

Subjectivity, otherness and intercultural *ethos* in Colombian education

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To reference this article / Cómo citar este artículo / Para citar este artigo: Benavides-Franco, A. (2024). Subjectivity, otherness and intercultural *ethos* in Colombian education. *Revista UNIMAR*, 42(2), 98-111. <https://doi.org/10.31948/ru.v42i2.3583>



Reception date: September 24, 2023

Review date: March 12, 2024

Approval date: April 20, 2024


Abstract

The hypothesis of this paper is that the processes of generation of subjectivities and national identity carried out by the state through the school and its educational policies have not abandoned the Eurocentric model of the colonizing subject. As a result, they have contributed to the continuity and naturalization of the rationality that feeds the conflict, instead of resisting and overcoming it. In this sense, it is proposed to approach this issue from an intercultural perspective, in dialogue with the Levinasian perspective of otherness. Thus, it examines some tools that critical intercultural thinking can offer to Colombian educational policies in order to promote processes of subjectivation in the school that allow the configuration of an 'intercultural ethos'.

Keywords: subjectivity; otherness; intercultural ethos; community; citizenship



Article derived from the reflections developed in the doctoral thesis *Educating citizens for peace: a critical look at political subjectivity in the discourses of citizenship training and the peace chair in Colombia*, developed between August 2016 and August 2020, in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

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Subjetividad, alteridad y *ethos* intercultural en la educación colombiana

Resumen

La hipótesis de este trabajo es que los procesos de generación de subjetividades e identidad nacional llevados a cabo por el Estado, a través de la escuela y sus políticas educativas, no han abandonado el modelo eurocéntrico del sujeto colonizador. Como resultado, han contribuido a la continuidad y naturalización de la racionalidad que alimenta el conflicto, en lugar de resistirla y superarla. En este sentido, se propone abordar esta problemática desde una perspectiva intercultural, en diálogo con la perspectiva levinasiana de la alteridad. Así, se examinan algunas herramientas que el pensamiento intercultural crítico puede ofrecer a las políticas educativas colombianas, con el fin de promover procesos de subjetivación en la escuela que permitan la configuración de un '*ethos* intercultural'.

Palabras clave: subjetividad; alteridad; *ethos* intercultural; comunidad; ciudadanía

Subjetividade, alteridade e *ethos* intercultural na educação colombiana

Resumo

A hipótese deste artigo é que os processos de geração de subjetividades e identidade nacional realizados pelo Estado por meio da escola e de suas políticas educacionais não abandonaram o modelo eurocêntrico do sujeito colonizador. Como resultado, eles contribuíram para a continuidade e a naturalização da racionalidade que alimenta o conflito, em vez de resistir e superá-lo. Nesse sentido, propõe-se abordar essa questão a partir de uma perspectiva intercultural, em diálogo com a perspectiva levinasiana da alteridade. Assim, são examinadas algumas ferramentas que o pensamento intercultural crítico pode oferecer às políticas educacionais colombianas, a fim de promover processos de subjetivação na escola que permitam a configuração de um '*ethos* intercultural'.

Palavras-chave: subjetividade; alteridade; *ethos* intercultural; comunidade; cidadania

Introduction

Since its inception, the school has maintained a close relationship with the project of modernity and a commitment to the configuration of the corresponding type of subject. That is to say, the school, understood as the institution responsible for the formation of the type of subject necessary for the configuration of the emerging nation-states of the eighteenth century, has responded to the demands of the project of modernity. Thus, the imagination of the nation-state and of the social

and political community was mainly derived from this notion of the subject promoted by the Enlightenment and the colonialist project. In other words, by contributing to the creation of an idea of what this new community should be, the school configured a type of subject that followed this idea, and vice versa, to the extent that it sought to construct a certain subjectivity and, at the same time, contributed to the construction of a convinced imaginary of political community.

As we all know, Colombia has been experiencing a social and armed conflict for more than half a century. Given this fact, it is necessary to ask what role this commitment between education and the modern subject has played in the configuration of a society crossed by a violent conflict that we have not yet been able to overcome. Therefore, it seems relevant to raise the question of the role that education has played so far in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia, especially with regard to the type of national identity and subjectivities that state policies have sought to configure through formal education, understood as a means of subjectivation.

