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Between traditional and emerging epistemologies: Reflections on the construction of knowledge in Social Work from feminist discussions

Entre epistemologías tradicionales y epistemologías emergentes: Una reflexión sobre la construcción de conocimiento en Trabajo Social desde debates feministas

Claudia Bermúdez Peña[1]
University of Valle, Colombia

How to cite

Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to present a review on emerging or non-traditional epistemologies of the social and human sciences to argue that much of the construction of knowledge in social work has its base in feminist epistemologies and experience. Indeed, as a discipline that developed on the margins, albeit from discussions in the social sciences, it has developed particular ways of knowing what social is which, like feminist epistemologies, were denied and made invisible and on which it is necessary to reflect.

[1] Corresponding author: Claudia Bermúdez Peña ✉ claudia.bermudez@correounivalle.edu.co

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es presentar una revisión sobre las epistemologías emergentes o no tradicionales de las ciencias sociales y humanas, para argumentar que buena parte de la construcción de conocimiento en Trabajo Social tiene su fundamentación en las epistemologías feministas y de la experiencia. En efecto, como disciplina que surgió al margen, pero desde los debates de las ciencias sociales, desarrolló unos modos particulares de conocer lo social que, al igual que las epistemologías feministas, fueron negados e invisibilizados y sobre los cuales es preciso reflexionar.

Intoduction

This article is structured in three sections: in the first, we review the context, crisis and critique of the social sciences from the debates that identify the "crisis" of the great narratives (such as those raised by postmodernity and/or countermodernity, including postcoloniality, decoloniality, feminist critique), and from there, the main debates in the emergence and development of the social sciences on the construction of knowledge.

In the second part, we present the ways in which Social Work articulated itself in the face of such debates, while it was excluded and marginalized because it was considered not to conform to or follow the logic of scientific knowledge by focusing on the "practical world". To this end, we trace the epistemological reflection, locating from the concept of epistemology the main characteristics of frontier epistemologies, non-traditional, emerging, feminist epistemologies and the ways of knowing raised from Social Work. In the third section, we note the relevance that the epistemologies of experience and feminist epistemologies have had in the construction of knowledge in Social Work and for Social Work.

Finally, some reflections are presented by way of conclusion as issues that should continue to be reflected upon.

Epistemological Debates in the Social Sciences: Creative Destruction

The emergence of the social sciences towards the end of the European 19th century is inscribed within the framework of the civilizing model inspired by the Enlightenment project (Escobar, 2005; Dussel, 2000; Quijano, 2000). Perhaps the direct effect on the configuration of knowledge was expressed in the idea of a unified science project from the proposal of the Vienna Circle in the early twentieth century (Packer, 2013; Harvey, 1998), which defined the need for all scientific disciplines to follow the methodological proposals of logical positivism (empirical observation, logical reasoning, abstention from value judgments, neutrality, objectivity, verifiability, among others). The nascent social sciences adhered to this proposal, so that "they were differentiating themselves from philosophy and seeking their own identity, especially in the United States, but also in the United Kingdom and other countries. They adopted the logical-positivist program as their blueprint for truly scientific research" (Packer, 2013, p.29). In this way, they were configured on the basis of a paradoxical unity characteristic of modernity: unification and fragmentation; in other words, a unity that is based on disunity.

Thus, European modernity was founded on the basis of the political and economic promises of the Enlightenment (liberty, equality, fraternity); and epistemologically, on the basis of the unification of the scientific method and the fragmentation of knowledge, with full confidence in technology at its core. Unity, as with fragmentation, appears then as a paradox that will be present throughout the development of such ideas. In this way, science, morality and art were proposed as autonomous developments, while other forms of knowledge were excluded. Habermas (1988) recognizes three structures of rationality in this configuration of knowledge:

1.   Cognitive-instrumental rationality
2.   Moral-practical rationality
3.   Aesthetic-expressive rationality

While the natural sciences appropriated the cognitive-instrumental rationality, the humanities were distributed between the other two rationalities (de Sousa Santos, 2007); and although the social disciplines from the beginning were divided between cognitive-instrumental rationality and moral and practical rationality, the cognitive-instrumental rationality proper to the natural sciences of the nineteenth century became hegemonic over the others and over other forms of knowledge. Thus, adopting science as the epistemological foundation of all knowled-

ge (unification), found in the fragmentation of knowledge a condition for access to it, while configuring, at the same time, rules of hierarchization and exclusion.

