

Competition and Cooperation. Justice and Peace

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1. Introduction

Fifty percent of the world's population lives in urban areas. Urbanization has become a growing, tangible process over the past decades. In the mid 20th century, only 33% of the world's inhabitants lived in cities, whereas by 2030 the figure is expected to rise to 63%. As it progresses, urbanization shapes economic and social attitudes that, for better or for worse, depart from traditional parameters.

Indeed, on one hand, the benefits of large conurbations are undeniable in that they facilitate access to good medical assistance and improved educational possibilities, social services and cultural activities, while strengthening the social fabric and making available a wide variety of tools that promote the emergence of new ideas and alternative proposals.

But it is also clear that it is precisely in urban areas where inequality and lack of solidarity, consumerism, acts of violence, housing problems, residential ghettos and a growing proliferation of "non-spaces" in reference to large shopping malls, service stations, airports, and chains of coffee shops, restaurants, hotels and so-called leisure centers that could be found anywhere in the world, are most likely to emerge.

The city has become a paradigm of social change and all the risks that undermine justice, freedom, peace and environmental protection, which we will see below, appear there in their strongest form, just as proposals for change are logically formed in the critical conscience of society.

2. Ever-Growing Injustice

Despite the scientific and technological progress that would indeed make it possible, the basic needs of a large proportion of the world's population are not yet met. It is often the lack of political will, the lucrative goals of businesses and the selfishness of individuals that force thousands of millions of people to endure appalling living conditions. Among examples are those who die of AIDS due to lack of access to medication because pharmaceutical companies are careful not to share their patents; the inhumane working conditions that are exploited by offshore subcontractors of major companies; the shortage of resources to fight hunger when enormous amounts of money are spent on war; the irresponsible and immoral arms industry; the closing of borders to migrants; international trade under conditions of inequality; corruption combined with illicit business and tax havens; brain drain, financial speculation; abusive foreign debt; relentless exploitation of natural resources; environmental degradation; and indiscriminate urban development—these are just some of the mechanisms that generate such shortages. Furthermore, it is easy to verify that they have an even deeper impact when the population is concentrated in the periphery of large cities.

These mechanisms not only prevent many people from maintaining their dignity, but also lead to growing differences between those living in the North and South, in addition to differences within each country. While in the 1950s there was a rate of 30 to 1 in the per capita GDP between the richest 20% and the poorest 20% of the world's population, the difference is now 103 to 1. The same oc-

curs, although in a smaller proportion, with in countries where capital income grows as work income drops. Lastly, the same pattern is repeated in cities, and perhaps even more intensely.

3. Democratic Governability Called into Question

Strictly speaking, politics is the government of the “polis,” or city, and it is safe to say that the first democratic experiences occurred in cities. Nevertheless, the current formulations of representative democracy leave much to be desired at many levels. If we begin with political parties—one of the basic instruments of citizen participation—we immediately observe three major deficits: the lack of “primary” elections to choose candidates, the practical non-existence of open lists, and the “favors” that are offered to economic powers in return for funding.

Things do not appear to improve at state level, where we witness discrimination between first-class and second-class citizens, for example by not giving immigrants the right to vote. Meanwhile, it is practically impossible to undertake popular legislative initiatives, and municipalities—the first mainstay of democracy—receive only 16% of public money, compared to the 53% allotted to the central government.

On a European and global scale, we are forced to acknowledge the practical nonexistence of democracy. Clear examples are the European Parliament without legislative powers, the United Nations with one vote per state and therefore hugely disproportionate to their populations, a Security Council with an incomprehensible right of veto for five privileged countries, and institutions like those of Bretton Woods (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) in which the vote corresponds to the quota allocation. Not to mention that above formal organizations are factual powers ranging from the G8 to the Economic Forum in Davos, the Brus-

sels Chamber of Commerce to the Bilderberg Group, which determine appointments, policies, economic decisions and military actions with utmost impunity.

Furthermore, if people’s freedom is an imperative of democracy, we can see how it is quickly disappearing as social control increases. Cameras in public and private places, illegal phone tapping, photographic dissection of land, the monitoring of e-mails and Internet sessions, and the computerized storage of any kind of personal data: these are all operating at full speed and are justified through false fears of terrorism that are often promoted by governments and, when they are not, ultimately require a different kind of response. Again, city dwellers are hit hardest by these attacks on people’s intimacy and privacy.