Given that the Colombian population is ethnically and culturally heterogeneous—which implies the coexistence within the national territory of a diversity of groups with differentiated socio-cultural patterns (Moreno, 2022)—and that, to this extent, as recognized by the 1991 Constitution, Colombia is a multiethnic and multicultural country, it is extremely important to ask whether these subjectivities configured by Colombian educational policies recognize otherness as a fundamental principle of any ethical relationship and whether they are imbued with what could be called an 'intercultural ethos'.

However, although the 1991 Constitution would imply the possibility of a displacement from a homogeneous nation paradigm to a diverse and multicultural nation paradigm (Carvajal, 2014), this has not materialized in practice. On the one hand, there is constitutional recognition of ethnic and multicultural diversity; on the other, we continue to witness acts of violence that

are generated in these communities, in many cases as a result of the armed conflict and the dispossession of their territories by transnational megaprojects (Carvajal, 2014).

According to Berche et al. (2006), Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples have denounced the ethnocide or genocide perpetrated against their populations and leaders, which threatens both the rights they have won and their political, cultural, and territorial integrity and autonomy; all of this shows that Colombia is still far from becoming a truly multicultural nation.

This paper hypothesizes that the processes of generation of subjectivities and national identities carried out by the State through the school and its educational policies have not abandoned the Eurocentric model of the colonizing subject and, as a result, have contributed to the continuity and naturalization of the rationality that feeds the conflict, instead of resisting and overcoming it. In this sense, it is proposed to address this issue from an intercultural perspective in dialogue with the Levinasian perspective of otherness.

To this end, the question of cultural identity, as conceived by the modern subject, will be addressed first. Next, the question of otherness and the so-called 'invention of the other' is analyzed from the perspective of Latin American social sciences. Finally, it briefly examines the tools that critical intercultural thinking can offer to Colombian educational policies to promote subjectivation processes in the school that allow the configuration of an 'intercultural ethos'.

The subject of modernity

Salas (2006) emphasizes the importance of utopia, arguing that ethics is necessarily based on the hope of the emergence of new configurations of reason, especially those that practical reason assumes in situations of conflict to generate the possibilities of dialogue necessary for coexistence. Faced with the question of the possibility of an authentically human life in a multiethnic world permeated

by diverse perspectives and values, the author believes that a first step would be taken if we could interculturally identify those processes that hinder communication and lead to the solipsistic isolation of individuals and communities with regard to their ethical systems.

Therefore, this paper attempts to show that one of these processes, perhaps one of the most important and decisive, is related to the production of a certain type of subjectivity resulting from modernity in multicultural and multiethnic contexts, such as the case of Latin American peoples.

Particularly in Colombia, the configuration of a type of political subjectivity that is linked to the consolidation of colonialism and that ignores the important issue of emerging subjectivities seems to contribute to the consolidation of the political and social conflict that Colombian society has experienced for more than half a century. In this sense, a decolonial educational perspective becomes necessary, which implies an epistemological pluralism that leads to a new way of understanding education in multicultural contexts; an education that stimulates the full socio-educational development of subjects and questions their assimilationist work (Muñoz, 2021).

It is important to analyze this logic of hegemonic universalization, as described by Salas (2006), which seems to be inherent to this subject of modernity. Levinas (1982)² problematizes it by relating it to an idea of totality, «in which consciousness embraces the world, leaving nothing outside, and thus becomes an absolute thought» (p. 67). What is questioned in this Levinasian problematization is, ultimately, the question of the subject. It is a critique of that subjectivity which is anchored in the metaphysics of being, insofar as it presupposes a monadic existence, that is to say, without relation.

In this sense, Levinas wants to think of a way of relating to the other that breaks with the model of the subject relating to the other as if the other were an object. Indeed, in terms of knowledge, for Levinas «it is a relation with

that whose otherness is suspended, with that which becomes immanent because it is on my measure and my scale» (p. 52). Arguably, the main problem derived from modern subjectivity that the Lithuanian philosopher seems to identify is the problem of the intersubjective relation. Thus, he attributes to the subjectivity configured under a logic of totality the idea of a total and additional society (Levinas, 1982). A society that is tragically constructed in profound ignorance of the question of otherness, thus denying the possibility of recognizing emergent subjectivities.

