

CONSTRUCTION OF CRITICAL INTERCULTURALITY IN A HANDICRAFT COOPERATIVE OF RARÁMURI AND MESTIZO WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Due to the historical coloniality in inter-ethnic relationships between the (dominant) Mestizo population and the (subaltern), Rarámuri population in Chihuahua, Mexico, it was of interest to examine the organizational experience of a handicraft cooperative made up of 21 women from the Rarámuri and Mestizo-Western cultures in the city of Chihuahua from the standpoint of critical interculturality (as opposed to the simple recognition of multicultural presence). The objective was to identify the practice of elements of critical interculturality or expressions of coloniality in the social relationships of its members. The study employed a qualitative research approach, including first-hand observation and in-depth interviews. It identified components of the practice of critical interculturality in inter-ethnic, intra-gender and labor relationships in the organizational processes of the cooperative, for example: knowledge exchange, horizontal decision-making, mutual recognition, and capacity strengthening. It also found the presence of colonizing elements associated with market mechanisms for handicraft products and norms foreign to the Rarámuri culture. The study shows the democratizing potential of the practice of critical interculturality in sorority and exchange of cultural elements, which do not threaten the preservation of the ethnic-cultural identities of the participants.

Keywords: Chihuahua, coloniality, democratization, domination, ethnicity.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship present between the Mestizo population and Native peoples in Latin America is profiled by traces of inequality and violence. The arrival of European conquistadores to lands in the Americas and the subjugation of Indigenous peoples installed a hegemonic tradition that has privileged White and Mestizo above Indigenous peoples for hundreds of years.

As time passes and liberal epistemologies based on human rights develop, the dominant groups have established various parameters in the interaction with women and men members of the native communities, introducing perspectives and concepts such as interculturality. Institutions and mechanisms in charge of safeguarding human dignity and defending Indigenous peoples have been created within this framework, based on the demand of the modern ideals of liberty, equality of conditions, and inclusion. Although this has allowed decreasing the cultural gap between members of both communities, the interaction is established through a binary relationship, where the hegemonic supremacy of White and Mestizo peoples imposes western social structures on minority cultures that are still subaltern, as is the case of Native peoples.

Citation: Ruiz-Salazar GA, Martínez-Corona B, Zapata-Martelo E, Pérez-Hernández LM, Arras-Vota AM, Garza-Bueno LE. 2022. Construction of critical interculturality in a handicraft cooperative of rarámuri and mestizo women. *Agricultura, Sociedad y Desarrollo* <https://doi.org/10.22231/asyd.v19i1.1507>

ASyD 19(1): 88- 109

Editor in Chief:
Dr. Benito Ramírez Valverde

Received: October 12, 2021.
Approved: October 28, 2021.

Estimated publication date:
August 26, 2022.

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In this context, the study presents an analysis about the power relations present between the groups previously mentioned, highlighting the conceptualization of interculturality – and its critical view– and then identify its elements and manifestations interpreted in labor and economic coexistence, and power relations between Mestizo and Rarámuri artisan women within a textile cooperative in the city of Chihuahua, Mexico. The study is the result of field research conducted during several months in the site, where the members shared their experience, in addition to allowing the observation of their coexistence. It presents the way in which power relations manifest, from an intersectional perspective of gender, ethnic group and class, and the differences that stand out in this bicultural interaction.

Then, with the information documented, mechanisms and social practices are analyzed which give rise to the development of critical interculturality, where differences are respected, beyond appealing to social inclusion.

Interculturality: Coexistence or dominant inclusion?

Before delving into the concept of interculturality, it is important to review briefly the concept of culture. Rockwell (2018, p.22) discusses the concept and points out that it is a notion which: "... emphasizes its plural, public, complex, open and dynamic character. It is a conception that integrates the historical dimension". It is also necessary to recognize the difference between interculturality, multiculturalism and pluriculturalism, in order to gain clarity regarding these epistemologies. While interculturality establishes the interaction between members (men and women) of different cultures (Bernal, 2003, p. 96), multiculturalism is their coexistence. The members, at the same time, represent a large diversity constructed from microcultures, defined according to the region, age, sex, work, religion, immigration, among others, of individuals from the same ethnic group (p. 93).

In this regard, Garcés (2007, p. 24) defines multiculturalism as "the simple verification of the existence of various cultures in a specific space without referring to their mutual relationships". In turn, Catherine Walsh (2002, cited in Garcés, 2007) mentions that "multiculturalism or multiculturalism operates in the descriptive order, referring to the multiplicity of cultures present within a society without there necessarily being a relationship between them" (p. 159). On the other hand, pluriculturalism is understood as "the simultaneous presence of two or more cultures in a territory and their possible interrelation" (Bernabé, 2012, p. 69), from a more aesthetic point of view. According to Villavicencio (2002), pluriculturalism is an approach to cultural diversity, which has a central axis of interculturality. In this sense, the author explains that: "culture can only be thought about and experienced, conjugated or declined, 'in plural'" (p. 2); and therefore, it only exists in function of other cultures and its characteristics of differentiation. Multiculturalism refers to the physical coexistence of two or more cultures, without relation between them; pluriculturalism recognizes the presence and the wealth of those cultures; and interculturality focuses on the way in which these cultures coexist and are related with one another.

Olivera Bustamante (2004) points out that interculturality emerges in Mexico and in Central America as a means that attempts to substitute concepts of multiculturalism and

multiethnicity used by indigenism in the last decades of the 20th century, since those schools took into account only ethnic and linguistic diversity, leaving aside the study of social inequality faced by Indigenous People. According to the author, interculturality provides the possibility of studying social and cultural changes produced when indigenous groups migrate from their communities. In this sense, interculturality makes it possible to understand the mechanisms that allow Indigenous men and women to live in two cultures, experience that Olivera Bustamante calls biculturality (p. 29).

