

Domestic Workers: Postcolonial Inheritance and International Relations

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Abstract: The discipline of International Relations (IR) in Latin American is still dominated by positivist and Westernized research. This creates challenges for international studies such as how to visualise the subjects or '*sujetas*' who participate in national and international politics but are ignored in this field, and how to value the current postcolonial research, which offers critical perspectives that equilibrate the epistemic balance and help build adequate tools to understand different regional phenomena. By analysing a case study of the Association of Women Domestic Employees of Paraguay, this article clarifies how a postcolonial approach enriches the field of IR. This study argues that postcolonialism contributes to this field by making visible cognitive subjects and '*sujetas*', who offer an alternative knowledge construction to rethink international relations with a meta-theoretical extension, visible. Postcolonialism is the theoretical basis of this qualitative research. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observations. This article suggests and concludes that women domestic workers as 'political subjects' enrich international relations by offering critical views to the research carried out in the subfields of foreign policy analysis, international political economy, and regionalism.

Keywords: international relations; postcolonial theory; coloniality; colonial relations; Paraguay; domestic workers.

Introduction

As its key contribution, this study clarifies how a postcolonial approach offers meta-theoretical tools to enrich studies in International Relations (IR), by investigating the geographic South's marginalised subjects and '*sujetas*' (see Pozo 2015) who have been traditionally ignored in this field. According to Tickner and Blaney (2013), there are several social groups that are still ignored in international studies. For example, the members of the Association of Women Domestic Employees of Paraguay (ADESP) have received little attention despite their active presence in national and international politics. Although this

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study considers only the ADESP case, the exclusion phenomenon these women experience affects other social groups in Latin America. Each case has its specific problems and concrete contributions to IR that need to be examined, and this study focuses on ADESP.

IR research employs a range of theoretical approaches that can be divided into two major groups: positivists (e.g., realism, liberalism, neo-realism, neoliberalism) and post-positivist approaches (e.g., feminism, post-structuralism, neo-gramscianism, post-colonialism; Lasagna 1995; Nogueira and Messari 2005). This classification follows the fourth meta-theoretical debate of IR, in which these two theoretical groups are contrasted to identify the most feasible ways of studying different international processes (Vasquez 1995). Following Llenderozas and Finkielsztoyn (2013) and Carver's arguments (2003), one could argue that both theoretical groups play an important role in IR, due to their different ontological, epistemological, and methodological visions. Positivist approaches explain international processes based on objective analyses and quantitative methodologies, similar to those of the exact or natural sciences (Frasson-Quenoz 2015).

Post-positivist approaches, including postcolonialism, were first applied in IR in 1990, and their application has increased over time (Nogueira and Messari 2005; Jackson and Sørensen 2018). These approaches focus on the emancipation of IR to understand international problems, including analyses of subjective factors and interpretative and multidisciplinary methodologies (Zalewski 2010). Post-positivist approaches incorporate a critical political view in order to avoid power relationships at the national and international levels. These critical views accept the influence of values in academic research, as they strengthen academic commitment and promote social, political, economic, and cultural equality, especially epistemic equality in IR (Zalewski 2010). As such, postcolonialism promotes critical thinking with the geographic South as the focus; its use in international studies began after the influence of the poststructuralist current (Nogueira and Messari 2005; Jackson and Sørensen 2018).

Elfbio and Soccio (2013) argue that the postcolonial current contributes to IR studies 'from' and 'for' South America, thereby expanding the ontological,¹ epistemological,² and methodological³ aspects of this field. It strengthens the interpretive research built on dialogue with social groups that are marginalised in this field, such as domestic workers. Postcolonialism transforms IR. For one, it does so because it makes it possible to reveal subaltern subjects and '*sujetas*'. Secondly, it reveals the inequality and socio-epistemic problems inherent to this field. Thirdly, it expands the field of IR to include social transformation studies. As such, it serves to counteract (to a certain extent) the inequality problems faced by domestic workers in Paraguay, despite the fact that the present study only discusses ADESP as an example.

Amplifying the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of IR is not enough to generate an integrated horizontal knowledge. Yet, considering the strengths of postcolonial theory is a start towards this direction, as this effort breaks the epistemic barriers of this field. It is important for the benefit of female domestic workers that IR become more pluralised because once these types of studies become a benchmark they benefit. It gives visibility to the gendered aspects of their fight and, as a result, labour equity could begin to

be included in national and international policies. Thus, postcolonial research is essential in promoting social transformation in this field.

This study addresses two research problems. Firstly, referring to Monte (2013) and Nogueira and Messari (2005), positivist approaches are dominant in IR, despite the field's theoretical plurality. This dominance generates other problems, such as state-centricity (Halliday 1999), an epistemic balance characterised by North American dominance (Barbé 1995), and the constant claims of universalisation (Tickner and Blaney 2013), to name a few. Although there are other criticisms, a major problem to be emphasised is the dominance of traditional and western theoretical currents, such as realism (Morgenthau 1967) or liberalism (Doyle 1986). This supremacy denies theories generated from other regions of the world, as well as themes, problems, and subjects that could be options to be considered in IR. Secondly, according to Castro-Gómez (2000), female domestic workers face socioeconomic inequality that negatively affects their well-being, apart from this epistemological exclusion.

