

New Global Studies

Volume 5, Issue 2

2011

Article 3

Another World is Possible? Utopia Revisited

José Pedro Zúquete, *The Institute of Social Sciences, Lisbon*

Recommended Citation:

Zúquete, José Pedro (2011) "Another World is Possible? Utopia Revisited," *New Global Studies*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 3.

Available at: <http://www.bepress.com/ngs/vol5/iss2/art3>

DOI: 10.2202/1940-0004.1130

©2011 New Global Studies. All rights reserved.

Another World is Possible? Utopia Revisited

José Pedro Zúquete

Abstract

The visualization of a radically different society and the search for another world have become recurrent in the discourse and practices of 21st century Latin American revolutionaries and alter-globalization activists. Utopia, often redefined, is embraced and conceptualized as the ultimate goal and final inspiration. This article analyzes the different ways in which such alternative worlds are envisaged, the utopian drives behind them, as well as the consequences for such concepts as politics and revolution. The article concludes with a reflection on the lasting power of imagination, hope, and heroic narratives of national and global liberation against the perceived evil of neoliberal globalization.

Man is, properly speaking, based upon Hope, he has no other possession but Hope; this world of his is emphatically the 'Place of Hope'

- Thomas Carlyle¹

INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century utopia fell into disgrace. Justly or not, the word became synonymous with totalitarianism and inhuman visions that coerced humankind into pre-designed schemes aimed at bringing, inevitably through brutal violence, a new order of things here on earth. Social scientists and opinion makers of almost every strand reiterated this idea, and Eric Hobsbawm's verdict as the 1990's drew to a close that "the problem isn't wanting a better world [but] believing in the utopia of a perfect world" (2000, 161), was commonsensical, almost indisputable.

Conversely, the 21st century may still be known as the century in which utopia makes a public comeback. If one reads the writings of those militants engaged in the left-wing struggle against "free-market, corporate or imperialist" globalization – making themselves heard through networks of rebellion or political regimes – it becomes all too evident that utopia not only has returned but has been rehabilitated as a powerful analytical and experiential tool for total change in human affairs. The word utopia is not murmured but loudly proclaimed from the rooftops. It is not passed around like a secret, a hidden truth, but instead is held as a badge of honor, a symbol of pride and defiance in an age supposedly bereft of any emancipatory visions from a mechanical, technocratic, and market-oriented eternal present.

The allure of utopia throughout the centuries has been clear; its definition and meaning, however, have been equivocal and prone to different interpretations. The concept has moved around on a continuum that begins with a narrow view of utopia as a literary fiction, a place of abundance and prosperity imagined by writers of the past and present, and has evolved into a broad vision of a sweeping drive for change inherent to human beings, a metonym for an ever-present hope in and desire for novelty, and new beginnings, in history.² Whether utopia is actually a literary genre or an archetypal human faculty is a secondary concern; the concept abounds in left-wing anti-globalization narratives as a synonym for

¹ Carlyle, Thomas. 1896, 129

² The classic broad definition of utopia harkens back to Ernst Bloch's volumes on the subject, particularly *The Principle of Hope*, written in mid-20th century, which sees utopia as the "not-yet-achieved." But it can be seen in a myriad of authors such as, for instance, George Kateb (utopia as the struggle "for the creation of a new reality," 1965, 463) or more recently, Ruth Levitas (utopia as a desire for "a better way of living" – 2003, 4) or Miguel Abensour (utopia as an "irrepressible desire for freedom" – 2008, 408).

holistic change and for the creation and experience of a radically different present. Moreover, utopias are not static, monolithic, unchanging throughout the times, but dynamic, expressing indeed the “realities of a *certain present* ... its obsessions and its dreams” (Baczko 1981, 476). Rather than an ahistorical creation, utopianism mirrors its own times and expresses itself accordingly.

The obsession of the current left-wing utopianism is with the “neo-liberal imperialist” global system. This capitalist offensive is the responsible for the world’s decadence, which manifests itself politically, economically, culturally and spiritually while threatening nature and the survival of humankind itself. But this gloomy diagnosis is countered by the dream of turning a fallen world upside down, and this yearning for another world drives the thoughts and actions of many anti-globalization devotees. This dual obsessive-dreamy dimension can be seen in many activists of what has been called the Global Justice (or alter-globalization) Movement, as well as in the politics and praxis of many contemporary Latin-American revolutionaries.

Thus, the main thrust of utopianism is both the visceral rejection of the world as it is (which currently means in its neo-liberal form) *and* the drive for an elsewhere (the world as it ought to be). The descent of utopia to reality in the 21st century, however, takes many forms. The objectification of utopia is plural, and there is not one big singular path in order to make the dream concrete. What is distinct in 21st century utopia is its multifaceted nature. Blueprints and plans for another world coexist and often mix and intersect with experiments of alternative worlds here and now, instead of imagined and distant futures *somewhere else*; both transcendent and immanent “another worlds” operate in 21st century anti-globalization frameworks. Utopia has not only returned but been recast. G.K. Chesterton stated once that “utopia is not at the beginning of the world or the end of the world. Utopia has been something always near and never discovered” (1929, 84). His observation could be expanded by noting that, today, for many human beings in struggle for the world, utopia can be *lived* and *experienced* in the present, amid a world in ruins.

