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Psychological Opinion in the Context of Socio-Environmental Conflict: Experiences and Challenges

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Abstract

This article discusses fundamental aspects in the elaboration of expert opinions (psychological reports) within the field of social psychology, in cases related to the environment and human rights, through the lens of environmental justice, particularly in situations involving rights violations, exploitation, oppression, and the marginalization of Nature and of traditional peoples and communities. It is a theoretical article developed from a decolonial and historical-dialectical materialist approach, grounded in the authors' lived experience in the Amazon region. It argues that such expert reports can take into account key dimensions, including sociocultural aspects, community-Nature relations, and intersectionality, while also emphasizing the importance of listening, writing, and co-writing in the production of these documents. The article highlights the need for psychological opinion reports to go beyond the mere formalities of professional competence, becoming instead a tool of political resistance that supports collective organization, while also strengthening and revealing the complexity of social and cultural relations in dispute. Finally, it points out that social psychology, in this context, demands ethical and political sensitivity, as well as a commitment to emancipatory practices, fostering the construction of more just and inclusive processes for communities and for Nature, as both are entities that have been historically marginalized and placed in situations of vulnerability.

Keywords: Amazon; Environmental justice; Expert testimony; Professional competence; Social psychology.

The Brazilian Amazon is a place of intense conflicts arising from disputes over the appropriation and privatization of common goods, which are then transformed into profits concentrated in the hands of a traditional elite (Salles, 2022). The land, waters, and forests – and the multiple forms of life and culture that flourish within them – have become hostages to insatiable capitalist ambition (Ferdinand, 2022).

The capitalist advance over this territory has produced a landscape of death, in which the rivers that nourish the Amazonian lands are blocked by the construction of dams and polluted by heavy metals from the unrestrained exploitation of minerals and precious stones (I. Oliveira, 2023), while the forests are devastated by the relentless expansion of the agricultural frontier (Marques, 2023). These are some of the brutal political and economic processes that disregard and subjugate the millenary traditions of the Amazon's peoples and communities, imposing oblivion and devaluation

upon diverse and ancestral cultures (Krenak, 2022). The Amazon, therefore, is a territory where confrontations between different modes of social reproduction have taken place – a space of dispute over the past, the present, and future prospects of humanity – in which collective resistance, together with the unyielding spirit of Nature², upheld by its guardians, sustains a continuous struggle for the course of planetary life.

In this context of devastation and subjugation, the logic of commodification and profit, which fuels the unrestrained exploitation of the region, benefits local and international elites while perpetuating negative socio-environmental impacts that disproportionately affect local populations (Capobianco, 2021). It is important to highlight that the relentless expansion of agribusiness, accompanied by other industrial enterprises, goes beyond environmental degradation: it also drives the impoverishment and marginalization of traditional and Indigenous peoples and communities³, who have historically depended on the land for their survival and cultural practices (Monteiro & Bernardes, 2024).

Land conflicts are not merely territorial disputes; they represent the crystallization of deeply rooted inequalities, in which access to territories and common goods becomes a battleground between the economic interests of elites and the rights of local populations and Nature (R. G. C. Silva & Dandolini, 2018). In this context, land is viewed as a commodity rather than as a territory that sustains families, peoples, communities, and their traditions. As a result of this unequal conflict, local populations face not only the loss of their territories but also subjective transformations in their historically and collectively constructed cultural identities (Ferdinand, 2022). This dynamic intensifies the region's existing precarities, where socio-environmental injustices intertwine with social and economic inequalities, exacerbating tensions and conflicts in the pursuit of a more just and sustainable coexistence (R. B. Ribeiro, 2022; A. B. Santos, 2023).

Consequently, Indigenous peoples, traditional communities, and other groups that depend directly on territorial access – both for their survival and for the preservation of their centuries-old cultural practices – face a worsening of already persistent vulnerabilities (M. R. S. Santos et al., 2017). However, these populations do not passively witness the expansion of Amazonian degradation; on the contrary, their resistance has been crucial in challenging the advance of an ongoing destructive project. Nevertheless, those who struggle in defense of Nature and for justice and equity for marginalized groups find themselves at a disadvantage in socio-environmental conflicts – for instance, in proceedings within the Brazilian justice system, where unequal relations of political and economic power predominate.

Within this context, psychology must play a critical role. Its intervention – especially through the production of official documents – can support the justice system by providing contextual analyses that not only elucidate the power dynamics at play but also uphold the dignity and rights of affected communities (Moreira et al., 2024). These documents are regulated by Resolution No. 006/2019 of the *Conselho Federal de Psicologia* (CFP, Federal Council of Psychology) (CFP, 2019), among which the psychological opinion stands out due to its importance in contexts involving collective demands.

