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Admeire da Silva Santos Sundström  
Heloá Cristina Camargo de Oliveira

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# Decolonial practices of Knowledge Organization: a Brazilian literature overview

*Admeire da Silva Santos Sundström*<sup>1</sup>

*Heloá Cristina Camargo de Oliveira*<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Decolonial practices have driven new parameters to integrate marginalized communities in a colonized society, and it has been influencing different disciplines in their methods and theories. Libraries, archives, and museums (LAM) are also integrating new approaches that argue to prioritize and represent different forms of knowledge production. In this sense, this article investigates how Knowledge Organization in Brazilian literature has been approaching, in the last 10 years, decoloniality in its methods, theories, and practices. Our goal is to understand how the concept of decoloniality has been adopted and shaped from the Brazilian Knowledge Organization theoretical field. The method is the literature review. As a result, we identified that the decolonial thinking in the Brazilian Knowledge Organization literature has been building its bases on women, Brazilian-African communities, Indigenous, and LGBTQ. We conclude here that the field remains behind compared to other countries, however, it has a range of possibilities.

**KEYWORDS:** Decolonial practices. Knowledge organization. Marginalized communities.

## INTRODUCTION

As Hjørland (2008) argues, Knowledge Organization is a field that investigates not only the process of organizing knowledge but also the

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<sup>1</sup> Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden.  
E-mail: admeire.dasilvassantossundstrom@lnu.se | ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4873-8592>

<sup>2</sup> Universidade Federal de Rondonópolis, Brazil.  
E-mail: heloa.oliveira@ufr.edu.br | ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2466-6678>

systems created to organize, represent and retrieve documents. However, the existing Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS) were built on a bias of gender, sexuality, race, age, ability, ethnicity, language, and religion, which limit the possibilities of expressing diversity in representing information. Beghtol (2009) also pointed out that the systems reflect society and therefore lack neutrality in their approaches. In this sense, KOS are not only occasionally hierarchical and predetermined, but also possess power within the categorization process, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Montoya, 2022, p.50).

Even biased, these systems of classification and index have been widely adopted worldwide and portrayed as neutral tools. This leads to consequences for the users who look for information in a biased system. Which main encounter a conceptual violence (Fox & Reece, 2012). Consequently, users do not see themselves represented in the system or see themselves in a misrepresented way (Olson & 2001, p.549).

However, questioning the universalism and neutrality of these systems is not new. In 2016, for example, a group of researchers discussed the possible conflicts that can emerge from local needs and global knowledge organization systems. In this panel composed of Melissa A. Adler, Joseph T. Tennis, Daniel Martínez-Ávila, José Augusto C. Guimarães, Jens-Erik Mai, among others, an overview was provided of the epistemological, practical, and ethical dimensions in conceptualizing the dynamic between local and global knowledge when it comes to organizing it (Adler et al., 2016).

Other perspectives also contributed to addressing this issue, such as: Andersen & Skouvig (2006) who argue that the legitimization of Knowledge Organization must be situated from a sociohistorical point of view. Fox (2016) has been addressing the issue from a gender perspective, while Guerrini (2022) examines the universalism of bibliographic control. Thus, Gutiérrez (2014) believes that we should work with the concept of declassification, since, for the author, when classifying, we are already removing that concept from one context and placing it in another. As he states, "Classification veils, divides, and separates while declassification reveals, aggregates, and reunites." (Gutiérrez, 2014, p.394).

Decolonial thinking has been influencing various disciplines as well as contributing to the emergence of new theoretical approaches and methods which consider the knowledge production in marginalized communities (Walsh, 2018). In Knowledge Organization, as we have seen in the literature, there is a strong current that has been questioning the presence of local knowledge in global systems, as well as how catalogs reflect this dichotomy. However, what we will address here as decolonial practices in Knowledge Organization involve the identification and criticism of colonial methods, and the creation of new tools that recognize and recentralize plurality.

In that regard, Doyle et al. (2015, p.115) address the theory of Indigenous warrants, which embraces Indigenous self-representation and their knowledge to create a KOS from and for them. From the Canadian perspective, research around Indigenous librarianship has been steering the notion of how we can create strategies to decolonize the KOS. Therefore, our objective is to analyze the Brazilian scenario to understand the nuances of decolonial approaches.

