

The idea of Latin American unity from the perspective of peripheral middle school poets

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Abstract

This research shows how a group of students from a middle school in one of the poorest and violent neighborhoods in Guadalajara, México, make poems to express how they experience and signify the idea of Latin American unity in light of non-Western perspectives. Drawing from Latin American philosophers such as Simón Rodríguez and Ramón Xirau, the method of this study draws from poetic images to construct theoretical arguments in education to analyze the poems produced by the students as active creators of Latin American epistemology in education. The findings suggest that the students as peripheral poets can enrich the foundations of critical pedagogy for Latin American unity. Of particular interest is the way in which the students challenge the distinction between colonialism and coloniality of power. This paper aims to show how Western critical pedagogy can be enriched by taking into account thinkers on education from the “Third World.”

Keywords: Latin American unity; middle school poets; colonialism; coloniality of power, Simón Rodríguez.

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La idea de la unidad latinoamericana desde la perspectiva de los poetas periféricos de secundaria

Resumen

Esta investigación muestra la manera en que un grupo de estudiantes de secundaria en uno de los más pobres y violentos barrios de Guadalajara, México, hacen poemas para expresar cómo ellos viven y significan la idea de la unidad latinoamericana a la luz de marcos teóricos no occidentales. A partir del estudio de filósofos latinoamericanos tales como Simón Rodríguez y Ramón Xirau, el método de esta investigación hace uso de imágenes poéticas para construir argumentos teóricos en educación a fin de analizar los poemas producidos por los estudiantes como creadores activos de epistemología latinoamericana en el campo de la educación. Los hallazgos sugieren que los estudiantes como poetas periféricos pueden enriquecer los fundamentos teóricos de la pedagogía crítica en pro de la unidad latinoamericana. De particular interés es cómo los estudiantes problematizan la distinción entre colonialismo y colonialidad del poder. Este artículo pretende mostrar la forma en que la pedagogía crítica occidental puede ser enriquecida al tomar en cuenta a los pensadores del llamado “Tercer Mundo”.

Palabras clave: unidad latinoamericana, poetas de secundaria, colonialismo, colonialidad del poder, Simón Rodríguez.

A idéia de unidade latino-americana na perspectiva dos poetas periféricos do ensino médio

Resumo:

Essa pesquisa mostra como um grupo de estudantes do ensino médio, em um dos bairros mais pobres e violentos em Guadalajara, México, fazem poemas para expressar como vivem e significam a ideia de unidade latino-americana à luz de referenciais teóricos não-ocidentais. Pautado no estudo de filósofos latino-americanos, como Simon Rodriguez e Ramon Xirau, o método desta investigação utiliza imagens poéticas para construir argumentos teóricos da educação para analisar os poemas produzidos pelos alunos como criadores ativos da epistemologia latino-americana no campo da educação. Os achados sugerem que os alunos como poetas periféricos podem enriquecer os fundamentos teóricos da pedagogia crítica para a unidade latino-americana. De forma particular, revela como os estes problematizam a distinção entre colonialismo e colonialidade de poder. Este artigo pretende mostrar como pedagogia crítica ocidental pode ser enriquecida quando se leva em conta pensadores do chamado “Terceiro Mundo”.

Palavras-chave: Unidade latino-americana, poetas do ensino médio, colonialismo, colonialidade do poder, Simón Rodríguez.



Introduction

Latin American students can be positioned as active creators of knowledge in education just as the European philosophers have been in the past. That epistemological rupture is possible only if the epistemological racism is challenged in order to make visible the extent to which Latin American people have been silenced in the “serious” discussion about what counts as knowledge in education. One of the key ideas that have been latent in that discussion is the notion of Latin American unity. According to Francisco de Miranda, Simón Bolívar, José de Martín, among others, Latin American nations will live in a colonial situation until Latin American unity is achieved and a single homeland can be build where there are not empires maintaining dominance over Latin American people. Can critical pedagogy help find/construct a place for the students who think about Latin American unity and who survive in colonized territories? That is the research question that this study addresses.

In this article we show how a group of students from a middle school in Guadalajara, México are peripheral¹ poets that can provide epistemological insights in education when non-Western methodologies are used to make sense of what they express; specifically, we illustrate the way in which the poems that those students wrote in light of Simón Rodríguez’s and Ramón Xirau’s work can be alternative foundations of critical pedagogy. A poetry workshop was conducted in a middle school in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. The goal was to put into action methodological proposals from Latin American philosophers, such as Simón Rodríguez and Ramón Xirau, who stated that the Western dominant rationale does not enable scholars to see how poetic images illuminate beyond narrowed cognitive ways to approach reality.

