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Intercultural Dialogue and Ethical Challenge in the Latin-American Thought

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Abstract

The article analyzes some central problems of the intercultural dialogue in the context of philosophical, historiographical and political debates promoted by the contemporary Latin-American thought. The analysis concerns: the anthropological and ethical approach of interculturality by Arturo Andrés Roig, its relation with the literary avant-gardes in Latin America and its expression in a liberationist philosophy oriented to overcome the patriarchy; the interculturality as a space for the asking by the other and as intelligence to live together, as well as its educational consequences, with regard to a pedagogy and to an ethics of decolonization; the relation between interculturality and integration of peoples, on the basis of the proposal of Giuseppe Cacciari about the ethics of imagination.

Keywords: Ethics of imagination, Intercultural dialogue, Latin-American thought, Liberationist philosophy, Pedagogy of decolonization.

In an essay on *Filosofía latinoamericana e interculturalidad* (Roig, 1997, pp. 132-144), the Argentinian philosopher Arturo Roig in 1997 stated that “la filosofía latinoamericana tiene como uno de sus temas recurrentes y decisivos la relación filosofía-cultura. De ahí, que la problemática actual de la interculturalidad y, en particular, del tipo de diálogo que genera, así como su teorización, sea cuestión, asimismo, de importancia para la Filosofía latinoamericana tal como la venimos definiendo”. A short time before he had specified, nevertheless, “no es una filosofía de la cultura y si tuviéramos que cualificarla deberíamos decir que más se aproxima a una antropología que a otro campo del saber” (ibid., p. 132), given that it is a philosophizing about a determined historical subject. The same author distances himself on two topics: first, the subject “común y a veces obsesivo” of cultural identity, considering it “una forma discursiva ordenada sobre categorías que juegan encubridoramente respecto tanto de nuestra unidad, como de nuestra diversidad social y cultural” (ibid.). Sec-

ondly, from a sort of “ontología de la cultura”, anchored to the relation subject-object, “es quema de todo acto de dominación y explotación” and that in the field of interculturality can drive to study of the other and its culture to enable its dominion.

According to Roig, within the anthropological mark of the Latin American philosophy, that he would define in other works as an anthropological *a priori*, the idea that “lo humano apoya más en lo contingente que en lo necesario, más en lo ‘accidental’ que en lo ‘sustantivo’...y, parafraseando el célebre *dictum* de Giambattista Vico, que no es verbo ‘ser’ el que nos ha de ayudar a responder por lo humano, sino el verbo ‘nacer’, el que para el filósofo napolitano no significa ‘comenzar a ser’ sino ‘construir nuestro ser’” (Roig, 1981) is put forward. This starting point is articulated with what the author calls “moral de emergencia”, from which human dignity, located at the root of intercultural communication, can be considered “desde la contingencia, el universal impulso que nos mueve a todos hacia la autoconstrucción de nuestra humanidad” (Roig, 1994). This spurs the author to propose a deconstruction of some macro-categories that, with their presence, prevented intercultural relations. Beyond a mere culturalism, we need to critically review the influence exercised by anthropocentrism on all our views of the world. Using the concept of geo-centrism as a referent, Roig shows that, despite observing the universe from our human condition is unavoidable, other thing is “hacer de esa condición una cuestión de poder en relación con el otro, en un nivel asimismo primario, el de las relaciones interhumanas...las relaciones entre etnias son, por cierto, humanas, pero marcadas por diferencias culturales, por ejemplo, el lenguaje o la religión; mientras que las relaciones entre miembros que comparten una misma cultura las llamaremos, simplemente, interhumanas” (Roig, 1997, p. 138). In any kind of relations there are phenomena of economic, social, cultural or generic asymmetry which can be understood by the figures of “master” and “slave”, which characterize the patriarchalism, basic core from which different kind of exercising dominion over the others come: “logocentrism”, androcentrism” “ethnocentrism”, “hegemonism”. According to the author “la filosofía intercultural y, dentro de ella, la etnofilosofía, no son más que rostros de una filosofía liberacionista la que tiene, entre otros de sus objetos, aquellas relaciones entre culturas y etnias, pero también y primariamente, enfrentar el