² The word Nature is written as a proper noun, recognizing it as a subject of rights. This means that Nature is regarded not as a resource but as an entity with intrinsic value, whose preservation and integrity are essential to socio-environmental justice (V. H. D. Oliveira, 2021).

³ In this text, the term community is used exclusively to refer to traditional communities. The adopted definition is that contained in Presidential Decree No. 6,040/2007, which considers these communities as collectives with specific cultural identities that self-define based on this distinctiveness, maintaining autonomous social organization and intrinsic relationships with specific territories and with Nature. These elements are fundamental to their multidimensional reproduction – cultural, social, spiritual, ancestral, and economic – grounded in traditional knowledge, innovative practices, and historically constructed and transmitted ways of life (Brasil, 2007).

According to this resolution, the psychological opinion is a type of written technical statement whose purpose is to provide a substantiated analysis in response to a specific problem in the field of psychology or to psychological documents that have been questioned (CFP, 2019). In essence, the psychological opinion aims to clarify and resolve doubts related to a topic or document that may affect the decision of the requesting party; it thus constitutes a response to a formal consultation (CFP, 2019).

This process requires the psychologist to possess specialized knowledge and the competence necessary to address the subject in question, ensuring that the analysis is both rigorous and relevant. Considering the complexities involved in socio-environmental issues in the Amazon, this theoretical article focuses on the following question: what are the fundamental dimensions that psychological opinions should consider in order to contribute to the promotion of justice and equity in situations involving socio-environmental conflicts?

The aim is to explore the importance of preparing psychological opinions in cases that deal with socio-environmental tensions, emphasizing the role of psychology in seeking solutions that respect the rights of life – both Nature and humanity – of the affected populations. To this end, the article first addresses the fundamental concepts surrounding the elaboration of psychological opinions and their relevance within the context of socio-environmental conflicts. Subsequently, based on the authors' experiences, it discusses the dimensions considered essential for producing psychological opinions in such conflictual settings.

As its epistemological foundation, the study adopts a critical perspective grounded in decolonial thought and in historical-dialectical materialism, since these approaches enable a critical analysis of the power and oppression dynamics underlying socio-environmental conflicts.

In this sense, the article aligns with Grosfoguel et al. (2022), who argue that while not every anti-imperialist project can be defined as decolonial or anticolonial, every decolonial/anticolonial project must be based on an anti-imperialist premise – one that stems from an analysis of the region's political and economic relations, characterized by the overexploitation of labor and the violent appropriation of natural goods. This context necessarily demands the articulation of struggles aimed at overcoming it. Accordingly, for those authors, it is unthinkable to be feminist, antiracist, decolonial, anticolonial, ecological, or anticapitalist without also being anti-imperialist. They contend that if these struggles, within their horizon, fail to include anti-imperialist resistance in a coordinated manner and as part of broad coalitions, they will ultimately be co-opted by the imperialist system – whether through the funding of debates opposing insurgent movements or through support for “green” or “violet” capitalism. The authors are also united by their radical critique of Eurocentrism, encapsulated in the slogan “*Nuestro norte es el Sur*” (Our north is the South), coined by anti-imperialist movements of the Global South.

In addition, decolonial thought is understood as a framework that can challenge hegemonic narratives and valorize subalternized forms of knowledge (Bernardino-Costa et al., 2019), while historical-dialectical materialism offers analyses for understanding the relations between the universal, the particular, and the singular, together with strategies for overcoming inequalities and advancing emancipation (S. A. M. Oliveira, 2019). Together, these frameworks provide a critical theoretical foundation capable of enriching psychological practice, allowing psychological opinions to become not merely technical formalities but instruments that contribute to social transformation and to the promotion of justice for affected communities and for Nature.

Fundamental Concepts

Psychology, as a scientific and practical field committed to human dignity, constructs analyses and interventions at the intersection of the subjective, the objective, and the structural. Psychological reports, assessments, technical notes, and opinions emerge as instruments of critical intervention (M. L. G. Santos & França, 2023), capable of revealing dynamics of oppression in complex scenarios – especially within Amazonian contexts, where life pulsates amid geopolitical conflicts. Among these documents, the psychological opinion stands out for its capacity to articulate in-depth contextual analyses and collective demands, thus becoming an ethical-political tool for contesting hegemonic narratives.

