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Community and Transmodernity: The Keys to Organizational Practices of Social Collectives in Mexico

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Abstract- In this article we intend to broaden the field of knowledge of the Organizational Theory (OT) and organizational studies, opening the action-research universe to acknowledge the diversity of organizational practices of social-community collectives. To this end, the first part shows the theoretical constraints caused by the epistemic coloniality that imposes the model upon the modern organization and productivity, competitiveness, and control as their sole axis of analysis. The second part shows the analytical categories used to understand the organizational practices of social collectives in Mexico. These categories came out of community considerations and practices, which stand for political-epistemic projects not included in the theoretical schemes of organizational modernity. Specifically, the notion of communality—conceived by intellectuals and activists from Oaxaca, México— and Dussel's Trans modernity concept, were created to define the context from which they developed. As a conclusion, we propose to open the field into organizational trans modernity, to understand the organizational practices of social collectives as a potential for cultural creation and reproduction of a shared life.

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I. Introduction

The starting point to broadening the approach to Organizational Theory (OT) and organizational studies is to admit that "by tackling the Organizational Studies we are dealing with one of the most important aspects of epistemic coloniality in the past 150 years." (Ibarra, 2006 p.466).

This implies assuming that our knowledge of what organizations are, what the yought to be, and/or what their know-how is, comes from institutionalizing a particular kind of knowledge generated by the Anglo-European elites. This knowledge was initially based on engineering, later on psychology and the behavioral sciences, and finally on management (Ibarra, 2006).

According to Podestá and Jurado (2003) this process started in the first decade of the XX century, fist by H.F. Taylor's 'Rationalization of Work,' and later in the 1930s and 1940s when the subject of study was extended to include psychology and anthropology research, to analyze human relationships in working environments.

Along that path other authors have noted that the epistemic coloniality of OT, based on reason and science, allows "taking domination relationships for granted, and legitimates the exaltation of the market" (Misoczky, 2010, p. 14); this persists even in the critical trends of organizational studies: both in the British school which "does not intend to promote changes to the current structural relationships" (Misoczky; and Amantino-De-Andrade, 2017, p.143) and in the critical track of organizational studies in Latin America, which has used imported theoretical approaches in the dynamics of "transfer and translation, let's say, repeating the knowledge generated in the Anglo-Saxon world" (Ibarra, 2006, p. 3).

Briefly described, these remarks point to various aspects of the epistemic coloniality of OT and organizational studies: First, they indicate the geopolitical component that suggests the existence of a privileged place in the political world map, i.e. the United States and three or four European countries making up the "epistemological North" (de Sousa Santos 2010); the analytical perspectives about the Organization emerge from the latter, which then become legitimate knowledge thanks to a dual-play by the "modern/colonial knowledge structures of westernized universities" (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 34) and by the establishment of a world-development model, based on the creation of surplus.

In this regard, the critique to epistemic coloniality results from imposing a particular type of knowledge that favors "the importance of calculations

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and technical rationality to design structures that will guarantee the efficient operation of organizations" (Ibarra, 2004, p. 3) based on the "pragmatic rationality that limits knowledge potential only to what is strictly useful and productive" (Podestá & Jurado, 2003, p. 98). The aim here is to point out the adoption of productivity criteria linked to instrumental rationality, to the notion of efficiency and effectiveness, and to the pursuit of surplus as the valuation model that limits social, personal, organizational, cultural and political processes to the logic of economic reasoning. The above, under an aura of objective neutrality based on obtaining optimal results, has colonized the worlds of life to the point of interpreting nature and people as resources; social relationships as Social Capital, and human potential for creation and imagination as Intellectual Capital.

Lastly, what we could call the third aspect of the epistemic coloniality of the OT, which includes "the set of approaches taken by organizational studies over the last century, under a wide variety of theoretical orientations, levels of analysis and disciplines of origin" (Ibarra, 1999, p.93), is that since the 1950s the term "organization" has been used as a substitute for company or industry. This does not only remove all political implications from a given organizational form, but additionally, when the concept of Organization is utilized in this way, it takes the meaning of a structural framework that requires a series of rules associated to the instrumental rationality based on matters of productivity, competitivity, quality, and efficiency. Back in the 60s'the term Modern Organization was finally adopted (based on the classical definition by Etzioni (1991)) to refer to all those social units (or human groupings) deliberately constituted and rebuilt for the pursuit of specific goals […] where planning, communication, direction and, control activities are executed, and positions and tasks are assigned by a particular social division of work.