Of course, one can take the Olympian attitude of invalidating the seriousness of such pronouncements as being too extravagant—or downright foreign to rationalistic ears—to be worthy of analysis. But the scholarly dismissal of what the subjects actually say and do, imposing instead predetermined ideas about what they *really* mean, risks missing a major engine of collective mobilization. And if the 20th century has demonstrated anything, it is that true believers’ dreams of regeneration and belief in the possibility of transforming the world should not be passed over as unrealistic or unreasonable.

The proliferation of utopian thoughts and dynamics give lie to the claim that humankind has reached an era of deideologization, or even a “shameful” post-utopian age (Bauman 1999, 8). It further demonstrates the resilience of the

nonmaterial in human affairs. As Mulford Sibley claimed, “Genuine insight into politics and social life soon overflows the limitations of statistical tables and nicely colored graphs” (1940, 177). Indeed, alter-globalization narratives powerfully testify to such an overflowing.

LATIN AMERICA: UTOPIA ON THE HORIZON

Since the turn of the new millennium, several new governments have arisen in Latin America that, in their self understanding, are dedicated to the overturn of old, elitist policies of the past through the ushering in of a new era. This new era will be one in which Latin Americans—freed from an inhuman, corporate-driven, and imperialist globalization—will create new forms of political participation in order to fulfill the democratic promise of power to all the people. Regardless of whether or not the “left turn” (Arditi 2008) in the continent will be halted, Eduardo Galeano’s belief that utopia is “good for walking” (1995, 326) finds confirmation in the discourse of many Latin American believers in the healing powers of contemporary leftist revolutionary endeavors. Policies and goals are described by participants as utopian; small adjustments within the old are insufficient for those in pursuit of the new. The goal is not simply to refurbish the house but to build another one upon new and unprecedented foundations.

A case in point is Venezuela, where the Bolivarian revolution is emerging as such a model home of utopian aspirations. Hugo Chávez assumes the role of utopian-in-chief and frequently proclaims that the ultimate aim of 21st century Bolivarian socialism is to build a “utopia” here on earth, marching toward a path of “life, greatness, [and] the kingdom that Christ announced two thousand years ago” (2005, 461-62). All initiatives taken by the government are part of a great plan of national revival that will lead to the rebirth of the nation, a society of new men and new women, the rise of a strong and unified Latin America, and, ultimately, the purification of the entire world. Against imperialism and the neo-liberal globalization of misery, a new world, with the new Venezuela, will arise.

The word utopia pervades the revolutionary narrative of the Venezuelan president: “What drives us is a utopia of liberation” (2004, 272). The concretization of this Bolivarian society of “Elsewhere or of ‘Not yet’” (Desroche 1979, 164), requires and is driven by three main aspirations. The establishment of a community of equals—in which the people, as a homogenous entity, decides its future for itself rather than depends on any sort of elitist minority—has been the primary goal since the early times of the Bolivarian revolution, which heralds the day when a “true” democracy will rule over the land. Until the new Bolivarian times the people lived under a false democracy, in which so-called representatives of the people exploited the system for their own profit and thus created in practice an oligarchy, the rule of a minority of powerful over a vast majority of powerless.

The Venezuelan leader calls the Bolivarian democracy a “revolutionary, participatory, and activist democracy” that rejects and transcends the “old” representative democracy, the “democracy of the elites” (2006). In the minds of Bolivarian militants the arrival of this new participatory democracy is what makes the fulfillment of utopia a possibility. A former minister of higher education calls participatory democracy a “concrete utopia.” Thus, “if this is a humanist revolution,” he says, “as I think it is, it will often provoke the reaction ‘this is utopia. Well, it *is* utopian. But it is a concrete utopia ... participatory democracy in Venezuela must be visualized as the theme that will transform humanity” (Navarro 2004). A militant writes, “In the face of disenchantment, hopelessness, conformity, it is crucial the role of utopia, democracy is a utopia, ‘the government of the people, for the people, and by the people,’ as our President says.” Venezuela, unlike the “exclusivist democracies” of the past, is building an “inclusive democracy,” which is “not only a utopia but a path for the fulfillment of the not-yet achieved utopias” (Montaño 2007). Venezuela is thus giving birth to a new democracy: the utopia of a community in which all equally and enthusiastically support and participate.

Intimately linked with these visions of a real and authentic democracy is the hope of creating a new communal state that will replace the old bourgeois state. These communal experiments in 21st-century Bolivarian Socialism are defined as “the means through which the newly enlightened and organized masses can take over the administration of the policies and projects created to address the needs of the community in the construction of a fair and just society” (*Gaceta Oficial* 2006). In the account of an activist, “In the communes the socialist spirituality makes utopia concrete.” It is possible to build, in mundane life, the “utopia, the dream of a Communal Venezuela without exploiters and exploited, without privileged and excluded.” In the commune one “experiments, lives, feels and tastes the new world.” No longer neglected, the people participates and transforms history: “We should be a people oriented toward the future, a people that transforms the history that receives and makes it new, humane and fair.” The life of Venezuelan communes corresponds to a utopia in the making, creating “a future that is achievable, a utopia that serves for much more than to keep us walking towards her” (Guédez 2007).

