Social Transformation: a Decolonial Paradigm

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Abstract

The article deals with a general presentation of the concept of social transformation, focusing on the author's positionality and ministerial experience, the African context, and the possible future applications in the area of pastoral ministry in the Church. The working definition of social transformation as the transformation of social structures and people's consciousness is supported by examples of scholars and transformers in the last century and a reference to the author's personal pastoral experience in ministry. The selection of scholars and the reading of the personal experience is made through the lens of decoloniality, which is considered essential in today's African context and beyond. While this paradigm has gained relevance among scholars from Latin America and Africa, it is still entirely unacknowledged in church environments and among Church pastoral agents for social transformation. The article concludes with the wish that the new decolonial perspective applied to the Church's social action can favor the rethinking of Church's theology and praxis for social transformation.

Keywords: Coloniality, decoloniality, ministry, paradigm shift, postcolonialism, personal transformation, structural transformation.

The Meaning of Social Transformation

While change in nature and society is universally accepted, there is discussion over the direction it can take, its implementation and how the cultural background influences it. Social transformation is a multi-level and multi-disciplinary concept, which describes a reality broader and more profound than social change and development. Some scholars define social transformation according to the typology of change: whether there is a fundamental, structural (most often permanent) change in society, opposite to a gradual, transitory one (Khondker & Schuerkens, 2014). Others consider the final goal of the process: for example, enhancement of quality of life (Pierli & Selvam, 2017) and human flourishing (Friedmann, 1992). The pluralism of opinions is what characterizes sociology and requires the analysis not only of social, economic, and political mechanisms, which may transform society, but also of the values that must inform them. I then accept the definition of social transformation as the process that "entails a transformation in both social reality and people's and collective consciousness" (Parise, 2009, p. 153) towards human flourishing or enhancement of quality life. Several authors have referred to the same concept using different definitions: development as freedom (Sen, 1999), integral human development (Grassl, 2013), authentic human development (John Paul II, 1987), integral development in solidarity (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005), transformational development (Myers, 2011). The common denominator in these definitions is their constitutive ethical dimension and person-centeredness, which overcomes the exclusively political and economic perspective. Social transformation is not reducible to any of its constituent parts (spiritual, social, political, economic, physical), but "it has to promote the good of every person

and of the whole person" (Paul VI, 1967, no. 14). In religious language, social transformation is "a deeply rooted change in people's economic, social, political, spiritual and behavioral conditions resulting in their enjoyment of wholeness of life under God's ordinances" (Getu, 2002, p. 92). It is, in other words, the long and beautiful journey of humanity towards becoming a new human family, initiating new heaven and new earth. It is the ultimate reality that Jesus described as the Kingdom of God and which give the direction to any transformation in humanity and society.

From this overview, it appears evident that transformation differs from a merely incremental or transitional change and not every societal improvement is transformational. True transformation begins with a shift in perspective of the individual when she or he begins to see reality differently. Different expressions can describe such experience: the Greek word *metanoia*; "the awakening to the crisis" (W. E. Deming, quoted in Daszko & Sheinberg, 2005, p. 6); a widening of horizons because of conversion (Doran, 2011; Lonergan, 1971); a decolonial epistemic turn (Grosfoguel, 2007); a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1970); a change in a frame of reference through a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1997); a bold cultural revolution (Francis, 2015, no. 114). The transformation of consciousness can happen through the exposure of the person to and her critical reflection on a different worldview, epistemology, value system, social context. Gradually, exposure and reflection lead individuals to become more aware of their positionality, and to feel, think and know differently (Mignolo, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b), a *conditio sine qua non* for social transformation (Brueggemann, 2001; Francis, 2013; Kaunda, 2015). From the personal level, transformation tends to overflow into the structural level of organizations and institutions. Then, people begin imagining a new future: they can challenge existing beliefs, patterns, assumptions, and they take further actions that they would have never made, or even considered, before the transformation. In this way, new policies, procedures, systems, and structures are generated. I contend that the critical challenging of beliefs, patterns, assumptions, habits and paradigms is the core of any process of transformation (Daszko & Sheinberg, 2005) and essential to challenge the structures of power. I also contend that this challenging is only possible if agents of social transformation become aware of their positionality, defined as the awareness of one's social location in time and space and one's worldview, which influences every aspect of how we understand and interact with the world (Schlitz et al., 2010). Positionality, often unconsciously, guarantees privileges and influences the type and modes of response to social challenges (Sánchez, 2010).