In the coexistence of cultures in historical processes, power relations have taken place between dominant and subaltern cultures such as racialization, one of the manifestations of these relationships, product of colonization processes. Aníbal Quijano (1992) suggests *coloniality*, concept that responds to the classification of populations or societies in terms of races, according to the relationship between colonizers and colonized. These actors remain in a constant struggle of domination/exploitation, based on which the author considers four basic scopes of human existence: sex, work, collective authority and subjectivity. In this regard, the author states: "...coloniality is one of the constitutive and specific elements of the global pattern of capitalist power. It is founded on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world population as cornerstone of such a pattern of power, and operates in each of the planes, scopes and dimensions, material and subjective, of daily existence and social scale (Quijano, 2014, p. 286).

In this sense, Maldonado (2007) takes up again the suggestions by Quijano and explains that coloniality of power has its origin in the ancient discussion by Europeans about the possibility of the existence of a soul in the "Indians". During the conquest of the American territory, new identities emerged, as was the case of European, White, Indian, Black and Mestizo. "A characteristic feature of this type of social classification consists in the relationship between subjects not being horizontal but vertical. That is, some identities denote superiority over others" (p. 132). In that sense, Walsh (2007, p. 20) speaks of the construction of an ideology regarding the "other", and introduces the concept of *otherness*, which plays a crucial role to understand the power relation that has developed throughout the years in the interaction between various human groups.

In this regard, it is worth rescuing one of the primary references of the conceptualization of otherness: the argument by the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1949). In her book, *The Second Sex*, she explains that the conceptualization of identity is always defined based on the categorization of "the other" and its relationship with the "I" or the "one": "No collectivity is ever defined as One without immediately placing the Other in front" (p. 52). Following the statements by Beauvoir (1949), there is understanding that some human groups determine their identity in function of the "other", which in general terms is the one who will then be subjected to the ideology of whoever assigns that category. This is how the first foundations of exclusion are established, exerted by those who define the roles of each of the men and women members who form their societies. These dominant groups decide to include or exclude *others*, categorized in an inferior position within the norm of this society. Latin American societies carry the consequences of the historical stigma of the "Spanish Conquista", where the hegemonic group is defined from the White/Mestizo community.

Its influence is the result of the previous imposition of ideologies from the western global North, also called Eurocentric, which produces colonized thought regarding the naturalization of such ideologies in subaltern populations (Restrepo, E. and Rojas, A., 2003, p. 43-46).

Hence, the importance of the proposal of interculturality through which power relations which are conjugated in these cohabitations begin to be revealed, and it is within this context that the researcher Catherine Walsh (2007) considers that interculturality: [...] indicates and signifies construction processes of another knowledge, another political practice, another social (and state) power, and another society; a different form of thought related with and against modernity/coloniality, and another paradigm that is thought about through political praxis (Walsh, p. 47).

Likewise, the researcher Tubino (2005) explains the importance of the proposal of interculturality in Latin America and claims that this concept is “an ethical-political offer of inclusive democracy of diversity that is alternative to the westernizing character of social modernization” (p. 7). With this, the author points to the influence of modern western thought on Latin American peoples. He mentions that it is an *offer*, understood by the Real Spanish Academy as “the gift that is presented to someone to be accepted” (RAE, 2020). In this way, hegemonic actors are the ones who offer to others –that is, the dominated– the *opportunity* of inserting and belonging (not coexisting) to the structure that is already defined under the conceptualization of people or society. In this regard, the researchers Viaña, Claros and Sarzuri (2009), claim that: Interculturality, as aspiration to a type of social relationship of respect and dialogue between those that are diverse to live in harmony, does not exist as general social phenomenon nor will it exist if we do not dismantle and deconstruct this order (economic, political, social, cognitive) of absolute inequality and domination (p. 7).

Within this context, an adequate coexistence between binaries –in this case, Mestizo and Indigenous– would seem impossible. However, Garcés (2007, p. 25), takes up again statements from the researcher Xavier Albó (1999, cit. in Garcés, 2007, p.234) and proposes two categorizations of interculturality, the positive and the negative, which can present themselves in a micro-cultural (the everyday nature of small groups), or macro-cultural (of national and international reach) level. According to the author, negative interculturality refers to actions and/or omissions that provoke the destruction or decrease of one of its parts, while positive interculturality suggests an interaction based on mutual respect, understanding, and exchange between two or more cultures. This proposal suggests two scenarios that are worth highlighting: the micro-intercultural level and the macro-intercultural level. The first refers to the individual relationship or of small groups of people from different cultures. In this scenario, it is possible for affective links to develop between the two parties, which can derive into positive interculturality. This agrees with what Bernal (2009) has mentioned, referring to micro-intercultural interpersonal relationships. Instead, regarding the macro-intercultural scenario, this author considers that the panorama is more adverse, since it aligns with the argument by Viaña *et al.* (2009) who claim that interculturality as a social phenomenon does not exist without an integral

deconstruction of the structure that establishes the vertices that construct present societies. In micro-intercultural relationships, for example, inside businesses, there can be negative situations that reaffirm power relations between different cultures, where one group holds a dominant position over another. It is true that there are greater possibilities for interactions to develop based on respect and the horizontal view of those who participate in face-to-face coexistence, in contrast with national and international structures where the imposition of dominant over dominated takes place, and is even considered, many times, as something normalized and not made visible.

Against this background, researchers such as Walsh (2014) and Cruz (2019), among others, have built more optimistic epistemological alternatives around the relationship and convergence of different cultures, in the search for the release or deconstruction of colonialist ideology present in the social reality of groups that coexist in Latin America. Such is the case of critical interculturality, conceptualization that emerges as an emancipating proposal to make visible and denounce inequality and oppression, in order to subvert it and work on the equality of conditions between subaltern and dominant, thus to build a new social project (Cruz, 2019, p. 759).