The utopian drive comes full circle with the coming of a new society that has been transformed by a new value-system and is constituted by new and revitalized human beings. This impending creation is typically described not only by the followers and comrades but by the Bolivarian leader himself, as the making of utopia into a reality. As the leader frequently states, these new men and women will be products of a “moral revolution, giving an example of a socialist ethic, of unselfishness, of solidarity and love between us” (ABN 2007). For the self-proclaimed “militants of utopia,” a “new world” is at hand (Amorin 2010). In the

words of one of such militant, “Our America has been destined for centuries to be the land of the accomplishment of the utopia imagined by Thomas More, but also of the utopia that seeks to create a truly democratic society, in which arises the new human being mentioned by Che Guevara, toward the construction of a world in which justice, liberty, and equality rule” (Garcés 2005). But the wonders of this earthly kingdom will be of benefit not only to Venezuelans, or even more broadly to Latin Americans; its liberating light will reach all the corners of the world. The future of the “entirety of humanity depends on our success,” as declared by a Bolivarian activist, and the peoples of the world will be freed from an oppressive, rapacious, and anti-human system (Guédez 2007).

Inevitably, one’s utopia may very well slide into someone else’s dystopia – hence, the strong opposition to such earth-shaking plans by a large minority, those who have not been touched by the appeal of Bolivarian utopianism, and fear the drive toward coercive purity. The zealotry of many Bolivarian militants is surely obvious in their passionate commitment to the cause. “Day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute, we follow,” says a devotee of what Chávez has labeled “Socialism for the 21st century,” “A leader, a people, creating the new history, never before so close to utopia” (Milton Chavez 2009). Or, as stated by another, “The possibility of utopia, as never before in history, is very near and is anchored in imagination and the replacement of values in the way that our peoples think and act, leading toward its complete emancipation” (Garcés 2005). The utopian drive of the Bolivarian revolution is met and supported by the enthusiasm and elation of militants. With their gazes set upon the utopian horizon they optimistically embrace the never-ending possibilities of their cherished revolution. The reference to utopia runs throughout Bolivarian revolutionary narratives. In other parts of South America, however, if the word utopia as such does not frequently shows up, the goals themselves are no less ambitious in their intent to drastically change the world as it is into the world that it could become.

In Andean nations, for example, the notion of utopia has persisted throughout the centuries not as the search for a nowhere, but signaling the desire to restore the times of the Incas, an imagined idyllic time of justice and equality for all (Flores-Galindo 1988). These utopian dynamics can be seen at work in Bolivia, and with Evo Morales intent on “founding Bolivia once again” with a “democratic and cultural revolution.” The “new history of Bolivia starts today,” declared the president in his inauguration speech, “[an era] of equality, where there is no discrimination” (Morales 2006a).

This self-proclaimed “decolonization project” has been buoyed by idealistic images of a “true democracy” built on pure, egalitarian, indigenous ancestral ways. The goal is not simply to go back to the imagined past but to recreate the foundations of society itself with the help of a local wisdom that had long been suppressed by Western rapaciousness and profit but is now returning to

light. This long-hoped-for holistic change corresponds to the Andean cosmological notion of *Pachakuti*, a founding event that overcomes an oppressive past and establishes a new and renovated world. As in Venezuela, what happens in Bolivia has global ramifications; and the belief is that a non-Western cosmology and knowledge system is humanity's last and best hope to save itself from extinction. The "defense of humanity"—defined as a struggle between "life" (deeply rooted in Andean ways) and "death" (identified with savage global capitalism)—can be achieved only by returning to the values of the indigenous peoples who "are the moral reserve of the world" (Morales 2006b). Only in this way another world—one that is balanced, just, and humane—will be possible. In Ecuador, although the references to an indigenous cosmology are less frequent, President Rafael Correa's "citizens' revolution" will inaugurate a new time, a new era of plenty and happiness, after the "long and sad neoliberal night" (de la Torre 2011). The revolution will lead to a second independence and to the final emancipation of the people (de la Torre 2010). Correa's highly personalistic "politics of redemption" (Ordoñez 2010) will bring salvation and social peace while putting an end to a history of oppression and humiliation under the rule of the oligarchs. Under the "new" and "authentic" democracy the awakened people, hopeful once again, march toward a future that "has no return." This awakening of the people does not represent "an era of changes, but the change of an era" (Correa, cited in Ordoñez 2010:93). A newly revitalized Ecuador will emerge as an example of dignity and independence.

Of course, if utopia is on the march again in Latin America, the pioneering and inspiring role of the Zapatista experience at the close of 20th century cannot be emphasized enough. Subcomandante Marcos outrightly rejects the utopian label: "Ours is not a liberated territory, nor a utopian commune. Nor an experimental laboratory for nonsense, nor the paradise of an orphaned left" (2007, 256). At the same time, the Zapatistas, and especially Marcos, have since early times portrayed their struggle as the struggle against free-market globalization for "another world," and have expanded in this way their own combat on both the local and the national levels to include all of humanity. Moreover, they have established new forms of direct democracy in their own communities and villages in the state of Chiapas, that constitute a "model for a new world" (Marcos, cited in Báez 1996, 99) that is waiting to be born. "We'll build another world," Marcos pledged on one occasion, "a better one, bigger, better, one in which all worlds can fit" (Marcos 2001, 186). Unsurprisingly, many external observers view the Zapatista network of autonomous communities as containing the potential for transforming radical politics and putting utopian thinking "in motion again" (Mentinis 2006, 137-8).