Regulated by CFP's Resolution No. 006/2019, psychological documentation assumes precise contours: the opinion is defined as a substantiated technical statement prepared to clarify issues that require mastery of psychological science, without deriving from individual assessments (CFP, 2019). Accordingly, the opinion functions as a critical analysis of scenarios, grounded in scientific evidence, legal norms, and ethical principles, to respond to formal inquiries from the justice system – whether from individuals or public institutions (CFP, 2019). Its strength lies in its ability to denaturalize violence, shifting the focus from “isolated cases” to their articulation with systemic structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice.

Aligned with the Psychologists' Code of Professional Ethics, whose fundamental principle is professional practice guided by the promotion of “freedom, dignity, equality, and the integrity of human beings” (CFP, 2005, p. 7), the psychological opinion embodies the social and ethical commitment of the profession. This document is also guided by the psychologist's duty to foster health and quality of life for individuals and groups and to contribute to the eradication of all forms of neglect, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, and oppression (CFP, 2005). From these perspectives, it can be affirmed that in conflicts such as those faced by riverine population – pressured by the construction of large enterprises – or by Indigenous peoples and peasants –exposed to pesticides or threatened with expulsion from their territories due to land grabbing – the psychological opinion cannot be limited to describing psychosocial impacts as academic categories. Instead, it must be a document capable of revealing power asymmetries, complex networks of oppression, and invisibilities produced by structures of power, while also recording the protagonism of communities and Nature, both of which are violated in this process.

Thus, the psychological opinion serves as a crucial tool for the epistemological translation of reality. This translational function is essential because it allows experiences that are often erased or marginalized – such as mourning for a murdered river, grief over the loss of a sacred space, or suffering resulting from deterritorialization – to be converted into technical language that can be recognized and valued in the pursuit of justice.

By performing this conversion, the psychological opinion not only legitimizes the experiences, knowledge, and emotions of affected communities but also contributes to the development of analyses that can influence legal, political, and organizational actions. In this regard, technical-scientific writing, which should guide the entire production of the document (CFP, 2019), becomes a springboard to support arguments, but not to render the reports inaccessible to the public. Thus, it serves as a means of amplifying the voices of those who are often silenced in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives and environments (B. S. Santos & Meneses, 2017). Moreover, by establishing a dialogue between popular knowledge and technical expertise, the psychological opinion fosters a crucial intersection between different forms of knowledge (Antonoff et al., 2023) and contributes to a more holistic, coherent, and just understanding of socio-environmental conflicts.

This articulation is vital for seeking solutions that respect both human rights and the rights of Nature, promoting a more integrated and equitable approach.

It is understood that conflicts cannot be conceived solely through a normative lens of divergent interests, as they are expressions of a predatory civilizational project, in which the exploitation of land and labor and the oppression of subalternized groups are intertwined. Here, socio-environmental conflicts are considered social disputes related to the environment; that is, the appropriation of resources by governments, private companies, and local and international elites that intensify exploitation and oppression among different groups, based on inequalities and asymmetries linked to gender, class, race and ethnicity, regionality, among others (Rincón-Ruiz et al., 2019). These conflicts emerge, for example, when mining, monoculture, hydroelectric projects, or land grabbing advance over ancestrally occupied territories, generating violence that transcends the environmental dimension: they are true open wounds in the social body and in Nature, marked by forced displacements, river contamination, criminalization of community leaders, assassination of defenders of human rights and Nature, and the erasure of cultural identities.

In the Amazon, the epicenter of these tensions, emblematic examples reveal the brutality of the hegemonic pattern of domination. The massacre of the Yanomami people in Roraima, where illegal gold mining contaminated rivers with mercury – poisoning children and the elderly – reveals that state violence and neglect constitute more than an environmental crime; it is an “ecocide” in which humans and Nature are exterminated by the capitalist project implemented in the region (Basta, 2023). Similarly, the advance of agribusiness over the Amazonian Cerrado, burning the plateau to cultivate soy, illustrates how “modernization” feeds on the blood of quilombola communities forced to witness the sterilization of sacred soils (Souza & Chaveiro, 2019). No less serious is the case of Altamira, in Pará, where the Belo Monte dam submerged affective bonds between riverine communities and the Xingu River, replacing fishing networks and rituals with artificial lakes and collective depression (Fainguelernt, 2020).