With that said, the questions of the study are: How have the concepts of decolonization and decoloniality been approached in knowledge organization in a Brazilian scenario? What KOS has been covered as decolonial practices? What communities have been addressed in Brazilian decolonial approaches from the KOS perspective?

This article is part of the ongoing project “Knowledge Organization Systems in Ethnic Collections”, a research group initiated in 2022 by the authors of this paper. It intends to contribute to the project’s ongoing discussions and identify the Brazilian state of the art on knowledge organization decolonial research.

This paper has the following structure: Firstly, we present a brief discussion related to the concept of decoloniality and decolonization. Secondly, we introduce some approaches in an international scenario prioritizing articles in English. Thirdly, we describe the methodological path, and, finally, the results identified in the Brazilian literature.

## THE DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

As explained by Mignolo and Walsh (2018), decoloniality cannot be considered merely a new paradigm or a critical thought; it also involves praxis, which provides marginalized groups with the methodological and theoretical tools to reflect on and center their worldview within new epistemological, sociological, historical, cultural, and economic parameters. The authors investigate various practices, ranging from political projects to pedagogical approaches, demonstrating how decoloniality evolves into collective actions.

Mignolo and Walsh also conduct a theoretical discussion explaining the conceptual framework and establishing the difference between the concepts of decoloniality and decolonization. They assert: “Decoloniality is not, and cannot be, state-led projects. They are projects by people organizing themselves in their local histories and needs to delink from the colonial matrix.” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p.115). As the authors describe, the concept of decoloniality implies a triad of concepts: modernity, coloniality, and decoloniality. Since decoloniality puts light on coloniality, it shows what the author calls the darker side of modernity.

In Brazil, the social movement named the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement (in Portuguese *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, MST) is an example of decolonial praxis involving territorial revindication. Coletti (2005) classified the MST as the resistance to neoliberal hegemony that has been growing in Brazil. In addition to claiming for a new regulation related to agrarian reform, the MST social movement also has new methods in agriculture, media coverage, education, and religion. Their agriculture method follows a sustainable development, which prioritizes the preservation of natural resources, and avoids the use of chemical inputs.

The example of MST can be seen as decolonial thinking, since this social movement represents a group that can be considered a micro-narrative, standing up and claiming to change and transform in a colonial territorial division. Nevertheless, Mignolo and Walsh (2018) present a distinction between the concepts of decolonization and decoloniality:

“Decolonization is the more usual world for the efforts to confront the ongoing colonial condition.” (p.49). As decoloniality is related to the emergence of new narratives including new cultural and social movements, as the decolonization embraces the historical process of unbuilding colonialism (Ariese et al., 2022).

Latin America, in the context of colonization, had to coexist with two worlds - the colonial and the modern, resulting in an unstable construction of its people identity. The colonial past is considered a historical ghost that needs to be brought to light, otherwise, it will remain trapped in the coloniality of power and its dependence, failing to reach the new world (Castro & Castro, 2018).

In addition to this constant struggle, it is a quest to maintain culture amidst the dissolution of an increasingly globalized world. For Latin American countries, six elements can be identified as shocking in the recognition of identity: metropolitan parasitism (which can be summarized in the exploitation of natural resources, in a short-term and elitist view); the already mentioned coexistence of two historical worlds; Thorp’s Empty Box (with ethnicity determining history, with lack of growth with equity); ethnicity as a marker of social categories; the federative form of the State and its social relations (often with an exploitative and even tyrannical and corrupt posture); and language, culture, and racism (which demonstrate a non-respectful coexistence of different ethnicities). (Castro & Castro, 2018).

The recent shifts in global politics, characterized by the appreciation of capitalism at the expense of acknowledging the complexity of human development, and the exploratory potential of its market expansion, guided new fronts that began to reach the current territories still under the protection of Indigenous peoples. This poses a significant risk to an entire environmental domain these people have long protected.

Harmonious coexistence and interaction would be (in the face of the growing complexity of plural societies, formed by people with different ways of living, with their own wealth of customs and worldviews), the basis of a local and global collective force, recognizing it as one of the world’s

heritage – and this relationship is called by IFLA “ ‘cultural diversity’ or ‘multiculturality’ ” (International Federation Of Library Associations And Institutions – IFLA, 2020).

