

Video Cesar Moreno

My name is Cesar Moreno. I am an anthropologist. I am Colombian, from Latin America, the corner of Latin America, on the northeast, in the Caribe. I am an anthropologist and the perspective that I have on development is a critical understanding of the concept. Anthropology has had in general a critical understanding of this idea of development.

*How do you see what several authors have said on development, mainly after the second World War?*

In what refers to readings, authors that have worked on this idea, after the second World War, I think that what Arturo Escobar has said in his book *The Invention of the Third World* is important, as he has an understanding with which I agree. He has a critical understanding and he argues that development is a discourse invented, built on the third world. This seems to me to be very interesting and when I was reading Arturo Escobar and the perspectives on development that he refers to as well as the links he establishes with social sciences since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, I believe that things have not changed much. I mean that it is an understanding on a civilizational process, from a unilateral and linear point of view, based on the idea of progress, in which there are advanced societies that show the rest of the world how societies should develop. The discourse on development is built on an idea, mainly the economic idea that justifies the capitalist economy. The perspective of this author is interesting. Within this framework the tales on the third world, the second world and the first world were created. In the first world we can find the most industrialized countries, the most advanced ones; the countries of the third world are the poorer ones, the ones that have to follow the model of the countries from the first world, the ideal world. There are no other ideas nor possibilities that what we can find in the third world, as well as in the second world; this is the only possible model of a civilization. I believe this perspective of Arturo Escobar is a critical one and from this point of view is interesting to me.

*How do you see development policies of your country in the last decades? The projects, the fields in which these policies were developed, the social groups involved?*

I believe that in the last three decades, namely since 1990, the year of 1991 is a turning point in Colombia (due to the adoption of the 1991 Constitution), somehow in line with the fall of the Berlin wall, there was the opening the Colombian market to the capitalist global system. In Latin America, in specific in Colombia, we start a new international relations model with other countries of the world. Some treaty of free trade were established in which the guidelines of political economy in this moment is based on. This country does institutional changes and starts a policy that aims at opening the Colombian economy, by signing the trade treaties, with other countries. I believe that public policies in Colombia, since then, are framed by this model, in economic terms, by the treaties of free trade with other countries, bilateral agreements, that in general include very specific conditions. These conditions have not been beneficial for the country. These treaties are established with countries that are more advanced technologically, more advanced economically, that have more political power. Negotiations are unfair. For instance, a treaty with the United States of America was established; we are not an industrialized country. What we produce are handicrafts, goods from the countryside, flowers,

coffee, meat, and other things. When facing a so strong economy like the one from the United States we end up by importing almost everything. The prices of goods that the USA import are somehow imposed to Colombians. I stress this case concerning the USA because in Latin America this is an important country. For instance, I do not have exact figures, but I guess more or less 80% of the exports of Colombia are to the USA. Colombia is a totally dependent economy from the USA and from what this country buy to us. Other treaties have been established in recent times, such as with China that has trade relations with Latin American countries, but we still have a very strong dependance of the USA. We are a country with an industry based in metallurgy, textiles, fabrics and threads, etc., but most of what we produce is not sold in the country. Some products are exported to Ecuador. In metallurgy, it is the foundry and the manufacturing of manual tools. There is not a vehicle industry such as in industrialized countries. Therefore, this opening of markets in 1991 is very much based in metal extraction. Here there are much richness in minerals, gold, emeralds, oil, and coal too. There were some attempts to have multinational enterprises to extract such products. We produce oil, but we do not do the refinery of oil. This means that oil is extracted, goes to the USA and then is sent back refined. What we see now is that the environment is being destroyed, natural places, that are the richness of Colombia. This idea of richness for me is very relative, because everything is thought in monetary terms and we do not think in natural terms, in biodiversity, in water, air, tranquility, in the nature as we may find in Colombia. In this sense, Colombia is a very diverse and rich country. And this is being destroyed with mines of coal, of gold. Within this frame, I am a little bit pessimistic when considering this extractivist policy. And when looking at the countryside, there are no policies that improve the living conditions there. We have almost 29% of almost 50 million inhabitants that are peasants. But public policies have not been directed at this population and the economic activities they are developing, but to extraction of natural resources. Therefore, the mining economy is considered the most important, such as oil extraction, because this is originating money. This is how I see how development policies and projects have been thought and established. Nowadays there are many enterprises that were created illegally, or even people is extracting on their own gold from rivers. There are several contradictions in what refers to this idea of development. At the end, this exploitation of resources that are in places where the peasants live, well, this people do not receive many things in return. This means that people are poor, living conditions are very precarious, people are starving, do not have houses, do not have good health conditions, do not have a good life at the local level. In this country in general existing resources are not enough and everything seems to be much related to corruption. Much of the money ends up in the hands of these policymakers that establish these contracts and agreements; so, these contracts and agreements are very much marked by corruption themselves. And when considering development, every country has its specificities. Here the issue of coca production is important as this is a sector of parallel economy that is very important. This parallel economy is allowing some sustainability of the domestic and family economy of many communities that live in areas close to the forest where coca plants are growing. Many peasants plant coca and they make a living out of it. Therefore, they live between two lines because they are controlled by mafias. In present times there are many Mexican drug cartels that fund armed groups that control these regions. They are funding these armed groups. Local people are recruiting these people to form local armed group forces and guarantee security by these means avoiding State armed forces to get here. Peasants live

