In the shadow of the tree: heterogeneous Rationality in Popular Education, Development and the Global South

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Abstract

The educational practices of the schools of the Fe y Alegría network in Chad, Africa, allow us to observe tensions between two different perspectives: on the one hand, the discourse of development as an ascent towards progress (from the Western paradigm) and on the other, the discourse that proposes the search for social transformation, resulting in a type of heterogeneous rationality -as a logic consistent with both views. In the specific case, the tensions are visible between the cooperation for the development and the popular education that, arising in the processes of resistance of Latin America, is grafted on the peoples of the African heart.

Organizations such as Fe y Alegría, which maintain elements of South-South cooperation within it, and which visibly expands in the most impoverished countries on the globe, is a particular case for the understanding of this rationality, because it reflects those tensions.

The paper will address the results of a research developed between 2013 and 2015 (Calderón 2016) that allowed us to understand this rationality and its discursive tensions: 1) the need for a subject consistent with the perspective of development and built with the contribution of cooperation, especially in the educational field ; 2) the perspective of popular education that is inserted in African territory in the midst of a context markedly nuanced by developmental discourse, stressing educational practices at the teleological, political, biocultural, cultural and pedagogical levels; 3) the existence of the mentioned tensions within Fe y Alegría, a transnational organization that installs the educational network in Africa; and 4) the existence of a heterogeneous rationality that emerges as materialization of tensions in social practices, from the perspective of the Global South.

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Between Próspero and Calibán: a look at the discourse of development in Chad

> And now Caliban, it's you and me!
>
> What I have to tell you will be brief:
>
> Ten times, a hundred times, I've tried to save you,
>
> above all from yourself.
>
> But you have always answered me with wrath and venom,
>
> like the opossum that pulls itself up by its own tail
>
> the better to bite the hand that tears it from the darkness.
>
> Well, my boy, I shall set aside my indulgent nature
>
> and henceforth I will answer your violence with violence!
>
> Aime Césaire, A tempest.

As we know, development, as an ideological category, can only be understood from a broader discourse that goes back to colonization. Within the framework of Western epistemology, the existence of a canon was assumed from the beginning, from which some countries and peoples considered themselves as "developed" while others were considered "undeveloped" (Escobar 2007). The depth with which these ideas were introduced into the minds of people, established the development as a point of arrival linked to a perspective of ascending progress, goal of Western modernity.

Significantly, and returning to the story of Caliban, without his help Prospero would never have been able to survive on the island where the multiple dialogues of coloniality take place. The question is invisible in his words, since the process is understood in only one way, and in relation to the model to which Calibán must adapt. Coloniality and development end up being part of the same logic in which there is a visible objective that needs domination and exploitation and that determines the asymmetry with which modernity was built.

On the basis of this construction, there is a process of colonization that has passed through the ages by different models and forms of management. The way it looks and assumes certain groups as inferior acting accordingly, establishes a form of colonialism "from above" (in the African case signed by the Congress of Berlin in 1884, in which the European countries divided this continent, based on previously existing borders and with "multiple genesis").(Mbembe 2008:173).

In this way, a form of possession was formed through colonial violence, as well as a discourse in which it was clear what was the budget from which said violence was justified. In this way a form of possession was formed, through colonial violence, as well as a discourse in which it was clear which was the point from which that was justified. The base from which the coloniality operated, allowed to configure a way of being of the colonized subjects that little by little was internalized in them. We could say with Fanon that "it is the settler who has done and continues to do the colonized" (Fanon 2007:17), and we could then speak of a "colonialism from below".

On colonization from below

When walking through the streets of Mongo in Guera, or even N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, stand out among the small round adobe houses with thatched roof and the small square rooms without windows, different buildings of the cooperation agencies installed in the country and a number of fences that, one after another, point out past, present and future works. Thanks to the multiple external efforts to internalize the discourse of development in Chad, it is possible to analyze the implications of this significant event in a small African nation, in contrast to the visible poverty in the country, finally questioning the developmental model in which They place the hopes.

In Chad, a significant time line could be drawn: slavery, colonialism, independence, international cooperation, and oil exploitation. After all these years of domination, and after 30 years of work of the different international agencies, development is consolidated as the dominant paradigm and is offered as the one that will put an end to all evils: with the construction of a water well in the center of some village, with food to prevent child malnutrition, with the construction of better latrines, with medical attention, -certainly positive questions for the population- is creating a mentality and the imaginary of development is deepened by transforming people in recipients of solidarity.