The still real division of the world poses different international perspectives that propose to help the decolonization process, but there is still a need to develop and clarify the complexity of this attitude. In countries labeled as “first”, “second” or “third” world, a reality has become clear - many people live in a “4th world”, a metaphorical representation of people who, although sharing the same “societal plane” with others, remain largely invisible (Oliveira, 2020).

They are people who survive in a parallel reality, which do not fit the descriptions and “goals of the millennium”. Time passes differently between worlds. They cohabit, and they coexist, but in a predatory way - the 4th world is the food of the rest - its fuel. They exist because they serve others, and if that service is not justified, neither is their existence.

Many of this world’s inhabitants know about the denial of their existence and, therefore, they also know that no one will miss what never existed, or at least no one with enough voice to be heard, and therefore they have no alternative but to conform to the barriers that surround them, of the invisibility that curses them, and then they survive with what life proposes to them.

Others, aware of this reality and with the intention of breaking it, venture into great battles in search of breaking down the barriers that are imposed on them and go out to demand their rights. However, there are many challenges and so far, it has been seen that society has been able to open spaces for insertion, but few for inclusion. This means that people get the right to be in spaces that for a long time did not “belong to them”, but that these spaces are still not capable of promoting an environment of inclusive equity (Oliveira, 2020).

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has a good example of a decolonial project: a section named Indigenous Matters-Action Plan 2021-22 which presents a guideline for library actions which prioritize the Indigenous knowledge in its addressing.

The guideline is tied to The UNESCO Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) which is linked to the document United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The document determines that Indigenous peoples have the right to preserve their languages, cultures, and knowledge.

In this context, IFLA published a Special Issue on Indigenous Librarianship, which was also reviewed in Sundström (2023). The number includes research from different parts of the world which describes different strategies and methods to organize and represent Indigenous knowledge considering their own knowledge production and representation. As Sundström (2023) reviewed, the IFLA publication clarifies that the decolonial practices in LIS involve a set of concerns which should center Indigenous knowledge. A common agreement from the reviewed articles, among them Gosart (2021) and Komeji et al. (2021), states that the Indigenous knowledge cannot be placed in an old-fashioned pre-established scheme. So, decolonization in this context means not only review the system itself, but also identifying the notion of knowledge in each community and then continue by asking how the tools should be constructed to approach their knowledge. The decolonization here goes beyond the new set of organization and representation arguing reducing the damage caused by biased systems Sundström (2023).

## METHODOLOGY

This research collected data using bibliographic methods, with the main focus on conducting a literature review, addressing decoloniality and KO in the fields of librarianship, archival science, and museology in a Brazilian scenario. It applied a content analysis in the retrieved results, (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). It was selected five databases: **BRAPCI**: *Base de Dados Referenciais de Artigos de Periódicos em Ciência da Informação* (BRAPCI), **SCIELO**: Scientific Electronic Library Online, **Periódicos CAPES** - Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior, **BDTD** The Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation, and The Brazilian Open Access Publications and Scientific Data Portal (OASISBR).



The *Base de Dados Referenciais de Artigos de Periódicos em Ciência da Informação* (BRAPCI) is the product of the research project “Methodological options in research: the contribution of the information area to the production of knowledge in higher education”, whose objective is to support studies and proposals in the area of Information Science. It contains titles of journals in the area of Information Science (IS) and indexes their articles, constituting a referential database. It currently provides abstracts of 19,255 texts published in 57 national printed and electronic journals. (BASE DE DADOS EM CIÊNCIA DA INFORMAÇÃO - BRAPCI, 2023). The search strategies used were: *decoloniza\** to analyze a more global retrieval on the topic in the area, and *decoloniza\** AND *organização do conhecimento* as descriptors in a second query for a more specific retrieval.

The Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO) is a repository for research data aligned with best practices and international standards for research data management, organized in the cooperative model by the institutions São Paulo Research Foundation - FAPESP, National Council of Scientific and Technological Development - CNPq, Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information - BIREME, and Foundation of Support to the University of São Paulo - FapUnifesp. It currently contains 399 journals and 485,196 documents. (Scientific Electronic Library Online, n.d). The search strategies applied were: *Decoloniza\** as a descriptor, with the Information AND Library in the area filter; *Decoloni\** AND *organização do conhecimento*, without other filters; and *Decoloni\** AND *Ciência da Informação*, without other filters.

The *Portal de Periódicos Capes* is one of the largest virtual libraries in Latin America, with national productions and subscriptions of international publishers to teaching and research institutions in Brazil. There is diverse content distributed in more than 49,000 full-text journals and 455 databases. It is high-level scientific content available to the Brazilian academic-scientific community. (Coordenação De Aperfeiçoamento De Pessoal De Nível Superior - CAPES, 2022). The search strategies applied were: *Decoloniza\** AND *organização do conhecimento*.

The Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation (BDTD), developed and coordinated by the Brazilian Institute of Information in Science and Technology (IBICT), integrates and disseminates the complete texts of theses and dissertations defended in Brazilian teaching and research institutions (IBICT, 2023). The search strategies applied were: *decoloniza\** AND *organização do conhecimento* as descriptors.

The last database included in this article was the multidisciplinary portal The Brazilian Open Access Publications and Scientific Data Portal (OASISBR), an initiative of the Brazilian Institute of Information in Science and Technology (Ibict), with “scientific production and research data in open access, published in scientific journals, digital repositories of scientific publications, digital repositories of research data and digital libraries of theses and dissertations” (OASISBR, 2024).

The first data collection was performed on April 15th, 2023, and the second one on almost all basis<sup>3</sup>, to actualize and amplify the results on 18th January 2024. The descriptors and filters were qualitative and adapted to the different databases used.

Criteria of inclusion: When the first truncation was used as “decoloni\*”, after analysis of the titles and abstracts, then retrieved documents that were not relevant to the objective of this article, because of that, the search was performed using the word “decoloniza\*” and “Knowledge organization”. After qualitative analysis of the content of the recovered works, articles that presented discussions on the concept of decoloniality in the Organization of Knowledge in the Brazilian context were included in the data for analysis. Articles that just mentioned the words without the theoretical discussion, or that weren’t in the Information Science aim weren’t considered valid data for this analysis. The results obtained are shown in Table 1.

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<sup>3</sup> We intended to conduct a new search at BRAPCI during December 2023 and January 2024 to update the results, however the database was unavailable due technical issue.

Table1: Literature review

Base	Descriptors	Total retrieved	Excluded by duplicated data	Data to analisys
BRAPCI	Decoloniza*	13	2	11
BRAPCI	decoloniza* AND organização do conhecimento	2	0	2
SCIELO	Decoloniza* Área Information AND Lybrary	1	0	1
SCIELO	Decoloni* AND organização do conhecimento	2	0	2
SCIELO	Decoloni* AND Ciência da Informação	3	1	2
CAPES	Decoloniza* AND organização do conhecimento	10	0	10
CAPES	Decoloni* AND “organização do conhecimento”	3	0	3
BDTD	Decoloniza* AND “organização do conhecimento”	2	0	0
BDTD	Decoloni* AND “organização do conhecimento”	2	0	2
OASIS	Decoloni* AND Organização do Conhecimento	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>				<b>36</b>

After the exclusion of the duplicated references, 36 articles were selected. The titles and abstracts were read for the analysis of the criteria of inclusion and exclusion. The results are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Application of the criteria of inclusion

Database	Title/Journal	Authors	Year
BRAPCI	Decolonizando a organização do conhecimento/ Tendências da Pesquisa Brasileira em Ciência da Informação	Garcez, D.; Sales, R.	2021

