

Multiculturalism, New Apartheids and Forms of Resistance¹

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Abstract

The term multiculturalism seems positive at first sight; apartheid is clearly a negative term, and the word resistance is ambivalent, meaning both passivity as well as a certain type of power exercise. In this paper I shall explore, first, the peculiar way in which the foregoing categories are articulated within the frame of globalization. Secondly, I shall analyze the proposal, made by artists and philosophers, of using Latin American artistic and aesthetic sensibility as a form of entering into the global scene and thus overcoming the apartheid resulting from a certain form of understanding and practicing multiculturalism. Finally, I pose a skeptical and critical point of view in order to continue exploring ways to cope with globalization and multiculturalism by stressing our own cultural resources.

“Latin America, in spite of its apparent indolence, of its affection for joy, of its petulance, its noisy popular parties, is always suffering, profoundly and continuously, in front of the current World, just as it suffered before in the past World. It is also the Continent of sadness” Ferdinand Braudel.

The term multiculturalism seems positive at first glance. Apartheid is clearly a negative term. And the word resistance is ambivalent, meaning both passivity and a certain form of power exercise. In this paper I will discuss first, the obscure side of multiculturalism, which can lead to new forms of apartheid in the peculiar way in which those categories are articulated within the frame of current globalization. Secondly, I shall analyze the proposal of Latin American artists and philosophers who claim that many of our cultural products and aesthetic sensibility is the way in which Latin America is entering into the global scene, and thus can be a form of surpassing other political and economic problems. Finally, I will pose a skeptical and critical point of view regarding such claim, in order to continue exploring ways to cope with the

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consequences of globalization, which underdeveloped countries suffer, from our culture and with our own material and intellectual resources.

Multiculturalism is a concept that, at first sight, shows a sweet face, since it is generally understood as the “ideal, policy or reality that emphasizes the unique characteristics of different cultures in the world.”² In this sense, its aim is to promote understanding and approximation among cultures, as well as respect to the difference. On the contrary, the term apartheid is immediately negative, while the word resistance is ambiguous, for it indicates either some kind of passiveness, or various forms of power exercise, ranging from civil disobedience to terrorism.

In this paper, I shall first discuss a critical approach to the peculiar form in which such three phenomena are articulated within the frame of globalization and how they negatively affect developing countries, specifically, in what has been called the new apartheid. Secondly, I will offer a brief description of the approach of some Latin American intellectuals who claim that Latin American sensibility, expressed in its artistic manifestations, is a dignified way of entering in the global scene, surpassing at the same time the apartheid and backwardness, in which our countries have remained for centuries. Finally, I will analyze such proposals from a critical perspective, in order to evaluate their content and be able to explore new paths that would lead to a more effective way of suppressing the apartheid from other forms of resistance, incorporating, however, elements from the proposals.

Multiculturalism

A brief genealogy of multiculturalism will help us understand its meaning in a broader sense. Events such as European Modernity, the discovery of America, the rise of capitalism, the protestant Reformation and colonialism, have been crucial in such history. When America appeared in the European horizon it provoked a great impact in the economy, politics and thought of what we now know as Modernity, but, most of all, the brutal confrontation of so many different cultures, began the process we now understand as multiculturalism.

Nonetheless, this was not the first time in history when events of that nature had taken place, although through the perspective of Western Modernity it may seem that way. The expansion of cultivable lands, the extraction of gold and silver, the new edible products, the labor force of Indians and Black people of the New Continent, together with the scientific and technical advances of Renaissance, provided Europe with great advantage over its then competitors such as the Islamic World, China and Hindustan.

But such advantage is quite new. By recent discoveries we have learned that Chinese fleets had reached American land in 1421, sixty-one years before Christopher Columbus. However, China's maritime projects were cancelled, so this Empire remained in a disadvantageous position in front of Europe. Among the causes for such cancellation were internal rebellions, a terrible economic crisis and the fall and dead of

² *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*

Shu Di³, first Emperor of the Ming Dynasty and orchestrator of the old world colonization project.