4. Pacification Is Possible

It is doubtful whether wars have made any sense over the course of history, but clearly they now make less sense than ever before. During times when the economy was largely based on agricultural activities that were subject to the vicissitudes of the climate and natural phenomena, it may have become impossible for people to survive and, although not justifiable, their will to attack their neighbors in order to attain the goods they lacked may have been comprehensible. Nowadays, despite the millions of people who are starving, there are more than enough resources to satisfy the basic necessities of the world’s inhabitants. And when local or circumstantial deficits arise, they can be overcome thanks to modern communication systems, means of transport, scientific knowledge and other existing techniques. Thus, war is nothing more than intense selfishness and competitiveness taken to the extreme.

But wars do exist and among the reasons behind them are the economic interests largely linked to commodities and energy resources. These wars aim to maintain, or increase, the

welfare status of a fifth of the world's population in detriment of the rest. The armed conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and those waged in Angola and Somalia, closely follow this model of self-interest that is maintained internally in Algeria, Colombia, Congo Kinshasa and Congo Brazzaville, among other places. Occasionally, without turning into a war, these benefits for the privileged are upheld through dictatorial means based on torture, repression and extrajudicial murders, often with the backing of foreign powers. Such is the case of Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Myanmar and Uzbekistan.

Other times, wars are waged due to a series of political, social and ethnic conflicts that lead to social marginalization, territorial occupation, majorities that oppress minorities, and even minorities that oppress majorities. This has been the case of Israel versus Palestine, Serbia and Croatia versus Bosnia and Kosovo, the Russian Federation versus Chechnya, the north versus the south of Sudan, Morocco versus the Sahara and, until recently, Great Britain versus Northern Ireland.

Besides the origin of these conflicts, the main reason for concern is the obsession of most countries with having their war machines in permanent operation, which incites others to do the same. The war machines are almost always justified through the fabrication of false or exaggerated threats and nonexistent enemies. Working efficiently to ensure this is the case are a significant number of media companies often backed by major industrial corporations, important financial powers, heads of defense departments and the arms industry. For instance, the French press is largely in the hands of Serge Dassault (*Le Figaro*), a leading combat aircraft manufacturer, and Arnaud Lagardère (regional press and the Hachette publishing empire), the principal shareholder of the country's privatized war industries.

The arms cycle—a more polite way of referring to the war machine—is presented in different forms, each increasingly pernicious.

Firstly, according to estimates by international organizations, military expenditure currently stands at \$1.2 trillion per year, twenty-two times more than the amount the World Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) believes would be required to eradicate world hunger for a year. Secondly, the number of people who have joined the armed forces (some 26,000,000) is surprising when, according to the United Nations, half a million blue helmets would be more than enough to appease situations of conflict worldwide. Thirdly, there is the perverse research with military goals that, despite its unacceptable ethical dimension, is justified with the excuse that civilians will benefit from these innovations. In fact, benefits have proven to be scarce, technology transfer channels usually follow the path from civil to military, and arms-related discoveries have absolutely no respect for human life. Fourthly, the production and transfer of arms that often flows from North to South ensure ample profits for the rich, while causing wars in poor countries. Conversely, drug trafficking flows in the opposite direction; arms are frequently paid for with drugs, and drugs are often purchased with arms. The Spanish weapons industry is particularly shameful, as it is one of the world's largest exporters and a major supplier of ammunition for wars in Africa, as denounced by Intermón Oxfam.

However, if we say that pacification is possible, it is because, as long as we have the personal and political will to secure certain conditions, we truly believe this to be the case. As a basic principle, and as set out in the UNESCO Charter, we should remove wars from our minds. Nowadays, it is impossible to conceive a "fair war" and if we consider that the war waged in 1991 to reconquer Kuwait—which resulted in the casualties of three hundred American soldiers, 270,000 Iraqis and the subsequent embargo that, according to UNICEF, created over one million victims among children under the age of five—we must immediately reevaluate our moral beliefs. However, if the conflict has already begun, unconditional peace negotiations must be instantly instituted.