BRAPCI	Decolonizando os acervos das bibliotecas públicas: formação de coleções de literatura afro-brasileira / Palavra Clave	Tanus, G.; Souza, G.	2022
BRAPCI	Decolonizando a Organização do Conhecimento: conceitos, teorias e epistemologias de Abya Yala/ Ciência da Informação Express	Garcez, D.	2022
SCIELO	La organización del conocimiento desde la perspectiva poscolonial: itinerarios de la paraconsistencia.. Perspectivas em Ciência da Informação, v.18, n.4, p.93-111, out./dez..	García Gutiérrez	2013
CAPEL	Das árvores do conhecimento aos rizomas e rukus. Clarice Sumi. Fronteiras da representação do conhecimento/	Gracioso, L; Almeida, M. Kawasaki, C.	2022
CAPEL	Por um reflexão sobre a organização e representação de conceitos decoloniais na américa latina: O pensamento de Aníbal Quijano à luz da Análise de Domínio / Encontros Bibli.	Albuquerque, A.	2023
CAPEL	Biblioteconomia indígena: tramas encantadas pela terra viva / Encontros Bibli.	Menezes, V.	2023
BDTD	A invisibilidade do feminismo negro nos instrumentos de representação do conhecimento: uma abordagem de representatividade social	Reis, V..	2019

The titles and abstracts were read to include or exclude articles within the topic. After that, a reading of the full text was performed. The final data were qualitatively analyzed, consistent with the objectives of the work, and will be presented in the following topic.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first article analyzed is Garcez and Sales, published in 2021. It presents an interesting search for the theme within international publications, using for that the publications of the Knowledge Organization journal, from 2000 to 2020. Although the article matches our selection criteria, they do not distinguish the usage of the terms decoloniality and decolonization, consequently, these concepts are taken as synonyms.

However, the authors present a paramount discussion related to the possibilities of knowledge that should be covered in KOS. Such as Cultures, beliefs, ethnicities, gender, population groups, languages, and habits.

According to Garcez and Sales (2021) all these points generate knowledge, and when they are not represented, their existence is infringed. As stated by them, to address the plurality of knowledge in a KOS, is necessary to ensure approaches from a decolonial and decolonized perspective.

The authors present discussions regarding “epistemic violence”, and highlight “[...] through invisibility and exclusion of knowledge from other ethnic-racial and social groups that do not belong to the hegemonic group that is in power.” and that would already be naturalized in the context of colonial power (Garcez & Sales, 2021, p.7 , our translation).

From the theoretical viewpoint, it was possible to identify that when considering decoloniality and decolonization as synonyms, this may lead to further uncertainties. However, the authors presented the marginalized groups driving the discussion on decoloniality in a broader perspective, such as women, people with Latin American backgrounds, African, Indigenous, Amerindian, and riparian communities.

As we noticed, the authors also identified Brazilian studies that indirectly consider and contribute to decolonial processes being related to Knowledge Organization. The aforementioned studies identified as being more directly related to the Brazilian context are focused on gender issues, African religions, the study of “oppressed groups”, and Amerindian thought.

The researchers conclude that the explicit use of terms such as decolonization and decoloniality is still quite limited and only begins to emerge in 2016; they use the term “deseuropeização” of archival description; and emphasize that the representation of marginalized peoples, religions, and languages in Knowledge Organization Systems are a first step in the search for the decolonization in the Knowledge Organization international research.

From the study of the first text, two points stand out: the need to clarify the difference between the terms decoloniality and decolonization; and a still expanding manifestation of studies in the area, not only in the national context but also in a representative publication in Knowledge Organization international research.

The second article analyzed, published in 2022 by Garcez, is a 1-page long paper that presents some general concepts that apparently will guide a broader study.

The title mentions a study directed to “Abya Yala concepts, theories and epistemologies” which, although not clarified in the text, possibly relates to the appropriation of the term Abya Yala, originating from the language of the Kuna people (which would mean “Mature Land”, “Live Earth” or “Land in bloom”) and which has been used as a synonym for “America”, in a “self-designation of the originating peoples” (Porto-Gonçalves, 2023, our translation).

The author establishes three guiding points in her search for decolonial approaches in the scientific production of Knowledge Organization:

- a) Discussions on oppression, under-representation, and relations of power and domination against marginalized populations; b) Discussions on knowledge production by geographically privileged populations (global north), but which are outside the societies to which they belong; and c) Critical reflection on coloniality and proposal of decoloniality as an alternative for confrontation. (Garcez, 2022, our translation).

During our analysis, we identified a challenge faced by these retrieved articles in translating the terms to Portuguese.