In this sense, the elaboration of psychological opinions in socio-environmental contexts requires more than theoretical expertise: it demands extended participation in the daily life of the territory, which allows for cohabitation with residents and an understanding of the meanings and significance that the community attributes to life in that location. In addition, it requires attentive, welcoming, and responsible listening, including reading between the lines, capturing what is not always verbally expressed but is felt as latent pain by the individuals. The preparation of these opinions seeks to give form to what is absent from academic accounts but is experienced by those who have suffered severe impacts caused by the actions of the state and private interests, as well as the ability to translate into writing the salient elements involved in these conflicts. For the authors of this work, these skills have been developed over years of practice as psychologists in the Amazon, both in the legal field, where conflicts become judicialized, and in academia, through teaching, research, and outreach activities.

Therefore, the reflections that follow emerge from this concrete experience of living in the Amazon – a unique place where major confrontations and contradictions constantly challenge its people. With this land and its dilemmas, the authors have learned to analyze socio-environmental realities through the lenses provided by its peoples, culture, and Nature. In this regard, this article does not present a definitive roadmap; rather, it offers notes intended to support psychologists engaged in the production of psychological opinions in the context of socio-environmental conflicts. It is recognized that contexts in the Amazonian territory are plural – a true kaleidoscope of unique dynamics, in which multiple elements intersect in their own interconnections, generating invisibilities

and demands that require sensitivity and professional commitment. Accordingly, some dimensions considered important in preparing this type of document are proposed, in light of psychology's commitment to all forms of life.

Sociocultural Dimension

Understanding the social and cultural dynamics in socio-environmental conflicts requires an analysis of the material relations of production that define life in the Amazon. From the perspective of historical-dialectical materialism, the world's largest forest coverage is not merely a biome but a territory of class struggles, where capitalist accumulation clashes with traditional ways of life, revealing insoluble contradictions within the prevailing system (T. S. Silva et al., 2023). Every cultural element and territorial dispute reflects the dialectic between productive forces and social relations, between the commodification of life and the resistance of those who struggle not to be reduced to cheap labor (S. A. M. Oliveira, 2019).

The work of the psychologist preparing the opinion consists of understanding and recording the complex nuances of these contested relations. Based on the experience of the authors of this article, it was observed that certain approaches can make this herculean task more practical. The first of these is the "path of language".

Starting from the premise that language is an element of the superstructure – where institutions, ideologies, and the cultural and political aspects of society are built upon the economic base (infrastructure) – it is within language that relations of domination are also expressed and reproduced (Marx & Engels, 1932/2007). Attention must be paid to terms such as "development", "market competitiveness", or "natural resources", which are ideological tools weaponized to naturalize theft, violence, oppression, and exploitation, masking the harms generated by capitalist expansion. Meanwhile, riverine communities experience and describe the river as "the life of the community". This different way of appropriating, relating to, and expressing the world reveals the immense contradiction between an ecocentric (water as a rights-bearing entity in an interdependent relationship with the community) and exchange value (water as a commodity) perspective.

The psychological opinion must expose this practical and semiotic struggle between different forms of appropriation and use of territory and common goods, as Marx did in his analysis of commodity fetishism (Marx, 1867/2023). In this regard, the attentive ears of psychologists preparing opinions must capture differences and contradictions: terms such as "resource" cease to be mere words and become keys to understanding historical modes of human and non-human labor exploitation. However, this language is also expressed through silences: violence generates interdictions on narratives, whether due to the risks of speaking out or the intense pain it may provoke (Spivak, 1985/2018). The psychologist must remain attentive to the dynamics of what cannot or should not be said, offering support – without, however, making promises of safety or guarantees regarding the outcomes of the process. It is essential to recognize that, unfortunately, the Amazon is a region where life is often undervalued, and in many cases, conflicts are still resolved by force – as evidenced by the massacres of Corumbiara in Rondônia (Mesquita, 2011) and Eldorado dos Carajás in Pará, and by the alarming increase in persecution and assassinations of community leaders in the region, which is the deadliest in Brazil for these individuals, according to the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT, Pastoral Land Commission) (CPT, 2024).

Another important path is "collective memory", the terrain of resistance for traditional peoples and communities in defending their ways of life and cultural identities against alienation. In

the oral narratives of Indigenous peoples and quilombola communities, or in the prayers of riverine healers, flows the history of subjugated classes preserved against colonial erasure (Mignolo, 2003). Mining, large-scale infrastructure projects, and the expansion of the agricultural frontier privatize territories, limit access to common goods, destroy archaeological sites and sacred places (Garnelo et al., 2023), and implement the logic of primitive accumulation described by Marx (1867/2023), in which the violent separation of workers from their means of subsistence degrades a dimension of humanity's transformation and the development of its history, life, and meaning through labor. The psychological opinion must denounce what is called the "capitalist expropriation of memory" as a stage in the exploitation of people, territories, and Nature.