From the above, it is possible to point out some of the dangers of insisting on the formation of a subject that conforms to the discourse of Enlightenment logic, since, in the words of Castro-Gómez (2000), modernity could be considered a «machine that generates alterities that, in the name of reason and humanism, excludes from its imaginary the hybridity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and contingency of concrete forms of life» (p. 88).

In this sense, two aspects of the illuminist subject can be highlighted that favor and promote situations of social conflict, such as the one experienced in Colombia: first, modern subjectivity is a conceptual device that rejects and excludes difference and otherness; second, as a consequence, it is a device that generates an image of community that leads to the impossibility of building a political community crossed by difference and the recognition of otherness. This implies that the school, and especially the Colombian school in the current social and political situation, must rethink its ideal of the subject, to allow the configuration of a new subjectivity open to dialogue with difference.

Therefore, the first problematic aspect pointed out in this work is that the political subjectivity constructed by the Colombian school from the second half of the twentieth century was related to an ideal of citizen that ignored its own social and cultural reality. That is to say, it was a political subjectivity that did not consider the existence of the differences and particularities of the numerous social and cultural groups living in Colombia. It was an uncritical political

² The quotations from Levinas used in this article are taken from a Portuguese edition entitled 'Ética e infinito', translated by the author.

subjectivity that ignored the possibility of political dissent.

According to a study conducted by Ortega et al. (2015), during the period between 1964 and 2011, the regulatory framework that established and defined educational policy in Colombia showed a lack of initiatives and measures regarding the teaching of recent history; moreover, it sought the formation of abstract citizenship, oblivious to the historical dynamics of the internal armed conflict and its impact on the Colombian population³.

Although science currently shows significant advances and achievements in the recognition of human and cultural diversity in terms of descriptive ethical constructs, the reality is that society in general seems to maintain an imaginary based on a univocal sense of the reality of nations, a perception that implies logics of social, educational, political, cultural and economic development that would assume standardized procedures for all, without questioning what would be a certain homogeneous unity among the individuals that make up a given society (Echeverry, 2021). Thus, in the Colombian case, it could be said that the type of subjectivity that Colombian educational policies have tried to form in recent decades has not been conducive to overcoming social and political conflicts, since it has not contributed to questioning and deepening the important issues of otherness and conflict inherent in living together in a multicultural context and the interaction with the other that this implies.

The social sciences and the 'invention of the other'

For Levinas, the book *Le Temps et L'Autre* is an attempt to escape the isolation that ontology

³ I do not intend to demonstrate here, through the particular example of the teaching of history, that Colombia has not been educated critically; I am interested in emphasizing the worrying fact that, for a considerable period of time, Colombian education made the reality of the armed conflict invisible, by not addressing it as part of the teaching of recent history. This would have contributed, to some extent, to the configuration of a political subjectivity abstracted from the historical and political conditions of the Colombian reality and, in this way, to the formation of an uncritical citizenship.

imposes on the subject. According to the author himself, his effort in this book is to show that knowledge cannot be considered as an authentic exit from the world, since in reality it is an immanence in which the other becomes thematic and is considered as a known object (Levinas, 1982). For the Lithuanian philosopher, knowledge is nothing more than a form of relationship «with that whose otherness is suspended» (p. 52), because it is embraced and becomes immanent and, and therefore, according to him, knowledge can always be interpreted as assimilation. More precisely, Esterman (2009) refers to 'assimilation' as a colonial and neocolonial strategy that seeks to subsume the other under a hegemonic and monocultural project that ends up annihilating otherness. Through this strategy, the Other must conform to the standards of European humanity in order to become part of universal humanity.

In this sense, "only he who could adapt to the Semitic-Greek ideal of the adult Indo-Germanic white male scholar could be called fully 'human'" (Esterman, 2009, p. 62). Furthermore, the author reminds us that «this Western ideal of the 'human', dominates to this day what is considered the 'humanities' and mental schemas of superiority and whiteness» (p. 62). It is essential to take this last aspect into account since the humanities will be the fundamental tool that the school will use to teach and reproduce the schemas mentioned above.

