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Knowledge and emancipation

From epistemic injustice to digital and epistemic sovereignty in Latin America

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Abstract

This essay explores Latin America's struggle for epistemic independence against dominant Global North informational flows in science and technology. It addresses the impact of knowledge production domination on the region, including epistemic injustice and academic imperialism, proposing strategies for bolstering science through epistemic sovereignty. It emphasizes higher education's pivotal role in a nation's sovereignty by fostering knowledge production, global citizenship, and intellectual leadership. However, in today's multipolar world, universities in less developed countries often serve as conduits for Global North knowledge, perpetuating their agendas. The consolidation of digital environments and globalization further exacerbates this issue, leading to an anglophone bias in scientific knowledge production, diminishing the visibility and relevance of Latin American scientific contributions—a form of epistemic injustice. The essay contextualizes the concept of epistemic sovereignty, highlighting ongoing resistance efforts in Latin American higher education against knowledge production dominance and instances of epistemic injustice.

Keywords: Epistemic Sovereignty; Epistemic Injustice; Latin America and the Caribbean; Higher Education; Digitalization

1. Introduction

The global hierarchy between North and South, center and periphery, is a central theme in academia that directs efforts towards understanding and - sometimes - overcoming such limitations. This hierarchy is also sustained by dynamics of epistemic violence, injustice, and subordination, where access to information is a privilege and a means of exercising power. Some schools of thought have been discussing these global power dynamics in the global knowledge ecosystem for some decades now. This is how the authors Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses (2010) conceptualize it, in the construction of their theory on the Epistemologies of the South, according to which the production of global knowledge eliminated the cultural and political context of the production and reproduction of knowledge from epistemological reflection. For the authors, colonialism is an epistemological domination, “an extremely unequal relationship of knowledge-power that led to the suppression of many forms of knowledge typical

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of colonized peoples and nations, relegating many other types of knowledge to a space of subalternity" (Santos; Meneses, 2010, p.19).

The approach that differentiates the relationship between the Global South and North, understands that the model of modern Western thought, which divides the world into North and South, has created not only a polarization, a characterization of the scientific order between colonizers and colonized, in the cultural and scientific sphere , but it also reinforced stereotypes and imaginaries that what was below the Equator were countries of low development, poverty, exotic and primitive knowledge (Oliveira, Bomfim, 2023). This paradigm leads to the denial of the existence and relevance of the other side of the abyssal line that divides the two poles (Santos, 2007) and promotes critical frontier thinking. Critical border thinking represents an epistemic response by subaltern groups to the Eurocentric project of modernity. Instead of rejecting modernity to retreat into a fundamentalist absolutism, border epistemologies absorb or redefine the emancipatory discourse of modernity based on the worldviews and forms of knowledge of subaltern groups, located on the oppressed and exploited side of the colonial difference (Grofoguel, 2008). Therefore, this theoretical line seeks to recognize and value knowledge that has been historically disregarded, promoting epistemological plurality (Santos; Meneses, 2010). Frontier thinking seeks to break down these divisions, valuing and integrating subaltern and local perspectives in the production of knowledge. This approach promotes a more pluralistic and equitable understanding of different ways of knowing, challenging the centrality of Western knowledge in academia and society.

Likewise, intellectuals from the Global South have been raising awareness of these issues since the 1960s. For example, Syed Alatas (2000, 2003) introduced the concept of academic imperialism and captive minds, which dialogues with the perspective arising from the Latin America and the Caribbean, on dependency theory as crucial in the formation of Latin American critical thought. This theory is a critical analysis of the processes that perpetuate epistemic and economic underdevelopment in opposition to the developmental vision of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC). Most intellectual movements and currents of thought that identified with studies on dependency theory sought to denounce epistemic violence and injustice against marginalized peoples. Our objective will be, throughout this article, to understand to what extent the idea of the scenario of political-economic domination, highlighted by Dependency Theory, in dialogue with the perspective of dividing the world between north and south, brings consequences in the production of knowledge, such as academic imperialism that describes the scientific order, both in the cultural and scientific spheres, between those who colonized and those who were colonized, resulting in a perspective of epistemic injustice at a continental level, which it is up to us, in the present text, to consider, at the as a way of pointing out paths towards epistemic sovereignty. Our objective is to reflect on the mechanisms that promote the emancipation of the production of knowledge and Latin American culture.

Like other marginalized regions in the global knowledge ecosystem, Latin America has emerged as a critical exponent for denouncing epistemic injustices in global academic circuits. Despite a trajectory that dates back to decades of resistance and offering critical thinking about the global ecosystem, the 1990s were marked by a rupture and decline in this thinking in which Latin America was one of the prominent exponents. During the 1990s, globalization and the spread of neoliberalism in academic circles (Albuquerque and Lycarião, 2018) led to a decline in the centrality of the Latin American position as one of the critical central roles. A situation that was strengthened by the emergence of closed circuits of prestigious scientific publication, the use of international rankings to evaluate universities and the dominance of the English language in the production of science and technology (Albuquerque and Oliveira, 2021). These developments can be seen as the result of epistemic injustice, which involves the systematic exclusion or limitations imposed on the creation, dissemination, and preservation of knowledge (Fricker, 2007). This notion is related to the idea that certain groups or individuals face disadvantages and discrimination in accessing knowledge and participating in epistemic processes, such as production, dissemination, and validation of knowledge (Fricker, 2007; Bakhuni, Abimbola, 2021).

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As a form of resistance, alternative non-dominant circuits of excellence were established in the region during the 1990s, such as the Scielo, Latindex and Redalyc databases (Beigel, 2017; Vessuri, Guedon and Cetto, 2016; Oliveira et al, 2021). Despite the importance of these institutional initiatives, scientific and technological dependence on international journals and commercial data repositories has perpetuated epistemic asymmetries in access to information technology. The Anglophone model of knowledge circulation dominated as the only means of international knowledge communication (Goggin and Mcclelland, 2010; Jenkins, 2018; Buckner, 2019). The growth of universities in Latin America without the development of their own techno-informational infrastructures resulted in dependence on technological solutions offered by transnational companies in the digital economy (Torres and Schugurensky, 2002). This dependence on transnational corporations for digital and scientific solutions has also perpetuated epistemic violence and injustice, particularly in the dimensions of knowledge, language, and technology.

