

PROBLEMS OF METHOD IN GEOGRAPHY, THROUGH THE SARTREAN STRABISMUS

<https://doi.org/10.4215/rm2023.e22014>

Junior, E.J.M. a*

(a) PhD in Geography.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7209-7735>. LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3962303942126121>.

Article history:

Received 25 February, 2023

Accepted 05 May, 2023

Published 30 June, 2023

(*) CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Address: UNICAMP. R. Pedro Zaccaria, 1300, Cidade Universitária, CEP: 13484350 - Limeira, SP - Brasil. Phone: (+55 19) 37016745

E-mail: eduardo.marandola@fca.unicamp.br

Abstract

Method's reflection is revisited owing to the problematic horizon of coloniality that traces scientific Geography, which questions the validity of its tradition in view of the need to re-discuss its bases. The paper resorts to the Knowledge-Existence dialectic, as placed in its praxis by the thought of Jean-Paul Sartre, as a strategy to problematize the epistemological and ontological issues that are involved in the challenges of contemporary Geography.

Keywords: Existentialism; Praxis; Coloniality; Epistemology of Geography.

Resumo / Resumen

QUESTÕES DE MÉTODO EM GEOGRAFIA, PELO ESTRABISMO SARTREANO

A reflexão de Método é revisitada tendo em vista o horizonte problemático da colonialidade que marca a Geografia científica, a qual coloca em xeque a validade de sua tradição diante da necessidade de rediscutir suas bases. O artigo recorre à dialética Saber-Existência, tal como colocada em sua práxis pelo pensamento de Jean-Paul Sartre, como estratégia para problematizar as questões epistemológicas e ontológicas que estão implicadas nos desafios da Geografia contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: Existencialismo; Práxis; Colonialidade; Epistemologia da Geografia.

CUESTIONES DE MÉTODO EN GEOGRAFÍA, POR EL ESTRABISMO SARTREANO

La reflexión de Método es revisitada teniendo en vista el horizonte problemático de la colonialidad que marca la Geografía científica, la cual pone en jaque la validez de su tradición ante la necesidad de rediscutir sus bases. El artículo recurre a la dialéctica Saber-Existencia, tal como la plantea en su praxis el pensamiento de Jean-Paul Sartre, como estrategia para problematizar las cuestiones epistemológicas y ontológicas que están implicadas en los desafíos de la Geografía contemporánea.

Palabras-clave: Existencialismo; Práxis; Colonialidad; Epistemología de la Geografía.

INTRODUCTION

“Whatever galaxy man goes to, they will need geography and history. Thousands of years from now, geography will always be present with man.” Livia de Oliveira (2017, free translation)

“Has the geography practiced amid the twentieth century become something else? Why continue to use the same label? And when man will be creating stations in the Moon and Mars, will they keep the same label?” Carlos Augusto de Figueiredo Monteiro (2008, free translation)

“The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition.” Hannah Arendt (2018).

To those who are dedicated to Geography, the words of Livia de Oliveira, in the epigraph, may sound like praise for its relevance. It even seems “overrated,” projecting Geography so far into time (thousands of years from now) and space (to other galaxies) that we get the impression that it will have no end (would it have had a beginning?).

Imagining how Geographical Science will be like in a few millennia seems like a speculative exercise that is as difficult as it is pointless. It seems something worthy of heirs and practitioners of a Modern Science, which, in its own contradictory way of relating to temporality, believes both on an endless and unlimited progress and on the continuous reinvention that establishes the novel in contempt of tradition (VATTIMO, 1991).

However, this is not the horizon our geographer has in mind. It is a matter of recognizing the founding character of geography itself, which is not restricted to a body of scientific knowledge as it was composed in Modernity. I read in this sentence, in fact, a broader sense of the geographical (cosmological, perhaps) that entangles, in complicity, the destiny of the human being and of the Earth itself, historically. In a way, it is the opening of Geography (proper noun that refers to the scientific corpus as outlined in Modernity) to geographies, as an expression of the geographical that is a constituent of existences (an ontological sense, therefore)¹.

Nevertheless, if we are launched into other galaxies, Earth will be another – perhaps not even Earth. This, in the epigraph, would then have to refer to something beyond this planet, which is material, but is, at the same time, beyond materiality.

The second excerpt above, from another eminent geographer of the same generation as Livia de Oliveira, Carlos Augusto de Figueiredo Monteiro, already addresses the issue in another way. In a text that reflects the transformations he saw happen in Geography throughout the late twentieth century, he wonders if the changes were so profound that they would call into question the permanence of the same designation. He refers to the shift towards the “social,” in the wake of the defense of Geography as Social Science, so in vogue since the 1970s. Interestingly, self-reflection about his own geography also leads Monteiro to wonder about the pertinence of the label “Geography” when humans are settling in other places, outside this planet: the Earth.

These reflections reminded me of Hannah Arendt’s initial argument that, in her 1958 classic “The Human Condition,” refers to one of the great events in the history of the human relationship with the Earth: the sending of the first construct that detaches from the ground and orbits the planet. In October 1957, the Soviet satellite Sputnik 1 mobilizes more than the so-called “space race”: the earth’s social imaginary is directed upwards, aiming at the sky.

The meaning of this event is the motto for Arendt (2018) to affirm the earthly condition as a constituent of the very human condition, as we read in the epigraph. According to her, more than civic or technological pride, that 1957 event was seen by many as the first step towards escaping human imprisonment on Earth.