Interpretative and critical research perspectives, especially postcolonial ones (Nogueira and Messari 2005), are undervalued in international studies, even though these approaches attempt to counteract the epistemic dominance of traditional theories and enrich this field by including to put forth critical views (Jackson and Sørensen 2018). For example, the postcolonial current allows questioning the dominant meta-theories in IR, as well as the epistemic superiority of the West on the one hand, and the colonial power that affects daily subaltern subjects and '*sujetas*' on the other hand. In any case, the postcolonial current, according to varied perspectives, was unknown in IR for some time. In fact, it has not been fully accepted in this field (Nogueira and Messari 2005; Elíbio and Soccio 2013), just as the decolonial current, which has not been completely accepted either (see Figueira 2000; Nogueira and Messari 2005; Jackson and Sørensen 2018; Morin and Paquin 2018). According to Linklater (1996), to amplify IR would mean to break out of the limitations posed by positivist approaches that avoid the construction of emancipatory knowledge.

Although Linklater (1996) refers to critical theory in his critiques, his argument fits the postcolonial approach. As such, this article highlights the importance of postcolonial studies in IR, as it allows changes in the role of academic knowledge in achieving social transformation. This theory has not fully emerged; however, decolonisation strategies enrich the research field, mainly by broadening the thematic spectrum of IR. An example of this is the Paraguayan domestic workers of ADESP and their demands. A postcolonial approach enables the considerations of these women's struggles and knowledge to understand international relations from their experience as a point of departure until 2015 when this study's fieldwork started.

This study applied a postcolonial approach and the qualitative case study method. The data was gathered through participant observation and semi-structured interviews carried out in October 2015 in Asunción, Paraguay, specifically in the Chacarita community. The referred community is located on the Paraguay Riverbanks, a few meters away from the house of government. Participant observation allowed us to obtain descriptive

data of ADESP with the coexistence and with perceptions of feelings of organization' women. Semi-structured interviews allowed subjective, open-ended questions for obtaining broad answers (Oliveira 2010). In this study, four interviews were conducted with ADESP women spokespersons and one interview with the representative of the Center for Documentation and Studies of Paraguay (CDE). The CDE is a non-governmental organisation that works with ADESP and other popular women's movements in the country. The names of the interviewees were kept anonymous as requested.

This article is divided into four sections. Firstly, it discusses the postcolonial current in its general form, and then in light of International Relations. The discussion focuses on the concepts of the 'coloniality of being', 'coloniality of power', and 'coloniality of knowledge'. Secondly, the meta-theoretical, ontological, epistemological, and methodological instruments of the postcolonial current are examined to clarify how they expose subordinate subjects and '*sujetas*' in international relations such as the domestic workers of Paraguay. Thirdly, it provides an analysis of the performance of ADESP's female domestic employees to reveal their main struggles, agendas, revindications, guidelines, and so on. It further discusses observations regarding the colonial oppression that these women have faced in their daily lives. Fourthly, it examines whether these women domestic workers can contribute to IR by considering their knowledge about the socio-political and economic processes in the region.

The basic premises of postcolonialism theory and 'coloniality'

This section discusses the main premises of the postcolonial current theory to understand their applicability in IR, including the concept of 'coloniality' with respect to knowledge, being, and power, and how these theories can be applied to mitigate socio-epistemic inequalities. The postcolonial approach was theorised in sociology, literature, and cultural studies in different parts of the world, albeit not in the field of IR (Ballestrin 2013; Jackson and Sørensen 2018), and it involves several theories. Firstly, classical authors (e.g., Frantz Fanón, Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi) question the role of the colonised. Secondly, critical theories focus on the West's domination of the East (e.g., Edward Said). Thirdly, subaltern studies (e.g., the works of Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak) review the 'colonial' stories of subaltern and silenced subjects. Fourthly, some scholars (e.g., Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy) look into coloniality from a cultural perspective and the different movements that have occurred in various regions of the world. Lastly, some scholars (e.g., Anibal Quijano, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Walter Dignolo) involve postcolonialism in subaltern studies 'from and for Latin America'. These different foci show the heterogeneity of the postcolonial current (Ballestrin 2013; Jackson and Sørensen 2018).

The last above-mentioned group was divided because of the different view held by both Walter Dignolo (2008) and Ramón Grosfoguel (2015); specifically, they disagreed with the way critical postcolonial studies were conducted. They questioned the exorbitant use of Eurocentric authors in the social sciences and rejected the application of

postcolonial studies carried out in other parts of the world to Latin America because such studies did not examine the processes of domination and colonial relations (Mignolo 2000; Ballestrin 2013). Consequently, a group that focuses on 'coloniality/modernity' was formed to construct critical decolonial studies that include the silenced voices of subaltern groups from the geographic South (Ballestrin 2013).

