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Colonized Territories, Interculturality and Social Work

Territorios colonizados, Interculturalidad y Trabajo Social

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Abstract

The incorporation of the territorial in approaching social problems has been increasing in Social Work due to its relationship with the historical, political, economic and cultural constitution. Territory is no longer another geographical dimension in the analysis of social reality, but instead embodied and made explicit in the materializations, symbols and relationships of those who inhabit it. To incorporate the historicity of the territories is to ask oneself about the implications of colonization, the established power pattern and its

Keywords:

Colonized territory; social problem; interculturality; social work

actualization with colonial modernity that is reproduced in existentiality and in the institutions that support it. It is impossible for the processes of social transformation to achieve their purpose while coloniality is reproduced in the social order that naturalizes it and makes it imperceptible or unquestionable. Territorial decoloniality is the detachment from the colonial matrix. Social Work can contribute so that intervention considers other forms of knowledge, other ways of inhabiting and living in the territories. These are the reflections that are presented in this paper. It arises from the research shared with colleagues from Social Work whom for several years questioned Social Work's ethical commitment in contemporary times. The objective is to highlight the importance of colonization as a determining element in the historical constitution of territories, whose coloniality needs to be investigated in biographies, contexts and daily life. Collectives, towns, communities and organizations try to change and improve their daily lives. Interculturality is an inevitable fact of the relationship that can become a transformation and liberation project. From its ethic, Social Work must contribute to the decoloniality of the territories as it compromises life and dignity in a significant way.

Resumen

La incorporación de lo territorial en el abordaje de los problemas sociales ha ido en aumento en Trabajo Social por su relación con la constitución histórica, política, económica y cultural de estos. El territorio no es una dimensión geográfica más en los análisis de realidad social, sino que se corporaliza y explicita en materializaciones, simbologías y relacionamientos de quienes le habitan. Incorporar la historicidad de los territorios es preguntarse por las implicaciones de la colonización, el patrón de poder instaurado y su actualización con la modernidad colonial, reproducida en la existencialidad y en las instituciones en que se soporta. Es imposible que los procesos de transformación social logren su cometido mientras la colonialidad se reproduzca en el orden social que les naturaliza, hace imperceptibles e incuestionables. La descolonialidad territorial es desprendimiento de la matriz colonial y Trabajo Social puede aportar para que la intervención se abra a otros saberes, otras formas de habitar y vivir en los territorios. Esta es la reflexión epistemológica que se presenta en este escrito. Surge de la investigación compartida con colegas de Trabajo Social, con quienes por varios años nos preguntamos por el Trabajo Social y su compromiso ético en la contemporaneidad. El objetivo es destacar la importancia de la colonización

Palabras claves
Territorio colonizado; problema social; interculturalidad; trabajo social



como elemento determinante en la constitución histórica de los territorios, cuya colonialidad es menester indagar en las biografías, los contextos y las cotidianidades. Los colectivos, pueblos, comunidades y organizaciones intentan cambiar y mejorar su diario vivir. La Interculturalidad es un hecho inevitable de relacionamiento que puede constituirse en proyecto de transformación y liberación. Desde su ética, Trabajo Social debe contribuir a la descolonialidad de los territorios, pues compromete la vida y su dignificación.

Introduction

This epistemological reflection arises because during the years 2016-2019 several colleagues from Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Germany, India and Lithuania set a task of formulating a research route that would allow an inquiry into daily professional and academic scenarios about human and social training, research and interculturality . From the perspective of assuming the need for Intercultural Social Work, we introduced the colonial question as part of our reflections. With each meeting, the need to situate the debate of the colonial and decolonial motivated me to write about the insistence we expressed to address colonization, not as a past fact, but as an imperial practice of expansion validated only very recently. However, the evidence of current social problems seemed to depotentiate this discussion and that is why, for the meeting in India, I proposed to write about the reason for our insistence on incorporating the history of colonization, its legacies in the analysis of reality in social problems and, therefore, the need to situate and embody them in territories, because although colonization is a practice of all times in world history, it does not necessarily develop in the same way in each territory.

Therefore, it became necessary to situate the reflection from our own places of life, linking the territorial with the social and professional. The starting point for linking is in social problems, because they have comprised much of the analysis in the social sciences. The Americans Paul Horton and Gerald Leslie in 1955 provided a classic

² Research project "Intercultural Social Work from Individual and Social Perspectives in Diverse Contexts" (2016-2019).