In addition to dependence on transnational institutions, we also see the growth of influence of other agents in the context of higher education in Latin America: interstitial educational institutions, playing a role in the production of qualified knowledge and in the definition of public policies (Tognato, 2018). Interstitial institutions refer to entities or structures that occupy a position between different social or institutional spheres, performing functions that transcend a specific sphere (Egholm, 2023). These institutions play a crucial role in the interaction and mediation between distinct spheres of society, such as the State, the market, and the civil sphere (Olave, 2018) Its fundamental characteristic is to act as connectors or regulators that cross borders, acting as overlapping spaces and performing functions of both the civil sphere and other social spheres, simultaneously (Khosrokhavar, 2019). These institutions can take different forms and purposes, from regulatory entities to training spaces that socialize citizens in practices and values associated with the civil sphere. Using a set of examples from Latin American universities, Tognato (2018, p. 149) shows that interstitial institutions can be housed within 'training' institutions and 'occupy almost the entire institutional space of the university'. Mainly, they are philanthropic organizations that, under a rhetoric of common good, offer tax-exempt donations and have few regulatory mechanisms in relation to epistemic institutions. The latter are legitimized to offer qualified information capable of influencing the public sphere in a country. Thus, interstitial institutions as donors now have the power to influence a public debate with bills and proposals. These institutions play a significant role in filling gaps in education and, at the same time, bring market values and strategies to the higher education process, directly affecting scientific production in Latin America.

The transformation of higher education over the last few decades, following economic and financial globalization, brings it increasingly closer to the market, creating a new dynamic in the production of knowledge.

To analyze and understand this context, discussions about epistemic sovereignty are fundamental. Reversing the situation requires a rearrangement of multiple stakeholders and a reconsideration of values, policies, production processes and adoption of knowledge (Beigel, 2013; Oliveira, 2021). This involves the recovery of values, social experiences, production, collaboration and sharing of knowledge by marginalized actors, such as indigenous, black, and feminist knowledge, in order to face contemporary epistemological challenges. In this context of growth in digital epistemic sovereignty movements in Latin America, initiatives such as data repositories, scientific circuits of excellence and indigenous multilingual platforms have emerged.

While the concept of epistemic injustice is valuable as an analytical framework for identifying and addressing testimonial and hermeneutic violence, it may not fully capture the struggles and resistance of those who experience such violence and actively engage in the construction of their own forms of knowledge. It is in this sense that the concept of epistemic sovereignty is presented in this essay. Epistemic sovereignty can be understood as the ability of a group or individual to exercise control and autonomy over their own epistemic processes, without being subject to external forms of domination or oppression. These concepts are interconnected, since epistemic injustice often results in a reduction in

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the epistemic sovereignty of certain groups or individuals. When these groups are systematically excluded or marginalized from the processes of knowledge production and dissemination, their ability to exercise autonomy and control over their own knowledge is compromised.

The notion of epistemic sovereignty can also be related to debates about the validation of knowledge produced in different cultural, geographic, or social contexts. Groups or individuals who possess knowledge situated from a specific perspective can claim their epistemic sovereignty, asserting their ability to produce legitimate knowledge from their own experiences and cultural contexts, in contrast to externally imposed knowledge. In this sense, epistemic injustice can occur when this knowledge is disregarded, diminished, or devalued by hegemonic power structures, compromising the epistemic sovereignty of these groups or individuals. Thus, the notion of epistemic injustice and epistemic sovereignty are intertwined, with epistemic injustice often resulting in the reduction of the epistemic sovereignty of certain groups or individuals, and the claim to epistemic sovereignty being a possible response to epistemic injustice.

In the fight against epistemic injustice in Latin America, the connection between 'episteme' and politics is essential. In this context, we observe a scenario where knowledge is transmitted on one side, while knowledge is forged on the other. According to this perspective, all knowledge producers operate from a 'place' or 'locus', consciously or unconsciously. This notion of 'place' encompasses two fundamental meanings: the epistemic, referring to the function of receiver and producer of knowledge, and the political, related to practice in the context of social dynamics. The union between the epistemic and the political aims to transform the oppressive reality into a liberating praxis, as well as the restoration of justice in epistemologies that have been marginalized by dominant thought. Furthermore, the second crucial element of this thought lies in the need for deep roots and constant reference in the knowledge of the original and Afro-descendant cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean (Wisly, 2023).

The essay aims to discuss why the notion of epistemic sovereignty is important and to understand the forces and disputes in the global ecosystem of higher education, in which Latin America has been fighting for its survival in the face of epistemic injustices propagated by the global forces that dominate the fields. of science, technology, innovation, and education. To this end, it presents the concept of epistemic sovereignty in a historical panorama to show the continuous resistance movements in Latin America against the dominance of knowledge production spaces, with a focus on higher education.

2. Towards a concept of epistemic sovereignty

Despite a long history of discussions about epistemic violence and academic imperialism (Alatas, 1969; Castro-Gomes, Martin, 2002; Alatas, 2003), the notion of epistemic sovereignty is recent. One of the first discussions dates back to the work of Karen Litfin in 1999, in which she discusses the impact of Earth detection satellites on the ability of a State to control information about processes and resources within its own territory, which is called “sovereignty”. epistemic”. Litfin highlights the importance of considering the role of knowledge and information in shaping and modifying practices of sovereignty, particularly in the era of the proliferation of information technologies.

Although the concept of epistemic injustice is valuable as an analytical framework to identify and address testimonial and hermeneutic violence (Fricker, 2014), it may not fully capture the struggles and resistance of those experiencing such violence and actively engaging in constructing their own forms of knowledge. It's in this sense that the concept of epistemic sovereignty is presented in this essay. Epistemic sovereignty can be understood as the ability of a group or individual to exert control and autonomy over their own epistemic processes without being subject to external forms of domination or oppression. These concepts are interconnected since epistemic injustice often results in a reduction of epistemic sovereignty for certain groups or individuals. When these groups are systematically excluded or marginalized from knowledge production and dissemination processes, their ability to exercise autonomy and control over their knowledge is compromised.

