Neoliberal Children: A Silent Dialogue with Ian Taylor

By:

German Sandoval

October 23, 2020

After reading Ian Taylor's article "Sixty Years Later: Africa's Stalled Decolonization," many ideas and reflections came. I remembered that when I was a child I asked my mother once if we were rich or poor. Her face froze at my question and she, like a tender mother, answered: "we are people who want a better life". That is why I had to prepare, educate and be a good human being. I grew up amid the worst social and economic catastrophe. But now being a teacher and looking at the future of my students, I remember my childhood with nostalgia and prudence, and I understand that even in the midst of those crises I was absolutely privileged (as I can now speak from my privileges) compared to future generations. Our past was built from colonization, the present in neo-colonial dependence and neo-liberalism times... but what about the future?

Mexico has always lead the list of worst social indicators in Latin America and the world: wages, pensions, health, security, rule of law, corruption and inequality of rights, femicides, organized crime. etc.

Right now, social problems are even more evident in my country: high homicide rates, drug trafficking, chronic diseases (diabetes, obesity, lung cancer, etc.). Yet, for some people, violence in Mexico is an exclusively domestic problem, corruption, poverty and weakness of the State. For some others, the root of these problems is different. We are a young democracy on the continent (like the rest of the Latin American countries by the way), and the democratic relationship between society and institutional politics is an apparent facade built between populism and the minimum necessary to maintain social needs and the State functions, according to the global economic canon. State institutions and society coexist in a tense relationship full of skepticism. As Mexicans (Latin Americans) we have developed a natural skepticism towards politics, economy and law. We do not have general “beliefs of metropolitan citizenship” because we know that the government is not sovereign, that it is only a mask of sovereignty and that public policies they are in total dependence on central economies and multinationals, now and before. For this reason, the weakness of statehood is only a consequence of the State itself’s inner contradictions. People only trust themselves and the distance and beliefs about the state is not very clear. Our young men who work as hitmen say that it is better to die rich for just one day, and not go hungry for a long lifetime.

For some liberal thinkers, specialized in law or economics, maintain that Latin American conditions derived from "cultural problems" such as corruption, instability, absence of rule of law, less industrialization, etc. It is evident that such opinions rest on a they colonial premise: if a State is integrated into the globalization process, then it has the capacity to negotiate better conditions, for which both economic integration and the right to investment will set the standard for equality of state actors. And as the TWAIL has denounced, the notion of equality between states within the history of international law and its application is rather questionable.

In other words, economic institutions are supposed to provide access to “development”. Those days since Prebich's formulas have not changed so much in the consciousness of third world social sciences. From CEPAL, the dependency theory arose; however, it was not intended to modify the economic system itself, only to reform it.

Today, reforms are insufficient; perhaps we would have to think in a revolutionary fashion, from freedom rather than epistemic dependence. We need to change the epistemic framework of our knowledge, because perhaps we are living the limits of neocolonialism in its neo-liberal mode, from now on it is possible that facing the global crisis will transform the grammar of goodwill between states, into that of urgency and necessity.

My childhood was the product of a neo-liberal semantics situated in development. The relationship between public policies, social development and international financing is a trinity that explains neo-liberal fundamentalism. But do we know what Development really means? Or is it simply a floating concept with empty content, used to perpetuate the dependence of peripheral economies on those of the center? In colonial times redemption was offered to Christianity to be part of humanity and the consequent access to earthly paradise ... but today only tax paradise works.

By "accepting" the good neighbour conditions around NAFTA to the T-MEC, we have followed in the footsteps of "Development." In general, around at least 2 decades of international free trade with the most relevant economy in the world (USA) Why Mexico continuous so unequal and poor? The answer is simple; it is another story of underdevelopment instrumented by neocolonialism. Of course, it is not only the narrative of Mexico, poverty and inequality has not only been the general context of our life, but more than one personal experience is a generational experience. Colonialism is the deep root that has given life to both the modern foundations of our nations and their uncertain future. It is an apparent contradiction because we, the Latin American countries, had independence ... and in the case of Mexico even a "Revolution"!. Our Constitution used to enshrine social rights. However, the neoliberal agenda has weaken social rights towards the needs of neoliberalism, -This is the case of human rights systems. But, as we can imagine, this is not a contradiction, on the contrary, this is how international neocolonialism rooted into our social institutions: By design! the Bretton Woods Institutions, the GDP formulas and the debt rating agencies Fitch Ratings, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. We take as parochial truth the will of the Market in which the only alternative is to fill the exchange conditions within the neo-liberal context, following

