

Redirecting the Compass: Paulo Freire, the Global South, and Sulear in Intercultural Communication

Redirigiendo la brújula: Paulo Freire, el sur global y el sulear en la comunicación intercultural
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Abstract

From a Paulo Freirean perspective, this article addresses the dominance of the Global North in intercultural communication by engaging the concepts of sulear (to south) and suleamento (southing) as critical epistemological tools. Moving beyond a purely conceptual exercise, these notions foreground the Global South as a dynamic site of knowledge production while acknowledging its internal heterogeneity. Methodologically, the study adopts a conceptual and hermeneutic approach to examine how sulear/suleamento reorients established frameworks in intercultural communication. It argues that prevailing epistemologies tend to universalize and homogenize knowledge, thereby obscuring asymmetries and silencing alternative perspectives. In response, sulear and suleamento are proposed as ongoing practices of intellectual and political resistance that challenge hegemonic paradigms and promote more dialogical and situated forms of knowledge production. The article concludes that decolonizing intercultural communication requires not only theoretical revision but also a sustained epistemological shift grounded in the Global South.

Keywords: Sulear; Suleamento; Intercultural Communication; Decolonial Epistemologies; Paulo Freire; Global South.

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Resumen

Desde una perspectiva freireana, este artículo aborda la hegemonía del Norte Global en la comunicación intercultural a partir de los conceptos de *sulear* y *suleamento* como herramientas epistemológicas críticas. Más allá de un ejercicio meramente conceptual, estas nociones sitúan al Sur Global como un espacio dinámico de producción de conocimiento, al tiempo que reconocen su heterogeneidad interna. Metodológicamente, el estudio adopta un enfoque conceptual y hermenéutico para analizar cómo *sulear/suleamento* reorienta los marcos establecidos en la comunicación intercultural. Se sostiene que las epistemologías dominantes tienden a universalizar y homogeneizar el conocimiento, ocultando así asimetrías y silenciando perspectivas alternativas. En respuesta, *sulear* y *suleamento* se proponen como prácticas continuas de resistencia intelectual y política que cuestionan los paradigmas hegemónicos y promueven formas de conocimiento más dialógicas y situadas. El artículo concluye que descolonizar la comunicación intercultural requiere no solo una revisión teórica, sino también un desplazamiento epistemológico sostenido desde el Sur Global.

Palabras clave: *Sulear*; *Suleamento*; Comunicación Intercultural; Epistemologías Decoloniales; Paulo Freire; Sur Global.

Introduction – or “On the Context from Which We Depart...”

At the opening conference of IAMCR 2017 (International Association for Media and Communication Research), Professor Omar Rincón, a well-known Colombian intellectual, spoke to an audience of researchers from five continents. The participants came from fields such as Communication, Media Studies, Sociology, and Cultural Studies. On stage, Rincón presented complex ideas about communication, drawing on Latin American authors and perspectives. He spoke with a firm and assertive voice, moved constantly across the stage, used strong gestures, and relied heavily on facial expressions. His presentation style was dynamic and expressive, very different from the more restrained style common in many Western academic conferences.

While the sun illuminated Cartagena de Indias outside, the auditorium inside was marked by visible reactions of surprise, discomfort, and curiosity. Some audience members might have whispered comments such as, “What is happening? Why does he move so much? Why does he speak like that?” These reactions were not random. They came mostly from researchers identified by their institutional affiliations as coming from Europe, North America, and parts of Oceania, that is, from the Global North. At the same time, researchers from the Global South, particularly Latin America, appeared more engaged and attentive, as if they recognized both the content and the performative dimension of the talk. Although everyone was listening to the same lecture, titled “Bastard Mutations of Communication” (Rincón, 2018), they were clearly not listening in the same way.

This moment revealed more than a difference in style. It exposed a deeper divide over who is recognized as a legitimate academic voice. The discomfort was not only about form, but also about authority, knowledge, and whose ways of speaking are considered valid in global academia. In that auditorium, it became evident that scholars from the Global North and the Global South were not oriented in the same direction. If one exists, the academic “compass” that is assumed to guide global knowledge production appeared visibly misaligned.

Years later, this brief preamble—an experience shared in conversation with other Latin American scholars rather than an isolated impression—serves to introduce the central concern of this work: the need to redirect the compass of intercultural communication studies, research, and teaching, especially at their intersection with Culture, Media, Education, the Arts, the Humanities, and Society. The “North” that has long guided research agendas, reading lists, and pedagogical practices in these fields must be repositioned through a different lens, both political and strategic, within academic knowledge production.

In short, this essay argues that the “South,” far more than a geographical marker and above all a geopolitical reference, should function as our epistemological benchmark. The act of *sulear* (to south) ideas should not be a seasonal, symbolic, or occasional gesture. *Suleamento* (southing) in intercultural communication studies emerges instead as an urgent intervention, opening pathways to alternative modes of knowledge production and circulation. By doing that, the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire is positioned as one of the central figures in the debate, especially due to the radical transformative potential of his ideas, a potential that is, in fact, “feared” by many who oppose the critical emancipation of subjects and a form of understanding the world that is directly connected to questioning educational systems that do not engage with people’s everyday lives and often attempt to erase the social markers that shape them. Instead, this perspective is dialogical, which means that it is grounded in reciprocal exchange and the co-construction of meaning (Citelli, Suzina & Tufte, 2021). In other words, these are “dangerous” and “subversive” ideas and, for that very reason, necessary to the field of intercultural communication and its dialogue with related fields (Pensoneau-Conway, 2012).