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According to Litfin (1999), knowledge and sovereignty are closely related concepts, as both are concerned with delineating authority and exercising control in the world. Science and technology, like the state, are emblematic of modernity and play a significant role in shaping the global landscape. The intersection of these two trends, which she calls the "epistemic dimension of sovereignty," is particularly relevant for understanding contemporary world politics. This neglected dimension of sovereignty focuses on control and access to the production and dissemination of information and knowledge.

Epistemic sovereignty often serves as an heir to traditional notions of sovereignty, such as state autonomy and authority within a territorial jurisdiction. In this geopolitical and territorial perspective, debates about the dynamics of power and domination propagated and based in nation-states are an intrinsic part of the debate. Notions such as academic imperialism were fundamental as a way of debating power structures in the global scientific ecosystem manifested predominantly in higher education. In fact, the character of political, economic, and cultural domination that the concept of imperialism concentrates on also has consequences that are felt in the production of knowledge. In Pierre Bourdieu (1999) we reinforce the idea of academic imperialism arising from Alatas (1999) as the process of cultural domination, not limited to the political-economic aspect, but in a broad historical process of control and power that subjugates, protects, assigns external standards and inferiorizes social practices, beliefs, cultures and knowledge outside the American axis, or, once again returning to Alatas (1969) the broad perspective of exploration and control, subjugating the production of knowledge of populations, through control or guardianship. Such thoughts corroborate the perspective of epistemic sovereignty on which we conducted the present study.

In sociological thought, a turn (later called the decolonial turn) occurred in the debate, especially between the 1980s and 1990s. Decolonial thinking, used mainly by the Latin American movement, aims to free the production of knowledge from the Eurocentric episteme. Criticizing the supposed universality attributed to Western knowledge and the domination of Western culture, decolonial perspectives see this hegemony as the basis of Western colonialism. These movements reflected the desire of Latin American thought to have its own voice and assert its own identity. After that, the discussion about the political and territorial nature of state control over the epistemic dimensions of sovereignty migrated to a social subversion aspect, in which asymmetries, interdependencies and epistemologies based on identities are proposed, especially from southern and non-western perspectives (Nunes, 2009; Garcia, 2016).

Both the notion of epistemic sovereignty and decolonialism are related in terms of challenging and subverting dominant power and knowledge structures. The rapprochement between epistemic sovereignty and decolonialism lies in the critique and rejection of hegemonic epistemologies and knowledge systems that were imposed through colonial domination. However, the two concepts have subtle differences in their approaches and approaches. While epistemic sovereignty refers to control, access to information and autonomy and authority over one's own knowledge, decolonialism can be understood as a theoretical and political movement that seeks to denounce colonial power structures and their persistent consequences in contemporary society. It is often used in the context of identity knowledge and cultural practices, to emphasize the importance of respecting and preserving the knowledge systems of marginalized communities.

The choice in this essay to adopt an approach to epistemic sovereignty resides in the search for a reversal of the situation of domination through the recovery of spaces of production and knowledge. The recovery of epistemic sovereignty is an ongoing task, involving multiple spheres. Reversing the exposed situation requires understanding the structural limits of the global system, a rearrangement of multiple stakeholders with a review of values, policies, production processes and adoption of knowledge, according to Beigel (2014) and Oliveira (2021), recovering epistemic sovereignty in region.

Traditionally, the concept of sovereignty concerns the ability of a country to exercise power within its territory (Magalhães Bambirra, 2000). However, it is necessary to observe the developments of this notion in global environments marked by disputes and influences from political, institutional, economic, and social actors. In particular, digitalization and the rise of transnational digital platform companies pose

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challenges to national information sovereignty policies in the most diverse aspects. For example, in the case of scientific information, there is a dispute between international oligarchies for the hegemonic pole of knowledge production. The current condition in which each country finds itself is related to historical imbalances in the visibility, circulation and credibility of information produced in each dimension of collective life. The way in which each State prepares to plan its informational sovereignty in a context in which social, political, and economic relations are anchored in the production of digital information is increasingly strategic from the point of view of maintaining independence.

The scientific and higher education system is a central element for a solid project of national sovereignty, as it deals with the production of knowledge and the formation of intellectual elites. In the current multipolar system, universities in peripheral countries often become mere channels for transmitting knowledge produced in countries of the Global North and reproducing agendas. This condition influences the public debate about how nations should deal with information, especially when it comes to regulatory aspects. Therefore, the recovery of epistemic sovereignty considers the university as an object and protagonist, as it can potentially promote debate on the production, circulation, and legitimization of science in the context of global asymmetries in production and provide elements to guarantee information sovereignty. The recognition and investigation of the infrastructure and asymmetry of the scientific system on a global scale makes it possible to think about the relationship patterns between peripheral and central institutions, as well as to develop mechanisms for the emergence of alternative academic circuits, contributing to the strengthening of the national sovereignty of the point from a scientific point of view.

3. Higher education in Latin America as a space of independence and oligarchic elites

The development of higher education in Latin America was not uniform across the continent. Despite the tradition of breaking with religious education models, higher education institutions in Latin America differ from those in Europe. These institutions were largely created or significantly transformed following the independence movements of the early 19th century, as part of the political plan to transform former colonies into nation-states and as a reaction to the colonial legacy. However, this independence was not fully realized.

The structure of knowledge and education in Latin American universities has been influenced by the legacy of colonialism and dependence on European universities. European-style education was considered essential to the development of the higher education system in the region and there was a belief that modernized European institutions would bring advanced knowledge to Latin America. This type of belief pressured local university systems to improve their quality and incorporate the most modern technology in Europe. These dependency links could consist of the tradition of completing studies at European universities, and the arrival of professors to teach at local universities (Schwartzman, 1996). However, this resulted in a relationship of dependence that persisted even after the independence movements at the beginning of the 19th century.

