



Community Social Psychology Practice: Reflections from Experiences in Brazil

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Community Social Psychology Practice: Reflections from Experiences in Brazil**Abstract**

The current definition of community psychology practice has the merit of recognizing that the struggle against inequality characterizes community practice in general. However, by proposing a definition that encompasses all psychological practices within communities, one runs the risk of falling into an abstract definition that disregards history. A more accurate definition must consider the meaning of community in different social realities and, consequently, different practices. In Latin America, the classical definition of community as a consensual and homogeneous unit of interaction, interdependence, and social ties, within a well-defined geographical area, does not adequately suit the diversity of community psychology practice. Colonial processes of epistemicide, genocide, and slavery have created a deep sense of uprooting in Brazil. For this reason, community social ties are often under threat or are even non-existent. Community psychology practice consists of creating conditions for the development of such social ties, which must be forged in the fight against forces that result in inequality. In this context, the concept of community psychology practice must encompass social group interactions and social ties; their potency of action; their experience with a territory; and the relationship between groups' internal and external histories. This article presents three empirical experiences that substantiate and exemplify these dimensions. We conclude that community psychology practice in Brazil helps communities to understand their past to build their future; it focuses on the struggle against oppression, on developing political literacy, and on increasing consciousness of relations between communities and society in general.

In this article, we argue that the concept of community psychology practice, in the field of Community Social Psychology, encompasses four interconnected dimensions: (1) interactions and social ties of social groups; (2) their potency of action; (3) their experience with a territory; and (4) articulations between the internal and external history of social groups. This proposition derives from the dialogue between the literature review and the authors' experiences in the field of Community Social Psychology in Brazil, three of which will be discussed in detail. The first experience occurred with social groups that live in or around protected areas of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest. The second and third experiences take place with social groups that live in vulnerable neighborhoods on the peripheries of the city of São Paulo, the largest metropolis in the country. Two of them are research experiences, and one is a professional experience that has been subject to scientific analysis. These experiences resulted in work

with social groups that articulated and helped to outline the four dimensions of the concept of community practice advocated in this article. Before we introduce these experiences, we will present a brief history of this field in Latin America and Brazil, in order to contextualize the subsequent discussion. We conclude by offering recommendations for future research and professional action in the field of Community Social Psychology, on the basis of the lessons learned from these experiences.

Brief Historical Review of Community Social Psychology in Brazil

The current definition of community psychology practice has the merit of recognizing that engagement in the struggle against inequality and oppression is an intrinsic characteristic of community practice in general. Thus, community psychology practice requires a deep understanding of community, referring to its historical

determinations. Yet, in proposing a definition that encompasses all community practice, one runs the risk of ignoring what distinguishes specific realities across different regions of the globe.

In Brazil, defining community is historically a process that is concomitant with the work done with communities. In other words, this process conveys a political, and not just a descriptive, meaning, and it expresses the struggle against inequality and violence as an inherent element in the organization of communities. The violence that we refer to consists of the genocide of the original peoples and the formation of a black slave, the labor force in proportions never seen in any other historical context. Therefore, the phenomenon of community, as it occurs in Brazil, finds a little parallel in other places in the world. As a result, the practice of Community Psychology in this region also presents its own particularities. Similar characteristics are noticeable throughout Latin America.

The field of Community Social Psychology (as Community Psychology is known in Latin America) is strongly marked by the social critique of inequality and oppression and brings together a plurality of experiences of research and professional performance. While such a plurality may create the impression of a fragmented field, it also expresses its richness and constant movement. This is because the involvement of different social groups, their histories, characteristics, and needs, tend to prevent Community Psychology actors from constructing knowledge and practices that are indifferent to context and social relations (Kelly & Chang, 2008). This way of producing knowledge leads to theoretical and practical innovations vis-à-vis the tradition of modern sociological thought about communities.

To contextualize our discussion, it is important to review some characteristics of the concept of community from this intellectual thread so that we can see in more detail to what extent they have been criticized and modified. Such a task is important because practice must be consistent with the theoretical and conceptual understanding of community. Nisbet (1969)

states, after an extensive review of the literature, that the core of the recurring sense of the term generally means "forms of relationship characterized by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time" (p. 71). Outhwaite and Bottomore (1996) similarly define community as "a group of people within a limited geographical area who interact within common institutions and have a sense of interdependence and integration" (p. 116). For Bauman (2003), also reflecting on this sociological tradition, the concept of community expresses a sense of security, shelter, and belonging.