Methodological Approach and Argumentative Structure

From a methodological perspective, this study is conceptual and theoretical in nature and relies on interpretive and hermeneutic approaches. The analytical procedure is based on close reading, decolonial critique, and comparative conceptual analysis of key terms and debates in intercultural communication and Global South epistemologies. The selection of authors, including Márcio Campos, Paulo Freire, and others, is guided by their relevance to the genealogy and development of the concepts of *sulear* and *suleamento*, as well as their contribution to critical debates on knowledge production beyond the Global North. The structure of the paper is organized as follows:

- (a) An epistemological account of the origins of the terms *sulear* and *suleamento* in the work of Brazilian intellectuals Campos and Freire in the early 1990s, as an early attempt to conceptualize knowledge beyond the Global North;
- (b) A discussion of the need to avoid treating the Global South as a homogeneous category defined by a fixed peripheral identity or a uniform condition of subalternity, particularly through a critique of Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s concept of Epistemologies of the South as insufficient for capturing the heterogeneity of the Global South; and (c) A conceptual reflection within in-

tercultural communication studies on how *sulear* operates as a decolonial gesture through the mobilization of authors and concepts from the Global South in a field still largely dominated by Anglophone epistemologies.

Redirecting the Compass: The Perspective of Sulear

The term *sulear* is a neologism from Brazilian Portuguese that transforms the noun *sul* (South) into a verbal action, that is, *sulear* (“to south”). Beyond a simple play on “North” and “South,” *sulear* constitutes a powerful way to politically and ideologically reinvent the guiding notion of *nortear* (northward orientation), a term traditionally used in Portuguese to designate “the path to follow” or an unquestionable reference point. *Sulear*, far more than an alternative to northward guidance, represents a positionality (where metaphor and literal meaning intersect) of considering the South as a foundation, as the anchor that guides our perspectives, worldviews, and knowledge-building practices.

Historically, the first documented use of the term dates back to 1991, when Brazilian intellectual Márcio D’Olne Campos, then a lecturer at the Institute of Physics at the University of Campinas (UNICAMP), published the chapter *A Arte de Sulear-se* (The Art of Southing) (1991). In the context of the work, which was part of a broader discussion, Campos questioned why the North is considered the ultimate reference point, including in the teaching of cardinal directions using cartographic projections such as Mercator, Gall-Peters, and Winkel Tripel. These projections not only place the North at the top but also distort the actual and projected sizes of countries and continents.¹ More importantly, Campos highlighted the absence of the South as a point of orientation, even for those living “below” the hemispheric divide.

When we learn to ORIENT ourselves, generations are taught to place the right arm toward the EAST. The problem is that in doing so, we end up looking toward the NORTH. Inhabitants of the Northern Hemisphere remain “northed” by this practical rule, while for those of us in the South, it disorients us. Why not establish a rule suited to our context: placing the left hand toward the rising sun, toward the East, so that we are looking toward the SOUTH when we are practicing the *sulear* [southing]? This integrates the body and lateral orientation coherently between sky and Earth, allowing us to truly perceive our horizon and environment. (Campos, 1991, p. 84)

Campos continues that by ignoring the South and following this “pseudo-practical rule,” we are left with “[...] a bodily orientation that, at night, turns our back on the Southern Cross, the fundamental constellation for the act of *sulear-se* [to south]” (Campos, 1991, p. 59). Beyond the literal assertion of cardinal direction, the author demonstrates that we also turn our backs on the South, on South-South relations, and end up facing the North, repeating the coloniality of knowledge

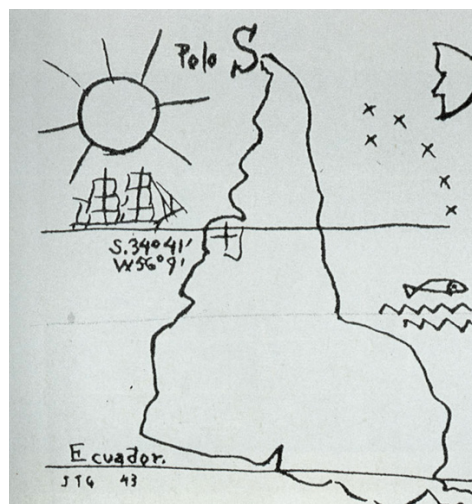
¹ In Campos’s words: “The notion of Northern superiority is also reflected in terrestrial globes, which are designed on supporting bases with their polar axes oriented northward and upward, irrespective of the hemisphere or location. [...] Terrestrial globes should be approached as if we were astronaut-observers, positioned outside the Earth’s atmosphere. In this perspective, notions of up and down disappear, gravitational forces are negligible, and the observer is weightless, effectively ‘floating’ in space” (1999, p. 44).

and power (Lander, 1993; Quijano, 2003). In other words, the Global North is often constructed as the primary source of legitimate, rational, and scientific knowledge, typically framed as inherently Western and superior, particularly within Anglophone contexts (Albuquerque, 2021; R'boul, 2022; Zabrodskaia, 2025). In this sense, by failing to *sulear* our ideas, we “swallow” knowledge that flows from the North, that is, a space that produces active knowledge creators whose work is rarely questioned. Without scrutiny or comparison to local Southern contexts, which are treated as passive agents, we become mere recipients of knowledge designed and executed according to Northern viewpoints that neither affect nor fully understand us (Campos, 1991, p. 59).

More than three decades after its first mention, the art of southing remains relevant. According to Campos, it is more than ever a powerful way to reframe knowledge, redistribute legitimacy to Southern forms of knowledge production, and, above all, act as a counter-hegemonic gesture. *Sulear* represents a critical stance against the enduring effects of colonization and subalternity, especially for populations historically labeled as Third World, underdeveloped, or indigenous subsistence communities. As mentioned earlier, the ideological and geopolitical stakes embedded in the term *sulear* challenge the North-centric notion of “*nortear*”—north as above, superior; south as below, inferior—a metaphor deeply ingrained in Brazilian thought as both a literal and figurative guide (Campos, 2019, p. 1).