Capitalist expropriation of memory can be understood as the expression of a project of objective change in relationships among people, with the territory and with Nature, in which ways of life are forcibly reorganized by the disruptions caused by the collision between global and local memories, narratives, practices, and projects, as described by Mignolo (2003), having a profound impact on collective memory. In this sense, socio-environmental conflict does not only provoke material struggles over rights but also affects the symbolic and subjective dimensions of collective memory. This memory, which should serve as a means of resistance and preservation of the identity of marginalized communities, is violated both at its foundational base and in the everyday contexts in which it is produced and shared (Arruda et al., 2023).

This process can be observed in practice when, for example, the historical narratives of Indigenous peoples, quilombolas, and riverine communities are threatened by large capitalist enterprises that prioritize profit over the ancestry and collective experience of these communities. Memory, in this context, is treated as a resource to be exploited, in which only recollections that support commodification and the logic of primitive accumulation are valorized. Any form of remembrance that does not feed this logic, that does not fit within the narrative of capitalist development, risks being silenced or disqualified, leading to the erasure of histories and traumas that do not align with dominant economic interests. Thus, the capitalist expropriation of memory reinforces alienation, transforming historical narratives into economic assets that perpetuate the dehumanization of those inhabiting these territories, while the culture and history of these peoples are neglected and exposed to oblivion (Missiatto, 2021). Resistance, therefore, becomes an act of reaffirming identity and a constant struggle against the devaluation of collective memory, essential for building a just and equitable future.

It is important for the psychologist preparing the opinion to analyze this context not merely as a matter of local cultural loss, but as a complex phenomenon tied to a historical arc and to the interwoven relations of inequality and resistance that connect local and global history. The capitalist expropriation of memory must be examined from an expanded perspective, as it goes beyond viewing memory as a mere affective recollection of local peoples – it should be understood as part of History, a right, and a political act deeply intertwined with the struggle against systems of oppression that transcend borders. When systems of power conflict with the interests of traditional peoples and communities, they act to marginalize their cultural practices. The disqualification of collective memory aims to reduce the significance of these histories to mere local anecdotes, disregarding their intrinsic value (Pollak, 1989).

Another analytical path begins with the "consideration and identification of various forms of inequality within relationships". Inequalities in relationships are understood as the power asymmetries imposed upon society, in which rights and access to livelihoods and public institutions occur unequally among social classes (Losurdo, 2018). These imbalances arise not only between

groups with opposing interests but also within groups – for instance, gender inequality within a community. In such cases, women face additional barriers in accessing resources and participating in decision-making processes; the lack of equity becomes a crucial factor to be considered (Davis, 1981/2016).

These dynamics are essential to understanding structures of oppression, as oppressive systems themselves exploit such vulnerabilities to dismantle the cooperativeness of marginalized groups, isolating their leaders and subtly yet effectively eroding their internal cohesion. This fragmentation undermines their collective interests, weakening their capacity for defense and mobilization, while power is consolidated without oppressive systems having to “dirty their hands”. Recognizing this intricate network of hierarchies within social relations – and its instrumentalization by systems of oppression – is fundamental to devising strategies that strengthen solidarity and resistance among marginalized peoples, fostering a more effective and conscious collective struggle.

Dimension of the Relationship with Nature

In territories affected by socio-environmental conflicts, the relationship between traditional communities and Nature is not merely utilitarian; rather, it is a living ontology – an ancestral pact that shapes ways of life, identity, memory, and existence. For traditional peoples and communities, Nature is not the “environment”; it is an extension of the body, a rights-bearing subject, and a place of knowledge – meanings found within Mariátegui’s (1928/2018) analyses of the “Indo-American” perspective of Amerindian peoples. To reduce this complexity in psychological opinions to the category of “natural resources” is to collude with epistemicide – the killing of other ways of knowing.

On a philosophical level, Krenak’s (2022) critique of anthropocentrism illuminates the urgency of decolonizing technical language. While Western science describes Nature as an object to be dominated, Indigenous peoples experience it as a network of reciprocity (Krenak, 2022). A river poisoned by mining, therefore, is not merely an environmental crime – it is the rupture of a millennia-old dialogue, a symbolic amputation that generates what Glenn Albrecht et al. (2007) call “solastalgia”: the nostalgia for a home still inhabited, yet rendered unrecognizable.