Such definitions have in common the fact that they consider a community as a consensual and homogeneous unit of interaction, interdependence, and social ties, within a well-defined geographical area (Sawaia, 1996). However, in Latin America, the research and professional experiences of psychologists have challenged these abstract definitions of the concept, aiming to understand its specific character in a reality marked by high levels of violence whose origin lies in its colonial history. The struggles of social movements and popular classes that took place on the continent in the 1970s and 1980s urged the field of Community Social Psychology to grapple with the history and problems of the region. This experience required an understanding of both the power relations that were at work in daily life and of the processes that fostered cooperative and transformative action by different oppressed social groups (Lane, 1996).

For Ignacio Martín-Baró, one of the most important representatives of Community Social Psychology in Latin America, the main characteristic of the peoples of the continent is precisely this situation of oppression that prevents them from articulating their historical perspective. Therefore, the task of Community Social Psychology would be to recover the memory of these peoples and to make the continent's popular classes conscious of the injustices and social inequalities they face. This means producing a Liberation Psychology that considers power relations in the configuration

and dynamics of human behavior and social groups (Martín-Baró, 1985/2009).

Another important scholar in the field of Community Social Psychology in Latin America is Maritza Montero. In line with Martín-Baró (2009), she argues that it is the responsibility of this field to understand the factors that enable social groups to cultivate and maintain the power to solve problems in their environment and to achieve change. Thus, for Martín-Baró (1985) and Montero (2005), the focus of Community Social Psychology is on issues of oppression and the forms of struggle and resistance of oppressed social groups.

The history of struggles for recognition and rights of oppressed groups help to understand the definitions of community adopted by Latin American Community Social Psychology. It is in this spirit that Montero (2005) defines community as "a group in constant transformation and evolution (its size may vary), which in its interrelationship generates a sense of belonging and social identity, making its members conscious of themselves as a group, and strengthening themselves as unity and social potential" (p. 207).

This definition of community emphasizes the potency of action of social groups that by organizing and acting also create consciousness and identity. The temporal aspect highlighted here is not the past, as in the Social Sciences tradition of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Since the group is in search of constant transformation, its future emancipation is prioritized. However, strict emphasis on the group's internal resources can lead to a vision that disregards broader historical aspects that determine the constitution of the group itself and of the problems it faces.

Similar to what happened in other Latin American countries, the 1970s and 1980s in Brazil, were marked by the imposition of a military dictatorship, political repression, and persecution of social movements and popular classes. In the field of Psychology, these circumstances fostered engagement in the struggle for re-democratization and urged

responses to national problems, social movements, and popular classes. This process was related to a critique of theories and forms of action that were imported from Europe or the United States and adopted in a decontextualized manner.

According to Freitas (1998b), Community Social Psychology in Brazil also accompanied these movements of resistance against the dictatorship and the uncritical importation of psychological knowledge. Initially, this occurred timidly and began with research motivated by simple academic curiosity about life and relationships in peripheral communities of large urban centers. Brazilian cities at this time (1960-70) went through a rapid transformation caused by rural exodus, which resulted in massive demographic concentration and led to different problems related to infrastructure and basic sanitation, housing, and access to basic services, among others.

In a second phase, academic curiosity and preliminary research intentions gave way to what Freitas (1998b) called activism, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. By the end of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), this period coincided with the consolidation of a critical movement within Brazilian Psychology, characterized by engagement with social movements. The third phase, currently in effect, has been characterized by the expansion of Community Social Psychology nationwide and beyond the peripheries of large urban centers, spreading also to rural areas of different territories of the country. It is a stage characterized by the ethical-political commitment of Community Social Psychology, which seals a relationship between sectors of Brazilian Psychology with social movements and local agents that fight for social rights and to overcome the scourges of capitalism. This stage is characterized by actions inspired by Paulo Freire's experiences in popular education and by participatory action research, among others (Freitas, 1998b). In this last stage, Community Social Psychology does not necessarily separate itself from activism, but it also takes on a scientific character, seeking explanations for community

demands based on concepts such as ideology, consciousness, and historical memory. Since then, community psychology practices have been systematized with more methodological and academic rigor, and courses and disciplines have been consolidated in undergraduate and graduate studies in Brazilian universities.

