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From assistance to the exercise of new citizenships: challenges of Social Workers professional performance towards the post — conflict victims in Colombia

De la asistencia al ejercicio de nuevas ciudadanías: retos en la actuación profesional del trabajador social frente a las víctimas en el posconflicto en Colombia

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Abstract:

A more than 60 years armed conflict in Colombian has caused deep social, economic and cultural consequences; however, the most affected are the victims, since they have had to flee from communities destroyed by war and to arrive to new settlements where distrust, lack of solidarity and stigmatization prevail. After the peace agreement signature, and its countersignature, arises the integral reparation challenge for the country and for Social Workers professional performance it is important with the purpose of reestablishing victims violated rights; however, this depends on perceiving the victims more as rights subjects and not as simple services receivers. In this context the article reflections on Social Workers role toward the victims and the need to overcome assistance actions and favor citizenship exercise from a rights paradigm, with the purpose of overcoming conditions that reproduce different kinds of violence and jeopardize social development in the post – conflict.

Keywords: Armed conflict, post – conflict, victims, social work, citizenship.

Resumen:

En Colombia un conflicto armado de más de 60 años ha ocasionado profundas consecuencias sociales, económicas y culturales; sin embargo, son las víctimas las más afectadas, pues han debido huir de comunidades destruidas por la guerra y llegar a nuevos asentamientos en donde prima la desconfianza, falta de solidaridad y la estigmatización. Luego de la firma de los acuerdos de paz, y refrendación de los mismos, se plantea para

el país el reto de repararlas integralmente y en esto la actuación profesional de los trabajadores sociales es importante a fin de lograr el restablecimiento de los derechos que les fueron vulnerados; empero, ello depende de que las víctimas sean percibidas más como sujetos de derechos y no simples receptoras de servicios. En este contexto el artículo reflexiona en torno a la actuación del trabajador social frente a las víctimas y la necesidad de superar acciones asistenciales y favorecer los ejercicios de ciudadanía desde un paradigma de derechos, a fin de superar condiciones que reproducen distintas violencias y comprometen el desarrollo social en el posconflicto.

Palabras clave: conflicto armado, posconflicto, victimas, trabajo social, ciudadanía.

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1. Introduction

Victims of the armed conflict assistance and integral reparation in Colombia, are a priority for the social policy that will be implemented during the post – conflict, therefore it is important to analyze the role different professions and disciplines will play, this article reflects about Social Worker performance, examining his/her perceptions about the victims and the changes of his/her professional acting, for so it is structured as follows: in the first place, an approximation to war in Colombia, pointing its most important features; in the second place, a reflection about the victims and their integral reparation, from the perception two Social Work professionals construct from their professional practice and, finally, some considerations about the need to pass from a task oriented to assistance to another directed to the exercise of new citizenships.

2. War in Colombia

Colombian armed conflict has been the object of several studies about its origin, development and impact (Duque 2014) it is considered the most ancient in Latin America (Rueda 2014) (Arroyave y Tabares 2013) and with the highest number of victims. According to the "Unidad de Atención y Reparación a las Víctimas" (Unit of Victims Assisting and Reparation) (2016) there are more than eight million persons affected since 1985, seven million of these suffered forced displacement¹. In this war,

¹ According to Law 387/1997, this is the person who has been obligated to leave his/her usual residence because his/her life and goods are threatened by the armed conflict or for Human Rights or International Humanitarian Law violation, these persons may access all state's services.

which combines several forms of violence life loss, deterioration of life quality for wide sectors of the population and the promotion of a fear culture which hinders citizenship practice, all these constitute a challenge for the State's integral reparation. (Bedoya 2013).

The development of the armed conflict has been the expression of economic interests and social struggles against poverty and inequity. In the 60s, Marxism represented by persons such as Che Guevara significantly influenced students and workers movements of the time, at the same moment peasants were demanding from the government an agrarian reform and better social and economic conditions, which were not solved and became the cause of political violence. In 1972, "Frente Nacional", was an agreement among the hegemonic political parties to alternate power, encouraged the conflict, since it excluded civil population and all other political sectors from any decision; by this time, guerrillas already organized as armed actors, controlled remote areas in national territory. In the 90s, narcotraffic produced an impact in Colombian society on the economic, social, cultural, political and ethic levels and it was the only alternative for poor peasants and settlers, who did not find in agriculture the profitability to survive with dignity together with their families. By that time, also paramilitaries who were born united to local and regional powers and as an answer to querrillas action, as well as the State's absence, sharpened violence and committed the worst slaughters in the country. (Dugue y Guevara 2014)