In the reading advanced here, the concept of *sulear*, understood as an epistemological and political gesture from the South, resonates symbolically with Joaquín Torres-García’s artistic work *América Invertida* (Inverted America), created in 1943 (fig. 1). By depicting the continent with the South at the top, the Uruguayan artist subverted Eurocentric cartographic hierarchies and affirmed a distinct Latin American centrality.

Figure 1. *América Invertida* (1943), by Joaquín Torres-García (1878–1949).



Note. The artwork is housed at the Museo Juan Manuel Blanes, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Just as *sulear* seeks to displace Global North reference points and legitimize Southern knowledge, Torres-García’s inverted map visually represents the decolonization of perspective, asserting cultural and intellectual autonomy. Both gestures, though expressed in different languages, con-

verge in critiquing Eurocentrism and affirming a viewpoint that values Southern geographies, histories, and experiences as starting points for constructing knowledge and identity.

Equally important, Paulo Freire, a frequent interlocutor and friend of Marcio Campos in the field of popular and critical pedagogy (Freire & Campos, 1990), refers to the movement of *sulear* ideas in his work *Pedagogia da Esperança: um reencontro com a pedagogia do oprimido* (Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed) (1992). Freire recounts a study in the early 1960s involving roughly 1,000 families across urban Recife, the Zona da Mata, Zona do Agreste, and what he called the “gateway” to the Zona do Sertão (the semi-arid interior region of Northeast Brazil) in Pernambuco. Freire was discussing the results of this research, which aimed to understand the role of schools and families in shaping the relationship between freedom and authority. During his talk, he emphasized how his academic language created a barrier between the worldviews he conveyed and those of the parents listening to him.

At that time, I would give long presentations on the chosen topics. Following the traditional lecture format, I would eventually move into debate, discussion, and dialogue with the participants. [...] As a result, my speeches were often interrupted or filled with phrases such as “I mean” or “that is to say.” Yet, [...] I usually began from my own perspective, without further explanation, as if it alone should serve as the “South” guiding them. It was as if my words, my topic, and my worldview carried the power to *sulear* them. (Freire [1992] 2011, p. 24)

Freire was fully aware of the life experiences of the working-class families, rural laborers, and fishermen he engaged with, yet he recalls a humble man’s words that stayed with him for life. This man, speaking from a position of extreme material hardship, acknowledged that while he and others could understand much of Freire’s academic discourse (including references to Piaget), Freire, the “Doctor Paulo Freire,” might not fully grasp the gaps that separated them in terms of class, housing, access to education, and the daily struggles of survival.

Freire realized that his act of *sulear* was not the same as that of the families before him. Their listening was active, and they demanded reciprocity: they expected him to listen to their realities as well. Their “South,” grounded in the lived conditions of exhaustion, scarcity, and neglect by the state, did not coincide with the “South” of the intellectual. For the worker who spoke to him, Freire’s “South” was a well-appointed house with multiple rooms for the family, running water, modern appliances, and a library—a reality far removed from the families’ lived experiences (Freire [1992] 2011, p. 24).

For contemporary readers navigating debates on the Global South, Freire’s reflection offers a vital lesson. It highlights the fracture between Northern and Southern axes of knowledge and warns against imagining the Global South as a single, unified, oppositional force. The South is not a monolithic entity; it is diverse, situated, and constantly negotiating its position in relation to knowledge and power. Finally, in interpreting this framework, *sulear* and *suleamento* emerge as closely related yet analytically distinct. Drawing on Freire and Campos, *sulear* operates as an epistemological orientation, that is, a gesture of thinking from and with the Global South that

repositions it as a legitimate locus of knowledge production. *Suleamento*, in turn, unfolds as a process and practice: the active movement through which such orientation is enacted by reorienting, applying, and displacing established theoretical frameworks. While *sulear* signals a shift in perspective, *suleamento* materializes this shift in concrete analytical and methodological interventions. Together, they articulate a dynamic interplay between orientation and practice, enabling a critical reconfiguration of intercultural communication from the Global South.

Problematizing the Epistemologies of the South: Homogenization and Intra-South Asymmetries

The Global South is not a space defined by a presumed essentialist identity, as if all its members share a uniform subalternity or participate in an indivisible system that mirrors itself in all Southern actors. On the contrary, the Global South is composed of multiple “Souths,” in which nations, societies, collective groups, and individuals are refracted through difference rather than reflected as a homogeneous whole. This work argues that these many Souths cannot be neatly placed under the rubric of a homogenizing *Epistemology of the South* umbrella concept (Santos, 1995). Nor can they be treated as if asymmetries within South–South relations did not exist, or as if the Southern Cross were perceived in the same way by all social actors, even when they occupy positions that may at times be in conflict.

On this topic, Dirlik (2007), highlights that the concept of the Global South emerges as a critical and political category addressing historical inequalities rooted in colonialism and the dominance of the Global North. While the term promises to foster solidarity and envision alternatives to global hierarchies, it also presents a predicament when used in vague or homogenizing ways that overlook the profound differences, conflicts, and power relations within the South itself. Its value, Dirlik stresses, depends on the critical and contextual approach adopted in its application. Similarly, Dados and Connell (2012), argue that the South should not be seen merely as a geographic label but as a set of historical, political, and economic relations shaped by colonialism, imperialism, and ongoing global inequalities. The authors emphasize that while structural subordination persists, the South also generates agency, knowledge, and cultural practices. By situating the South in global dynamics rather than treating it as a fixed, homogeneous identity, they highlight both the inequalities that define it and the potential for resistance, alternative modernities, and epistemic contributions that challenge Northern dominance.