China retraction opened European market towards America and Asia, thus contributing to the “original accumulation of capital”, an important factor in the development of capitalism, as Marx pointed out. Consequently, the rise of the west is founded, on the one hand, in the mercantile and territorial expansion, and on the other, in the fall of the Far East. The cultural movement inherent to what is known as the “first modernity”, from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century, articulates the mercantile and territorial expansion in a scientific and philosophical system of thought that legitimates the colonization process of various European countries, such as Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, France and Holland.

An important matter for the Modern system of thought was the “civilizing” mission that Europe had to carry out with colonized peoples. The concept of “Modern Reason”, excluded from the progressive project, all those peoples other than European cultures, the so called by Hegel “peoples without history”.

Thus, European modern, dominant values and criteria, such as faith in reason, scientific and technical progress, were imposed over the values of all other cultures, deemed by Europe as decadent. Such different cultures were measured with the same standards, from a pretended universality, which was nothing but Europe’s own values and criteria. Consequently, thanks to their ideological and military superiority, Europe was able to impose its domain.

The Twentieth Century makes its entrance in a devastating scenario: The painful wars experienced by Europe, the Asian and American revolutions, revolts and independent movements, conflicts in the Far and Middle East, hunger and misery of broad sectors of the world population, arose the need for new paradigms of interpretation. Among those who created new paradigms were, from the philosophical discourse, the members of the Frankfurt Institute, structuralists and existencialists, to mention only a few. But from the world of science and arts also emerged new approaches with thinkers such as Kuhn, Feyerabend, Picasso, Cassals, the Latin American novelistic boom, the Mexican muralists and so many others impossible to list here.

³ Shu Di (1360-1424), son of Shu Yuanzhang, peasant and general of the rebel movement to force out the Mongols who had governed China since 1279. After escaping from a conspiracy to kill him, Shu Di became Emperor in 1402, and carried out spectacular works, such as the reconstruction of the Forbidden City and the great wall. He can be also considered as the first great colonizer, since he sent expeditions to the east of China, through the silk route in Asia and built an enormous fleet that arrived as far as Africa and America.

Social movements and the resulting or inspiring theoretical reactions produce new language games and concepts with which we interpret and evaluate situations, persons and things. Hence, during the Twentieth Century new subject matters such as the economical, political and cultural backwardness, the respect to cultural differences and human rights emerged as a necessity for better understanding and living. And it was in Canada, when during the sixties the word multiculturalism (cultural pluralism) appeared for the first time, to cope with the social and cultural problems associated with the growing process of immigration. Later on it was used to pose problems about the fact that in most countries various cultures, with specific and particular distinctive features, cohabitate in one same territory and live under the same laws.

The new apartheid

So, how can multiculturalism become a new form of apartheid? How can this be possible when there is a proliferation of discourses that propitiate cultural pluralism, respect to human rights, democracy and so on, developed by individuals and groups from many social, political and economic spheres? Are these people honest or do they hide other purposes? Maybe their intentions are honest, but still a skeptical doubt can sometimes open our eyes and minds to other realms, perhaps concealed to the naïve intellectual. Following Michel Foucault, I should say that to me, the real function of the kind of philosophy I am interested in is to detect new forms of dominance where they remain masked under legitimized discourses and social practices. To unmask such discourses and practices we must use the right theoretical tools, one of which is a skeptical approach taken from the masters of suspicion, as Paul Ricoeur calls them, Marx, Nietzsche and Foucault⁴. From this perspective, one could find intentions or functions, that for the time being I would like to refer to as “hypothetically”, hidden in the concept of multiculturalism:

1. Multiculturalism may turn out to be a way of objectifying a “strange” culture, the so-called “Other”, when such culture is taken as an object of study (subject matter), conversation, compassion, folkloric curiosity or tourist attraction.
2. Multiculturalism may become a new form of domination. Roberto Morales, a keen Guatemalan thinker suggests that multiculturalism is a covered strategy to politically divide cultures or peoples who seem potentially dangerous, or which can be threatening to well-established interests and order of things. As Morales points out: “In the ‘politically correct’ jargon, there are no problems connected to networks of structural causes and effects, but isolated “issues” seem to spring by means of spontaneous generation. In this form the political function of multiculturalism is achieved: to magnify the symptom in order to hide sickness. And also the slogan which expresses the strategic objective of multiculturalism: ‘divide (and disperse), and thou shall win’”.