The first time I visited a school in the Bitkine area about forty kilometers from Mongo, I was struck by the massive attendance at the meeting that had materialized because of my presence. After the presentations of the case in the local language the kenga, and the subsequent translations into Chadian Arabic and French, the latter almost exclusively for my understanding, they started the different round-trip questions. When one of the inhabitants spoke, even before answering some of the concerns I had, he began to express his demands: the town needed a well, new classrooms, a small pharmacy, and textbooks for teachers and students . The interventions continued, some asked me how I can do to help them, what kind of project I am going to do, how can an academic be a real and concrete help for a people without light or water; They took me to visit the area, they showed me a construction they are doing and they made me greet the workers, people from the town who had offered their labor for the construction.

The people of Chad are accustomed to receive something for nothing, or at the other extreme, to receive it in exchange for a job that looks like exploitation. In the words of one of the people working in cooperation with the refugees: "it is the same system that is creating poverty that tells them I come to help!" (Teoco, 2015, dialogue). All this has basically contributed to two issues: 1) the same cooperation agencies work with the same people and communities, therefore, those are burdened with the work that each one asks for as retribution (Golonti, 2015, meeting), and 2) all this has reinforced in many ways the imaginaries around development and has "educated" people about how the system that allows them to receive what they have works.

However, one of the axes on which development cooperation focuses in Chad, and in some countries of Central Africa, is precisely education. It highlights the most formal school space for which more or less, as a general rule, everyone must pass. The school is an important center for the injection of resources, and this has led to the creation, little by little, of a subject related to the development that today sustains, from the base, international cooperation.

There is no doubt that such investment has some benefits for the population, as in this case, the possibility of having schools and trained personnel in many areas that allow girls and boys to finish school and continue with their studies. However, this cooperation is able, on the one hand, to maintain the ideological bases that sustain the forms of colonization -even though it is done implicitly- and, on the other hand, to attract some people to process the reins of the country and maintain a consistent policy with its financiers.

The subjectivity necessary for development is built in the long term, it is entering year after year through educational processes that are thought in detail by the cooperation agencies, and are expressed in indicators and sources of verification. The result of this is domination and exploitation as in colonial times, only in this case facilitated by the same subjects who have been part of the process. The school, not only assumes the discourse of development but is responsible for transmitting it, and in this way, both colonialism (before) and development cooperation (now) materialize a condition of domination "from above", whereas subjects (related to development) are responsible for doing "from below".

It is important to mention, however, that it is also "from below" that the fight against colonization and against any form of domination arises. The various historical processes of which there is an extensive literature (Césaire 2006; Fanon 2007; Guitard 1962; Prashad 2012; Rabaka 2010) are a sample of the questioning of this paradigm of ascending progress, although discursively it is presented as the formula and solution to the greatest social and economic problems of today (Esteva 1988).

The discourse of popular education

At an educational level, the Network of Fe y Alegría schools, whose origins date back to Latin America, is installed initially in Mongo in 2007. This particular fact, in a country in which development is present in a visible way in everyday life, becomes an excellent focus of reflection to understand the complex social dynamics that exist in the encounter between transformation and development, given that Fe y Alegría defines herself as "Popular Education Movement".

Popular education starts from the principles of critical pedagogy and can be conceptualized from three elements: 1) consider the context itself in order to transform it 2) develop a participatory methodology that turns on people, their potentialities and values; and 3) to seek that these sectors are protagonists of their own development, and that they decide on their life and their future.

In Chad, Fe y Alegría schools are born within the framework of a collaboration agreement with the State that involves the administration and management of some of the official schools in the area. For this reason, the dynamics of schooling is similar to that proposed

by the Ministry of Education and implies the fulfillment of some conditions, that is, their ideals are stressed with educational standardization.

Despite this, there are concrete and visible issues of popular education that are explicit in the school practices of Fe y Alegría. At the management level, they try to integrate the community teachers into the decisions of the school, which theoretically would correspond exclusively to the director. The work and the presence in the community assemblies of the towns is a sign of the interest that the movement has to promote a participatory school that emerges from the heart of each town as a response to their own needs. It is a movement whose history shows the appropriation of people with the ideals of organization, context and shared identity, necessary for social organization and struggle.

