

**AUTONOMOUS NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF HONDURAS, 2020
POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT**

TITLE

HERMENEUTIC PERSPECTIVES OF INTERCULTURAL JUSTICE IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT "SCHOOL FOR ALL" OF CENTRAL AMERICA.

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INTRODUCTION

This postdoctoral research project is aimed at hermeneutically deepening Fajardo's thesis (2017), entitled: "PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUSTICE AND INTERCULTURALITY IN MESOAMERICA: THE PARADIGM OF THE PROJECT 'SCHOOL FOR ALL' OF CENTRAL AMERICA". The precise aim of the postdoctoral project to be developed is to carry out an archival investigation, where, using the letters of the followers of the popular education project "School For All" (SFA) of Central America, it is possible to verify and systematize the presence of features corresponding to the construct "alternative universality", as an eminent form of intercultural justice defined in the third chapter of the said thesis.

The SFA project is understood as an initiative generated in Central America in the mid-sixties of the last century, which for eighteen years received financial support from the Ministry for Economic Collaboration of the German Federal Republic, through the *Deutscher Volkshochschulverband* (German Association of the Popular Universities). Thanks to this initial support, SFA was able to provide a cultural promotion service, through thematic content of a general and encyclopedic nature, with a dissemination aimed at audiences composed mostly of people with little or no access to Formal Education Systems in the Central American multicultural environment. Geographically, the project covers the entire Central American region, touching areas of southern Mexico at its northern end, to Panama on its southern flank, and for some years the migrant population of the region that has traveled to settle in the USA.

His proposal of "distance illustration" combines communication and instructional means, such as: radio, mail (postal and electronic) and a text in Book-Almanac format, whose editions are updated annually. The motto that guides its actions is "Understanding the understandable is a human right."

It is supremely evident to the institutions that lead the project today (the Central American Institute for the Extension of Culture, ICECU, and the "School For All" Foundation), that one of its greatest treasures is the section of its archives called "The Heart", where an average of two hundred and fifty thousand letters are kept, which the followers of the project have written since the sixties. These letters are ordered according to the month and year of receipt. Inside, there are questions that summarize the concerns about knowledge that have characterized the Central American region for more than five decades. At the same time, they are an expression of their feelings and convictions, forged in the middle of very complicated historical times for the life of the Central American peasantry.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

Hermeneutically understand the mode of presence of intercultural justice among the preferential recipients of the popular educational project SFA.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Conceptually define the theoretical ranges of research, so that there is a categorical set that allows the event of interest to be analyzed with philosophical sufficiency from the notion of intercultural justice.

- Execute an archival investigation using the letters of the followers of the SFA project as the primary and principal source.
- Assess in a rigorous and systematic way, in the light of the previously defined conceptual apparatus, what were the keys of meaning that allowed the SFA project to reach the educational success rates that particularly characterized its first decades of work.¹
- Project reproduction keys of this educational experience in other cultural spaces and audiences.

CURRENT STATE OF THE INVESTIGATION ABOUT SFA

The theoretical and methodological advances on the subject have been rather scarce, but significant in relation to the value of SFA. These include:

- Tattenbach (1974), after an archival investigation based on 6,208 letters from the followers of SFA, publishes the main results in his article: “Analysis of the interests of the audience of a radio education program (The case of 'School for All' of Costa Rica)”. Tattenbach indicates that the purpose was to verify unreliable results of previous evaluations, to determine the problem and cultural level of the listeners, and to evaluate some optional research methods.
- Subsequently, we have Müller (1981), with a book titled: *Lernen durch Fragen (Learn by asking). Social communication and lack of communication between the countrymen of Central America, the example of the Central American Institute for the Extension of Culture in Costa Rica*. This work presents the doctoral research of the author who reviewed 7,622 letters. The focus of the study was from the communication sciences. A methodical analysis was made of the questions of the followers of SFA, “that without provocation or imposed influences, express an originality of opinions and interests that no empirical interrogation method could have produced” (p. 1).
- The Costa Rican academic and researcher Malavassi (1978), wrote in double volume, the work *Understand The Understandable*, whose purpose was a first attempt to systematize this experience, pointing out aspects such as history, doctrine, methods, results and institutional projections of the Central American Institute of Extension of Culture (ICECU, by its acronym in Spanish).
- Finally, the study conducted by Fajardo (2008), titled: *The basics of the 'School For All' project in Mesoamerica from an intercultural philosophical perspective*; and in addition, the thesis cited in the Introduction (Fajardo, 2017), explore the project from intercultural philosophy and propose it as “a paradigm of intercultural justice” for our time.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a theoretical framework for the proposed study, I will refer to chapter three of the doctoral thesis already mentioned (Fajardo, 2017), which was entitled: THE CONCEPT OF JUSTICE FROM THE INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHICAL LOOK. In this chapter, certain categories that constitute the conceptual axis that sustains and guides the present research proposal were specified.