Today, the integration of these three armed actors, guerrilla, drug traffickers and paramilitaries, called emerging criminal bands, generate a war stage characterized by multiple Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law violations. As structural causes of the conflict are identified: pressures for land tenure, the interest on State's megaprojects, struggle for the control of rich zones with precious metals and energetic products or territories were narcotics and weapons are grown or trafficked, (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2016). However, there has always existed in Colombian society and in the different governments the interest of reaching a negotiated peace (Loaiza, 2012) as result, in the last 20 years we have witnessed, with very few results, several peace processes with subversive groups (Jiménez 2013). Now, before the Habana dialogues among president Santos government and FARC-EP group, it is posed a higher possibility of the conflict ending and a future post – conflict process stage.

Now, talking about post – conflict in territories historically immersed in political and social violence constitutes a challenge for State and society and with no doubt, for the construction of a stable and lasting peace, based on reconciliation which will demand the participation of all. Including military forces, (Caicedo 2009). State and public policy (Reeberg et al. 2003) and government with national security policy (Pérez 2011). It is important to point the current national debate about if we are before a post-agreement or in a post – conflict stage, for some political scientists, it seems that the signature of the agreements between national government and FARC-EP

group, were just a partial solution of the conflict, but here it is considered we are in a post – conflict condition were ceasefire, demobilization, weapons delivery and reinsertion of the oldest and most numerous insurgent group members, is the first step for the construction of a stable and lasting peace; there will be another task for the institutions and the whole society for strengthening democracy and the population socio – economic conditions for not falling back in the factors causing it and to generate the basis of post – conflict. (Pérez 2011).

However, the experience developed in countries with a post - conflict stage, permits to point out some challenges we must face: in the first place, such as attitudes change, it is important for Colombian society to identify alternative ways to settle conflicts and start denaturalizing aggression and the elimination of the other before the differences; on the second place, to promote political participation, not only for those rejoining civil life, but for the general public, which implicates to dismantle political machinery and support the exercise of all democratic and plural forms, on the third place, the reconstruction of social tissue, means to rescue the different expressions of leadership and social organization, many of them limited by intimidation of armed actors, strengthening territorial, regional and local management, with resources quarantee, this due to the excessive centralism that characterizes public management in the country and finally, the construction of a peace culture, in which it is possible to rescue values such as solidarity, confidence and respect to the other especially to life, in any case, social investment is important for the assistance and reparation of victims and the attention to vulnerable population groups such as young people, which is worth to say, face inequity, poverty and lack of opportunities in Colombia, many of them consider they have an opportunity when joining groups outside law as their only possibility of subsistence. (Giraldo 2004) (Moser 2001).

3. Victims and their integral reparation

One of the most recent efforts for recognizing victims in the country is Law 975 25 July 2005, denominated Justice and Peace, widely debated and rejected by human rights defense organizations on national and international levels, due to the minimum sentences given to demobilized who have committed atrocious crimes. This Law proposed juridical solutions which facilitated demobilization of paramilitaries and their victim reparation, (Duque y Guevara 2014) mentioned norm would provide the basis for Victims Law and Lands Restitution in 2011², which includes integral reparation to persons and communities victims of armed conflict. Here there is recognition and dignifying through the reestablishment of their constitutional rights.

² Law 1448/2011 denominated of Victims and Lands Restitution recognizes other victimizing facts, such as anti – personnel mines, enforced disappearance, torture and cruel treatment, sequestration, sexual crimes, unlawful recruitment, injures and disability.

As victims, it recognizes persons and communities that since 1985 have been affected by the armed conflict, who will have the right to truth, symbolic reparation and guarantees of non-repetition; while it is true in the framework of this Law, the State shall advance attention, assistance and reparation actions, it is worth to say, the results after 5 years passed from its implementation are poor, both in reparation processes as in services accessibility, due among other aspects, to a low budget related to the number of victims, complex routes of attention and administrative difficulties. (Uprimny y Guzmán 2010). Now, it should be mentioned that in recent years, victims of armed conflict attention social policy has changed from one characterized by the provision of resources and services, to another oriented to the socio-economic stabilization, which looks for the reestablishment of rights and psycho-social recuperation of victims with a differential focus, transforming and of non – harm action, mentioned efforts are concreted both in Law 1448/2011, as in the Program for Psycho - Social Attention to Victims of Armed Conflict "Programa de Atención Psicosocial a Víctimas del Conflicto Armado", PAPSIVI, although, it should be noted, that many of the institutional practices contradict these principles, among other aspects, by professional acting more oriented to services provision and assistance than to promote the effective exercise of rights given people's perception of victims.