Literature review. Critical pedagogy can be enriched from Latin America

It is worth enriching critical pedagogy by means of incorporating intellectuals from colonized people around the world (Indigenous, African, Asian, or Latin American descendants). For many years, an epistemological racism has established a dichotomy where certain nations are positioned as sites where “serious” knowledge is generated and some countries are just considered territories to conduct “fieldwork”. Rogers highlights the propensity of social sciences to privilege western knowledge and under use Latin American authors calling it a “sociology of abscesses and segregated flows of knowledge” (2017, p. 25). Rogers illustrated how as a research community we must look toward equitable flows of knowledge so we can move toward cognitive justice. This article attempts to problematize the distinction between epistemic “seriousness” and “folklore”,

¹ We are using the term peripheral drawing from the dependency theory from Latin American which points out the extent to which the periphery (Latin American nations) enriches the center (The U.S. and Europe) at the expense of the former. As Dussel explains: “Before the ego cogito there is an ego conquiro; “I conquer” is the practical foundation of “I think.” The center has imposed itself on the periphery for more than five centuries. But for how much longer? Will the geopolitical preponderance of the center come to an end? Can we glimpse a process of liberation growing from the peoples of the periphery?” (Dussel, 1985, p. 3).



by incorporating the theory of the Latin American philosopher for the Latin American unity such as Simón Rodríguez (who preceded Paulo Freire by 150 years).

Critical pedagogy is a complex ongoing field of study, especially when intellectuals from around the world are incorporated into the discussion. From Latin America, Anibal Ponce's *Educación y Lucha de Clases* (1934) and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), demonstrated how critical educators from colonized nations were able to enrich critical pedagogy. There have been great efforts to complexify the field of critical epistemologies² in education, especially from the strand that made use of class as a core category (GIROUX, 1983; MCLAREN & GIROUX, 1989; MCLAREN, 1989, 2000), to some other theoretical strands on critical postmodernism and multiculturalism (MCLAREN & SLEETER 1995; STEINBERG, 2001; STEINBERG & KINCHELOE 1997). While the epistemological implications of critical education have enriched the discussion on critical pedagogy (KINCHELOE, 2004, 2008), the connection between critical pedagogy and democracy (CARR 2011, 2012) or critical pedagogy and neoliberalism (DE LISSOVOY 2007, 2008, 2010b) have brought to the forefront how critical epistemologies needs to be enriched in alternative directions. In particular, it is necessary to enrich the conversation towards alternative epistemological territories, that is, towards nations that have been positioned as "primitive, exotic and backward" (GIMENO, 2000, p. 97). That epistemic violence undermines the non-western methods or forms of knowledge positioning the West as an epistemological location where serious knowledge is created. Such dichotomy of western knowledge versus non-serious knowledges (in plural) has begun to be deconstructed in recent decades by postcolonial frameworks.

Only when colonized societies, (Indigenous, African, Asian or Latin American descendants) are incorporated into the "serious" discussion on epistemologies, then, Latin American thinkers such as Simón Rodríguez (1990a & 1990b) can be considered as relevant as Pierre Bourdieu among others in critical pedagogy. It is important to acknowledge that Simón Rodríguez was mentor and teacher of Simón Bolívar. Simón Rodríguez is hailed as the most important educator preceding Paulo Freire (PUIGGROS, 2005) and has been considered one of the most important intellectual in the theoretical strand about Latin American unity. Simón Rodríguez's work (1990a & 1990b) in light of liberation philosophy (DUSSEL, 1985/1980, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2007, 2009) has enriched the critical pedagogy sorely needed to achieve Latin American unification.

The philosophy of liberation as a Latin American framework (DUSSEL, 1980, 1985, 1990, 2007, 2009) is helpful to show the way in which dominant Western thought has silenced thinkers from Mexico to *Tierra del Fuego*, as a form of historical amnesia. Just as the coloniality of power (QUIJANO & WALLERSTEIN, 1992a, 1992b; QUIJANO, 2000a, 2000b) helps to address the legacy of colonialism, philosophy of liberation reveals how colonialism is still very much alive in materialistic and symbolic terms.

² We are talking about epistemologies in plural instead of epistemology in singular since there are many epistemologies around the world



Methods: Simón Rodríguez and Ramón Xirau: poetic images as epistemological vehicles to construct knowledge from Latin America

In this study, Simón Rodríguez's theory was used to analyse the work of middle school student poets on the topic of Latin American unity. Rodríguez theory was selected due to his view that Latin American people still live in colonial conditions because of those nations are not neither independent nor united. Simón Rodríguez made use of aphorisms and conceptual images to describe his thoughts on Latin American unity. We analysed the ways in which the middle school students described their experience on Latin American unity through the poems they wrote.