Different perspectives address the concept of interculturality and it presents various angles. In the text "Education between multiculturalism and interculturality" [*La educación entre la multiculturalidad y la interculturalidad*], the researcher Aurora Bernal (2003) simply states that, "interculturality is the adjective that designates the actions of interaction between individuals of diverse cultures" (Bernal, p. 97). In this sense, the author suggests that the proposal of interculturality considers that the interaction between people of different cultures is possible, through interpersonal links, which arise from the coexistence and the exchange of knowledge and experiences between men and women members of different communities (Bernal, p. 97). Josef Estermann (2014) goes beyond by considering critical intercultural philosophy and its implementation: "... [it] stems from the verification of asymmetry between cultures, of hegemony of certain cultures over others..., of power relations within cultures and asymmetry in gender relations within and between cultures" (p. 356).

For her part, Rebollo (2010, p. 8) claims that interculturality is an exercise that demands horizontal relationships between men and women members of cultural groups that coexist in the same space. In this sense, the plural interaction between individuals is contemplated, which excludes hierarchical or domination schemes, and privileges transcultural dialogue. The author also points to the interrelationship of interculturality with gender perspective, detailing that both theoretical proposals have the objective of making visible, recognizing and contributing to the social participation of groups, people and/or persons, which, due to their culture, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, or others, have been excluded from traditional life systems (p. 11).

These statements are complemented with contributions from Ayala and Zapata (2016, p. 18), who warn that interculturality implies "contact and exchange between cultures, in equitable terms, in conditions of equality", which implies establishing horizontal relationships in terms of the exercise of power. This exercise should overcome gender, age and intra-gender (way in which the different affective and power relations manifest and of

social interaction between people of the same gender), and ethnic asymmetries. A process where cultures in interaction are enriched and re-signified “based on the permanent relationship, communication and learning between persons and groups, as well as between their different knowledge, values, traditions, logics and rationalities” (p. 18).

Catherine Walsh (2014) also articulates critical interculturality and contrasts it with functional interculturality: While functional interculturality assumes cultural diversity as its central axis, underpinning its recognition and inclusion within society and the national State (uninational from practice and conception), and leaving aside the mechanisms and patterns of institutional-structural power –which maintain inequality–, critical interculturality stems from the problem of power, its racialization pattern and the difference (colonial not simply cultural) that has been constructed in function of it (p. 9). Thus, Walsh highlights the presence of a diversity of power asymmetries to overcome in the exercise of critical interculturality.

In this way, critical interculturality necessarily proposes decolonization processes, which according to Josef Estermann, lends itself as “a critical and emancipating tool that must point to a reflection around the great parameters of critical thought: social class, cultural-religious identity (and diversity), and gender” (Estermann, 2007, p. 65).

From the recognition of diversity, Dietz (2017) points out that the diverse identities in coexistence: “...are articulated individually and collectively, through discourses... and, in particular, through the praxis of interactions between heterogeneous actors in hybrid, interstitial and shared spaces” (p. 195). Therefore, the author points out that the analytical approach tends to be intercultural, in the search for the characteristics of relational, transversal and inter-sectional interactions of gender, class and ethnicity, which are considered in the analysis of this study case.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the approaches proposed above, it is possible to establish our own concept of interculturality, which will be the main axis of the research: Interculturality corresponds to the exercise of interaction that develops between people who integrate different cultures, in the framework of specific spatiality and temporality, and based on social exchange and interpersonal relationships. However, interculturality presents itself from the recognition of the “other”, definition that depends on the dominating culture. Although the determination of the ideological, political and social construction process is determined from the hegemony, interculturality ought to head towards the adequate treatment of diversity, through the approach of critical interculturality, whose mission is to denounce the incidence of authoritarian power on subordinate cultures. This presents in two scenarios, micro and macro, and can even be positive or negative, according to the context and the number of actors involved in the interaction between two or more cultures.

This proposal is consolidated as the starting point of the study, which is centered on the relationship between Rarámuri and Mestizo women, between whom there are ethnic-cultural differences, of class and inter-generic, which become evident in the daily

interaction as members of the textile cooperative. To analyze these relationships, a study case was conducted where 21 women were interviewed, in order to understand the dynamics, present within the singular context of the textile cooperative, which allowed building an approach to the processes that shape and give new meaning to intercultural relationships of the women who work in the cooperative.

A feminist method was considered in the research to contribute to make visible the participation of women in terms of their condition and the processes in which they are immersed. In addition, it involves ethical issues, of reflexivity, which take into account emotions, feelings, perceptions that emanate from the social constructs that arise from their gender and ethnic position, in addition to the relationships with other women with the same cultural characteristics and different ones such as class and age (Delgado, 2010, p. 205).

This method takes into account the perceptions, interpretation and their meaning, and clarifies the inter-subjectivity established between researchers, the men and women subjects, and the study object in terms of the construction of interculturality in a textile cooperative, in order to contribute to the transformation of colonizing and patriarchal domination structures and to generate conditions of equality. This is where the participating men and women are collaborators in the research, since they are cultural creators, making it possible to interpret contents and biases of gender, ethnicity and class, which place them in differentiated positions.

The study had a qualitative research approach, which allows men and women subjects who express their reasoning and perceptions to reflect on the research object, while researchers focus on the sense or meaning that they give their words and actions (Ruiz, J., 2015). The observation technique was used, which implies understanding what is being studied within the context in which it happens, and how the production and reproduction process takes place, creating and recreating the cultural sense of what is experienced. This was done in order to identify the set of interrelationships present in the reality experienced by men and women members, and the relationship between the empirical information and the theoretical elements considered in the study (Castañeda, P., 2010, p. 230). Likewise, a notebook or field logbook was used to record the observations or notes.