³ The terms "decolonial" and "decolonial" are used interchangeably because they indicate a political positioning that seeks to differentiate itself from "de-colonization", i.e. the physical withdrawal of the colonizers in different territories of the planet, and which tends to be confused with the very process of independence, considered historical moments of the cessation of colonization. Precisely this is what is being challenged. Decoloniality or decoloniality follow the same path, so it is not an anglicism. There is also a political stance involved in that to decolonize is not to get rid of all of modernity but of its colonial side, that is, the side that increases the victims of this civilization, the epistemic violence and the extermination and invisibilization of other worlds, beings, peoples and communities in the world.

definition of the sociology of problems, translated by Francisco M. Suárez (1989, p.1) as “a condition that affects a significantly considerable number of people, in a way considered inconvenient and believed to be corrected by collective social action”. Because it affects people it is undesirable, can be solved by collective action, and is sought to be modified over time in accordance with standards or expectations.

Social problems, their relationship with society, politics and public policies, denote circumstances and situations that condition, but it is required that the actors recognize their existence and mobilize in the face of that reality accepted and recognized by broader audiences (Valcarce, 2005). Due to their broad nature and institutional capacity, the approach to the problems is in dispute with the idea of social reality used to determine their methodology. Likewise, it is considered that they are strongly related to the social order, therefore control, regulation and institutional discipline to address the problems are inscribed within the possibilities of this instituted order (Gonnet, 2015).

With regard to the definitions of the social problem and its methodology, there is the privilege of the expert, who takes up these issues of the public or social groups, but draws new debates that show the need to situate them in their affectation to the socially desired quality of life (Lauer, 1976). This means that it is the people themselves who must define the ideal quality of life and the professional will be the one to identify those situations that are incompatible with this ideal in order to improve his or her intervention.

In Social Work, the debates on the social problem, its definition, the contexts that give rise to it and the methodologies for its intervention, would merit a state of the art. The social problem refers to

(...) a situation of imbalance, maladjustment, disorganization or lack of harmony, or an abnormal situation that requires a drastic reformulation. Social problems are a product of the contradictions of the social system in force and are expressed in the material conditions of the population's life; they constitute the disturbing issues that occur within a society and in relation to which there is an awareness of the need to find solutions (Montoya et al., 2002, p.106).

Problematizing the very idea of social problems, as a tool to make notions and schemes of the naturalized perception of these problems explicit and to define them in another sense, is a necessity for the intervention to be politically and strategically grounded (Weber Suardiaz, 2010). It also entails questioning the social intervention assumed from the

professional specificity, as a field or social space of analysis and operational reference of social action in which institutions, social services and professionals intervene in the contexts in which the social is produced. Therefore, they need to be extensively theorized, contextualized and methodologically reflected upon based on the history of Social Work itself, its political, paradigmatic and methodological positions, which make this process a conflictive and even contradictory moment, but fundamentally pluralistic (Estrada, 2011).

When it comes to the relationship between problem and policy, it is necessary to review the intervention in social reality, since it implies the articulation between knowledge and action from a perspective of totality that faces the fragmentation in the apprehension of the social question as a negative effect of capitalism and the absorption of the State in this same system. Situational planning gives clues to insist on situations as manifestations of the social question and interactions between different dimensions, where objective and subjective expressions converge in spaces of particularity (Cavalleri, 2008).

In short, the approach to social problems is influenced by temporality, historicity, the magnitude of their impact, the confluence of contextual dimensions, epistemological paradigms and, of course, the conception or idea of well-being, or good living that prevails as a value in social and human life.

With regard to territory, social movements have been making a profound claim on the importance of the territorial. Critical physical geography and social sciences have responded to this demand. Conceptually, it has moved from the territory as a geographical space with geological, vegetal and animal properties to the whole human, social and environmental relationship that is dynamic in time and space (Llanos Hernández, 2010). This has implied opening up to other disciplines and to the interdisciplinary, qualifying the analysis of natural, environmental, cultural, economic and political reality.

In Social Work, the relationship between social problems and territory has always existed when referring to the neighborhood, the sidewalk, the country, the region and its inhabitants, but it has been revitalized in the epistemological approach as a natural geophysical space, with resources for development and as an anchorage in which material life is reproduced and, therefore, articulates the whole social issue (Massa, 2019). Thus, the territory has gone from being a support for population settlement to become a common scenario in which cultural elements converge, marking group relationships which, in the political order, promote harmonious relations, but also disputes and conflicts over land ownership and use



For several decades, territorial debates have been centered on the urban and the rural. In the former, social problems are related to public spaces, territorialities and the provision of services and goods for collective use to consolidate cities at the technical, urban and social levels (Quinteros, 2020). In the latter, the emphasis has been on land ownership, community, production, triggers of violence, its resolution and, mainly, community and social organization around agricultural production (Díaz Angarita, 2017). For their part, inter-institutional dynamics have been relevant to channel the intervention with the populations; hence, the state, private and community presence are combined in common objectives related to the achievement of development, citizenship and welfare. These three categories being quite controversial, the important role of territory as a social construction stands out, where geography constitutes spaces for social processes that transform environments and people, who constitute identities associated with the very symbolism of the territory, its languages and materializations (Romero et al., 2013).