patriarcalismo como categoría omnicomprensiva de todas las formas de dominación y subordinación humana” (ibid.) of disowning. Examining the critical and combative role of the avant-gardes, Roig argues that “fue en el campo de las letras y la plástica donde se dieron los primeros pasos en la construcción de un discurso de oídos adecuados para la percepción del otro”. In this way the opportunity to hear new voices, including that of woman and of indigenous Latin-American population, arose. In the literary avant-gardes, that according to the author are precursor to Latin-American philosophy, a “new sensitiveness” was cultivated, which get close to the human in listening and dialoguing: “no se trataba únicamente de ser capaces de oír la voz del otro, era necesario que todos conquistáramos nuestra propia voz”. Therefore, the development of dialogue and the effort to decolonize thought and speech result convergent. There is no doubt that, along with the precursor role of the avant-gardes, the dichotomies that fed many (prevalently academic) discourses, such as those of the “superior and vulgar” and its result in the disdain of the so-called inferior races or popular arts, represented serious difficulties, obstacles and blocks in the Latin-American intercultural dialogue (Roig, 1997, p. 143). Unlocking its possibility can contribute to make real the *polyphony* discussed by R. Fornet-Betancourt (1994), the *polylogy* proposed by F. M. Wimmer (1995) or the *multilingualistic dialogue* of M. L. Gil Iriarte (1996).

1. Interculturality as a space of interest for the Other

Contemporaneity seems deeply characterized by a new universalism: that of the global homogenising culture, based on the answer (technological, ideological, operational) to the needs, either spontaneous or induced, of human beings all over the world. The answer, transformed in material or immaterial product that operates in the global market according to his usefulness, is the same for all human beings, irrespective of their different cultural horizons; therefore the difference, that can be considered the element of real anchorage to real life of people and communities, is completely devaluated. The logic of the answer is that of effectiveness, productivity, fastness; starting from this, it excludes the reflective dimension, considered an unproductive waste of time, and places an important section of human be-

ings outside the field of moral assessments and obligations. The societies that Zygmunt Bauman defines characterized by “moral blindness”, referring to the concept of *adialora* (Bauman & Donskis, 2015), establish moral, ideological and technological schemes of quick answer to the global stimulus present in an exhausting informative saturation, which drives citizens to isolation, insensitiveness toward what happens to the others and to the complete indifference toward what happens in the world. Along with “universalism” - globalising and, sometimes, justified as answer to itself - there were cases that E. Trias (2003) called “local shrines”, ethnical, cultural or religious groups that radicalize the traditional values of some closed communities. In both cases, the consequence of the disregard for difference, for the Other, has brought violence and has worsened politics as a space of dialogue.

Within this context, today a central problem is to re-establish the power of the word closest to the experience of human life as a space of diversity, of “what is different” and, at the same time, space of peace, negotiation, learning. This power is *the question*, asking as a communicative action which expresses an essential aspect of human existence and which finds its roots in the imagination as an ethical dimension, able to open opportunities for the intellectual construction of a more human life (G. Cacciatore, 2013).

As a demand of learning and growth, asking is historically built with three different meanings. First there is the asking to know: *what is*, in the sense of understanding, knowing the cause of something, searching its root, explaining; it is a kind of asking that has the expert as its model. This meaning, considered typical of the human being in the classical Greek philosophy, starting from the thought of Modern Age began to achieve a central place, today not diminished, putting apart any other asking and involving all the spaces of life, starting from reason. The second is the communicative asking, of the person: *who are you? how are you?*, in the sense of understanding, opening oneself to the relation in which there are the messages exchanged among people, groups, cultures; it is the asking to the person without reducing the message to previous rational categories, but trying to insert it in the intention and in the life of the speaker, and that cannot be known like the interlocutor himself. It is the asking that tries to take the place of the other. The third is the asking that questions, criticizes everything and is open to possible changes, that of protestation and typical of the

moral assertion *because that is the way and cannot be different*, that tries to question in the sense of contesting, and refusing.