The study also used in-depth interviews, which are a face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee; this type of interaction happens in a social space that is ruled by the norms of social encounters. Interview respondents attempt to show the interviewer their best face, and this tends to transmit a coherent view, seeks to work on the inflexion points, seeks to identify the contradictions through testimonies, and to delve into the reasons, motivations, perceptions, and signification of facts and processes of the interviewee (Ruiz, 2015, p.52). Testimonies were obtained from members of the cooperative with the use of this technique.

The participants in the study were a group of women organized into a handicraft cooperative, made up of 19 Rarámuri women from the Sierra Tarahumara, settled in the city of Chihuahua, Mexico, and two Mestizo women who speak Spanish and are inhabitants of the city of Chihuahua. The ages of the members of the cooperative are between 20 and 56 years old. They are all mothers, except for one of the members.

The fieldwork was conducted in the city of Chihuahua, Mexico, in the period 2019-2020. When it comes to the characteristics of Rarámuri women, seven live with their spouse, seven are separated, and five are single; they are bilingual, speaking Rarámuri and Spanish and from various communities located in the Sierra Tarahumara. All the members of the organization gave full consent on the use of information and anonymity was ensured both of their organization, and of each of the participants, referring solely to the functions that they carry out in the cooperative, or using assumed names to preserve their anonymity. The testimonies collected and the record of observations in the field logbook allowed the approximation to processes present in the organization analyzed, as well as to address the characteristics of the interaction between Rarámuri and Mestizo women who participate and coexist daily within the framework of the cooperative's activities. In order to carry out this analysis, it is important to consider relevant aspects of the sociohistorical context in which both cultures coexist, issue presented next.

The Rarámuri women initially expressed resistance to dialogue in the investigative process, because a Mestizo (*Chabochi*) woman interviewed them, situation overcome by the coexistence and the effort made to generate trust, and because most of the Rarámuri women have learned Spanish. However, dialogue frequently emerged in Rarámuri during the observation, which was beyond the comprehension of the researcher due to not speaking the Rarámuri language.

Historical relationship between Rarámuri and *Chabochi* (or Mestizo) people

Those who are part of the hegemonic group, White people, have defined the relationship between Mestizo men and women and people of native cultures. Although this situation dates back to the arrival of the Spanish to the American territory, the events that took place during the 20th century in Mexico and Latin America stand out, since the immediate bases of the interaction and coexistence that currently exists between the predominant (Mestizo) and indigenous cultures were established during that time. To understand the relationship between them, it is necessary to analyze, generally speaking, the context under which this exchange develops.

According to Nivón Bolán (2013), during the 20th century, the governments from Latin American countries adhered to the idea of modernity, refuting the native cultures under the argument of progressivist improvements. For intellectuals of the time, the search for modernizing Latin American regions based on the ideal of progress was one of the pillars of political vanguards, establishing the foundations for a process of rupture in relation to the past. Their argument took as starting point the history of nations, which had been determined by poverty and indigenism, with practices and beliefs based on myths and traditions (p. 25). This ideological tendency established the polarization of the population, since within the circles of power there was the belief that societies should take on the cost of change, forcing members from different cultures to adapt to technological innovations and to the ideals of modernity.

In this regard, Nivón (2013) documents that some thinkers from the United Nations (UN) argued in 1951 that the growth and economic development of nations would be

impossible without the rupture and loss of certain characteristics of traditional societies. The author gathers some fragments from the declarations issued at the UN, from which he cites: Ancestral philosophies should be eradicated; the old social institutions must be disintegrated; ties of caste, creed and race ought to be broken; and large masses of people incapable of following the rhythm of progress should see their expectations of a comfortable life thwarted. Very few communities are willing to pay the price of economic progress (2013: p. 25).

These precedents provide an initial panorama around the binary relationship that exists, since last century, between Mestizo and Native peoples, particularly in the countries of Latin America.

In the specific case of the Rarámuri ethnic group, there is a record that “slightly over fifty thousand Tarahumaras inhabit an extensive region of the state of Chihuahua since remote times, although gradually their dominions are being reduced. That is where they coexist with White, Mestizo people, or as they name them: *Chabochis*” (Navarrete, 2020, paragraph 1). Other sources point out a larger number of Rarámuri speakers (86,000), considering its linguistic variants (INEGI, 2020).

Rarámuri men and women, also known as Tarahumaras due to the Hispanic deformation of the name (Navarrete, 2020), or because they reside mainly in the Sierra Tarahumara, are the predominant ethnic group in Chihuahua. However, despite of this, through the years part of this population has been displaced throughout the region due to various problems, among them the removal and overuse of their lands, initially by the Spanish conquistadors and then by Mestizo people.

According to the researcher Zuzana Gabrielová (2007), the first contact that Rarámuri had with White people was during the first decade of the 17th century, when a missionary by the name of Juan Font intervened as mediator in a conflict between ethnic groups. Decades later, in 1630, the Jesuits established their first mission among Rarámuri men and women, and the Spanish began opening mines. The first record identified about abuses exerted by Conquistadors on Indigenous men and women was made in 1724, because of the need for labor for the mine. The Spanish began to force Natives to perform the most difficult and risky tasks inside the mines, which caused the death of many Indigenous people and the discontent of Jesuit missionaries who documented the greed of the Conquistadors and the mistreatment of Natives: “the Spanish that come here are not worried at all about the propagation of faith. Their sole interest is the silver mines to become richer, without a care for the decline of *Indians* ...” (p. 40).

Then, according to Gabrielová (2007), the situation for indigenous people worsened in the 19th century after the expulsion of Jesuits because the Mestizo people began to take over the Rarámuri lands with commercial purposes. The Indigenous territory suffered a great reduction, due to land possession by livestock producers and Mestizo farmers, as well as the arrival of large timber companies and of the train, decades later. According to the author, Spanish and Mestizo people took advantage of different legal schemes to take over the lands that had been populated originally by Indigenous communities, opening even further the inequality gap and abuses between both cultures (p. 40).