It is curious that a book dedicated to politics and to understanding the impact of work on human action in the context of Modernity takes as its starting point the recognition of our earthly condition: precisely the Earth, which has been the object of resentment, for reminding us of our condition of finitude, of our volitions, of what we do not control, of the mystery and the incomprehensible. Nietzsche is eloquent in showing this relationship of Reason with the Earth, as contempt, with the ascending

movement of Reason being associated with an evident distancing from the Earth (DAVIM, 2019).

However, Arendt's purpose is clear: she sees in instrumental modernity a double escape: from the Earth to the universe and from the world to the self. Both are the failure of politics as plurality and the common, founded on practical life. According to her, the escape is not only the real possibility of leaving the planet, but of breaking ties with life, which leads to an understanding of Earth also beyond materiality, in a cosmological sense. Thus, although "The Human Condition" is a book that focuses on the modern condition, it is based on a critical position that recognizes the Earth that, in a founding manner, is a condition of our existence.

Why remember all this now? Just as Monteiro wondered about the coherence of keep using the same name for Geography that seemed to have become a social science at some point in the twentieth century, today many wonder about the pertinence and the possibility of continuity of a science that is founded on bases that have been accused of being Eurocentric, sexist and racist. Consolidated and dominant issues and approaches came to be systematically questioned by sectors and groups that echo the criticism of rationalism and of the articulation between knowledge, power and oppression.

This is not the first time in the history of thought that this kind of crisis has happened. Nor do we have to resort to Thomas Kuhn to think about Critical Geography, that to which Monteiro referred, as an effort to break from the "traditional" geographical discourse, understood here in its modern sense — as something to be discarded. But how to found it anew? Redefining its theoretical-methodological bases. In this case, the replacement of positivist and neo-positivist bases were converted into Marxist and structuralist epistemologies, disciplinarily linked to sociological and economic readings. The defense of the Method and the need for other theories greatly occupied geographers at this time, who sought in Philosophy and Social Sciences (notably, in Sociology) another orientation for Geography.

However, the formula was not new, as this was precisely what the New Geography (with neo-positivist and systemic base) had done, just two decades earlier, in order to renew the Geographical Science. In fact, perhaps it was with it that theory and method became so central, in this case, as a circumscription of the geographical practice and thinking.

The demands we have today and that shake the foundations of scientific Geography may seem, but are not of the same order. That is because the criticism of a Eurocentric, sexist and racist science reaches so deep into the foundations of Western thought that it is beyond the criticism of rationality, considerably consolidated throughout the twentieth century, within itself.

In this sense, it is not difficult to find movements of complete refoundation that deny everything that derives, in some way, from the Greeks, attributing to them commitment to the project of power that has led the nations of the world to succumb. Such positions, which multiply in different variations, seem to situate us at a decisive point in time in which the defense of tradition and the project of another science seem, again, to clash.

In this context, it would be worth asking, as Monteiro wisely did, whether a science so redefined would have something of what has been called "Geography" for centuries. Would we be talking about a new redefinition of the fundamentals, and so we would have to resume the discussion of Method, or would the way be to found other methods? Therefore, would this lead us to the problems of Method in Geography?

To call this into question, I would like to revisit a text published in that same iconic year of 1957: "Search for a Method" (or "The Problem of Method," from French "Questions de Méthode") by Jean-Paul Sartre. Situating the issue on which Sartre focuses in that work can provide us with elements that are relevant to Geography and its challenges. I will do that in a hermeneutic manner, to a certain extent strabismic, that is, with unpaired foci.

SITUATING "SEARCH FOR A METHOD"

"[...] a philosophy, when it is at the height of its power, is never presented as something inert, as the passive, already terminated unity of Knowledge. Born from the movement of society, it is itself a movement and acts

upon the future [...]. Every philosophy is practical, even the one which at first appears to be the most contemplative. Its method is a social and political weapon. Thus philosophy remains efficacious so long as the praxis which has engendered it, which supports it, and which is clarified by it, is still alive.” Jean-Paul Sartre (2002, p. 5-6)

The situationality of the production and publication of “Search for a Method” is very useful for us to think about its developments and scope. In it, Sartre (2002) wanted to reposition Existentialism within Marxism, not as a mere addendum, but as a necessity for Marxism to leave its situation of the moment that, according to Sartre, had lost its heuristic condition, that is, was limited to its own totalization, as a point of arrival (truth) of knowledge. As we can read in Sartre’s epigraph, the philosopher considered that Marxism had lost the “movement,” having become a finished knowledge.

This criticism of Marxism was broad, involving not Marx himself, but the French Marxists and those of Eastern European countries, for example, in which Marxism was intertwined with the very state machine. From another point of view, Lukács and other Marxists accused Sartre and the existentialists of having succumbed, through Idealism, to bourgeois thought. “Search for a Method” is the first part of the substantial Sartrean response, completed in his second major work (after “Being and Nothingness”), “Critique of Dialectical Reason”² (SARTRE, 1991; 1992).

Sartre answers by resuming the question about truth, validity (social function), and searching for a method for socially meaningful, potent, and transformative knowledge. How to do that? Rejecting the manner that Marxism had acquired, preserving Marx and adding to the method a phenomenological-existential facet: the progressive-regressive method, reelaborated based on Henri Lefebvre. What interests us here, however, is not to enter into the solutions that Sartre elaborates, but rather the “question” raised by him. The “only” question that he asks and that occupies the background of the entire “Search for a Method” is: “Do we have today the means to constitute a structural, historical anthropology?” (SARTRE, 2002, p. XXXIV).