The above, combined with the institutionalization of the Organizational Theory and the tendency to "take market rationality for granted" (Ibarra 2008, p.223) are the basis for the Organizational Modernity Project, developed by the organizational theory and extended by organizational studies into a simplified and orderly knowledge of the world that places the enterprise as the quintessential reference for an organization.

To extend the approach to Organizational Theory (OT) to develop a new knowledge domain that allows recognizing the specificity of organizational practices of the various community and society collectives that cannot be considered within the parameters of the "modern organizations" since they do not pursue productivity, nor are they ruled by efficiency parameters. Quite the opposite, they stand for ways of life and ways of doing things with others that are at once the expression of a culture and the opportunity of cultural creation of alternatives, which defy modern/technological society and bring along new forms of organization: local currencies, locally constructed enviro-techs, community canteens, recovery of farmlands, territorial advocacy, among many others (Esteva, 2012).

In this direction, we will take one step beyond criticizing OT's epistemic coloniality and the management paradigm developed above, and we retake the proposition for the decolonial turn, which incorporates "the openness and freedom of thought and alternate ways of life <alternate economies, alternate political theory>..." (Mignolo 2007, p.29). This proposition for the decolonial turn, developed a few years ago by several researchers, intellectuals, and activists from various countries, mainly from Latin America, has been aimed to:

> Intervene decisively in the narrative proper of modern sciences to configure an alternate space for the production of knowledge —a different kind of thinking, 'an alternate paradigm'—that will represent the very possibility to speak about «worlds and knowledge in a different way». (Escobar, 2003).

And formulate alternatives to modernity, its civilization project, and its epistemological propositions. Significantly, it has successfully cast doubt on the criteria from which Euro-centralized modernity —with its expansionist and lineal historical development model, and its type of knowledge, based on rationality and maximization— is set as the reference for universality. Instead, they assert that modernity is a historical-cultural product based on a complex power matrix founded on the coloniality of knowledge (epistemology), understanding (hermeneutics) and being (ontology) (Quijano, 1992).

Maldonado-Torres (2007), specified that coloniality:

> Refers to a power pattern that emerged as a result of modern colonialism […] it is kept alive in learning manuals, in the criterion for sound academic work, in culture, in common sense, in the self-image of the peoples, in the aspirations of individuals and, so many aspects of our modern experience. (p. 131).

As theorized by Sousa Santos (2010), coloniality implies playing down, marginalizing, invisibilizing, or discriminating all other existing historical and cultural totalities that have their rationalities and narratives supported by specific ways of being, inhabiting and understanding. And, in the matter of our concern we include other organizational forms or practices, assuming along with Quijano (1992) that "it is necessary to let go the links between rationality-modernity and coloniality, […] which brought about distorted paradigms for knowledge and marred the liberating promises of modernity." (p. 437)

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In short: Acknowledging the epistemic coloniality of the Organizational Theory (OT) and organizational studies implies assuming that the theoretical and methodological references which we currently rely upon on studying, analyze and understand the multiple organizational practices, as abundant and varied as they may be, are limited by the determinations imposed by the Anglo-European conceptualization of modernity, defined in terms of structural arrangements focused on productivity and maximization. That such conceptual tools used -over the last 150 years- do not let us tackle, understand and characterize the multiple organizational practices, collective projects and ways of doing things with others that exist in the world and, therefore, it is necessary to make progress in the construction of a fresh approach that may allow the configuration of an alternate room for the production of knowledge to discuss "worlds and knowledge in a different way" (Escobar 2003), in order to facilitate the understanding of various organizational practices of social collectives that have as their core concern taking care of the common good, not as an asset to be managed, but as a way of life.

Hereunder we present the categories that have emerged from community considerations and practices, which will allow us to understand the organizational practices of social collectives in México and which represent political-epistemic projects excluded from the theoretical schemes of organizational modernity. More specifically, we introduce the notions of communality —created by intellectuals and activists from Oaxaca, México—and trans modernity conceived by Dussel to show the context from which they develop.