In turn, Gomes (2012), provides a critical analysis of Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ proposals regarding the Epistemologies of the South, framing discussions that delineate the existence of a Global South. Gomes explores how Santos articulates an alternative to the epistemological paradigm of modern science, which he argues has been in crisis for at least two decades. Central concepts such as abyssal thinking, post-abyssal thinking, the ecology of knowledge, and epistemological pragmatism collectively offer a more comprehensive understanding of the Epistemologies of the South. From this perspective, Santos (1995, 2019), defines the Epistemologies of the South as a set of critical perspectives aimed at recognizing, valuing, and legitimizing the knowledge his-

torically produced by peoples and social groups marginalized by Western modernity, particularly in contexts shaped by colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

This leads to a reflection on the need to approach Santos' theoretical framework through the lens of *suleamento*. But is it redundant to emphasize a movement toward *sulear* when Santos' debate already positions the South as the focus of these epistemologies? Before addressing this potential redundancy, it is useful to pose a question to readers, especially scholars and researchers who identify as Brazilian, Mozambican, Cape Verdean, Angolan, Bissau-Guinean, Timorese, São Toméan, Macanese, and Goan scholars, as well as members of Lusophone diasporas, Indigenous peoples, quilombola communities, and other historically subalternized groups not encompassed by nationalist labels. Can we truly see ourselves, as producers of knowledge emerging from these multiple "Souths," as occupying an equitable position of academic legitimacy, on par with a Portuguese researcher and enjoying the same privileges as if we were equals? Or does this assumption conceal enduring asymmetries?

In other words, can the singular act of thinking through the *Epistemologies of the South* by a Portuguese academic truly carry the same weight as the plural *southing* undertaken by multiple Portuguese-speaking and multilingual scholars across the Global South? How do race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, embodiment, and age intersect with these Southern discourses in post-colonial and decolonial contexts? These questions can be extended to many others who do not necessarily operate within formal spaces of research and teaching, yet engage in their own ways of generating knowledge, practices, and discourses that produce rich and powerful forms of understanding—forms that may not be recognized as valid from an academicist perspective grounded in what Paulo Freire (1997), describes as the banking model of education. This paper invites into the debate popular, activist, shamanic, ancestral, rural, and peasant knowledges; knowledges from favelas and *juremeiro* practices; those emerging from the Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*) and the Homeless Workers' Movement (*Movimento Nacional da População em Situação de Rua*); as well as those produced by *travestis* and other marginalized groups.

Southing the Epistemologies of the South: Questioning Redundancy and Epistemic Legitimacy

It is important to emphasize that this work does not intend to critique national identity, nor does it constitute a personal attack on any scholar. Rather, it raises the question of whether the Epistemologies of the South, as widely cited in Lusophone and non-Lusophone universities, can truly encompass the experiences of the diverse "Souths" that make up the Global South within Portuguese-speaking academia, for example. Does the academic recognition granted under the umbrella of the Global South translate into an equitable position across different Southern realities?

This is to say that Portugal may, in some contemporary and critical readings, be seen as a Southern periphery of Europe, or even as outside a strictly and narrowly defined Western paradigm (Reis, 2020). However, Portugal's historical and colonial experiences differ markedly from those of Brazil, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Timor-Leste, São Tomé and Príncipe, Goa, Malacca, and Macau, whose trajectories were shaped by Portuguese colonial rule, even years after the independence of its last colonies in Africa and Asia (Castelo, 1999). This echoes Fanon's (1963), discussion of the radical differences that persist in ideas, political and social structures, cultural spheres, and even in the gendered and racialized reading of bodies within the colonizer–colonized binary, which does not simply disappear with the formal establishment of national independence.

In this sense, while Santos was pioneering in systematizing the Epistemologies of the South in 1995, contemporary applications of his concept often adopt an almost universalist perspective, assuming that all subaltern knowledge naturally belongs to the Global South, without adequately considering historical tensions, specificities, and intra-Southern colonial relations. The act of southing thus highlights the importance of engaging with thinkers and practices emerging from the Global South, challenging the epistemic centrality of the North. For instance, connections among Paulo Freire; Cape Verdean and Guinea-Bissau leader Amílcar Cabral (Cabral & Davidson, 1979; Gadotti & Romão, 2012); Equatorial Guinean Eduardo I. Bodipo-Malumba (1974); Angolan Martinho Kayava (2006); Ghanaian Leonard Kwami Tabernacle Dorvlo (1993); Indian Asoke Bhattacharya (2010, 2011); and Taiwanese Fang Yung-Chuan [方容寬] (2007), demonstrate how Southern intellectuals across diverse geopolitical and cultural contexts have developed critical reflections on liberation, emancipatory education, and the decolonization of knowledge. These encounters show that southing is not merely a conceptual exercise but also a political and cultural practice, reviving historical solidarities and enabling new alliances in a South-South perspective.

Finally, the work of Freitas (2019), points to a possible alignment between the concepts of the Global South and the Epistemologies of the South, emphasizing horizontal dialogues among subaltern forms of knowledge. However, unlike Freitas, this paper critiques the uncritical adoption of Santos as inherently decolonial and automatically representative of the Global South. From the perspective of colonial knowledge relations between Brazil and Portugal, merely including Portugal within a Southern narrative, or reading Santos's work linearly, risks erasing historical conflicts, asymmetries, and epistemic tensions, thereby obscuring the complexity of knowledge production and intercultural connections within the South itself.

In response to the question regarding the possible redundancy of the *sulear* movement in relation to the Epistemologies of the South, it must be noted that the dialogues proposed by Campos and Freire both precede and intersect with Santos' theoretical systematization of the Epistemologies of the South, demonstrating that the practice of thinking from the South was already underway before it was formally theorized. Moreover, when considering the authors cited earlier in the context of the struggles for the liberation of nations colonized by Portugal in Africa, the encounter between African experiences of anti-colonial struggle, Latin American reflections on

critical pedagogy, Indian formulations of cultural decolonization, and Taiwanese proposals for intellectual emancipation reveals a diversity of pathways for confronting epistemic injustices.