Secularization, the detachment of the individual from the communitarian world, the desacralization of nature and its consequent pretension of dominion and control, the confidence in reason, the rupture with tradition and the past, and with it the overvaluation of the future, were constitutive features of modernity, which came to impact diverse aspects of the social organization of the European world. However, for Dussel (2000), although this process became hegemonic, there are spheres of life that were not "modernized". Therefore, he defines modernity as the determinations of a part of European culture that called itself modern and that became hegemonic almost worldwide.

The modern project was possible on the basis of the paradox of creative destruction (Harvey, 1998), since modernity, insofar as it presupposes "the new" (Habermas, 1988), poses an opposition between present and tradition, that is, a rupture with the past. In this order of ideas, "how could a new world be created without destroying a large part of what already exists" (Harvey, 1998, p.31). Modernity has to destroy in order to create, to start anew. Castro Gómez (2005) refers to this process as the zero point,

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> *to start all over again means to have the power to name the world for the first time; to draw borders to establish which knowledge is legitimate and which is illegitimate (...), therefore, the zero point is that of the absolute epistemological beginning, but also that of the economic and social control over the world. (p.25).*

The author shows how, in the configuration of knowledge and the reordering of the world, reason appeared as the basis and the way to explain and transform reality, which was understood as unique, predictable and controllable. Thus, the nascent social and human sciences set out to seek laws in the social world, which was assumed to be invariable and unalterable, and at the same time developed a deep confidence in the possibility of leading society towards progress and civilization, which was possible through the intervention of society on itself. That is, through social intervention. Here we find another paradox: leading society towards progress presupposed a social world capable of being altered through intervention, i.e., the social world was neither invariable nor unalterable.

Epistemological debates from Social Work

Our starting point is the articulation between Social Work and social sciences. From this conception, we grant analytical centrality to the social forms of knowledge construction. That is to say, it is relevant for us to pay attention to the conditions in which the processes of expansion of such knowledge take place, the knowledge that is silenced, as well as the subjects involved in it (both the agents that legitimize it and the political influence and power that some groups impose on others). In this order of ideas, we consider that in the relationship between Social Work and social sciences, beyond good neighborly relations, there are determining factors in the social construction of knowledge (Lorente Molina, 2002, p.48). Indeed, in the case of Social Work, it is worth noting that although it emerged within the framework of the social sciences, it differentiated itself early on from them, especially in epistemological terms, by considering both the field of knowledge and the field of social action as the axis of its reflections. That is to say, it did not position itself from the fragmentation of knowledge and gave value to the knowledge of experience and the practical world. In other words, Social Work was considered the construction of knowledge, the definition of action (social intervention), and at the same time, the production of knowledge about the same action. For Bonfiglio (1982), this means that it defined its object as a unit of analysis and as a unit of action, i.e., it assumed the construction of knowledge and action as part of the same continuous process of comings and goings, and not as separate processes. From this condition it positioned itself in the debates of the social sciences (Soffer, 1982), and although it also adopted the questioned fragmentation of knowledge proposed by modernity in methodological terms (for example, with the classic North American models of case, group and community intervention), it proposed ruptures by positioning itself from different logics of knowing and producing knowledge, in contrast with the scientific method adopted by the other social sciences.

In the debates proposed since modernity, the exclusion of knowledge that does not operate under the rules of logical positivism is clear, so that relations of knowledge-power were established in which certain ways of knowing became hegemonic and others were assumed as subaltern knowledge, and from that place, were excluded. According to Lorente Molina (2002), in the process of configuration of social science knowledge and its consequent fragmentation (subdivision), Social Work was and has been the object of several exclusions. Thus, insofar as it is assumed that as an applied discipline it is practical and not theoretical, it is assumed that it does not construct knowledge, which

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means a clear denial of the contributions it has made to issues such as help, care, or social change, among others, which at one time were central to the understanding of the social order from the social sciences. However, it is clear that the emergence of Social Work was part of the same social science project that was initially defined from an applied vocation, i.e., close to the world of action, although later differentiations were established, considering it of little value from the point of view of scientific prestige (Miranda Aranda, 2003).