II. Approach

In this section, we will further the purpose of this job, which consists of broadening the Organizational Theory's and organizational studies' fields of knowledge to open the action-research universe towards ac know ledging the diversity of organizational practices of social-community collectives. In this way, once we have expounded the main aspects of the epistemic coloniality, we will develop the concept of organizational transmodernity, based on Dussel's proposition, and we will introduce the notion of communality as a category for analysis to understand the organizational practices of social collectives in México, within the meaning given by anthropologists Floriberto Díaz y Jaime Martínez —who respectively are of Mixe and Zapotec ethnicity from the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, México. As we will see ahead, these authors rescue the existing elements in the collective organization in the community in a fully different sense to the western society. Lastly and for exposition purposes, we will briefly show how the components of communality hinge together in the *Red de Huertos Educativos en México* (Network of Training Orchards in Mexico).

The concept of Organizational Transmodernity that we propose is an idea-force that arises from the concept of what is transmodern, proposed by Argentinian-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel to frame the practices and theories:

> Which originates from epistemic traditions that belong to universal cultures that have assumed the challenge of modernity and erupt from an alternate exteriority that is always different from modernity and from European/North American post modernity, but that responds a different place, from a different location. (Dussel, 2012 in Misoczky; Dornelas Camara, 2015, p. 299).

That is to say, for Dussel (2005) speaking, about what is transmodern implies first to recognize the existence of universal cultures that stay alive and are not included in the Euro-centered modernity project. Hence, they cannot be contained in a historic, expansive, and linear development model. He underscores the fact that those cultures keep their epistemic traditions —means of understanding and knowing—which get reflected in ways of feeling-thinking and inhabiting the world, and it is based on those ways that they act in response to the challenges imposed by modernity; hence his reference to that *other place*—other cultural location—as the exteriority alternative to modernity. With that concept, Dussel points at the phenomenon of historic transversality in which universal cultures —not modern— stay alive and introduce solutions that are impossible for the modern culture alone. In the words of Ahumada Infante: "Trans modernity is a project that runs outside Modernity and Post modernity; a parallel project that originates outside Europe and the Unites States, thereby opposing the totalizing character of the modern European project." (2013 s/n)

When we talk about organizational transmodernity we point at the existence of a great diversity of organizational practices generated by the various social collectives whose characteristics are linked to cultural experiences originating each from their context, and whose core concern is neither about managing resources nor about organizing work to maximize profit, but rather, unlike the "individualistic and covetous perspective" associated to the organizational modernity described above, they fall within the field of the fight to reinforce liaisons that increase the chance to reproduce the life in common, which, in the words of Filiberto Díaz: "are not limited to human's physical space and material existence, but also [to encompases] their spiritual existence, their ethical and ideological code and, therefore, their political, social, legal, cultural and civil behavior." (2004 p.367).

Thus, by 'transmodern', we understand the organizational practices of the various collective projects have existed [and do exist] across multiple periods and

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that are formal expressions of community modes, grass rooted in the tradition of different universal cultures that places. We assert that the particularity of each of these practices needs to be recognized to understand the multiple expressions taken by long-standing organization modes, that erupt "from the alternative exteriority to modernity" with the possibility of cultural creation to reproduce the life in common, whose immense richness cannot be constrained to rationality schemes or management paradigms and cannot be understood under the tenet imposed by the theory of organization and the analysis schemes of organizational modernity.

The variety of expressions of what we here refer to as transmodern forms of organization can be appreciated in different movements and processes that run up and down Latin America, that go from the "the roofless" in Bahía, Brazil, to the "rummagers" from Uruguay, the experience in Boca Sur, Chile, to the management of water in Cochabamba, analyzed by Zibechi (2015), the autonomous experience of indigenous peoples in Cherán, to the Zapatistas in México; to grassroots neighborhood organizations in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Chile; also the Organization for the Amazon Peoples and Nasa of Valle del Cauca, of the Mapuche People, among many others for the defense of their territories, but also de creation of alternate local currencies which occur both in Medellín, Colombia, and in Buenos Aires, Argentina, or Veracruz and Oaxaca, México. Likewise, the environmental technologies locally recreated that are adapted and adopted by communities to solve social needs such as locally built bicycle machines, environmental toilets, urban orchards or, solar concentrators, as pointed out by Esteva (2012).