The resurgence and celebration of utopia in Latin America is not exclusive to those acting on the ground; it is a feature of scholars too. An edited volume on

the new Latin American Left has the subtitle “utopia reborn” (Barrett *et al* 2008); Mexican sociologist Armando Bartra, for example, praises the “utopian realism” of the new ecumenical left because it is “utopia mixed with possibility, it is dreaming and wakefulness, it is revolution and reform, it is to demand (of ourselves) the impossible while doing what can be done” (2008, 213-4). Sara Motta praises the “recreation of utopias” in contemporary Latin America (2006, 92), while Benjamin Dangl hopes that his book on Latin American social movements “contributes to our collective journey toward utopia” (2010, 11). The allure of and fascination with utopia and the promise of an alternative world—shared by revolutionaries, scholar-activists—is a factor that must be accounted for in any through analysis of contemporary politics in Latin America.

GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT: THE MAKING OF UTOPIA

The theme of utopia is conspicuous in the wide and heterogeneous global movement against free-market globalization. The individuals and groups associated, whether loosely or substantive, with the alter-globalization movement, welcome and embrace the word and the concept of utopia against a world devoid of grand designs, and against the liberal-capitalist “illusion” that contemporary human beings are living in a postideological and postutopian age.

The redefinition of utopia, the reinvention of politics, and the recreation of revolution all intertwine in contemporary left-wing global activism. First, “another world is possible” is not an empty motto but rather the driving force of activists, even when their work is consigned to the local level; further, such an alternative world is not something to be postponed indefinitely in the future, but is achievable, and is in fact experienced, in a variety of ways, in the present. Neat blueprints leading to the promise land are out of fashion; the path to the future does not have a map. And the road is messier, fluid, while the alternative world is less mediated, more direct, almost instantaneous. “‘Correct’ political lines, one-ideology-fits-all, rigid blueprints, and cookie-cutter solutions won’t work,” declares a militant for another world, “Instead, the new radicalism finds its hopeful possibilities in the diverse interconnected movement of movements that has risen up around the planet” (Solnit 2004, XIV). As stated by the collective network *We Are Everywhere*, “rather than seek a map to tomorrow, [activists] are developing [their] own journeys, individually and collectively, as [they] travel.”

They wonder, “Do we have the courage to move—sometimes stumbling, sometimes running—towards an unknowable destination?” (*Notes from Nowhere* 2003, 506). Such are the dynamics that inspire Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to argue for the existence of a new global revolutionary force (the “living thing” they call the “Multitude”) that transcends nation-states, ethnicities and races. According to them, this radical and shapeless force has created a counter-Empire

engaged in a war of liberation that, in typical utopian fashion, will end with the arrival of a radically transformed world (2004).

The changing role of utopia expresses itself in the primacy given in left-wing global activist circles to the creation of spaces of freedom, liberated from an oppressive global system: sacred spaces that represent what visionary anarchist Hakim Bey called Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ). This concept is widespread within the rave movement, as a space for “all of us to move forward emotionally and spiritually by allowing us to be who we really are—and who we really can be.”³ In the global justice movement these independent spaces are felt to be and sought for as liberated spaces, in which the alternative future is lived in the present; they anticipate the wider imagined community of all those who will be freed from the domination and hierarchy of an inhuman and soulless global capitalism. These spaces of escape from the dominant structure can take many forms, from street parties, to a wide range of rebellious and popular forums such as those associated, for example, with the World Social Forum (what Chico Whitaker, one of its Brazilian founders called, a “Square without an owner”), and other social forums, or even the creation of autonomous communities, from the Zapatistas to squatters to the landless movement in Brazil. These temporary autonomous zones are celebrated as “temporary utopian spaces” that facilitate “a temporary ‘escape to freedom’ and provide the ‘experience’ of another possible world, even if temporarily” (Curran 2009, 205). These spaces of alternative ways of living constitute contemporary manifestations of “Grounded Utopian Movements” (GUMs) in which a more fulfilling and just order of things is experienced.⁴

These spaces of rebellion are often associated with carnival, and it is common to find in global activist circles calls for a “carnavalesque rebellion” against the system. The liberating role of the carnivalesque has been well documented by Bakhtin (1984) as moments of subversion and reversal of social roles and hierarchies. These ecstatic performances remind participants that “carnival and revolution have identical goals: to turn the world upside down with joyous abandon and to celebrate our indestructible lust for life, a lust that capitalism tries so hard to destroy with its monotonous merry go round of work and consumerism.... It gives a glimpse of what is possible, igniting our imagination, our belief in utopia—a utopia defined not as no-place, but as this-place” (*Notes from Nowhere*: 175, 181). Thus, in these joyful insurgencies against global capitalism, a new world is achieved “which will not wait for the future, a

³ See, <http://fusionanomaly.net/taz.html>

⁴ Such as the Rastafarians in Jamaica, the American Indian Ghost Dance religion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the Guatemalan Maya movement of the 1980s. See, Price, Nonini, and Fox 2008: 127–159

world which embraces paradox, a world which contain many worlds” (Jordan and Whitney 2001, 25).