Sartre’s relationship with the Human Sciences (Psychology, Psychoanalysis, History, Sociology, Anthropology, Sociology) is notorious, precisely because of the concern with “man,” with his history and with his destiny (issues shared between Marxism and Existentialism). However, the question posed does not reveal a mere philosophical interest in the science of Anthropology: rather, this was the pivot, in France, of one of the most significant interdisciplinary articulation efforts involving the construction of a theory that encompassed the Human Sciences and Philosophy until then: Structuralism (DOSSEL, 2019). This question, for Sartre and his contemporaries, however, was not merely an epistemological question, which would involve discerning between the available options and which method would be truer. There is, indeed, an epistemological and ontological concern, which the philosopher has since his discovery of Husserlian phenomenology; nevertheless, there is also an understanding of Existentialism as ideology, that is, as moral (political conduct and position). There is also an understanding of the role of intellectuals and Philosophy, in their historical situationality, of also acting for social transformation. In other words, it is a questioning focused on praxis.

Sartre is known as a politically active intellectual with a participation in public life. In this expedient, “Search for a Method” perhaps represents, acutely, a Sartrean plunge into confronting the core of what, from his perspective, would be the blind spot of his Marxist critics: the tension

Knowledge (epistemology) Knowing

vs.

Existence (ontology) Being.

It is in this sense that we must understand Sartre’s intentions and his question about “historical structural anthropology,” which did not refer, therefore, to a scientific corpus or discipline in itself. Themes related to knowing and being are articulated, such as his concern with the relationship between the movement of interiorization of exteriority (form of objective understanding of subjectivity) and

totalization. What is at stake is an attention to the problem of empiricism, what is its real value/power, on the one hand, and with the superstructure (structuralist analysis, so in vogue and powerful at the time), on the other hand.

According to him, a structural and historical science of man (anthropology) would only be complete if it included the double regressive movement (resumption: history and biography) and the progressive movement (project: future). It is a matter of considering the historical totalization of singularity in articulation with the general historical totality, dialectically, through syntheses derived from successive contradictions between moments of complicity and criticality. Far from being a theoretical movement, it refers to praxis. It is in the composition of this method that the philosopher saw the articulation between an Existential Phenomenology and the Marxism of the superstructure. This would not only be a science, but, within the framework of the structuralist project, Philosophy itself.

Sartre was aware that the whole effort of Reason, even that of the positivists, refers to being (through metaphysical tradition). Thus, the relation between knowing and being (Knowledge and existence) is at the core of “Search for a Method”: it assumes the expansion of knowledge beyond the epistemological sphere, including the ontological, the ethical and the political spheres. More than that, it poses other problems derived from the Knowledge-Existence relation that, meseems, are fundamental to contemporary Geography:

Empiricism vs. Truth

Empiricism vs. Totalization

Subjectivity vs. Structure

Science vs. Philosophy

Theory vs. Praxis

These pairs, which are not always constituted as dialectic, appear in the wake of the development of the Knowledge-Existence dialectic, which is ubiquitous throughout the writing. It projects and articulates the other tensions, manifested in the daily life of the construction of research, but which have a much broader scope when we consider the extent to which the Sartrean totalization movement takes us. After all, according to him, it is a problem of method.

Thus, I take this dialectical pair, Knowledge-Existence, proposing, strabically, that we change the question proposed by him: do we have today the means to constitute a decolonized, situated geography?

GEOGRAPHY AND METHOD

In the 1960s, Sartre was convinced that the only possible construction considering the Knowledge-Existence question was Marxism, via Dialectics, with a phenomenological-existential ink, in a close relationship between Philosophy and Science, as transformative social action.

More than 60 years later, Post-Structuralism, Post-Marxism, Post-Phenomenology among many other possibilities of contemporary thought, and the great social demand that arises for us, in countries such as Brazil, is the need to deal with the colonality of Knowledge, which is also a form of colonality of Existence (CRUZ, 2017). This is not constituted as a new question itself, but it has been shown to be increasingly penetrating in the gears of contemporary social production and reproduction. What is currently considered as a movement to confront colonality articulates a series of longings and struggles against different forms of oppression, silencing, marginalization and extermination. From the most subtle to the most explicit forms, Reason is held accountable to pay for what it has helped to build by action or by inaction.

The point, however, is not to deny tradition or everything related to Reason, even because it is not in another semantic horizon that we move when elaborating such criticisms. The effort to criticize the legacy of Reason is undoubtedly a demonstration of willingness to make it regain its heuristic potential. In other words: the criticism of Science and Philosophy aims to reorient them toward what they can offer to our practical demands. It is, therefore, a matter of re-situating Reason in a flagrantly political field.

In the case of Geography, for example, situating implies combating the “neutral point” of knowledge (Europe, the West, the masculine, the white, the heterosexual) as much as letting emerge, from the multiple geographies, the telluric force that Reason, especially in Modernity, tried to carefully silence (the denial of the Earth). It is a matter of bringing the Other, and that even the totalization sought by Sartre in the 1960s seems to have left aside. Totalization needs to go beyond the human, including the Earth (as a being) and so many other beings that also constitute Existence. There are many movements towards this reconnection that reorientates the Knowledge-Existence issue, expanding the sense of being beyond the human, which appears in different forms of post-humanism, based on a strong criticism of Western ontology (VALENTIM, 2018).

In this context, would not Geography have a task to be carried out, in times of cosmopolitics, rights of nature, identity and difference (identity movements and racism), political crisis and global environmental crisis?

I do not know whether the answer to the question about a decolonized and situated geography lies in the Method. Many contemporary movements seem to believe in it when proposing new epistemologies or methodologies, which continues to be required in the production of research (such as in graduate research), as something that must be outlined already in the research project. In many cases, Method has become a methodology or methodological procedures, focused on itself as a mere internalist question of an epistemological nature.