Simultaneously, it has had an impact on social intervention in diverse territorial contexts with deep social inequalities. As reflections on social problems based on social diversities, gender, generation, intergenerational, migratory and border identities, the human-nature relationship and the struggles for the defense of territories based on ancestral and the right to a dignified life in the city gain strength, the issues of public, private, public policy and organization, among other issues, generate different valuations on the territorial (Zambrano, 2010; Testa, 2013; García García, 2018; Suárez Manrique et al., 2019; Lozano and Zapata, 2021).

In summary, these and many other studies of territory have diversified their geospatial, population, socio-political, environmental approach with other epistemological currents coming from environmental ecology, critical geography, political ontology and territories of difference, among others. For this reason, articulating social problems to territorial enclaves is very pertinent because no problematic situation is excluded from the dominant logics in these and the interconnections must be described and analyzed in correspondence with contextual and biographical temporalities.

This link between social problems and territories has been a concern of critical thinkers in Latin America and the Caribbean in relation to their historical character linked to colonization. For several decades it has been argued that social problems, their expression, magnitude and incidence, correspond in a broad sense to historical issues related to the geopolitics of world power and the maintenance of a colonial pattern established through colonization, sustained in the institutional framework over



the centuries and reproduced in everyday life through the colonial matrix. Although the immediacy of social problems would seem to correspond to phenomena that are equally immediate or have a short history, the decolonial option insists that colonization in itself is not a phenomenon of the past, nor is it overcome by the withdrawal of those who have taken possession of territories. In fact, cartography and travelers' accounts played a very important role in documenting and facilitating the advance of colonialism in the world, and the very expansion of modernity would not have been possible without them. However, what matters is that this colonialist practice was naturalized with the idea of an emancipated Europe that could emancipate the other peoples of the world, which also validated the hierarchical classification of peoples and civilizations. Colonization encrypted in evangelization took the form of evangelizing coloniality that consolidated the idea of progress, first in the metaphysical world and then on the earthly plane. As a result, development as a social paradigm remains valid.

Therefore, in order to strengthen critical thinking, it is necessary to situate colonization as a practice of domination, dispossession and coloniality in concrete territories whose biodiversity, history, temporality and social life continue to be affected by violent practices of acculturation, exploitation and suggestive induction to self-acculturation that, in time, becomes naturalized as if it were a legacy of its own; precisely, with colonization the history of the colonizer is transferred, not in its totality, but in what is required for colonization to be effective. Its epistemology is to know about the world, social life, the idea of the human and even the ways of changing and transforming the conditions of living. For this, the precepts, moral virtues and behaviors are the object of reflection, standardization and ethical normalization with regulation in their applications.

Colonization is visible, but coloniality is almost always not perceptible, due to the naturalization it acquires in its hegemony as a civilizing project. Critical contributions have existed for centuries and in current movements they are directed towards territorial decoloniality because it is a matter of a shared good life not deserved by only a few. In these searches, intercultural relations take place with many tensions between life and territory projections, conflicting and in dispute for power over society and human beings. For this reason, it will be necessary to consider the coloniality of social problems as part of the coloniality of territories. Likewise, to identify in the critical interculturality the possibilities for the decoloniality of social problems and therefore of territories or the detachment of colonial rationalities by those decolonial traces that are insurging the different forms of domination, towards other senses and possible worlds, to live in dignifying conditions and achieve good living. Intercultural and Decolonial



Social Work has been committing itself to the challenges posed in the forging of life in the territories from other conditions, as is shown in the following sections.

Colonized territories and colonial rationalities

In order to address the relationship between colonization and coloniality, it is necessary to differentiate the former as a fact from which the continuous process of colonialism derives and the result of which is coloniality. Situating it in America, it is pertinent to start from the fact that it is the second largest continent on Earth. It has an area of 43,316,000 km² and a population of 1,041,034,000 inhabitants. It is made up of three major regions (north, center and south). Latin America and the Caribbean comprise the central and southern regions. It has an area of 22,222,000 km², with 650,000,000 inhabitants, 20 countries and 7 dependencies.

According to official history, until three decades ago, America owed its existence to accidental events from the 15th century (1492), related to European travelers and explorers, among them Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci, who are said to have discovered these lands. Regarding Latin America, it is said that its name is an ethnic concept of the 19th century as part of the French hegemony. Likewise, exploration, conquest and colonization are recorded at the beginning of the continent's history, after the European arrival. This whole story is questioned when the reflection is placed on the fact that America is the result of invention, not discovery (O'Gorman, 1995). In the historical records, the colonization of America occurred between the XV-XVII centuries. There, a political (vicerealty), economic (precious metals, slave labor, land ownership, tax system), social (racial social hierarchy, social services provided by the church) and cultural (western civilization) structure was established.