Drawing from qualitative research, the method of this study aimed to use poetic images to construct theoretical arguments in education as a method to analyse how the student produced their poems. Just as the postmodernist analysis of discourse is a European critique of its own modernity, we assert that van Dijk's critical discourse studies is still a methodological importation of the Frankfurt school, and if we are to position non-Western writers as active creators of knowledge (COON, 2017), it is necessary to follow an alternate methodology created from colonized territories, such as Latin America. In addition to Simón Rodríguez's work, we are incorporating a methodology that draws from the Mexican philosopher Ramón Xirau (1968, 1975, 1993, 1995, 1997) who points out the extent to which poetic images are epistemological vehicles used to construct knowledge.

Setting

The study took place in central Mexico in metropolitan area of Guadalajara. The city's population is at the cusp of six million people. Industrial activity has evolved, in part, due to the cheap skilled labour and cutting-edge technology. The social and human development office of Guadalajara identifies the neighbourhood in which this study took place as one of the poorest and violent in the city. That middle school was selected because it was located in the area of the municipality of Zapopan, in the metropolitan area of Guadalajara, Mexico, where violent enterprise and crime rate have greatly risen in the last five years. It was important to conduct the study in an area with these characteristics since it is a typical example of what a Mexican public middle school looks like in current times where Mexico has been positioned in the international commercial market as the producer of drugs that the North American market needs.

The vocational middle school "Great Homeland" was the first middle school in that area of the city. Approximately 720 students attend this school in two shifts and they are taught by over sixty teachers. Approximately 90% of the student's mothers are housewives and 80% of the fathers are builders, carpenters, craftsmen, or have a similar occupations. In addition, about 30% of the student's parents are working as immigrants in the U.S. and have not returned to Mexico with their families for the past ten years. Many of the middle school students who participated in the poetry workshop do not remember what their fathers looked like and a great number of the students have fathers who are incarcerated in the U.S.



Poetry Workshop

This study is part of a larger study that all three authors planned and coordinated, all three authors analysed and coded the data collected. The first author took care of the day to day activities with a group of 200 middle school students from the “Great Homeland” middle school from January 15, 2016 to March 20, 2017. The poetry workshop was not conducted neither in the summer break (from July 18, to August 20, 2016) nor in the winter brake (from December 18, 2016 to January 6, 2017). Although the poetry workshop was conducted with 200 students, the poems presented in this study are those ones produced by one group of middle school-third grade of approximately forty-eight students, which the gender composition was of 48% male and 58% female, from a range of age between fourteen and fifteen years old. The majority of the students were born in Mexico whereas two of them were born in the United States.

Each week, (Author 1) spent 10 hours working with 4 groups of students consisting of 50 students approximately per group. The students and (Author 1) completed 800 hours of poetry workshop from January 15, 2016 until March 20, 2017. To develop the poetry workshop, (Author 1) worked as a history teacher in the middle school, where the school administration assigned him to teach the two-hundred students. The history classes served as a pedagogical space in which the students learned about Simón Rodríguez and other Latin American theorists. As part of the history classes (Author 1) developed the poetry workshop with historical perspectives. As a result, (Author 1) conducted a participatory research (JARA, 1992, JARA, 1998, ROJAS, 2002) to obtain reliable information and data.

Data sources included the collection of lesson plans, field notes, audio recordings, and poems as artifacts (MARSHALL, 1984). The data sources were analysed and coded for emerging patterns and themes (MILES, HUBERMAN, & SALDAÑA, 2013). In order to establish trustworthiness, data sources were triangulated. Some semi-structured interviews (TAYLOR & BOGDAN, 1998) were conducted with the middle school students to better understand their poems. As mentioned previously, all three authors participated in the coding of the student produced artifacts and field notes to ensure that we agreed on what counted as an analytical chunk. Memos were created by all three researchers and discussed to determine how they began generating descriptive codes. The codes were brought together into a large document and it was checked for consistency. In the third and final round of coding (SALDAÑA, 2013), the researchers summarized the data and connected it to the literature of colonialism in order to determine how the students were connecting their use of metaphor and aphorisms.

Data collection and analysis: Simon Rodríguez, Latin American Unity And The Middle School Students’ Poems

Latin American peoples have long endured racial and epistemological struggles found a worthy representative of independent thought in Simón Rodríguez in terms of Latin American unity. Since 1828, Rodríguez had pointed out the colonial character of nascent capitalism in Europe, which led him to proclaim that the nascent Latin Ame-

rican nations were “formed but not founded” (RODRÍGUEZ, 1842/1990b, 1842, p. 6). This implied that Latin American peoples were not yet independent.