This was, undoubtedly, one of Sartre’s focal points of combat in “Search for a Method”: making Method something socially transformative, a weapon for battle. Method not as an assumption, but as a movement, which would guarantee social participation and relevance and, at the same time, political engagement and meaning. This is where Existentialism should enter into Marxism: not to supply methodological flaws, but to renew Marxism, so that it also considered concrete existences, beyond a dogmatic metaphysics, turning to the “living man.” In the facticity of existences, pulsating and moving in their situationalities, Sartre saw the antidote to the crystallization of the Method, that is, of Philosophy itself. The clamor that knocks on our door today also guides us to these concrete existences: the subjects embodied in their differences and situationalities. However, if the question were only one of Method, would not Existentialism itself and Marxism have been enough to supply this clamor for making science “human” and “social,” respectively? Here, the role of the geographical seems to make some difference, as well as asking ourselves who we consider as existing in our scientific work.

About those existing, it is especially important when we have the inclusion in the universities of those who were historically relegated to the condition of “object” and become “subjects of knowledge,” which certainly was a decisive impetus for the current demand for a decolonized and situated geography. To obtain a notion of the breadth and depth of this transformation, we can think of the situationality of the Brazilian geographical community, which occupied university positions (teaching and research), let’s say, until the early 2000s. It should not differ much from the context described by Robert Herin as to the geographical corporation in Spain in the 1990s: white, predominantly male, belonging to economic and social groups of middle strata, whose role in the university consisted in taking part in supposedly neutral social positions, at the same time articulated with their own social origins and bonds (HERIN, 1992). The transformation we have experienced in recent years diversifies not only these social positions (which tend to the same fictional neutrality of Reason, as “point zero”), but also the political commitments, value systems and the very social function that knowledge has in the contexts of life.

Also, add to this the shift that those who were previously only “subjects” experience when having compromised their condition of “neutral point,” throwing them into the situation common to all, also having their bodies racialized/generified, including in the condition of “object.” On the other hand, those who now become “subjects” do not cease to be “objects” at the same time, including of and for their own.

Another problem that is potentiated concerns when geographical beings cease to be “objects” and become “subjects,” as subjects of rights, for example, in the case of recent laws of Bolivia and Ecuador (COSTA, 2016). Beyond the legal sphere, the question that arises is whether Geography can conceive geographical beings beyond the human, as an Other that shifts us, permeates us and constitutes us? Can we accept this relationship in which the Earth assumes another position, beyond base, resource, surface, environment, spatiality? Can we enter cosmologies that, in addition to recognizing our terrestrial condition, assume the Earth that we are? Would doing so force us to rethink the label “Geography”?

These “shuffles” and crossings throw us beyond epistemology, inevitably to an existential soil that situates knowing and being, dialectically and phenomenologically. Thus, we have the terms in which Knowledge and Existence present themselves defiantly to us, in the task of thinking of a decolonized and situated geography.

WHAT DECOLONIZING IMPLIES?

Among other issues, an always critical movement oriented to its own assumptions. Not a few Western philosophical orientations propose such attitude of continuous vigilance. In the famous “The Formation of the Scientific Mind,” a bulwark of praise for the heuristic potential of Science, Gaston Bachelard (2002) refers to a somewhat uncomfortable cycle that usually affects academics: fruitful questioners and renewers of their sciences at a time in their lives, and resistant to changes and new ideas at a later time.

The philosophies of life, of which Existentialism is one of the most prominent chapters, do not hesitate to remind us of finitude, becoming, change, movement. For this, a constant questioning that puts the self at risk seems fundamental. The progressive-regressive method seems to seek to prevent itself precisely from the risk of this crystallization, and that is why Sartre evoked it to resume the heuristic character of Marxism.

In a way, these reminders that spring from the bosom of Western Philosophy resonate strongly in cosmologies and life forms that are in spatio-temporal registers that are distinct from the West, which makes us question how seriously we are taking these warnings in proposing the task of decolonizing. Currently, one of the trends in vogue in contemporary thought has to do with decolonization, which flirts dangerously with the same *modus operandi* that underlies its criticism and mobilization. This, which seems a risk to all thinking that seeks to renew (see Buttimer’s (1992) lucid criticism of Humanism, through the mythical figures of Phoenix, Faust and Narcissus), is not a condemnation of the teleology, but a justification to give more weight to the movement that collectives and groups dedicated to confronting coloniality carry out, than to the political and theoretical-methodological project of each one of them. In terms of decolonial studies, it would be worth asking whether there is a limit to the epistemic disobedience advocated by Mignolo (2009), for example, in an iconic text, or if it would stabilize at some point.

In view of this, the study of the formal fields that have been constituted in recent years, such as Post-Colonialism, Subaltern Studies and Decoloniality, leaves us, with and beyond them, the need to face coloniality³. This is not a new enterprise, but it is also a reorientation of issues that are available in tradition and that seek, at a given moment, a reorientation. It is in this point that I wish to insist: movements to confront coloniality activate historical social agendas and struggles, potentiating new conceptual and theoretical approaches, which not only embraced, but extended the criticism of Reason to the civilizational, social, ethical and political criticism. If it is true that the growth of identity movements and “minorities” movements (which gained strength post-1990 with the current stage of globalization) fragmented political agendas in some cases, on the other hand, there is a great front of articulation of such agendas that have converged two criticisms that walked relatively apart throughout the twentieth century: the criticism of rationality and the criticism of value.

In this sense, it can be said that the confrontation of coloniality assumes, in a way, what Amador Fernández-Savater (2017) calls the “paradigm of inhabiting”: the praise of undeveloped potencies, letting emerge what we already are. In existentialist terms: the potency of existing, of existence while in-existing.