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Latin America was configured at the end of the 19th century, to differentiate it from the Saxon America of the North. It was a French invention that had influence, at that time, in the region. "Latin America is not a subcontinent but the political project of the Creole-mestizo elites" (Mignolo, 2005). With the wars of independence, from 1790 decolonization took place, when the Creole leaders, or heroes of the homeland, fought for emancipation from the Spanish and Portuguese yoke, being supported at that time by France and England. Although there was a change in political power with the nation-state and the emergence of the bourgeoisie, the class hierarchy was consolidated and the economic and cultural structure left by the colony was not modified (Guerra Vilaboy, 1997).



At the dawn of the twentieth century, different social issues came to light and raised questions to the established order with its modernizing effervescence. Racism, ancestral identities, peasant, indigenous and Afro territorial struggles, the recovery of the nominal forms of calling the ancestral territories Abya Yala, Tawantinsuyu and Anáhuac, the territorial dimension as a symbolic and embodied spatiality, as well as the illegitimate annexation of the Americas by the United States, and the recovery of the territorial dimension as a symbolic and embodied spatiality, the illegitimate and undue annexation of territories and the existence even in the 20th century of colonies dependent on European and North American metropolises, among others, opened debates on the prevalence of colonialism in modernity and its contemporaneity. While colonization is the fact, colonialism is the process that continues and gives it validity.

From what was stated by Jürgen Osterhammel and Jan C. Jansen (2019) in their study on the history, forms and effects of colonialism, it can be inferred that in America the process of colonization of territories has been in force in the last five centuries and has been presented in different forms, with different effects and variably located in the geography of the region. The first form of colonialism through massive individual migration from the metropolis and the forced migration of slaves was carried out with the modality of insertion into the various existing multiethnic societies, which meant that some original societies remained culturally intact. The second form of frontier colonization or frontier expansion has been eminently economic, not so much to establish colonies, but to transfer factors of production such as labor and capital to places where natural resources abound. The third form of colonization by settlement overseas is characterized by the creation of small population centers, territorially and socially separated from the local population, creating an economic system of servitude with the relentless displacement of the original population. The appropriation of the best indigenous lands took place with the support of the State of the time and once the native population was annihilated as a work force, it was extended to the forced importation of slaves for the plantations. The fourth form has been colonization through wars of conquest as a prolonged process after initial contacts that resorted to military control and colonial domination, creating a layer of local Creole population that self-reproduced demographically. As a result, settlements have occurred on already existing territories, maintaining the existence of colonies of domination, with the implantation of mixed urban society, colonies of settlement under military protection and with government practices outside the colonized, but close to the new population groups created within by colonialism



Colonized territories are thus configured, i.e., those that, regardless of their geographic magnitude, have been converted into an object of possession and dominion by a group that takes them for settlement or appropriation of their natural and human contents. Modern colonization, from the critical geography, was born from its imperial power and wars of conquest and trade, as well as from the established racial hierarchies (Machado Aráoz, 2015). This produces a geopolitical division in which peripheral societies are placed at the service of the metropolis, establishing relations of otherness based on the foreignness of the other, with an expectation of extensive acculturation, all justified in the awareness of the fulfillment of a universal mission

(...) As a contribution to a divine plan to be executed among the pagans, as a secular mandate for colonialism to “civilize” the “barbarians” or “savages”, as a “white man’s privileged burden”, etc. is always adduced as reasons for the conviction of one’s own cultural superiority (Osterhammel and Jansen, 2019, p.15).

It will always be important to insist that the European empire was established on the basis of different forms of relationships that transformed life in the territories, but whose historical shame was the justification of dispossession, violence and the killing of more than 50% of the original population, in the face of which genocide is not recognized and reparations have not even been attempted (Cuervo Álvarez, 2016).

Although postcolonialism as an academic category corresponds more to the decade of the eighties in the twentieth century, postcolonization, that is, the physical expulsion of Europeans after independence brought expectations in terms of configuring a social, economic, political and cultural order according to the emancipatory canons that were part of the intra-European phenomenon since the sixteenth century or second modernity and its revolutions. It was inspiring for the Americans, in line with the reflection of European history. Thus, until the end of the 20th century and from this canonical history, the social problems of the Latin American and Caribbean region were analyzed in correspondence with the post-colonization era and were analyzed as weaknesses in the consolidation of the nation-state, backwardness and dependence in economic, scientific and technological matters, as well as resistance to the modernization of institutions. Social problems derived from the difficulties of democracy and power conflicts in the domination of the territories that make up the nation-state. Development as an elusive goal due to the negative impact of science, the exploitation of nature and living conditions, as well as the longing to achieve the good life and social welfare, when access to social services and social security are increasingly privatized and



education, science, technology do not seem to be in line with the economy, have been a substantial part of the meetings, seminars and debates of Social Work. At the same time, there is a great mobilization coming from the diversities, who demand transformations, fulfillment of rights and opportunities to live in freedom in their territories.