Simón Rodríguez’s theory was expressed in a single whole reflection in his two masterpieces: *Sociedades Americanas* and *Luces y Virtudes Sociales*. For Rodríguez both publications were two parts of a single comprehensive work that he published from 1828 to 1840. In his work, Simón Rodríguez insisted on how Latin America did not achieve the “real” independence in all the social movements of 1810. In relation to this point, Simón Rodríguez developed a conceptual image to describe how Latin America was not yet independent and therefore, the Latin American nations were not united; as he stated, “*Se ha obtenido ya en América, no la Independencia, sino un armisticio en la guerra que ha de decidirla*” (In America what has been obtained is not Independence but rather an armistice in the War that will decide it.) (RODRÍGUEZ, 1828/1990a, translation by BRIGGS, p. 19). If a colony does not gain independence from its empire, colonialism still exists. The end of that armistice that would decide the independence and the unity of Latin America.

During the writing workshop, the middle school students from Guadalajara discussed Simón Rodríguez’s quotes, noted above. In pairs, they reflected on Simón Rodríguez’s notions on Latin American unity, they wrote down their impressions in their notebooks, and asked questions in class. For instance, some students draw large maps on their notebooks on what a great Latin American homeland would look like in terms of Latin American unity. Others asked if their empty window frames in their classrooms would have glass panes instead of voids if all the Latin American nations created a single force against imperialism. Yet, other students asked if their middle school would have a cafeteria to provide them cheap meals just like those schools in the United States, as portrayed by television shows.

As a starting point, one of the Simón Rodríguez’s poetic images from his work *Sociedades Americanas* was used in the poetry workshop to describe the paradox and the absurdity of Latin Americans who imitated Europe:

*Veamos
a los europeos,
inventando medios
de reparar un edificio
viejo, por no tener
dónde hacer uno nuevo.
new one.*

Behold the Europeans,
creating means to
repair an old building
because they do not
have space to build a

*Veamos
a los americanos,
en un país vacío,
perplejos, o imitando
sin necesidad, lo que
hacen los Europeos.*

Behold Americans, in an
empty land, perplexed or
unnecessarily imitating
what Europeans do.

(RODRÍGUEZ, 1842/1990b, our translation, textual design in original, p. 109).



In this scenario Simón Rodríguez noted that, “America should not imitate slavishly but rather be ORIGINAL” (RODRÍGUEZ, 1842/1990b, translation by Briggs, text’s design, italics and bolds originals, p. 286). About this point, the students read, wrote down and discussed the above quotes (and conceptual images) from Simón Rodríguez. After that, they created poems to express their opinions about Simón Rodríguez’s ideas on the independence and Latin America unity.

It is significant how the students’ poems address their experience about living in a colonized territory in Latin America. In the systematization of the fieldwork, we noticed that the poems could be grouped into themes according to analytical categories from the content of the poems. The three emerging themes are: a) “Traditional conceptions of colonized Latin America”; b) “The meaning of Latin American unity and colonialism from the middle school students and c) “There is no place for the colonized”.

a) Traditional conceptions of colonized Latin America

This theme describes how some students perceive colonialism as the traditional idea of direct invasion from a foreign nation to another and how they understand colonialism as unequal macro relationships among countries. The following is one of the poems from this theme:

*América Latina,
Tú que eres como una hormiga indefensa que todos la atan.
Tú que fuiste colonizada
Porque fuiste como una tortuga, como un conejo lento, frente a los demás países,
Como un niño: nadie le hace caso.
Gracias por ser fuerte.*

Latin America,
You are like a defenceless ant that everyone ties down.
You were colonized,
Because you were like a turtle, like a slow rabbit, in the face of other countries,
Like a child: no one pays any attention to.
Thank you for being strong.

This poem illustrates the notion of the colonized as having little if any agency as noted in the poet’s use of “*indefensa*” (“defenseless”); beleaguered and unable to surpass a state of infancy, “*como un niño*” (“like a child”) whose development in the modern world has been truncated by deficiencies caused from exploitation. Yet, the poet acknowledges Latin America’s resiliency, “*Gracias por ser fuerte*” (“Thanks for being strong”). The peripheral poet illustrates Latin America as a colonized pool of poverty, having no agency. However, other poets discussed the implications of colonization at a micro level as we see in following sections.

Another poem with this traditional conception of colonialism lamented the products of colonization:



*América Latina,
país colonizado,
lleno de esclavos
y tiranos que siembran el mal.
Hacen que me sienta como playa sin mar,
Como un cielo sin estrellas que observar,
Como un asesinato sin oscuridad
Como el silencio sin tranquilidad.
Hace que el océano de lágrimas brote de mis ojos
Y la vida quiera dejar.*

Latin America, colonized nation,
Full of slaves
and tyrants that sow evil.
All of this makes me feel like a beach without the sea,
Like a sky without stars to gaze at,
Like a murder without darkness,
Like a silence without peace,
All of this makes an ocean of tears flow from my eyes,
And makes me want to leave this life.