⁴ For Ricoeur the third one is Freud, whom I substitute with Foucault.

3. New apartheid. The political division of peoples that should stick together may result in some sort of apartheid, when such peoples remain isolated from each other, thus losing the required strength to struggle as a whole. As one can see, if on the one hand we must recognize and respect cultural differences, on the other, overstressing such difference might turn out in isolation.

So we must think if actions taken to include marginal cultures in a positive way in the global scenario are the right strategies, or if we are supporting the same problems we are trying to solve. So, without disregarding or minimizing the problem of two great cultures confronting each other, such as, Mexico against America, America against the Islamic World, East against West, North against South, and so on, we must look at our culture to determine if the enemy is inside, or if we are promoting apartheid precisely there where we intend to eradicate them.

Forms of Resistance

Contemporary globalization is closely linked to multiculturalism, since it shows a double face: on the one hand it is a form of production in which various countries intervene; on the other, it refers to an exchange of cultural products. Its positive side stresses cultural interchange, thanks to the development of communication and transportation means. It also strengthens economic and cultural exchange, because of the various countries involved in the production process. Its negative aspect favors exploitation and cultural penetration for hegemonic purposes.

Thus, from such processes conflicts arise: the economic need to enter into the World market without being subsumed by stronger economies, on the one hand and the cultural need to enter into the international scenario, keeping each culture's own characteristics, on the other. Facing this double problematic, some resistance focuses appear with the purpose of preserving the autonomy and authenticity of peoples, without being left-out from the benefits of globalization.⁵

Let us discuss now some Latin American proposals. William Ospina, a Colombian poet and novelist relates an anecdote: "Some time ago, in Paris, while being questioned by the press on how is Latin America defending itself from the cultural invasion of our times, Gabriel García Márquez answered that he did not feel that we were being invaded, but, on the contrary, that we, Latin-Americans, are the ones who are culturally invading the world. He added that it was outstanding the way in which literature, fine arts, music, arts and crafts, costumes and gastronomy of our America were opening its space in contemporary world."

⁵ Hegemonic and dominant groups react against activities of groups aimed to defend their autonomy. Within the frame of international law, such reactions take place as round tables and other discussion spaces to eliminate any type of "turmoil".

In fact, our literature is as good, and sometimes better, than any other in the world. Novelists from the boom generation are more than the best representatives and speakers of Amerindian cultures, and they beautifully express the “marvelously real” –as the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier used to call it— of our land. Our arts and crafts are highly appreciated and our gastronomy is increasingly accepted in many countries. As far as philosophy is concerned, liberating discourses are being spread throughout the world, placing Latin America in the philosophical discussion of many international forums. One subject matter common to most of these discourses is the role of victim suffered by our people, the historical, political and economical causes, and the means to subvert such reality.

But, must we place our hopes of surpassing the underdevelopment and misery in which most of the peoples from Latin America live, in those cultural expressions? This is García Márquez and Ospina’s⁶ hope and project, which I, of course, share. Nonetheless, I find it insufficient, because 30 or 40 years have elapsed since the Latin American Boom, and we have not seen any positive consequences yet. Should we then regard ourselves always as “victims”, like some Latin American philosophers think? I would argue that, in fact, there have been many historical moments in which Latin American peoples have been in a disadvantageous position, but that does not mean we are completely defenseless, which is the strong sense of the term “victim”.

So far, the tangible result is that many Latin American intellectuals, social workers and businessmen are enjoying the fruits of exploiting such discourses. And meanwhile the “Profound Mexico”, as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla called it, is still there, with its poor, ignorant and marginated peasants, indigenous groups and working classes; it’s exploited and battered women and children.