in these places, do not have work and they are in-between mafias, illegal armed forces and the State that in general is pursuing them because it is claimed that they are criminals as they plant coca plants. These marginal economies are established; these are challenging public policies and State institutions. It is a very complex scenario. This marginal economy is very important because it has been an opportunity to peasants to have some more income, to have their livelihood, and living resources for large sectors of peasants and also in many towns.

*Can development projects or activities can be found in your country that are relevant? What are these and why do you think that they are relevant?*

Since 1990, several development plans have been implemented such as the building of roads. In Colombia the free trade was established with the world, but this free trade was established without the country having roads. Colombia is a very mountainous country. We do not have a trains network. Everything is done by trucks. All goods are transported by trucks all over the country. It is a country of one billion and five thousand square meters more or less. It is twice the square meters of France. Half of the country is formed by mountains, where you can find towns and most of the Colombia inhabitants. Owing to the tough geography, it would be important to have an advanced and competitive transports' system. Governments open up the borders to free trade and free market, but we do not have roads. We are not up to the businesses that we are developing. It is like you are establishing a business of coal, but you are transporting coal not in trains, but on horses or men. It is a like bit what is happening here. Ports are also not prepared. Not even airports. The transports' system is very precarious, industry is very precarious. Now some roads are being slowly built, some ports and we try to establish a transports system that is more dynamic. But this has been a very slow process. Also, there is this approach of privatizing the economy. Some progresses have been made in education, in health, in housing. In education access has been achieved in the whole country and improvements have been made in primary education up to higher education. The same with the health system. There is a system of public health in the whole country, but these systems are... there are plenty of paradoxes when coming to these issues. Access has been a concern with the building of schools in the whole country, but the quality of education is not good. In what refers to the health system it is even worse. It is not the best health at all. The public system does not answer to the needs of people. In parallel, a private system of health has been established and who wants to have good health services has to pay much more. In the near past, people who attended the public health system were dying, at public hospital entrances. For instance, what is it going on in present times? If you want to see a specialized doctor, you have to first go to a general practitioner. The general practitioner gives you a medical appointment so that you can be observed by a specialized doctor and this can take a lot of time before people can be examined. Meanwhile the patient gets worse. The system is prepared to avoid expenses and to produce profit to private entrepreneurs of profit-making health enterprises. Existing enterprises are not providing this service or do not guide you to a specialized doctor. Or when they do it, it may take a lot of time, six months or a year. The system is very precarious. If you want to have a good health system you have to pay it by yourself. In Colombia more than 60% of the population lives in absolute poverty. This means that these people do not have the basic resources to provide for basic needs. People may get in some moments five dollars a day. He/she has to live with five dollars a day. For having food to have breakfast, lunch and dinner.

