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Violence and Exclusion in J. G. Herder.

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ABSTRACT: It is intended to account for the legitimation that J. G. Herder makes of violence and exclusion as the natural mode of relations between different cultures; It has been used as a methodological strategy to collect the main theses of his work *Essay on the origin of language*. The analysis of the text will help to understand the need for exclusion and violence to preserve the internal cohesion of cultures. This less studied perspective of our author, makes that later it is read and retaken, as in the case of Gadamer, with a supposed universal character and as an apostle of the great justice or equity of History, however, in our way of seeing not only lays the foundations for differentiation, but also for subordination and clear contempt between own and strange, the cultured and the barbarian, where the identity, culture and soul of the people so pure, authentic and different leaves no room for anyone other than possess them naturally. This perspective shows the tensions, lights, and shadows of the problems that coexistence between different and distant cultures raises. For this we will start fundamentally from the notion of circle and relationship with language, this notion that it raises and predetermines, will help us to better understand its postulates, the narrower the circle and the radius of action of a language and a people, the more it is strengthened towards the interior and in contrast to the exterior, outside the circle it is nothing, even the circle already predetermines it.

Keywords: violence, exclusion, language.

The text brings us closer to the notions of exclusion and violence from the theory of language of J. G. Herder (1744-1803) in an early work of his Bückeburg period: *Essay on the origin of language* (1772). It seeks to offer one more perspective of the author. Herder's approaches to his work in general and to his romantic legacy

become a grammar of war in which the sound of origin will be drastically transformed, as we shall see, into hatred between nations. The notion of circle that it raises and predetermines, will help us to better understand its postulates, the narrower the circle and the radius of action of a language and a people, the more it is strengthened towards the interior and against the exterior, outside the circle is nothing even the circle predetermines its work.

The article consists of three parts, in the first we will talk about the general content of the Essay, in the second about the notion of a circle and finally we will close with some brief conclusions.

I.

The Essay attempts to account for the genesis and development of language. It approaches it from multiple and original facets, understanding it as a thought tool pregnant with a subjective and particular vision, which each individual reflects directly and clearly in his customs, culture and traditions; it deploys a wide range of statements up to hostile definitions, which even justify exclusion, violence and war. We indicate that this is an almost unknown aspect of the author.

It is divided into two parts: The first consists of three sections and in them it analyzes and points out the gaps and deficiencies that it considers that various authors have on the subject, it presents how man has a disposition to create language, it also exposes the different relationships between vision and hearing, color and speech, smell, and sound, and develops their characteristics and elements.

In the second part, he maintains their unitary origin, hence the similarities between languages and their manifestations, except for Chinese grammar. It also encompasses the circumstances and motives by which man comes to language,

and which Herder brings together in four main laws, which he calls natural because they are proper to man and his species.

This work is of great fruitfulness. Anyone who reads it, whether in favor of the hypotheses or not, will realize that we are dealing with a writer full of intuitions; many of them leave them only pointed, others will pick them up and take them even further.

We consider that the work we are analyzing becomes the starting point where identity cannot be understood apart from the ontological and cultural value, which is given to it from linguistics. Herder offers us a paragraph:

It is possible that our artificial language has displaced the natural one, that our civic way of life and our social behavior have restrained, dried up and diverted as much as you want the waves of the sea of our passions, but the most violent instant of sensation, wherever Whatever it is, and however rare it may be, it continues to take its right and make its accents resonate immediately in the mother tongue. When the raging storm of passion, the sudden outburst of joy or joy, pain, or grief, dig deep furrows in the soul, as does the raging feeling of revenge, despair, anger, fear, horror, etc., everyone becomes manifest, each according to its own nature¹.

Our author writes under a romantic atmosphere, whose ideals are opposed to the educational values of a humanity, thought with a Cartesian coordinate axis, or of a mechanical universe, whose laws contrast to force, anger, desire, violence, love and other nuances of our feelings that, because they are our own or individual expressions, could not remain, as in the case of Newtonian mechanics, synthesized, abstracted or subjugated, under a universal formula for all beings and peoples on Earth. We will start from the notion of a circle that he develops in the first part of the Essay.