Undoubtedly, the 1980s and 1990s bring other questions to the postcolonial era, in contexts characterized by the supposed end of colonies, the loss of the centrality of Europe, the acceptance of developed and underdeveloped peoples, the naturalization of the existence of the Third World and the historical and cultural invisibility of the colonized in the representations that the colonial metropolises have constructed as knowledge, as well as the creation of the East as a cognitive and cultural projection of what constitutes the West. The orientalism of Edward Said in 1990 and the subaltern studies of South Asia, North America and Latin America, prompted the need to review the writing of imperial and post-imperial history, questioned bourgeois and leftist nationalism and the articulations between the state, the nation and the modern project (Dube, 1999; Silva Echeto, 2016) whose main result has been the permanence in the subaltern condition, both of peoples and territories, by the hegemonic prevalence of the West that is imposed with Eurocentrism.

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Colonial legacies emerged in their critical analysis from the existence of neocolonial practices in globalization, whose political and economic power continue the plundering and provoke dependence through methods that benefit the invader (Macías Chávez, 2015). Spain does not withdraw completely, France, England, Holland, the United States and Germany, among others, follow century after century. The arrival of postmodernism, the decline of socialism and the fracture of the Soviet bloc, the growing territorial disputes of the East and West blocs in different parts of the world, detonated the intra-European crisis of modernity. The commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America in 1992 triggered historical social critique, led by the indigenous movement with the slogan Nothing to celebrate! as opposed to a yearly custom of celebrating October 12 as an emblem of the Hispanic holiday. The large mobilizations in Latin America and Europe opened the colonial wound “it is a day of genocide and colonization”, pointed out Fernando Chávez Pérez, general coordinator of the New Peru Movement (Peñacoba, 2017). Marches, uprisings and social mobilization against this celebration made visible the diversity of sectors, groups and collectives with claims in addition to gender, environmental, cultural, social, ancestral, among others. The protests were against a history marked by pain and dispossession in which the processes of emancipation, transformation and liberation were unfinished if not frustrated.



On the premise that contemporary problems derived from the expansion of capitalism, feudalistic practices in the exercise of power, the prevalence of cognitive privilege by centers of knowledge in the metropolis and their reproduction with internal colonialism, the deepening impoverishment, the dispossession of knowledge and territories, the social inequalities resulting from injustices increased by different types of exclusion, and the use of military force and violence to maintain the status quo, were what led a large number of activists and intellectuals to seek the support of a large number of activists and intellectuals. Social inequalities resulting from injustices increased by different types of exclusion and the use of military force and violence to maintain the status quo, were what led a large number of activists and critical intellectuals in the region towards social reflection with other fields of analysis linked to Latin American critical reason. Among these, the need to review in depth universal history and its relationship with American, Latin American and Caribbean historiography, the establishment of modernity as a civilizing and emancipatory project within the colonial logic, the connection of capitalism with modernity and the production of reproducing subjects of colonized subjectivities, among others, and as colonial legacies, which led to a review of how power operates in territorial contexts and under different strategies, techniques and devices (Castro Gómez quoted by Grupo de Estudios Sobre Decolonialidad, GESCO, 2012).

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Criticism has been forceful in affirming that as long as colonial legacies persist, any transformation process will be exposed to conflict, violence and invisibility, because the coloniality of power permeates even progressive forms of government, the reproduction of capitalism and the co-optation of labor and all possible forms of economy; human subjection to racialized superiority and the desire for whiteness is not only an ethnic problem, but is related to all people who, living in the territories, are exposed to or live in line with this social classification; likewise, the domination, exploitation, commodification and deterioration of terrestrial ecosystems (Quijano, 2014). Colonization, therefore, is not a past moment, because with it a colonial pattern of power is established that allows the production, reproduction and permanent updating or modernization of colonial logics, both for those who impose them and for those who suffer them and those who validate them.

Freeing oneself from social problems requires delving into their knowledge and situating them within processes of colonization that have marked biographies and territorial contexts with the coloniality of power and its continuities, not only in the political and economic spheres, but in matters of human existence, controlled and reproduced through social, cultural and territorial relations that constitute what we call the structuring of



the Latin American and its objective, subjective and material dimensions (Quintero, 2010). It requires reviewing society and subjects around five basic spheres of control, domination and conflict identified by Aníbal Quijano (1992): work; subjectivity/ intersubjectivity; sex and human reproduction; authority and relations with nature.