Rodríguez (2014) describes that, in 1825, after the issue of the Colonization Law by the First Constitutional Congress in Chihuahua, Indigenous people suffered from the large removal of lands in the Sierra Tarahumara, carried out by ranchers who were descendants of the Spanish. This action caused Rarámuri people to lose fishing, hunting and harvesting spaces, which became private property through public auctions, whose profits were incorporated to the state rents. The abuse from colonizers caused the Rarámuri people to escape to more remote zones in the region (pp. 47-48).

This situation remained during the Porfiriato period and continued many years later, as documented by Gabrielová (2007). During the mandate of the governor Enrique Creel in Chihuahua, in the first decade of the 20th century, the dominant classes considered Indigenous communities to be an obstacle for the country's development, which is why they sought to integrate them into a market economy, without taking into account the specific identity characteristics of native ethnic groups. This thinking was reflected in the declaration by the governor Enrique Creel (in the period 1907- 1910), who stated that "it was necessary to 'make the *Indian* enter the march of progress' and to 'take advantage of it and not eliminate it'" (p. 41). This view fostered abuse and discrimination from the hegemonic groups and continued into the 20th century through the invasion and ecological destruction caused by White and Mestizo people to the Rarámuri territory. This manifested in the "immoderate felling of forests and extensive livestock production, mining, and the consequent environmental contamination and use of Indigenous labor for unqualified tasks" (p. 41).

The agrarian reform, conducted during the 20th century, also influenced the relationships between Indigenous and Mestizo communities, which was associated to the interest in forest exploitation of the Sierra Tarahumara, process that began in 1920 and had the highest peak between 1950 and 1970 (Martínez, M., 2019, p.129). Land ownership in the Sierra Tarahumara is divided into colonies, indigenous communities and *ejidos*. There are 360 *ejidos* and their total surface is 5,994,308 ha; however, although Rarámuri communities had been participants in the distribution directed towards the conformation of forest *ejidos*, there are inequalities in their management and in the distribution of benefits (Azarcoya, 2014, p. 9).

In a stratified random sample carried out in 2004 in 38 *ejidos* of the Sierra Tarahumara (Pérez-Cirera, 2003, cited in Arzacoya, 2014, p. 9), the concentration of units obtained from exploitation of the forest was evidenced. This is evident because the collections are not of communal property, they are in the hands of groups in the region called "caciquiles" (*ejidatarios* who have economic and political power, and control decision-making). For example, 83% of the value of the equipment or goods destined to forest extraction is property of 5% of the *ejido* members, and as consequence, 10% of the members of the *ejido* receive 58% of the income.

The new working plans had an impact on the loss of traditions and the equilibrium in indigenous communities, generating economic dependency and "the destruction of their traditional lifestyle to be able to survive" (Gabrielová, 2007, p. 41). This includes temporary or definitive migration towards large cities or agricultural fields as paid workers, to deal

with socioeconomic and environmental problems (Martínez and Hernández, 2019, p. 341).

Presently, the main threat that Rarámuri men and women face is drug production and trafficking in their territory, which implies: violence that affects the Sierra regions, recruitment of Rarámuri youth, exploitation of lands, and reproduction of mechanisms and expressions of discrimination of Mestizo people towards Indigenous people. Just in 2019, according to the reports presented by the Mexican Commission in Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (*Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos*, CMDPDH) (2019), forced displacements in Chihuahua affected at least 300 people who belonged to indigenous groups. “From the 28 episodes of forced massive internal displacement caused by violence recorded in 2019, 12 (around 43% of the total) displaced the indigenous population... 9 happened in the state of Chiapas... the other episodes that displaced indigenous population during 2019 took place in the states of Chihuahua, Guerrero and Oaxaca” (p. 41).

In addition, the CMDPDH reports that these displacements happened under contexts of violence, and in the specific case of the state of Chihuahua it was generated due to the intervention of organized armed groups. “These zones represented areas of territorial dispute between rival groups and are scenario of frequent attacks, confrontations, extortions, forced recruitment, and other forms of violence that force the population to be displaced...” (p. 54-55).

These precedents evidence the complexity of the relationships present between the Mestizo and Rarámuri populations in the Sierra territory. As resistance mechanisms, Rarámuri men and women attempt to maintain social distancing from the *Chabochi*, since the context places them in a position of disadvantage that has made impossible an equitable and fair interaction for the members of the Indigenous communities. It is necessary to mention that they faced limitations in terms of the identification of ethnographic and historical information relative to Rarámuri women.

In the organizational process of participants in the study, the associative figure to which they resorted was that of cooperatives, which have guidelines and regulations to which members have had to adapt in order to reach their objective. According to the last reform of the General Law of Cooperative Societies (2018), in Mexico: The cooperative society is a form of social organization integrated by individuals based on common interests and in the principles of solidarity, own effort and mutual help, with the purpose of satisfying individual and collective needs, by conducting economic activities of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services (Diario Oficial de la Federación, 2018, p. 1).

RESULTS

The present study case affiliates with the analysis of a cooperative for textile production elaborated by Rarámuri women, which contains elements of their culture. A first aspect observed was the organizational structure present in their functioning and in the productive and commercialization activities of the members.

The origin of the group constituted by 21 members relates to the interest and purpose of a Mestizo woman, who based on the friendship and observation of the artisanal activity of Rarámuri women in the city of Chihuahua, was interested in facilitating the production and access of the textile handicrafts that they produce to the market, under better conditions. She invited Rarámuri artisan women who faced difficulties in trading their products, as well as another Mestizo woman to facilitate the production and commercialization of the handicraft production, which led to the conformation of the group integrated by 19 Rarámuri women and two Mestizo women that currently make up the cooperative.