The poet notes that Latin America is, “*lleno de esclavos*” (“full of slaves”). This has certainly become evident not only in the U.S. where many immigrants, documented and undocumented, come to work for low wages and inhumane working conditions but also in Latin American countries where numerous workers are paid extremely low wages for the physically demanding labour and long hours of work. The evolution of slavery as an illegal form of exploitation with physical bondage has morphed into a legal one where bondage is morphed into other forms of subjugation.

The “*tiranos que siembran el mal*” (“tyrants that sow evil”) which can refer to the foreign imperialism that offer millions of dollars to corrupt national politicians who support laws that exploit people in Latin American countries. These actions are brazen, like a murder in broad daylight, in the student’s words “a murder without darkness.” All these macro level decisions have implications on the people who lived in colonized territories. During the remainder of the poem, the peripheral poet describes how the macro level policies have micro level consequences. For example, the poet notes the irony that exists if there is a beach but no sea or silence that does not bring peace. As the poet is a part of the colonized Latin America she experiences stress at the micro level which causes “*océano de lagrimas brote de mis ojos*” (“makes an ocean of tears flow from my eyes”). At the same time that middle school poet is an example of how it is possible not only resisting but rather, re-existing in the field of education, as Catherine Walsh explains (2009). If those students in constructing alternative epistemologies are taken into account as active providers of knowledge, then they, while dealing with surviving in a colonized territory on a daily basis, are helping to promote spaces of re-existence from colonized areas of Latin America.

On the other hand, while writing their poems, some students even problematized the independence achieved by Miguel Hidalgo, largely considered the Mexican “father



of the nation”. While Dussel insisted how “Hidalgo, Bolívar, and San Martín ignited the thought of emancipation” (DUSSEL, 1980/1985, p. 11) the students seemed to be aware that emancipation was not part of their present-day condition and every-day reality. In this sense, Simón Rodríguez realized that the first political independence did not mean true emancipation for Latin America; this is why he refers to “societies” and not “republics” in reference to the oppressed and disorganized Latin American people that were not neither independent nor united as a single homeland.

b) The meaning of Latin American unity and colonialism from the middle school students

The second theme illustrates how colonialism and Latin American unity in the everyday life means something more than just unequal relationships among countries. They expressed the way in which colonialism affects their lives in concrete facts; such as when parents do not have time to spend with their children due to poorly paid employment. Those inequalities that the student’s parents experience are the result of regional free trade agreements that on one hand have produced more poverty and on the other impede the unification of Latin American countries. This means that coloniality of power as current sophisticated forms of colonialism still recreates international economic inequities. For instance, The Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) has explained how “NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) ultimately destroyed local businesses. It specially had a negative effect on Mexican agriculture, and therefore it denigrated the overall economic stability of that nation. Since the passage of NAFTA in 1994 the numbers of Mexicans migrating each year to the United States has more than doubled” (2011, p. 1).

For instance, one of the poem states:

*Soy como la desterrada del libro de historia, porque mi familia no tiene dinero.
Soy como un personaje olvidado de la historia, porque mi mamá no tiene trabajo.
Soy como el árbol sin raíces en la tierra, porque mi hermana tiene que trabajar para poder estudiar. América Latina unida.*

*I am like an exile from the history book, because my family does not have money,
I am like a forgotten character of history, because my mom does not have a job,
I am like a tree without roots in the earth, because my sister has to work to be able to pay her schooling. Latin American united.*

When this female student of fourteen years states: “I am like an exile from the history book, because my family does not have money”, she might reflect on how the students that survive in colonized territories are already aware of the way in which they are left out of the main narrative of history. As Dussel (1980/1985) explains, history in the Western narrative is understood as a totality in which Latin American does not exist; it is a totality because it does not need the colonies, that is, New York is the city where everything occurs, but Guadalajara, Mexico or El Alto, Bolivia are places that are not necessary for that entire, total version of history. In this sense,

the poems written by the students are historical narratives (SALINAS, FRÁNCQUIZ & NASEEM-RODRIGUEZ, 2016) that challenge the dominant total version of history where those who survive in Latin America are invisible because of those Latin American nations are not united. According with the Bolivarian thought, if all the Latin American nations get united as a single homeland or country, they would be visible and independent.