Thus, from the 1990s onward, research and professional practice in the field of Community Social Psychology – such as the examples presented below – began to focus on the investigation of social groups in urban and rural areas, involved in struggles for recognition and rights (Freitas, 2002). Such experiences inspired by the educational work of Paulo Freire, among others, stimulated the reflection and the potency of action of groups through methods that value community participation in the investigation, understanding, and transformation of social reality. On the other hand, it is not enough to state that Community Social Psychology is geared to support social groups in the transformation of the society in which we live. It is necessary to make explicit the work processes and "tools" used with those groups that can enable them to promote transformation. This is especially true when we consider the polysemy of the concept of community, the diversity of theoretical references that underpin it, and the plurality of research experiences and professional practices in this field.

Despite theoretical and conceptual differences, Community Social Psychology in Brazil and Latin America departs from some theoretical and methodological principles that contradict a positivist model of science and professional practice and are based on the perspective of participant action research (Bonilla, Castillo, Fals Borda & Libreros, 1972). These are some characteristics of participant action research: (i) colonialist traces in the relationship between academic and popular knowledge must be overcome; (ii) reality and social practice must guide theory, and exploitation and oppression must be considered structural elements, especially in the Latin American reality; (iii) methodology and the researcher

are not two separate dimensions of research; (iv) methodology is inseparable from the social groups with which the researcher works; (v) methodological principles vary, develop, and transform according to political and social conditions within and outside communities; and (vi) Latin American reality requires overcoming the conception of research as an act of strict contemplation of reality. Research must go along with actions carried out in territories and communities, defined together with the participant population and guided by ethical and political principles that coincide with those that underpin Community Social Psychology, itself (Bonilla et al, 1972).

The influence of participant action research in the three experiences reported in this article (Euzébios Filho, 2015; Massola, Svartman, Galeão-da-Silva, Martins, Vidoto, & dos Santos, 2015; Santos, Meneses, & Nunes, 2005; Svartman, dos Santos, Martins, Casco, Galeão-Silva, Massola, 2015) is revealed: a) by the way we approached the participant communities; b) by the recognition of the demands of the groups as the real demands of research and professional action; c) by the strategies adopted for information gathering, which privileged participatory interaction models, such as open interviews and focus groups; d) by the use of accessible language; and e) by the presentation and discussion of the research results with the participants to validate the knowledge produced collaboratively, emphasizing the value of local knowledge.

The communities that define Latin American Community Social Psychology are forged in the fight against oppression, and they are made up of groups which are the product of colonial processes of epistemicide — the death of local knowledge perpetrated by an alien science (Santos et al., 2005, p. 22) — or of the *tout court* genocide of the original peoples, or the mass trafficking of African people to the Americas. In the face of these events, psychologists work with the result of the largest, most systematic, and violent process of uprooting ever witnessed by humanity, which either destroyed the foundations of traditions that would guarantee stable social ties, or always threatens to do so (Massola et al.,

2015). For this reason, community ties always implies a willingness to fight against oppression.

Brazil was the last country in the world to abolish slavery on May 13, 1888. Slaves resisted slavery in several ways, but two of these ways stood out: rebellions — the direct confrontation against slave owners — and quilombos, the greatest symbol of African-American resistance in Brazil. The socially widespread image of the quilombos in Brazil is well known: a group of slaves fleeing from captivity who congregate in wild, sparsely inhabited regions and live in isolation, organizing themselves around customs partly or totally inherited from their African traditions. The colonial system fought many of quilombos violently and sometimes they resisted for dozens of years. Most times, however, quilombos have existed close to, or even within, farms and cities as semi-autonomous forms of organization (Moura, 1986; Price, 1996). The word "quilombo" originates from the Mbundu word kilombo (Munanga, 1996), which designated an association of warriors whose members were submitted to dramatic rituals of initiation that took them out of the protective scope of their lineages. An essential characteristic of the members of the quilombo (or quilombolas) was, therefore, their high degree of uprooting. Many quilombos originated in small African-American rural communities that exist to date. They rarely had legal ownership of their land which brought high insecurity to their collective existence.