Despite efforts to create independence from colonial rule, much of the knowledge and training in Latin American universities maintained a dependent relationship with the former colonies. There was a dominant belief in the need to import advanced knowledge from Europe and for European institutions to benefit the development of higher education in Latin America. As a result, universities in Latin America were built to serve the interests of their own elites, often guided by public authorities and European universities, and focused on providing training for professional elites in the areas of science, engineering, medicine, and law. As Schwartzman (1996, p. 29) points out, “we should teach more natural sciences than philosophy; engineering, enthroned in France as the great profession of modern states, began to compete for primacy with medicine and law among the professions of the elites”. In other words, universities in Latin America were established during political independence from colonial powers, but they mainly served the interests of local oligarchic elites.

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Latin American universities were guided by the idea of building and modernizing the nation-state. Its close relationship with political power resulted in intense politicization of students and teachers, generating confrontations and tensions between the government and academic elites for university autonomy and serving as a space for the formation of political leadership (Schwartzman, 1996; Monteiro, 2009; Codato, 2015; Albalá, 2016). The new knowledge produced by higher education in Latin America was mainly taken advantage of by a small and privileged elite, using it as an instrument to gain social and political leadership positions. These university-educated individuals were part of an intelligentsia (especially in higher education) that leveraged the symbolic value of science and technology to assert their social and political leadership. This new experience was often the result of ancient local aristocracies and the state-controlled nature of Latin American universities, combined with a modernization project, led to a focus on economic development and, at the same time, responding to the demands of unequal societies (Torres, 2002; Schwartzman, 2007, Miceli, 2016; Whitehead, 2022)

This statement can be exemplified from the comparative analysis of the author José Vieira de Souza (2023), among the recommendations regarding higher education in Latin America, coming from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and OECD.

In this way, the OECD produces and circulates documents on higher education, based on a guiding standard of neoliberal reforms that seek to conceive it as a commodity and that guide multilaterality by the market paradigm, and not by the paradigm of society's demand. Recommendations from the OECD and the World Bank are in terms of paradigms for formulating educational systems and cross public policies, in order to identify indicators that privilege the economic context, to the detriment of the social one. The 2017 report "A fair adjustment - Analysis of the efficiency and equity of public spending in Brazil" highlights that the educational system is expensive and inefficient, questioning the constitutional obligation to allocate 25% of municipal tax revenues to education, arguing that this leads to disproportionate spending, without necessarily improving learning (BANCO MUNDIAL, 2017). Furthermore, the report notes that factors such as a low student-teacher ratio, the quality of teachers and high failure rates contribute to so-called "inefficiencies" in the educational system Brazilian. These findings, together with the OECD/PISA 2018 report, indicate the need for substantial reforms to improve the quality and efficiency of education in Brazil and achieve standards of excellence on the global stage. Such recommendations, which influence public and private investment policy at national and global levels, having as indicative, more representative, an increase in the participation of the private sector in the provision of educational services (Thiengo, 2019 in Souza, 2023) and as an example of such affirmation of the Brazilian case. According to Souza, in 2020 - despite the increase in students at higher education in the Latin context, from 11 million students in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the region in 2000 to almost 29 million in 2020 (UIS, 2021) the access rate to Brazilian higher education was only 37.4%. This indicator confirms the affirmation of an elite Latino university education.

In the midst of this configuration of higher education in Latin America as a space for the formation of political and mainly economic elites, a fundamental movement emerged both for Latin American thought and for its policies that were later developed: Dependency Theory. Dependency theory was opposed to the views established by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the conventional positions of European Marxism (Machado, 1999; Grosfogel, 2018; Dos Santos, 2020). It was a Marxist theoretical formulation developed by intellectuals such as Ruy Mauro Marini, André Gunder Frank, Theotonio dos Santos, Vania Bambirra, Orlando Caputo, Roberto Pizarro and others, which criticizes the processes of reproduction of underdevelopment on the periphery of global capitalism, contrasting with the position conventions of communist parties and the vision of ECLAC. This theory gained prominence in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, as it became clear that economic development did not follow a linear path. Dependency theory argues that the characterization of countries as “underdeveloped” arises from the dependency relationship between “central” and “peripheral” countries, expressing the subordination of peripheral countries to the development of central countries,

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and defends the liberation from dependence as a means of overcoming underdevelopment, which may involve breaking with the capitalist system itself (dos Santos, 2000; Machado, 1999; Grofoguel, 2018).

Dependency theory emphasizes that the dependence of underdeveloped countries is not just a result of their agrarian-export condition or pre-capitalist legacies, but rather the pattern of international division of labor in modern capitalism, imposed by imperialism. This theory introduces the concept of sub-imperialism, which refers to the expansion of national capital over neighboring economies, within the limits imposed by global monopoly capital (Marini, 2000). Technological dependence is a significant factor in this movement of sub-imperialism, since the bourgeoisie of dependent countries do not have the necessary strength to compete globally on their own. Despite partially rivaling the central country, the sub-imperialist country does not free itself from dependence, serving as a platform for the intermediation of capital and surplus value between the central country and peripheral countries. According to dependency theory, the characterization of countries as "backward" arises from the dependency relationship between the "central" capitalist countries of the world and the "peripheral" countries. "Core" countries are at the center of the world economy, dominating the flow of information, science, technology, and other aspects, while "peripheral" countries experience a smaller scale of development in these areas and have limited interactions with the center (Wallerstein, 2003). Intellectuals from Latin American universities, influenced by this line of thought, believed that it was necessary to transform the conditions of exploitation that their countries face in the face of dominant capitalist powers (Beigel, Patel, 2010).