The decolonization project seems to take on the task of ending the curtailment, denial and violence to all forms of existence that lie beyond the modern-colonizing project. This is why, amid so many fragmentations in the form of identity movements, it is possible to act politically for what people have in common.

But this seems exactly what Marxism if it were existentialist, as Sartre wanted it to be, would be able to do. Would the decolonization movement be the realization of the Sartrean provocation?

Here, maybe, we need to be a little strabismic and unpair things a little bit. The change of the Sartrean question through historical structural anthropology to a decolonized and situated geography is not motivated by any disciplinary care. After all, just as historical structural anthropology would be, according to Sartre, Philosophy itself, here we assume this decolonized and situated geography as thought, in the vortex of the relation between Knowledge and existence, and not a discipline, field or subfield. In other words, the conversion of the question implies the tonification of thought, of the effort of a scientific and philosophical practice on other bases: from the “science of man” to the “description of the Earth.” This description, however, introduces the subject of knowledge assuming himself as listening, understanding that the Earth itself carries out its own writing (PARDO, 1991). If Anthropological Science reinvented itself in its ontological turn, could Geographical Science operate a turn that breaks the shackles on the Earth, thus contributing to a rehabilitation of the terrestrial in the tradition of Western thought itself?

“Structural” and “historical” are theoretical-methodological but also political adjectives. They refer to the stance that this anthropology should take – to carry out its historical task. While “decolonized” and “situated” refer to another order: they refer to that into which geography would need to be turned. A decolonized geography assumes not a must-be, but a project. On the other hand, just as the “historical” imposes a condition for the realization of the “structural,” the “situated” imposes the condition for “decolonized”: is only possible a thought that is grounded, that is, emerging from geographies.

These geographies refer to the recognition of our terrestrial condition, in a register of complicity such that it establishes a co-belonging, a co-existence, to the point that we can talk about body-earth, referring to our communion (NOGUERA, 2012). Evoking this register, of the Earth that we are, however, implies a cosmology, which refers to so many forms of being-and-being-in-the-world of indigenous peoples, peasants, ribeirinhos, caiçaras, quilombolas and so many others that are considered “pre-modern.” The qualifier “pre” marks a periodization that casts them as remnants or stubble from another time, from another spatiality. However, this condition is appropriated as resistance, pointing to the claiming of its condition of existence, while revealing, in the utterance, its condition of Other through colonization.

The violence that brings the Other into the field of the Same, a good way to describe coloniality, racism and sexism, becomes so deep that it causes existential insecurity about the self. This, together with exile (such as eviction), is one of the most efficient strategies of colonial conquest, practiced continuously even today (LIMA, 2019).

In this process, the split between Knowledge and Existence is complete and radical. The movement towards the field of the Same implies stripping oneself of all knowledge, that is, being stripped of one’s own existence. To enter the modern-colonial mode of being (which operates a normativity) is to be erased, which included having erased the geographicity that we express, as Earth, corporeally. And I am not referring only to whitening, denial of sexuality or denial of spirituality, but also of gestures, tastes and sayings, which constitute tonal modulations that express the Earth that we are.

However, lest this be a new exercise in dogmatic metaphysics, situating is necessary.

SITUATING: EMPIRICISM OR PRAXIS?

If the Sartrean accusation of Marxism having left the human dimension would be resolved by attention to the existing ones, it is through the situation (the being-in-situation) that this daring procedure would take place. This task, however, presents some difficulties and evinces the obstacles to the attempt at, in the Method, operationalizing the Knowledge-Existence tension. On the one hand, a structural and

historical view questions empiricism for its inductive, partial and provisional character. On the other hand, an existential perspective puts into question the abstraction and the universal claim proper to Reason.

A decolonized and situated geography, as thought, is attuned to the existentialist gesture towards the subjects, but fears falling into the mere empiricism of singularisms (or essentialisms, to use an expression rejected by cultural and post-structuralist studies). To what extent situating would not be falling into the realm of empiricism that demobilizes politics as the space of the common, just as it condemns thought to its mere immanence?

This is an issue that touches deep a science like Geography, which has its tradition linked to the praise of multiplicity, plurality and difference. Armando Corrêa da Silva, perhaps the Brazilian geographer whose thought was most deeply influenced by the Sartrean project, reflects on this characteristic of Geography in a central article in his structural ontologic phenomenology:

The [G]eography of the past strove in the identification and description of the singular, of what is unique and diverse in multiplicity. It related the singular and the universal. It did not always mediate the particularity. However, it is the particular that gives concrete meaning to the theory. Therefore, if the richness and multiplicity of the real constituted the starting point of [G]eography, this occurred because geographers gave importance to differences (SILVA, 2000, p. 19, free translation).

This recognition of the work of geographers in surveying the diversity of the empirical world and its factuality, albeit praised by Silva, had clear limits for him, because “the empirical itself is devoid of theoretical meaning, except through intuition” (SILVA, 2000, p. 19, free translation). What does such limitation imply? The delimitation to what appears empirically visible. The role of particularity, as mediator between the universal and the singular⁴, does not present itself among geographers, according to the author, which at the same time limits the scope of theory (as abstraction and project), but also of the empirical itself, however rich it may be. According to Silva (2000, p. 21), Marxist geographies, on the other hand, promoted a double rejection of empirical research: as a moment of the method and as a concomitant investigation, based on the separation between “ideas” and “facts.”

In the analysis of Antonio Bernardes (2013), Silva’s syllogistic proposition — appearance-being-form — aims precisely to give movement to the moment of appearance (as presence of the being-in-the-world in the place), which becomes aware and elaborates the lived (through perception) and projects as form (space-structure). Situating, in this case, is neither similar nor close to any empiricist trait. Rather, it is related to the concreteness of the lived in movement with the different processes of elaboration of the real that go from place to space and return, in an incessant dynamism.