If you have family, it is difficult, isn't it? Seventy percent of the economy is informal economy. Many do not have social security, many may even have some education, but they have to live from a small business of selling fruits, vegetables and other kind of goods in the streets. It is within this frame that development projects are being implemented. Around this, there is this pressure and in what refers to the education and health system these become private business for these politicians that are the owners of these enterprises. Private universities have been established as a very profitable networks and it not so much quality education that is at stake. In housing, some improvements have been made, but in many occasions everything is very precarious. Houses being constructed are not good ones. Unemployment rate was before the pandemic 10% to 12%; now it is 22% to 24%. Some progresses were made with employment, but a backward trend is clear due to the pandemic. It will be very difficult to recover. And inequality. Some say that Colombia is the most inequal country or the second most inequal country of Latin America. It is at the same level as Haiti, for instance in this respect. There have been some progresses, but the country does not seem to have resources. It is the first or the second most corrupted country in the world. All of these issues make a complex scenario when it comes to development. It is difficult to have an optimistic view upon development when considering all of this. Of course, I have a very critical perspective.

*Do you believe that this idea of development should be abandoned? What other understanding could development have when considering Colombia and the problems you have pointed out?*

This is a very difficult and complex idea, but I believe that the idea of development has two dimensions. On the one hand, international development, universal development, of all countries, the richer, the poorer, the first, the second, the third ones. And the second idea of development at a national level, this idea of national development that we have been making. I mentioned before what is happening at the national level, the idea of development that we have here within Colombia. But development is also what is based on the idea of universal development and of the development that has been implemented as a result of international policies imposed by the most powerful countries. When considering the richest sectors of Colombia, this is the idea of development that is the dominant one. In this sense, Arturo Escobar argues about the need of considering the plurality that the idea of development may include, the idea of pluriverse. From a point of view more based on participation, more critical, more reflexive. Colombians cannot complain of the existing asymmetric relationships with other richer countries, if at the national level we do not create conditions that are favorable ones, if we do not build an identity in economic terms, as a country, etc., when considering the other. We are always trying to sell something that we have got to survive. There is a problem with the model of development. Each country has its specificity: Colombians have the internal war, a conflict with more than 50 years. What we are talking about cannot be applied to Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, because these countries have not faced this internal conflict, the problems caused by mafias and by coca. The issue of development here is very much affected by peace agreements being established in 2016 with the FARC guerilla and the demobilization of guerrilleros. One of the flags of this guerilla was that this guerilla was very much based on peasants and on the claims for the land, the right to have the land. In Colombia in all the country and in the most productive areas in agriculture, the land is owned by some landowners. The process of peace has been established within the guerilla and some issues have

been considered. This is an important moment of the consolidation of peace and the enforcement of the agreements. There is an international agreement of what is thought for the country for the next years and for the peace agreements. As a politician used to say, the agreements are essential: in these the criteria may be established, what we want for the economy of the country, in what refers to equality and access. There are three elements that are in these agreements that are related to the restitution of the land to peasants; these are 29% of the Colombian population and it is the most abandoned sector of the population by the State. These people do not own the land but these are the ones who have supported the rest of the population with agricultural goods during the pandemic, that have been feeding the country. But nothing is given to them in return. This is a first issue, the land. In this moment, we do not have a census, and this is a part of the peace agreement, to know who are the landowners in the countryside. We do not know who are the owners and what is the extension of the lands. This is a work that has to be done and it is part of the peace agreement. Another important issue is the drug issue. It is also an issue of the peace agreement, alike the land issue, that required a political agreement, a compromise among the different sectors involved in the agreement. It has been said that it is necessary to have a policy of prohibition of drugs. This is a situation that has generated much deaths, killings and there are no visible results. The policy implemented in present times is the one of criminalization. And this ends up by killing people, destroying coca plantations but there are no visible and effective results. There are some onwards, but people come back to coca production and do new plantations of coca in other lands. One of the senators argue that it would be important to buy the production of coca to the peasants, to buy all the production and it would be much less expensive that the existing policy of fumigation. The fumigation policy costs 4 billion of pesos and if the State could buy the cocaine production it would cost 2 billion of pesos. Well, this is an idea and it would be necessary to get to some agreements. There are international policies but at a national level the Colombian State could also establish such agreements. This is this challenge. Another challenge is related to political participation. Here people are killed because they are left wing or right wing. The left wing political parties have approached the political participation issue and this was also included in the peace agreement. In 1990, 1991, there was this agreement with the guerilla and an institutional change occurred: there was this opening of political parties. In this moment, with the FARC, there is this claim again, but some social sectors are still stigmatized from some right wing political parties. This is also an issue to the agreed upon in order to look forward. This was an issue when the peace agreement was discussed but it was a second line issue and it is needed first to discuss the economic model of development of the country. Additionally, Colombians can not think that they have to resemble to the United States society, the French, the German, not even the Spanish society. And we have to consider that we are not industrialized, we do not produce vehicles, nothing of this. We do not have a technological industry. What we have is the land and agriculture opportunities. What we can develop is the land and the agriculture production. We can develop what we do in the countryside, in the existing land, the work done over these lands, the agriculture production. To improve the production conditions, the work conditions of peasants, to sell food to the world. People in the world need to eat. Having this in mind, it is necessary to establish international agreements with rich countries, between comas, that may bring resources that will allow us to protect environment, for us and the rest of the world, to protect rivers, forests,