Intercultural Territories for the Decoloniality of Life

Any colonized territory is subject to coloniality; it inscribes its social problems within the same logics of reality established by the civilizing model of those who colonized it. Basically, its historical development, political structure of government, economic and cultural model are inherited. The variations in its development arise from the internal struggles in the territories of the surviving peoples, collectives and communities that adapt or resist. Many, from the recognized ancestry, re-exist because they re-edit, recreate and transform their cultures in order not to perish, almost always inscribed in the forms of mobilization and in the daily life from which they fight for territorial justice in accordance with their diversities. Modernity, as a civilizing project, engenders its own social problems in its logics of incessant reproduction. Dismantling this colonial pattern of power established more than five centuries ago is a very long task; however, it is possible to overcome this coloniality if we dare to make other analyses of the social, its problems and to dimension social intervention in the perspective of the decoloniality of the territories.

In this sense, the social manifestations, the protagonists and the demands shown in movements of society in recent decades, show that territorial struggles have other meanings. Territory expands and becomes part of those who inhabit it, it spirals from the body itself to nearby environments and to mother earth. It invites unseen solidarities because it is marching for the restitution of ties and bonds that were broken in their sacred and holistic nature. Thus, the dissident territories have their validity because the mobilization is at a constant rhythm in daily life, it moves towards the public to claim other dialogues, not necessarily whose epicenter is with the State, rather, it dispenses with it because they have lost confidence in that modern civilizing project and in the institutionality that sustained it. They reject, as Natalia Sierra (2018) mentions, the sacrificial symbolic mandate for the territories of Abya Yala; they seek to free themselves from modern normativity and recover lost dignity.

It is then a vital force entrenched in living well in a different way without feeling the shame of backwardness. They try to distance themselves more and more from the dependence on the State and the market that acts to promote development, which is nothing more than a ghost that continues to develop global capitalism rooted in national

states (Quijano, 2000). It means in turn to escape from the mercantile logic of life in which work is instrumentalized in dependent and servile employment, where knowledge is extended to the school of life where knowledge in dialogue has meaning and value, as well as respect for the cosmovisions and spiritualities that take up the ethical principle of biocentrism in accordance with different planes and expressions of existence.

On this path towards territorial decoloniality, there is a need to understand interculturality as the basis of societal relations in which power struggles converge over the prevalence of the territorial way of life. The relationship between humans is only one of the components of interculturality, although it has been central so far, precisely because if we assume that culture is the heritage of humanity, each collective, group, community or people builds its cultural legacies and tries to protect and teach them. However, interculturality is not only a relationship between cultures, but also powers at stake in the dispute over a model of society, of human being and of community. Therefore, territories have always been constituted from intercultural relations and this in itself does not necessarily make them exemplary. The question of reflection is about the scope of this intercultural relationship and its possibilities to move towards the decoloniality of the territories. It implies committing ourselves to respect the faces of diversity, their spiritualities and religiosities; their particular ways of grouping together as families and collectively; the meanings of life and the way they relate to nature and planetary life, as well as critically reviewing the rationalities about what happens in the world and, particularly, their ways of being and acting in everyday life.

Intercultural territories merit the construction of relationships between human beings and all expressions of life on earth whose vitality can reconfigure the materialization of living in uncolonized spatialities, geographies and temporalities. It is also possible for economic exchanges to constitute projects to eliminate the toxicity of the earth, to heal the body, to grow food whose seeds are outside the agrochemical market. Intercultural territories are more than the harmonious relationship of people, cultures and their protagonists; they are rather about restoring the harmonization of the material with the spiritual, returning their sacred character in those places that should be protected and not available for exploitation, urbanization or monoculture production (Gómez Montañez, 2015). Likewise, from critical interculturality, territories are defended from capitalism and its commodification of life and the importance of cosmovisions that are legacies is renewed, both for rural and urban areas, only that it moves away from development and progress as the ultimate goal of society.