Similarly, riots are viewed as moments of both destruction and creation in which the glimpses of another possible world are experienced. As stated by a participant in the 1999 Battle of Seattle, the episode created “a break that exists to this day ... it’s only by focusing on this initial political fissure that we can see the slim utopian space, where, perhaps, we can truly be ourselves” (Cook 2008, 39). The effervescence of such moments of confrontation and transgression – from destroying property to clashing with the police—have been described as moments of potential creation, “events that rupture ‘normal’ political time and space, that speed up history, and open new political spaces ... They can generate an effervescence that might create new collective solidarities.” The making of utopia calls for such events: “Radical politics cannot live without the intensity created in such moments: it is those moments that make other worlds possible” (Mueller and Sullivan 2011). As stated by a participant in the Greek riots of 2009, “There are no futuristic visions of paradise inside the heads of the people [but] when we decide to attack, our attack is like thunder that comes from outer space and breaks the night of social apathy. We are waiting, waiting for the proper moment... Nothing will stay like it was. We are an image from the future” (Sagris 2011). These “images from the future” proliferate in the alter-globalization narratives and practices of the 21st century.

These spaces of resistance to neo-liberal globalization, such as temporary freedom zones, carnivalesque events, and revolutionary rioting, contribute to a redefinition of utopia as something that is no longer a transcendent affair, but is rather an immanent (as well as imminent) condition, or process. Utopia in this view is a primal, creative, and Dionysian force, rather than a fixed state. Hence, “utopia not as a place we might reach but as an ongoing process of becoming” (Coté, Day and Peuter 2007, 12). Rather than in “unchanging” and “static circumstances,” utopia in this manner is conceptualized and operates “as dynamic processes of relations that are constantly formed and reformed” (Shukaitis 2005, 2). Against a deferred utopia, or a utopia in the future, the goal is to experience, in all its energy, “utopia now”: “not a prefiguration of something-to-come, but an instantiation of something-else, a not yet fully formed space/place, a becoming-different that shows that other worlds are not merely possible, they are information” (Robinson and Tormey 2009, 175). Utopia has been grounded within and anchored to the present tense.

This “presentist” tendency can also be seen in more conventional accounts that propose to achieve utopias here and now as long as they are attuned with, or adapt themselves to, the surrounding world. One can see the defense, for example, of a “real utopia,” defined as a “collectively developed vision that I believe is fully possible and within reach of human potentialities—meaning designed to

accommodate real people in real world conditions” (Spannos 2009), or the power of “minor utopias” (Winter 2006), to bring about peaceful and gradual change. These are in tune with the calling forth of a “realistic utopia” that “must set aside the messianic illusion of a radiant future, [but] nevertheless nourishes the hope of such a better world” (Morin 2006, 141). This contemporary refusal to achieve a finished, and fixed, paradise, could lead one to think that utopia has been downsized, to have lost its grand designs and become more modest in the 21st century. But even when proponents of a better world feel the urge to associate realism with utopia, they nevertheless make utopia—regardless of its size and pace of change—the yardstick with which reality is measured and left wanting.

At the same time these new waves of struggle seek and are shaped by the reinvention of politics. This recreation is made in two ways. Representative democracy is castigated as illegitimate and a tool of coercion and oppression used by the elites to infantilize the people and keep them under their thumb. As told by the insurrectionary anarchist *CrimethInk* network, “Some reformers hawk pipe dreams of more participatory systems of representation, but a world in which people act for themselves and thus need no representatives—that is unthinkable” (2009a). Democracy, when it is not immediately rejected, it is only accepted as a system of government if it is direct, unmediated, and free from the evil hand of capitalism. Hence, “democracy, as we know it, is dead. It was murdered by the market... We need to accept this reality and move on, into what can hopefully become a new phase of genuine people-power, with the market as its servant, not as its master” (Kingsnorth 2004, 35). Not surprisingly, the so-called “indignant movement” in Spain—constituted by thousands of mostly young people afflicted by high unemployment--occupied public squares in cities across the country (most famously the *puerta del Sol* in Madrid) in the spring of 2011 and demanded a “new” and “real” democracy as opposed to the democracy of the elites. Meanwhile, the motto of protesters in Portugal was “Our dreams do not fit in your ballot boxes!” The “power from below” imagined by militants takes many forms, including, for example, consensus-based decision making, which is often inspired by the life of indigenous communities. In many forums, festivals, protests and temporary autonomous zones, such horizontal decision making processes are adopted even if they are not immune from occasional disagreements and tension regarding procedures and goals.

This renovation of politics is also symbolized in what has come to be known as “prefigurative politics.” With or without violence, activists confront the world as it is, with its institutions and symbols, while at the same time they promote and experience the world as it should be. The goal, in the words of a militant, is to simultaneously battle the status quo and to “plant the seeds of the new society within the shell of the old,” in dual-power strategies (Reinsborough, 2004, 198). Hence, “the world of our dreams exists to the exact degree that we

behave as if we're already living in it—there's no other way it can come to be" (*CrimethInk* 2009c). For many devotees a "new politics" is decisively emerging, "a politics that doesn't wait... but acts in the moment, not to create something in the future but to build in the present, it's the politics of the here and now. When we are asked how are we going to build a new world, our answer is, 'we don't know, but let's build it together'" (Jordan, cited in Solnit 2004, 105-6). These militants for another world want, with their own impetus and voluntarism, as authentic agents of change, dramatically to reverse the postulate that "in politics, the adventure of changing the world is transformed into the tedium of waiting for it to change" (*CrimethInk* 2009b). With the advent of the new politics boredom vanishes, and the wait is finally over.