¹ Cfr. Herder: *Werke*, I, *US*, p. 712. (Ribas: o.c. p. 146).

II. Notion of circle

Herder uses the analogy between nature and language throughout his work:

Every animal has a circle to which it belongs from birth, in which it has immediately entered, in which it remains throughout its life and in which it dies. But it is curious that the sharper his senses and the more admirable his works of art, the smaller his circle, the more peculiar his artistic work.

The circle, as well as the sphere, reveal the deep influence of its teacher, Leibniz, the relationship that might exist, both between the animal and the small circle of its existence, and the relationship of the cultures, peoples, and languages with their own radius of action. The latter leads us to make a different reading of man and language, from the point of view of the Leibnizian "active force" and, at the same time, to return to this question from Herder's reconsideration of "prejudice", as has been highlighted by philosophical hermeneutics, especially Gadamer.

Later Herder continues:

The bee builds in her hive with a wisdom that Egeria was not able to teach her Numa. But, outside of those cells of her predetermined work in them, it is nothing. The spider weaves with Minerva's art, but all her art is equally woven into that limited space of web; that's his world. How admirable is the insect and how narrow its circle of action!²

We will comment on two things. The first is the continuous idea of the circle of our existence, according to which there is an inverse proportion between the

² Ibidem. Egeria era una ninfa de Roma. Cfr. Ribas: o.c. p. 448.

effectiveness of our creations and abilities and the specific object to which we dedicate ourselves; Our instincts become more powerful the more we specialize them in a single perspective or range of action. Herder explains that, for man, this inverse ratio is not equal to that of animals, because his faculties would predetermine him to a broader and more complex scope than that of the bee and the spider.

The second is the animal examples that he establishes. Now we know that the metaphor used between the weaving of the spider and the creation of that web as its "specific world", is something fundamental, because with this, our author becomes an antecedent that relates the "language" with a world. The spider weaves its web in which it is itself, as man is in language, but not in any language. And here we find the difference with the spider web that is the same language and that all spiders use to create their world. Each man, each people, has a specific linguistic space through which he expresses and lives his way of being.

With the exaltation of the originality with which the arthropod creates his world, and together with the previous inverse relationship between creativity and effectiveness that becomes more intense the less open the circle is, several problems arise.

For Herder each town will weave its own spider web, each town must carry out its originality and authenticity as signs of its own identity within a small circle with a smaller radius of action, in this way it is strengthened towards the interior and it differs from and protects from the outside, from the alien, from the strange and foreign that will represent danger and weakness. In the same way that the spider weaves its world from the inside, since for this purpose it has at one end of its abdomen the organs that produce the silk thread that serves to catch insects, feed and transport itself exclusively in the limited and safe radius that occupies its nest. The spider expels everything foreign to its web.

We want to emphasize that the fabric is formed from its own interior, it does not take external elements but configures it from the same that is included between its limits. This distinctive of one's own identity is what we think leads Herder to the real impossibility of recognizing other cultures, other languages, in short, other ways of being and the reason for this is because the authenticity of the signs of identity are, in inverse proportion to the radius of action of their circle.

A clearly anti-enlightened and anti-cosmopolitan principle, in Herder's own words and that later subtly derives to the case of man, but in another sense, is the following:

the sensitivity, abilities and artistic instincts of animals increase in strength and intensity in inverse proportion to the magnitude and variety of their circle of action³.

It does not mean that it equalizes the areas, the case of man is different from that of animals because his sphere is wider, he has a huge range of possibilities, of activities, he is not directed towards a single objective. Therefore, having a much larger circle, his senses, unlike animals, are weaker.

What is being pointed out has to do with the philosophy of nature from which Herder thinks, and whose praise for the creations of the tiniest insect in its reduced sphere of action, is undoubted. And here is, as we see it, one of the fundamental bases of his anti-enlightenment.