The organizational structure influences the characteristics of the social interaction of the members, expressed through an organigram that is “the synopsis or plan of the organization of an entity, of a company, or of a task” (RAE, 2021). In the first place, the study identifies the president, position that a Rarámuri woman who was one of the first members occupies. However, the founding member influences these functions, since she is in charge of the cooperative’s administration, the search for the market, and the distribution of work, as well as proposing regulations and operation mechanisms with the help of the other member who is also Mestizo. They both help sensitize members to the compliance of legal statutes that correspond to this type of productive organization; it is worth to point out that the differences in access to schooling are also higher among the Mestizo women. Likewise, they carry out the role of facilitators of productive processes, they are in charge of providing support and of supervising the work of members who are in the final part of the structure and whose function is handicraft production.

“... we have struggled to adapt to things such as the schedule. The Tarahumara women work at their own rhythm and their time, and this makes it somewhat complicated, particularly because we are used to working in a certain schedule, primarily in the morning. But it’s just that, because they always work and deliver the garments and articles when they must”. (Margarita, founder, Mestizo, 58 years old, personal communication, September 2018).

Despite the organizational structure and the functions described above, according to the perception of the facilitators, there are differences that affect the productive dynamics that obey to cultural views that are different regarding use of time and productive processes, influenced by hegemonic aspects such as adapting to the market’s demands. However, they point out that there are mechanisms that ease the participation of all the members.

“It has been a very interesting process, very participative. In the cooperative we try to respect the methods of the Rarámuri members all the time, and in this sense, we have participated in decision-making, which is always done in consensus”. (Marcela, facilitator, Mestizo, 45 years old, personal communication, September 2018).

Consensus decision-making shows the construction of horizontal relationships, although there are sectors within the organizational structure, the coexistence and the social interaction that coexist in the working space between all the members, which is the result of relationships based on respect and sorority, allowing them to have a satisfactory work climate for all of them.

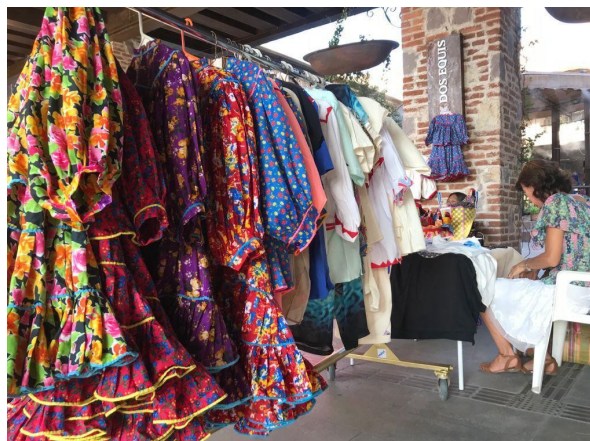
“It was good for us to come here, both because of the *seño*’ [referring to the founder], and because of the other women [peer members and facilitator], they are good to us, and it is

better to work here than in other places. There are many places where they treat us as less, but not here. We feel at ease here and we advance as we can” (Carolina, Rarámuri, personal communication, 26 years old, October 2018).

Carolina’s testimony shows that both in her and her peers there is satisfaction in terms of the treatment they receive and the way in which they coexist with the rest of the women in the workspace.

Through the observation, it was possible to confirm the relationships and forms of interaction and communication between members of the cooperative. Although it is evident that the founder represents an authority figure on the rest of the women (in function of her knowledge and because she is owner of the property where they work), her way of interacting with the women is kind and cordial. She does not establish differences or distinctions between Indigenous women and the Mestizo facilitator, which contributes to the consolidation of a space of trusting relationships between all the members (Figure 1).

It is important to pay attention to the experiential context that Rarámuri women have experienced before their participation in the cooperative. They have been part of processes of migration and work insertion, where they have been witnesses or victims of expressions of colonialism through their interaction with urban Mestizo society, where they have experienced discrimination or abuse in other work experiences. On the contrary, they consider the work in the textile cooperative as a safe and adequate space that allows them to obtain income without feeling vulnerable, aspect that influences the positive perception that they have regarding the work and the treatment that they receive in the cooperative. The artisanal work that the Rarámuri members of the cooperative carry out contain expressions of the symbolic spectrum of their culture, tradition and worldview, which gives it a range of possibilities around the issues of this production system. Likewise, it contains a burden of meanings based on the beliefs and traditions that constitute Rarámuri



[Grissel Ruiz] (Chihuahua, 2018).

Figure 1. Commercialization of the cooperative’s production in the handicraft fair.

culture. The inclusion of these elements in clothes directed at purchasing by Mestizo women and their commercialization contribute to the dissemination of these characteristics that represent elements present in the worldview of artisan women and the ethnic group. This can reinforce their permanence, dissemination, and contribution to the conservation of the tradition and the artisanal technique, in addition to the self-valuation of the work that the members perform. The ability to make their own clothes is part of the sense of obligation of Rarámuri women, learned from early ages through their mothers and grandmothers. For example, the symbolism present in the weaving of girdles stands out in the ethnographic work conducted by Aguilera (2011, cited in Marceleño and Ariza, 2017, p. 195), which are used and elaborated mainly by women. They reflect elements of the worldview whose creative process: "...necessarily implies a cosmogonic and technological knowledge, which, when captured in the object created, reproduce the culture in its entirety". Thus, Rarámuri embroidery and weaving contain a sense of practical and aesthetic use with symbolic content. Figure 2, for example, shows the way in which they represent the pines of the Sierra, present in their environment of origin, on the edges of the blouses and skirts' frills, and in the girdle the paths that they travel on in their communities. Their preference



[Grissel Ruiz] (Chihuahua, 2018).