Crisis and critique of the West by the West: postmodernity

The project of unified "enlightened" science was not free of tensions and disputes, and was soon the object of multiple criticisms and debates that we identify here as the critique of the West against the West. One of the maximum expressions of this critique can be found in the so-called postmodernity. It is, in a way, a type of internal critique in which Europe examines itself "looking in the mirror", that is, a critique that emerges from its own center.

Of what did the West's critique of itself, which was largely grouped under the movement of postmodernity, consist? It can be said that it is a reaction to the ideas of modernity, whose approaches are summarized in Lyotard's (1987) statement, when he points out the disbelief in the great totalizing narratives that exclude other small non-universal narratives as the axis of the discussion; this disbelief was accompanied by a feeling of pessimism and failure, because the modern promises were never fulfilled: in the economic sphere, there was no liberation from scarcity (inequality persisted), nor was there generalized progress; in the political sphere, the arbitrary use of power was not eliminated (on the contrary, new forms of dictatorships emerged); in the epistemological sphere, the great theories proved incapable of understanding microrealities and epistemic diversity, while at the same time they ignored and excluded other knowledge and knowledges. In the face of all of the above, perhaps what postmodernity most evidenced was the concealment in the modern narrative of spheres of domination and oppression (Harvey, 1998).

The rupture with the idea of universals and homogenization redirected the gaze and the senses towards other more local issues and towards the recognition of plurality, the ephemeral, the chaotic, the discontinuous. It also questioned the idea of reason as the only way to understand social reality and human action, that is, it was interested in what modernity excluded. Thus, postmodernity as a sign of the times and of "self-consciousness" generated several shifts in the conceptions of being, knowing and doing, a process of deconstruction that, this time, did not aspire to achieve a unified vision of the world.

It is worth noting that the West was also the object of external criticism, not only from the East but also from the global South. For the purposes of this paper, we are interested in highlighting the critique of the West posed by postcolonial studies and the critique posed by decoloniality.

Critique of the West: Postcolonial studies

The crisis of the ideas of modernity permeated other spheres of reflection. The so-called postcolonial studies are recognized as a set of theories that emerge from the identification of gaps in theoretical, epistemological and political issues, as regards the ways of understanding and explaining the social reality posed from the West. They are located in the spectrum of critical theories, as an alternative to Marxism (Bidaseca, 2010). Although this set of theories shares some of the postulates put forward by the internal critique of the West, they denounce the way in which this internal critique perpetuates and reproduces the same exclusions that generate "disenchantment". Thus, for example, postcolonial studies denounce the inability of the West to recognize a different other, and also denounce that even postmodernists remain silent and close their eyes in the face of colonialism, that is, in the face of the subjugation of a different other. In the same way, they denounce the Western incapacity to recognize Eurocentrism, in such a way that when the West looks in the mirror and observes universalism, univocity and fragmentation with distrust, this does not mean openness towards the different other, since, in any case, it continues to revolve around itself.

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In other words, the internal critique of the West never abandoned certain postulates such as the myth of progress, the idea of civilization and its supposed superiority. Thus, the difference is understood from the hierarchization, from the silencing and concealment of the barbarism derived from the plundering, the violations and the aggressions present in the colonizing process. That is why Aimé Cesaire (2006) wonders why they set themselves up as superior if they are a society capable of killing, of plundering; is that a civilization or, on the contrary, is it an uncivilization?

For Castro Gómez (2005), the construction of the discourse of superiority was installed having as a place of enunciation the point zero, in which Europe stands as the only model to follow and as a criterion to measure the "development" of other societies, which, it is estimated, must go through the same process (Castro Gómez, 2005; Cesaire, 2006).

It should be noted that post-colonial studies arise from theoretical reflections produced by intellectuals from the English and French colonies, around the 1970s, who were

trained in the hegemonic centers of power (England, USA, France) and who, being at the center of the debates, built anti-colonialist narratives that questioned the epistemological status of their own discourses and the ways in which knowledge is produced (Bidaseca, 2010). These studies come from various disciplinary fields, among which we can highlight: subaltern studies, orientalism, Afrocentrism and the Gulbenkian report. Their approaches, proposals and stakes were diverse, but in any case, questioning.