The American social philosopher Immanuel Wallerstein (as cited in Castro-Gómez, 2000) showed that the humanities and social sciences had become a fundamental element in the formation of nation-states. According to him, the emergence of the social sciences was not simply an additive phenomenon to the processes of political organization required by the nation-state, but a constitutive phenomenon of those very processes. In other words, the modern state needed a window of scientific observation of the social world it sought to govern. It was precisely through the social sciences that the incipient nation-state could establish collective goals, build a cultural identity, and assign it to its citizens.

Thus, according to Castro-Gómez (2000), the knowledge provided by the social sciences defined and legitimized the norms that made it possible to link citizens to the production processes inherent to the 'modernization' of the new states. And, in turn, this attempt to create forms of subjectivity coordinated by the state gave rise to what the Colombian author calls the 'invention of the other'.

This 'invention' refers to the knowledge/power devices out of which representations of others are constructed. It is a process of material and symbolic production in which Western societies have been engaged since the sixteenth century (Castro-Gómez, 2000). According to Castro-Gómez (2000), the social sciences gave scientific legitimacy to the regulatory policies of the state and favored those processes of material and symbolic production through which cultural identities were consolidated; but the representation of one's own cultural identity was constructed on the basis of, and in contrast to, the representation of an 'abject other'.

As Castro-Gómez said, the social sciences have been imbued from the outset with a Eurocentric imaginary that leads them to present the process of rationalization as the result of the development of qualities inherent to Western societies. Thus, according to Fornet-Betancourt (2004), the constellation of knowledge in which we move today is fundamentally a product of the West; it contains a guideline that prescribes what the different disciplinary fields must know in order to configure the reality of the West.

The phenomenon of colonialism would have meant the beginning of a tortuous but inevitable path of development and modernization for the Latin American peoples, to mention just one example. Paradoxically, these peoples had to follow this path in order to distance themselves from this 'abject other' as they saw themselves. As we have seen, according to Fornet-Betancourt (2004) and Castro Gómez (2000), this colonial imaginary has traditionally been reproduced by the social sciences and philosophy, even in Latin American societies. According to them, not only has the colonial imaginary permeated the social

sciences since their inception, but they have never made an epistemological break with it.

But how does the invention of the other work in this imaginary? Well, the human species would have gone through different stages of perfection until it reached the maturity that European societies would have reached. Therefore, Latin American indigenous societies would represent the lowest stage in the scale of human development. The last stage of this development, represented by European societies, is constructed as the absolute opposite of the first and in contrast to them. In this way, the analytical models of the social sciences are impregnated with binary concepts such as barbarism and civilization, tradition and modernity, poverty and development, etc.

Castro-Gómez (2000) concludes that the social sciences structurally functioned as an ideological apparatus that legitimized the exclusion and discipline of those people who did not fit the subjectivity profiles that the state needed to implement its modernization policies. Thus, the Constitution of 1886 said nothing about the reality of the peoples who inhabited the national territory and who, despite countless vicissitudes, played a fundamental role in the formation of the nascent republic. However, they were legally 'non-existent', although they did not cease to exist as a labor force or as a reserve for armies and indoctrinators (Rojas, 2019).

The Colombian authors Herrera et al. (2003) analyzed the imaginaries constructed by social science textbooks in the first half of the twentieth century in Colombia. According to them, the national identity presented in these texts was a model imposed by the Colombian elites, referring to an ideal citizen who was unaware of his or her own social and cultural reality and who was guided by doctrine and closed instruments whose written structure did not allow questioning the existing social order. In other words, the process of constructing national identity was directly articulated with the construction of the political project of the nation-state, understood as a project of the elites, which

would have left aside cultural diversity and the plurality of cultural and political expressions in the country, making these expressions invisible and silencing them.

Thus, the process of transformation of social science education in Colombia, which cannot be described in detail here, functions as a body of knowledge traversed by multiple demands and the actions of numerous actors. According to the aforementioned authors, the conflictive character of this tradition implies the recognition of defeated and invisible perspectives and values: the perspectives and values of emerging subjectivities.