Critical interculturality requires several keys to make it possible in the territories:

- 1) To found another type of otherness with whom we relate. Recognition of the other as different from the self (Dussel, 1995), because in this relationship there are axiological (good/bad, inferior/superior/love/hate), praxeological (I adopt their values/assimilate the other, submission to the other/submission of the other) and epistemic (I know or ignore the identity of the other) representations and imaginaries (Todorov, 2005). Colonized peoples carry the weight of inferiorization in their subjectivity. Colonizing peoples carry assumptions of spiritual and material superiority
- 2) Respect the existence of diversities and their identities. To recover them in history with their contributions to humanity. Multicultural policies have allowed access to social services and political representation and have promoted cultural diversity. But when their demands challenge the interests of the dominant capitalist, state and elite classes, they are violently attacked through banishment, violence, ethnic cleansing and the curtailment of development
- 3) Advocate for cultural symmetry, incorporating the critique of cultural legacies. With culture, rights are claimed. Many norms today allow for prior consultation for mining operations. But this recognition is subject to the unquestionable values of modern Western culture. Conflicts are often generated between communities and diverse peoples over the privileges of recognition. This must be reviewed within coloniality (Polo Santillán, 2016). The greatest risk is the whitening, or transfer of external asymmetry to the interior of cultures. Interaction between cultures should occur without fear of colonization (Fornet Betancourt, 2003).
- 4) Denounce the forms of racism that lead to the inferiorization of human beings, communities, peoples and civilizations (Quijano, 1999). We have overcome the enslavement of Africans and the indigenous peoples preserve their reserves, but their ways of life are considered unproductive for the capitalist system and for national development projects. The white mestizo society hides its racist ideas, wants to resemble the colonizers and imitate their lifestyles.
- 5) Promote intercultural dialogue. Beyond what Unesco (2017) proposes as simple exchanges of cultures to preserve peace, intercultural dialogue is an action and ethical imprint to stop the destruction and colonization of humanity and life. The colonized peoples still struggle to achieve a pleasant life, to preserve their ancestry. They offer



the best to tourists. They resist international cooperation that wants to continue colonization with aid. Sometimes they are essentialists in preserving their cultures, but it is also because of the criminalization of their cultural practices and the misuse of their territories (Bautista Revelo et al., 2018). More and more elders in the communities are dying without being able to teach their knowledge. Identities are reconfigured all the time, because they migrate to the city or to another country. They persist in demanding respect and differentiated treatment and overcoming structural inequality.

Territorial decoloniality implies, then, delving into their historical, biographical and contextual narratives that transgress coloniality. It is about going beyond the simple control of the geographical physical space and drawing other maps with the geographies in which the communal, life and identities materialize within power relations that configure and reconfigure them (Jabardo Pereda, 2018); likewise, decapitalize the meaning of the economic and return it to its social niche. Recover the sacred meaning of the land and of the vital elements. To return the feminine principle of life stolen by the patriarchalization of the world. To restore the usurped symbols. Basically, interculturality must allow us to build territory from other ways of learning and educating ourselves, to live socially, to heal ourselves, to live in community and to transgress the unjust systems in which we live.

By way of final reflections. Challenges for Social Work

As has been raised throughout this text, incorporating the historical component of colonization and coloniality, inscribed in the bodies, places, biographies and contexts of those who from the territories advocate intercultural territorialities for the transformation of their links with the land, nature and thus the improvement of their living conditions, as well as the inscription of social problems as part of the colonial pattern of power that is territorialized and lived in the modern capitalist world, patriarchal, racist and globalized, poses many challenges for Social Work in the perspective of Interculturalizing and decolonizing the territories, since as expressed by colleague Gianinna Muñoz-Arce (2018), the territories are not only scenarios where the social occurs, but they are lived spaces that demand first-hand an interdisciplinary approach, because the first thing is to realize our incompleteness. In this sense, Social Work must follow the path of indisciplinarity within what has been forged as a discipline. Include the principle of knowledge as belonging to society, rather than disciplinary property, and therefore, it should be built with those who share the moments of life that social intervention provokes.



In this sense, it is pertinent to consider that social problems in the territories have a historical component that allows us to analyze them beyond what at first glance we identify as deficiencies, lack of education, organization or desire to get ahead. Rather, to address the problems that are undoubtedly present, as part of their becoming, interdependent of unjust social systems that historically have generated solutions aimed at controlling, stopping conflicts and maintaining peace, even at the cost of exclusion, or of inclusion that contains the protest, but maintains the dependent, subaltern and colonial status.

Likewise, a great task opens up for the human beings that inhabit the territories. It consists of assuming our existence is impacted by colonial modernity that, even so, preserves ancestralities and diversities present in our origins and identities, because they inhabit us and must be made conscious. This will allow spiritualities and all their symbolism and materiality to have due importance in the intervention.

As Social Workers we have professional identities that are the fruit of the relationships we establish, the paradigmatic imprints that are forged with research and training, as well as with the practices of professional practice. These have been constituted and institutionalized with the foundational history of the profession and are made explicit in the territorial actions undertaken in the territories. It justifies, then, to reinterpret these identities often forged with colonial legacies that are reproduced in social intervention (Gómez-Hernández, 2018).