Great Transformers in the Last Century

In selecting some of the people who influenced social transformation in the past century, my choices were based on two criteria. The first is my positionality - geographical (Kenya, Africa), cultural (European in Africa), religious (Catholic priest). The second is the working definition of social transformation, that is, the transformation of social structures and people's consciousness for the enhancement of African agency. Out of my personal experience and literature review, I became convinced that recovery of African agency for the transformation of structures of power and knowledge must go through a decolonization of the mind - a liberation from colonialist argument, which still paralyses the African mind (Kebede, 2011) and poisons the Western mind. The fields, which I consider relevant in social transformation, are:

1. *Economics*, as the field which most directly empowers or subjugated people (economics for empowerment and equal distribution versus economics for domination and exploitation);

2. *Politics and civil movements*, as the expression of the direct participation of the people in determining their political and social organization;
3. *Cultures*, and in particular, education for critical consciousness as a concrete tool for a change of minds;
4. *Gender equality*, as part of the political and cultural profound transformation which must happen to favor real universal participation in social, political, and economic life;
5. Finally, strictly linked to my being a Catholic missionary involved in social transformation, the *dialogue between theology and social sciences*.

I use the concept of decoloniality as a paradigm of reference. Decoloniality is the dismantling of asymmetrical relations of power, the unmasking of a universal and univocal production of knowledge through the dominating educational system, and the preservation of modes of knowing, being, and relating threatened by coloniality (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). It unveils "the traditions of resistance" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1994, p. 28) and resilience among the former subalterns, which "materialized at the very moment in which the slave trade, imperialism, and colonialism were being launched" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 488). Therefore, decoloniality means resistance, critical thinking, and action toward cultural, social, economic, and political freedom. It is the political and existential journey toward "rehumanizing the world" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 10). It breaks racial and gender hierarchization and inaugurates 'an-other thought,' 'an-other logic,' 'an-other thinking' "that has the potential to liberate ex-colonised people's minds" (Mignolo, quoted in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b, p. 7). For social activists and pastoral agents, it is the passage from being *for* the poor/subalterns to being *with* them to *listening to* them (Spivak, 1988), to, finally, *learning to read the world through their eyes* (Andreotti & de Souza, 2008).

I look at some of the people who, especially in Africa, have contributed to this process, subdividing it into four primary decolonizing dimensions: power, knowledge/education, mind/culture, and Christianity/theology.

Decolonization of Power

The socio-economic dimension of social transformation. The Bangladeshi social entrepreneur *Muhammad Yunus* (1940) is the founder of Grameen Bank, for which he gained the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. He is the pioneer of microcredit and microfinance, two pillars of social entrepreneurship and the new economy. He set out some principles for social business: overcoming poverty as the primary objective, not maximization of profit, the return of investments without a dividend, and the reinvestment of the profit in the company. Social business must be gender sensitive (the bank has deliberately targeted poor women) and environmentally conscious, besides assuring optimal working conditions. Yunus is one of the best representatives of the philosophy that equal and sound development can be guaranteed by the empowerment of even the most disadvantaged people, especially women (Khandker et al., 1995; Yunus, 2010). It can happen by combining credit access to the poorest (something impossible in the standard capitalistic bank system) and social development for learning skills. At the same time, personal and collective economic empowerment contributes to global stability, since real development is the only way to real peace and security (Sen, 1999). In spite of its great success, the initiative still leaves many open issues, such as the relation between microcredit and neoliberalism, the effective improvement of gender relations, the efficacy of the model in eradicating poverty. The criticisms towards the Grameen Bank only indicate the complexity of any attempt to transform the structures of power,

economic power in the case, which still dominate today's "postcolonial neo-colonial world" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. 3).

Ernest Friedrich Schumacher (1911 – 1977). The German economist is famous for his book *Small is beautiful: a study of economics as if people mattered* (Schumacher, 1973), in which he developed the concept of appropriate technology. Technological development must be small-sized and ecologically sound, that is, it must keep in due consideration the finite natural capital, whose benefits must be assured to present and future earth population. The publication of this essay coincided with the rise of the environmental movement, which dramatically contributed, to the growth of ecological awareness. He gradually moved towards Catholicism especially through the documents of the Catholic Social Tradition like *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. He advocated the concept of distributism: private property is a fundamental human right, but property ownership must be spread as wide as possible in society against state capitalism, plutocracy, and corporatocracy (centralization of means of production in the hands of corporations). The ideas of Schumacher were the anticipation of what today is the anti-globalization movement and the call for sustainable development. Today, almost fifty years later, the impact of globalization and neo-liberalism makes, unfortunately, Schumacher's ideas and hopes almost anachronistic and utopian, which makes a decolonial turn even more urgent.