This is the solution to the impasse of empiricism that Silva proposes, recognizing the subjectivity inherent in the “seeing” of appearance and that “denotes the being and with it the form.” (SILVA, 2000, p. 16, free translation). The lived space-time assumes, from this perspective, the function of mediation, operating in the necessary movement of overcoming the empirical meaning. At the same time, however, it is the place that allows spatial awareness: the “piece” (SILVA, 1996). According to Bernardes (2013, p. 136, free translation), “It is necessary to be in a situation to be, as it is in the place that are actualized the daily experiences, whose objects are intentional and loaded with meanings.” In Silva’s ontology of space, it is by the movement between appearance-being-form that empiricism would be overcome, taking place this role of possibility of everyday life, in which the “intentionalities and possibilities of being by praxis” happen, therefrom emerging the being-in-the-world.

We clearly note the reverberation of the articulation between Knowledge-Existence by Sartre’s proposal of Method in this proposition of Geography as ontology of space. Seeking to overcome induction and mere abstraction (that dogmatic metaphysics criticized by Sartre), Silva defends a Geography based on spatial awareness, oriented by the relation between Existentialism and Marxism, as Sartre proclaimed. The situation is not empiricism, but praxis, whose heuristic possibility is in the movement (dialectical) that begins with the appearance, but that needs to go back and forth from abstraction to maintain its indeterminacy.

We have seen how this situational perspective has offered possibilities for Latin American geographers, even if still in particular instances, who have sought to contextualize the effort of

confronting coloniality through situated existing ones. The work of Everaldo Costa, for example, mobilizes the Sartrean framework to think about the territorial heritage in Latin America through subjects in their spatial situation, with a strong existential sense (COSTA, 2016, 2017). His proposal, in the form of utopianism, evokes as principles the “subject-place-world interactions,” the “elaboration of a situated or Southern epistemology” and “the treatment of solidarity in the popular period of history” (COSTA, 2017, p. 69, free translation).

The solution to the problem of empiricism is elaborated differently in relation to Silva: the subject-world relations are mediated by the place, in an ambivalent way (mutual transformation), understanding the particularity in the context of the place, in the context of the history of the territory and of the situated subjects. On the other hand, a conscious action of the subject and social subjects (situated subjects) is considered necessary for activation, as political action, which implies the spatial awareness of the duration of social groups on the continent. Accordingly, although in another way, the overcoming of empiricism is also elaborated by a movement of totalization and double dialectics. Finally, the multiple utopias that feed the constitution of the proposal give the character of project, in the Sartrean sense, launching thought as an action for the future, towards transforming the historical and geographical situationality of such subjects.

Therefore, his work points to the potential for particularity that the different existentially constituted spatial situations project in the relation between the singular and the universal, which constitute coloniality in Latin America, based on the empowerment of subjects historically situated in the margins of modernity and colonization.

At the end of “Search for a Method,” Sartre (2002, p. 181) states:

From the day that Marxist thought will have taken on the human dimension (that is, the existential project) as the foundation of anthropological Knowledge, existentialism will no longer have any reason for being. Absorbed, surpassed and conserved by the totalizing movement of philosophy, it will cease to be a particular inquiry and will become the foundation for all inquiry.

I wonder if Sartre, upon observing these movements in Brazilian Geography, would announce the end of Existentialism.

TERRESTRIAL HEURISTICS

“Do we have the means today to constitute a decolonized and situated geography?”

This is the question that the Sartrean strabism has bequeathed us, and therefore I would like to resume the initial epigraphs, examining them now in an unpaired manner.

“Whatever galaxy man goes to, they will need geography and history. Thousands of years from now, geography will always be present with man.” Livia de Oliveira (2017, free translation)

I now see other words that had not been highlighted at the beginning of the writing. Oliveira speaks of geography and history as “necessity.” What is this need? Would it be a totalization or acquisition of awareness of spatiality? I have doubts, because she states next that geography will always be “present” with man. This certainty of the presence of geography reiterates its cosmological character, which does not depend on our elaboration, but which perhaps precedes it or manifests itself factually in existence. Would geography be beyond the sphere of knowledge?

Has the geography practiced amid the twentieth century become something else? Why continue to use the same label? And when man will be creating stations in the Moon and Mars, will they keep the same label?” Carlos Augusto de Figueiredo Monteiro (2008, free translation)

Monteiro’s epigraph now meseems an invitation to think about the meaning of “become” in relation to the doubt about whether Geography will “keep” the same “label.” I know that the course of this essay does not offer elements to answer the question about the need or not to keep the name

Geography for this Science that was involved with colonization. However, what draws my attention now is the movement of “becoming,” of being turned into something, which refers to a conception of historicity that redraws the way of understanding the construction of the geographical discourse. If the project is a decolonized and situated geography, which is not delineated within the scope of a disciplinary corpus, the strabismic exercise perhaps offers less linearity for us to relate to tradition in another way: not as something to be discarded (as in Modernity) nor as something inescapable (as in Antiquity), but as the medium in which we are already launched, as language, and in which we constitute our hermeneutic experience, which implies a process of creation. This understanding of tradition, proposed and put into effect by Hans-Georg Gadamer (2006), is based on a proposition for the Knowledge-Existence tension: to understand is to be, to be is to understand. In reality, understanding would be a mode of being, not a merely rationalized cognitive operation.

It is interesting to bring Gadamer at this time, as he uses terms that were quite loaded at the time (his great book, *Truth and Method*, was published in the same year as *Critique of Dialectical Reason*). In proposing to deal with ontology and hermeneutics he carries out a difficult dialectical movement of understanding tradition as creation.

