A Different Philosophy: The Tojolabal Thought

Diego Morollón Del Río

Postgraduate student of Latin-American Studies (PhD) in National Autonomous University of Mexico

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Abstract

In this article we will expose an intention to think outside of the capitalist thinking. And we will do that through the tojolabal thinking, a community in the south of Mexico that has a different philosophical view. The argument is that these communities have a different language roots, thus an ideological position that tends not to the West philosophy. We will compare the language of the tojolabals with the Indo-European roots. The text’s sources are the philosopher Enrique Dussel and Carlos Lenkersdorf.

Keywords: tojolabal, anti-capitalism, Indo-European, West thinking, original thought of Abya Yala.

Introduction

Today, the reality of every human being is surrounded by one economic system: capitalism. That system is extended to our personal, regional and global levels. Everyone is almost convinced by act or by thought of this logic and as a result it has become a cultural and philosophical form of life. The capitalist culture is philosophical because it argues with reasons and practical gestures to continue the same application to only one way of thinking, developing the same vision in every human sphere and finally following only one track, only one direction.

Inside this world view where only this kind of logic exists, we can suggest that every linear thought will reside in only one point, in only one mind. However it is no coincidence, that philosophy runs the risk of falling into a panoptical view nowadays. Besides this single ideology there is a techno-science and a structural dialectic, modern and postmodern, which make up the single path. There are also many hypotheses supporting “the only way of thinking” that end in capitalism. We think also in language, especially in language referring to Indo-European forms, which also contribute towards this inevitable direction. We recognize that it is not the unique reason to support a panoptical view like capitalism, but is an important one and we will analyze it. Starting from several languages but pointing to one big root of all of them, we can understand better how we think pretty much the same: because we speak similar languages above all those who proceed from Latin and Anglo languages.

If we assert that the panoptical way of thinking we referred to earlier, modern and postmodern, is followed by not only a formal but an economic and material system; the result of this assertion is an empirical corroboration of one prevailing philosophy in the global scene, but despite this we contemplate other ways of thinking that the same system left outside in a deep sense. These kind of philosophies are trans-modern (Dussel, 2001: 387-408), not post modern; and they try to recuperate the tradition of the others cultures not mercantilists and by this reason left away.

It is obvious that language has done a lot to concentrate ideas around only one system. Indo-European languages have in their roots common characteristics that decisively influence philosophy. We are to consider this idea in two ways: the common division in all Indo-European languages about subject and object and the root mono (monarchy, monoculture, monism, etc.). These common ways to express ourselves that we all know, are shared by languages from India to Great Britain, and they end in widespread philosophical theories. For example, saying the famous philosophers that confirm this view in our language such as Francis Bacon, in Novum organum, or Descartes’ (Descartes, 1996: 61 -66) opinion about the reunion of all wisdoms and knowledge around one total (panoptical) point. We see the same phenomenon in Hegel. One question is: why does philosophy always try to amount wisdom in only one mind? And, more important if our objective is to leave the single pre established way of thinking by our speech: how can we escape from this ubiquity of the system that extent itself into a kind of sub specie aeternitatis economy?

It is not our aim to answer the question from only one point of view; this is precisely what we try to criticize. Moreover we believe in difference itself, in alternatives to the panoptical view. It is the marginal thought that we claim like the difference. Mainly, if we don’t understand and respect ancestral forms of organizing the human society, original ways of thought with different roots (like we will see without the structure of subject-object and without the root mono) we won’t know alternatives to go out from the hegemonic philosophy. And if we commit the error of comparing this cultures to one “universal” culture like Western culture, that imposed universality by force, we won’t leave the single track where the mechanic reason can end. In this sense, capitalism, extending one way to understand the world of sense, brake and tear the human diversity, destroying the richness of the organic constitution of the human being on every level. We can say implementing only one idea in every human being, makes humans sick of themselves.