The unease emerging from these lines is in no way directed as a personal critique of Santos as an intellectual (even considering such a possibility would be unhelpful to the discussion).² Rather, the aim here is to show that we need to move beyond a scenario in which the focus is on whether an individual's intentions can truly be considered good in isolation. Instead, we must recognize how the processes of the colonality of knowledge are so resilient that they co-opt discussions important to the various "Souths" within the Global South perspective such as the issue of *suleamento*. To the extent that a perspective that promises to be highly progressive, such as the Epistemologies of the South, can, by osmosis, become a way of reaffirming a possible homogeneity of the Global South and the "colonial necessity" of relying on a theoretical framework that, in many respects, may not resonate with us as much as the potential of the *sulear* movement in the thought proposed by Campos and Freire. These are ideas capable of affecting us in context and lived experience.

Thus, returning to Campos' reflection (1991, p. 83), we are faced with the following question: "ORIENTATION, NORTHing, or SOUTHing? Which is truly ours?" Campos' answer is direct and, in the interpretation of the author of this work, perhaps also metaphorical: "It depends on our local—or somewhat broader—references, as in our case: being in the Southern Hemisphere and, unlike Portugal, not seeing the North Star or Polaris, which some Indigenous peoples call 'the star that never moves'" (Campos, 1991, p. 83).

It is therefore necessary to redirect the question to researchers from different parts of the Global South, particularly to those who have experienced the processes of the (many) Portuguese colonizations in the past and their continuing impacts in the present. By not mobilizing the process of *suleamento* within the Epistemologies of the South, are we not turning our backs once again on the Southern Cross, and perhaps engaging in an even more reckless act? In other words, might we be pretending to see a pseudo-constellation of the Southern Cross when, in fact, it may be merely another disguise of the capricious North Star in its continuous process of "northing" our research?

Intercultural Communication and Suleamento: Decolonizing the Field from Global South Perspectives

As Atay and D'Silva (2019, p. 2), explain, the field of Intercultural Communication (IC) "dates back to the late 1940s and early 1950s to Edward T. Hall's efforts at the Foreign Service Institute"

2 As a political stance, I cannot withdraw from the debate without expressing my intellectual and affective solidarity with the collective of more than a dozen women researchers who, since 2023, have sought social justice in response to what they report as experiences of harassment allegedly perpetrated by Santos at the Center for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal. For further information from the perspective of the researchers themselves, readers can consult the open letters published by what is referred to as the Collective of CES Victims on the website academiasemassedio.com. This website also contains discussions regarding the proceedings reportedly initiated by Santos against the complainants, as well as some of the publicly available information regarding the outcomes of the university's internal investigation concerning the researcher's conduct and that of his former students and research assistants.

in the United States, with a strong anthropological and sociological focus. Since then, observing the works of Chen and Starosta (1996, 1998), much of IC's development has centered on mutual understanding of difference and the creation of bridges in contexts where distinct languages, cultures, and identities began to be seen as opportunities for connection rather than sources of separation. For a long time, much of the discussion in the field "mainly [focused] on the interpersonal, group, or organizational aspects of cultural communication" (Atay & D'Silva, 2019, p. 2).

With the increasing globalization of communication, a more critical perspective became necessary, particularly concerning power dynamics and politically minoritized groups in IC. "Nonetheless, profound changes in global communication, particularly in social media, are now causing us to reexamine our notions of culture, communication, audience, and identity," remind Atay and D'Silva (2019, p. 2). Moreover, Chen and Starosta (1996, p. 353), note:

As we grow increasingly aware of the global interdependence of people and cultures, we confront ever shifting cultural, ecological, economic, and technological realities that define the shrinking world of the twenty-first century. The development of new ways of living in the world together is pivotal to further human progress; we must learn how to see things through the eyes of others and add their knowledge to our personal repertoires. Such a global mind-set can result only from competent communication among peoples from diverse cultures.

From the context that Starosta and Chen (2003, p. 3), classify as the "ferment" or "fifth moment" of intercultural communication (marking the field's critical turn), new theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches began to gain traction. Research increasingly focused on contemporary perspectives such as Critical Intercultural Communication, Mediated Intercultural Communication, and Queer Intercultural Communication, briefly discussed below.

Critical Turns: Power, Media, and Queer Perspectives in Intercultural Communication

Critical Intercultural Communication (CIC), drawing on Martin and Nakayama (1999, p. 8), is defined as an approach that seeks to understand "the role of power and contextual constraints on communication in order ultimately to achieve a more equitable society." Following this critical turn, CIC "represents an exciting, productive, and rapidly growing area of inquiry within the field of intercultural communication in the larger Communication discipline and one that connects with and joins other situated fields in Communication [...]" (Halualani & Nakayama, 2013, p. 1). CIC intersects with areas such as rhetoric, feminist studies, critical pedagogy in communication, organizational communication, media studies, race and ethnicity studies, interpersonal communication, and performance studies (Halualani & Nakayama, 2013). In other words: "This area foregrounds issues of power, context, socio-economic relations and historical/structural forces as constituting and shaping culture and intercultural communication encounters, relationships, and contexts" (Halualani & Nakayama, 2013, p. 1).

Similarly, Halualani, Mendoza, and Drzewiecka (2009, p. 31) argue that CIC "can help reconceptualize intercultural communication and broaden how 'inter' and 'intra' might be better

deployed to analyze more fully the relationship between culture, identity, and power.” In other words, the relationship between culture and communication in CIC can be understood as a contested space, an arena of meaning-making in which communication is never neutral.

Mediated Intercultural Communication (MIC), in turn, emerged to address the gaps between traditional IC research and the highly mediated, digitalized realities of today (Atay & D’Silva, 2019). As Atay (2018, p. 182) notes: “Increasingly, new media technologies, mobile communication, and quick media applications, referring to online and mobile media forms, occupy a larger role in our everyday communication.” MIC also allows us to pedagogically³ explore the complexity of mediated interactions, which “can be effectively and creatively used to address intercultural communication issues such as power and hegemony in educational settings and in everyday life realities, identity constructions and performances, whiteness, and representations of human bodies, to name a few” (Atay, 2018, pp. 183–184). Yet, despite the growing influence of media technologies, there is historical resistance to acknowledging how mediated elements connect to intercultural communication: “[M]ediated texts are too often not utilized as pedagogical tools within the discourse of intercultural communication” (Atay, 2018, p. 180).