Both perspectives have been gradually incorporated into international studies. The postcolonial perspectives taken into consideration in this study are closest to the Latin American proposals because they enrich IR: the subaltern studies 'from and for' Latin America, and that of 'coloniality/modernity'. Working together the proponents of both perspectives increase their contributions despite their differences. Specifically, they contribute to the visibility of domestic workers and their knowledge, which, in turn, helps to rethink this field. Ballestrin (2013) consolidates these two groups, intending to promote critical social sciences that question the different colonial processes in Latin America. This point of convergence is revisited in this study.

The postcolonial approach examines the different forms of colonial oppression that are manifested in the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of regions that have experienced European conquest processes, including Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Ballestrin 2013). This process is called 'coloniality', a central concept in postcolonial theorisations (Jackson and Sørensen 2018). According to Quijano (2000), 'coloniality' refers to the domination of the colonised (Global South) by the coloniser (Global North). This concept considers the specific circumstances of such relationships within the Global South and the North (Balaton-Chrimes and Stead 2017). In other words, the presence of '*nortes*' in '*sures*' and '*sures*' in '*nortes*'. This analysis is called 'internal colonialism' (González 2002).

The concept of 'coloniality' allows analysing the power that one group exercises over another by legitimising coercive or tenuous relations. This process of legitimisation is manifested through (in)actions that appear to be normal because they are witnessed daily (Castro-Gómez 2000; Mignolo 2008). The concept of 'coloniality' assumes the hierarchical and politicised differences that follow structures built by excluding colonial constructs such as state-centricity, race, class, sex, colour, and gender, among others, considering them into the theorising. These constructs are incorporated in social, political, academic, economic, cultural spheres, and so on. In addition, this concept involves analysis of the modernising discourse (Jackson and Sørensen, 2018). Power is observed through the 'coloniality of being', 'coloniality of knowledge', and 'coloniality of power' (Castro-Gómez 2000; Mignolo 2008).

The 'coloniality of being' refers to the relations of domination from two aspects: (1) the physical and social profile of the subject and (2) the capitalist and Eurocentric system. Both elements allow us to understand the state of competence and individualism of societies, where some benefit more than others because of their social status (Fraga 2015). It exposes the structures that legitimise domination, which are built from various political constructs such as phenotypic, identity, cultural, racial, class, gender, ethnic, and linguistic factors, among others (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Gómez-Quintero 2010; Costa 2016).

Added to these unequal relationships are the hierarchies caused by Westernism, in which people from Western countries (the United States or Europe) are considered superior 'beings' when compared to others (Gómez-Quintero 2010).

The 'coloniality of power' refers to the relations of exploitation and domination of the colonised by the colonisers within the capitalist economic and political system (Quijano 2000). According to Mignolo (2008), the coloniser has the privilege of 'being' and the power to control the 'other' because, as a subject, it dominates the colonial systems. The privileged 'being' controls and dominates the different economic, political, social, and cultural processes to remain in power. The 'coloniality of being' and 'coloniality of power' justified by 'colonial knowledge' academics (e.g., in the field of IR) do little to question colonial relations. According to Lander (2000), social hierarchy and relations of domination are reproduced in the social sciences. This occurs when studies are indifferent to inequality and ignore social phenomena. The postcolonial current calls this exercise of power the 'coloniality of knowledge'.

The 'coloniality of knowledge' refers to the power exercised by excluding epistemologies that concentrate knowledge production in the privileged groups of the geographic North and South. It problematises the processes that affect the geographic South and that are not properly addressed in the social sciences because of the low production of critical and autonomous knowledge. In addition, it questions the power hidden behind the epistemologies that are based on the geopolitics of knowledge, such as the (de)valorisation of knowledge according to physical, historical, social, cultural, and geographical spaces, among others (Dos Santos 2018; Walsh 2004).

International relations are not an exception; the knowledge generated in the privileged locus of enunciation, especially in the West, is dominant and has a universalising character. This knowledge has an advantage over those that are not. The primacy of positivist approaches and the disadvantages of post-positivist approaches exacerbate this problem. In this regard, the postcolonial current allows the questioning of such inequalities, which involve the 'coloniality of being', 'coloniality of power', and 'coloniality of knowledge'. They also allow the development of studies from a postcolonial perspective in IR to balance this episteme by broadening the meta-theoretical perspectives of this field, as will be discussed below.

Contributions of the postcolonial current to IR

This section examines the ontological, epistemological, and methodological contributions of the postcolonial approach to the field of IR, with respect to the concept of 'coloniality'. This analysis considers the subjects and '*sujetos*' that can be viewed through this current, such as ADESP's Paraguayan domestic workers. It is hereby argued that the postcolonial approach integrates the state domestic workers, as well as other marginalised groups, into IR, and it does so through meta-theoretical developments. The postcolonial current widens the spectrum of this field with elements that help build knowledge outside academic borders, making it one of its greatest contributions.