A fact of psychosocial relevance concerns the use of the term "quilombo." African-American rural communities abandoned this term by the end of the 19th century, their inhabitants were called only Black peasants, and no longer "quilombolas." But the 1988 Federal Constitution, promulgated after the military dictatorship, gave the "quilombos remaining communities" the right to land ownership, ending a long-standing struggle for these groups. The absence of any guarantees of land ownership, even for communities that, in some cases, had occupied the same place for over 400 years, was an important part of the

mechanisms for maintaining their condition of subordination and oppression. Slowly, this language began to be used as a sign of empowerment and the fight for territory. Young people declared themselves quilombolas, a term that older people rejected (Fernandes, 2016). This showed that a new sense of collective identity, built on the struggle against slavery, had been forged during the struggle for land, with a consequent renewal of community ties. Quilombos, therefore, are an important example of how communities in Brazil originate from uprooted people fighting against violence and oppression, and the constant reinvention of their ties and collective identities.

Such historical aspects are of paramount importance since the definition of community varies according to the temporal dimension that influences the problems faced by and the strategies of the group. Thus, to deal with these characteristics of the field itself, we argue that the concept of community psychology practice in Community Social Psychology should encompass four interconnected dimensions: (1) the history of interactions and social ties of social groups; (2) their potency of action; (3) the experience with a territory; and (4) articulation between internal and external history of social groups. Next, we will provide examples of research and practice with Brazilian communities. We will briefly present the history of these communities and develop through them, the ideas presented so far.

Research and Professional Practice Experiences in the Field of Community Social Psychology

Case Study 1 – A Research with Social Groups Living in Protected Areas of the Atlantic Forest

The Ribeira Valley region in Brazil contains most of the country's Atlantic Forest. In this region, the presence of two social groups is especially important, the *caiçaras* and the *quilombolas*. *Caiçaras* are people who live on the coast of the Ribeira Valley and form a group that originated from the miscegenation of indigenous peoples, white settlers, and Afro-

Brazilian groups. They live basically from artisanal fishing, plant extractivism, and ecotourism. Quilombolas, in turn, are spread over different areas of the Ribeira Valley, although with greater concentration in the mountains. They live basically from plant extractivism, family agriculture, and ecotourism. In the Ribeira Valley, the territories where *caiçaras* and *quilombolas* live are called traditional communities, a term that designates the historical presence of these social groups in the region, constituted from family units whose livelihoods are associated with the use and management of natural resources (Diegues, 2002).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, much of the Ribeira Valley was converted into protected areas. The new legislation banned or limited the presence of traditional communities and their management of natural resources. Under these threats, the communities organized a series of economic and political activities to give visibility to their struggles, including the recognition that their presence, way of life, and management of natural resources contributed to the environmental preservation of the region. As a result, they implemented ecotourism initiatives combining income generation, their struggle for rights, and environmental protection.

This Community Social Psychology research aimed to learn about the ecotourism initiatives developed by the *caiçara* and *quilombola* communities and the difficulties they experienced. Ten professors from the University of São Paulo participated in the research, investigating specific themes related to community-based tourism, such as the relationship with the territory, political memory, artistic production, and work relations. The research was negotiated and developed in collaboration with local leaders. It involved the participation of students from local high schools, who were trained in research methodologies for data collection and the identification and selection of local agents in the communities to form the research coordination team. Once the field research and data systematization stages were completed,

the results were presented to community members and their leaders.

The results showed that ecotourism initiatives advanced through participatory forms of the political organization of the communities, produced significant changes once the communities created associations to represent them with public authorities, non-governmental organizations, and private initiatives. In addition, these were important initiatives for recovering collective memory, promoting their culture, and generating income while preserving the environment. This research was an important foundation for our reflections on Community Social Psychology praxis. Throughout this work we encouraged exchanges between academic and community knowledge brokers. We organized events at the university and in the communities, in which representatives of both spheres, presented their views on the research topics. This epistemological dialogue was evaluated as a positive experience by the communities' members and leaders. The strengthened ties between local schools and communities increased students' knowledge about the region in which they lived. This resulted in a sense of unity between students and communities and raised the visibility of the struggles undertaken by communities for recognition and rights. The research findings generated technical support for tourism projects, increased the visibility of territorial struggles, and supported the creation of environmental education projects linking local schools and communities. Detailed results of this research can be found in dos Santos et al. (2016), Massola et al. (2013), and Svartman et al. (2015).