From the questions posed by postcolonial studies, they establish ruptures with what has been proposed from the West. Thus, they constitute an alternative and offer a contribution to the epistemological debates of the social sciences. On the other hand, by highlighting knowledge-power relations, they propose a clear political openness, i.e., the need for the social sciences to engage in action, a task that has been present in social work since its origins, as we have pointed out.

Postcolonial studies bring together a plurality of voices and are interested in making silenced voices visible. For Bidaseca (2010), a particularity is that their starting point is the "colonial wound", and from there "they propose a critical analysis of the center-periphery relations created by colonialism" (Bidaseca, 2010, p.95). In other words, they argue that modernity cannot be understood outside coloniality. In this order of ideas, the postcolonial perspective constitutes a possibility to explore other narratives and open other paths, silenced and/or concealed. Therein lies a good part of the current challenges of the social sciences and Social Work.

Critique of the West: The decolonial turn

For some authors, it is in Latin America where for the first time a critique of coloniality gestated (Bidaseca, 2010). Early thinkers such as Guaman Poma de Ayala, Simón Rodríguez, José Martí, José Carlos Mariátegui stand out; in the last decades of the twentieth century, thinkers such as Paulo Freire and Orlando Falsa Borda stand out, and recently we find the approaches of thinkers of the modernity/coloniality group, such as Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano. Thus, a trajectory of concerns can be traced that configures a matrix of analysis in which Latin America is assumed as a category of knowledge. However, it was the commemoration of the arrival of the Spaniards in America (1492-1992), one of the main triggers to pick up, retake and rethink issues that had already been raised in the debate on Latin American identity and modes of knowledge construction from the South. Thus, the decolonial turn was proposed as "another paradigm", contrary to the great modern narratives (Christianity, liberalism,

Marxism), and was defined as a way of thinking from the edges of hegemonic systems of thought (Maldonado Torres, 2007).

For the decolonial turn, modernity did not begin with the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, but in 1492, when Europe was confronted with a different other, which was not discovered; on the contrary, it was en-covered, controlled, violated and exterminated (Dussel, 1994; Quijano, 1988). Latin America was not only erased from universal history, it was plundered of its resources and knowledge. For this reason, authors of the decolonial turn, such as Maldonado Torres (2007), argue that coloniality refers to a pattern of power that, although it emerges as a result of modern colonialism (power relationship between two peoples), transcends forms of domination in which work, knowledge, authority and inter-subjective relations are the result of the colonialist system, authority and intersubjective relations are articulated among themselves through the world capitalist market and the idea of race, so that it is necessary to see the other modes of domination, which do not necessarily pass through the economic, such as, for example, the coloniality of being, the coloniality of knowledge, and the coloniality of power.

Up to this point we can affirm that by the time of the advent of the debates proposed by post-modernity and counter-modernity, Social Work had already explored some paths that established distances from the epistemological postulates of modernity, such as the following:

1- Social Work did not opt for the fragmentation of knowledge or for the definition of a single and exclusive object. Instead, it integrated different social science knowledge, which was expressed in its training processes, thus anticipating interdisciplinary dialogue (Travi, 2006; Lorente Molina, 2002).

2- Their ways of knowing were not framed in academic canons, but they did dialogue with them and there they made a place for themselves, even if subalternized, without abandoning social knowledge (Lorente Molina, 2002).