Grounded in frameworks such as the ecology of knowledges (B. S. Santos, 2007), the psychological opinion must reveal how environmental degradation corrupts ontological practices: fishing is not only subsistence, but a ritual of listening to the tides; planting is not merely cultivation, but a ceremony of dialogue with the cycles of rain and drought. By neglecting these dimensions, the law often naturalizes harm – as in the case of the Belo Monte dam, where the flooding of sacred sites was treated as a “loss of area”, rather than as the dismantling of entire cosmogonies (Fainguelernt, 2020).

Here, psychology encounters Bachelard’s (1989) philosophy, according to which space is not neutral but a matrix of affections. When a psychological opinion describes, for instance, how a community associates the disappearing of the warrior’s spirit with the illness of a species of tree whose seeds cure fevers, it is mapping a living territorial system in which human and ecological health are inseparable. To ignore this is to omit the fact that, for many peoples, depression does not reside in the mind, but in the wounded, threatened, and/or stolen land.

To capture this relationship, the opinion must employ a language that grasps the ambiguity of reality – technical enough to be recognized by the judiciary, yet without erasing the complexity present in the experiences and language of those who relate to Nature with deep affection, respect, and reciprocity. To achieve this, three interrelated axes are proposed:

1) Affective-volitional cartographies: mapping points of meaningful connections that link personal, collective, and territorial histories, for example: streams where children learn to swim; ritual clearings; trees that shelter love stories. These should demonstrate how relationships, activities, and communication between people and these elements form fundamental parts of the cultural identity of these individuals – their social practices, memory, and history, as well as their past and present experiences and their visions for the future of themselves, their families, and their communities – thus integrating a force that is both personal and collective. Indicate the consequences that the destruction or transformation of these points of connection may generate, such as existential and cultural uprooting, both personal and collective.

2) Symbolic translation: converting terms such as “biodiversity” into living narratives. Instead of “endangered species”, present the expressions used by the community, as in the example: “the children of the forest who are being silenced”. This is not merely a change in terminology, but an act of respect for the people and for local wisdom. In this sense, the writing calls upon the person preparing the opinion to decolonize on two levels: first, because it disrupts the colonial structures that suffocate subalternized knowledge; and second, because it speaks both to the mind and to the heart.

3) Denouncing the commodification of life: invoke an ecocentric critique – one that challenges anthropocentric perspectives – to denounce developmentalist projects that conceive rivers as mere “bodies of water”, devoid of history, and communities as “residual populations”, stripped of prerogatives. In this context, it is essential to treat Nature as a subject of rights, recognizing its intrinsic importance and value.

The following is a hypothetical example of a psychological opinion that incorporates the three axes mentioned:

“The riverine community of the Floresta River, whose lives have intertwined with the cycles of the waters for generations, now faces the dismantling of its sacred geography (symbolic translation). The waters of this river are a source of memory for the riverine people; it is there that children learn to swim while listening to ancestral stories, and where boys fish with their fathers before the sun rises (affective cartographies). (...) All these elements demonstrate that the Floresta River is not a water canal, but a relative of that riverine community – its liquid body is as sacred as that of each human who bathes in it, drinks from it, eats from it, and lives by it. To treat this river merely as a mineral reservoir is a crime against them and against every living being that depends on it (denunciation of the commodification of life)”.

Dimension of Intersectionality

Socio-environmental conflicts are not monochromatic. In fact, they are far from it: they are complex labyrinths of oppression and exploitation that manifest in intertwined ways, where race, gender, class, and regional inequalities merge into sophisticated dynamics of structural violence (Crenshaw, 1989). In this context, an intersectional approach is indispensable for an accurate understanding and analysis of these realities.

Intersectionality, as an academic concept, was proposed by Crenshaw (1989) and further radicalized by thinkers such as Collins (2024). This analytical category reveals that the suffering

⁴ Ecocentrism is a philosophical and ethical approach that places Nature and ecosystems at the center of moral and political considerations, asserting that all living beings and their habitats possess intrinsic value, independent of their utility to humans. In contrast, anthropocentrism is a perspective that prioritizes human beings over Nature, often assessing the value of other forms of life and ecosystems based on their usefulness to human interests.

of Amazonian communities cannot be understood in fragments: it is a geography of overlapping hierarchies, in which being a woman, Indigenous, riverine, and poor does not merely add vulnerabilities – it multiplies them in a cartography of neglect. In this context, the psychological opinion must function as a detector of naturalizations, capable of deciphering how environmental racism, extractivist patriarchy, and other forms of oppression and exploitation interconnect to silence bodies already marked by historical violence.