Latin American intellectuals of Dependency Theory saw the polarization between center and periphery as inherent to the diffusion of capital and believed that the concentration of wealth implied a one-way path to overcoming underdevelopment. Breaking dependence on central countries would require breaking with dependence, not just the modernization and industrialization of the economy, and may even require breaking with capitalism itself (Beigel, 2006). The conclusion of dependency theory is that alignment with the national bourgeoisies of dependent countries is counterproductive for the Latin American proletariat, and that the formation of class alliances between the urban proletariat, the middle classes and the peasantry within these countries is more viable. This is a condition of epistemic sovereignty. However, implementing these changes within the university was a challenge due to the fact that it has historically been a space for the formation of oligarchic and political elites. It was only decades after the emergence of the intellectual movement of Dependency Theory that the university began to open itself to the peasantry and urban proletariat through policies designed to increase access to higher education. Even today, the reconfiguration of the university as an inclusive space continues to face numerous challenges.

4. Loss of epistemic sovereignty: from dependency theories to dependencies of international organizations

The emergence of military regimes in certain Latin American countries marked the beginning of the 1964 coup, resulting in the expulsion of left-wing intellectuals from universities and their removal from positions. Many of them sought refuge in Chile, which was then governed by a progressive regime under President Salvador Allende, but were forced into exile again after the Chilean coup in 1973. Dependency Theory faced a crisis after that, being heavily criticized for its alleged influence on the Chilean government of Salvador Allende. Critics argued that it failed to adapt to changes brought about by the consolidation of neoliberalism in Latin America in the 1980s and globalization in the 1990s. Academic and political debate during this period was dominated by macroeconomic perspectives, which limited discussions about development. The rise of authoritarian governments in many countries also led to the group's dispersion and persecution, which made it difficult to disseminate their ideas. Most of these intellectuals moved to Mexico, while others went to Europe, leading to the group's dispersion and making it difficult to maintain its theoretical unity. Furthermore, the early expulsion of the founders by military dictatorships in some countries, together with the limited availability of works in Portuguese and the

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increasing transformation of English-language scientific production circuits after the 1980s, also contributed to the decline in popularity of the theory.

During the resistance to dictatorial regimes in Latin America and the struggle to break with the system of subordination and dependence on central countries, a process of consolidation of social sciences in the region began. A significant part of this consolidation was due to the support of international financial institutions, such as the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, which provided funding for scientific activities, universities, and research institutes due to the growing importance and need for science and technology for development global. However, these institutions also supported non-governmental organizations, local participatory groups and were particularly concerned with addressing social realities (Calandra, 2011; Cueto, 1994).

The Ford Foundation has played a significant role in distributing resources across numerous fields and countries in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Its focus on supporting public administration has been a major priority. The Foundation also actively supported social movements that opposed authoritarian regimes, funding research programs on local social movements, as well as programs related to sustainable development, public health, educational reform, ethnic and racial issues, inequalities, and biodiversity. Overall, the Ford Foundation supports programs led by local communities and works to promote public policies (Faria, Costa, 2006).

The Rockefeller Foundation, after the Second World War, began to support physical, chemical, and natural sciences, mainly in the area of agriculture. However, during dictatorial regimes in Latin America, the foundation had a conservative political stance on processes of social change, promoting population control and planning centers and programs, such as the Population Council, and evaluating projects influenced by political and ideological values (Faria, Costa, 2006).

According to Hélio Jaguaribe (1967), the training of intellectuals in central countries, especially in the United States, was highly sought after. Foundations, such as the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, were responsible for determining the areas that received funding, but the receiving country had the freedom to choose the specific projects (Marino, 2001). However, most of these countries were under dictatorial regimes, as is the case in Argentina, Colombia, Chile, and Brazil, or in the midst of social revolution, as is the case in Mexico. Part of this investment was related to resistance to communist expansion, in line with US government policy. This is evident in the support given by foundations for the consolidation of social research programs in these countries, such as the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP) in Brazil, the institution responsible for training a group of intellectuals in Dependency Theory. Although commercial interests and humanitarian activities were not mutually exclusive, North American scientific institutions sought to adapt their research and activities to suit the unique themes and realities of each foreign country. As reported by Faria and da Costa (2006), fruitful institutional partnerships do not exclude conflicts or symbolic struggles. Although there have been lasting and positive effects of the actions of American foundations, focused mainly on scientific and technological capacity building in developing countries, it is important to note that there was a “subtle form of control” in the relationship between the US government and the directors of American foundations. and the scientific community of the beneficiary countries, as the curators determined the areas that would be supported and, consequently, the broader agenda of themes and objects.

After the introduction of agendas established by philanthropic and financial foundations such as the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, science based on neoliberal perspectives has been expanding globally. This neoliberal approach to science has been widespread since the 1990s, imposing a conservative worldview from North American think tanks to Latin American countries. This model is presented as inherent to academic capitalism, where competition for resources and the generation of scientific products are considered paramount, rewarding successful intellectuals with an increasing share of the profits from academic ventures. According to Lander's (2008) interpretation, science and academic research have not escaped the influences of the mercantile culture present in the market and in state and private institutions. The transformations that have occurred on the planet in the last three decades as a

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result of the advance of neoliberalism that began during the Reagan and Thatcher governments have profoundly affected the modes and processes of knowledge production in contemporary societies, including Latin America. Science and university research have been impacted by the mercantile logic that has been increasingly expanding in different areas of collective life (Lander 2008; Pereira dos Santos, 2022).

Today, Latin America faces challenges in its specialization system, as interstitial institutions, such as financial foundations and think tanks, participate in the public sphere and influence public policy. As these organizations gain strength, they aim to shape public opinion and play a role in areas such as education, politics, environment, health, and communication. This has led to a decline in the symbolic space of academia as universities face disinvestment from the State, which in Brazil, in 2022 alone, amounts to around 30% of the planned budget (Andifes, 2022), making them more dependent on investment private and philanthropic nature of these interstitial institutions, leading to the alignment of academic research with the values of these organizations. This scenario ends up making Latin American universities more dependent and resulting in the conduct of research and other initiatives that support the political decisions of such groups and organizations.

These organizations adopt different ways of working that use different styles of research and communication to reach different audiences as part of their strategies to influence public debate and public policy (Jang, Bechara, Bottom, 2022). Traditionally, the activities of these interstitial institutions were mainly restricted to deliberative circuits and epistemic communities, such as legislators, executive branch agencies, non-governmental organizations, and scientists, with long academic treatises on specific topics to direct public policy managers. But recently, they began to use social media, extending their reach directly to the general public, using discursive and persuasive strategies to mobilize followers' emotions and belief systems to drive debate in the digital public sphere (Schäfer, 2015; Castillo-Esparcia et al, 2015).

