapter 10 highlights the ways in which pedagogies can contribute to producing and reinforcing articulations between struggles and social movements, thus building counter-hegemonic globalization, one of the main objectives of the epistemologies of the South. In Chapter 11, the author highlights the pedagogy of the oppressed, by Paulo Freire, and the participatory action-research, by Orlando Fals Borda, leaving the challenges and tasks that imply the decolonization of the western or westernized university to be discussed in the next chapter. In this way, Boaventura discusses the fundamental role of popular education and some of the paths through which the university can flourish as ‘pluriversidade’ and ‘subversidade’.

Boaventura's book establishes fundamental contributions to the production of knowledge in accordance with the epistemologies of the South, which are constituted through a wide panorama of knowledge, methodologies, and post-abyssal pedagogies. Its main objective is to lead the resistance against injustice, exclusion, and discrimination that the global, capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal north imposes on the global south.

Finally, reinforcing Santos' premise (2019, p. 411) that “the credibility of any form of knowledge will be assessed according to its contribution to the reinforcement of resistance and the prevention of resignation”, follows an indication that rescues and values social experiences in enabling ways, that is, “in ways that reinforce the struggles against the three main modern forms of domination: capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy”.

Therefore, closing this review, two complementary classes are suggested, whose themes are part of this book, taught by Boaventura at the Center for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, entitled “Post-abyssal methodologies: struggle, experience, body and authorship” and “Post-abyssal pedagogies: Epistemologies of the South and the defense of the University”.



## Reference

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