

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

## **To Be Read in 2050**

*Reflecting on utopia*

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One day, when we finally find we can describe the age we now live in, the greatest amazement of all will come from the realization that we lived it all with no sense of before and after, replacing causality with simultaneity, history with news, memory with silence, the future with the past, the problem with the solution. That is how atrocities ended up being blamed on the victims, aggressors were decorated for bravery in the struggle against aggression, thieves acted as judges, major political decision makers without a single moral bone in their bodies got away with decisions resulting in the most appalling consequences. It was an age of excess lived as want; speed was never fast enough; destruction was always justified with the imperative of building. Gold was the fundament of everything, but it was founded on a cloud. Everybody was an entrepreneur until proven otherwise, but disproof was prohibited by the evidence in favor. There were the maladjusted, but maladjustment was barely discernible from adjustment, see the numerous concentration camps of heterodoxy throughout the city, in bars, nightclubs, drugs, on facebook.

Public opinion was indistinguishable from the private opinion of those with the power to publicize it. Insult became the most effective means for an ignoramus to be the intellectual equal of a sage.

Packaging evolved to such a point that there was no product to show for but itself. Thus landscapes were turned into tourist packages and

fountains and springs were shaped like bottles. They changed the names of things so that things could forget what they were. Thus inequality was renamed merit; destitution, austerity; hypocrisy, human rights; all-out civil war, humanitarian intervention; mitigated civil war, democracy. War itself came to be called peace, so that it could go on forever. Guernika too became a mere painting by Picasso, so as not to obstruct the future of the eternal present. The age began with a catastrophe but soon managed to make popular entertainment out of catastrophe. When serious catastrophe hit, it was taken for a new series.

Every age has to deal with pressure, but this particular age became permanently unbalanced, both at the collective and individual level. Virtue was cultivated as vice and vice versa. Praise of someone's virtues or moral qualities ceased to rest on criteria of personal worth but was rather achieved at the expense of somebody else's vilification and degradation or by negating their qualities and virtues. It was believed that darkness illuminated light, not the other way around.

There were three parallel powers, none of which of a democratic nature, operating simultaneously – capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy –, having at their service various sub-powers: religious, media, generational, ethnocultural, regional. Curiously enough, although none of them was inherently democratic, they were the linchpin of democracy-as-was. They were so powerful that one could hardly mention any of them without suffering the wrath of censorship, without being demonized on account of one's heterodoxy, stigmatized for being different. Capitalism, based as it was on an unequal exchange between supposedly equal human beings, was so adept at disguising itself as reality that its very name fell into disuse. Workers' rights were regarded virtually as many excuses for not working. Colonialism, which was based on discrimination against human beings who

were nothing but equal in a different way, had to be accepted as something as natural as aesthetic preference. The purported victims of racism and xenophobia were invariably troublemakers before they were victims. As to patriarchy, which was based on the domination of women and the stigmatization of non-heterosexual orientations, it had to be accepted as something as natural as some moral preference endorsed by almost everyone. Limits had to be imposed on women, homosexuals and transsexuals in case they did not know how to stay within their limits.

Never were general laws and universals so selectively applied nor violated with such impunity, under such pretenses of law-abidingness. The rule of law consorted amiably with unlawfulness. It was normal to de-constitute Constitutions for their sake.

Inaction and stagnation stood for radicalism at its most extreme. The craving for images and sounds produced static maelstroms. Time and lack of time were lifelong obsessions. The age came to know hope, but eventually found it too demanding and exhausting. So it settled mostly for resignation. Those who wouldn't give up had to emigrate. They headed for one of three destinations: abroad, where economic compensation for resignation was highest and therefore could be confused with hope; or inwards, where hope inhabited the streets of indignation or went to die in the shape of domestic violence, common crime, in the muted rage of the home, in emergency rooms, prisons, in downers and antidepressants; the third group lay waiting in-between, where hope and hopelessness blinked on and off like traffic lights. The whole thing seemed about to explode but it never really exploded because when it did it happened in drawn-out and piecemeal fashion, and those who suffered from the explosions were either dead or poor or underdeveloped or old or backward or ignorant or lazy or useless or mad – in any event, expendable. They were the vast majority, but an insidious

optical illusion made them invisible. The fear of hope was such that hope ended up fearing itself and throwing its own followers into confusion.

Over time, people became the biggest problem of all, for the simple reason that there were too many of them. The big question then was what to do with all the people who contributed nothing to the well-being of those who were more deserving. Rationality rose to such prominence that a final solution was meticulously developed for those, such as the old, who produced the least. Whenever termination proved impossible they were biodegraded and sociodegraded, so as not to violate existing environmental codes. The success of this solution led to its being applied to other expendable populations, such as immigrants, young people from peripheral areas, drug addicts, etc.

The co-existence of gods and humans was one of the most effective achievements of the age. All it took was to trade and sell them in the three existing celestial markets: the market of the future that lies beyond death, the market of charity, and the market of war. Many competing religions sprang up, each resembling the faults attributed to its rivals, still all alike in being what they most vehemently claimed not to be: a market for emotions. Religions were markets and the markets were religions.

It is odd that an age that was all about the future when it first started (all previous catastrophes and atrocities being proof to the possibility of a new future without catastrophes or atrocities) had nothing but the past when it ended. When thinking about the future became too painful, the only time available was time past. Since no major historical event has ever been anticipated, this age too ended in a way that caught everyone by surprise. Although it was generally accepted that the common good had to be based on the opulent well-being of a few and the destitute ill-being of the many,

there were those who would not accept such normalcy and therefore rebelled. The nonconformists were divided according to three different strategies: trying to improve what there was, trying to bring down what there was, trying not to depend on what there was. Viewed from this distance, there is no doubt today that the three strategies should have been used in a concerted manner, as is the case with the distribution of tasks in any complex work – the division of labor, as it were, of nonconformity and rebellion. But this was impossible at the time, because the rebels could not see that, as a product of the society against which they fought, they should rebel against themselves to begin with, effecting change in themselves before presuming to change society as a whole. Their blindness caused them to be divided in that which was supposed to unite them and united in that which was supposed to divide them. That is why events turned out as they did. The full measure of the ensuing horror is deeply carved in the way we now strive to heal the wounds in our flesh and spirit, even as we reinvent one and the other.

Why do we persevere, after all we've been through? Because we are learning anew how to feed on the weed that the past age sought to eradicate radically with the most potent and destructive of mental herbicides – utopia.