Tensions between professional tasks, its practices and institutional policies are recognized, alluding to the spatial metaphor of the field of Bourdieu (1990) related to the forces and contradictions converging in social intervention field, although as suggested by Estrada, it should continue giving priority to social intervention, but at the same time, it should make an effort to address, construct and transform the intervention object into a knowledge object. (Estrada 2010: 57), only this way we may overcome both the deep instrumentalization of the profession, as well as the wrong perception of the victims.

An approximation to this perception was done through qualitative interviews³ to two officers who work for institutions providing attention to victims of the armed conflict in Bogotá. The catholic institution "Fundación de Atención Integral al Migrante de la Arquidiócesis de Bogotá," FAMIG, (Foundation of Integral Attention to Migrant of Bogota's Archdioceses) and the "Unidad Nacional de Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas" (National Unit for Attention and Integral Reparation of Victims), state institution, selected for their trajectory in their work with this population; Social Workers were randomly selected and for their willingness to participate.

The religious institution professional indicated victims are fragile persons, despoiled, disorientated, groped and discriminated, concepts that justify philanthropic actions for being considered subjects with lacks. Meanwhile, the Social Work-

³ For this article effect, the interview to the Social Worker of "Fundación al Migrante", will be interview number one and the interview to the professional in the Attention Unit will be interview number two.

er in the State institution characterized them as leaders, resilient, strong and with some uncertainty and fear and points that many times victims are not really treated as persons; starting by that I can say they are a population which in spite of the conflict blows, they are embattled, feisty, patient, very loving and specially very grateful. (Interview two).

The officers perception, although differing on some aspects, in general terms implicate compassion, weakness, patience and even gratefulness, highlights the victims capacity to endure the situation, which is far from what would be a rights approach oriented to the construction of a citizenship type that may foster and demand it accomplishment through empowerment.

When asking them about the image victims have about these institutions, the religious institution professional expressed that they are recognized as an institution providing spiritual accompaniment and reception with human quality (Interview one) while the one in the state institution, considers victims perceive the institution for its kindness, understanding and they attend their needs fast. (Interview two) Although, he clears, that sometimes there is confusion on the different procedures and processes that must be done to access the attention and which reflects disorganization and helping attitude of the officers. When asking for six words related to feelings describing experiences of victims in war, FAMIG's Social Worker related pain as the main feeling that invades them given the negative actions of armed actors; anger when they know they arrive to a place and their rights are violated, humiliation as the most present feeling due to the pointing of which they are object. For the Unit professional, sadness is the feeling due to the difficulty to achieve a new life project, contempt and indifference they receive when coming to any state entity to demand for their reparation, more and more difficult for the different reforms and the uncertainty toward their future.

Although, the religious institution Social Worker considers the value, courage, and bravery victims have to face day by day, the lack of opportunities and discrimination. The state's professional observes frustration, sadness, contempt to which they are submitted and the generalized pain. Both professionals consider that the condition may be overcome with courage and entirety. About the perception on what the victims live when they access helping entities, FAMIG's professional said that: there is a hope feeling when victims go for a technical training and a psycho – social and spiritual accompaniment with the possibility of accessing either to productive processes offered by the state or the possibility to perform in a formal or informal job, (Interview one), The Victims Unit professional relates the joy and happiness for indemnification and housing solutions provided by the institution. Some victims also express hopelessness, discomfort and nonconformity when humanitarian attention passes to a transition stepⁱ. (Interview two).

The question about how victims would contribute to connivance, FAMIG's professional answered: in the first place, a society guarantying rights that were taken from

the victims and second to understand the population heterogeneity, (Interview one), Victims Unit Social Worker considers that by generating a peace culture, where they may be the main actors of their change and from education, assistentialism well-conceived, improvement plans, financial accompaniment and integral reparation. (Interview two).

About the assistance the institution provides, FAMIG's professional points that it tends to (labor) productivity, assertiveness, integral training for overcoming and confidence. Victims Unit Social Worker considers that from his working space he is inclined to the sense of victims active listening, with an empathy degree and understanding toward the citizen, where respect, inclusion and a differential focus, prime; besides, he says that it is an attention providing entity which provides some help from feeding, housing rent, starting from social inclusion. (Interview two)

About the opinion on how victims could overcome their situation, the interviewed answer was: with their attitude, personal and familiar motivation and responsibility for their lives. Mentioned motivation is necessary to access different programs for either working or personal training according to FAMIG's vision. Meanwhile, Victims Unit professional says: wanting is succeed from business entrepreneurship, productive projects, and therefore having a livelihood making those poverty conditions are mitigated as long as they have indispensable government help. (Interview two). About victims recognition of the armed conflict as rights subjects with reparation rights, FAMIG's vision promotes self-management processes, where each person is unique; addressing to groups training processes promoting citizen formation, which will permit them to leave the victims posture and at the same time they will learn how to transform their reality and being participant subjects of their own change. In Victims Unit, they are recognized from the victim or victimizing facts and from there, national government pretends to repair victims and provide quarantees for non-repetition.

