

THE CULTURE OF THE SOCIOECONOMY OF SOLIDARITY

*In his death bed, Josias recapitulated his life.
He discovered that he could have lived a much happier life, had he learned
To collaborate with the others, instead of taking them as opponents or enemies.
He sought the origins of his way of being.
He mentally visited the church and the school of his childhood,
He recalled his family,
He revisited his professional life, and found in all these relationships,
And even deeper than they, explanations for his way of being and seeing,
A source of such deep unhappiness.*

And, perhaps too late, he wished he had another chance...

There is a variety of concepts of culture. The one that satisfies me the most is that which embraces the set of values, attitudes, behaviors, aspirations, ways of relating that are characteristic of a certain stage of evolution of a society. Culture is silently present in the gestures, words, gazes, actions of our daily life. It is present in the way we see ourselves and the world, in the ways we relate to ourselves, to Nature, to society, to each person with whom we live day-by-day, to our ancestors and to those who will come after us in endless future generations. Culture is present even in the manner we protest, we show indignation, we revolt against it, and also in the ways it expresses itself in us and in society.

When we are not satisfied with our culture, and we wish to replace it with one that is superior and more evolved, it is out of the old culture that we must extract the elements to build the new culture; in the old culture we find the germs and the seeds of the one we yearn for. The old culture, just like the old way of organizing society, is the matrix and the cradle of the new culture and of the new way of organizing society.

When we identify culture with art and with esthetics, we do it simply because in them culture is openly manifest, with no subterfuge. An art in which people are depicted as competitive, aggressive and violent beings is the daughter of a culture that conceives the human being as competitive, aggressive and violent. In turn, each work of art -painting, sculpture, poem,

play, movie, speech - in which we depict the human being as a cooperative, fraternal and loving being has a twofold impact: on the one hand, it loudly negates the culture of competition, aggression and war, as well as the mode of social organization this culture has fostered; on the other, it announces that another culture is possible, and can already be anticipated; such a culture is expressed in a way of organizing society and of relating socially and interpersonally that is based on cooperation, solidarity and love.

The culture of cooperation and solidarity is also the culture of love. Not “charity”, not infatuation, not instinctive passion, but the natural and biological phenomenon of love - “the dynamic, spontaneous condition of acceptance, by a living system, of its coexistence with other living system(s)... the foundation of the social phenomenon and not its consequence... the biological phenomenon that allows us to escape the anti-social alienation created by us through our rationalizations.” (Maturana, 1997: 184-185) This Chilean biologist is convinced - and so am I - that “competition is anti-social... [it] implies the negation of the other... Competition negates love. Members of modern cultures praise competition as a source of progress. I think that competition gives place to blindness, because it negates the other and it reduces creativity, reducing the circumstances of coexistence. The anthropological origin of *Homo Sapiens* did not occur through competition, but rather through cooperation, and cooperation can only happen as a spontaneous activity through mutual acceptance, that is, through love.”

If this is so, then we can also assert that a cooperative socioeconomy is also a love economy. And a cooperative globalization is also a globalization of love. This is the meeting point between culture and economics, and it has some key implications for the way both can be conceived in an innovative perspective.

Self-managed cooperativism is the affirmation that the human being can become the subject of his/her own economy, and can stop being an object and a puppet of others and of his/her own creations - capital, wealth, money, machines, technology. It proves that there can be a different and superior culture to that of greed, usury and avarice. It also proves that the capitalist is a redundant figure. From the culture of competition emerges a frightening ethics: all that helps ME to have, possess, control others and accumulate wealth is

good; all that hinders ME from all that is evil. (The ME is written in capital letters to indicate the cult of the abstract individual, taken as an absolute, isolated from its social and historical contexts, a person seen as an “I-without-we”). This is the ethics of EACH ONE FOR ONESELF, AND GOD FOR ME...

Instead, the culture of cooperation and solidarity has a constructive ethics: all that helps US share the means of subsistence and wealth is good. All I do that supports the promotion of others is good for the others and has returns for me as well. (The US in capital letters has to do with the concept of the individual seen as intrinsically linked to (in solidarity with) its social and historical contexts, thus, a person-relationship, “I-and-we at once”). This is the ethics of ONE FOR ALL, ALL FOR ONE. This is also the ethics of love.

In the culture of globalized modernity the **Economy** has been distorted to such a point that it can barely be recognized. From **“the management of the house”** (etymologically speaking) **for the well being of all its inhabitants**, it became “unlimited growth and endless accumulation of wealth”, for the good of those who are capable of taking possession of them at the cost of others and of Nature. **The house** is our body, our home, the land and other spaces in which we labor, is our community, district, city, state, Nation. It is also, and in a very real sense, our Planet and the whole Cosmos. The capitalistic culture sees all these as commodities to be bought and sold, as instruments of wealth accumulation, even at the cost of their degradation and destruction. It is a culture of death. The humanistic culture, on the contrary, sees them as gifts of Life, over which we are empowered and, by consequence, made responsible. It is our duty to cultivate them and care for them in such a way that they blossom and bear fruit for the well being of each and every one of us. And in the depth of our souls we know that one day we will be asked to present our accounts, to show how we managed those gifts that Life gave us. The Economy, in the humanistic culture, demands the care and the good management of each one of those “houses”.

It is not by chance that in Brazil we organized two meetings - one of the Latin region in 1998, the other of the Brazilian nation in 2000 - both associating the word Culture to the expression Socioeconomy of Solidarity.* They focused on the Socioeconomy - that is, the Economy, as defined above, oriented toward the social and human well being, the Economy in which I want the other

individual's or enterprise's well being because the other dwells in the same house as I, and being better off, I will also be better off. Furthermore, the Other is part of me and of my world, the Other is a prolongation of me. And if the Other is not well, I cannot be well either. This is the fundamental principle of a Socioeconomy of Solidarity. Besides, the meetings also focused on the Culture of Solidarity. Such a culture involves a number of values that deserve to be mentioned here: reciprocity, cooperation, compassion (= to feel with the Other), respect of diversity, complementarity, communion, love.

The challenge is a serious one. Our heart, our psyche are anchored in the values of the dominant culture. The only way for us not to be rhetorical, but rather to give the new values real life is to see ourselves as arenas of struggle, as spaces in which the struggle between the old and the new culture, the old and the new values, attitudes, behaviors, aspirations and ways of relating is being fought. And this is a daily struggle, to be fought in every space, instance and relationship. It is the struggle to re-educate ourselves and help others educate themselves as new women, new men and new children. It is the struggle to seek a new form of freedom, in which we are free because we conquered the control over our own impulses and instincts, because our conscience is being illuminated and our will strengthened, for both allow us to make the best choices. It is the struggle to help one another in this process of self-conquest and self-education. After all, the conversion of competitive and aggressive human beings, alienated by the capitalistic culture, into cooperative and loving beings, emancipated and integrated with one another in the construction of a humanistic culture, involves a daily struggle of life, death and resurrection!

REFERENCES: Maturana, Humberto, 1997, "Reflexões sobre o Amor", em *A Ontologia da Realidade*, Editora UFMG, Belo Horizonte.

* Reference to the Latin Meeting on a Culture and a Socioeconomy of Solidarity (Porto Alegre, Aug. 1998) and the Brazilian Meeting on a Culture and a Socioeconomy of Solidarity (Mendes, RJ, June 2000). This article was written as preparatory reading for the Brazilian Meeting.

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