The political dimension of social transformation. Recovering African agency in the political sphere cannot be achieved without decolonization of political power. The history of African politics in the last sixty years has seen many leaders taking up the struggle against foreign dominance and the burden of building not only new nations but also most importantly, people's new sense of being a nation. Political and economic reforms went together with profound cultural transformations, sometimes defined as revolutions.

Albert Luthuli (1898 – 1967) was president of African National Congress (ANC) from 1951 and Nobel Peace Prize laureate (1960) for his non-violent struggle against apartheid in South Africa. His academic formation, combined with education in mission schools, allowed him to integrate traditional values, Western culture and Christian, nonviolent practice. In his "Message to the African people and their allies in the struggle for freedom in the Union of South Africa" (Luthuli, 1953), he launched a campaign to increase political awareness among ordinary Black people.

Thomas Sankara (1949 – 1987) is considered a decolonial revolutionary. He gave back to people their dignity and sense of belonging to one nation. He changed the name of the country from colonial Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, the 'Land of the Upright People'. The choice of the new name remains one of the most excellent examples of his attempt to include the various ethnic groups in one national political project (Palumbo, 2017). He campaigned for the emancipation of women by including many of them in his government. Sankara tried the way of economic self-reliance through an increment of food production (safeguarding, at the same time, the environment), land reform, drastic reduction of public expenditures, and gaining independence from international financial bodies. He dared to invent the future, showing a broad imagination of what could be achieved at all levels of societies, once the people are given the opportunity to be protagonists for themselves. He fought the "saviour complex" by cutting the dependence from foreign aid agencies and development NGOs (Manji, 2015).

Julius Nyerere (1922 – 1999). The first president of the new state of Tanzania (1964), he also widely contributed to the creation of the Organization of African Unity, what is now the

African Union. He was the first Tanganyikan to study in a British University (Edinburg). After conversion to Roman Catholicism, he taught in many Catholic schools. His 1962 paper *Ujamaa— The basis for African socialism* (Nyerere, 1962) offered the philosophical basis for the famous *Arusha Declaration* which outlined the principles of socialism and the role of the government (Nyerere & Tanganyka African National Union, 1967). As president, Nyerere tried to blend socialism with African tradition of communal life. All people are considered equal and must have equal access to the country's resources, the only way to assure a gradual but steady increase of the level of primary material welfare, which must always be considered more important than any rise in production. While Nyerere's socialism registered some successes in the field of education (mass literacy campaigns, free and universal education), health, and political identity, it failed from an economic (production dropped sensibly) and social (peasants were unhappy to give up their lands in the collectivization of agriculture) point of view. Nyerere had to face the same criticism, which was addressed to Sankara: to assure a fast implementation of reforms, they both tended to shift towards a sort of authoritarianism (for many years, Tanzania was a one-party State). Two aspects of Nyerere's vision are particularly worth mentioning. The first is the link between development, peace, and the construction of a society that enhances the human person's well-being and preserves human dignity. There is no point in working for development if it is an internal, personal, private matter, with no impact on society as a whole. He opted for the socialist state, hoping that it would be the right formula for the broadest possible participation of the people. The second aspect is the attention reserved to the role of the Church in the process of development and transformation of society. From preaching resignation and acceptance of the immutability of social, political, and economic structures, the Church is called to accept rebellion which in particular situations is required for the regaining of human dignity, the creation of more equal social structures, and the fight of unjust power relations (Nyerere, 1974).

Decolonization of Education

The process of psycho-social empowerment and the role of education. Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997). His seminal books The pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 2000) and Education for critical consciousness (Freire, 1974) had a tremendous impact on the conscientization of the masses and the methodology for participatory action. He created a model for adult literacy, addressed mainly to oppressed populations. Education for critical consciousness becomes the tool, and the goal for true liberation of the people subjugated through a banking-education system. Through the process of acquiring a critical awareness, people liberate themselves from cultural patterns that have enslaved their minds, manage to regain their agency (subjectivity) and are empowered to participate actively and fully in the shaping of their lives and future. A significant contribution of Freire's thought is the analysis of the subjugation not only of the consciousness of the oppressed but also of the oppressors: both need conscientization and liberation.

