

INTERCULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF PHILOSOPHY
AND RECOGNITION REPORT IN
RAUL FORNET-BETANCOURT. A RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF
GLOBALIZATION AND NEOLIBERALISM

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Abstract

The political recognition of every cultural and every identity/different in a democratic and inclusive sense, requires the practice of intercultural dialogue, and therefore of the rethinking of the relationship between cultures: a dia-logic, as an instrument, but also as a terrain, of identity recognition that, constitutively implying "facing the other", and translates into putting in place a dialogic experience. Moreover, every question related to recognition implies an "unavoidable disimmetry", peculiar specificity of every relationship with others different from us. This proposal intends to show how intercultural philosophy, starting from the elaboration of the Cuban philosopher Raul Fornet-Betancourt, is first of all a search for new paradigms of thought, starting from the comparison and conflict of cultures, to try to understand if it is a question of dialogue / confrontation or conflict, and this touches the practical-political sphere and therefore also an ethical option. And the search for a new relationship between philosophy, politics and interculturality can meet precisely in the assumption of the task of overcoming the situation of mere fragmentation of cultural universes, to fulfill instead that of building new interidentity and transcultural relations, as a response to the contemporary challenges of neoliberalism, Western capitalism and globalization.

Keywords: dialogue, identity, interculturality, politics, globalization

1.INTRODUCTION: WHAT PHILOSOPHY FOR LATIN AMERICA?

The political recognition of every cultural identity and every identity/different in a democratic and inclusive sense, requires the practice of intercultural dialogue, and therefore of the rethinking of the relationship between cultures: a dia-logic, as an instrument, but also as a terrain of identity recognition that, constitutively implying "facing the other", translates into putting in place a dialogic experience of renewal of society and humanity. Moreover, every question related to recognition implies an "unavoidable disimmetry", peculiar specificity of every relationship with others different from us. The philosophy of interculturality promulgates a debordering process of the cultures to go beyond the borders of globalization homogeneity based on consumerism and profit, towards a humanity of different and mutually enriching⁴⁹.

The starting point of Raul Fornet-Betancourt's transformation of philosophy in an intercultural direction is the concept of culture, understood as the realm of freedom, creativity and fulfillment of every human being. The right to material necessities and economic development is the precondition for the free development, liberation and realization of every culture, especially poor cultures.

My proposal intends to show how intercultural philosophy, starting from the elaboration of the Cuban philosopher, is first of all a search for new paradigms of thought, to begin with the comparison and conflict of cultures, to try to understand whether it is a matter of dialogue / confrontation or conflict,

⁴⁹ See E. Demenchonok (edited by), *Intercultural Dialogue. In Search of Harmony in Diversity*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge, 2014.

and if this reaches the practical-political sphere and, consequently, also an ethical choice. And the search for a new relationship between philosophy, politics and interculturality can meet precisely in the assumption of the task of overcoming the situation of mere fragmentation of cultural universes, to fulfill instead that of building new interidentity and transcultural relations, as a response to the contemporary challenges of neoliberalism, Western capitalism and globalization.

First, Fornet-Betancourt addresses the problem of Latin American culture, defining it as a complex mosaic of many peoples and the trade of many other traditions, and invites us to discover Latin America as an original land by virtue of this plurality⁵⁰. Therefore, he argues that Latin America expresses its own philosophy and, at the same time, also warns that, if one wants to formulate a new intercultural and philosophical transformation, one must know the ideas of the authors who made possible the development of thought that leads to its critical reconstruction⁵¹. For example, quoting what José Martí wrote, who defined "Our America" as the utopia of a historical-social order that he wished to see realized in Latin societies, encouraged the revisiting of Ibero-American cultural history, a theme of great relevance and importance for intercultural philosophy⁵².

In Fornet-Betancourt there is a belief that philosophy, which originated in Greece, extended to Latin America where it was reworked in an original way through, but also beyond, European philosophical mediation. On the basis of these assumptions, it is considered essential, as the first step of this rereading, to focus on theoretical-methodological assumptions, in order to detach the Ibero-American event from Europeanism, bringing to light the particularities of a Latin American philosophy, and the idea of its transformation in an intercultural sense⁵³.