paramos, water. This is what we need to be funded right now. There are many things that we need to think about, aren't they? This is a major challenge because there are many sectors, groups with political power that are not easy and it is important to get agreements. Meanwhile we are witnessing the national conflict: the war, the mafias, the illegal armed groups, the illegal economy, etc. This is a pessimistic discourse but this is the way I see this country, from an anthropological perspective, from being an academic in all these years when considering challenges faced by this country.

*The last question is why have you selected these pictures?*

These are related to what I was referring to before in what concerns the land and the countryside. I will try to have some comparison among the pictures of the first line, of the second, of the third lines. The two first pictures, one from the right and the other one from the left. I believe that in Portugal these forms of agriculture production can not be found anymore. There might not be found forms of production with animals, but here these can be found, and it is the most primitive, the most basic that may be found. But people work this way the lands still.

*There are people here in Portugal who work the land using these means, but a few of them. The majority uses machines, such as tractors.*

This kind of work for people is a hard one. Someone said to me a couple of days ago that instead of animals and plows, in many places people were doing all of the work. This has nothing to do with development. But people still work like this in the countryside. It is not only like that, in some places there are tractors. And on the left picture we see technology in which development is based on, more technology should be used in the countryside. In this sense what may be found in Colombia is abandonment. Technological development, including the use of drones, for instance, scientific knowledge for the countryside. Next picture, on the second row, at the left there is a machine that is working on the opening of a road. This is the situation we may find in many places where still armed conflict happens. People can not get in these places, can not get goods to be sold outside, there are no transports; if one cultivates products, these are lost because it is not possible to get out of these places and sell these products. It is more expensive to bring these goods to markets where these can be sold than to spoil food. This means that advances are very slow. It is a process that is developing step-by-step, the one of building roads. In what concerns the second picture it is about improving the conditions so that people can circulate. So that people can have a living place, so that people can have transports to sell products in local markets, to commute. The last row, this is a picture of the production of chocolate. In Colombia one may find the production of many products, such as fruits, vegetable and others. Very diverse goods in many parts of the countryside. There are no adequate transports. In many situation the intermediaries are taking all the profit of what is produced in the countryside. The peasant sells to an intermediary and the intermediary gets the major part of the profit. The peasant is the one who gets the less. The one who gets the more is the one who transports goods from the countryside to town. The State should have policies that would consider the transports of countryside goods and would assure an income to peasants. This is the fight peasants have right now when it comes to the production of coca. But to peasants, no living conditions are assured, no land is given to them, no goods are bought to

them, no roads are available to them so that they can sell their production and by these means they may have enough income so that they can live properly. Right now the only thing that allows peasants to have a decent income is the production of coca. It is the most profitable production. If they produce cacao or oranges they will starve. Peasants are in a situation in which they do not have the adequate living conditions. A first step would be to assure that all social sectors would not starve, from children to other members of families, in rural and urban areas. This would be a central issue in a new model of development to be implemented. And these are may ideas expressed in a graphical way.