The peace process should continue with nuclear and conventional disarmament, reducing the contingent of armed forces, destroying arsenals and reconverting the military industry to benefit civil goals. Although these are usually political decisions, they must be exhorted by citizens through social movements and individual commitments. At this point, nobody can deny the moral justification of those who demonstrated against nuclear tests, the Vietnam War and the invasion of Iraq, to mention only a few specific cases. Similarly, today we all understand those who object to compulsory military service on moral grounds, and we are slowly acknowledging the reasons for fiscal, financial, labor and scientific objections to anything involving war provisions.

We have left a central factor until the end of this chapter: education for peace. Education for peace, and peace itself, needs to be understood in a broad sense that demands justice, disarmament, respect for human rights, social equity, development of peoples, care for the environment and many other requirements. In this respect, it comprises the education that leads to the fulfillment of these goals. But education for peace also calls for us to become aware of the privileges we enjoy as citizens of the North, to renounce competitiveness, eliminate any manner of discrimination, fanaticism and patriotism and hold the value of human dignity above any material, individual or collective gain. Education for peace also demands the disappearance of the ever-present virtual violence in films, comics, videogames, role-playing games, war toys and any educational or leisure instrument for children, youth or adults.

Complementing education for peace is research for peace, paradoxically undervalued compared to research for war, but essential if we wish to determine the origin of conflicts and their possible solutions. It is reassuring to know that working in this direction and following the models already established mostly in northern Europe is the newly launched International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP),

approved by the Parliament of Catalonia and based on the Law for the Fostering of Peace, and the subsequent creation of the Catalan Council for the Fostering of Peace, the consultative body that connects the civil society with political institutions in peace issues.

5. Immigration, the Keystone of City Life

The city is the migratory space par excellence. The injustice described in the second section and the wars analyzed in the third explain the driving forces behind migrations and population flows. We are interested in learning how the North can respond to these flows but, unfortunately, the response is very negative: we close our doors to the arrival of immigrants, which leads to mafia-controlled trafficking of humans who often end up dead; we do not give them the necessary documentation but instead put them in situations involving precarious work and social instability; we do not give them full rights as citizens and thus facilitate their mistreatment and discrimination.

Misconceptions must be reversed and we need to realize that migration—a practice as old as humanity itself—has always been motivated by hunger and war. We should also understand that aging societies like those in Europe require immigration as a source of youth and labor force. However, the real reason we must welcome them is because they have the right. To conclude, we should understand that, contrary to the cultural clash that is so often mentioned, migrations are at the origin of our habits, customs, traditions, artistic wealth and literary heritage.

It is also necessary to realize that mutual interrelations have not always come about in the same way. At times, processes of enrichment and respective osmosis have worked well enough, whereas in other circumstances they have given rise to conflicts, ghettos and situations of dominance. In our context, it has been a case of social rather than ethnic

discrimination. Thus, when we hear about the riots in the *banlieues* of major cities in France, we should realize the protests are actually against the faulty “social ladder” as a result of the labor and income policies of right-wing governments, rather than conflicts between groups from different ethnic backgrounds or territories.

Still, when walking around the Rambla del Raval area in Barcelona, one realizes that peaceful cohabitation is perfectly plausible and that we are still able to prevent the serious conflicts that have erupted in other European countries. But it will only be possible if we are capable of curbing the racist traits that appear in certain media, eliminating the xenophobic spirit of certain groups of the local population and instituting open public policies that are respectful to immigrants.

Before concluding this section, I would like to mention how unfavorably Spain has dealt with the issue of political asylum and exile over the past thirty years. Indeed, it is quite contradictory that as freedom practices in public life have improved, we have lost the ability to offer refuge to those who escape war and repression and come to our country not to improve their living conditions but to actually save their lives. The plurality and wealth that accompanied the arrival of those expelled by Latin American dictatorships in the 1970s have disappeared from our cities and, in absurd contrast to our situation at the end of the Civil War, we have refused to accept refugees, except in symbolic numbers, from Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya, not to mention those from Rwanda, Sudan, Iraq, etc.

6. Consumerism, Limiting Resources

Another of the major challenges that affect today’s societies and urban life in particular has to do with the exponential growth of consumerism and progressive depletion of resources, which was first observed in the 1950s and reached its height in the 1970s.