Ontology

According to Grix (2020), ontology allows us to know which units act and how they interact with each other, and what must be known to identify the origin or 'being' of international phenomena. It reveals the presuppositions about what exists (or does not) in the social environment according to the corresponding theoretical vision. In this case, the postcolonial current contributes ontological elements that question 'coloniality' in international relations, which have delineated international practices according to the Westernised perspective (Dos Santos 2018).

First, the postcolonial current allows us to examine the origin of international phenomena by looking at the states and their hierarchical classification (Wallerstein 1994). However, these states are not examined as unitary and rational entities; rather, they are analysed through the colonial relations between non-state actors within the domestic state sphere and their interaction with external Western factors. According to Quijano (2000), looking at 'colonial relations' helps in understanding the origin of national and international phenomena.

Second, looking at postcolonial ontology helps in investigating the 'being' of the international processes through an analysis of colonial relations based on subjective political constructs that influence agents and structures (e.g., colonial and westernised factors; Fraga 2015). This theory holds that political, social, economic, and cultural phenomena are not objective but rather, are constructed subjectively and are subject to change. In this context, it offers a perspective that makes domestic workers visible. They are invisible because they are non-state '*sujetas*', and because they are subject to colonial exercises of power. In effect, this ontology demonstrates the social groups affected by the colonial constructs, thereby helping to clarify the phenomena through an examination of the marginalised and the excluded.

Epistemology

According to Grix (2020), epistemology indicates the 'what' and 'how' of understanding international phenomena. It shows the ways of acquiring knowledge of what is supposed to exist, either objectively or subjectively (Grix 2020). The postcolonial current examines epistemological changes (Galindo 2013) to produce knowledge in a way that is different from traditional sciences and considers alternative sources that counteract the 'coloniality of knowledge' in IR. Thus, it raises several criticisms against rational and positivist studies because they do not include 'other' knowledge that enriches the IR field.

Postcolonial epistemological changes indicate that studies maintain a social commitment to 'decolonisation' from an IR perspective (Jackson and Sørensen 2018). Ballestrin (2013) claims that the creation of knowledge must have a political objective; an example thereof is helping marginalised or excluded groups in different spheres, including academic ones. Such a perspective encourages studies to consider the problems and subjectivities that strengthen colonial relations between the colonised and colonisers. It also

promotes the need to create knowledge from dialogue with non-academic social groups that are affected by these colonial relationships. Lastly, it supports the construction of ways that offer possible solutions to marginalised groups.

Moreover, the postcolonial current demands the creation of an epistemic balance in IR, considering 'other' loci of enunciation for value of the knowledge produced outside the great poles, such as the United States and Europe (Lander 2000). For this, it is necessary to counteract the universalisation and pre-eminence of international studies developed in the West and change the epistemic locus to build alternative knowledge that appreciates differences (Mignolo 2000; Acharya 2014). These changes make it easier for IR studies developed in Latin America to consider popular or traditional knowledge that look into the specificities and geopolitical places of marginalised groups (Friggeri 2012; Grosfoguel 2015; Pozo 2015). Consequently, this opens up ways that link the academic environment with society, which Berrío, Rosa, and Duarte (2011) designate as a 'dialogue of knowledge'. In the view of Mignolo (2008), domestic workers are an example of the 'excluded groups' that, with their knowledge, contribute to this field.

Methodology

According to Grix (2020), the methodology captures the logic of an investigation; it establishes the methods and techniques for acquiring data or knowledge. In this case, the postcolonial current, as an alternative to positivist and quantitative studies, widens the qualitative methodological spectrum of IR studies. This contribution makes the marginalised social groups which balance the 'coloniality of being' propagated by the academic environment on subaltern social groups visible. In this sense, the postcolonial current allows us to think of methodologies to support research that is relatively more horizontal in this field.

On the one hand, postcolonialism allows the use of innovative methodologies that respond to the challenge of building situational knowledge, through dialogue with various non-academic social groups present in specific local contexts. This shows the need to consider multiple qualitative methodologies that value the social groups which experience colonial power. Examples of such methodologies are postcolonial discourse analysis (Aguilar and Soccio 2014), collaborative critical dialogue (Hernández 2007), and postcolonial historiography (Resende 2014). In addition, a postcolonialist approach recognises the influence of values by researchers at the time of developing international studies. As such, the current approach encourages the development of fieldwork that supports social commitment; yet it also prevents researchers from reproducing colonial relationships between themselves and subaltern groups at the time of the research (Jackson and Sørensen 2018).