Education in Colombia would have been particularly focused on the formation of nationalist subjects with a high sense of civic and moral responsibility, competitive, and productive, according to the imperatives of the global capitalist economic and political context (Ortega et al., 2015). The problem is that this model of citizenship ignored the social reality of peasants, blacks, indigenous peoples and, in general, the so-called ethnic minorities, resulting in the configuration of a type of subjectivity that ignored the historical and political causes of the country's internal armed conflict. In this way, the reality of the conflict was dangerously simplified, and the imaginary of community implied the elimination of differences and the normalization of what was different.

Citizenship and the impossible community

In light of the panorama described above, it seems appropriate to raise the question of how to think through education, the construction of a political community that, in a context of conflict such as the Colombian one, is capable of dealing constructively with the enormous cultural, social, and political diversity and plurality of the country. The problem is that as long as Colombian education is unable to problematize with sufficient radicalism the kind of subjectivity that seems to dominate educational discourses and practices and that, as has been shown,

derives from the Eurocentric hegemonic project of modernity, the construction of a community capable of overcoming the social and political conflict that afflicts the country seems to be a task doomed to failure. From a Levinasian perspective, the problem lies in the impossibility of thinking sociality from the ontology of the modern subject. For Levinas (1982), it is clear that «the social is beyond ontology» (p. 50).

For Levinas (1982), the sphere of commonality that any synthesis presupposes is not present in the relations between human beings; therefore, the Lithuanian philosopher tries to conceive a sociality different from what he calls 'total and additional sociality'. The latter derives from the ontology of the modern subject and allows us to speak of an objectified society permeated by a supposed common element «by which man resembles things and is individualized as a thing» (p. 70).

In particular, the total and additional society that Levinas questions, which is related to our conventional notion of society, seems to start from the assumption that the principle of a sociality that would be originally conflictive must be limited. On the basis of this conception, the Western paradigm of civilization seeks to solve the problem of the sociality of nation-states by eliminating differences and everything that represents a possibility of dissent. To achieve this, the project of European modernity implements the strategy of incorporation, which, according to Esterman (2009), constitutes the final act of the elimination of otherness, whose main variant would be the practice of inclusion.

This practice, according to the author, is based on a fundamental premise of asymmetry and domination, in which an active subject is assumed to be included and a passive object to be included: «The goal of this process is a society based on an exogenous project of 'development', 'civilization', and 'welfare', currently translated in terms of 'modernity', 'technology', 'participation', and 'consumption'» (Esterman, 2009, p. 63). In other words, it is included to impose a project and a vision of the world, so that no one is left out of this

imposed order. It is included, ultimately, to deny difference and otherness and to configure sociality according to the logic of totality.

Thus, according to Fonet-Betancourt (2004), there are currently inclusive societies, but they are systematically and structurally discriminatory; it is not simply a matter of including, for example, indigenous peoples and their traditional knowledge in a dominant order, but of restructuring the rights of all within that order. For him, the intercultural strategy, in order not to become 'inclusivist' in this sense, must open up the framework of rights; that is, it is a matter of decentering and restructuring those rights, rather than including others within the existing law.

An example of this inclusion in current law, according to the author, is the concept of citizenship, which often becomes an instrument of exclusion in the legal framework. In fact, he states that «in the nation-states, the concept of citizenship is used as an instrument of exclusion; it is rather a means of institutionalizing exclusion» (Fonet-Betancourt, 2004, p. 48). In other words, the strategy of incorporation and inclusion that operates in the concept of citizenship is nothing more than the subtle imposition of a hegemonic project that ends up denying otherness. It could be said that the acquisition of citizenship becomes a filter through which only people whose profile fits the requirements of the Enlightenment project can pass: male, white, Catholic, property-owning, educated, and heterosexual. Therefore, those individuals who do not fit this profile, that is, what Ricardo Salas (2006) calls 'emerging subjectivities' -women, blacks, indigenous people, illiterates, homosexuals, etc.- would remain in the sphere of illegality, under the surveillance and punishment of the law that excludes them.