Intersectionality requires the person preparing the opinion to adopt the rhizomatic perspective – open, connectable networks of systems of exploitation – proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2011), according to which oppressions act like underground roots that nourish the same tree of power. It is a form of listening that is not satisfied with what is said, but examines what is whispered, what is wept at the edges of justice, and what is silenced out of fear of reprisal.

It is important to consider that intersectionality is not merely a conjunction of axes, but a powerful methodology of unveiling that exposes how systems of domination feed off one another (Collins, 2019). In the Amazon, for example, the construction of the Santo Antônio Hydroelectric Plant, located in Porto Velho, Rondônia – the fifth largest in operation in Brazil – did not affect all people equally: while white men negotiated compensation, Black riverine women, responsible for food production, faced a triple burden: deterritorialization, overload of reproductive labor, and the risk of sexual violence in construction camps (A. M. Ribeiro & Moret, 2014). To ignore this dynamic means naturalizing the epistemology of exclusion, which treats affected communities as a homogeneous mass, erasing bodies that carry the weight of the world on backs already bent by history.

Identifying who, within the community, stands on the front lines of precarity is a crucial step toward understanding the dynamics of social and environmental injustice that permeate specific situations. In the context of pesticide contamination, for instance, the impacts are disproportionately felt by vulnerable groups such as Indigenous children and women. This phenomenon of inequality and vulnerability can be analyzed in light of the concept of the “matrix of domination”, proposed by Collins (2019), which refers to the intersection of multiple strategies of oppression manifested in different social contexts – such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Collins (2019) argues that these intersections not only affect the experiences of individuals and groups but also structure the very dynamics of power and privilege within society.

Narratives that reduce these impacts to mere “side effects of progress” must be confronted. When a corporate report states, for example, that “50 families were resettled”, the opinion should ask: how many of these families were headed by women? What kind of ongoing psychological support should be offered to help them process the grief of losing their territory? How does the new location allow for the representation of culture and territorial relations that integrate the life of these families? Even if the new settlement offers access to schools and health centers, it is important to know whether these institutions were prepared to welcome new members, and how they will act from a perspective of respect for their pain, supporting processes of re-signification and guaranteeing cultural expression.

The following is an illustrative example of text from an opinion concerning a quilombola community affected by mining:

“The Ferro Project, established in the heart of the Rio Preto Quilombo, enacts a form of violence that extends beyond the land itself. While the rivers are poisoned by tailings, quilombola women – the guardians of native seeds and healing rituals – find themselves doubly affected: beyond losing their sacred fields (the foundation of their economic autonomy), they are stereotyped as

‘ignorant’ for refusing derisory compensations (an intersectionality marked by gender oppression + environmental racism + the erasure of traditional knowledge). Meanwhile, young people, pressured to migrate to urban centers, face the precarization of living conditions and the stigma of being labeled as ‘Black and peripheral’ in the cities, losing the ethnic belonging that tied them to the quilombola territory (an intersectionality marked by ageism + structural racism + cultural uprooting)”.

Analyzing intersectionalities means understanding that the same hand that dumps toxic waste into the Rio Doce also signs policies that deny childcare to Indigenous mothers, ignore Black mortality during COVID-19, and veto racial quotas in universities. The psychological opinion, therefore, is not merely a report: it is both the denunciation of a system that oppresses life in its multiple forms and the strengthening of resistance that, even in the cracks, insists on blooming.

Dimension of Listening, Writing, and Co-writing

The preparation of psychological opinions in contexts of socio-environmental conflict requires technical skills, but also something that goes beyond analytical, interpretive, and writing abilities: it demands a form of listening that genuinely respects individuals, embraces silences, and questions hierarchies (Maynard et al., 2014). Respectful, welcoming, and responsible listening is not a method, but an ethical stance; it is an act of hearing and guiding interventions while recognizing that community histories are subterranean rivers of knowledge – often dammed by the barriers of fear or mistrust produced by historical violence (Maynard et al., 2014). “Plain language” does not mean simplification, but a careful translation of complexities, breaking with the linguistic pragmatism that turns technical terms into cages that imprison meaning (Prefeitura de São Paulo, 2020). Finally, co-writing with marginalized individuals is a political act, as the person preparing the opinion rejects the position of the “specialist who speaks on behalf of” and instead assumes the role of one who collaborates with the narratives of people who are protagonists of their own stories – where the words of science and lived experience intertwine without erasing one another.