On the other hand, postcolonialism allows for the incorporation of methodological tools into IR by integrating decolonising theoretical approaches that have been complemented with the postcolonial current, mainly feminist views. However, they are methodological contributions with respect to origin, not academia. An example is the Bolivian community or autonomous feminism (Paredes 2014) that arose with the struggle of

indigenous peoples and methodologically proposes gathering knowledge from ‘the sense of the common or the community’ (Cabnal 2010). Postcolonial/decolonial feminism is another example, as it promotes the incorporation of multiple methodologies in IR to create emancipatory knowledge (see Vázquez 2012; Cypriano 2013; Pozo 2017). Such an approach enriches the theoretical framework of IR as a discipline and integrates a methodological vision that helps to assemble an alternative knowledge.

In this study, the postcolonial current made it possible to carry out fieldwork (with the ADESP’s female domestic workers) that not only satisfies the need to establish horizontal relationships that avoid creating an academic status, but also maintains a social commitment to the fight and demands of this articulation. Moreover, it also considers new unconventional techniques for future research that facilitate contact with different social groups during the studies. The last point deserves additional research; thus, we do not explore it in further detail here, as this requires development another article to discuss in depth. In short, the postcolonial current enriches IR because it allows changing the colonial matrix and creating ways to make visible ‘*sujetas*’ and subjects that have been previously ignored. According to Acharya (2014), a postcolonial meta-theoretical change allows for multiple subjects, ‘*sujetas*’ or themes to be recognised legitimately within IR, as demonstrated in this section. Moreover, this approach highlights the colonial power that affects these groups and enables the construction of popular and horizontal knowledge in international studies. ADESP’s female domestic employees are an example of this; they also contribute to IR with their knowledge, as discussed below.

Looking at the experience of the Association of Women Domestic Employees of Paraguay

This section discusses the experience of the ADESP Paraguayan women domestic employees as ‘*sujetas políticas*’ in terms of their union articulation and social organisation, as well as their agenda for fighting for their interests at the national and international levels. It is argued that one of the biggest problems faced by these women is coloniality immersed in Paraguayan society in varied ways, at least until 2015, when this study’s fieldwork was carried out.

In Paraguay, there are several social articulations, especially among women who fight in different sectors, such as the peasantry, the indigenous territory, or the enactment of equitable labour rights, to name a few examples (Corvalán 2012). ADESP, founded in 2008, is an example of an articulation founded to defend labour rights; its main headquarters are in Asunción. Domestic workers have been articulated as being among many Paraguayan women dedicated to this service, to strengthen their demands throughout the country. The ADESP can be considered a social movement⁴ because Paraguayan domestic workers frequently direct political demands to the legislative and executive branches of Paraguay to transform the situation of exclusion into a more equitable one. The association claims to create labour policies that guarantee their rights and refer to the enforcement of the existing ones.

ADESP's first objective is to create empowerment spaces for female domestic workers, where they know their rights and the value of their work. To this end, the members maintain different spaces to exchange knowledge and experiences through training, workshops, seminars, and courses, among others. Its second objective is to consolidate a social organisation of struggle and demands that guarantee equality and the rights of domestic work in Paraguay, for example, salary adjustments, adequate working hours, bonuses, social security, payment for overtime work, and so on. Third is to find solutions to the different forms of colonial violence faced by women. Although ADESP's women domestic workers demand equal labour rights, they also revindicate the rights of their communities, mainly of children and the elderly. These women have led various programs developed in the Chacarita community to improve the quality of life of these families, such as installing community rooms, small schools, or health centres.

Nationally, ADESP maintains political alliances with the National Union of Domestic Workers (SINTRADOP) and the Union of Domestic and Allied Workers of Itapúa (SINTRADI; ENT001, interview by the author, 2015). This link allows them to act as '*suje-tas*' to strengthen their political actions at the domestic level in Paraguay. Internationally, these women have had links with international institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) or the United Nations (e.g., UN Women). In addition, the women founded their own international spaces in collaboration with female domestic workers from other countries in the region, such as the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Domestic Workers (CONACTRAHO) and the International Federation of Domestic Workers (ADESP, website, 2020).

Paraguayan domestic workers face different forms of violence because of the country's social relationships, which are grounded in 'coloniality. An example thereof is the devaluation of domestic work in Paraguay. This is due to the politicised social constructs that make these women become subject to prejudices in terms of race, sex, class, gender, colour, and mainly colonial phenotypic traits established in comparison to the modern white male. They represent elements that sharpen the social hierarchy as a person moves away from Western traits, as Spivak (1998) affirms. These subjectivities have created prejudices and stereotypes that lead to the social division of labour and have allowed the exercise of power over domestic workers, mainly in the workplace. These problems affect female domestic employees by virtue of their 'being women', 'being indigenous', 'being lower class', 'being of colour', and 'being guaraní'. As these constructs have justified violence and discrimination in their working environments, as well as the neglect of their labour rights that guarantee their well-being, domestic workers have faced low wages, unpaid hours of work, and informal hiring, among other problems.