This experience portrays some characteristics of psychological practice in communities in Brazil: community psychologists are involved in a struggle against the consequences of secular violence whose origins lie in the processes of colonization; their practice requires intervention on the quality of community ties to promote more democratic relationships; threats to social groups' territories are fundamental components of mechanisms of oppression against

communities; and the result of this work is often the creation of projects for the transformation of the community itself, to the point of recreating its identity in response to the residents' struggles and projects.

Regarding the four dimensions of the concept of community psychology, the first dimension (history of interactions) draws attention to the fact that social relations were supported by a traditional culture, which had developed over three or four centuries and involved interconnected economic, political, artistic, and religious activities. At the same time, young people wanted to know about the lifestyle of the bigger cities, which represented a conflict between tradition and modernity. The third dimension (experience with a territory) relates to the lived experience with the territory of these communities, which featured the integration of culture and nature and a low-impact economy that were responsible to some extent for preserving the environment. Such communities held a view in which environmental preservation could be accomplished with human presence in the territory. When this culture was threatened by the creation of the state park and the consequent threat of eviction, community groups created associations that started to organize economic and political activities inside and outside the communities. These actions increased the visibility of their struggles. We see here dimension two (potency of action) and four (articulation between internal and external history) expressed in the fact that an external intervention extended the reach of struggles that already existed, but in an embryonic, incipient, or very localized way. The action research encouraged the communities' investigation about their own history and fostered their consciousness of the need to navigate between the traditional and the modern, assisting in the development of new projects and increasing the interaction with their surroundings (mainly the schools from nearby towns) and with the university.

Case Study 2 – A Research with Social Groups Living in Peripheral Neighborhoods of the City of São Paulo

Cidade Ademar and Pedreira are peripheral neighborhoods in the southern region of São Paulo characterized by scarcity of green areas and health, educational, and cultural facilities. These territories are predominantly inhabited by low-income families, and the number of informal workers is much higher than in other areas of the city. For many years, residents of these neighborhoods have struggled to improve their living and working conditions. In 2010, they created a space to discuss the problems of both neighborhoods and formulate strategies to face them collectively, called Cidade Ademar and Pedreira Social Forum, which brought together local leaders and representatives of the earliest social movements in the region.

This Community Social Psychology research initially studied the history and organizational structure of this effort. Forum members reported a decrease in the participation of residents in the forum's activities. They also reported that young residents were not very engaged, which meant that the memories of all their actions could be lost, in addition to the risk of losing potential new leaders.

Other similar community spaces also faced the same problems. This led participants to establish a partnership with the Federal University of São Paulo to create a course on political systems and public policies, democratic participation, social rights, and citizenship. The Citizenship School project was then created to address the political qualification of leaders and the population of the city's peripheral neighborhoods.

Members of the Cidade Ademar and Pedreira Social Forum attended some classes and decided to implement the Citizenship School in their neighborhoods. They requested the support of the research coordinators to build the project, present it to the university and help with the course. The political-pedagogical project (the presentation of principles and methods of work) was built collectively, during several meetings, with intense participation of the whole team formed by different community leaders. The consensual objective was to create a participatory space for the construction of

knowledge that would facilitate the dialogue between academic and popular knowledge, built upon the history of struggles in the region. Classes were to include expert guests and residents, which would stimulate a dialogue between broader and local perspectives.

The first course was held in August 2016, it lasted 12 months, and had 33 attendees. Besides enrolled students who attended the entire course, there were often listeners that followed a specific debate, and some meetings had 120 participants. In 2018 and 2019, there were new editions with similar attendance rates. At the end of each course, as part of the research in Community Social Psychology, questionnaires were administered and interviews were conducted with participants, members of the coordination team, and representatives of social movements.

The results showed improved communication among the leaders of the housing, health, educational, cultural, and environmental movements in the region. Participants also felt better qualified to deal with demands for improvements in public policies. In addition, there has been an increase in participation of residents and engagement of local artists in cultural activities such as literature and poetry events.