Respectful and responsible listening is a disruptive practice, inspired by the lives of traditional peoples and communities who have for centuries organized through cooperation and horizontal relationships. It involves creating safe spaces, such as conversation circles about the experiences and challenges faced by humans and Nature, or assemblies on family porches where people are not “interviewed”, but become narrators of their own experiences (Dias, 2024). In regions of conflict, where leaders are threatened and persecuted, such listening requires care and attentiveness when deciphering metaphors (for example, “the river is sick” may mean contamination by pesticides) and courage to capture what is left unsaid (the trembling hands of an elderly woman as she recalls the day tractors invaded her field). Here, psychology engages in dialogue with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology (1945/2018): the body expresses rootedness in the world, and the psychologist preparing the opinion must be capable of reading into pauses, gazes, and tears as if they were sacred texts.

Resolution CFP No. 06/2019 requires clarity in writing (CFP, 2019), but simplified language goes further – it concerns the democratization of knowledge (Roedel, 2024). In opinions on socio-environmental conflicts, terms such as “generalized anxiety” can be replaced with expressions like “the community’s life is shaken, the people’s hearts beat faster due to a fear that spreads among its residents”. This is not romanticization, but respect for local cosmoperceptions that understand health as a communal coexistence and exchange with the forest. Writing should be as accessible as a river, flowing without obstacles so that riverine people, judges, and adolescents alike can navigate through it.

Co-writing is the “pedagogy of the oppressed” applied to psychology (Freire, 1968/2019): instead of documents drafted in air-conditioned offices, it proposes participatory processes in which quilombola, Indigenous, and fishing communities review drafts and suggest revisions. Co-writing shares power among its participants: the psychologist is not the “author”, but a mediator of voices, ensuring that expressions like “the pain of the land” are not replaced with “collective depression” in the final documents. Thus, joint writing translates struggles and demands in a way that is more coherent and closer to the lived experiences of the subjects.

In summary, listening with care, writing in simplified language, and producing collaboratively are not merely techniques but gestures that call for historical reparation. An opinion grounded in these principles is like a seed planted in the hard soil of institutions of power, which so often reduce lives to numbers and simplify socio-environmental issues into legal norms. Although it may take time, these seeds can make a difference if they are connected to the collective and political organization of peoples and communities – since they equip their struggles within and beyond their territories. One day, these peoples and communities will crack the concrete and become the driving force behind a new form of justice.

Final Considerations

This essay was guided by the following question: what are the fundamental dimensions that psychological opinions must consider in order to effectively contribute to the promotion of justice and equity in situations involving socio-environmental conflicts? Its objective was to offer guidance for the elaboration of psychological opinions in contexts dealing with such tensions, highlighting the role of psychology as a supportive tool in the struggle for social justice, dignity, and the rights of life – both human and natural.

Throughout this text, concepts considered relevant to the field of practice were discussed. Subsequently, based on professional experience, several key dimensions were addressed in the preparation of documents related to socio-environmental conflicts, grounding reflections in decolonial thought and in historical-dialectical materialism. The discussions encompass sociocultural dimensions, the relationship with Nature, and intersectionality, as well as listening, writing, and co-authorship.

From these reflections, it is considered that the answer to the initial question lies in the articulation between psychological practice and socio-environmental realities, showing that the psychological opinion must transcend mere technical formality and become an instrument of political resistance – one that not only denounces social inequalities but also celebrates the lives of the populations inhabiting these socio-environmental realities and strengthens their collective organization. A critical analysis of power relations, along with the valorization of collective memories and intersectionalities, proves crucial for these documents to truly represent the needs and realities of marginalized communities. It is also important to emphasize that the writing of the psychological opinion can be disruptive, incorporating the language of communities to ensure representativeness and understanding among those who will use the document.

It is believed that this theoretical article – by addressing a challenging and increasingly recurrent topic in times of climate change and intensified conflicts involving social groups and natural environments – can serve as a useful reference for psychologists working in these contexts as they prepare their psychological opinions. Moreover, by fostering intersectionality in analysis and documentary writing, psychological practice becomes more inclusive, enabling a broader understanding of the dynamics of oppression present in territorial disputes.

For future studies, it is necessary to conduct research on these documents that addresses: intersectionality in socio-environmental conflicts; the presence or absence of emerging issues such as climate change and Nature as a subject of rights; the styles adopted by psychologists in this type of work; the identification of challenges in preparing psychological documents in socio-environmental contexts; and the impact these documents have generated, particularly in the field of justice. Research in these areas may provide psychologists with better tools, increasing the effectiveness and accuracy of their efforts to uphold rights.

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