Illustrating exclusively the category of “alternative universality”, which is proposed as a key to hermeneutically understanding the notion of intercultural justice present in the SFA project, I will say that it responds to a cultural challenge today. Following Fernet-Betancourt (2014), an epochal contextuality can be pointed out with a tendency to level cultural diversities in line with the logic of capital, rather than in justice. Therefore, it is necessary to think of a new form of universality, which, opening within an *alternative* dimension, allows a fair globalization. Inspired by the ideas of José Martí (1853-1895), considered the most brilliant and universal of Cuban thinkers, Fernet states:

...universality should be understood rather as the contextual historical process of the willingness to communicate and, therefore, also as a process of developing the political will

¹ As for the listener / reader public, the study by Malavassi (1978) states that by the end of the seventies, three million readers and more than three million listeners were calculated, adding more than six million followers of the project (half of the peasant population of Central America at the time).

to order living conditions in diversity in such a way that it is not constructed a global world, but many worlds can live in balance (Fornet-Betancourt, 2014, p. 61).

The "alternative universality" proposes an inverted sense of what is traditionally conceived as universality. Do not start from a pre-designed idea of "universality". Be part of the cultural plurality observed in the human world. So, universality is the communication of observable differences; but, this is a conditioned communication, whose meaning is *to be transformed* by the singularity of others. Thus, *communication* is the medium par excellence for universality. The above has an ethical-political landing: it implies the will to establish life systems that stimulate relations of equity and conviviality. This is the practice of justice, where cultural differences are appreciated for the construction of common humanity. This is what "alternative universality" proposes, which connects with "intercultural justice", as a path of solidarity humanization (*humanitas*)².

PROBLEM APPROACH AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The problem that motivates this research is **to understand hermeneutically how this initiative made presence in the meaning of intercultural justice for its preferential recipients**. This problem inspires research questions that correspond to the objectives set, namely:

- Which hermeneutical categories are the most appropriate to establish the philosophical profile of the SFA project in terms of intercultural justice?
- How to achieve the maximum hermeneutical benefit of the available research material (archive of letters written directly by the followers of the project)?
- How to establish an appropriate explanatory relationship between the hermeneutical data to be discovered and the educational success that this project achieved for its target audience?
- Is it possible to project the educational dynamics of SFA to other cultural spaces, for example, the university cultural environment?

METHODOLOGY

Key features: hermeneutics, qualitative, ethnographic, sociolinguistic.

As the title of this project indicates, it seeks to build hermeneutical perspectives, that is, to discover the maybe deep and vital or maybe different meaning that SFA had for people who were affected by their educational influence.

Therefore, a methodology will be developed specifically focused on an archival investigation (examining letters written directly by the followers of the project), which extracts units of meaning (qualitative dimension), to determine from the direct popular sensitivity (ethnographic dimension), the modes of discursive articulation (sociolinguistic dimension) that manifest the presence of intercultural justice in relation to the recipients of the event. In this logic, it is assumed as a methodological reference to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1993), who in his work *Truth and Method*, understands by hermeneutics the theory or *anamnesis* of the effective experience of thought; thus, the hermeneutical method starts from the word itself in the relationship it maintains with thought. For this author, the effective experience of thought is evidenced precisely in the word, since it unfolds in the field of language and, through dialogue, updates the structure of the questions and answers caused by the experience of the *worlds of life* (as happens in the radio programs carried out by SFA). Thanks to the linguistic dynamics, one can enter as a researcher in the experience of auscultating the tradition, which is to enter the flow of historicity itself. Thus, "language reveals a completely new dimension, a dimension of depth from which tradition reaches those who live in the present" (p. 554). This is the possibility offered by the

² ... process of formation of human existence as participatory and valued subjectivity, understanding by it the community order through which human existence is described as a self that, just because it is in its own subjectivity or consciousness (of itself) an existence that it is known as being already in relation to another or, more exactly, that it is consciousness (of itself) as consciousness of and among others, and that, therefore, its subjectivity is subjectivity "interested" (*inter-esse*) in and on the other, and can't achieve such quality except as ethical training (Fornet-Betancourt, 2003, p. 56).

relation of the horizon of the author of the text, with the horizon of the researcher-interpreter, which will give rise to a comprehensive horizon that will exceed the simple historical horizon (process known as *fusion of horizons*). To illustrate the above, I proceed to analyze a short paragraph. This comes from a letter sent from Honduras in 1993. The SFA Foundation (1999), transcribed this paragraph in the Almanac Book, together with fragments of letters from other listener/readers, due to its profound meaning:

... I am 15 years old and I am Salvadorian, but due to the war, my parents came to Honduras. My mother is Honduran and my father is Salvadorian. Well, but something I like about you is your love for all of Central America. It makes me sad to see that people can't get used to loving their Central American brothers. I dream of one day seeing Central America united in one nation ... (p. 3).