In the MIC context, the power of mediated narratives as protagonists in social integration is crucial, especially during times of pandemic-induced isolation. Atay (2022, p. 202), describes these narratives as our true “companions”: “Narratives are integral to human communication. [...] We use oral, written, and visual stories to communicate, make sense of who we are, explain the world around us, and archive our experiences”.

Finally, Queer Intercultural Communication (QIC) represents one of the newest research approaches in the study of interculturality (Atay, 2021). From Eguchi’s perspective (2021, p. 275), IC “had overlooked queer issues and concerns of sexuality, sex, and gender in its knowledge productions.” Similarly, Chávez (2013) emphasizes that, historically, queer studies have been marginal within IC: “The intersections and interplays between the queer and the intercultural thus need to be more explicitly explicated, elucidated, and elaborated” (Chávez, 2013, p. 84).

Beyond the critical turn already discussed, what becomes evident with the advancement QIC is a questioning of the Western-centric lens that historically dominated IC research, highlighting experiences and worldviews emerging from the Global South and its relation to media practices (Iqani, 2016; Iqani & Resende, 2019). By challenging Eurocentric and North American dominance, QIC amplifies voices, bodies, and intellectualities previously marginalized. These scholars are not merely “objects” of study but active subjects whose lived queer experiences inform their research. QIC is thus defined “as a field of inquiry [that] heavily draws on the foundational assumption of queer theorizing that rejects the universalized and essentialist sexual paradigm of a gay-straight binary” (Eguchi & Calafell, 2019, p. 4).

³ The author, proposing the creation of Critical Mediated Intercultural Communication Pedagogy, explains that his epistemological stance “recognizes that the media texts we consume are forms of intercultural communication due to the issues they present—race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, sexuality, disability, and immigration. Hence, we actively partake in the intercultural communication that is mediated. In addition, mediated texts that are global in nature also direct us toward communication that is global in nature because of the prominent presence of different languages, cultural practices, and human bodies” (Atay, 2018, p. 191).

Whether through Critical, Mediated, or Queer Intercultural Communication, the central question remains: how is it possible to engage in the *suleamento* of intercultural communication in ways that decenter the Global North and prioritize knowledge, practices, and decolonial perspectives rooted in the Global South?

Decolonial Intersections: Gender, Race, Indigeneity, Disability, and Communication

A possible example to understand the issues that call upon intercultural communication and its connection to gender studies from a perspective that seeks to south ideas is to consider what María Lugones (2023), highlights as the coloniality of gender. Coloniality of gender is a central concept in Lugones' work, proposing a critical analysis of how European colonialism not only dominated territories and bodies but also imposed rigid and hierarchical gender categories, disregarding and marginalizing the experiences of Indigenous women, Afro-descendants, and other subalternized populations. For Lugones, modernity/coloniality produces not only economic and racial inequalities but also establishes gender regimes that naturalize female submission within a European patriarchal logic, rendering local gender practices and knowledge invisible. The coloniality of gender demonstrates that in any intercultural encounter, power relations are not limited to political or economic spheres but permeate the body, sexuality, and subjectivity, requiring communication and dialogue between cultures to recognize and problematize these historically constructed hierarchies.

Regarding placing intercultural communication alongside race and ethnicity studies, a particularly powerful example is the work of Lélia Gonzalez and her concept of *amefricanidade* (amefricinity) (Gonzalez, 2020; Rios, 2020). This concept seeks to value the cultural, social, and political contributions of Afro-descendant populations in Latin America, especially in Brazil, proposing an understanding of Africinity as a plural, dynamic, and resilient identity. Gonzalez denounces that structural racism and Eurocentric hegemony have historically silenced Afro-Brazilian knowledge, traditions, and forms of social organization, marginalizing their presence in education, culture, and politics. Amefricinity emphasizes that African diaspora processes and historical experiences of resistance cannot be treated as secondary or supplementary but constitute central elements to understanding Latin America's cultural and social diversity from a decolonial perspective (Henson, 2021). Bringing this perspective into intercultural communication highlights that dialogue between cultures must recognize and incorporate Afro-descendant and Indigenous knowledge and practices, creating spaces for visibility, legitimacy, and appreciation of cultural plurality as a decolonial practice (Guilherme, 2019; Ortiz Ocaña, Maloof Díaz & Mejía Porto, 2025; Proaño Zurita & Herdoíza Mancheno, 2025).

From an Indigenous perspective, the studies of Ailton Krenak (2019, 2022) and Davi Kopenawa (Kopenawa & Albert, 2019), provide essential elements for thinking about intercultural communication from their cosmologies, without relying on the objectification of Indigenous peoples through the researcher's gaze. Krenak emphasizes the interdependence between people, nature, and spirituality, highlighting that communication occurs not only through verbal language but

also through gestures, rituals, stories, and collective practices that articulate memory, territory, and ways of life. Kopenawa reminds us that humans are not separate from the forest; more directly, the logic of human-nature codependence emerges as an imperative across all societies throughout history. According to him, nature is sacred and inhabited by spirits, and respecting it is essential for everyone's survival. Incorporating these perspectives means recognizing that interculturality is not only a space for exchange between cultures but also a commitment to attentive listening and respect for Indigenous epistemologies, valuing historically marginalized knowledge and resisting the imposition of Eurocentric categories. Equally important, in the context indigenous knowledge, *Buen Vivir* (loosely translated as "good living" or "well living") is a key decolonial concept for understanding intercultural communication, as it challenges Western-centric assumptions and foregrounds relational, collective, and ecological ways of knowing. It helps reframe intercultural encounters beyond mere cultural exchange, emphasizing reciprocity, coexistence, and epistemic diversity (López, 2024).