Now, if knowing is the act of knowing about the lives of “others” because they are of interest to us, epistemology, i.e., the foundations, principles and methods with which knowledge is generated, must be reviewed. The people with whom we intervene have ancestral, millenary, centenary knowledge and “knowledge is related to and forms an integral part of the construction and organization of the modern world-system which, at the same time, is still colonial” (Walsh, 2005, p.41). In this sense, validity is not necessarily determined by the origin of these, but in a common context of coloniality of knowledge, pluralism becomes the starting point for intercultural dialogue, and with it, the possibilities of discerning, discussing and building appropriate and situated knowledge in those contexts in which, in turn, proposals for territorial transformation are constituted.

Theoretically, Social Work has in its favor the contribution of the social sciences for the analysis of social realities. However, Social Work must build theories based on the broad experience it has in social issues. It is necessary to overcome Eurocentrism, because it keeps us subject to universal explanations that do not allow us to engage in



situated dialogues. Eurocentrism is not at all the citation or reference of knowledge coming from Europe or North America; Eurocentrism is the granting of validity and authority to a single place of enunciation with criteria of absolute truth. Indeed, the centers of power that constitute the geopolitics of knowledge in the world are indeed located in these geographies, but they must be located as part of the colonialism and coloniality in which they are inscribed. The decoloniality of knowledge will only be possible if we situate them in their contexts of origin and in their temporalities, just as we should situate our knowledge, rooting it in our contexts, geographies and temporalities. Only in this way will critical intercultural dialogue be possible between different epistemes that think of their action in the transformation of the world. Otherwise, we will simply reproduce universal theories and waste time systematizing to validate what has already been written without generating new, different knowledge.

Methodologically, we have insisted that our role as social workers is not to save anyone, because we must all free ourselves from our colonial burdens. But we can adjust our methods of territorial intervention to the particularities of the groups with whom we work. We have implemented critical interculturality as a methodology and we have learned from other forms of community work. Learning that cultural legacy that many diverse peoples and collectives have used to communicate, organize, generate cohesive practices, mobilize politically to claim their rights and live according to their meanings of life, we have also learned that we need to reflect on our professional ethos, that it is important to become part of what we research, of the territories and the people with whom we work, but it is even more important to root ourselves in these social, cultural and political struggles as part of a larger horizon of liberations that attempt to transmodernize society.

From an ethical perspective, it is important to strengthen the principle of respect for a dignified life, based on the right to be culturally different without contempt of any kind, but more than anything else, to bet on an ethic that promotes the possibility of contributing to society as part of a larger framework of life. Beyond recognition, intercultural dialogue must be committed to the struggle and overcoming of social inequality, racism and all the multiple violences of unjust and colonizing social systems (Gómez et al., 2020). Ethics must bet on another type of humanism, more biocentric, because at the end of the day, the native peoples have been insisting on it throughout these centuries. We are part of the planet, not superior to it, and this simple and profound saying cannot continue to be trivialized by those thinkers who, although critical, are deeply anthropocentric and arrogant with science and technology. It is enough for the earth to shake a little and all our pride will be shattered.



These debates need to be deepened in universities and training centers. It will be convenient to insist on the fact that critical interculturality allows us to move towards decoloniality. Therefore, Decolonial Intercultural Social Work brings us closer to projects and processes of transformative and liberating scope. Therefore, I would like to end by taking up a phrase of the Argentine professor Francisco Ramallo (2014), who emphasizes that history and its teaching must be decolonized, because it is necessary to denaturalize reality and think that other worlds may be possible. He says that there is a hegemonic history that dominates, but that another one can be built as a tool for liberation and humanization. For this, it would be necessary to retake the pluriversal historical narratives. “Our proposals from the decolonial turn and our classroom practices are aimed at feeling and thinking that when one teaches history, one is teaching that changing the world is possible” (Ramallo, 2014, p.54).

Intending the decoloniality of territories makes it possible for colonial legacies to be visible in the analysis of social problems intrinsically linked to the territories. These are unresolved legacies, which act through power in three areas: the materialization of relationships and their objects, the subjectivity and spirituality of human beings, and intersubjectivity in their relationships. They are relevant for Social Work, because they allow us to see that, in addition to the material (socioeconomic) classification to which we are accustomed with diagnoses, there is also an underlying (cultural) classification of populations and this generates a social status. If we are aware of this situation, we could recognize social heterogeneity, human diversities and their claims, revealing the faces of those who face multiple exclusions due to capitalism, racism, xenophobia, patriarchy and homophobia, which are in force century after century. From Social Work we have the opportunity to make interculturality a critical perspective of what we are, especially, to be aware of the colonizer within us and to assume that the reproduction of the current world and its injustices can be changed, because there are possibilities to live well and to remake the territories in another way.



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