The next poem makes a connection between the idea of Latin American unity, the fact of being dominated by a foreign country and how the students' parents forego time to share with their families:

*El ser un país colonizado
No solo representa odio,
También algo de orgullo
Por decir que luchaste, America Latina unida.
Por no vivir de las manos de alguien que solo quiere apoderarse de nuestro tiempo
De que nosotros podamos ser felices,
Que nuestros padres lleguen temprano,
Aunque no disfruten de lujos.*

*To be a colonized country,
Does not only mean hate,
It also means pride,
Because you can say that you have fought to stop, Latin American united, living from
somebody else's hands, who wants to take hold of our time,
To take hold of our opportunity of being happy,
of our parents' chance to return home,
Even if they are unable to enjoy luxuries.*

These poems link the idea of Latin American unity, the effect of the unequal relationship of power between nations and the students' lives. As the dependency theory explains (MARINI, 1972, DOS SANTOS, 1976, CARDOSO AND FALETO, 1977), poor nations are impoverished to the extent that wealthy countries are enriched, which has been called the historic-structural dependency in Latin America. Instead of having many Latin American countries (for instance, Nicaragua, Mexico, etc.) the idea of Latin American unity suggests that Latin American countries would be no poor if they get united as a single great country. The students talk about some other qualitative or "non-tangible" dimensions of Latin American unity and colonialism, such as the lack of time for their parents. In other words, the middle school students point out how the Latin American unity might help to overcome that lack of time of their parents. In this sense, Latin American unity means having more time to enjoy with the family. Is evident here how the poetry workshop enables the students made these types of meaningful bidirectional home and school connections (FRÁNCQUIZ, LEIJA & GARZA, 2015) where oral histories are privileged over the canon. This particular student embraces the idea of struggle as a form of dignity where time spent together may be considered a zero-sum game if they are to exist comfortably rather than merely survive.

The following poem identifies another aspect of the students' meanings on Latin American unity and how they live surviving in a colonized territory.



*Ser colonizado es,
Es como estar en casa de un amigo y no poder decir groserías...
Como que tus papás nunca tienen tiempo y siempre están enojados,
Porque no tienen tiempo, porque no estamos unidos en Latinoamérica.
La colonización te come el tiempo...*

*Being colonized is like,
It is like being in a friend's house and not being able to swear in front of anybody...
It is like when your parents do not ever have time and they are always angry, because
we all are not united in Latin America.
Because they do not have time,
Colonization eats your time...*

When the student make use of the conceptual and poetic image of “It is like being in a friend’s house and not being able to swear in front of anybody...” to describe how the lack of Latin American unity impacts his experience on being a colonized person, the student is pointing out the sensation, the ontological discomfort of living out of what Dussel calls the totality of the centre (1980, 1996, 1998). In writing this poem, the student is creating knowledge from the philosophical periphery (DUSSEL, 1980, 1997, 2007, 2009) where the colonized survive every day. Nevertheless, it is significant addressing how those qualitative “non-tangible” or symbolic aspects on how Latin American unity might impacts their lives are also tied to concrete dimensions of colonialism. As the poem states: “It is like when your parents do not ever have time and they are always angry/Because they do not have time...”. As previous poems addressed, the students reinterpreted Simón Rodríguez’s ideas about independence and Latin American unity as something that has to do with unequal relationships among nations, but the students also reinterpreted Simón Rodríguez’s thought on how there are symbolic dimensions of the lack of Latin American unity and being colonized as well, such as having angry parents with no time to share with them due to poorly paid employment. The lack of time is an example of how the idea of Latin American unity is a notion that leads colonized peoples to think of how re-existing is a pedagogic practice of insurgency (WALSH, 2009).

c) There is no place for the colonized

Another theme that arose is highlighted in the poems where the students talk about how there is no place for the colonized whether they stay in the colonized territory or if they relocate to a non-colonized nation. One of the students made use of the poetic image of “Like Water for Chocolate”:

*Como agua para chocolate,
Los tiempos,
La luz adelante, los pájaros uniendo un nido.
Quédate atrás y se te cerrarán las puertas,
Vete y nunca escaparás del territorio colonizado,
Contemplar la canción, tus victorias y te derrotarán.*



Like Water for Chocolate,
 The current times,
 The light ahead, the birds are joining a nest.
 stay back and the doors will close on you,
 Leave and you will never escape from the colonized territory,
 Contemplate the song, your victories, and they will defeat you.

As the poem states: “Leave and you will never escape from the colonized territory”. The idea that there is no place for the colonized brings up an important tension because the students are addressing characteristics tied to the ontological situation of being colonized. The poems are talking about how the issue is not only that the colonized suffer due to domination by a foreign nation, but the poems brings up how the colonized peoples suffer for not having any place neither in their home country nor outside of the colony. Since educational foundations in critical pedagogy have been built from privileged locus of enunciation that have shaped the inferiorization and marginalization of those ways of knowing located at colonized territories, those poems that point out the borderline situations that suffered the colonized peoples are key pedagogical resurgences (WALSH, 2009).

