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Reclaiming Utopia

Contribution to GTI Forum [Can Human Solidarity Globalize?](#)

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To envision a better world of tomorrow calls for great courage because the dominant paradigm reads There Is No Alternative. Or, to quote the Borg from the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* series, “Resistance is futile!” It is how the imagination of another now (to refer to Yanis Varoufakis’s [book](#)) is kept imprisoned. The aim is to silence and discourage all thoughtful, rebellious, and critical minds (and groups). Critique is tolerated if it is not too radical (i.e., does not go deep to the root causes of the present inequalities and suffering) and if it comes mostly from the Western (“more civilized”) part of the world.

We, the people from the Global South, however, have much to say about the past, present, and future of this world. And most of all, about the lack of global solidarity—since we are on the “recipient side” of the crumbs of charity, assistance, and empathy. Strangely, even we who used to live in an acting utopia of former Yugoslavia have almost forgotten the unique experiences of socialism with a human face, non-aligned foreign policy, self-management, and the culture of peace with which we grew up. The free and universal health care (along with free and accessible education and retirement system) was based on the solidarity principle. Even the traces in today’s intrinsic solidarity with the Palestinians, Iraqis, or any other oppressed groups comes from the old school system based on values of non-enmity, antimilitarism, global solidarity, and belief in international law.

Yugoslavia was far from a perfect country, yet it was the closest realization of the ideals of the Paris Commune. The Yugoslav leadership and population did not fear to think beyond the two dominant mantras of Western capitalism and individualism and Eastern state socialism and collectivism. The peace researcher Hakan Wiberg once compared Yugoslavia (with its internal

diversities and contradictions) to a flawed butterfly that was not meant to fly but, not knowing that, flew for several decades. The successor states almost overnight embraced the TINA principle and sought to make any past achievement and legacy obsolete and non-inspirational. The so-called international community has been insisting on the heavy feeling of guilt, shame, and self-blame for the bloody conflicts of the 1990s. Instead of imprisoned imagination, here one can talk of killed imagination (and utopia).

For many of us, it is of utmost importance to evoke Karl Marx's warning from 1852: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." We gave up the positive and even heroic achievements of our predecessors, and instead embraced the traditions of the past generations in the West as guidance for the allegedly inevitable (bright!) future. Instead of seeking friends and showing empathy and solidarity with the ones who are in a more miserable position, we have been confronted with (newly invented) enemies at home and abroad, take part in imperial endeavors of our new colonial masters, and teach our children that war is peace and peace is war.

Self-management (in economic, political, and societal terms) used to be a school of participatory democracy and mutual solidarity among the members of the community/communities of Yugoslavia and with the wider world. Egoism, competition, and self-interests are the driving forces for the new generation of "entrepreneurs." How to work subversively, especially from within academia, is the challenge I face every day. Planting the seeds of critical thinking and dissent is essential, and yet possible: step by step, day by day, patiently and stubbornly against the mainstream. Without personal freedom and self-awareness of the pandemic of inequality that has long preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, there can be no collective action toward a common goal and global solidarity.

The promotion of various forms of global solidarity is a luxury of rare (yet courageous) people able and free enough to work on the global cause. One should not disregard and disrespect much less significant efforts on a micro level that take place every day. Solidarity grows from within small communities, and only then expand and embrace wider spaces of our Earthland. But those small

heroes often need moral and intellectual support. The resistance against social injustices is well-alive despite the grim general picture of the world, but it lives in small pockets of society. It calls for a trigger to be awakened—such as mass tragedies and misfortunes. Even the once war-ravaged part of former Yugoslavia still has the potential to provide for an outburst of mass solidarity in a time of need (be they floods, earthquakes, etc.). Bearing in mind that all these “natural catastrophes” are in essence a result of social decay and structural violence embedded in unjust and repressive institutional arrangements, this is obviously not enough. Solidarity could be sustainable only if institutionalized and yet not alienated from the people the system should serve.

In April 2020, Arundhati Roy hoped that the pandemic was a portal, i.e., a gateway between one world and the next. Indeed, the world is changing even faster than we thought, but there is no guarantee that the results will be positive. The COVID-19 pandemic is just a test for everything else: if we manage to disempower Big Pharma, then anything else will be possible. Our common struggle for a better world should be carried out on many levels and in many forms. Obviously, this is (again) a time of monsters, and we need to synthesize the feelings of pessimism and optimism, and to transcend them in a Gramscian way: while our minds may be pessimistic, we should mobilize as many people with strong and optimistic wills as possible.

What should be our common and most urgent goals in this endeavor? Palestine and the pandemic management come first to mind: these urgent affairs combine the local with the planetary! Ending Israeli apartheid and making COVID-19 vaccines (and eventually cures) a global public good. The next step should be universal health care, along with the universal basic income. Global civil society (not the one deliberately created and funded by power centers in order to promote the liberal agenda or even the status quo) must reclaim its independence from any limitations imposed by geopolitical “realism.” Free market, neoliberal status quo, and militaristic interventionism “for the sake of humanitarianism” or R2P are not outcomes of any natural laws; they are all man-made and their sustainability depend inter alia on current hegemony of knowledge.

Let’s reimagine and adopt a sense of possibility because There Are Thousands of Alternatives (TATA) should be our guiding star. By labeling something as utopia we immediately give up the sense of possible-ism. We have no other choice but to embark on the path fueled by necessity and desire, without being ashamed by our inherent need to dream and work for a better world. While being

guided by TATA principle, there is just one thing we are not allowed to disregard: the bio-political imperatives that imperil human survival and ecological balance call for unprecedented cooperative energies turned loose.

About the Author



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About the Publication

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