These developments in the conceptions of utopia and politics have obvious consequences for the concept of revolution. The proliferation of liberated spaces is the confirmation for many in the alter-globalist movement that the revolution is *already* under way: in autonomous communities, against global and state power, one acts "as though one is already free." These spaces represent revolutionary acts in which the future is shaped and experienced in the present.⁵ Revolution is not viewed as one big sudden event but is made instead of many continuous bursts subverting the system from below and within. The fire is not at the edge of town but burning away from the inside. Activists' enthusiasm is all too evident: "The anticapitalist movement is the most sustained recent attempt to reinvent the notion of revolution into a constantly evolving process rather than the triumph of an ideology" (*Notes from Nowhere*, 2003, 506). It is no wonder that the idea that it is possible, and preferable, to "change the world without taking power," has gained ground in alter-globalization narratives. "Instead of focusing our attention on the destruction of capitalism," Holloway writes, "we concentrate on building something else. This is an inversion of the traditional revolutionary perspective that puts the destruction of capitalism first and the construction of the new society second" (Holloway 2010).⁶ From the cracks in the dominant society a new society, however incipient and evolving, is being built. In the same vein, the influential French revolutionary manifesto "The Coming Insurrection" calls for the creation of communes as territories of freedom, within the state and amidst a collapsing civilization: "Why shouldn't communes proliferate everywhere? ... Communes that accept being what they are, where they are. And if possible, a multiplicity of communes that will displace the institutions of society: family, school, union, sports club, etc" (2009, 101-2). For the new revolutionaries, another world is not only possible but exists already, in many forms, however fleetingly, within an old, and rapidly decaying, world.

⁵ This is the view of the anthropologist and alter-globalization activist David Graeber (2009).

⁶ For a different perspective see Webb (2006) for whom a successful global revolution would have necessarily to transform itself into a global state.

Above all, these utopian movements of liberation place a supreme value on imagination as the remedy that will reverse humankind's path from a technocratic and rationalistic ethos that is leading to a homogenous, soulless, and exclusivist material and consumerist civilization. Bertrand Russell's 1917 warning that "it is not a finished Utopia that we ought to desire, but a world where imagination and hope are alive and active" (1963, 19), has certainly been heeded by the militants for imagination in the 21st century. In their words and actions, they battle the fatalistic resignation to this world and the notion that there is no alternative to liberal capitalism: "People literally have trouble imagining what form a future society would take, and so they think that nothing is possible beyond their own. But history has proven that the possible is not limited by the conceivable" (Wright 2006, 143). The need to "decoloniz[e] the revolutionary imagination" is seen as crucial, because "in facing the global crisis the most powerful weapon that we have is our imagination [but] the system we are fighting it's also inside us ... Our minds have been colonized ... to make fundamental social change seem unimaginable" (Reinsborough 2004, 162-4). Politics can only be resurrected as a tool for human change if it is "played out on the terrain of imagination and desire," owing to the fact that "individual and social agency becomes meaningful as part of the willingness to *imagine* otherwise in order to *act* otherwise" (Giroux 2007, 34, 39). And to the provocative question made by the anarchist magazine *Adbusters*--"Has the wild human spirit been tamed?" (2010)--the collective answer would inevitably be a resounding "No!"

Even though left-wing combatants for another world refrain, in most cases,⁷ to imagine a finished, and cloistered, utopia the driving force of their new imagined worlds is a new value-system. It is omnipresent. The urgency to achieve a complete reversal of values runs through any discussion regarding alternative worlds. What takes priority is a larger, profound reversal in humankind's attitude toward the self and the world. As a premise, if humanity is to survive, a spiritual change must be accomplished first; materialism must take a backseat, and the current deluded value system based on individualism, greediness, and consumerism, must be inverted. In activists' minds the dichotomy is clear, and it is between "a culture of death (commodification and consumerism) which increasingly has nowhere to go but down, and one of life which must struggle in order to realize itself in a society of cooperation and creativity" (*Black Bloc Papers* 2009, 28-9). Often long suppressed and millenarian traditions are idealized and heralded as containing the values that will open the gates for the coming alternative world: "The primitive offers a cleansing wash of sustainable values: diversity, egalitarianism, mutual aid, and the cultural and ethical control of

⁷ For an exception see, for example, Harvey 2000.

needs in the interest of mental, physical and ecological well-being” (Laska 2000, 15). And if a decisive feature of utopias is that they strive to “leap onto a new state of being in which contemporary values ... are totally transformed or turned upside down” (Manuel 1979, 8), as shown by contemporary left-wing global activism, one must reach the conclusion that a society that is not interested in imagining and dreaming new possibilities and realities is still yet to be born.⁸

CONCLUSION

After immersing ourselves in the world of Latin American revolutionaries and left-wing global activists it is difficult not to conclude that, as the millennium begins, utopian thoughts and utopian drives are back with a vengeance. In these territories in struggle for the world, for the most part, utopia has lost the bad reputation that it had gained in the previous century and is now viewed as a noble and splendid horizon for any worthy human enterprise. The same holds true for concepts such as revolution and people power. If in Latin America the new utopians still navigate between blueprinted futures and the daily ecstatic experience of a revolution, alter-globalization activists have decidedly conceptualized utopia as an immanent and chiliastic adventure rather than a transcendent goal on a distant horizon.