Lorenzo Milani (1923 – 1967). He was an Italian Catholic priest of the diocese of Florence. After a pastoral experience in a parish where he showed radical concern for the masses of the poor and marginalized – ideas considered, in those days, too radical and dangerously close to communist ideology – Milani was sent into a sort of internal exile to a remote parish in Barbiana, a small mountain village in the diocese of Florence. There, Milani started a full-time school for children of peasants who were drops-out or excluded from the national education system. Quickly the experience extended to hundreds of children and became a case discussed (and criticized) at the national level. The school aimed at educating the children to analyze critically the events of the time through the reading of national and international news and the exposure to the witness

and contributions of professionals from all disciplines. Among Milani's most famous writings, it is worth remembering *Esperienze pastorali* (Pastoral experiences) (Milani, 1997), *Lettera ad una professoressa* (Letter to a teacher) (Milani & Scuola di Barbiana, 1972) and *L'obbedienza non è più una virtù* (Obedience is no longer a virtue) (Milani, 1965).The recurrent themes in Milani's writings are the importance of an education which must be liberating and not levelling, and the primacy of personal conscience. Milani is considered among the first proponents of the objection of conscience against the national, obligatory military service.

Decolonization of Culture

Culture and language. In the discourse of the decolonization of the mind, we must mention *Frantz Fanon (1925 – 1961)* and, in the Kenyan context, *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1938).*In his main works, *Black skins, White Masks* (Fanon, 1986) and *The Wretched of the earth* (Fanon, 1963), Fanon tried to articulate a new understanding of humanity, beyond white supremacy and black superiority. In it, decolonization becomes a moral imperative and goes well beyond political and administrative autonomy (Nicholls, n.d.). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is considered one of the fathers of decolonization of the mind. He wrote, among other works, *Decolonising the mind* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986) and *Re-membering Africa* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2009), in which he brings the question of decolonization to the use of language and the recovery of African memories. Decolonization can happen only when the 'cultural bomb' is defused, that is African agency is genuinely expressed through local languages, symbols, and myths. He also believes that the connection between the intellectuals and the masses is essential in the struggle for African subjectivity.

Gender equality: The African variant. *Catherine Obianuju Acholonu (1951 – 2014)* and *Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1940)*, both Nigerians, are among the African women writers who search for an African way to feminism. The worldwide feminist movement has been criticised for being rooted in Western worldview and addressing mainly the needs and demands of middle-class white women. Alice Walker's *African Womanism* was the first attempt to integrate the experience of black women. However, the contribution of Acholonu and Ogundipe-Leslie is the first attempt to focus on African women in Africa. Acholonu's *Motherism* (Acholonu, 1995) and Ogundipe-Leslie's S*tiwanism*—acronym for 'social transformation including women in Africa'— (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994) represent an indigenous African way to look at women's role in society and gender discourse which is rooted in the experiences of African women in Africa (Ebunoluwa, 2009).

Wangari Maathai (1940 – 2011). The 2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate (first African woman to receive the recognition) deserves a special mention. She was the first East African woman to earn a doctorate in 1971. She became an international personality for her life-long environmental activism and the foundation, in 1977, of the Greenbelt Movement. The pillars of Wangari's praxis were a holistic approach to development through community empowerment, conservation of the environment, and capacity building. Her commitment and passion inevitably brought her to active political engagement in defence of democracy, human rights, and empowerment of women. In a very patriarchal society, she was a living reminder for and a constant challenge to all Kenyans, and Africans in general, to confront prevailing social hierarchies. For such a commitment, she paid a personal price: she faced opposition from her husband, the Kenyan regime, and the university colleagues.

Decolonization of Christianity

Particular attention must be given to the church as a catalyst of social transformation, an integral part of evangelization. As the initial story shows, her role has been and probably still is ambivalent (Magesa, 2000; Mugambi, 1996, 1999; Okon, 2014). On the one hand, the Church has been an accomplice in religious colonization, although often unconsciously. As evidence, scholars point at the church's acritical social action for development, the production of knowledge in the Church-sponsored educational system (Pawliková-Vilhanová, 2007; Simpson, 1999), and a unilateral representation of the other, using the same categories created by modernity (tribal, uncivilized, pagan, poor, underdeveloped) (Adichie, 2009; Swanson, 2004). Tiénou (1991, p. 6) even speaks of "the bulldozer ethos", that is the tendency "to level other traditions and erect buildings in international style". Magesa rightly points out that, at least at its beginnings, Church's theological and pastoral style was persuaded to follow the conclusions reached in the West; hence, "the paradigms of Christian mission in Africa were paradigms of negation" (Magesa, 2000, p. 159).