Furthermore, public and private organizations that aim to influence public opinion and policies have become instruments of territorial, paradigmatic and geopolitical disputes by defending different worldviews and interests (Ribeiro, 2021). In traditional centers of economic power, such as the USA and the EU, they try to maintain their role as validators of liberal thought in the new multilateral order, influencing debates on environmental preservation and opposing climate change mitigation policies (Almirón et al, 2020). There is an extensive literature on the influence of these interstitial institutions in the US and Europe, where they are seen as promoting doubts about science and the environment or supporting efforts to combat information disorders such as disinformation and hate speech (Jacques et al, 2008; Almiron et al, 2020; Plehwe, 2021). However, there is limited academic research on the role of interstitial institutions in Latin America, with a focus on highlighting their neoliberal role in the advancement of neoconservatism (Azevedo Junior, 2020; Ribeiro, 2021).

With global geopolitical relations undergoing a multipolar shift, Latin America has become a central focus of dispute and attention (Mori, Bardales, 2020). Institutions, financial foundations and think tanks from traditional centers of economic power, such as the United States and the European Union, are trying to reinforce their role as validators of liberal and neoliberal values in the new multilateral order. To achieve this, they are forming alliances with Latin American governments and institutions, including state-funded scientific institutions, in order to support the implementation of their agendas in public debate.

However, the growing number of actors in the specialization system for political purposes, many of which are financed by the Ford Foundation itself, signals a new mode of influence, dependence and colonialism of ideas in Latin America. To understand the role of these interstitial institutions in the public debate in Latin America, it is necessary to study their functions, persuasive strategies, activities, and context (Mendizábal, 2014). Understanding the role of these institutions is crucial to understanding the ongoing destabilization of democratic regimes and the international flows that maintain a state of colonial

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dependence, particularly in the domain of information, which has been a central factor in shifting the dynamic center from the West to the East.

5. Circuits of excellence as epistemic sovereignty

With the resurgence of democracy in Latin America, particularly in the 1990s, there was also an intensification of the globalization process. This was accompanied by a restructuring of the global scientific community (Oliveira, 2020). English has become an essential form of communication and a necessity for countries without language policies that prioritize the teaching of the language in their basic and higher education systems, such as Latin America. There has been a significant amount of research on the impacts of the widespread use of English, including its role as a normative model in second language teaching (Cook 1999; Parakrama 1995) and as a lingua franca of science (Leung 2005; Dewey, 2007). Some literature argues that this represents a form of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992; Kontra, Phillipson, Skutnabb-Kangas 1999).

According to Suzina (2020), the use of English as a lingua franca in science creates barriers to equitable participation and diverse perspectives in scientific publications by imposing a standard level of fluency for international circulation. Suzina argues that the dominance of English in the scientific publishing system acts as a form of language domestication and leads to epistemological domination. This supports the idea of epistemic injustice, as described by Fricker's concept of hermeneutic violence and Spivak's notion of epistemic violence (Spivak, 2015).

Despite this, Latin America has established its own open access scientific publishing circuits and with a diamond state model, as a response to the predominantly English-language model dominated by authors and editorial board members from Western countries (Albuquerque et al, 2020; Goyanes, 2020; Goyanes, Demeter, 2020). These initiatives were created almost a decade before the launch of the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) in 2002 (Sanchez-Tarragó et al, 2012). Latin American open access initiatives were founded on the principle that knowledge should not only be accessible through traditional scientific publishing channels, but also through alternative spaces that are less dependent on editorial monopolies, English as a lingua franca and its commercial models (Oliveira et al, 2021). This challenged the uneven production and circulation of knowledge in traditional “centers of excellence” that excluded peripheral scientific communities (Beigel, 2016; Vessuri, Guédon & Cetto, 2014).

Latin America has established its own transnational and regional circuits to neutralize the effects of epistemic injustice, creating a publishing system that aims for epistemic sovereignty. These initiatives constitute an alternative to traditional circuits of hegemonic prestige (Beigel, 2016), relying on decentralized infrastructures and non-commercial solutions for academic publishing. Latin American initiatives are based on collaborative efforts to publish research results in open access repositories, such as SciELO, Redalyc, Latindex, among others.

Despite the importance of Latin American initiatives for epistemic sovereignty in scientific publishing, these circuits remain largely invisible due to the dominance of a global-based model of academic capitalism that is heavily influenced by university ranking systems that originated in the 1990s. 1990, both in the West and abroad. -Western countries (Mugnaini, Digiampietri, & Mena-Chalco, 2014). This university classification model, produced mainly by institutions based in the United States, perpetuates ethnocentric views and reinforces the notion of a universal standard (Albuquerque & Oliveira, 2020).

A “metric tide” (Wouters et al, 2015), developed mainly by Western and central countries, began to dominate discussions on studies related to the use and analysis of CT & I indicators. Despite criticism of this scientific measurement process, such as the Declaration of San Francisco (2012) and the Leiden Manifesto (Hicks et al, 2015), these indicators are still used in the scientific policies of several countries to assess the quality of scientific production and to make comparisons between countries, industries, and organizations public and private. Most of these policies in non-Western countries do not address measurement problems and simply adopt a set of indicators widely accepted by traditional literature, often

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ignoring the particularities of scientific circulation in each country. Such uses of international classification systems tend to underestimate the role of scientific production, equating quality and impact with presence in central and English-speaking circuits.

