

Challenges of Intercultural Dialogue

The following article discusses the effects of globalization and argues that, far from distributing wealth, it means the globalization of poverty and exclusion of most of humanity. The author argues that given the dominant monocultural model of civilization a utopian possibility affirming life in its diversity appears, as the richness of cultural diversity is a gift of life.

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And that was how a guacamaya grabbed the colour, and there it goes walking it, for men and women have forgotten that there are many colours and thoughts, and that the world will be glad if all colours and all thoughts have their place.

S.I. Marcus: The story of colours

When we talk nowadays about the challenge of a real intercultural dialogue, critical reflection should lead us to uncover the unprecedented colonization of humanity we now face. I mean the vaunted “good news” of neoliberal globalization, which does nothing but intensify and amplify the expansive dynamics of capitalist modernity in the process of globalization.

The trouble is that globalization involves us and wraps around all without our consent, imposing a single culture to which we are objects and not subjects of the processes it entails. A reduced - but more aggressively - version of Westernization of neoliberal policies that require “structural adjustments” accelerates and widens. It eats the conditions of production, reproduction, and display of different cultures, since the overwhelming invasion of

market logic undermines the territory of diverse cultures, distorting time, and space.

Prior to the dialogue as such, we should then address the conditions that prevent, restrict, or distort it. For, what can a human being that does not have the resources to build his own cultural world do, starting with economic and political? For that reason, defensive reactions, such as nationalism or political and religious fundamentalism have appeared. As the “almighty-market” far from globalizing wealth, it means the globalization of poverty and the exclusion of most of humanity.

No wonder the Zapatista movement, precisely when Mexico was signing the NAFTA, resoundingly denounced the new neoliberal global war against humanity. Today we can see how the pseudo-universal capital tends to devour cultural diversity, in its homogenizing and leveling integration. Through cultural industry and global communication centres, it injects the totalitarian ideology of the “world economy” and “world culture” as a horizon with no alternative.

The “single mindset” of global neoliberalism encourages fatalism; it rests on a supposedly progressive philosophy of history that shows us the only possible future for all humanity. Therefore, it can proclaim “the end of

history”, inviting us to conformism. Given the prevailing neo-colonialism, establishing a genuine intercultural dialogue is not easy, if we consider the contemporary context in which opposing forces and asymmetric powers converge. I think therefore that the cross-cultural philosophy involves, above all, an ethical-political choice for the liberation of oppressed cultures, marginalized or excluded, as submitted by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, one of the leading advocates.

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Placing ourselves in the sphere of philosophy itself, I do not think it would suffice to make new elaborations in philosophy of culture or culture comparative philosophy. That would be not other than prolonging philosophy and cultures established on a “supra-cultural” stand, which is an impossible abstraction. Therefore, as stressed by Fornet - Betancourt, questioning intercultural dialogue should lead us to a radical self-criticism, a very profound and comprehensive trans-

formation of philosophical activity to what might be called a true liberation of philosophy.

I remember the anarchist thinker Manuel González Prada said: “School is the prison of a child”. We would say that universities could become the prison of students and, especially of teachers of philosophy, as the hegemonic philosophy that pretends to be universal, is the European and the Anglo-Saxon philosophy, as a correlative cultural domain of the Western civilization. It is worth mentioning the inherent power that involves naming and defining things, as Aristotle noted. For example, Heidegger, one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, believes that philosophy is Greek in origin and essence, and, by extension, Greco-Western. So, other people and cultures could not properly philosophise or to do so, it would have to undergo “brainwashing” as the Western tradition.

In this way, the origin of European philosophy, partly born in Greece, is confused with global philosophy,



which has many traditions and ramifications. Philosophy was not born only in Greece, and nor can be taken as the prototype of philosophical discourse. Rather than the Eurocentric view, it would be better to take into account that this activity that in Greece was called philosophy, is a human potentiality that is actually grown in all cultures of humanity that have a certain conception of the world, life, women and men. This implies, in turn, a plurality of ways of thinking and acting.

Hence, defining *philosophy* is not a privilege of someone or a particular culture, but an unresolved issue that must be contested and agreed in intercultural dialogue. Hegemonic philosophy, which keeps the strict sense of philosophy to itself, can concede that in the East and the Amerindian, there is a philosophy in a broad sense, as individual "world views" or "ethno philosophies", but not a universal philosophy. And this is done without realizing that its own conceptual development cannot but be an expression, among others, of a specific cultural matrix. Thus, Gramsci's view is more correct when he stated, "all men are philosophers" although not in the same way, as there are many ways to learn, interpret, evaluate and shape the world.

The release of philosophy does not concern only to its emergence. As Fonet-Betancourt argued, one has to enter a dynamic deconstruction or disassembling of philosophy, i.e. "'de-philosophising' philosophy", which can only be done within intercultural dialogue - as it should be emancipated of the dominance of the western paradigm. Also release its full potential in the encounter with the otherness of the "other" different, not only in the past but also in our historical present.