The different meanings of human asking are interconnected thanks to the concept of research, understood respectively as cause, person and future. Moreover, as it is a human preoccupation, they relate themselves with the research of explanation, sense and persistence (Marin, 2014). The space of asking in which human beings and cultures can establish an intercultural communication is that of the person and of his actions, in the interconnection among specific contexts and in search of a sense. Compared to the meaning of asking to know, the other cannot be reduced to object of knowledge, because when it happens, the fact of understanding the other and its culture turns into a strategy of subjugation. With regard to the critical meaning, the asking that questions the present cannot drive to a dialogue with the other, as it aims to include the maximum of human realization and happiness peculiar of each culture and that, being part of the process of intercultural dialogue, are related with the creation of the condition for being freely chosen.

As a specifically human – and therefore conflicting – power of the interrogative, inquisitive, problematic word - asking has always been risky: it has troubled regimes, knowledge and cultures that, from a position of power, felt to be threatened by the question and, more, by who asks: the other, the different. Asking is establishing a distance, introducing a difference. The authoritarian power, as well as the traditional education, the self-referential cultures, the rigid societies, have always considered it a conflict to avoid, a dysfunction to be corrected, a pathology to eliminate. The different – under both the literal and the metaphoric point of view – is always the stranger, who came from abroad or is found outside the established interests. This situation drives us to the words of Homer about the foreigner who bears truth, something that could or can be dangerous, to the point of speaking “ungrateful poleis”, that mistreated Homer but later claimed to be his birthplace (Luque Lucas, 2006). Learning to valorise this ability to distance oneself and, at the same time, to interrogate oneself starting from the question means to acknowledge the value of the others (Bello Reguera, 2006), following a path articulated at least in three parts: it begins with the sensitiveness of acceptance, continues with the prudent exercise of reason which recognises dignity; ends with the affective-cognitive ability to join a

project of mutual learning and growth. Thanks to intercultural dialogue, we have opportunity to overcome the “ungrateful poleis” and to build “polis cordiales”, of acceptance and coexistence.

The effort to progressively extend the spaces (cultural, social, politic) of question and to improve the protection and the activation of the right of asking (political institution, human rights) has characterized the history of human beings. This can be seen by the perspective of development, not continuous but spasmodic and paradoxical, of two complementary lines of capability: on the one side, those corresponding to knowledge, effective and processing, necessary for the dominion of the elements that threaten the survival, globally understood; on the other side, those related to the development of knowledge, based on its power but directs it from a prudential perspective, easing the understanding of the limits (of cultures, societies and political systems) and of the differences, to learn by them without renouncing to appreciate their own things. In this way the knowledge that feeds off the sources of intercultural communication is precious not only for the survival, but also for life. The perspective of a more and more complex scenario - in order to allow, from the one side, the quality of human life and, from the other side, the existence itself of the species despite the threats to the life of the planet - underlines the importance of the prudential approach proposed from the birth of bioethics (Van Potter, 1971) ad today accepted by prominent international bodies (UNESCO, 2015a; 2015b).

In the West the XX century was characterized by some questions that until now, in the XXI century, have not received an answer. *Man can survive?* asked Eric Fromm (2000) in the Fifties, as scenario of the question: *Can we live together?* formulated by Alain Touraine (2000) and, finally, *Must we bear everything?* recently asked by César Tejedor and Enrique Bonete (2006) about a very discussed topic in the intercultural field. These questions, whose answer is still open, are characterized by two essential interrogatives: one reflective, *can we choose our future?*, expressed by G. R. Urban (1973) at the beginning of that we elsewhere called “the new political century” (Martin, 2012); the other communicative: *how to live together?* Living together seems not to be, for human beings, an option among the others, neither a condemnation, but a decision and an opportunity; however, it is necessary to ask *how*, in order to transform the opportunity into decision.

2. Interculturality as intelligence to live together

Studies on neurosciences argue that the progressive construction of human knowledge allowed the birth of an intelligence stimulated in its development by the difficulties of adapting to hard contexts (Marina, 2012; Gardner, 1994). The intelligence for survival drove to a significant increase of the ability of dominion exercised through knowledge, that allowed to subjugate nature to human designs, making the human will a measure of life. Later this ability was exercised to put under control elements of anarchy and social conflict: protestation, social discussions, rebellions (Roig, 1998), using for that purpose institutions and power of the State and, thanks to the progress of technology, a new stage of the process of subjugation and conditioning of minds and behaviours began, in order to put them at the service of market and political ideologies, of rigid moral systems, of different kinds of fundamentalism and racial, cultural and religious prejudices.