> "Latin America disappeared from the system because its production was considered invisible by the rules of the game. (...) It is not that Latin America has stopped producing significant research, or that quality has decreased; research in the region was simply excluded from the circuit that began to define quality in global terms and was considered second class" (Albuquerque, Oliveira, 2020, p. 88)

Universities play a central role in legitimizing new forms of domination, establishing ties of academic dependence between peripheral and central societies, and creating discourses that justify this new order and serve as a basis for public scientific policies. This extends beyond the publishing system, but also to all areas of academia. Guzmán-Valenzuela's (2017) analysis of teaching and learning documents at Latin American universities between 2000-2015 showed that these programs tend to prioritize theories produced in the Global North and ignore knowledge from the South and its context. According to Majee and Rees (2020, p. 476), internationalization practices in the Global South are linked to struggles for racial equality, while the administrative perspective sees internationalization as a neutral, objective, and depoliticized operation.

The emergence of initiatives to reduce the dependence of the higher education system on scientific publishing monopolies and their evaluation metrics that reinforce asymmetries is evident in Latin America. The Latmetrics Network, formed by LATmetrics and the Latin American Symposium on Metric Studies in Science and Technology, is an example. Created in 2018, the Network brings together researchers, institutional managers, and other stakeholders to discuss alternative metrics and open science that align with social justice in Latin America. The biennial event attracts more than 200 participants and aims to increase participation in science policy and provide a less normative solution independent of scientific publishing monopolies (Velez-Cuartas et al, 2022).

Another demonstration of epistemic sovereignty is the creation of AmeliCA, a cooperatively supported scientific publishing and open scientific communication infrastructure based on a non-profit publishing model to preserve the academic and open nature of scientific communication (Becerril-Garcia, 2018). The formation of the Asociación Latinoamericana de Editores Cientifiques (Alaec), made up of associations of scientific editors such as Aseúc in Colombia, ABEC in Brazil and AURA in Uruguay, is another example.

This associationism is a characteristic of Latin America as a way of strengthening and institutional recognition of collectives (Gohn, 2008; Azerrad, Rossler, 2018). As Oliveira et al. (2021) discuss, initiatives like these, which emerged in Latin America and the Caribbean, began to appear in two contexts and reflected a general feeling of dissatisfaction with traditional metrics: a) The first comes from the dissatisfaction of the scientific community with traditional metrics and indicators that do not reflect the reality of Latin America. Dependence on large index databases, such as the products offered by scientific-technological-editorial oligopolies, whose investigations for decades have shown a low presence of Latin America and the Caribbean in these spaces. b) in the context of technological transformations, in which we began to pay more attention to the terrain and the way in which science circulates in traditional circuits of scientific and technological production, as well as the way in which it dialogues with society.

6. Platformization of science and dependence on technological oligopoly

Platformization is defined as the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes, and government structures of digital platforms into different economic sectors and spheres of life (Poell, Nieborg, van Dick, 2020). Platformization occurs in different areas of science, technology, and innovation. In terms of technology, the dominance of the US-based system by five major technology companies (AlphabetGoogle, Amazon, Facebook [FB], Apple, and Microsoft, known as GAFAM) has permeated

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economic and civic life on every continent except China. In contrast, China operates a state-controlled business ecosystem centered on its three large companies (Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent or BAT). Despite having few "big" national technology companies, the European Union (EU) intends to position itself as a driver of change in the global digital economy. The clash between state powers is increasingly taking on a techno-business dimension, revealing interconnected interests between American, Chinese, and European actors in global digital governance. This entanglement is generating tensions between the continental superpowers and their allies (Van Dijck, 2021). In terms of science and innovation, the consolidation of the scientific publishing industry and the significant profit margins of large publishers have sparked broad debates within and outside the scientific community. After the 1990s, when the science and innovation ecosystem radically changed through a tide of metrics to indicate quality (Wouter et al, 2015), there was an increase in the migration of journals between small and large publishers (Larivière, Haustein, Mongeon, 2015). Science has always been competitive, but with the globalization of knowledge and the increasing use of global classifications, competition has reached new heights (Hazelkorn, Gibson, 2017). Higher education institutions and university research are seen as national differentiators in the global knowledge economy, and global US and Chinese rankings are used to measure quality, performance and productivity. These rankings are driven by the realization that national pre-eminence is no longer enough and reflect the public's growing demand for transparency, value, impact and benefits.

Currently, the Latin American and global scientific system depends on three oligopolies: a) scientific oligopolies, dominated by six large companies (ACS, Reed-Elsevier, Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Taylor & Francis and Sage), where profit is generated from the commercialization of knowledge (Larivière, Haustein & Mongeon, 2015); b) the global classification system (Woodcock, 2018; Feldman & Sandoval, 2018), which tends to evaluate scientific research in Latin America based on criteria that do not reflect the role of universities in the Global South; etc.) a technological oligopoly, made up of giants such as Google and Microsoft, which provide support services for academic activities, as part of the science platformization process.

The growing presence of technological giants such as Google and Microsoft is affecting scientific practices in Latin America and the world, as they provide their services to universities and research institutions as "solution providers" "free of charge". Its business model is based on collecting and analyzing large amounts of data and metadata from users of its educational packages, which include email, video conferencing, groupware, file exchange and other services. This results in the platformization and datafication of higher education and universities. The platformization of science means penetration into all research phases of higher education systems (van Dijck et al., 2018). According to a study by Amiel et al. (2023), almost 80% of Latin American universities use the services offered by these technology giants, with eight out of ten institutions trusting their offers.

In May 2022, Google (which holds a significant 63% share of the technological solutions market for universities in Latin America, according to Amiel et al., 2022) changed its contract and imposed policies on academic communities, limiting its service to users. The widespread adoption of these services, which was accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic, is largely due to disinvestment in public education in Latin America and represents a threat to the operational autonomy of research and teaching institutions. Additionally, there are concerns about personal data security, data control, privacy, and transparency for teachers, administrators, and students (Amiel et al., 2022).

Divided between opportunities to improve the quality of academic community practices and new risks and threats to security, privacy, freedom and democracy, these countries face the challenge of developing knowledge, skills, and competencies to adequately take advantage of these new technologies. The expansion of universities in Latin America, especially in Brazil, without accompanying the creation of their own technological infrastructures, has led public and private actors to accept the technological solutions offered by transnational companies in the digital economy, without wasting time to reflect on economic transformations, political, institutional, and cultural factors that they can produce. These public-

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private partnerships create a strong dependence on knowledge and increase the digital divide between North and South countries.