On the other hand, however, the church is meant to be a multicultural community of equals where former colonizers and former colonized live, share and praise together. The preferential option of the poor, rooted in the Gospel and church Tradition, has often located the church on the side of the oppressed against the oppressors. A long list of witnesses and martyrs is a testimony of this. Whether locating herself on the side of the poor has succeeded in influencing the church's organizational structures and decision-making modalities is still an open debate, of which the ongoing question of inculturation and critique of colonialism are only two of the many aspects.

Inculturation. *Joseph-Albert Malula (1917 – 1989).* He worked at the Africanisation of Christianity through the institution of the lay ministers called *bakambi* and of the so-called *Congolese Rite* (Roman Rite liturgy adapted to Congo). He also pioneered the birth of the Living Ecclesial Communities, the forerunners of today's Small Christian Communities, as the ordinary place of the Christian life (Healey, 2013). Card. Malula was the first to launch the idea of an African Ecumenical Council, which led, many years later, to the convocation of the first Special Synod of Bishops for Africa in 1994.

Laurenti Magesa (1946). He has engaged academically and pastorally in the search for an African Christianity. Fundamental and unavoidable questions concerning the core of the Gospel, the link between cultural identity and transformation under the influence of the evangelical message, the necessary attention to the socio-cultural context in which the Gospel is proclaimed, have been accompanied Magesa in his research (Magesa, 1997, 2004, 2006, 2016). "A faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived" (John Paul II, 1982 no. 2, 1994, no. 1). Therefore, if Christian faith has to penetrate and transform the lives of the people, it has to be expressed in new ways according to African cultures, be rooted in the daily life of the people without any artificial separation between sacrum (liturgy) and profanum (daily life), and produce and nourish a new spirituality meaningful to the often dramatic African socio-political context.

Critique of colonialism: From liberation to reconstruction. *Jesse N. K. Mugambi (1947)* and *John S. Mbiti (1931)* are two Kenyan Anglican theologians, notable for their reflections on African contextualisation, the role of African Churches in the post-colonial reconstruction of society and social transformation, and the relevance of African religions and philosophy. Mbiti had academic and pastoral experience within and outside Kenya, also becoming Director of the

World Council of Churches Ecumenical Institute. Mugambi, on the contrary, remained in Kenya and he is considered a significant African voice, introducing the reconstructionist paradigm to African theology (Gathogo, 2007). They both significantly contributed to the first wave of African theology emerging from a context of colonialism (Heaney, 2015), helping in the birth of a post-colonial theology. Their reflection originates in the African context of colonialism and post-colonialism and touches the extremely delicate question of the relations between colonialism and foreign missions. Specifically, they addressed issues like the lack of support for the struggle for liberation, the theological justification of colonialism, the cultural subjugation, the normative interpretation of Christian faith, the limitation, or even the destruction of African agency, and the introduction of denominational tribalism. According to the two theologians, African theology begins with African experience and transforms it, which means that it gives importance to everything that was previously demonized by foreign missionaries. Because the church exists in a society, theological inculturation is not possible without societal liberation. Liberation "must be the overarching goal—the historical project—out of which and for which an African Christian theology must emerge" (Mugambi, *African Christian Theology*, quoted in Heaney, 2015, chapter 6, Mugambi's *Rationale for a Theology of Reconstruction*, par. 1). From a missionary and ecclesial perspective, the link between (African) theology, liberation (liberation from), and reconstruction (liberation for) is fundamental for any Church's contribution to social transformation.

My Involvement in Social Transformation and Implications for Christian Ministry

My involvement in social transformation originates in my ministry within a Comboni Missionaries pastoral community in a situation of marginality (an informal settlement in Nairobi) and my past (in Poland) and present (in Kenya) service in the formation of future Church pastoral agents. Marginality is a crucial concept in both theology (insertion in the peripheries, option for the poor) and sociology, especially through decolonial and borderland theories. Marginality is "created and perpetuated by mainstream interests. It is also maintained by the internalization of mainstream values by marginal groups" (Jones, 2000, p. 104). 'Mainstream', defined as the set of values held by the majority of people in a given cultural setting and considered as normative or conventional, refers, in my experience and understanding, to Western epistemology exported worldwide through colonialism in the past and globalization today.