There are other problems concerning the work of domestic workers in Paraguay such as the exclusion caused by the 'coloniality of power'. The control of politics by the colonising groups or by Paraguayan political classes, especially senators and deputies, undermines the established labour rights of these women. The Paraguayan state is used as a political instrument to maintain this system of inequality in force, wherein domestic workers did not feel represented or heard, at least not until 2015. The privileged position of Paraguayan senators

and deputies gives them the power to control the country's political economy, and they have shown little concern over the equitable distribution of economic resources through fair salaries. Thus, domestic workers feel helpless with respect to laws, policies, decrees, or international treaties, as some are inactive while others have not been approved (ENT001, interview by the author, 2015). As such, these women question the effectiveness of ratified conventions of laws as well as their utility for their struggle as domestic workers.

The unequal division of labour in Paraguay is the result of the country's colonial sociocultural, political, and economic system. Such unequal labour relations have been justified by arguments and ideas that originate from the 'coloniality of knowledge'. Academic knowledge can challenge colonial relationships, but it can also serve to support these systems of inequality. In Paraguay, ADESP's female domestic employees did not maintain alliances with the academic environment to receive support until 2015. Thus, the local knowledge of these women about the laws, public policies, or about a Paraguayan system that guarantees labour equity had little value compared with the universal knowledge defended by the colonial Paraguayan elites, including some academics groups. In the past, these boxes of knowledge dominated the political, economic, and social models governing the Paraguayan state, and the women had representation problems. One reason therefore is the fact that the models did not conform with the demands and realities of this social group. Another reason is the fact that they were used to respond to the interests of the Paraguayan elites.

In summary, ADESP's female domestic employees demand equal labour rights and better living conditions for themselves and their communities, as well as the end of different forms of colonial violence that affect their daily well-being and day-to-day lives. However, their interference in Paraguayan politics at the international level is rarely considered in IR, and this has silenced their voices. Therefore, making this struggle visible is important in terms of the effort to understand the political dynamics of domestic workers from an 'other' perspective to rethink IR informed by their knowledge and with them, and to allow them to be considered as '*sujetas políticas*'. The topic of enabling is discussed in the next section.

The contribution of women domestic workers to IR

This section examines how IR can be rethought from the perspective of the 'being', 'knowing' and the 'power' of Paraguayan domestic workers. It has been shown that postcolonial studies regarding IR are relevant, although according to Nogueira and Messari (2005), there are still arguments that defend the opposite view. It is argued that domestic workers contribute to this field by offering alternative ways to understand national and international politics, which 'decolonise' IR based on the demand that these women make of colonial relations. These women help in rethinking various subfields of IR by highlighting problematisations and criticisms in (1) foreign policy analysis, (2) international political economy, and (3) regionalism. These classifications are replaced by those given by domestic workers based on their political knowledge and practices, namely, (1) their political

movement abroad, (2) international strategy, and (3) community alliances, respectively. The intention of the initiative is to give a voice to these women and counter the knowledge linked to hegemonic and colonial science in IR. Thus, it is shown that international practices and their conventional studies reproduce colonial relations by ignoring certain discussions.

Political movements abroad

In foreign policy analysis, studies examine the factors that lead certain international actors, commonly the state or governments, to take a foreign policy decision, such as the influence of the academic environment (Lorenzini and Doval 2013) and behavioural (Brecher, Steinberg and Stein 1969), ideological (Köstem 2017), and national and international contexts (Giacalone 2012). However, little is observed about the pressure exerted by non-colonial social groups on foreign policy decisions. Studies generally analyse interest groups, such as business elites, to understand the dynamics of foreign policy (e.g. Presto 2001; Hernández 2008; Bull and Kasahara 2017; Chacón 2018). Although these investigations are important, they render the political pressure behind foreign policy decisions exerted by subordinate groups such as the ADESP domestic workers in Paraguay invisible.

Women domestic workers call the influence of social groups in political decision-making processes, including foreign policy, a 'political movement'. In Paraguay, the has ADESP pushed for the ratification of the ILO Convention 189 to motivate the construction of laws that guarantee the labour rights of domestic workers (ENT001, interview by the author, 2015). They even managed to obtain a place in the ILO conference, where a representative of the articulation was able to attend the meeting for this agreement's ratification, although only acting as a listener (ENT002, interview by the author, 2015). Indeed, women lobbied for the agreement's ratification on both the national and international levels. Although the articulation had a political aspect outside of the formal spaces of political decision, its actions from an informal perspective reached the expected objectives. This type of political dynamic should be incorporated to foreign policy studies.

Paraguayan domestic workers as '*sujetas políticas*' suggest integrating two elements in foreign policy studies that complement this subfield of IR by examining (1) marginalised groups and (2) spaces for informal politics. As demonstrated by the ADESP women's political dynamics, the foreign policy decision-making process needs to be viewed from a more pluralistic perspective. Indeed, social groups marginalised by colonial structures have managed to change the course of foreign policy; an example thereof is the Convention 189. Paraguayan domestic workers also draw attention to the role of international institutions in shaping national and international politics, as discussed below.

