



**Boaventura de Sousa Santos**

## Learning from Genoa

*Four Lessons in Globalization*

Boaventura de Sousa Santos sees two different kinds of globalization that now have to enter into a dialogue. As counter-hegemonic globalization grows, the responsibility of its protagonists increases.

The lessons we learn from the recent events in Genoa during the G-8 meeting are fourfold. We shall keep them in mind at the Second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in February 2002.

First lesson: **this kind of globalization is not sustainable.** The most important report of the G-8 meeting was prepared by people who were not even there, that is to say, by the Ministers of Finance of the seven richest countries. This report, entitled "The Debt Relief and Beyond," clearly reveals the insurmountable contradiction between neo-liberal economy and the welfare of the majority of the world population. Duly acknowledging that welfare depends today on relieving the poorest countries of their debt, the report proclaims the success of the initiative in the case of 23 countries and insists that, in the short run, debt sustainability will depend on the greater integration of these countries in the world trade. However, the report itself confirms that the participation of less developed countries in the world trade decreased during the last decade, and that they got poorer as a result. Since no radical changes are proposed in the document to improve this state of affairs, there could be no greater hypocrisy: what has been recognized as their problem is imposed upon half of the world population as their solution. Hypocrisy reaches its outrageous peak in the case of the pandemics that afflict less developed countries (HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis). After admitting that these diseases will kill 15 million a year, the document maintains that the production of more inexpensive drugs must be procured without violation of the intellectual property rights of pharmaceutical multinationals.

The contradictions of this model are insurmountable because the liberalization of exchanges without conditions is like a boxing bout between a heavyweight and a featherweight. If Mali controlled the international price of cotton, its debt would not be, as it currently is once again, "unsustainable." If Mozambique had been allowed to resist the imposition of the World Bank to eliminate the tariffs on raw cashew exports, it would not have destroyed its cashew processing industry. There would be less famine in the world if the less developed countries were allowed to protect their economic activities from the voracity displayed by the 200 larger multinationals, which hold twenty-eight percent of global trade but only one percent of global employment. If countries indebted in dollars could fight the devaluation of their currency, their debts

would not increase by way of such devaluation. The balance of trade of less developed countries would not deteriorate so drastically if their products were not subjected to the protectionism of rich countries (the mother of all the hypocrisies of neo-liberalism) and compelled to compete with highly subsidized products.

Second lesson: **an alternative globalization is under way.** As neo-liberalism drops its mask, a global public opinion is beginning to emerge. It is based on national governments being held hostage today to large economic interests, and democracy disguising this dependency by being reasonably efficacious in areas that do not interfere with such interests. Without forms of effective democratic political control at the local, national, and global level, the incessant search for profit creates disparities between the rich and the poor that are ethically repugnant, and induces irreversible damage to the environment. Under an economic model based on a sacrosanct respect for private property, the inordinate lack of public control of the world's wealth lies in the fact that 50 of the 100 major world GNP's do not belong to countries but rather to multinationals. This model of (non-)civilization has feet of clay and can be fought, its strength residing mainly in the apathy and conformism it provokes in us. This global public opinion is beginning to give rise to hundreds of thousands of non-governmental organizations and transnational advocacy networks that gradually organize resistance to hegemonic globalization and formulate different kinds of alternatives. Although these alternatives may conflict in their diversity, one thing they have in common: The idea that human dignity is indivisible and can only thrive in harmony with nature and in a society that does not reduce values to market prices.

Third lesson: **the dialogue between the two kinds of globalization is pressing and must not be postponed.** Global capitalism – represented by the governments of rich countries and the multilateral financial and trade agencies they control – believed it would have it easy after the fall of the Berlin Wall. On the contrary, it is now obliged to erect barriers of concrete and steel so that its representatives may continue to take the decisions it demands. The violence of the system feeds on the violence of some minority groups that fight it. Above all, the system feeds on its own failure to recognize the alternative form of globalization put forward by all those who have solidarity with the interests of the many millions of people that have been excluded from meetings and fall victim to their decisions. The dialogue, therefore, is urgent. Cynical rhetoric of empty concessions must give way to a global social contract guaranteed by a new and equally global democratic political framework. The dialogue will be difficult and no doubt confrontational, but it is unavoidable.

Fourth lesson: **it is a long way from Genoa 2001 to Porto Alegre 2002.** As counter-hegemonic globalization grows, the responsibility of its protagonists increases. This responsibility will be assessed on three levels: organization, performance, and objectives. In every case, the tasks are highly demanding. The energy of the movement for an alternative globalization resides in its internal diversity and multiple objectives. Diversity will continue – if for no other reason, then because the movement includes no group or organization capable of co-opting or eliminating it to its own advantage. Nonetheless, as far as organization is concerned, the means of co-ordination must be improved and its democratic character guaranteed. Regarding performance, the movement must distinguish between condemnable violence that must be repelled, and acceptable illegality that must be supported whenever legal means are insufficient or not available. At the same time as it brings about the

deregulation of every country's economy, global capitalism imposes a new legality that renders illegal, for example, the protection of the rights of workers or the environment. Every important democratic movement began in illegal activities (rallies and unauthorized strikes, direct action, civil disobedience). A theory of nonviolent democratic illegality is called for. Finally, regarding objectives, a distinction must be made between first steps and horizons. Right now, first steps are fairly well defined and ready to encourage the first and most difficult moments of the dialogue between forms of globalization: effective pardon of the debt; Tobin taxes; democratization of the decision processes of multilateral trade agencies; submission to referenda of the most important decisions concerning the liberalization of trade; inclusion of human rights, especially labor and environmental rights, in new trade negotiations (particularly within the World Trade Organization). Moreover, these first steps must be articulated with a wider civilizational horizon, the horizon of a better world. Lest the current system, unjust as it is, be replaced by another one, rendered even more unjust by the perversion of counter-hegemonic objectives. These are the urgent tasks on the agenda of Porto Alegre.

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