3- Its link with social assistance, the issue of care, solidarity, and the concern for the search for alternatives to problems and social change placed Social Work in the world of politics. Indeed, as Arendt (2008) points out, action is connected to the political sphere of human life, insofar as it implies a relationship between fellow human beings. From this point of view, living implies a relationship between equals and in this order of ideas, "action always produces stories, intentionally or not" (Arendt, 2008, p.105). Therefore, Social Work has contributed to the construction of social thought having action as a starting point. On the subject, Lorente points out that "the social sciences are discovering what Social

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Work has been developing throughout its history, since the challenge of the plural gaze has been imbricated, by absolute professional and academic necessity, in our epistemological baggage" (Lorente Molina, 2002, p.54). This can be seen in the Gulbenkian report, directed by Inmanuel Wallerstein (2006), which proposes the need to "open up the social sciences". There, the author points out the importance of transcending disciplinary boundaries, the need to cross the lines, not only because the disciplinary organization is somehow exhausted, but also because that mode does not allow us to understand the multiple social realities facing the social world. Thus, he argues that

> *To be historical is not the exclusive property of persons called historians, it is an obligation of all social scientists. To be sociological is not the exclusive property of certain persons called sociologists but an obligation of all social scientists. Economic problems are not the exclusive property of economists; economic questions are central to any social-scientific analysis (Wallerstein, 2006, p.106).*

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Thus, Social Work early on crossed disciplinary boundaries, as proposed by the Gulbenkian report. In the same way, Social Work opted for the epistemologies of experience and from that place it positioned itself in the debates of the social sciences. Therefore, it is worth reviewing how these epistemologies of experience, including feminist epistemologies, have contributed to the construction of knowledge in Social Work and for Social Work.

Feminist critique as an epistemological stake

Feminism interrogates postcoloniality and the decolonial turn using the same questions that these movements asked the West: what do they cover up, what do they silence, what do they make invisible? Moreover, it wonders about the voice of the subaltern in critical theories: can the subaltern still speak in counter-modernity? This is how feminism finds a void when it becomes evident that these perspectives do not include the voices of women or sexual dissidence. Evidencing that, for the most part, critical intellectuals are men who perpetuate the phallocentric constitution of the social and human sciences (Bidaseca, 2010). In the same sense, when feminism is subjected to an internal critique, it shows that women's oppression impacts them differently. Thus, for example, a white woman can be oppressed by a white man, but she in turn can be the oppressor of a black man; a black

woman can be subject to multiple oppressions, for example, she can be oppressed by a black man, by a white man or by a white woman; in the same way, the world of private life, which can be read by a white bourgeois woman as synonymous with oppression, can be read instead by an enslaved black woman as a privilege. This is how Ochoa puts it:

> *Habib Gómez also points out another problem with the Western conception of human rights, which is that it reinforces the idea that patriarchy is the (only) form of oppression suffered by women. While many struggles led by impoverished or popular indigenous, Afro-descendant and mestizo women, who place themselves within the decolonial camp, argue that there is no decolonization without depatriarchalization, the truth is that the "multiple oppressions" faced by racialized women are not shared by white women. The capitalist oppression that weighs on white women is intensified in the case of racialized women by the experience of genocide, slavery, and servitude they have historically endured. (2021, p.20)*

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Thus, feminisms in the plural (popular feminism, Afrofeminism, postcolonial feminism) are proposed, and are interested in making visible and analyzing these multiple oppressions (such as those of sex, race, class). They recognize that in different circumstances women can act as oppressed or as oppressors, and distance themselves from the so-called bourgeois feminism. In this order of ideas, they point out that the subject of feminism is not unitary, nor does it represent a stable identity, so that it is a subject that occupies multiple positions.

These feminisms in the plural also question the category of gender, since from their point of view, this category does not allow an explanation of multiple oppressions. Thus, they affirm that when patriarchy is pointed out as oppressor and not racism, white women are somehow enabled to continue oppressing others from their privileges. Now, how is Social Work articulated in the face of these debates?

Feminist epistemologies, epistemologies of experience and social work

One of the particularities of feminist epistemologies[2] is that they not only question the way in which gender relations influence the construction of knowledge, by making visible, among others, power relations, the presence of prejudices, what is excluded and denied, but also propose alternatives for action (Blazquez Graf, 2010). Their central argument is that traditional epistemologies have not allowed us to see the place of gender in the construction of knowledge, and from there they propose to understand the way in which gender relations and practices participate, influence and contribute to this process, while showing how these norms and practices affect women's lives and are implicated in systems of oppression.

Although these epistemologies began to become visible in the 1970s and 1980s, and were born placing the category of gender at the center of the debate, it was in the 1990s when the debate was broadened and other aspects such as ethnicity, race, social class or sexual orientation were introduced. From decolonial feminist epistemologies, it is argued that these categories also act as structuring factors of power and subordination relations, and should therefore be made visible (Alcoff and Potter, 2003).