Can we forgo the label “Geography” and invent another situated path? It is evident that such possibility is before us. However, this movement would be based on the denial of history and geography that, however violent they may be, cannot be unmarked from this body-earth. We can reinterpret tradition (in the movement of creation) to reorient the project, but we cannot evade our hermeneutical situation, which is existential: our historicity and our geographicity. This also calls into question the meaning of decolonizing, as it reifies a historical and geographical movement that, although decisive in many moments, can become a delineator of a way of understanding thought from a point of view that tends toward dichotomization, that is, without oscillations, ambivalences and recreations.

CONCLUSION

“The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition.” Hannah Arendt (2018)

Finally, the Earth is the main heuristic of this essay. The being-in-situation is a terrestrial being, a being-in-the-world that is in it, lives and moves not only as intentional acts of consciousness, but as earthly drive.

This drive may not reach what Arendt thought in her work, but it is difficult to imagine a decolonized and situated geography that is only a reelaboration at the level of Reason, without opening the way to the uncontrollable, the unforeseen and the meaningless that make the diversity of geographies flourish.

Would it be possible that this terrestrial condition is something more ambivalent, which includes the question about our belonging to the earth, the human of the Earth (BERNAL, 2015; MOREIRA NETO, 2018), that which makes geography something with and at the same time beyond the human? It would be a radical alterity, which places the Earth as Other, shifting it from the condition of object (LIMA, 2019).

Thinking hermeneutically offers us a path of mediation between the refoundation and the expansion of the very notion of tradition. It seems necessary to recognize other traditions that also constitute us, in addition to recognizing Alterity, which includes the geographical, as an earthly condition. This leads us to ethics and to another ontological sense of the political (beyond the human), which have already fissured more the Reason and the epistemological tradition centered on the Same, opening the way for concrete (situated) existences that multiply the possibilities of existence.

It seems that situating, as grounding, is not only a condition for decolonization, but overcomes it, making the decolonial imperative itself displaced, as situating implies recreating the relations with each movement through the geographically constituted emergences and decolonization constitutes an emerging movement only in a second moment, after reifying the structural positions. In a certain way, therefore, “decolonial” and “structural” present a strong reference to each other, which indicates the

need for the geographic to be oriented more by a thought “situated” in its multiple horizontality of coexistences, in the expectation of contributing to the feeding of the incessant movement that vivifies the thought through the multiple geographies inherent in the existences and in the existing ones.

The question as to the constitution of a decolonized and situated geography becomes a plurality that Sartre did not envision: the project of a structural and historical anthropology has difficulty in maintaining the Knowledge-existence dialectical ambivalence due to the strength of the structures of an epochal understanding contained in the very formulation. A decolonized geography flirts with the same risk, assuming the structure as a priori and material condition of realization of situations. Therefore, it is necessary to ground situationality, which the geographical enables achieving through its radical phenomenality: the chaotic and emergent happening of geographical beings and existences.

Thus, instead of a decolonized and situated geography, situating thought enables potentiating its geographical character, and this is the crucial difference of the challenge of the contemporary thought in relation to the context of conception of “Search for a Method,” in which the Geographic Science is included: not a “science of man,” but a hermeneutic description of the Earth, in its potency and heuristics for thought oriented towards Difference and Alterity, without a structure that hierarchizes or orders the relations between Knowledge and Existence.

Thus, situating would not be a task for the Geographical Science, but rather the opposite: it seems that the geographical, as situated thought, presents the possibility of displacing “Search for a Method.”

NOTES

1- Throughout the text, I seek to demarcate this difference to contrast and tension what constitutes the academic discipline with its theoretical-methodological corpus, Geography, with the multiplicity that geographicity refers to as multiplicity and difference. Authors from different epistemological traditions have noted this ambiguity of the geographical as systematic knowledge and as experience of the world, with Dardel (2011) being one of great prominence.

2- The articulation between “Search for a Method” and “Critique of dialectical reason” is so close that some editions have started to publish them in a single volume, as is the case of the Brazilian edition of DP&A used in this essay (SARTRE, 2002).

3- Luciana Ballestrin (2013) made an excellent contextualization of the formation of the Modernity/Coloniality Group (M/C) and its proposal of decolonial turn, through divergences with the postcolonial, subaltern studies and cultural studies, which enables understanding the political projects and theoretical-methodological orientations.

4- Understanding that Silva draws from Lukács, according to Bernardes (2013).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The composition of this text was due to the initial impetus of the invitation of the Graduate Program in Geography of the Federal University of Goiás, in September 2020, to participate in a webinar called “Problems of Method in Geography.” I thank teachers Ana Cristina da Silva and Eguimar Chaveiro for the invitation and for the fruitful debate held that day with the students.

I also thank Valter do Carmo Cruz for the dialogue around the issue of coloniality and the “paradigm of inhabiting,” by Amador Fernández-Savater, who helped me to define one of the theoretical frameworks of this text, in addition to the constant dialogues with Jamille da Silva Lima-Payayá, Oswaldo Bueno Amorim Filho, Gustavo Silvano Batista and Antonio Bernardes, who are present at different times in the text. Quoted in the epigraph, I would like to dedicate this text to the memory of two geographers who inspired generations with their dedication to teaching and research and with their intellectual restlessness: Livia de Oliveira and Carlos Augusto de Figueiredo Monteiro, born in the same year and who passed away in 2020 and 2022, respectively.

The author thanks Espaço da Escrita – Pró-Reitoria de Pesquisa – UNICAMP - for the language services provided.