A significant number of residents and local leaders, mostly those associated with the housing movement, had not completed formal education, a reflection of a long history of denial of rights and decent living conditions to the working classes. These courses made it possible to re-establish their school trajectory and awakened their will to complete formal schooling. Public school teachers reported that they would take what they learned to their schools. In some cases, this group undertook final school assignments related to issues addressed in the Citizenship School. Participants' general evaluation was that the Citizenship School provided a new cycle of popular education and renewed local community participation. This work also presented important elements for reflection on Community Social Psychology. Classes included

reports on local activities and debates on the relationships between what was discussed by teachers and the history and problems experienced in the region. Local cultural activities were shared and became more visible. Young students learned that many positive aspects of their neighborhoods, such as parks and hospitals, were the result of actions organized by leaders and members of movements who attended the course. On many occasions, narratives and recollections were complementary to the historical examinations of local problems, favoring an articulation between history and memory. This contributed to overcoming the false notion that problems are immediate, when in fact they are mediated by historical relations of concentrated power and dispute.

The first dimension of the community psychology practice (interaction), in this case, can be related to the fact that the group's initial relationships were based on the political and friendship ties of former community leaders in the region, linked to different social movements. The aim of the Forum and the Citizenship School was to discuss the region's problems, increase the participation of the local population in community activities, involve youth in political formation activities, and preserve the memory of popular struggles that resulted in improvements for the region. We see here an articulation between dimensions one (interaction) and two (potency of action), since these initiatives aimed to address specific and local problems, and also leveraged emancipatory projects that took the community's struggles beyond its immediate territory. The territory of life and action of the group (third dimension) refers to a region of the city in which it is possible to observe various effects of social inequality and urban segregation. People engaged in popular movements know that community struggles with public power are fundamental and ensure the realization of some social rights. Here, we highlight the fourth dimension, that is, articulation between internal and external history. The evaluation of participants was that the Citizenship School project created an important space for dialogue and exchange of experiences, strengthening local community

ties. Courses and debates allowed a better understanding of the characteristics of the territory where participants lived and worked. Community participation in social movements increased, encouraged by the debates held during courses, revealing the importance of activities that brought together research, popular education, and community activities.

Case Study 3 – An Intervention with Social Groups that Live in Peripheral Neighborhoods of the City of São Paulo

Jardim Pantanal is one of the 17 neighborhoods located in the floodplain of one of the largest rivers that runs through the city of São Paulo. Although the neighborhood is in an area of environmental protection, it coexists with large industrial facilities that pollute the river. Its population lives below the poverty line and suffers from precarious conditions of housing, work, and access to health and public education. Residents have been working collaboratively since the 1990s to seek improvements in living and housing conditions through their residents' association, named Movement of Urbanization and Legalization of Jardim Pantanal (MULP). In this context, the psychologist's work revealed a peculiarity: it was an experience that, although it resulted in academic research (Euzébios Filho, 2015), was characterized more precisely by what Freitas (2002) called community practice in the field of Psychology, with an emphasis on group processes and the strengthening of sociopolitical ties.

This practice started as a demand from MULP itself, where the psychologist was already a collaborator. It should be noted that both in the work done with MULP and in the work done with Citizenship School, the initiative to seek psychological counseling came from the community. This is important because the initiative of social groups has a direct influence on popular education in Community Social Psychology and is a way to resist populist manipulation of the masses (Freire, 2020). This implies that this work aimed to stimulate collaboration in the strict sense (when groups participate in the research on equal terms with researchers), rather than cooperation (when

the project still "belongs" to the researcher) and certainly more than compulsory participation and co-optation, coming closer to what Tripp (2005) calls emancipatory action research.

Such demand for the psychologist's expertise reconfigured the initial relationship. The psychologist was acting as an activist when the movement identified specific needs in the psychology realm: to strengthen the social ties between young students in MULP's university entrance prep course and spaces of deliberation and claims of the movement. As part of the political pedagogical project of the university's prep course, this demand elicited community practice in the field of psychology over and above individualized clinical care.

Initially, the psychologist sought to build rapport with the students, to learn about their life trajectories, and what led them to the prep course. Following that initial stage, the psychologist facilitated group activities to stimulate reflections on issues concerning: black people's insertion in public universities, citizenship and social class, peripheral youth insertion in the world of work, and professional identity.