The search for utopia, regardless of which form it takes, coupled with the belief that it is possible to change history and create alternative worlds as if they were made out of clay, may well sound outlandish for those who have not heard the revolutionary trumpet, either in Latin America or in global activist circles. Such developments may then be equally inspiring or terrifying. But, for better or worse, they show that the non-material realm has a long-lasting power in human affairs and may well help explain the optimism, enthusiasm, and passionate commitment to the cause of creating another world that one finds in the verbal and symbolic discourses of the new militants of utopia. If there is one thing that the current glorification of utopia confirms, it is that epic narratives to dispel evil from earth continue to exist and that the human proclivity to hope for “an elsewhere” remain unabated. And such hope is often ecstatically alive and well.

⁸ On this issue, see Lindholm & Zúquete 2010.

REFERENCES

- Abensour, Miguel. 2008. "Persistent Utopia," *Constellations*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 406-21
- ABN. 2007. "Si yo me callara gritarían las piedras de los pueblos de América Latina." November 12
- Amorin, Jorge. 2010. "Militantes de la Utopia," June 25, www.aporrea.org
- Baczko, Bronislaw. 1981. "The Shifting Frontiers of Utopia," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 53, No 3, September, pp 468-476
- Bartra, Armando. 2008. "Mexico: Yearnings and Utopias: The Left in the Third Millennium," in *The New Latin American Left: Utopia Reborn*, edited by Patrick Barrett, Daniel Chavez and Cesar Rodriguez-Garavito, London: Pluto Press, pp. 186-214
- Báez, René. 1996. *Conversaciones con Marcos*. Quito: Eskeletra Editorial.
- Carlyle, Thomas. 1896. *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh*, London: Chapman and Hall Limited
- Chávez, Hugo. 2004. "Discurso del Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías." *In Selección de Discursos del Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías: 2004, 'Año de la Gran Victoria Popular y Revolucionaria. Gobierno Bolivariano, Año 6, Tomo VI*. 2005. Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la República. 258-280
- Chávez, Hugo. 2005. "Discurso del Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, con Motivo del Tribunal Internacional Antiimperialista en el Marco del XVI Festival Mundial de la Juventud y los Estudiantes," August 14. *In Selección de Discursos del Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías: 2005, 'Año del Salto Adelante': Hacia la Construcción del Socialismo del Siglo XXI. Gobierno Bolivariano, Año 7, Tomo VII*. 2005. Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la República. 425-462
- Chavez, Milton. J. 2009. "11 de Abril, solo unas líneas," April 13, www.aporrea.org

- Coté, Mark., Day, Richard and Greig de Peuter. 2007. *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization*, Toronto; Toronto University Press
- CrimethInc. 2009a. "The Party's Over: Beyond Politics, Beyond Democracy," www.crimethinc.com
- CrimethInc. 2009b. "The Art of Politics (A primer for community self-defense)," www.crimethinc.com
- CrimethInc. 2009c. "Harbinger: The End of the World," www.crimethinc.com
- Curran, Giorel. 2009. "(Con)temporary Utopian Spaces," in *Globalization and Utopia: Critical Essays*, edited by Patrick Hayden and Chamsy El-Ojeili, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 190-206
- Dangl, Benjamin. 2010. *Dancing with Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America*, Oakland, CA: AK Press,
- De La Torre, Carlos. 2011. "Corporatism, Charisma, and Chaos: Ecuador's Police Rebellion in Context," NACLA
- Desroche, Henry. 1979. *The Sociology of Hope*. 1973. Translated by Carol Martin-Sperry, London: Routledge
- Gaceta Oficial. 2006. "Ley de los Consejos Comunales," Asamblea Nacional de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, April 10.
- Garcés, Homar. 2005. "El renacimiento de la utopia," May 19, www.aporrea.org
- Guédez. 2007. "En las comunas: la espiritualidad socialista hace concreta la utopia," August 12, www.aporrea.org
- Flores Galindo, Alberto. 1988. *Buscando un Inca: Identidad y Utopia en los Andes*. Third Edition. Lima: Editorial Horizonte
- Galeano, Eduardo. 1995. *Walking Words*. Translated by Mark Fried. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