Within the pre-political space characterized by the violent attitude toward difference, the fights for survival – political, cultural, religious – exacerbated the elements that, in an interested way, claim to give a sense to human actions, starting from a determinate “we” – political, cultural, religious – that denies, in the name of the protection of the group, what is different, because it is considered a threat. In the pre-political space of violence, “what is different”, as a justification of indifference, hostility or aggression (cultural, political, religious), is concretized in the different human beings that, until they will be considered a bar to be dominated for carrying out a project of a determinate “we”, will be excluded and any opportunity to be considered interlocutors will be denied. In the interpretation of the other as a threat, in their “hermeneutical absorption” by an authoritarian I, typical of a pre-political logic, any opportunity of encounter among different entities (cultures, civilizations, religions) disappears and a determinate logic of confrontation as an exercise of power prevails, based on the construction of the different as a threat and on its exclusion by a number of tools (coactive, discursive or symbolic, but always violent) directed to the real cancelation of the different (Arendt, 2006).

Within the logic of power, the reduction of the “threat” represented by the different has been presented under the form of “integration”, understood in coactive and reductive sense, actually realized by forcing the other

to uncritically adapt – *integrate* – to a closed totality (economic, ideological, religious), that considers itself as “true”, “superior” “unique” or, anyway, “unavoidable”. In this case, integrating means to submit and this questions the value that we can see in the other and the degree of compatibility considered “admissible” among habits, experiences or praxis that have a potential of confrontation with the correlative elements usually admitted inside the “we”. However, such potential of confrontation must not be understood as generator of intercultural violence (Bello Reguera, 2006); the development of initiatives like, for instance, the proposal of *communities of intercultural dialogue and argumentation* (Quintero, 2011), can pave the way to overcome the levels of the potentially violent contradiction, driving them to levels of contrariety, potentially complementary.

Terrorism and dramatic migration processes that affect several parts of the world, mainly the European countries, on the one side question the real validity of human rights and international treaties (F. Cacciatore, 2013) and, on the other side, the fragility of the integration processes and the limits of the proclaimed cooperation and solidarity relations. In Latin America history offers many examples of this logic, whose discussion is found in the present scenarios of the processes of integration among countries, as well as within countries and religions (Martin, 2016). The concept of integration, considered within the logic of power and without considering the asymmetries among countries, regions and social groups, support the juridical initiatives of the treaties on the matter and it has also fed educational and communicative programmes directed to consider its acceptance as convenient or unavoidable. There is no doubt about the importance of linking the projects of intercultural ethics to the efforts to develop an education for the Latin-American integration in a plural and critical sense (Martinez & Hernández, 2014-15). Educating to interculturality and educating to integration are two convergent processes within a critical review of the potentialities of globalization.

3. *Education and intercultural dialogue*

Education to interculturality needs to analyze the relations – both confrontational and non-confrontational – of the exchange among cultures. We

cannot demand the elimination of the conflicts, given that the diversity of life entails them as an its own conflict. It is necessary to separate conflict from violence: violence is not a necessary element of conflict, even if it can be essential in case of an inappropriate answer. The concept of intercultural conflict, read in the key of the present world, neither entails nor justifies any kind of violence. Starting from the scholars who analyzed the positive view of conflict (Galtung, 1998), it represents an opportunity to build coexistence in the stages of management, learning and transformation of conflict. As underlined by R. Salas (2011), coexistence is built to carry out harmony, an improvement of the balance that, as a process, is realized through a series of theoretical-practical interactions and is not established through the fast way of the reductionist appropriations, like several times the rationality of the West tried to do.