Tensions that make up a type of rationality

As an oxymoron, the schools of Fe y Alegría are the expression of two contradictory views, of two perspectives whose differences are greater than their similarities. Fe y Alegría is popular education, but it is also the daughter of development and its discourse. In a country like Chad where international cooperation has established the framework for "colonialism from below", a network of schools with liberating principles, which seeks to build a subject of resistance, resembles the tree that struggles to survive in the *sahel*, that is, (in Africa) the place where the **de**sert and the savannah coexist.

As an organization, Fe y Alegría expresses a type of rationality that I call "heterogeneous" when living in practice with two divergent perspectives trying to be faithful to both. Within the Movement, the issue seems invisible, and in some way, significant work spaces in the field of education conceal the contradictions that occur in the midst of this materialization resulting from the integration between transformation and development. Analyzing everyday experiences, classroom work, ways of living the school and future dreams, tensions emerge, questioning, from within, the Popular Education Movement.

There could be many more, from different analyzes, however, I have grouped them into five:

- A **teleological tension** that materializes, on the one hand, development as a goal supported by projects that seek to intervene in the country, and on the other, the transformation, that can only arise from participatory processes.

In a school the pedagogical counselor after listening to the dissatisfactions of a teacher, concluded that it was positive that many of the enrolled students did not attend school because they were altogether 207, and the attendance average was 80, which is enough. Two days later, in another school, and with the same counselor, they tried to solve the problem of absences, motivating the parents to sensitize the people so that they send the children to study.

- A **political tension** that seeks standardization and is aimed at raising the levels of schooling at the numerical level with the support of international organizations, as opposed to a contextualized view that seeks educational quality, measured beyond the number.

The World Bank canceled the debt to the heavily indebted poor countries. This brought with it a series of demands, including educational ones with the introduction of automatic promotion in schools. Seeking that the students "do not approve without knowing anything" a test of knowledge was prepared, basically of language and mathematics. This allows to show two questions: 1) the sincere interest that Fe y Alegría has for children to learn and pass the school with the appropriate knowledge, 2) in the face of a situation of standardization, the response of a Popular Education organization is a "standardized" assessment that will measure if schools reach a similar level.

- A **biocultural tension** that faces the exercise of power over life that looks at education as a service, regarding the search for the right to education.

A father of a family, stated that he had 10 children, and that the price was 1000 francs for each. Having produced only 3 bags of grain, he actually earns only for his home's food, but not for school. However, Fe y Alegría is reminding him, every time, the need to send their children to school. In reality, it is something that results from the good intentions of the organization, but that ends up reaffirming this biopolitical situation, that is, establishing a framework of control of community life in function of the schools.

- A **cultural tension** that is torn between reaffirming an original identity or accepting cultural adaptation as a strength, and at the same time between forming to reinforce the city or to reaffirm the life of the peoples.

Fe y Alegría is a Christian organization that has a mostly Muslim team in Chad. Many work issues have to adapt to the group, because the context demands it, every Friday, for example, the day is reduced to a few hours in the morning, because at noon the prayer mats are prepared. But the cultural tension is not only religious, it has to do with the teaching of French in the midst of peoples who speak Arabic and local languages, in a community of three families there may be three different languages, and also three different religions.

- A **pedagogical tension** that makes school structures based on traditional pedagogy subsist, with respect to the ideal of integrating school and life as a result of the application of popular education.

One of the riches in the towns of Chad, is the strength of the community expressed at specific moments such as meals. A single dish large enough for a group about eight people is prepared inside the homes, and is served on the mats under the shadows of the trees. The families also live around a large patio in which the circular houses are raised to welcome each of the new women who will be incorporated with the marriages of the children. When they enter the classroom, the children sit in columns and look at the blackboard. Community strength is lost inside the school.

The unifying concept of "heterogeneous rationality" implies a concrete logic that underlies the practices and that allows the coexistence of the two different perspectives without explicitly denoting their contradictions, but rather making them seem complementary, or as Simone expresses it as a type of infrastructure that underlies the relationships between individuals. The heterogeneous rationality is then understood as the normalization of tensions to the point that they are no longer perceived as such by their different actors, but go unnoticed in the midst of existing daily practices, in this particular case, in schools of Fe y Alegría. The daily practices in this Latin American organization grafted in the heart of Africa, are an opportune example to denote that two loves are not always going to build two "cities", as St. Augustine (1916) said, but sometimes, in the same " city "there may be hybrid and contradictory elements.

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