In this text it is possible to capture how a teenager in the region expresses her feelings with the confidence that the interlocutor offers (SFA). She distinguishes how violence has ungrateful consequences for family life, but is sensitive to the idea of love and unity that the SFA project inspires, and this allows her to dream a peace opportunity for the region. These words are a reliable example of the way in which an educational initiative can raise senses of intercultural justice, by fostering the idea of how differentiated identity itself is a reason for mutual enrichment and not for rivalry (which corresponds to the “alternative universality” model proposed from intercultural philosophy). In other words, it is about developing a kind of *cultural hermeneutics* through the treasure of words contained in the letters.

This work will need the support of the best environment and interdisciplinary academic guidance, because the wealth to be discovered is wide. Therefore, the election of an expert advisor in the disciplinary areas that this research implies, is of vital importance for its success. This will be highlighted at the end of this document.

Projecting the inquiry raised in a two-year work plan, methodologically subdivided the steps to be followed in four semesters, like this:

First semester: theoretical consolidation with bibliographic review centered on the category of “intercultural justice” (understood in the key of “alternative universality”), in order to prepare the categories of philosophical analysis that will be used to examine the archival information from the SFA project.

Second semester: preparation of archival information (letters from the followers of the project) for further analysis; this step will include the detailed review of the sample of selected letters (average of six to seven thousand letters as in the two previous studies), in order to transfer the most relevant elements in relation to the research problem to digital format. Here, there is the great advantage of the high level of organization of **the letters archive** (Thun, 1968), since each letter is individually numbered and classified by year of receipt; and thanks to the **response archive**, which is divided by colors, it is possible to access the general themes that interest this research: for example, theme 7, light blue color, groups themes of religion and mythology, with answers to concerns about meaning of life, ethical and existential option, transcendence, religious imaginary and cultural identity, etc. Thus, it is possible to trace through the response archive, the original question and letter, since these data appear in the header of each answer sheet.³

Third semester: analysis of archive information. This will follow the own technique of qualitative studies: reduction of data to units of analysis; review of relevant categories that serve to group the units of analysis; examination of the units of analysis for classification; review of the categories of analysis to establish relationships between them based on the first findings; proposition of descriptive and explanatory relationships that help to illustrate the hermeneutical connections present between the analyzed elements.

³ Relationship illustrated in the photographic Annex at the end of this document.

Fourth semester: Preparation of Conclusions and drafting of the Final Research Report.

JUSTIFICATION

This research is justified on the following reasons:

- the first, in the logic of the postdoctoral route, is to carry on the previous doctoral research (Fajardo, 2017) with field data, to confirm and expand the theoretical findings achieved; this is at the same time, a continuation of the archival studies carried out by Tattenbach (1974) and Müller (1981).
- the second reason is to strengthen the academic support that can be used to propose an SFA relaunch project at the level of university communities in Central America, showing the International Cooperation how the economic support given to the region more than half a century ago, can continue to bear fruit of educational well-being in new cultural spaces.
- and to conclude, an eminent contextual motive is the academic opportunity represented by the St. George Institute, which, with its competence in the areas of education, psychology and pastoral spirituality, will allow a nurtured investigation of interdisciplinarity and rigor in the empirical analysis of SFA's archives. Under the accompaniment of the academic host, Prof. Klaus Kießling, an expert in the aforementioned disciplines, and who is in charge of several educational projects and evaluation studies, especially in cooperation with the international group of his postgradual students and in touch with their intercultural questions, it is highly probable that this inquiry will reveal the hermeneutical keys of human value proposed in its objectives.

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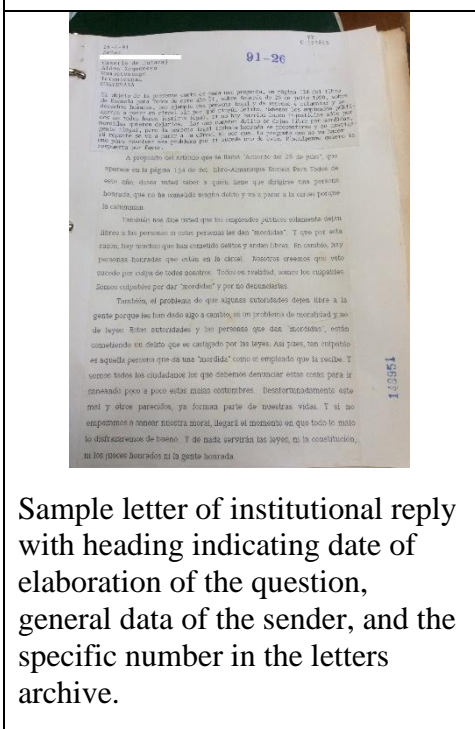
PHOTO ANNEX



Side and central view of **the letters archive**; Letter No. 65870, from 1973, sent from El Salvador, asking for the definition of “social justice” (name of the sender deleted due to the institutional regulations of the SFA project).



Response archive divided by thematic colors; each theme has subtopics organized in alphabetical order.



Sample letter of institutional reply with heading indicating date of elaboration of the question, general data of the sender, and the specific number in the letters archive.



UNESCO Certification for the incorporation of the ICECU* Questions and Answers Collection in the "Memory of the World Register of Latin America and the Caribbean", 2009.

* Central American Institute of Extension of Culture.