The meetings that were scheduled by the psychologist gradually began to be organized by the students themselves. At a later stage, these meetings began to be organized between students and members of MULP, surpassing the institutional space provided by the prep course. Finally, MULP integrated these meetings into their open discussion forum for the entire community, which contributed to effective interactions between students and actors in the movement. The forum's meetings also created spaces for listening to residents' narratives, contributing to the rescue of the historical memory of the neighborhood and the organized social movement. Thus, stories about the origin of the neighborhood, the movement and its personages were told to young students, who came to know more about the very territory in which they were born, and about the origin of MULP's agenda.

These meetings held by the forum also contributed to the organization and realization of cultural activities, of which the “Sarau do Pantanal” is an example. The objective of the “Sarau” (a party or artistic event held in the evening) was to encourage the expression of artists from the neighborhood, favoring the strengthening of local culture. Moreover, participation in the forums fostered engagement of residents in MULP's activities and the recognition of other social movements outside the neighborhood, which were engaged in similar struggles for recognition and rights of peripheral communities and the working class – thus expanding the notion of community beyond a geographically delimited territory.

Still, intending to strengthen the link between students and the movement, efforts were made to understand how the relationship established between students and MULP took place, as well as the degree of political participation of students in the struggles of daily life of the neighborhood population. A participatory diagnosis was then carried out, elaborated through the collection of different reports and opinions about the functioning of the prep course and its relationship with the movement.

Part of this diagnosis was transformed into academic research (Euzébios Filho, 2015). It revealed, among other aspects, that training spaces offered by MULP, in partnership with the prep course, were the object of interest of students, who emphasized the importance of the prep course for academic and political training. The reports stating that the course contributed to academic and political training somehow portrayed the quality of ties established between students and MULP. These ties started being built through discussions held in the prep course classrooms, taking into account that the political pedagogical project highlighted the importance of establishing connections between academic content and issues that involved residents' concrete reality. The diagnosis also identified students willing to contribute to the movement and to the prep course (Euzébios Filho, 2015). These students were contacted and consulted about the role they wanted to play in these spaces – becoming

members of the course's pedagogical coordination, contributing to practical tasks related to the course's operation, or as coordinators or promoters of MULP forums and assemblies.

The psychologist was also called into action, at different times, as a coordinator of meetings involving students and members of the movement. In this role, this professional sought to distance his identity as a specialist and promoted his support of community agents. Still, as a coordinator, the psychologist sought to facilitate the search for consensus, engaging participants' plurality of trajectories and thoughts – divergences arose at all times, after all, as previously stated, the community did not present itself as a static and homogeneous entity. Diversity should be encouraged – not repressed – by the group. The community is dialogue, it is negotiating, and it is movement.

Throughout this experience of community practice in the field of Psychology, the local agent was considered the living agent of change and the protagonist of his destiny, emphasizing the importance of community self-organization. Thus, from the beginning, there was a clear need to build projects and actions "with" the community, and not "for" them. As advocated by Freitas (1998a), this shows the importance of starting all community practices through participatory methods of needs analysis.

We could thus summarize the relations of this work with the four dimensions of the concept of community psychology practice: the first dimension, the interactional history, relates more directly to the fact that the reunion and organization of people stemmed from the struggle to guarantee a basic and fundamental social right, the right to decent housing. The resulting movement (MULP) supported the group's action to claim this right and work toward urban improvements in the neighborhood. After a while, a preparatory course for university entrance exams was created in the neighborhood, something that met the interests of youth. The territory of action initially referred to the neighborhood where the struggles for a dignified living space

took place. Gradually, as the communication with movements based in neighborhoods that experienced the same problems increased, the territory of action of those groups transformed into a space where political and cultural exchanges could occur. The psychologist was invited to help bring the two groups (MULP and the preparatory school) closer together. On one hand, MULP could help in the political formation and, on the other hand, young people could get to know the history of the neighborhood better and offer continuity to the history of struggles and claims. After the project, the preparatory school started to receive more attention from the movement, since it was related to an important life project for young people, and the movement benefited from the contribution and formation of new leaders.