How we can cure that illness? Maybe we should follow same the path as 15,000 years ago, when humans walked from Asia to Abya Yala. They crossed the high plains of Middle...
America and formed a culture where they transformed their language with other ways of expression and where established until the conquest that they suffered. These cultures, in spite of the violence, are surviving and we can listen to them in order to grow in other roots of thoughts, testifying that there is not only a panoptical view. We can see that these cultures have different morphemes and other language basis, thus different ways of thinking. At least, we suggest, that there is a different philosophy (influenced by a different empirical language) in a community that really exists outside of colonization and capitalism: the tojolabal community.

The tojolabal people are communities in Chiapas, a state in the southeast of Mexico. The reasons to learn from their philosophy are many. Firstly, as it is not Western or even capitalist, it is not infected by the principal illness. But secondly, and not just universal, there is a reason applied to Latin America. If we build on a base of original wisdom, we end the trajectory where the model was Europe. We discover alternatives to the traditions from EuroAfro-Asiatic paradigms that are not mentioned in the official history because they were silenced.

In language and thus in the thinking of these millenarian cultures, and in the concrete case of tojolabal, words like “enemy”, “money”, “rich”, “poor” do not exist. We cannot even imagine our language without these terms and here are our limits. For this reason we want, at least, to open our ears and focus on the cultures that resist the panoptical way of thinking. We want to liberate ourselves from the sentence that dictates that the only way of thinking is the Western way. And again, we think about the structure object-subject in these languages. We see when studying the tojolabal language, that there are not objects, in any sense, there aren’t “me” “that” “this” and of course the verb “to be” not exist. A language without objects indicates that subject that determines the object doesn’t exist, thus the object isn’t dominated. Everything, in that sense, is a living subject, performing a function in an equal organic action.

This is a community in all senses. Represented by the term tik in the tojolabal language (Lenkersdorf, 2005: 23-36). The human being needs a community, and at the moment there is a mercantilist vision of the world (an object-subject vision) there is a rupture in the community because only one individual subject is the winner of this exchange (Marx, 2012: 51). Thus, in the tojolabal way of thinking we find a complementation and not competition between the subjects. The different subjects (everything is a subject, even feelings, plants, all animals and “inorganic” beings, because everything is in community and has a function in the community) complementing each other. Thus there is not competition, this is a pluri-verse and not a uni-verse, that confirm the community of the community, the groups of groups. This is the tojolabal vision and audition of reality, something that includes all forms of life in an active sense, in a complementary sense, and other of subjects follow a structure of speech that is other logic, without a separation between subject and object (Lenkersdorf, 2005:101 -109).

If we examine linguistic structures, we can see different conceptions tending to the collectivity. In tojolabal idiom the root mono does not exist. Thus, there is no mon-archy, mono-culture, mono-theism. The concept that we use instead of the root mono is something that we can call we-ness (collectivity). “We” means inclusion and pluri-verse, something collective, that is not a mono-cause of everything but a pluri cause of the plural visions and collectives. It is an organic we-ness in every sense because the collective searches for the good in every subject, expressed in the sentence ‘oj jkoltu jb’ajtik that means “let’s help each other”. This sentence reflects what we are talking about, and more in the term “tik” that is in almost every sentence in the tojolabal language because is the core of that language. And this tik is not a univocal principle, is a principle that collect all collectivities (Lenkersdorf, 2004: 161).

All of these ideas construct the world as a relationship between “we-ness” that is formed with all the subjects. This community and communitarian philosophy builds a true word. True words that are not a formal logos, thoughts separated from reality. But “we-ness” is a proposition that includes an autonomic economy and a different politics. We remark, in conclusion, that all of these concepts and relationships are not idealistic but materialistic and real. The basis of these original philosophies starts in a reality where these folks who tend toward the inclusion of all forms of humanity and propose a lajan lajan aitik, an equal walk, they have suffered the worst violence, the worst human aberration expressed in hunger, in war, and it continues in the present. So, when we say that the proposition of these communities is to follow their language where there is no object to dominate, which is to say that their behavior is coherent to their words, that their traditions are true with their words, transforming this into a true word, into an oral tradition that is honest. And this leads to a different way of production and different politics. Aspects that we invite the reader to investigate because they offer to us other paths to follow and by which to organize our societies.

References