International strategy

International political economy is common in international institution studies (e.g., Crenshaw 1989; Whitworth 1997; Bøås and Desmond 2004; Briceño 2011; Vivares 2013).

It is about observing the role of these organisations in the political and economic dynamics involved in the international arena, either because they configure the financial system or promote development, to name a few examples (Calduch 1991). These studies can be divided into two large groups: critical studies on international institutions (Cox 1983) or those that are less critical (Cohen 2008). In both groups, few studies have examined the colonial power exercised by these organisations on social movements in South American countries, as in the Paraguayan case. They are political and economic alliances that could be dangerous because of the colonial matrix of international institutions. This is the cause of the international institutions' colonial influence in the Paraguay dynamics and in the international sphere, which affects the lives of vulnerable groups such as domestic workers. Therefore, this problem needs to be addressed.

Colonial relations between international institutions and domestic workers are part of the 'international strategy' put forth by ADESP's women. In this regard, international organisations such as UN Women or Oxfam have developed different programs or projects with ADESP such as international meetings, empowerment talks, workshops, seminars, and even financial aid (ENT001, interview by the author, 2015; ENT002, interview by the author, 2015). Although this cooperation in a way strengthens ADESP women, it also jeopardises the sovereignty of their movement, from the perspective of domestic workers. It does so firstly because international organisations usually decide the agenda, talks, seminars, or courses provided to domestic workers, while the issues these workers consider critical are often put aside. ADESP women recognise this relationship as an attempt to impose Westernised logic through these training environments. The second reason why this effort can be jeopardizing is the fact that the people in charge of these international institutions do not establish collaborative relationships with the domestic workers. This limits their understanding of the reasons that led these women to search for articulation. The third reason is the following: domestic workers do not identify with those in charge of the said institutions, especially because of their Westernised profile. For them, these three factors hinder the construction of horizontal relationships and perpetuate the international colonial structure.

Domestic workers contribute to international political economy studies by offering critical views of international institutions from their perspective as excluded social groups. The women propose to examine the 'coloniality of being', 'coloniality of knowledge', and 'coloniality of power' exercised by these organisations through international co-operation programs. They highlight (1) the colonial profile of the representatives of the institutions, (2) the knowledge that such representatives impose through the ideas of 'empowerment' or 'gender', to name a few concepts, and (3) the violation of the popular autonomy of social movements. Thus, they suggest examining the subjectivities that lie behind the political and economic projects developed by international institutions because these enrich the studies of the international political economy. Moreover, women domestic workers point to social regionalisation as another central process in the delineation of national and international politics, as will be shown in the section below.

Community alliances

Studies in regionalism, integration, and regionalisation have several streams—namely those that examine the states and the competitiveness between them (e.g., Carvalho 2006; Luce 2007), the European integration process (e.g., Malamud 2012; Balassa 2013), the role of infrastructure (e.g., Honório 2013; Costa and Gonzalez 2014), and the economic factor in regionalisation (e.g., Nasser 2000; Briceño 2011). However, little attention has been given to the action of social groups that promote regional processes in political alliances that go beyond the reach of national states. This dynamic can be considered as the first phase to achieve the subsequent regionalisation of the states (Pozo 2017).

Women domestic workers call the political relationship between domestic workers from different countries in the Latin American region and the constitution of their social organisations at the regional level as ‘community alliances’; examples are CONLACTRAHO (ENT003, interview by the author, 2015). The concept of ‘regionalisation’ has been defined by Soderbaum (2013) or Vivares (2014) to refer to transnational socio-political processes promoted by state and non-state actors within a geographic space such as co-operation, integration, complementarity, or transnational identity. The ‘community alliance’ created by the ADESP domestic workers (1) questions colonial relations in national and international politics, (2) is a process that is properly thought of by domestic workers as ‘*sujetas políticas*’, (3) addresses the needs of the poor sectors of Paraguay and of the other countries of the region, and (4) considers their struggle to obtain labour rights as a common point that strengthens this alliance. Altogether, these elements make creating a ‘community alliance’ a particular process that is thought outside the academic borders.

This proposal put forth by ADESP’s domestic workers contributes to studies of regionalism, integration, or regionalisation, by showing alternatives to thinking about these processes from a social perspective, mainly considering groups marginalised from the praxis of regionalism. In this sense, these women suggest that regionalism studies analyse regional policy guidelines by examining social processes other than the states. They also recommend analysing dynamics that move away from the European logic of integration. In this way, domestic workers offer critical perspectives from their popular locus and political struggle as a working class to think about regionalism in other ways.

In summary, the ADESP domestic employees contribute to IR by looking at different national and international political processes from a critical perspective. As ‘*sujetas políticas*’, they change the state-centric focus of international studies, by drawing attention to social groups that influence national and international phenomena. They invigorate the relevance of critically looking at international politics through observation of colonial relations. That way, they help to rethink IR from local knowledge that, at the same time, create an epistemic balance of IR, which is dominated by Western perspectives. Thus, they offer alternative ways of studying foreign policy, the role of international institutions, and regionalism in Latin America.