In all of them, a radical difference manifests itself to "the modern capitalist civilization of segregation and disconnection, where humans and non-humans, mind and, body, individual and community, reason and emotion, etc. regard themselves as separate, self-contained entities" (Escobar, 2017 p.61). And, by contrast, they constitute different political and epistemic projects in which, as stated by Rivera-Cusicanqui (Ecuador to the World 10, Nov. 2016), the community is the epistemic environment that defines the collective ways of knowing and doing in a cognitive atmosphere that recognizes the existence of subjects in the non-human world and that begins from a relation between hand, earth and brain, that results from sowing, harvesting, sharing and making rituals. These, as noted by Escobar (2017), are relational ways of being, knowing and doing, in which the existence of *something* depends from its relationship with *everything*: the Abya Yala, the Uma Kiwe, the Sumak Kawsay or the good living, that in México takes the shape of community and territory relationships to carry out a life with autonomy (Bonfil, 2003).

In this direction, we take the notion of communality as a category to introduce and characterize some of the elements that give structure to the organizational practices of social collectives in México, that seek to transform the precariousness and violence conditions by building what is common, from restructuring the social tissue and creating alternatives to have more wholesome ways of life.

It is worth noting that, as mentioned by Esteva (1212) that communality (in Spanish *comunalidad*) is, first of all, a coined word —independently by two intellectuals from Oaxaca: Jaime Martínez Luna, a Zapotec, and Floriberto Díaz, a Mixe—with the purpose of, while expressing and sharing the experience of living in a community, showing the decision "to maintain and update the ways of life and government of a communal nature, moving from resistance to liberation in their determination to transform and renounce to all forms of individualism" (p.14). In this way, the word communality has been gaining strength and, in the context of various gatherings and debates, it has developed as a concept thanks to the efforts of activists, farm workers, and intellectuals committed to the organization and as a result of the pondering about the need of maintaining and recreating life in a community and the autonomy beyond any "individualistic and cumulative perspective" associated to the capitalist western society (Bonfil 2003: 57 et seq. in Gonzáles de la Fuente, 2011: 83-84)

In this sense, it is worth mentioning that the conversation around communality is different from that of communitarianism, which originated from the critique to liberalism by philosophers and social scientists (mainly Anglo-Saxons) for whom the community is understood as "an ideal type of social relationship in which the willingness for action rests (…) on a common property (emotional or traditional) that is subjectively felt by the participants." (V. Pazé, in Castellanos 2008 p. 492). And, it disagrees with Ostrom's evocations to "what is common" which are aimed at establishing a "public-private" logic, where cooperation does not imply building liaisons of solidarity in the production and reproduction of social relationships. Instead, they are aimed at opening a space (third sector) that will allow the "successful" coordination between the economic actors and strengthening the commercial relationship under a new modality (Federici & Caffentzis 2013, pp. 83-97). The main difference between the theoretical trends of European and North American sociology and political philosophy lies in their conception of community. As mentioned by Díaz (2004):

> For a scholar or politician in the western culture, the community is no more than an aggregate of individuals, from the standpoint of their egocentric isolation, and that is how they understand the definition of 'group'. It is an arithmetic community. (p.366).

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By contrast, the idea of community present in this perspective holds what Escobar (2017) defines as a relational way of being, knowing, doing and feeling: in the words of Filiberto Díaz (2004) "the community is a series of relationships, first between people and space, than between individuals. For these relationships, there are rules interpreted from nature itself, and defined by the experience of generations." (p. 367). The rules mentioned by the author are the ordering principles that determine the relationships in the community and that encompass "not only the physical space and the material existence of human beings, but also their spiritual existence, their ethical and ideological codes and, therefore, their political, legal, cultural, economic and civil behavior." (p.367).