Figure 2. Rarámuri artisan woman in the cooperative's workshop.

is also in terms of the use of fabrics with bright colors and with engravings of flowers and plants, which they associate to their environment in the Sierra. For the organization's founder: "Working with the women has been a whole cultural experience; I have come to understand things about their lifestyle that I had no idea about before, and I was surprised to know that each design and color has its own meaning..." (Margarita, founder, Mestizo, 58 years old, personal communication, December 2018). Although they have learned to use sewing machines, for some components of the clothes or other products directed at the Mestizo market, they defend continuing to elaborate the garments primarily by hand, with needle and thread, because there is an intense relationship between the threads (paths) and the Rarámuri life for the women (Marceleño and Ariza, 2017 p. 195).

The meanings and worldview are present in the elaboration of the textile products, which is why the artisan women members defend the agreements in terms of how and what to produce, as the Mestizo facilitator points out: "The selection of designs, colors or fabrics, which for us (Mestizo members) seemed so simple, represents for them a whole process of selection and voting, which they carry out between all of them. Aspects such as those are intrinsically linked to their conception of the world, to their beliefs and ideologies" (Marcela, facilitator, Mestizo, 45 years old, personal communication, December 2018).

During the processes associated to the production, where there is flexibility and consensus, at some point can there can emerge conflicts that are solved through intercultural dialogue, until reaching consensus, respecting the creativity of the members and the demands of the market that are frequently expressed in specific orders.

"We all choose how to make the clothes, skirts or what they order... but also the colors, because if I don't like it, I don't make it. When I arrived here, I already knew how to make clothes, but now I know how to combine colors better and I do it a little faster, because if they ask for the things with dates to be delivered. The Mestizo women also help, and we learn new things and make different designs... but if we don't like them, I do say it..." (Rosa, Rarámuri, 37 years old, personal communication, January 2019).

However, when participating in market mechanisms, handicraft production contributes to the phenomenon of appropriation of symbolic capital, through which, according to García Canclini (1984), "the consumption covers the social processes of appropriation of products and, therefore, the class struggle to participate in the distribution and enact their rights..." (p. 78). In this context, the conceptualization of the Rarámuri dress as a product that is directed towards the tourism market reinforces the hegemonic dynamics of power and of the use of workforce and creativity, at the same time that it capitalizes on the cultural exchange of heritage.

The cooperative has the objective of self-employment of its members, through the fabrication of textiles carried out by Rarámuri women for their commercialization within the regional Mestizo market. This scheme has as starting point the production and commerce of goods –clothes as cultural product– with the aim of generating capital for those who participate in this work option.

Although the production systems reaffirm the dominion of the colonial power system that permeates in western communities, it is undeniable that in order to survive within

this context, they resort to the insertion of instances or spaces approved by governance and to joining the economic and labor dynamics of the hegemonic societies. There are associative figures, such as those analyzed, which have used organized groups of indigenous artisan women. These groups allow them to strengthen the collective scope and even their empowerment and exercise of rights, where they create and recreate more egalitarian intra-gender relationships (specifically when establishing relationships with other women from the reformulation of the paradigms of gender, ethnicity and class) towards interculturality, becoming established in interstitial spaces in face of the logic of colonialism. Rockwell (2011, p. 27) points out the metaphor of the margins and the interstices to refer to expressions and possibilities of collective initiatives of other forms and relationships, in this case inter-ethnic and intra-generic.

...The analysis therefore includes, as Rockwell (2011, p. 27) points out, the coexistence, because: "...in the daily life we find the most solid evidence of the structural processes, as well as of coercion points that close exits and the moments of consensus that open alternatives. Daily life is a space with slits, cracks, fissures, junctions, and even deep faults. It is towards these interstices where we must look to understand and consider the social processes that configure social reality".

It is possible to state that the dynamics present in the cooperative allow balancing the two poles: on the one hand, the working scheme that guarantees Rarámuri women to conserve a large part of the elements of their culture, without intervening drastically in their lifestyle and in their symbolic system expressed in artisanal production. In addition to this is the flexibility of exerting the right to continue with their ritual practices and responsibilities in their communities of origin: "When we have to go to the Sierra, we tell them and we can go; I go to my town for the festivities of the virgin. Or when I have to go check on my animals or help with maize sowing" (María, member, Rarámuri, 26 years old, personal communication, January 2019). On the other hand, it allows improving their living conditions through the income generated by their work, from access to services like education and social benefits of health and housing, aspects that go beyond only guaranteeing their and their families' sustenance within the modern urban environment. At the same time, it allows them to redefine their role as women within the framework of their culture.

"...all of them have the opportunity of going to their places of origin, without leaving their work undone, and it was explained about how a cooperative should operate; we admire what they do and respect their harvest times or festivities they perform. For example, I have been interested much more in their culture, now that I have been sharing and working with them, I started studying more about the Rarámuri people and I even know new words in Rarámuri, and take into account their opinion. The president, María [Rarámuri member], does her job well and sincerely we all have an opinion and a vote here" (Margarita, founder, mestizo, 58 years old, personal communication, September 2018).

An important process has been the adaptation of Rarámuri women to the working dynamics of the cooperative, in terms of schedule (six hours per day) and workweek from Monday to Friday. They have also managed to negotiate inside the organization to have

permission to attend commitments in their localities of origin, as well as going to school meetings or for medical attention for themselves or their children. This denotes that in the organization, they take into account the care work related to their gender roles and other activities linked to the uses and community customs as Rarámuri women (Figure 3).

All the women members of the cooperative receive payment considered fair for the work they carry out, based on the profit generated, in addition to receiving other types of benefits associated to the exercise of rights. This allows them to broaden the spectrum of their welfare and the possibilities of improving in quality of life, as is the case of access to benefits established in the Mexican legislation.