As Castro-Gómez (2000) points out, pedagogy would be responsible for materializing this desirable type of modern subjectivity, and thus the school became the place where the type of subject required by the regulatory ideals of the constitutions was formed. It was there that children were to acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and cultural models that would enable

them to play a productive role in society. In this way, the school taught how to be a 'good citizen', but not how to be a good peasant, a good native, or a good black, since all of these human types were considered part of the sphere of barbarism.

Fonet-Betancourt (2004) criticizes education as an instrument of the nation-state because it is incapable of dealing with Latin America's diversity; he considers it important to «hold ourselves accountable for the damage caused by the nation-state, with its homogeneous way of educating for a uniform life that ignores the diversity of historical memories of this continent» (p. 50). In fact, the educational system not only coordinates knowledge, but also acts as a filter and a mechanism of exclusion of other knowledge. In this way, «the educational system is in reality the knowledge apparatus through and by which the members of the elite of a given cultural, political, etc., community tell the members of that society what they should learn» (pp. 21-22).

It could be said that the process of inventing citizenship and the process of inventing the other are genetically related, in that the creation of the identity of the modern Latin American citizen implies the creation of a counterpart from which this identity could be affirmed. Thus, paradoxically, the creation of the Latin American citizen implies a process of exclusion and denial of difference and otherness, resulting in what we could call the impossibility of community. That is, by denying, in the name of an ideal or imagined community, the plurality of expressions that would make possible a 'factual' community, that is, a community that does not deny conflict as something inherent to itself, the very possibility of community is denied. In this sense, Fonet-Betancourt (2004) invites us to consider, from an intercultural perspective, that dissent is at the heart of the social biography of a culture:

[It is important] to suspect that the image that a culture currently presents to us is an image that is supported by the consensus of the totality of its members. We can and should assume that there has always been someone

who has protested, and the problem, of course, is how a culture treats the minority that produces dissent. (p. 31)

In the same vein, Salas (2006) argues that ours is a polycentric society that increasingly allows for cultural heterogeneity. This cultural diversity, in turn, «is not problematic if one assumes that human life is intimately bound up with conflict» (p. 26). It is not a question of affirming that the identity logic of the modern subject is the only and true cause of the internal social and armed conflict in Colombia, but it is possible to think that this logic is at the root of the problem and that it favors it. The idea of peace, according to this logic, would have to do with the absence of all conflict: a kind of earthly paradise in which dissent disappears and all differences are leveled under the figure of an ideal national identity.

But how can a culture of peace be built in a social and cultural reality based on the non-recognition of difference and otherness? From the logic of identity derived from modernity, it seems that the conflict inherent in the configuration of any community is a problem that must be solved by eliminating differences, if necessary violently (Grupo Memoria Histórica [GMH], 2013). Moreover, in the name of an ideal of community, not only does it seek to eliminate the conflict that results from the coexistence of differences by denying and destroying them, but, above all, through the school, it seems to promote ignorance of this violence and, therefore, of the greater polemic that results from this dangerous solution.

Thus, the aforementioned study by Ortega et al. (2015), after a documentary review of the Colombian regulatory framework between 1964 and 2011, highlights the absence of initiatives and proposals related to the teaching of the recent history of violent conflict in Colombia. On the contrary, the teaching of history in particular and social sciences in general has been diluted in an education based on abstract citizenship skills, far from the historical dynamics of the internal armed conflict and its impact on the population. These authors even affirm that during this period, the internal social, political and armed conflict,

as well as its causes, actors and dynamics, were not mentioned under any name. As a result, they are deprived of a pedagogical approach by the national education policy. According to Colombian researchers, education in Colombia has been instrumentalized to construct a type of subjectivity that corresponds to the perspectives and interests of one of the actors in the conflict: the economic and political elites with their hegemonic nation-state projects.

Ideas for intercultural education in conflict contexts

In the world and, of course, in Latin America, there has been a remarkable interest in directing educational reforms towards more diverse curricula that allow the inclusion of the different types of subjects that make up societies (Muñoz and Saiz, 2022). Thus, since the approval of the 1991 Constitution, national governments have made significant efforts to promote dialogue with these communities and to influence educational policies aimed at interculturality and the training of ethno-educators (Moreno, 2022).