The third and last article analyzed was published in 2022 by Tanus e Souza and presents a broad discussion about the need to decolonize the collections of Brazilian public libraries. The authors are anchored in the characterization of these libraries as democratic spaces for access to information and as representative places of a society identified as diverse.

The importance of formalizing the process to decolonize collections is highlighted, especially in collection development policies, to ensure legitimacy and continuity. Although it focuses on the reported absences of authors, the absence of black-Brazilian themes, points of view, language, and audiences in public library collections are also highlighted. Also,

other themes the authors fail to discuss in these collections are mentioned: women, feminists, Indigenous people, and LGBTQIA+.

It is worth highlighting that the presence of the book is one of the paths of political action and transformation, but it does not end with the practice of acquiring and placing it on the shelf. The book, in its modifying potential, needs to be read, debated, and dialogued; in which the library is a space for mediation actions, in particular, cultural mediation [...]. (Garcez, 2022, p. 3, our translation).

Albuquerque (2023) explains the background of the theoretical approach to decoloniality in Latin America. The article centers on a specific researcher Anibal Quijano, and his research group called “*Modernidade/Colonialidade*” which was paramount to introduce decoloniality perspective in Latin America, gathering other research such as: “Edgardo Lander, Arturo Escobar, Walter Dignolo, Enrique Dussel, Fernando Coronil e Aníbal Quijano” (Albuquerque, 2023). Quijano was essential in identifying how coloniality was entered into society.

Menezes (2023) mentioned some initiatives in representing Indigenous knowledge, however, the author focused on this article to illustrate the complexity of librarianship in embracing Indigenous knowledge, since the word “library” means their land, knowledge is something alive, and all objects part of their reality has life on it. “In Indigenous worlds, every object of interpretation is understood as another person, that is, the act of interpretation itself presupposes the personhood of what is being interpreted, therefore, every object is also a subject.” (Menezes, 2023, p.4, translated from Portuguese). The author also distinguishes between the Indigenous Librarianship and the Indigenous Knowledge Organization (OCI), when the first is a field, and the second one is methodology (Menezes, 2023).

Reis (2019) identified the terminology that represents the black feminist literature and inspected how the current controlled vocabulary has been covering this area. As a result, they face the incapacity of these

tools in representing the topic, and they emphasize the importance of constructing controlled vocabularies that serve Brazilian Black literature.

This critical view goes beyond the materiality addressed and demonstrates a concern with the complexity imposed by decoloniality. Even if the researchers demonstrate a scarce field of studies focused on decoloniality from the Brazilian perspective, they show us that the field is deep in complexity and with possibilities for development.

## CONCLUSION

As a result, we will highlight some points, firstly the translation issues with the terms un-colonial (*descolonial*) and decolonial (*decolonial*), which may have an impact on the development of the literature on the subject. Santos (2018), among the authors reviewed here, argues about the importance of the theoretical and political differences between these terms, where the first one relates the “un-colonial” as a counterpoint to “colonialism” and decolonial as a contraposition to “coloniality”. When consulting some dictionaries, the terms un-colonial (*descolonial*) and decolonial (*decolonial*) may have been translated as synonyms.

Secondly, decoloniality has a more complex perspective, concerned with colonial structures beyond the condition of the colony itself. This can impact the attention directed to practices without problematizing the complex social aspects involved. This issue is relevant to knowledge organization as it allows for a critical examination of how informational tools are created and their impact on society.

Thirdly, we believe that this concern about how informational tools, their structures, and foundations are constituted in the scope of decoloniality can offer the possibility of strengthening the decolonial paradigm in the areas that work with information and heritage.

It was possible to conclude that Brazilian studies about decoloniality and Knowledge Organization (KO) are still in their initial phase, but there is an emphasis on the already existing practices that can be identified as decolonial and are being implemented across various information units.



These practices have a great impact on the search for the development and application of the decolonial paradigm, but they need to be further studied to understand and affirm their scope in this context. It is suggested that future texts explore the practical issues highlighted to give visibility to the real state of the art of research that may or may not be framed within decolonial conceptions.

Greater development of the theme in the national context is viewed as a way to contribute to the international development of decoloniality in informational spaces, especially Archives, Libraries, and Museums, recognized here as important spaces for the development of decolonial thought.

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