- Giroux. 2007. "Utopian Thinking in Dangerous Times: Critical Pedagogy and the Project of Educated Hope," in *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization*, edited by Mark Coté, Richard J.F. Day and Greig de Peuter, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 33-42
- Graeber, David. 2009. "[Tactical Briefing]," *Adbusters: Journal of the Mental Environment*, May-June, # 83, Volume 17, Number 3.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. 2004. *Multitude: war and democracy in the Age of Empire* / New York : Penguin Press.
- Harvey, David 2000. *Spaces of Hope* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 2000. *On the edge of the new century: in conversation with Antonio Polito*; translated from the Italian by Allan Cameron. New York: New Press
- Holloway, John. 2010. "An inversion of the traditional revolutionary perspective," *Adbusters; A Journal of the Mental Environemnt*, # 92, November 22-28.
- Jordan, John and Jennifer Whitney. 2001. "Resistance is the secret of joy," *New Internationalist*, 338, September, 24-5
- Kateb, George . 1965. "Utopia and the Good Life," *Daedalus*, Vol. 94, No. 2, Spring, pp. 454-473
- Kingsnorth. 2004. "Democracy is dead," *New Internationalist*, Issue 373, November, pp. 34-5
- Laska, Peter. 2000. 'Revisioning the Millennium,' *Left Curve*, No. 24, pp. 4-16
- Levitas, Ruth. 2003. "Introduction: The elusive idea of utopia," *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp 1-10
- Lindholm, Charles and José Pedro Zúquete. *The Struggle for the World: Liberation Movements for the 21st Century*, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Manuel, Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel. 1979. *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Marcos, Subcomandante. 2001a. *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings*, edited by Juana Ponce de Leon, New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Marcos, Subcomandante. 2007. *The Speed of Dreams: Selected Writings: 2001-2007*. Edited by Canek Peña-Vargas and Greg Ruggiero, San Francisco: City Lights.
- Mentinis, Mihalis. 2006. *Zapatistas: the Chiapas Revolt and what it means for Radical Politics*, Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.
- Montaño, José Antonio Velásquez. 2007. "Una Democracia sin Utopía, es una aberración," www.aporrea.org
- Morales, Evo. 2006a. *La Revolución Democrática y cultural: Diez discursos de Evo Morales*, La Paz: Editorial Malatesta.
- Morales, Evo. 2006b. "Palabras del Presidente de la República, Evo Morales Ayma en la inauguración del seminario internacional de derechos humanos," Santa Cruz, October 24, *Agencia Boliviana de Información*
- Morin, Edgar. 2006. "Realism and Utopia," *Diogenes*, 209, pp. 135-144
- Mueller, Tadzio and Sian Sullivan. 2011. "Making other worlds possible? Riots, movement, and counter globalization, in *Disturbing the Peace: Riot, resistance and Rebellion in Europe, 1381 to the Present*, edited by Brett Bowden and Michael T. Davis, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Navarro, Hector. 2004. "Concrete utopias," September 10, www.venezuelaanalysis.com
- Sara Motta. 2006. "Utopias Re-imagined: A Reply to Panizza," *Political Studies* Volume 54, Issue 4, pp. 898-905, December
- Shukaitis, Stephen. 2005. "Space. Imagination // Rupture: The Cognitive Architecture of Utopian Political Thought In the Global Justice Movement," *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History*, 8, pp. 1-14
- Spannos, Chris. 2009. Written Testimony, March 18.

- Notes From Nowhere. 2003. *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism*, NY: Verso.
- Ordóñez, Pilar Pérez. 2010. "El Presidente Rafael Correa y su Política de Redención," *Ecuador Debate*, 80, August, 77-94
- Price, Charles, Nonini, Donald and Erich Fox Tree. 2008. "Grounded Utopian Movements: Subjects of Neglect." *Anthropological Quarterly*, Volume 81, Number 1, Winter, pp. 127-159.
- Reinsborough, Patrick. 2004. "Decolonizing The Revolutionary imagination: Values Crisis, the Politics of Reality, and Why There's Going to Be a Common-Sense Revolution in This Generation," in *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World*, edited by David Solnit, San Francisco: City Lights Books, pp. 161-210.
- Robinson, Andrew and Simon Tormey. 2009. "Utopias Without Transcendence? Post-Left Anarchy, Immediacy and Utopian Energy," in *Globalization and Utopia: Critical Essays*, edited by Patrick Hayden and Chamsy El-Ojeili, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 156-175
- Russell, Bertrand. 1963. *Political Ideals*. 1917. Reprint. New York: Barnes & Noble Inc.
- Sagris, Tasos. 2011. "We are an image from the future," *Adbusters: Journal of the Mental Environment*, January/February, # 93, Vol. 19, No. 1
- Sibley, Mulford Q. 1940. "Apology for Utopia: II, Utopia and Politics," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May, pp. 165-188
- Solnit, David (ed). 2004. *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World*, San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- Solnit, Rebecca. 2004. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, New York: Nation Books
- The Black Bloc Papers*. 2010. Edited by David van Deusen and Xavier Massot of the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective.
- The Invisible Committee. 2009. *The Coming Insurrection*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press

- Whitaker, Chico. 2004. "The WSF as Open Space," in *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*, edited by Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, and Peter Waterman, New Delhi, The Viveka Foundation, pp. 111-121.
- Webb, Adam K. 2006. "The calm before the storm? Revolutionary pressures and global governance," *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 27, No 1, 73-92
- Winter, Jay. 2006. *Dreams of Peace and freedom: Utopian Moments in the 20th Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press
- Wright, Chris. 2008. "Reflections on the Question 'Is History Over?'" *Left Curve*, No. 32, pp. 137-143