According to M. A. Bartolomé, within the perspective of interculturality

los seres humanos ya no poseeríamos sólo nuestra cultura de nacimiento sino que seríamos propietarios de múltiples tradiciones, a las que invocaríamos de acuerdo con el contexto interactivo coyuntural...sin embargo, esta perspectiva no debe dejar de lado los aspectos políticos y económicos de la globalización y la imposición cultural que genera, ya que lo que realmente se globaliza es Occidente. Entendida así, la interculturalidad sería sólo una nueva denominación para la Occidentalización planetaria y la destrucción de la diversidad cultural (Bartolomé, 2006).

The westernisation of the planet cannot in any way be the scenario of encounter and dialogue among cultures, first because it prevents the acknowledgement and the valorisation of non-western cultures (in the European and North American sense), rejecting what is learnt by the exchange of meanings, symbols and valorisation of cultural spaces like those of Asia (China, India, Japan) or America (maya, náhuatl, quechua, aymara). Therefore it cannot be built as a platform to stimulate agreements able to make possible the creation of an intercultural ethics. Moreover, at political level, this makes impossible to reach a global governance for a more balanced and less violent world (Berggruen & Gardeis, 2012). From a Latin-American perspective of the analysis of the history of the region's countries, of their relations and projects of integration, the intercultural approach requires to overcome the situation of colonization and neocolonization. M. P. Quintero stated:

Consideramos necesaria para una comunicación y educación intercultural en América Latina, entre las culturas criollas y las culturas fundacionales, la mediación, el 'puente' que proporciona una Teoría y práctica de la Descolonización, que incluya una epistemología, una psicología, una pedagogía y una ética de la Descolonización (Quintero, 2011, p. 36).

Education to interculturality begins with the development of mechanisms that tries to stimulate intercultural dialogue. We refer to interdisciplinary spaces and educational tools considered, as highlighted by M. P. Quintero (*ibid.*, p. 34), an universal necessity, whose importance comes from the fact that

la coexistencia de culturas diferenciadas requiere de estrategias de relación intercultural, por lo que el pluralismo cultural o multiculturalismo no es pensable sin el desarrollo de un diálogo intercultural (Bartolomé, 2006, p. 126).

To approach to the peculiarity of the intercultural dialogue as a process to establish a real mutual relations, R. Salas-Astrain (2003) summarises the orientations on the formal and contextual regulatory criteria, the interconnection of specific contexts, the starting point in the interest of the diverse subjects and communities, the priority of the conflict that can be solved, the exclusion of any element related to the pretense of mutual understanding and the resolute refusal of any recourse to violence. With regard to the regulation of the intercultural dialogue, the latter follows - as argued by Martinez and Hernández (2014-2015) – regulatory criteria derived from both formal principles and peculiarities of their context. About the intercultural communications, the same authors argue that it is “un producto inestable de la interconexión de contextos específicos” and “para poder generar un verdadero intercambio discursivo, es preciso partir de las formas argumentativas existentes históricamente de facto y no disolverlas en un modelo abstracto”, with the aim to reach a common level of discursive rationality.

The intelligence necessary to live together in the diversity is found on the basis of an approach to the processes of integration of Latin American countries that must be based on mutual dialogue, learning and enrichment, in order to promote the human development by mechanisms of intercultural communication – able to lead to the valorisation of their own things– and by

the relation with the different, understood as bioethical, intercultural and prudential fundamentals (Franco 2011). It is necessary to dialogue in order to achieve, in deliberative communities, the implementation of strategies of self-knowledge, self-valorisation and self-affirmation, organised on educative elements of decolonisation of mind and development of creative imagination in order to design and wide the horizon of the possible. These targets involve both institutions of formal education and the educative function of mass media in the creation of spaces of learning based on respect, dialogue and active tolerance for the search of shared minima. Starting from different ethnic roots, from different national stories and different encounters, the process of acknowledgement of the shared minima can put them into practice on the basis of similar historical processes and common social experiences; in Latin America the colonial period and the stages of the neo-colonial cultural emptying marked shared experiences of subjugation and of cultural learning of self-devaluation (Quintero, 2011).