In explaining this, those students are constructing knowledge in their struggle to survive as colonized subjects (DUSSEL, 1980, 2007, 2009). The students provide not only a distinctive discourse but also a different categorical map from the colonized (DUSSEL, 1980, 1998). The following poem describes that philosophical situation of the colonized as “Going from landfill to landfill thinking the garbage would be different, but it is the same”:

*A nosotros nos va mal.
 Estando aquí, estando allá.
 Yendo de basurero en basurero creyendo que la basura será mejor, cuando
 Solamente es igual.
 Simplemente es igual.
 Todo estaría mal a pesar del lugar por ser mexicanos, por ser de un país colonizado.
 Si en ningún lugar es genial, ¿De qué sirve luchar?*

It goes not bode well for us
 Being here or being there.
 Going from landfill to landfill thinking the garbage would be different, when it's
 only the same.
 Simply the same.
 Everything will be bad for us since we are Mexicans, since we are from a colonized
 country.
 If there is no good place for us, what is the use of fighting?

This group of poems suggests that the result of the imperialism of the philosophical totality (DUSSEL, 1980, 1998, 2007) is that there is no place for the colonized. The dominant knowledge from oppressors contains an ontology that confirms the certitude of the others as others (DUSSEL, 1980, 1990, 2007). Having no place either in the colonized homeland or outside of the colony creates the paradox as the ontological and concrete place for the colonized individuals, as the following poems states: “The colonized suffer paradoxes all the time”:



*Los colonizados sufren paradojas todo el tiempo
Paradoja como sueño de un mar rojo de odio,
Paradoja de ser dueño de nada,
Colonizados de paradojas,
Para exprimir el sol, un sol de libertad para los colonizados.*

The colonized suffer paradoxes all the time,
A paradox like a dream of having a red ocean of hate,
A paradox like being the owners of nothing
Colonized by paradoxes,
To squeeze the sun, a sun of liberty for the colonized.

As the poems says, “Colonized by paradoxes” is how the middle school students describe living as colonized persons in the “Third World”. This idea that there is no place for the colonized is a critical founding in critical pedagogy. Those epistemological vehicles that make visible the processes of re (existing) from those paradoxes that the colonized suffer on a daily basis (WALSH, 2009) are foundations for any kind of critical pedagogy. As that middle school student says in this poem: “The colonized suffer paradoxes all the time”, but who is interested on making visible those paradoxes in academia, about those schools in Latin America? The poems written by those students are poetic decolonial epistemological cracks in the system; are insurgent ways of re(existing). Those poems are literary resistance from Latin America (FREGOSO BAILÓN, 2015, 2017), in other words, those poems reflect the broken intimacy between poetry and pedagogy (ROMO TORRES, 2016), between “serious epistemology” and “folkloric epistemologies”.

When the privileged modern/colonial/capitalist/patriarchal locus of enunciation is trying to explain what Kant might said on epistemology, what Hegel might understood as pedagogy, these middle school students are writing their poems with the guidance of their *Normalistas*³ teachers in small overcrowded classrooms at 35 grades Celsius (95 Fahrenheit), shooing flies, keeping them out in a middle school located at a neighbourhood ruled by violent business dealers who in turn are key in the colonial distribution of international commerce that designed Latin America as territory to be still plundered, more than 500 years after.

Discussion

Can critical pedagogy help find/construct that place for the students who think about Latin American unity and who survive in colonized territories? This is the key research question that this study addressed in a context where those nations from México to Tierra del Fuego fight to build unity with autonomy, that is, without the imperial dominance from any empire (PRECIADO, 2016).

³ *Normalistas* teachers of Mexico are pre-service and in service teachers that graduated from public teacher training colleges from all over Mexico. They come from humble social class backgrounds and perhaps because of that they are willing to teach in poor communities after graduating. Those institutions were created as a product of the Mexican revolution of 1910. In many other Latin American countries, *Normales* teacher training colleges were also developed during the first part of the twenty century to make people literate. *Normalistas* teachers usually have a leftist strong political formation that made them willing to work in the poorest schools in Latin America.



To respond this question, we studied how the middle school students discussed Simón Rodríguez's ideas and his legacy on Latin American unity and colonialism. We made use of poetic images and metaphors as a way to use a non-Western methodology. What we have learned from this study is that the middle school students in being peripheral poets can be active creators of critical pedagogy. After also using Xirau's proposal (1968, 1971, 1995) to build knowledge through poetic images, the findings suggest that the colonized peoples are not only subjects in the fieldwork but producers of knowledge and theory. The peripheral middle school poets enrich intellectually the foundations of critical pedagogy from the "Third World", that is, from the periphery, from the colonies. Those poets are not only resisting, they are also re-existing the idea of Latin American unity in the middle of those paradoxes that shape the life of those who survive in the colonized territories of Latin America.