As discussed by Zuboff (2019), this new economic order claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales. They present themselves as providers of "almost free solutions" and use a discourse of democracy, access, work facilitation, security and transparency to meet demands for better science (Maciel, Appel & Albagli, 2014; Oliveira & Sobreira, 2020). These private companies standardize scientific practices as a way of attributing a universal value to a knowledge production routine (Mirowsky, 2018; Oliveira et al., 2021). The world's leading academic publishers, such as Elsevier, Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Taylor & Francis, and Sage Publishing, have adopted the discourse of "radically collaborative science" to offer services and make it a profitable market segment (Wiley, 2011; Heimstadt, 2017). The platformization of science and the rise of open data, open review, preprints, and repositories reinforce the infiltration of economic processes into scientific practices (Mirowski, 2018).

7. Final considerations on epistemic sovereignty

The notion of epistemic sovereignty is a critical framework for addressing injustices and asymmetries in the global knowledge ecosystem. It goes beyond identifying and reporting epistemic violence and injustice and provides a path to creating solutions to combat these issues. Epistemic sovereignty emphasizes the importance of control, access, and autonomy over the production of information and knowledge and challenges power structures and dominant epistemologies.

A significant aspect of epistemic sovereignty is the recognition of historical imbalances in the production and circulation of knowledge, particularly between the global North and South, the center, and the periphery. It highlights the need to recover the knowledge and experiences of marginalized actors and to promote the production and validation of diverse knowledge. This involves challenging the dominance of the English language and Western-centric knowledge systems, and creating spaces for local, regional, and situated knowledge to be valued and respected.

Epistemic sovereignty also involves addressing structural changes in the global system, including the reassessment of values, policies, and knowledge production processes. It calls for the development of alternative academic circuits, such as the Scielo, Latindex and Redalyc databases, to counter the commercialization and exclusion practices of international journals and data repositories. It also requires challenging the reproduction of dominant power structures in higher education institutions in peripheral countries and promoting mechanisms for the emergence of diversified knowledge production.

As global geopolitical dynamics shift toward a multipolar landscape, Latin America has emerged as a region of central focus in the struggle to regain its own sovereignty, fought over by transnational corporations over the past decade. The role of scientific and higher education systems is fundamental in the construction and maintenance of national sovereignty, as they are responsible for the production of knowledge and the formation of intellectual elites. And Latin American universities were fundamental in this process of denouncing epistemic injustices and creating mechanisms to recover their sovereignty over knowledge.

For example, in this context of growing digital epistemic sovereignty movements in Latin America, we see the launch of multilingual indigenous data repositories and platforms. The National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (Iphan), an agency linked to the Special Secretariat for Culture and the Ministry of Tourism, launched, in 2022, the Nimuendajú Platform. It is a web version of the Ethno-Historical Map of Brazil and Adjacent Regions, created and designed by ethnologist Curt Nimuendajú in the first half of the 20th century. The platform aims to allow user interaction with the Map, in a digital environment, through direct queries to the database created from the information contained in the original documents and printed versions (maps and books). The map aims to update access to content created by Nimuendajú for the digital-informational medium, with the possibility of associating them with layers such as

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archaeological sites registered by Iphan, Biomes, Indigenous Lands, Conservation Units, States and Municipalities. The Platform is the result of a partnership between Iphan, the Federal University of Pará, in Brazil, and Cooperativa Eita.

Faced with a moment in which the influence of interstitial foundations and think tanks are present in the public debate, Latin America has taken measures to assert its presence in public discourse and claim its epistemic sovereignty. In Brazil, scientific lobbies such as the College of Communications Directors and the National Association of Directors of Higher Education Institutions joined forces to establish a unified news agency for Brazilian universities. This initiative aims to increase the visibility of these universities in the media and among public policy makers, mapping their scientific experience and creating data centers. The National Institute of Science and Technology for Informational Disputes and Sovereignty was also created to support efforts to assert epistemic sovereignty in Brazil. These initiatives aim to promote a more active role for Latin America in the public debate and reestablish its experience in defining public policies.

To reduce dependence on commercial platforms, Latin America has explored creating its own technological infrastructure since the 1990s. For example, the Lattes Platform, created in 1999, aims to gather metadata and information about researchers and their work. and is used by the Brazilian academic community to evaluate researchers, programs, and institutions. Another example is the National Education and Research Network (RNP) in Brazil, a Social Organization (OS) linked to and supported by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MCTI). It pioneered internet access in Brazil in 1992, to meet the needs of the academic community. It is interconnected with other teaching and research networks in Latin America, North America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Oceania through terrestrial and submarine fiber optic cables. ColaV, a transdisciplinary collective at the University of Antioquia in Colombia, works on research, development and innovation at the intersection of universities and society, preserving language, culture and memory in Colombia and addressing governance and public policy. The Colombia Consortium brings together higher education institutions to provide more cost-effective access to specialized tools, publications and scientific research. It created a portal to showcase the strengths and capabilities of member institutions and promote international collaboration and networking. These are some examples of how Latin America has sought to develop its own infrastructures as an alternative to the proprietary platforms of transnational technological oligopolies and international interstitial institutions.

The notion of epistemic sovereignty provides a powerful framework for understanding and addressing injustices and asymmetries in the global knowledge ecosystem. It emphasizes the need for control, access and autonomy over the production of information and knowledge, challenges dominant power structures and promotes alternative academic circuits. By recognizing and reclaiming epistemic sovereignty, countries and communities can assert their own identities, challenge hegemonic epistemologies, and strive for greater autonomy and authority over their own knowledge systems. The essay aims to discuss why the notion of epistemic sovereignty is important and to understand the forces and disputes in the global ecosystem of higher education, in which Latin America has been fighting for its survival in the face of epistemic injustices propagated by the global forces that dominate the fields of science, technology, innovation, and education. To this end, it presents the concept of epistemic sovereignty in a historical panorama to show the continuous resistance movements in Latin America against the dominance of knowledge production spaces, with a focus on higher education.

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