We have created a fundamentalist religion based on an economic model and a formula that has given us underdevelopment and inequality. God: capitalism Religion: Neo-liberalism Holy Trinity: IMF, WB, UN The Third World has never decided, its role has simply been to "copy and paste", both in the hegemonic and in some counter-hegemonic versions. This is the case of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, now president of Mexico. Despite being related to the *left* in economics and politics, his Development Agenda continues the practices of neoliberalism as his project around the *Mayan train, Dos Bocas refinery project and the "new airport".*

This tradition is centenary. by the hand of local and international policies, the dependence of the independence discourse began through the epistemic dependence of the "developed nations". It sounds like a funny riddle, but it is a sad tragedy. The independent Mexicans declaimed the ideas of Rosseau, Locke and Hobbes to achieve our Political Independence from Spain in 1810. Only another dependence on a European, white and patriarchal world image was continued. We declared ourselves free only to be enslaved by their ideas.

That is why in our current Constitution (1917) ... reader please wait a second ... where do the concepts of "constitution", "Modern State", "human rights", "social rights", "modern law" even come from ... Yes, they come from the colonial venture and the world where nature and indigenous people are enemies of development, and common people and women have a specific role in the production system, always as objects.

In the metropolitan discourse, the conception of nation, state and law found translation to the needs of the structures of capitalism in the political and legal language of the European region. The concept of Biopolitics instrumented by Michel Foucault is in accordance with the grammar of specific disciplines and particular historical contexts that explain *ad hoc* the way of being carried out in the modern society of the center and not of the periphery. In this conception, "liberalism" is the theoretical framework of this biopolitics, at least in the European and American narrative around the provision on politics and economics. And for Africa or Latin America it is the Achille Mbembe Necropolitics. But by the way, the Third World is not in the same narrative, perhaps we would like to apply the same concepts but it is only possible as a

metaphorical resource, but not as reality. Giving substance to something that does not exist is called a hypostasis, and our ex-colonial realities should perhaps be narrated outside the neo-colonial hypostasis based on the "resistance from below."

I assume that modern conceptions of liberalism, law and politics, have been adopted by dependence on third world "nations" to reproduce the same "development" alternatives. But wait a second, we cannot reproduce the same cultural conditions in Europe, since the first contract theory of the 19th century identified the social contract as a means to access civil rights following the general idea of citizenship. But the third world was not a "nation", we were nations (still), we are a multiplicity to be represented in infinite possibilities. And the inclusion of the "social contract" in the ex-colonial territories is much more as Boaventura de Sousa Santos says: pre-contractualism and post-contractualism. In both, there is a promise to be included but this never happened, and it is worse, because some of the people who were previously in social inclusion are now excluded. But the tragedy of neocolonialism is not only caused by the economy, but by the constant dependence on counter-hegemonic discourses as happened at the Bandung Conference and the Tricontinental conference, the aspirations of emancipation of the third world were always replaced by European discourses and realities: liberalism, socialism, communism, anarchism, etc. Colonial independences were semantic realities as much as the UN decolonization process, which only gave way to neo-colonialism in its global economic manifestation. Now the main economic means is the neoliberal doctrine, but accumulation by dispossession is finding new ways of access and dispossession of traditional knowledge and life itself (ancestral knowledge, seeds, DNA).

In conclusion, we could react to this provocation in 3 different possibilities: a) Position of good intention (naive): We can change the economic rules within the same vision of the world to rebalance the distance over underdeveloped nations; b) Position of skepticism: We can follow the international economy reaching growth to find the sovereign conditions to emancipate ourselves from them; and c) Nihilist position: there is nothing to do but wait for the contradictions of capitalism to destroy the system *per se* and perhaps before capitalism terminates human life.

I disagree with them, and that is why these pages are written this way, because we have to decolonize our traditional academies, deconstruct our thinking and try to make some resistance.

Obviously, this is not a work for ISI or Scopus league. I apologize if you are offended by my different way of writing, but we have to get back to the simple stuff. Neo colonialism as described by Ian Taylor is as valid then as it is now, but there are alternatives beyond the modern paradigm and we have to run the risk of decolonizing the academy, people are changing and fighting from other ways of life, but our academies? can you hear them? Indigenous peoples, community organizations, peasants and nature are speaking to us. The question is what language and what knowledge we will use to listen and speak them. Can we choose? Or do we just return to the comfort of statistics and quartiles in magazines?

View online: Neoliberal Children: A Silent Dialogue with Ian Taylor

Provided by Afronomicslaw