As I pointed out before, facing such scenario one is urged to ask, where are those authentic and effective forms of resistance, which do not end up producing the opposite of the desired effect or beneficiating a few at the expense of the most? According to Michel Foucault’s genealogical approach we could answer that such resistance struggle

⁶ “The Twentieth Century was the one in which Latin America passed from invisibility and remoteness to being the center of the dramas of contemporary World, but also the center of its spiritual adventures. Everybody is aware that our current presence in the international realm is profoundly marked by the difficulties attached to our reality, by the persistent of very ancient problems and by the emergence of very modern problems. Everyone is aware of the existence of drug traffic, terrorism, political and economical exiles. But we must not allow those facts to eclipse or annul the other great truth, the one of vigor and the growing actuality of our cultures, the way in which we are reinterpreting the tradition of the West and the unique flavor of our creations. [...] It is impossible to think the Twentieth Century literature without thinking, among others, in Jorge Luis Borges, Joao Guimaraes Rosa, Pablo Neruda, Juan Rulfo, or Gabriel García Márquez. Each one of them does not only represent a language, but represents, within the heart of such language, the expression of a region, of a sensibility, one of the irreplaceable faces of this kind of Latin Planet [...] Latin America has entered in equal terms in dialogue with the World in the field of culture. Maybe it won’t be long until such cultural exchange also becomes a real political and economical exchange and into something much more important and urgent: a dialogue in equal conditions regarding the path of human civilization.” W. Ospina, *Mundo Latino*. Ospina sees the Latin American problems as if they were the two faces of God Janus: drug traffic, terrorism, political exiles on one face and the vigor and growing actuality of our cultures as the other. I think that if, in fact, they are two aspects of one same society, they are not polarized, but they must be necessarily deem and deal analytically as parts of a whole.

may take place in two fronts: one which springs from the peoples themselves, and other from the groups of intellectuals⁷. So my suggestion is that we should try to take a more aggressive position and, making use of both our artistic and philosophical patrimony, as our artists and philosophers recommend, start fighting to gain our place in the global world. Finally, I would like to end up outlining three possible paths to overcome the three forms of apartheid aforementioned:

1. Against the objectification of different cultures: a) Restrict the use of terms such as “the Other”. B) Avoid determining the needs of others. C) Do not become spokesmen or intermediaries of cultural struggles unless we make them our own. Does this mean we must become passive? No, but as Foucault says: “fight against forms of power there where it is at the same time the object and instrument in the order of ‘knowledge’, ‘truth’, ‘conscience’, ‘discourse’”.⁸

Let us take as an example the demands of the EZLN, developed during their first years of struggle: “Antonio dreams that the land he Works belongs to him, he dreams that his sweat is paid with justice and truth, he dreams that there are schools to cure ignorance and medicine to scare away death, he dreams that his house is lighted and his table is full, he dreams that his land is free and that it is the reason of his peoples to govern and be governed”. Sub Commander Marcos, *La palabra de los armados de verdad y fuego*. We cannot surely know up to what point Antonio’s dreams represent the dreams of the Chiapas Indigenous communities, or whether they were imposed or influenced by Marcos. But at the eyes of the modern world, those seem like just and normal dreams for everyone.

Another issue is the one concerning change and tradition. Who is to decide what should change and what should remain? Obviously, the native communities themselves should resolve such issues, and it is for sure they will not do so without conflict, as any other group. Do we have the right to demand Islamic women to take off their veil?

2. In front of explicit or implicit strategies to divide. As in the forgoing point, we must be the vehicle to propitiate, issues proposed by the cultures, to organize workshops in order to provide instruments of analysis, procedures for dialogue, language lessons for those who do not speak Spanish, etc.

3. Facing the concealing: review the way in which the term multiculturalism is being used, having in mind that scientific and philosophical concepts or categories are not neutral or naïve, but that they fulfill political functions, which must be analyzed.

⁷ This is not the case, as Marx suggested a century ago, that revolution would be carried out with the head of intellectuals and the hart of proletarians.

⁸ “Los intelectuales y el poder”, in: *Microfísica del poder* p. 79.

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