This approach to conflict victims of two institutions officers with different objectives permits to identify there is still a perspective of victim as lacking person, with assistance need and where the possibility of overcoming the situation is in their attitude and capacity, not in the active exercise of his/her citizenship and the effective claim of his/her violated rights. This perception in terms of aid, support, and succor to whoever needs it, contradicts social worker professional action oriented to strength in the victim its autonomy and especially the struggle for and defense of his/her rights. Draws attention, the presence of official and institutional speeches tending to stigmatization, before which Social Workers will have to understand war contradictions and expand initiative and the victim capacity to propose. For this, Social Workers will have to overcome assistance and technocratic perspective, which has characterized this profession because the issues complexity and psycho – social impacts in the population claim for more humanistic, (De Zubiría 2009) holistic and ethical – political professional actions. (Rozas 2004)

4. From assistance to new citizenships exercise

The construction of citizenship concept dates back to XVII century when Kant refers to national and international citizenships, as expressions of everlasting peace. The first includes the loyalty principle and juridical order of the nation. The second refers to the sense of hospitality the inhabitants of a territory have when visited by a foreigner. (Kant 1998: 27, cited by Ayala 2013)

In XIX century Habermas suggest citizenship comes from the sense of belonging to a society juridically organized where people among them, have obligations in family, friends circle, neighbors' scope or citizens of a political community or nation. (Habermas 1998: 21 cited by Ayala 2013)

In XX century, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, bonds the features of citizenship with the consequences of economic, financial, technology advances and information globalization, causing migrations in search of better life conditions or for forced displacement caused by war. Therefore the author suggests that citizenship shall be deterritorialised, this is, less national and more egalitarian, less sacred and more democratic and more constructed the socialist way, that is, more socially consequent and less unique. (Sousa 1999: 2148 cited by Ayala 2013)

For the Colombian case, citizenship construction refers to rights and duties exercise in a guarantees frame, where violence victims are included and may participate in decision making when facing social marginality of the population majority (Ibáñez 2006) situation that impedes citizenship construction.

Then, the exercise of citizenship construction in victims as expression and symbol of social formation suggests the construction of political subjects that, through democratic practice of individual and collective participation, may claim for their rights and achieve overcoming the conflict aftermath. This means implementing a permanent process from education and citizenship formation; this construction, without doubt, will promote justice objectives, equity, and social development, which will incentive participation, social construction and victim integration to new social stages and also being responsible for the rights representative institutions functioning; in this sense we understand the citizen is who knows and acts to access his rights, with an attitude or position, from the conscience of belonging to a collectivity based on the right of being the society member. (Gonzales, 2001:92) It is worth pointing the important role of only a victim minority which participate on movements for the achievement of their rights and in the intervention on public policy.

Other challenge is constituted by the need to resignify the city in terms of citizenship, identifying social practices in the juridical frame which make possible the reconstruction of social tissue and social inclusion. (Ramirez 2007). It is important to

impulse communitarian and democratic social practices, in the victims of Colombian violence, to develop membership feelings in new contexts.

The above, addresses us to think Social Work in the stages that will arise in the post – conflict here, besides facing structural problems in our country, such as poverty the coexistence of several violence and the lack of resources, this professional shall intervene in spaces where former armed actors will integrate with civil population in territories and zones that where whipped by violence and where one and other will look for the state's protection and guarantees. Here, arises the challenge of overpassing traditional assistance model that does not promote population's self – determination and empowerment or those who promote empty citizenships understood as the meaning absence of belonging to the nation which transforms them occasionally into beneficiaries of state assistance but whose life and properties are recurrently unprotected (Rodríguez 2013:68)

In conclusion, it is possible to say that Social Work as profession, has to face the other's citizenship recognition, establishing a shared loads and responsibilities model in which the citizen may not be reduced to a user or a simple number, which means to construct professional redefinitions which face bureaucratization and the mere management of benefits (Lopez 2012) in this approach citizenship construction would require the transformation of social workers acting restating both: power exercise and institutional subordination in the development of social policies. Nothing can be achieved with law (1448 of Victims and Lands Restitution), which seeks to dignify victims and achieve and integral reparation, if our professional practice stays in assistance models.

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