4. Interculturality and integration

The different roads taken in Latin America to advance in the process of integration of peoples and cultures with significant differences, with specific encounters and historical-political processes, raised many debates about the real actors and the aims of the integration: integration of élites, without the population; integration of markets, with superficial homogenisation of cultural models. The triumph of a rationality based on efficiency but lacking the polemic imagination and the disregard for a prudential rationality directed to sustainability. In Latin-American countries acknowledgement, otherness and valorisation (Martin, 2011) have been challenges to establish effective strategies and policies of intercultural dialogue, until now widely deficient. The slow passage from multiculturalism to cultural pluralism and intercultural dialogue moved in parallel with the slow passage towards projects of integration important for the people of the region.

The confrontational experience of the arrive of European powers in American lands questioned the possibility of a community of origin as a fortress for a thought of integration. The independence wars raised the discussion about the difficult construction of a community of life that, due to

the political events, established basis of survival. This continued even later, in the neo-colonial period. The community of destination, as third element of creation of an integrating process, was built in the moment of maximum strength in the history of the Latin-American countries. As future is constructed through intercultural dialogue as processing power of present and past, it depends on the opportunities of establishing a new universalising rationality able to create an open common model, in the convergence between the value of the single experiences (with a critical work of intra-cultural valorisation) and the encounter with the different experiences (through tools of intercultural education).

The forms of coexistence have always been imagined starting from conditions that have denied them. In the history of the West, the polis imagined by Aristotle, understood as a project of possible coexistence, was impossible. Therefore we can think that nowadays the project of the intercultural coexistence is the task of the imagination, as underlined by G. Cacciatore (2015, p. 53):

El nexa imaginación/interculturalidad asume un peso específico determinante también en el ámbito de las políticas y de las éticas que están fundadas en una visión pluralista y dialógica de las civilizaciones y de las culturas.

In order to realize an actual exchange in the space of reason and rules built in the intercultural dialogue, it is necessary to break the forms of hybridisation and reciprocity creatively *imagined*: starting from the narration of cultural contexts and from an effort to translate their languages,

se constituye una actividad imaginativa capaz de reemplazar la fijeza de los principios ordenadores de una cultura con formas de contaminación, lugares de un posible futuro saber común y espacios en los que se comparten decisiones éticas y derechos fundamentales: la supervivencia, la integridad de la persona y la reducción de las situaciones de indigencia, la ampliación de las chances de actuación de las capacidades personales (ibid., p. 54).

Imagining the possible coexistence among cultures and human groups makes possible to activate the potentiality of a mutual agreement among the actors, that can become real through intercultural dialogue and represents the beginning of the intercultural ethics. The aspect of imaginative anticipation present in the dimension of a project can feed the space of open-

ing to knowledge, valorisation and solidarity in the processes of integration. According to G. Cacciatore, the role of the ethical and political imagination is essential to approach the problems of integration of the Latin-America countries:

Es justamente el aspecto simbólico-imaginativo lo que puede dar mayor fuerza a una declinación de la interculturalidad como espacio que hoy no se puede dejar de privilegiar si se quiere propiciar el diálogo y el encuentro de culturas e identidades (ibid., p. 57).

A philosophy of interculturality seems to be requested by ideas and praxis of hybridization and encounter. The experiences of encounter, starting from the horizon of the fights and of the critical conscience that imagines the possible transformation of the social and political reality, can be the starting point to build a new form of universal rationality

que no pretenda incorporar y cancelar las diferencias culturales. De esta forma se torna posible hablar de una verdadera 'tercera vía' respecto del indigenismo utópico mitológico y de la lógica mercantil y homologante de la globalización neoliberal (ibid. p. 66).

The basic assumption of the Latin-American integration processes can be based on a new kind of universalism:

Cada individuo y cada grupo puede y debe tener garantizado su derecho a vivir y a desarrollar su identidad, pero también a buscar, en el diálogo intercultural la mezcla de pertenencias con instrumentos inéditos de hibridación lingüística y cognoscitiva, pero también con la fuerza de la imaginación creadora (ibid., p. 67).

Within this new kind of universality – that, following the criticism of M. Beuchot (1999), cannot be univocal but only analogical – the way to prudential rationality is open. It claims the anticipative ability of imagination and in it there is the bioethical horizon of a valorisation of the life (integrity of life, right to political life, access to goods and information, right to hospitality and to an harmonic ecology) (Martin, 2014) as a practice of diversity and exercise of harmonization.

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