In turn, from the perspective of folk communication, Luiz Beltrão's (1987, 2001), studies on communication among marginalized communities highlight the importance of understanding popular and peripheral communicative practices as legitimate expressions of culture and social resistance. Beltrão observes that in contexts of economic and social exclusion, elements such as *latrinalia*, *ex-votos*, graffiti, and other everyday expressions function as means of denunciation, solidarity, and collective identity building. Applying this approach to intercultural communication demonstrates that cultural interaction should consider not only institutional or normative codes but also these everyday forms of knowledge and power, expanding our understanding of dialogue and social class.

Similarly, studies on disability, particularly the work of Anahi Guedes de Mello (2014), underscore the need to rethink power relations and inclusion in intercultural communication. Guedes de Mello critically examines paternalistic, charity-based and pathologizing conceptions of disability, advocating for approaches that recognize the agency, autonomy, and rights of people with disabilities as full social subjects, with particular attention to women with disabilities. Applying this perspective to intercultural communication involves recognizing structural barriers, adapting communicative practices, and creating accessible and inclusive spaces, ensuring that other subjects are incorporated as integral participants in intercultural dialogue rather than merely objects of study or objects of pity. Building on this perspective, even sexuality-focused studies in intercultural communication can benefit by relocating the debate from bodies that deviate from functional, aesthetic, and normative standards of body normativity and ableism (Mello & Gavério, 2019).

Language, Hegemony, and Epistemic Visibility in Global Academia

In terms of intercultural communication and foreign language teaching, João Nemi Neto's (2018), work is illustrative. When applying queer pedagogy to language teaching, especially Portuguese as a foreign language, he argues that teaching materials and classroom practices often

reinforce heteronormative and cisnormative norms, rendering invisible LGBTQIA+ identities. He highlights that the gendered nature of Portuguese, present in pronouns, articles, and adjectives, may limit the expressive possibilities of non-binary students and those with diverse sexual orientations if teaching is confined to traditional standards. Queer pedagogy in this context proposes not only the inclusion of diversion content but also a critical reevaluation of how language and identity are taught in the classroom, creating safe and affirming spaces where learners can recognize and express themselves. This perspective connects directly to the idea of southing intercultural communication, since learning a new language also means engaging with the cultural values and social meanings embedded in its linguistic structures. By making alternative possibilities of gender and sexuality visible, Portuguese language teaching can broaden students' intercultural understanding, fostering dialogue between different identities and challenging homogenizing views of culture that are often tied to monolingual, Eurocentric standards (such as the assumption that Portugal alone defines linguistic norms).

Still within the field of language, and specifically from the perspective of English as a *lingua franca* in academia, Suzina's (2021), work invites a highly critical reading of how communication and media studies—including intercultural communication—must, even when their insights emerge from the Global South, be written in English to achieve even minimal resonance within spaces considered privileged for intellectual debate. Reflecting on the hegemony of language and on how knowledge produced outside the Anglophone sphere is often rendered invisible within Global North academia also highlights the significant lack of citation networks for non-English texts in the field of intercultural communication. Such networks effectively render work originating from the Global South invisible if it does not conform to the logic of the English language, the writing style arbitrarily deemed “academic” by these standards, and the structural mechanisms that determine which texts (despite being in English) manage to penetrate the academic space. Beyond language, factors such as journal indexing and quartile rankings act as powerful gatekeeping mechanisms that shape the reading, discussion, and citation of these works, producing what the author, in the title of her work, describes as a “sterilisation of scientific work” (Suzina, 2021).⁴

Decolonial Practice and Suleamento as Epistemic Action

A final example of *suleamento* in intercultural communication comes from Paola Prandini's (2022), concept of *decolonialidades*. For Prandini, *decolonialidades* designates an active and conscious attitude that goes beyond merely recognizing colonialities, aiming to transform institutions, curricula, pedagogical and communicative practices, and mindsets that still reproduce colonial legacies of cultural, cognitive, and symbolic order. Unlike the theoretical concept of decoloniality, *decolonialidades* emphasizes practical engagement, especially in education and educommunication, encouraging teaching and interaction that challenge and dismantle Eurocentric and white-

⁴ Accordingly, reflecting on the *suleamento* of intercultural communication in a metalinguistic sense also entails the attempt to write in languages other than English, a challenging endeavor as evidenced by this very work. In trying to reach audiences potentially unfamiliar with Paulo Freire's concept of *sulear*, the author had no viable alternative but to write in English, an experience that was both frustrating and limiting.

ness-based structures. It is also linked to “educommunities,” understood as collective, horizontal, and plural spaces where dialogue and sensitivity to diverse identities are central to communication and education. By adopting the plural *decolonialidades*, Prandini highlights the multiplicity of paths to being and acting decolonially, recognizing that each context (such as Brazil, Mozambique, and South Africa, part of her observations) produces singular manifestations in response to specific marks of coloniality.

In this sense, southing intercultural communication means shifting the reference axis away from hegemonic theories (typically originating from the Global North and guided by ideals of harmony, consensus, and cultural neutrality) to value perspectives that recognize *conflict* as a constitutive element of encounters between cultures (Valenciano Canet, 2025). Instead of seeing conflict merely as an obstacle to communication, *sulear* a comunicacao intercultural aqui e criar um space for negotiation, meaning-making, and affirmation of historically silenced identities. This approach challenges universalist assumptions that render colonial, racial, and power inequalities invisible, demonstrating that intercultural communication is not a neutral field but one traversed by structural tensions. Thus, engaging with *suleamento*, intercultural communication transforms this field into a critical territory that examines its context through local epistemological references, a space unafraid to confront and highlight the provocative role of conflict, open to new and diverse forms of knowledge, and committed to social justice. In other words, southing intercultural communication is a continuous and challenging process that aims to *genuinely* put an end to the epistemic hegemony of the Global North, which often assumes itself as unquestionable, infallible, and universal (Zabrodskaia, 2025).