The multicultural model and the holistic model became key aspects in the generation of intervention strategies in school spaces intersected by cultural diversity (Castro, 2019). In addition, it began to be recognized that the quality of education goes beyond the economic investment in the education sector. Therefore, the training of teachers in inclusive and intercultural processes is necessary if the school is to become an emancipatory space where the confluence of plural and democratic positions is possible (Lalinde and Arroyave, 2022). However, although the education of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples appears in the planning horizon of the Colombian state, this horizon does not cease to adapt to the logics of development and, as a result, there are often encounters and disagreements between the visions of the communities regarding the management of their institutions and national educational policies (Moreno, 2022).

As Rojas (2019) states, «it is one thing to name cultural diversity as a fact of reality and quite another to assume it» (p. 18). This means understanding that it is the result of a social and historical process and, as such, does not escape the enormous variety of cultural representations that exist around diversity and what it implies. Thus, it would be necessary to problematize the rapid transition from a «dominant hegemonic society» to «coexistence on equal terms and with mutual respect», as if in eight years Colombian society had magically eliminated the conditions of inferiority, subordination, and marginalization to which the 'indigenous' and 'Afro-Colombian' minorities are subjected.

In addition, the fact that so-called intercultural education has been proposed exclusively for 'ethnic groups', for which 'ethno-education' has been formulated, should be problematized. So far, it has been assumed that intercultural education is only for indigenous or minority groups. However, since the Constitution (1991) clearly recognizes the multicultural character of the country, education should be in line with these postulates: «This means that intercultural education should be offered to all Colombians, whether they belong to a minority group or not» (Rojas, 1999, p. 57).

This implies aiming at the formation of a type of subjectivity that leads to the construction of what could be called a multicultural society, to allude to the diversity of cultures that seek to solve similar individual needs within a society; to do so, they should have the same opportunities (Ávila-Dávalos, 2022). The fundamental challenge of such societies would be the inclusion of minority groups and the recognition of their identity (Guzmán-Marín, 2018; Rodríguez, 2020), for which it is necessary to form a society of subjects open to this recognition.

In the reflections that Fornet-Betancourt (2004) offers on the concept of interculturality, he poses the following question: «What does pedagogy mean, what does it mean to teach in the context of a society that does not want to be reductionist and accepts different educational processes» (p. 48). Much of the

answer has to do with the central problem that, according to the author, interculturality poses: not only recognizing diversity on a theoretical level, but also recognizing the right to 'make the world differently'.

Here, the question of the ideal of education must be considered: «What ideal of education is behind what we teach, what is ultimately important: to preserve this knowledge or to achieve a society made up of people who really make their lives» (Fornet-Betancourt, 2004, p. 49). These are questions that, posed from a concern for the configuration of an intercultural world, help to broaden the horizon to rethink the ideal of what we want to teach. And, as has been explained throughout this text, the broadening of this horizon must necessarily imply the problematization of the type of subjectivity that the school forms, especially, but not exclusively, in conflictual contexts such as the Colombian one.

In this context, it is necessary to consider other ways of thinking about subjectivity that allow for the configuration of another form of sociality, different from the 'additional and total' sociality that Levinas problematizes. In this way, it seems necessary to begin to take much more seriously the possibility of a subject configured on the basis of openness to otherness and the recognition of difference.

Similarly, Salas (2006) argues that interculturality implies a new awareness that all cultures are in the process of gestating their own universes of meaning and that the absolute subordination of the other to my own system of interpreting reality is not really possible. According to this author, interculturality introduces a discussion that must of course be considered in education: the forms of recognition of cultural identities and the mutual recognition of cultures that have lived in asymmetry throughout history.

For Salas (2006), the notion of interculturality is fundamentally ethical and points to a new space that must be constructed to coexist. As the author warns, this new space cannot be conceived as something that is always accepted by all, since there are divergent interests both inside

and outside the world of life, but the process of mutual recognition can lead to the creation of a new relationship between oneself and the other: «a relationship that, although currently asymmetrical, can give rise to symmetrical relationships in which the in-communication and excommunication that currently exist can be overcome for the sake of a new exercise of intercultural dialogue» (pp. 81-82).