Our author, in his essay *Towards a Latin American intercultural philosophy*, writes about the need for a methodological change, referring to a change in the vision of the indigenous and African American universe, recognizing them as active subjects and interpreters of their world⁵⁴.

What interests the Cuban philosopher is to establish a true dialogue between the peoples of Latin America and other peoples through an authentic dialogue and a philosophy capable of achieving this in an intercultural way. He does not want a cultural synthesis, but cultures that share their diversity to intertwine and dialogue with each other, without the need to abandon their origins and the nature of their traditions, symbols, rituals, magic, episteme. In short, we must have a philosophy for our time,

⁵⁰ The term "Latin American philosophy" refers to a philosophical project that proposes a contextualization of philosophical reflection that arose and developed in the Latin American context, referring to the wide set of philosophical currents spread in the different countries of Latin America. It is the project of a philosophy that was born in Latin America and that turns its reflection to its most peculiar problems and situations.

⁵¹ The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* write like this: "Latin American philosophy is philosophy produced in Latin America or philosophy produced by persons of Latin American ancestry who reside outside of Latin America. It is typically taken to exclude philosophy produced in non-Iberian former colonies, with the occasional exception of former French colonies in the Caribbean. Other names have also been used to refer to the whole or part of Latin American philosophy, including Spanish American, Hispanic American, Iberoamerican, and Latino/a philosophy. The first two refer specifically to the philosophy of former Spanish colonies, the third to that of former Iberian colonies, and the fourth to the philosophy produced in the United States by descendants of Latin Americans. Latin American philosophy is usually taken to have originated around 1550, when Spanish conquerors founded the first schools in Latin America and began to teach and publish philosophical treatises. Recently, there has been an effort on the part of historians to include pre-Columbian thought in Latin American philosophy, although the pre-Columbian texts cited are often fragmentary and religious in tone and intention. In terms of traditions, style, and influence, post-Columbian Latin American philosophy is part of the Western philosophical tradition. Indeed, philosophical discussions in Latin America have been and continue to be dominated by European philosophical influences. Even those Latin American philosophers who have endeavored to develop original theories have frequently framed their own contributions in the terms of European thinkers. Partly in response to this phenomenon, there has arisen a large body of literature concerned with the identity, authenticity, and originality of Latin American philosophy".

⁵² See, R. Fornet-Betancourt *Verso una filosofia interculturale latinoamericana*, Costarica: DEI, 1994, p. 39. See also, P. Guadarrama González, *Filosofía Política: Umanesimo in America Latina*, Guida, Napoli, 2018.

⁵³ See, E. Mendieta, (edited by), *Latin America Philosophy. Current, Issues, Debates*, Indian University Press, Bloomington, 2003.

⁵⁴ About this point, P. Colonnello, (edited by), *Filosofia e politica in America Latina*, Armando Ed., Roma, 2005.

contextual, capable of remaining in tradition but also of looking at the new emergencies and needs of culture and society.

2. INTERCULTURAL TRANSFORMATION FOR A “CONTEXTUAL” PHILOSOPHY

A key point to achieve this goal of an intercultural philosophy is connected to the need to relearn to think⁵⁵ and do philosophy for our time, that is, a contextual philosophy for contemporary reality .

According to Fornet-Betancourt, learning to think is learning to understand and present one's own word always respectful of another, it is to dissociate oneself from cultural relativism to place oneself in a perspective of cultural rationalism⁵⁶.

With this new way of thinking, the relationship between Subject-Object would be replaced by a dialectical-dialogical movement, based on the respectability that occurs in the meeting of voices in intercultural dialogue and that goes beyond the process between the knowing subject and the knowable object, that is, it is not satisfied with knowing an object, but wants to know the other subject as equal and different.

We are faced with a new learning of thought and a new way of communication between the subjects, which leads to a new way of practicing philosophy. In other words, this new intercultural philosophy is seen as the meeting of flexible philosophical theories both in their cultural heritage and in their current perspectives. In this way, it will be possible to overcome the ethnocentrism and cultural reductionism of globalization.

Moreover, in the context of contemporary philosophical investigation of Latin American thought, more and more attention is devoted to the reception of the intercultural paradigm by the philosophy of liberation, or, more generally, to what has been defined as "giro intercultural de la filosofía latinoamericana"⁵⁷.