Finally, in line with Milan and Treré’s (2024), reflection, it is necessary to be attentive to the risk of falling into a “decolonial reductionism,” which often draws on Global South scholarship without fully engaging with or integrating it into communicational praxis. No less important, and following Grohmann’s (2025), argument on the need to consider Latin American intellectuals—not only Freire, but also Jesús Martín-Barbero, Álvaro Vieira Pinto, Arturo Escobar, Orlando Fals Borda, and many others—as a set of critical epistemological propositions that should not be mobilized as mere tokens, it is worth recalling that Latin America (and, more broadly, the Global South) is not simply a “site of research” for academic observation, but also a space where intercultural communication can be critically theorized.

Conclusion (and Reopenings)

The debate surrounding the terms *sulear* and *suleamento* is more than a conceptual exercise: it constitutes a political, epistemological, and pedagogical gesture that challenges the centrality of the Global North in knowledge production and intercultural communication practices. By placing the Global South as a point of reference—not only geographically, but also culturally, episte-

mologically, and politically—it asserts that knowledge construction must recognize the diversity, complexity, and internal asymmetries of the Global South. As we have seen throughout this work, from Torres-García’s inverted cartography to Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, through the contributions of thinkers such as João Nemi Neto, Paola Prandini, Lélia Gonzalez, María Lugones, and Ailton Krenak, to *sulear* ideas is to legitimize multiple forms of knowledge historically silenced or rendered invisible.

Thus, the importance of consolidating *sulear* and *suleamento* in academic discussions on the Global South, intercultural communication, and decolonial studies is undeniable. They provide conceptual and political tools to challenge hegemonies, make subaltern experiences visible, and create horizontal dialogues among multiple “Souths”. Rather than offering definitive conclusions, the debate remains open, in constant motion (as every act of *suleamento* should be), permanently seeking to reorient, reimagine, and reinvent the field of knowledge from the South. By placing the South at the center of reflection, research, and teaching, we challenge not only the geopolitics of knowledge but also the norms, methods, and hierarchies imposed by Northern universities, which for decades have dictated what is valid, legitimate, and universal.

Another point that deserves emphasis is the need to *sulear* the epistemologies of the South. These epistemologies are often seen as the sole frameworks produced by and for researchers of the Global South. Yet, from the argument advanced here, we can observe that the very ideas of *suleamento*, as proposed by Campos and Freire, emerged prior to the formal systematization of the term by Santos. In this view, without committing anachronistic distortions, these early formulations hold even greater potential precisely because they arise from academic production rooted in a country that experienced colonization and slavery, rather than necessarily originating from the country that carried out that colonization and enslavement.

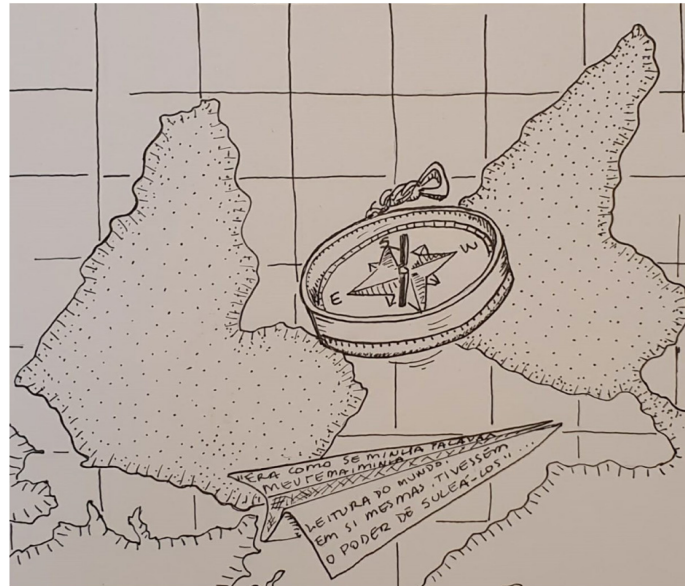
At the same time, the *suleamento* of intercultural communication should not be understood as a one-off or symbolic act; it is a continuous movement that demands attention to power relations, specific contexts, and the social practices that shape human interactions. More than closing debates, *sulear* opens possibilities: new epistemologies, critical methodologies, and intercultural perspectives that place race, gender, sexuality, disability, and cultural belonging at the center (not the margins) of inquiry and communicative practice.

Yet, as a possible opening to imagine other forms of *suleamento*, it is worth engaging with scholarship that approaches intercultural communication from “other Souths,” such as countries in South and Southeast Asia. This would involve perspectives shaped by concepts such as inter-Asia referencing, “Asia as method,” the de-Westernization of Asia, critiques of nationalism, and even the notion of the Majority World (which often challenges the very framing of the Global South). These are developed by scholars such as Chen Kuan-Hsing, Chua Beng Huat, Koichi Iwabuchi, Thongchai Winichakul, and Kasian Tejapira, among others.

Finally, *suleamento* is neither neutral nor voluntary: it is a constant practice of intellectual resistance, an ethical commitment to diversity, horizontality, and cognitive justice. The gesture

of *sulear* opens the way for plural epistemologies (pedagogical, political, and cultural) capable of reshaping not only what we study, but also how we study and who has the right to produce knowledge. If *sulear* is a responsibility, then the real challenge remains: who among us will have the strength not only to radically displace the epistemic centrality of the Global North in academia, but also to endure and navigate the consequences of doing so?

Figure 2. “Sul–Sul” [Sur–Sur] (2020)



Source: Illustration by Flávia Suzue de Mesquita Ikeda, kindly provided to the author.

“Os ventos do norte não movem moinhos”

(Sangue Latino, Secos & Molhados - 1973)

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Note

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