Conclusion

The postcolonial current enriches IR studies with the change of the colonial matrix, as it offers a meta-theoretical turn to this field. Firstly, it offers an ontology that allows analysis of the subjectivities of colonial relations to understand the 'being' of international relations. Secondly, it encourages epistemological change or a place of enunciation that allows considering alternative knowledge to build knowledge in international relations, especially among non-academic groups. In addition, it promotes the development of epistemologies that achieve social transformation. Thirdly, ontological and epistemological transformations require an emerging and alternative qualitative methodology that serves to gather knowledge from a direct link with the social aspect. All these elements allow considering topics on subjects or '*sujetas*' or other neglected discussions in IR, such as ADESP's domestic workers.

This neglect is a consequence of the dominance of positivist approaches in this field and the epistemological superiority of the West. As such, IR studies need to consider marginalised social groups, mainly those affected by the 'coloniality of knowledge', 'coloniality of being', and 'coloniality of power'. Domestic workers in Paraguay—who have faced social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities in the workplace due to colonial relations—are a good example. Women domestic workers formed ADESP to pursue public policies, laws, or international treaties that guarantee their labour rights and that serve them to confront other colonial systems that oppress them and their communities. This articulation brings together a large part of domestic workers throughout Paraguay and helps to maintain political alliances with the movements of domestic workers from other countries in the region. These alliances strengthen ADESP and help these workers' voices to be heard by the representatives of the states and international relations groups.

Here, the postcolonial approach facilitated the execution of a collaborative study with female domestic workers, to contribute to IR. The contributions offered by the postcolonial approach through the concept of 'coloniality' were highlighted by offering ontological, epistemological, and methodological changes that allowed the domestic workers to become visible. The performance of these women as '*sujetas políticas*', who face the damages of colonial rule with their organisation, was demonstrated in this study. Specifically, critical perspectives were offered from the 'being', 'knowing', and 'power' of domestic workers to develop inclusive studies of foreign policy, international political economy, and regionalism and integration. Thus, the critique of these women can be considered as an epistemology that is locally constructed 'from' Latin America for IR. It was corroborated by international studies that are diversified in the observance of '*sujetas*' or subjects that have been ignored.

Finally, the postcolonial approach was used to conduct fieldwork with ADESP domestic workers. It helped in placing value on local knowledge and the specific context of these women. In addition, the author prevented the reproduction of colonial relations with ADESP's representatives. However, this topic demands further research. In any case, the postcolonial approach is important for IR studies because it allows this field to become an interdisciplinary one and to broaden its the horizon.

Notes

- 1 Ontology allows us to know which units act and how they interact with each other and what must be known to identify the origin or 'being' of international phenomena. It shows the presuppositions of what exists (or does not) in the social environment according to the corresponding theoretical vision (Grix 2020).
- 2 Epistemology indicates what and how to know international phenomena. It shows the ways of acquiring knowledge of what is supposed to exist, either objectively or subjectively (Grix 2020).
- 3 The methodology is the logic of the investigation that establishes the methods and techniques to acquire data or knowledge (Grix 2020).
- 4 The concept of 'social movement' indicates the movement dynamics of political sectors that seek to achieve transformation through popular power and dominate protest events through constant social organisation (Darling 2012).

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Trabalhadoras domésticas: herança pós-colonial e Relações Internacionais

Resumo: A disciplina das relações internacionais na América Latina ainda é dominada por pesquisas positivistas e ocidentalizadas, o que gera desafios para os estudos internacionais, tais como visualizar os sujeitos ou ‘*sujetas*’ que participam da política nacional e internacional, mas que são ignorados nesse campo, e como valorizar o pós-colonial atual, que oferece perspectivas críticas que equilibram o equilíbrio epistêmico e ajudam a construir ferramentas adequadas para compreender diferentes fenômenos regionais. Este artigo esclarece como uma abordagem pós-colonial enriquece o campo das relações internacionais, por meio de um estudo de caso da Associação de Mulheres Empregadas Domésticas do Paraguai. Argumenta-se que o pós-colonialismo contribui para esse campo ao tornar visíveis sujeitos cognitivos e ‘*sujetas*’, que oferecem uma alternativa de construção de conhecimento para repensar as relações internacionais com extensão metateórica. O pós-colonialismo é a base teórica desta pesquisa qualitativa. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas e observações participantes. O estudo conduzido neste artigo constata que, enquanto “sujeitos políticos”, as trabalhadoras domésticas enriquecem as relações internacionais ao oferecer visões críticas às pesquisas realizadas nos subcampos de análise de política externa, economia política internacional e regionalismo.

Palavras-chave: Relações Internacionais, teoria pós-colonial, colonialidade, relações coloniais, Paraguai, trabalhadoras domésticas.

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