In particular, it is interesting to consider those passages in Fornet-Betancourt's work where it is possible to observe more clearly the ways in which intercultural and Latin American philosophy intertwine. In this way, the two-way character of this mixture will be highlighted, which can be described both in terms of an "intercultural transformation" of Latin American philosophy⁵⁸, as well as in those of a Latin American philosophy as a "model" for an intercultural philosophy.

In order to identify a red thread capable of making us follow this trajectory of investigation, it is interesting to turn our attention to the binomial "inculturación/transformación" as it appears in some works by Fornet-Betancourt. If the term "transformación" immediately brings to mind his work *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*, the term "inculturación" makes us think, through a whole series of passages, of that movement of "reabsorción de la circunstancia" which, at least from two directions, that is from José Ortega y Gasset, passing through José Gaos, and from Juan Bautista Alberdi and José Martí, it will be reinterpreted and taken as a program of Latin American philosophy⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ R. Fornet-Betancourt *Verso una filosofía intercultural latinoamericana*, cit., p. 51.

⁵⁶ Ivi, p. 55.

⁵⁷ R. Fornet-Betancourt (a cura di), *Crítica intercultural de la filosofía latinoamericana actual*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 2004, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁸ The legacy of Latin American philosophy at the beginning of the twenty-first century underwent a particular transformation by three thinkers: the Cuban Raúl Fornet Betancourt, the Ecuadorian Bolívar Echeverría and the Colombian Santiago Castro-Gómez. See also, G. Hurtado, *Balance y perspectivas de la filosofía latinoamericana* ÉNDOXA Series Filosóficas, n. 12, 2000, UNAM, México, pp. 359-378.

⁵⁹ Acculturation, inculturation and interculturality are social projects and practices that involve a set of concepts that remain implicit in the processes of formation of a group, in the constitution of a nation or a larger society. In this essay the three categories represent models of intervention or social relationship between human groups, which for simplification I will call cultures. These groups can be political, religious, economic, sexual, ethnic, racial, etc. Here we emphasize, in a general way, what would be a kind of general crossroads of social "projects", where conceptions, interests and goals of those who interact intervene, while they participate in the same process of exchange based on their concrete practices. See, L. Mujica Bermúdez, *Aculturación, inculturación e interculturalidad. Los supuestos en las relaciones entre "unos" y "otros"*, in "Revista del a Biblioteca Nacional del Perú", Fénix 43-44 (2001-2002), pp. 55-78.

Through this binomial it is possible to access one of the paths in which the Latin American intercultural philosophy is expressed⁶⁰. And the Fornetian intercultural proposal is to be understood, essentially, as a programmatic proposal for the transformation of what we generally refer to as "philosophy" - and therefore not simply in its academic meaning, but rather assumed in the broader sense of philosophical praxis, of the exercise of thought. But at this point, if we hypothesize a binomial "inculturación/transformación", then it might be appropriate to ask: how does the "reabsorption of the circumstance" connect with the need for a transformation of philosophizing? There is no shortage of doubts in this regard⁶¹.

Faced with an increasingly conflictual and discriminating world, there is a need of a social and political relationality that allows philosophy to be removed from the instruments of power and domination which one culture uses to subjugate others, ignoring a present where reality is increasingly plural and different, in which all human beings have the right to a mutual recognition which cannot be denied or taken away from them. It is therefore a question of inaugurating new relationships between the subjects and elaborating a reflection on the new dimension of philosophical discourse in the creation of intercultural dialogue, oriented towards new open and public spaces for better worlds and realities, in an attempt to provide better communication, tolerance and human rights between people.

In this sense, the recognition of otherness is sought on the basis of a historical practice that accounts for the particular truths of each cultural universe and that in turn can legitimize the subjectivities that give rise to the encounter between cultures. The understanding with any other culture, in order to carry out a communicative process, starts from the acceptance of the propositions-language and symbols of all cultures, applying an interdisciplinary and intercultural methodology.

The above allows us to assume philosophy as a system of relations whose meaning results more from differences than from analogies, and in this case the Latin-Americanist perspective with which this philosophy is understood and interpreted allows us to situate the proposal of interculturality within the theses of the philosophy of liberation of Latin America⁶².