Recommendations for Future Research and Professional Practice in the Field of Community Social Psychology

As stated in the introduction to this article, we argue that the concept of community psychology practice in the field of Community Social Psychology in Latin America must encompass four interlinked dimensions: (1) interactions and social ties of social groups; (2) their potency of action; (3) experience with a territory; and (4) articulation between social groups' internal and external history. These dimensions can help guide research and practice in the field by forming a scheme to understand contextual and historical variation of community phenomena. Through the examples of research studies and professional experiences discussed above, we sought to demonstrate how it is possible to collaborate with social groups and cultivate these four dimensions.

Thus, we propose that community psychology practice should be understood as the development of activities in communities that allow social groups to broaden their knowledge about their history, their political experiences, and their forms of social relations and inhabitation of a territory. The elaboration of such knowledge by social groups should foster the formulation of projects of cultural

and political participation and action (both internal and external to social groups) toward the goal of good-living, emancipation, and social justice.

Our experiences indicate that it is essential to observe how the people who make up a social group participate in the group's discussions and decisions. The quality of social ties and the feeling of belonging to the group are directly related to the respect for personal participation in the different areas of the group's life, and not simply delimiting borders and repeating traditions, norms, and social roles. The study of this dimension also allows psychologists to understand the formation of subgroups and identify the leaders with whom they can negotiate the construction of each stage of a project.

Further, we emphasize the importance of organizing processes for collective action in the constitution of social groups called community. That implies mobilization for securing rights, such as the right to permanent presence in a territory and access to housing, health, and education. In this way, social groups are inescapably in interaction with several other types of actors and institutions, such as government representatives, public policymakers, NGO's, and political parties. Hence, it is possible to affirm that the notion of community always entails some "political literacy" that calls on the social group to learn ways (strategies and tactics) to influence the broader social organization and ensure achievement of collective goals.

We also highlight the relevance of understanding the relationship between the social group's internal and external history. This dimension refers to the temporal aspects that explain social group formation, characteristics, and power of action, as well as the evolution of the group-society relationship. It is essential to understand the context that leads to the formation of a group and for what it is fighting. These are aspects of group constitution and characterization that make it possible to understand the formation of its projects and the relationships established with society as a whole. On the other hand, helping a

group to tell its own history is one of the tasks of Community Social Psychology, that is, helping social groups to speak with their own voices, recovering their historical memory.

In this context, the notion of territory entails the spatial and symbolic dimension of community social life. It is fundamental to the understanding of a community to observe the space in which its interactions and social ties take place, its material life forms, and its spatial-symbolic delimitation. These factors reveal the material dimension of group culture and collective identity. In the case of traditional communities, it reveals members' particular way of handling natural resources and relating to nature. In the case of urban communities, it exposes the inequality in the distribution of resources and access to rights in urban spaces, articulating the material and symbolic aspect of members' struggles.

Finally, we would like to highlight the ethical dimension that permeated the community psychology practices reported in this article. We believe that reflexivity is a fundamental aspect of any research or intervention with communities. Thus, we always seek to reflect critically on the temporal, ethical, and political dimensions that guide our practice. According to Paiva and Yamamoto (2010; 2011), such a posture prevents us from assuming the "quixotic" posture of wanting to save the world with only good intentions. To promote meaningful transformations in the communities where we operate, we need to understand our context of action, review our attitudes, and "seek real solutions for the community groups we serve, always in the direction of emancipation" (Paiva & Yamamoto, 2011, p. 48).

Adopting a reflective stance, therefore, entails not being content with some of the ideas widely accepted by psychology. It means, for example, not being content with the premise that all community psychologists promote social transformations or that working with groups in a situation of vulnerability is, by itself, an indication of our social commitment. Furthermore, when we adopt a reflexive posture, we must specify what social

commitment we address. It is necessary to specify the strategies, the alliances, and the tools that we use to promote transformations – especially when we consider the polysemy of the concept of community and the diversity of theoretical references and political positions that support it.

A reflective posture also implies that it is not enough to define ourselves as those who seek to promote the well-being and the quality of life of communities. After all, what do well-being and quality of life mean? Who decides what a "good life" is? What criteria and interests guide these decisions? (Cordeiro, 2018). Do well-being and the good life have the same meaning in a rural community and in a community at the periphery of a megalopolis? We often assume the meanings of these notions as obvious and shared by everyone. And, in doing so, we run the risk of adopting a normalizing posture, which assumes that there is an ideal model of life and that it is up to Psychology to bring "deviants" closer to that ideal.

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