The findings suggest that the literature can be enriched by taking into account scholars, thinkers and students from Latin America, in other words, after Simón Rodríguez, and Paulo Freire, the students that survive in colonized and peripheral territories of Latin America can be the intellectuals needed to build knowledge that might help to counter colonialism and therefore move toward achieving Latin American unity. The paradox that the students pointed out in terms of how there is no place for the colonized people can be solved with another cyclical process: to stop being colonies, Latin American countries should be united as a single entity, but, to be united they need to cease being colonies, and to cease being colonies, they need to be united.

The literature describes how critical pedagogy (in singular) has been nurtured by Eurocentric and Western perspectives, but this study provides some insight in line on how the other 80% of the world (Latin America, Middle East, Africa, Asia) can enrich critical pedagogies (in plural) as a field of knowledge. As was described, Latin American scholars have made use of aphorisms and images to describe his thought on epistemologies from colonized societies. This is why we sought to analyse the way in which the middle school students describe the way in which they think of the Latin American unity and how they illuminated their experiences of living in a colonized Latin America through the poems they write. Those poems, and the guidance that the students receive every day from their *Normalistas* teachers are those decolonial cracks (WALSH, 2009) that are important to make visible decolonial-turn epistemologies exterior to ubiquitous power.

The methodology of this study focused on the written text produced by the Latin American students. Since Simón Rodríguez made use of aphorisms and poetic images to describe his thought on Latin American unity, we drew from him and from the Mexican-Catalan philosopher Ramón Xirau (1968, 1975, 1993, 1995 and 1997), who explores the extent to which it is possible to construct knowledge through poetic images. After analysing the poems produced by the middle school students, the findings suggested that those students are poets can be seen as active creators of critical pedagogies if and when Western epistemological racism is overcome.

Some limitations encountered were the lack of time to analyse some other dimensions of the poetry workshop, for instance, the interesting attempt of addressing the decolonization of poetry itself, in other words, it is necessary to unpack the Western epistemologies from which poetry is funded. Another limitation was the necessity of de-



veloping the potential of metaphors as vehicles of feelings and other ethos of being from the colonized territories. Therefore, some new questions that arose from this study are the following: What is the potential of poetry not only as vehicle of knowledge-epistemologies, but also as ethos of being? What if something else exists under poetry (other dimension of reality, for instance) what Western epistemology has not able to discover because of its colonial lenses? What if metaphors are just only the tip of the iceberg of something really powerful that decolonial-turn epistemologies have to reach out?

In this discussion, the people that survive in the colonies (the middle school students, for instance and their *Normalista* teachers) are critical to truly uncover new funds of knowledge-epistemologies in critical pedagogy. In the case of this study, the middle school students seem to be aware that they will live in a colonial situation regardless of whether they stay either in a colonial country, such as Mexico, or if they move out of a colonized nation. In doing so, those students are also challenging the difference between colonialism and coloniality of power. Quijano's notion of coloniality of power points out the extent to which even five centuries later colonialism is still alive, but in epistemological and qualitative terms (QUIJANO & WALLERSTEIN, 1992a, 1992b; QUIJANO, 2000a and 2000b). Nevertheless, those peripheral middle school poets are addressing the paradox on how they still experience concrete aspects related to colonialism while they also live some other symbolic aspects that have to do with how colonialism still works today.

Perhaps, one of the best ways to illuminate sophisticated current forms of colonialism is through poetic metaphors. After all, poetic images enrich reason by breaking up the unit of rationality, as Xirau states (BERNÁRDEZ, 2010). Since Simón Rodríguez made use of aphorisms and poetic images to describe his thoughts about Latin American unity and colonialism, we used Xirau's methodology (1968, 1975, 1993, 1997) to analyse the poems produced by the middle school students. As a result of that process, we found out that the Latin American middle school poets and their *Normalistas* teachers are active creators of knowledge from the periphery of the world.

While the sophisticated epistemic centres of power are reflecting on Habermas' main influences, millions of *Normalistas* teachers and their students risk their lives every day in Latin America. They teach in schools at violent neighbourhoods, persecuted by the state, fatigue, and drug dealers. Thousands of those teachers have lost their voice - and we are not speaking in figurative terms, we mean physically since their voice is their unique working tool in the middle of at times neglected, unhealthy, and overcrowded schools and classroom from where a student emerge to reach the teacher to show her/his poem. Nevertheless, the teacher is not able to stand up from the desk due to knee pain. For the Western canon, those students and their *Normalistas* teachers do not represent funds of serious and sophisticated critical pedagogy. That colonial situation will only change if the Latin American unity is achieved.



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