It is quite clear that a problem arises along the way of this process, because the development of this philosophy implies a break with the traditionally dominant mode of Western European philosophy towards Latin American thought.

Indeed, this development marks the end of the era in which European philosophy served as a subject seeking in Latin America simply the echo of the unfolding of its own voice. The "process of inculturation", freeing philosophy in view of cultural polyphony marks the beginning of a new relationship between European and Latin American philosophy.

This opens the perspective of an intercultural dialogue supported by free subjects with equal rights, and the concept of inculturation can appear as a relic of a hegemonic past, linked to the canons of a good part of the Western philosophical tradition.

This, according to Fornet-Betancourt, means that the Western philosophy that has prevailed until today does not respond to the needs of contemporary man and therefore must be transformed in an intercultural sense⁶³.

⁶⁰ See, R. Fornet-Betancourt, *Trasformazione interculturale della filosofia*, cit., pp. 55-56.

⁶¹ Ivi, pp. 57-62.

⁶² See, E. Dussel, *Filosofía de la Liberación*, Editorial Docencia, Buenos Aires, 2013.

⁶³ Fornet-Betancourt refers, for example, to the fact that the "critical theory of society", or first "Frankfurt School", movement of thought that at the beginning of the decades 1930-1940 was consolidating in Europe, in its approach does not overcome the dominant Europeanism of our history, which only modified the Marxist model and gave preference to monocultural rationality; while the second Frankfurt School is more flexible and seems to allow cultural diversity. "Critical theory" was one of the main currents of "Western Marxism", represented by a group of intellectuals who from the mid-20s, and in particular after the Second World War, developed critical positions towards Stalinism and social democracy. Their ideas had great diffusion and credit in universities in Europe and Latin America, particularly in the 60s and 70s, when their books were published in hundreds of thousands of copies. The topics of interest for Latin American philosophy were the critique of the capitalist system, the market, the exploitation and blindness of the masses, as Marcuse wrote.

3. DECONSTRUCTING TO RECONSTRUCT A NEW PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: THE TASK OF *RECAPACITATION*

The debates on these issues ultimately range from the problem of cultural identity to the more specific problem of the possibility of a philosophy of liberation that responds to the real problems and needs of the Latin American peoples. Betancourt is looking for a new type of thinking capable of realizing, accepting and letting itself be "touched" by the concrete complexity of the real human condition. This situation of concrete closeness is the context that characterizes our time and that the process of globalization has helped to exacerbate.

It then becomes a question of survival to find a different way of relating that can face the challenges arising from the actuality of the historical present.

Philosophy, transforming itself into Intercultural, that is, choosing to take into consideration the concrete historical context of each individual culture, becomes philosophy for our time, as first of all able to "look in the face" and "recognizes" situationality as real. It is clear how a real "leap" of awareness is required of the human being:

«Intercultural philosophy begins to be a way of doing philosophy that becomes aware of the rootedness and situationality of thought (and life) as a condition of possibility to exercise in a universal way. Its being contextual does not close it to communication or to the search for universality, but puts it on the notice that the search for universality must follow different paths from those traced by an abstract and formal conceptualization. And for this reason it is necessary to show that true universality requires the historical contextuality of human life in all its plurality because it originates and develops through contextual processes of interchange and common understanding. In this way intercultural philosophy, as a form of contextual philosophy, proposes itself as the expression of a philosophy that [...] considers the assumption of contextual responsibility as a necessary condition for opening up to a dialogue with diversity in which, overcoming tautological attitudes or the willingness to listen to the Other only the resonance produced by its own word, learns to share differences and solidarize with them in the cultural and bodily flesh of the other, that is, learns to be universal by sharing contextuality"⁶⁴.

What Raul Fonet-Betancourt proposes is a real "struggle", fought through the philosophical weapon of resistance in dialogue, to the globalized vision of the world, that is, to the way of knowing that belongs to that kind of man who has produced, and functionally maintains, globalization.

This can only happen through a "questioning" which means deciding to enter in the same way into a relationship with Otherness (others) as with Identity (oneself), and this relationship can only be conveyed by a specific form of dialogue that in addition to saying, is sincerely willing to listen and let express.

Raul Fonet-Betancourt speaks of reaction to old anthropological categories, for a new process of anthropological learning organized in two specific moments: a first *critical* or *deconstructive* moment, and a second proactive or intercultural moment.