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Although it seems that there is agreement on the foundations of feminist epistemologies, they are not represented in a unified theoretical corpus and their positions are diverse. Nevertheless, some of the points on which they converge have to do with the questioning of traditional epistemologies on issues such as:

[2] A starting point of primary importance is that feminist epistemologies were developed in contexts different from those of the South, mainly by European and North American feminists.

-       The homogeneity and neutrality of the cognizing subject, arguing that this is diverse, and diversity (gender, ethnicity, class) acts in the construction of knowledge.

-       The individualism present in modern epistemology, which, based on Cartesian principles, proposes knowledge as the result of the careful exercise of an individual's mental faculties. The main problem with this conception is that individual knowers are generic, whereas feminist epistemologies recognize epistemic subjects as situated knowers (Haraway, 1989).

This means that differences in knowers (based on gender, ethnicity, and class) lead to differences in perspectives and these have consequences for knowledge construction. Thus, in addition to situated knowers they also raise differentiated knowers, issues that are absent from traditional epistemologies.

-       They propose that it is communities that are able to produce knowledge and not individuals alone. In this sense, they insist on the social and interactive character of those able to produce knowledge. Knowledge is a social construction in which power relations act and must be unveiled.

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-       In accordance with the above, objectivity is deeply questioned. Indeed, if it is understood that knowledge is a social construction and, in addition, knowers are situated, it cannot be neutral or impartial. Impartiality is impossible due to the partiality of knowledge because it is situated, experiential and differentiated.

For racialized, Afro-descendant, indigenous and mestizo feminists, who since the 1970s have raised their voices and delved into the implications of the patriarchal and capitalist power framework, the relationship between the different systems of domination, read sexism, racism, heteronormativity and classism (Curiel, 2007), is crossed by the articulation of knowledge and action. That is, as in Social Work, knowledge and action are not assumed as separate processes and, therefore, do not separate the construction of knowledge from the processes of transformation. By not separating knowledge and action, it is important that knowledge contributes to action, and in turn, to knowledge processes. In this order of ideas, experience is introduced from feminism as an instrument for the construction of knowledge, and from that place it was introduced in the debates and devices of knowledge (Trebisacce, 2016).

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It is at this point that we find a clear relationship between feminist epistemologies and the construction of knowledge in Social Work. Indeed, according to Mosquera (2005), in the processes of professional intervention, knowledge is created with a local and contextualized nature, and even when it is made up of knowledge produced from the canons of scientificity, it is knowledge that also includes experience, emotions, as well as ethical and political stakes. For the author, it is knowledge that is constructed collectively and interactively and is structured by the experiences of the subject who knows, but also by the experiences of the subjects who participate in these processes of knowledge and action. In this way, the cognizing subjects are not relegated to the neutrality of knowledge, but are bearers of experiences, identities and relationships that shape knowledge.

From our point of view, this knowledge, which Mosquera (2005) calls knowledge in action, can be recognized as such from the possibility offered by feminist epistemologies, as we have pointed out. In this order of ideas, to the extent that knowledgeable subjects are located in processes of interaction, the knowledge that is constructed is not assumed as an individual result, but is part of a collective construction in which objectivity, as understood by traditional epistemology, has no place. It is understood that knowledge is neither neutral, nor impartial, nor generalizing, but is situated, differential and experiential, as occurs with the knowledge built in action, which, according to the author, can be called the knowledge of Social Work.

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As has been pointed out, the construction of knowledge from Social Work has as its starting point the doing, the practice and the experience, establishing from there a clear relationship with the construction of knowledge. Thus, it can be stated that Social Work understands that "Knowing something is always knowing how to do something" (Beillerot et al., 1998), and that it is a knowledge-doing related to the professional intervention carried out in the wide world of social intervention.

It was not until the 1980s that the specialized literature began to refer to social epistemology, which recognized two opposing traditions in the history of philosophy with respect to the conception of science: Aristotelian and Galilean. However, this way of approaching the debate is now in crisis, because according to several authors (de Sousa, 2009; Guzmán and Pérez, 2005; Maldonado Torres, 2007), there are broad issues and facts of social life that cannot be explained from these frameworks. In other words, scientific knowledge falls short.