The school must stop being seen as an instrument of a colonizing project associated with modernity and begin to be seen as one of the fundamental vehicles of polycentric societies, such as Colombian society, for the construction of this new space that allows the generation of common paths of recognition, «if we want to avoid falling into the abyss of fundamentalism and cultural closure that leads to the exclusion of the other» (Salas, 2006, p. 82).

However, according to Esterman (2009), the discourse of interculturality ceases to be simply an intentional and interpersonal discourse if it is not imbued with a critical reflection on the process of decolonization; he points out that this process is not limited to simply eradicating all traces of colonial power from a culture, since critical intercultural philosophy considers that all cultures are the result of a complex process of 'inter-trans-culturation' and rejects any notion of cultural purism. For the author, the perspective of profound decolonization implies becoming aware of the coloniality of structures, power relations, values, internalizations, mental schemes, and legal systems.

Therefore, from Esterman's (2009) perspective, critical intercultural thinking must start from the «recognition of an asymmetry between cultures, of the hegemony of certain cultures over others [...], of power relations within cultures, and of the asymmetry of gender relations within and between cultures» (pp. 63-64). Thus, the school, in order not to become a mere tool of this hegemonic power and of this dominant culture, has the responsibility of being the space par excellence where the recognition of the situation of power and asymmetry of a given culture takes place.

On the other hand, the recognition of asymmetries and power relations within cultures implies the need to face the conflict inherent in the processes of cultural and social configuration and transformation. In this sense, Salas (2006) highlights the relevance of the notion of conflict as a fundamental category in intercultural reflection. Nevertheless, the idea of conflict he proposes does not refer to the bipolar logic of class society, but to a reality inherent to human societies, related to a dynamic process of agreements and disagreements that occur at different levels of deliberation and human coexistence, whose socio-political implications must be recognized.

In his theory, conflict appears as a constitutive element of intercultural dialogue and, in this sense, it must be understood as an intrinsic element of a contextualized action; thus, with regard to the situation of Latin America, Salas emphasizes that, according to Kusch, «one could say that the problem of America is, in part, that of tolerating, if possible, different rationalities, perhaps to find a rationality that is deeper or better, closer to our conflicts» (p. 33); therefore, the configuration of an intercultural ethos, for Salas, implies a theory of conflicts that is built through the search for common spaces of self and hetero-recognition within the cultural context itself, but also outside of it; that is, in contact with other cultures.

Conclusions

Levinas' reflections seem to show other ways of thinking about subjectivity. Levinas (1982) questions modern subjectivity and proposes a plural subjectivity, a subjectivity that includes the other because it is constructed on the basis of sociality: «It is in ethics, understood as responsibility, that the knot of the subjective is given» (p. 87). This subjectivity traversed by otherness seems to be the fundamental principle of a critical intercultural understanding. It rejects, according to Esterman (2009), any essentialism or cultural purism and defends that all cultures are the result of a complex and long process of 'inter-trans-culturation'.

In intercultural thinking, culture, like the Levinasian subject, is traversed by otherness, by dialogue with other cultures. The relationship between cultures is prior to any idea of an uncontaminated cultural essence. This means that there is no state prior to culture, but that each culture in its present state is the result of innumerable processes of dialogue and interaction with different traditions (inter) and historical transformations (trans) within the same culture (Esterman, 2009).

Consequently, thinking about intercultural education in a context of political and social conflict such as the Colombian one seems to be an important task. This task must begin by questioning the single paradigm of Eurocentric rational subjectivity and begin to observe these opaque, singular, and diverse subjects that interact in everyday life.

Thinking about education from an intercultural perspective would mean considering that education must be pluralized and that it is necessary to abandon the idea that it is an instrument of national states and a producer of a more or less homogeneous nation. An intercultural pedagogy should begin by broadening our vision of ourselves and taking responsibility for who we are. This implies, of course, taking responsibility for educational policies with the aim of building a society in which the voices of others, of those who are different, of those who have not been heard or recognized, are heard.

Conflict of interest

The author of this article declares that he has no conflict of interest in the work presented.

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Contribution

The author prepared, read and approved the manuscript.