The notion of communality identifies the elements that make it possible and promote the existence of the community as an epistemic and political environment that enables ways of knowing and doing with others, that are radically different -and at times opposite- from the individualistic perspective, from the market / profit logic. As Martínez-Luna claims:

> We are communality: the opposite of individuality. We are a communal territory, not private property; we are collaborators*, not competitors; we are polytheists, not monotheists. We barter, we do not do business; we are diversity, not uniformity […] We are interdependent, not free. We have authorities, but not monarchs. (Martínez-Luna 2009 p.17)

(In Spanish: "somoscompartencia, no competencia." *Compartencia* is a coined word that makes the phrase rhyme).

The elements of communality that define the being, the doing and the feeling among people who share a territory, a history, a language and a way of an organization are i) the common territory made up of the land, which is understood as the nurturing mother, not as an asset or resource; hence relationships, are based not property, but on mutual interdependence; ii) the collective work is understood as a service the community (*tequio* Mexican Spanish word, originally from Nahuatl *tequitl*: tribute, work) and a reciprocity service to one another (mutual support or helping hand); iii) the assembly, as a space for participation and decision making by consensus, iv) the *fiesta* and ceremonies as an expression of the communal gift. These elements: collective work, assembly, *fiesta,* and territory are:

> The pillars, the principles, and the pathways that are not removed, nor are they located in an ideal world; rather, they shape the horizon within which the communal Us is recreated and community is constructed: «…what is taken as correct, is prescribed, remembered and executed»(Guerrero, 2015, p. 117).

In this sense, communality as a concept and the four elements that constitute it, have been adapted and adopted as a guide to action and an inspiration of various social collectives in Mexico, which, as mentioned, seek to recreate community relationships between people and nature, to build collective spaces of autonomy, and to advocate for what is common to them and as a way to prevent, confront, and revert the degradation of the social, political, and environmental tissue that, one way or the other in this part of the world, is lived as a consequence of the imposition of a political and economic model that was christened by Harvey (2005) as capitalism through is possession: A model based on an individualistic and accumulative perspective, maximization of profit and occupation (or plundering) of the common property and the communal ways of life, to convert them into merchandise. In this context, to speak of organizational transmodernity allows us to recognize the existence of social collectives: "…that are transforming their resistance to development and economical ways of life into an endeavor for liberation that takes them to claim and regenerate their community domains, and to create new ones." (Esteva 2012 p. 18)

Such is the case of the Network of Training and Community Orchards (RHEC, by its Spanish acronym) of Xalapa, Veracruz, México. It is an independent collective by activists, students, and scholars that since 2015 collaborates non-profit with various private and public schools to foster the creation of agro-environmental school orchards conceived as labs to generate community relationships, to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, and skills through collective work.

The RHEC was first configured as an independent, self-managed, open and horizontal organization whose central proposition was to operate under a reciprocity principle as a collaborative work network where all the stakeholders have something to give and take. Secondly, it promotes the collective, participative, and horizontal organization between school authorities, students and teachers to develop activities that include creating, and maintaining the agro-environmental orchard, thus encouraging the creation of spaces for discussion that facilitate the exchange of knowledge and skills and induce shared learning practices.

The collective work promoted by the RHEC in school orchards is understood as a "means for the emancipation as an activity in which each participant learns to meet different responsibilities, always within the space of the unit of consensus collectively generated." (Misoczky, 2010, p. 19). The fact that it takes place in

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traditional school institutions that are structured in hierarchical, individualized order with vertical power relations, under highly individualize denv ironments, and that an agro-environmental orchard is created under those conditions, opens a common space to establish community relationships, first between people, and later with the environment, i.e., nature. Additionally, this proposal, which together with the collective work includes the participation in the exchange of knowledge and experiences of everyone involved (regardless of their position in the school institution) transforms [momentarily] authority and tuition-learning relationships based on hierarchy, to instill collective decision-making practices based on dialogue, on commitment, work and sharing along with the above, it is working in the agro-environmental orchards introduces the cyclicality of sowing and harvesting, which encourages the creation of a new type of holiday, not found in the official calendar.