REFERENCES

- ARENDT, Hannah. The human condition. 2nd Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- BACHELARD, Gaston. The Formation of the Scientific Mind: A Contribution to a Psychoanalysis of Objective Knowledge. Trans. Mary McAllester Jones. Manchester: Clinamon Press, 2002.
- BALLESTRIN, Luciana. América latina e giro decolonial. *Revista Brasileira de Ciência Política*, n.11, 2013.
- BERNAL ARIAS, Diana A. A rosa do deserto: hidropoéticas do lugar no habitar contemporâneo. 2015. Dissertação (Mestrado em Geografia) – Instituto de Geociências, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas.
- BERNARDES, Antonio. Aparência, ser e forma: a ontologia do espaço em Armando Corrêa da Silva. *GEOgraphia*, v. 15, n. 30, p.114-140, 2013.
- BUTTIMER, Anne. Fênix, Fausto, Narciso: esperanzas y riesgos del humanismo em Geografia. In: GARCIA BALLESTEROS, Aurora. (Ed.) *Geografía y humanismo*. Barcelona: Oikos-tau, 1992. p.19-68.
- COSTA, Alberto. O bem viver: uma oportunidade para imaginar outros mundos. Trad. Tadeu Breda. Rio de Janeiro: Elefante, 2016.
- COSTA, Everaldo B. “Utopismos patrimoniais pela América Latina: resistências à colonialidade do poder.” Em *Las utopías y la construcción de la sociedad del futuro: Actas XIV Colóquio Internacional de Geocrítica*, editado por Nuria Benach, Miriam Hermi Zaar e Magno Vasconcelos. Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona. Disponível em: http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/xiv_everaldocosta.pdf. 2016.
- COSTA, Everaldo B. Ativação popular do patrimônio-territorial na América Latina: teoria e metodologia. *Cuadernos de Geografía: Revista Colombiana de Geografía*, v. 26, n. 2, p. 53-75, 2017.
- CRUZ, Valter do C. Geografia e pensamento descolonial: notas sobre um diálogo necessário para a renovação do pensamento crítico. In: CRUZ, Valter do C.; OLIVEIRA, Denílson A. (Orgs.) *Geografia e giro descolonial: experiências, ideias e horizontes de renovação do pensamento crítico*. Rio de Janeiro: Letra Capital, 2017. p.15-36.
- DARDEL, Eric. O homem e a terra: natureza da realidade geográfica. Trad. Werther Holzer. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2011.
- DAVIM, David E. M. Retorno à vontade da terra: Nietzsche como devir fundamental para uma geofilosofia. 2019. Tese (Doutorado em Geografia) – Instituto de Geociências, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas.
- DOSSEL, François. História do estruturalismo. Trad. Álvaro Cabral. São Paulo: Ed. UNESP, 2019. [2 Volumes]
- FERNANDEZ-SAVATER, Amador. Nova cultura política: o paradigma do habitar. In: *Outras palavras: jornalismo de profundidade e pós-capitalismo*. Publicado em: 07 de Julho de 2017. Disponível em: <https://outraspalavras.net/sem-categoria/nova-cultura-politica-paradigma-do-habitar/>.
- GADAMER, Hans-Georg. Truth and Method. 2nd Ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Continuum, 2006.
- HERIN, Robert. Las dimensiones personales en la Geografía Social. In: GARCIA BALLESTEROS, Aurora. (Ed.) *Geografía y humanismo*. Barcelona: Oikos-tau, 1992. p. 57-68.
- LIMA, Jamille. O sentido geográfico da identidade: metafenomenologia da alteridade Payayá. 2019. Tese (Doutorado em Geografia) – Instituto de Geociências, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas.
- MIGNOLO, Walter. Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom. *Theory, Culture & Society*, v. 26, n.7-8, p. 159-181, 2009.

Junior, E.J.M.

MONTEIRO, Carlos A. F. Geografia sempre: o homem e seus mundos. Campinas: Edições Territorial, 2008.

MOREIRA NETO, Henrique F. Geografias do fim da vida: fenomenologia do ser-geografia na enunciação da morte. 2018. Dissertação (Mestrado em Geografia) – Instituto de Geociências, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas.

NOGUERA, Ana P. Cuerpo-Tierra: El Enigma, El Habitar, La Vida: Emergencias de un Pensamiento Ambiental en clave del Reencantamiento del Mundo. Editorial Académica Española, 2012.

OLIVEIRA, Livia. Percepção do meio ambiente e geografia: estudo humanistas do espaço, da paisagem e do lugar. MARANDOLA JR., Eduardo; CAVALCENTE, Tiago V. (Orgs.) São Paulo: Cultura Acadêmica, 2017.

PARDO, José L. Sobre los espacios: pintar, escribir, pensar. Madrid: Edições del Serbal, 1991.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Search for a Method. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1963.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Critique of Dialectical Reason. Trans. Quintin Hoare. London: Verso, 1991. 2v.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Being and nothingness: an essay on Phenomenological Ontology. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992.

SILVA, Armando C. De quem é o pedaço? Espaço e cultura. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1986.

SILVA, Armando C. A aparência, o ser e a forma (Geografia e método). GEOgraphia, Ano II, n. 2, p.7-25, 2000.

VALENTIM, Marco A. Extramundandade e sobrenatureza: ensaios de ontologia infundamental. Florianópolis: Cultura e Barbárie, 2018.

VATTIMO, Gianni. Endo of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Author's Affiliation

Junior, E.J.M. - Professor at Campinas State University, Limeira (SP), Brazil.

Authors' Contribution

Junior, E.J.M. - The author elaborated the entire text.

Editors in Charge

Jader de Oliveira Santos
Lidriana de Souza Pinheiro