Indeed, once societies recovered from the devastation of the Second World War, the Western world, and particularly its companies, realized that consumption was the basis of profit and set in motion a careful and fervent plan using psychology and advertising techniques to motivate buyers, hypnotize them with products, offer them spaces that predispose their five senses towards the attention to goods, providing them with access, extended opening hours and easy payment terms, and luring them into a false sense of happiness.

This situation is beneficial to governments, regardless of whether or not they are democratic, because they create conformist citizens with uniform models of life, particularly in terms of consumption and leisure, who are rarely prepared to raise their voices against the system, especially if they are burdened with the responsibility of paying long-term mortgages, as occurs in Spain. France’s May 1968 was a clear warning of this situation, but it was only seized by certain minority groups; for the rest, the door to a single way of thinking was left wide open.

The results have not taken too many decades to become visible and we are now witnessing two things: firstly, that the current level of consumption cannot be generalized to the rest of the world. As stated during the Johannesburg Earth Summit in 2002, if all of humanity wanted access to the same natural resources (water, minerals, energy sources, wood, etc.) as those in the industrialized world—which account for a fifth of the total—we would need three planets. Consequently, from the viewpoint of justice as contained in the title of this section, the only way of applying it in the material area is by putting the theory of decrease into practice. In other words, we are not ethically authorized to grow any more—though we can, of course, continue to develop—when the majority of the world’s population will be forced to refrain from doing so. It is about time this idea were expressed by economic authorities and thus served as an example to business-

people and citizens alike, who must work to achieve the same goals.

Secondly, our injustice in terms of consumption will have an even greater effect on future generations. The symptoms are very clear: depletion of resources, loss of biodiversity, all kinds of pollution, global warming, etc. Furthermore, we are now beginning to witness resource wars, new diseases, lakes drying up, the disappearance of emerging areas, etc. Thus, we are in no way complying with the Indian proverb that says we must treat the earth well since it was not inherited from our ancestors but rather, is borrowed from our children.

7. All Is Not Lost

Although still going strong, today's socioeconomic system, which we have described in the previous sections, reached its height in the 1990s after the fall of the misnamed alternative to real socialism, which was in fact none other than state capitalism with a very high level of militarization. During the second half of the decade, signs of unrest were observed first in Chiapas in the south and later in Seattle in the north. These signs became established in January 2001 during the first of the World Social Forums, which under the well-known slogan "another world is possible" present a series of proposals for transforming the current globalization system.

While it could be considered an oversimplification, the series of contributions from the Forums, which began in Porto Alegre and have later been held at different levels in other cities around the world—once again, the role of the city—largely represent an attempt to build a community economy to replace the current one, which is seen as unjust and predatory.

Certain traits that can be inferred from the issues addressed point clearly in this direction. Good examples include: the improved

distribution of land for agricultural purposes, free transfer of technology, cancellation of foreign debt, growth of development cooperation, a curbing of the speculative rather than the productive economy, fair trade practices, promotion of ethical finances, establishing cooperative business formulas, distributing labor among all workers, responsible purchasing, promoting links with southern countries, occupation and recovery of abandoned factories, women's business ventures, creation of international taxation instruments, reconverting military expenditure towards social goals, basic income practices, soup kitchens, nonmonetary exchanges, and many others.

This new form of understanding the economy entails at least three requirements that correspond with the three social "partners": individuals, companies and the public authorities. Individuals, including not only consumers but also workers and investors, must replace the philosophy of "having" with that of "being," replace competitiveness with cooperation, and material profit with collective welfare. Companies must embrace the concept of social responsibility in the true sense of the term rather than as a marketing strategy, as so often occurs. Social responsibility should be applied to workers, customers, users, suppliers, commercial competitors, subcontractors, public tax offices and all levels of the government. Meanwhile, public authorities must ultimately understand that their purpose is to offer a public service to all citizens and not only to the most powerful and privileged, that taxation must be fairly distributed, and that economic, social and cultural rights must be as fully respected as civil and political rights.

In this context, the city is nothing more than a space for rather unfortunate verifications and a laboratory for tests that may actually become transformation tools. If that were the case, then we truly would be in a position to speak of educating cities.