Philosophy has been imprisoned as a profession or as an "academic subject", which more often ends up in a reading and interpretation of texts and philosophical systems that are no longer down to earth. Hence, it is located within the institutionalized knowledge with academic magazines, subordinated in turn to a national education system. For this reason, philosophy will have to free itself, not only to enter an interdisciplinary dialo-

gue with other knowledge, which is already being done in part, but also to open up to real life in our historical context.

And it should do it especially in order to connect with popular wisdom that, although 'conveys' alienating banal common sense, often carries the sense of things and even the art of "good living" or *sumak kamsay*, in the language of some peoples of the Andes. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that the so-called "national culture" of Argentines, Peruvians, or Mexicans in its pretended unity, for example, rather hid cultural diversity of our countries. This unity, which does not consist exclusively of the mixed or Creole culture of the ruling class, is also of the varied cultures of oppressed peoples, particularly indigenous and African Americans.

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Thus, philosophical reflection will have to overcome the internalized colonial habits from our historical past as a way of rediscovering and fighting hegemonic civilization. This requires re-learn to think, diversifying the methods and sources for research, if you want to read the contexts rather than the texts, in which they are made. Of course, if you want to look deep into the symbols, the imagination, the memories, practices and rituals of other cultures and ours. Not as objects to be known, but as the living voice of other sub-

jects that one may contact face to face in everyday life, in the interweaving of biographies and stories that invite us to a personal self-creation.

Leaving university classrooms imprisoning us, those of us who are dedicated to philosophy have to venture further in the areas of social and political public life, committed by a public service where currents of political opinion that influence criticism of our societies and creative initiatives for the historic march toward more human that can benefit from cultural diversity are brewing.

A good example is Mexican philosopher Luis Villoro who, apart from his solidarity with the struggle for the autonomy of indigenous peoples, is arguing for and proposing the passage from the "homogenous state" to a "plural

state”, and the possibility of building a communitarian democracy, far from going against individual freedom, reinforcing it within a community spirit. For its part, the indigenous president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, is calling us to build “communitarian socialism in harmony with Mother Earth”.

Although we do not completely agree with this approach, as thinkers and stakeholders we are being invited to contribute in some way to solving the problems that affect us, in order to alleviate the suffering of our brothers and our mother Earth. The responsibility to find the best way to do it is in our hands.

A UTOPIA OF DIVERSITY

Utopia has often been conceived and designed as an abstract ideal world that historically had to be carried out in the here and now. A new order conceived by visionary elites, who should lead the rest of humanity into a homogeneous organization of perfect harmony. The historical results, as in the case of “real socialism” with its bureaucratic totalitarianism, have been disappointing. Therefore, it has been much talk about the death of utopia as a dangerous fantasy, because not only reason produces monsters.

However, without a reasonable utopia as “regulative idea” of practical reason aimed at the action, that of Kant, which opened new possibilities in an incomplete reality, history would freeze in a static present with no alternatives or a single future. That is what the ideologies of neo-liberal globalization want with its pseudo-utopia of total market and liberal democracy, in which history would end. But most alarming is that this “new world order”, a huge mess actually, is imposed on us in an intolerant way without listening to other expectations, lifestyles, and expectations.

Given the dominant monocultural model of civilization, that is leading us to a self-destructive abyss, there is the possibility of a utopian state of life in its diversity, for the richness of cultural diversity is a life gift, and can

only upset those who consider theirs the only way of life even against others’ lifestyles. Hence, the importance of taking into account an alternative polycentric civilization that might arise from the small and large cultural configurations linked by a multiple, open dialogue free of violence.

This is the utopia from the bottom, from the cellars of the world and inhabited by peoples who, like the Zapatistas, aim at “a world where many worlds fit” and where men and women feel treated fairly and with dignity. And so this is how they demand not only their right to difference, autonomy, but also their right to participate along with many others in the joint construction of national and global society. As recalled by the World Social Forum, “another world is possible”, for which we must promote dialogue of the various actors and socio-cultural movements of the planet.

This historic project involves an inter-philosophical dialogue in depth, which redefines the notions of universality and truth, not as something given but as a totality or a truth to be hammered out in the praxis of solidarity between peoples and cultures. Intercultural philosophy, whose hermeneutics some call “diatopic” or “inter paradigmatic”, could cross cultural boundaries to build bridges for mutual recreation, for translations and conceptual reinvention. And create a trans-modern utopia because it is exposed to the “viable unknown.” This is a new global civilization linked to different traditions, not recognizing a monologue but a polyphony.

Finally, I will emphasise that this utopia of diversity opposed to a liberal restricted democracy - in the service of global economic and political power, and excluding the majority - demands a radical, inclusive, and global democracy. A democracy of direct participation up to where it is feasible, that institutes real power of each and every one of the peoples and cultures. A democracy that encourages autonomous action of individuals and communities of all kinds eager to flourish cultural diversity and build new cross-cultural symbiosis. 🌐