The construction of critical interculturality in the handicraft organization is a process under construction observed in the way in which intercultural and intrageneric social relationships are constructed, despite the external context in which the interaction between Indigenous and Mestizo women is established. However, the production of capital reaffirms the coloniality that prevails in western societies, where hierarchies are present in the face of differences of class and access to educational opportunities that affect members of Native peoples. There is the intentionality of surpassing those differences in the space of economic and social relationships between members and the development of a coexistence of harmonious and horizontal respect to difference.



[Grissel Ruiz] (Chihuahua, 2019).

Figure 3. Between stitches.

However, in the dynamics that have been established in the cooperative there are still reproduction forms of manifestations of colonizing thought that it is necessary to deconstruct, such as the historical discourse that remains today as the idea that Indigenous peoples need the guardianship of external agents to “progress”. This model can be overcome in the cooperative if this position is deconstructed, towards development processes of autonomy of the Rarámuri participants inside the organization to relieve the leadership from the Mestizo women.

Testimonies of the Mestizo women show the purpose of the creation of a space that dignifies the labor condition of Rarámuri women who participate in the cooperative. However, the artisanal work of Rarámuri women was better valued economically and in its aesthetic components through Mestizo women, aspect that evidences the permanence of elements of the cultural and economic hegemony that sustains the dominant culture. The working plan in the cooperative has fostered benefits in a horizontal way between members of the cooperative, which is still attached to the western economic model that demands a specific production rhythm in order to comply with the goals that are established by the market. This forces the Rarámuri women to become inserted in a different sociocultural system than their traditional forms and rhythms of exchange and work rhythms. According to Gramsci (1934), hegemony finds its basis on the economic activity: The fact that hegemony undoubtedly assumes that the interests and tendencies of groups on which hegemony will be exerted are taken into account, that a certain balance of commitment is formed. That is, that the leading group will make sacrifices of economic-corporate nature but when it is also unquestionable that such sacrifices and such commitment cannot affect the essential, because if hegemony is ethical-political, cannot cease to be also economic and cannot cease to have its foundation in the decisive function that the leading group exerts in the decisive nucleus of the economic activity (p. 42).

In addition, Gramsci (1934) points out that becoming aware of the economic interests represents the “political phase” of the equation, resulting in the formulation of a complex superstructure, where various ideologies enter into confrontation (p. 36-37).

For Fernández Lira (2015) the economic structures that derive from the hegemony produce consequences that can be understood as a trade of the particular interests of the parties involved, where a phenomenon is produced where: People accept the order established as if, deep down, there were a secret conviction that makes them think that things are as they should be. Thus, to speak about subjecting to power, it is not enough to think in the coercive power. [...] can happen..., to the extent that the population, in general, considers that the power is «legitimate» (p. 61).

The women that make up the cooperative, both Mestizo and Rarámuri women are inscribed in an economic, political and cultural system, which, beyond their individual needs, determines the mode in which work and economic relationships are exerted, even when the associative figure of cooperative offers opportunities to build more egalitarian relationships. These relationships take on particular nuances since they take into account differences of age, schooling, economic position, and marital status. For example, the

age of the members is relevant, and the younger Rarámuri women were seen to be more willing to follow instructions from older women.

The prevalence of differentiating aspects from cultural aspects of Mestizo and Rarámuri women in the cooperative, in their coexistence, by means of engaging them in dialogue and negotiation, have served to strengthen and enrich the labor and affective relationships, to reach agreements that constitute processes of identity resignification between members of both cultures, which allows them to identify the construction of interculturality processes.

CONCLUSIONS

The experience of the textile cooperative of Rarámuri women in Chihuahua is considered positive, in function of the horizontality with which the social and economic interaction develops, and the dialogue of knowledge there is between Indigenous and Mestizo women. In addition, due to the elements with which a collective has been established that does not become attached to the reproduction of hegemonic forms of discrimination towards the members of the Rarámuri ethnic group within the context of the city of Chihuahua. Adaptation of the workdays and the production conditions of the cooperative regarding the Rarámuri systems of beliefs and traditions, the creative freedom, egalitarian payment to the members, according to production and manifestations of sorority between its members. There are elements that attach to the philosophical framework of critical interculturality, since it is presented as a dignified workplace for members of the Rarámuri culture who decided to migrate to the city in search for better opportunities and quality of life.

The cooperative is adapted to the capital production plan and there is a certain hierarchical organization of functions between members for their functioning. This dynamic reproduces elements that are inherent to vertical power relations, in aspects of administration and search for the market, because a Mestizo woman, founder of the organization, assumes the authority figure. Recognizing the work that Mestizo women conduct facilitates the processes in the project of the cooperative is necessary, since they have the purpose of contributing to the integral human development of Rarámuri women, within a framework of respect and reinforcement of their culture and the generation of income, as a means of sustenance in the Mestizo context.

The objective set out was achieved since it was identified that in the urban insertion of Rarámuri women there are examples where ties have been built between members of both cultures (Mestizo and Rarámuri). Although this has not been possible to break with the power that concentrates the cultural and economic hegemony, there are attempts to overcome the subaltern placement of members of the Rarámuri ethnicity, through the construction of democratic relationships, and the establishment of intercultural dialogue between men and women members of these societies. However, deconstructing ideologies that normalize gender inequalities from their own culture and in the gender relationships in both cultures is still a challenge.

The task of sensitizing of Mestizo cultures concerning the reproduction of stereotypes and indigenous alterity is an important step to deconstruct authoritarian power relations and to construct equality between cultures.

It is also important to foster the reflection and implementation of the philosophy of critical interculturality in actions directed at social justice in the indigenous communities of Sierra Tarahumara, and in the generation of alternatives for sustenance that consider the recognition and the respect of the identity foundations of Native peoples.

According to the Portuguese sociologist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, it is imperative to generate a conversation in the world, where the South also contributes to the liberation of the North, and in which there is a horizontal exchange of knowledge: recognizing before knowing (LABTV, 2013).

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