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Thus, "concepts such as conjecture, falsification, criticism, intersubjectivity, otherness, innovation, change, have replaced old concepts such as verification, certainty, objectivity, tradition, stability" (Guzmán and Pérez, 2005, p.5) (italics added by the authors). In this regard, de Sousa affirms that the model of traditional scientific rationality is facing a deep crisis, and from his point of view, it is irreversible. For the author, we are witnessing a moment in which it is important to open up to emerging epistemological paradigms, which will also contribute to the search for global social justice; in his words: "global social justice is not possible without global cognitive justice" (de Sousa, 2009, p.38).

Conclusions

The above points out the way in which the construction of knowledge in Social Work has been closely related to the ways in which emerging epistemologies and epistemologies of experience, such as feminist epistemology, propose to approach social knowledge.

Thus, Social Work did not adopt the opposition between theory and practice, nor did it adopt the split between knowledge and action (which other social sciences did adopt in their origins and which led them to exclude the sphere of practice and experience to a secondary role in the construction of knowledge). For Social Work, doing, practice and experience became a central reference for the construction of knowledge, as also happened with gender studies.

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Thinking an epistemology that resorts to experience as a tool to produce knowledge in other spheres and from other perspectives, argues Trebisacce (2016), not only precedes gender studies, but was considered as a true revolution in the way of understanding and building knowledge in the field of knowledge, mobilized critical senses, made it possible to talk about that for which science had no words and made visible from a language and method these other realities, in which the alternative subjects, their stories and their conditions were unknown.

In the same way, introducing experience as an epistemic principle implies an analysis not only of what and how knowledge/intervention is founded and produced, but also of the social factors involved in the acquisition and construction of knowledge/intervention.

De Sousa (2009) states that what should characterize this emerging paradigm is "prudent knowledge for a decent life" (p.40). This means that it cannot be a paradigm that only supports the construction of knowledge, but a social paradigm, that is, one that contributes to the realization of life, beyond an anthropocentric perspective. In this framework of crisis of scientificity and crisis of traditional epistemology, what we know as frontier, emerging, non-traditional epistemologies arise. These epistemologies raise the need for the construction of a knowledge that recognizes our own, understood as a situated knowledge, an episteme from our own roots "that takes into account our own culture and promotes it, by becoming aware of our memory and projecting it as an instrument of communication among ourselves and from ourselves to the rest of humanity" (Vielma, 2018, p.10).

Emerging epistemologies aim at unveiling realities, as necessary realities and as a situated, continuous process, which is constituted from interactions and, therefore, is configured outside the universalizing pretensions of knowledge, of objectivity, to make room for particularity and subjectivities.

Another characteristic of these emerging epistemologies is that they recognize that the cognizing subject is also situated and inhabited by multiple categories of subordination and power that cross him/her in the construction of knowledge (such as social class, ethno-racial belonging, gender identities, nationality, generation, among others). They also recognize that human beings, in the construction of knowledge, are inhabited by lived processes that are constituted in specific socio-historical and cultural contexts.

Recognizing the contributions and the relationship of Social Work with the debates and tensions between traditional epistemologies, and recognizing the relationship with emerging epistemologies and feminist epistemologies, opens an important panorama for reflection that should continue to be explored.

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Acknowledgments

About the authors

Claudia Bermúdez Peña, Social Worker. Master in Popular Education from the Universidad of Valle in Colombia. Doctor in Social Sciences, Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento in Argentina. Professor at the School of Social Work, Universidad del Valle, Colombia

E-mail: claudia.bermudez@correounivalle.edu.co

ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7313-9327

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Alba Nubia Rodríguez Pizarro, Anthropologist from the Universidad of Cauca, specialist in theories, methods and techniques of sociological research, Master in Sociology from the Universidad of Valle, Colombia. PhD in Sociology from the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain. Professor, School of Social Work, Universidad del Valle, Colombia.

E-mail: alba.rodriguez@correounivalle.edu.co

ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1055-9636