Decoloniality has offered new categories to analyze and understand today's reality, hence my ministerial approach to transforming this reality. In summary, I can identify four aspects of my experience of the process of changing social structures and individual and people's consciousness. I include myself as someone who is undergoing a perspective transformation, once I decided to question my epistemological location and consider other epistemologies and agencies.

1. *Transforming imagination.* The pastoral ministry in a slum was centered on community holistic empowerment. A pedagogy of hope and recognition was fundamental among people who are systematically excluded from satisfying the most basic needs and are considered disposable by the productive capitalistic system. In the process of empowerment and consciousness transformation, the Small Christian Communities—the most fundamental cell of Christian praxis and worship—still play a crucial role, though they are also affected by the pervasiveness of coloniality and a negative sense of powerlessness. In a slum context it appears almost self-evident that social transformation can be done only by a transformed imagination, that is, a decolonized mind (Brueggemann, 2001; Dugassa, 2011).

2. *Becoming political.* The conscientization of the people does not happen only within the faith community, but it expands to the community at large for the decolonization of its social and political structures. The ministry of human and social rehabilitation of the most excluded people in society (street boys and girls, and alcoholics) and the ministry of human and faith empowerment of the Christian community were always connected with a political ministry. There used to be a series of 'awareness campaigns' for the community leaders, primary and secondary school teachers, religious leaders, and ordinary members of society. The target was people who could have, at different levels and in different roles, an impact in the policy-making process. The aim of such campaigns was to help every member of the social and Christian community to become political: To reach "the moment when one constitutes oneself as being capable of judgment about just and unjust, takes responsibility for that judgment, and associates oneself with or against others in fulfilling that responsibility" (Isin, 2002).

3. *Connecting reflection and action.* At the beginning of and during my ministerial experience, I was helped to reflect critically on the experience, through studies and exposure to various people, scholars and non-scholars. I was challenged to fill the gap between Church's religious and social action, integrating them in one ministerial praxis. Insertion and reflection presented to me new theories to interpret the complexity of reality in a new way. Hence, the link between direct pastoral experience and studies, especially in social sciences, is fundamental, as one gives meaning to the other.

4. *Decolonizing theology.* Today, I minister in the human, religious, pastoral, and theological formation of future pastoral agents. The fundamental elements of this ministry are the lived experience of internationality and interculturality in the context of a religious community and the challenge to pay deep attention to reality through insertion, social analysis, theological and critical reflection. In particular, the international context reveals how much 'coloniality' is still present in our way of thinking and pastoral approach: the way we still a-critically borrow categories and concepts from other cultural contexts; how we are still affected by 'salvationism' (Andreotti, 2012), that is, linking the action for development to the universal mission of saving the world; the paternalistic tendency to provide "a set of 'basic needs' for people (the set may vary), typically without consulting them on what their needs actually are" (Duflo, 2012, p. 12). The process of decolonization of pastoral theology passes through the courage to be questioned by reality as it is, and the continuous search for a spirituality for transformation, whose language and ideas can be relevant to both pastoral theology and sociology. I believe it is one of the major contributions that a decolonial approach can offer to both theology and social sciences.

Conclusion

Moving from a particular definition of social transformation (transformation of social structures and people's individual and collective consciousness), the article attempted to show that the decolonial paradigm can become a key perspective to analyse, understand, and eventually transform society. The world in general and African society, in particular, are still affected and conditioned by asymmetrical relations of power which still limit African agency and make Church's social mission ineffective. This way of reading reality follows a long tradition of the praxis of many scholars and activists in the world and Africa in particular, in the last century.

Exposure to situations of marginality, awareness of one's positionality, critical reflection on social action in conditions of asymmetrical power relations are elements that can open new

ways to rethink pastoral ministry for social transformation. The hope is that a more in-depth consciousness of the dynamics of "the postcolonial neocolonized world" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. x) and the rediscovery of the alternative, prophetic consciousness of the Church, originating in her identity and mandate, can rekindle the Church's action for the transformation not only of society, but also of theology and praxis of the Church herself.

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