Thus, through its actions and practices, the RHEC- Xalapa, recreates "ways of being, living, understanding, talking and inhabiting a common space made a territory" (Ángeles, 2017, p. 90).And that they use communality asa structural component that articulates the various aspects "of undetermined reciprocities […] like an interdependent relationship, wherein what enables the relationship between subjects is what they can input to the common, with the common and within the common." (Ángeles, 2017, p. 90). In this direction, we will briefly describe the practices where the RHEC has adopted communality principles, as a horizon of understanding, as well as the dilemmas and conflicts it brings along:

i. The agro-environmental orchard appears in schools as a territory, as a gathering space for collective work, for coexisting and learning, where relationships are rebuilt among people (students, teachers and school authorities), and with nature.
ii. Collective work (tequio)as a service to develop the orchard and activities of reciprocity in the spaces for the exchange of knowledge and experience are promoted, as well as workshops, where RHEC members take part in the creation of new educational spaces for the community.
iii. Gatherings and assemblies are held with direct participation, where all attendees have freedom of speech, and they make decisions collectively by consensus. The distribution of tasks is associated with the work and with the ability to meet commitments.
iv. Lastly, and in the same way, a fiesta is encouraged in each community at the end of their school cycle, there is an event called *Festival de la Cosecha* (Harvest Festival); a space to get together and socialize. Among the activities that take place at the celebration are workshops, round table discussions, talks, orchard walkthroughs, artistic expressions, solidarity markets for trading and bartering, and much more. Funds come from the solidarity support from collectives that freely share their experiences and skills and access to the fiestas is free and open.

III. Conclusions

In this paper we introduce the concept of organizational transmodernity, based on the notion of the transmodern proposed by Dussel, to indicate the existence of multiple organizational practices by social collectives that link their actions and guide their efforts towards recovering, restoring and defending life spaces or community domains that, contrary to the "individualistic and cumulative perspective" associated to the capitalist western society (that finds its foothold in modernity supported by the OT and organizational studies), do not have as a core concern managingre sources, or maximizing profit, but promoting cooperation and community relationships to lead a life with autonomy.

Likewise, we start to talk about transmodern organizations to refer to the multiple social collectives with community organization modalities, whose immense richness cannot be limited to the idea of managing the common property. Instead, they show the presence and vitality of universal cultures, capable of preserving relationship forms for collectively knowing and doing. They uphold the interdependence of human beings with nature, and using the fiesta or the ritual, they contemplate their existence and the irinteraction with subjects in the non-human world. As long as they represent epistemic traditions -ways of understanding and knowing- based on community relationships that point at ways of inhabiting and conceiving the world; ways of living in the world that are independent and relational, they are part of political-epistemic projects that are different to the Euro-centered modernity project.

In this context, we introduced the notion of communality, which was independently proposed by anthropologists Floriberto Díaz and Jaime Martínez to point out the elements that are present in the organization of the community, the latter being understood very differently from what is held by the European and Anglo-Saxon scholarly traditions. It is based on a) collective work as a service to the community (tequio) and as a reciprocity service (mutual support or helping hand); b) the assembly as a space for participation and decision making by consensus; c) the *fiesta* and the ceremonies as an expression of the communal gift, and d) the territory from the land, conceived as the nurturing mother, not as a asset or resource. We show this through the case *Red de Huertos Educativos y Comunitarios* (Network of Training and Community Orchards) (RHEC, by its Spanish acronym) of Xalapa, Veracruz, México, as well as the brief description of their activities and organizational

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four elements, are working as a guide for action and inspiration for various social collectives in México.

Based on all of the above, we sustain that the conversation about the epistemic coloniality the OT and of the studies about the organization based on the scheme of modernity-post modernity "is not a mere scholarly or semantic debate, but the definition of a political project." (Esteva 2012:9). A political project that involves recognizing the various modes of a community organization that keep alive multiple ways of being and of doing with others, to transform and improve both at a personal level and as an autonomous collective (Misoczky, 2010), which is supported by the fact that the organizational fabric regulates the interactions and determines the domain of expression for the individual as he/she relates to others and the world. Therefore, recognizing the existence of other ways of an organization also amounts to discovering other possibilities of being.

In this direction, the concept of organizational transmodernity that we introduce stands for an epistemic horizon to think beyond the epistemic coloniality of the OT and the studies on the organization. And, it is an invitation to generate new knowledge based on the various political-epistemic projects that exist today in the world to redefine the elements that make multiple forms of organization that up to now have remained in the domain of the modernity-post modernity organization model.

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