What does he mean by "deconstruction"? Making a philosophy liberating from prejudices and one-sided readings. Deconstruction also understood as cultural disobedience toward the asymmetries derived from globalization, colonialism, and economic capitalism. This starts from a universalizable ethical choice that is the choice in favor of the oppressed peoples in all cultural universes. It is the practice of a hermeneutic attitude that starts from the assumption that human finiteness requires renouncing the tendency, peculiar to every culture, to sacralize and absolutize what is one's own, stimulating instead the habit of interchange and difference.

Three important operations belong to the *deconstructive* moment:

1. Review of anthropological theory;
2. Deconstruction of individualism;
3. Criticism of anthropocentrism.

Three more operations also belong to the intercultural- reconstructive moment :

⁶⁴ R. Fonet-Betancourt. cit., pp. 34-35.

1. the task of 'recapitación';
2. intercultural learning;
3. inter- and intra-cultural dialogue.

It is important to underline that the type of man that the author intends to demolish, and then restructure, is the one formed by the teachings of capitalist modernity: a human being projected towards individualism, possession and domination, robbed of the fullness of his abilities and reduced to the inability to coexist, and therefore to survive:

«This anthropological learning process would imply [...] First, the revision of anthropological theory that expands with secularized European modernity and that leads to the fact that the human being, losing all sense of contingency and contextuality — that is, of measure, relationship and proportion — it conceives itself as the exclusive agent subject of an enterprise of increasing total usurpation, whose logic of domination produces not only exclusion and oppression but also the massive destruction of every sphere of reality”⁶⁵.

It is therefore essential to dwell on what Raul Fonet-Betancourt calls the task of "recapitación". The Spanish term has two important meanings:

1. Rethink, that is, really reconsider what man is.
2. To enable to do: "[...] acquire new human skills to be able to better human practices⁶⁶."

Of equal importance is also the operation of inter- and intra-cultural dialogue. The encounter with cultural plurality involves a reflection on one's own identity, favoring intra-cultural dialogue.

This allows every culture to be able to free itself from deforming tendencies and alienating processes that prevent it from relating sincerely with itself and with other realities. Intra-cultural dialogue is a very important act that favors the demolition of the "old" by creating "space" for the reconstruction of the "new".

In summary, among the deforming tendencies Raul Fonet-Betancourt includes:

- Ethnocentrism
- Traditionalism
- Culturalism
- Elitism
- Institutionalism
- Folklore
- Coherentism

The alienating processes are:

- Modernism
- Commercialism
- Civilism
- Armamentism

In this way it is possible to have an awareness on the part of humankind that needs to re-propose to itself the classic existential questions concerning the meaning that humanity could have if it engages in a change and overcoming, a *recapitación*, of the monocultural and one-dimensional anthropology generated by capitalism and the neoliberal design of the world.

4.CONCLUSION: WHAT CULTURE DO WE WANT FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE GLOBAL WORLD?

Intercultural philosophy calls for solidarity in an increasingly individualized world to put into practice the phrase of the indigenous people of Chiapas: "a world in which many worlds adapt".

But the cultural polycentrism of today's complex societies has definitively undermined the comparative model of cultures: there is no point in comparing very different systems of thought with inadequate hermeneutical criteria.

⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 39.

⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 40.

Therefore, comparing the discursive rationality of a monological philosophy with the dialogical philosophy that we want and need, there is the urgency of a philosophical thought that works and acts starting from a philosophical praxis that must contribute to unveiling the incompatibilities between human contexts and putting them in dialogue, if we want to understand the historical situations that determine them.

The central question, therefore, is: what culture? What culture do I want for myself and for each other? What cultural identity to grow in universality?

To respond, according to Fernet-Betancourt, philosophy will have to overcome monocultural style, characterized by a monological rationality, which always tends to cancel the dialogical openness of reason with the otherness that serves as its foundation⁶⁷.

This new philosophy must be prone to creativity and go beyond any purely rational act; it must recognize cultural identity in order to participate in universalizing and creating solidarity among all human beings, in dialogue with other traditions and in sharing humanity's different ways of thinking.

This is the challenge of the cross-cultural transformation philosophy. A challenge that we can no longer ignore.

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