III. Circle and language

In the same way, for Herder, each language, therefore, each people that speaks it innately carries a core so deep, intimate, authentic, and different from that circle, that it makes it impossible for the stranger to understand it:

³ Cfr. Herder: Werke, I, US p. 713 (Ribas: o.c. p. 147).

Hence the languages of all ancient and primitive peoples are eternally unpronounceable to outsiders, as far as that intimate vital tone is concerned⁴.

Herder returns to primitive languages and praises their immense variety, as well as the various nations from which they originate. For example, in the aforementioned paragraph, we read later the following:

Well, the more alive a language is, the less it has been thought to cover it in letters; the more it goes back to full, unselected natural sound, the less writable it is, the less writable with twenty letters; moreover, it is usually entirely unpronounceable for foreigners⁵.

This means, in turn, that the original capacity of each language has a circle of expression and existence so determined that, with respect to other languages, it only seems that it cannot be related. We consider that there is no possibility of interaction between them, and if there is no such possibility, neither could we think, as Herder does not, in a public space, whose quality is precisely in the dialogue and criticism between the subjects whose culture it may not be the same.

For Herder, language is the unfolding of each nation, that is, the natural development of its own definition. In his words:

In this respect, the language of an ancient nation is a study in the labyrinths of fantasy and human passions, as is its mythology. Each family of words is

⁴ Cfr. Herder: *Werke*, I, *US*, pp. 701-702 (Ribas: o.c. p. 137) "*und die Sprachen aller alten und wilden Völker sind daher in diesem innern, lebendigen Tone für Fremde ewig unaussprechlich!*"

⁵ Cfr. Herder: *Werke*, I, *US*, p. 702. (Ribas: o.c. p. 138).

a weed that has grown around a main sensible idea, around a sacred holm oak in which there are still traces of the impression that dryad produced on its discoverer. Feelings are interwoven for him: what moves, lives, sounds, speaks, is your friend or enemy, as it sounds in your favor or against you; He is god or goddess and works out of passion like you⁶.

The feelings and passions are those that consolidate the relations of friendship or enmity and are given by nature.

What emerges from his poetic theory of language is that we only recognize ourselves in confrontation with the other. In the language-tradition, which we are talking about here, to understand the essence and authenticity of the mother tongue for those who are strangers to it, it confirms that this is the history of each people, they will be stories that, like the parallels, they can only be found at infinity. But he is a long way from us, while we consider that his theory lays the foundations, already here, of exclusion.

What we want to emphasize because it is a perspective little studied, is that Herder has been promoting conflict and exclusion between cultures, languages, and ways of being and seeing the world.

Herder goes to great lengths to substantiate what separates one language from another, he has a real conflict when he relates unity with plurality in a pre-established harmony that his theory of the genesis of language, we consider leaves practically empty. Moreover, it gives the impression that it places excessive emphasis on the originality and uniqueness of each language, which forces us to understand each one, each people or culture always from the outside and not from

⁶ Cfr. Herder: *Werke*, I, *US*, p. 738 (Ribas: o.c. p. 170). N del T. Dríada es una ninfa del bosque cuya vida se encuentra ligada al árbol. Cfr. Ribas: o.c. p. 448.

the inside, since each language, remember, would have a nucleus inaccessible to those who have not been born into it.

IV. Conclusions

We consider that his theory, whose poetry is based on the essential sounds of the origin of the people, grounds the exclusive perception of culture and language, where its essence will be untranslatable to any other, it is the circle that predetermines it like this. In the words of Herder:

“On the other hand, for a foreigner whose hearing has not become accustomed to it since childhood and who is now taught the tongue with a phlegm due to which the sound stays almost in the mouth, this law of economy and necessity makes the speaks something imperceptible and unpronounceable”.⁷

We can see how cultures and languages have also been able to transplant and grow in different regions beyond the limits of its own circle, perhaps without understanding the intimate tone vital have been able to become bridges and not barriers, in unifying elements enabling miscegenation and social reconstruction.

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