

From Catalonia: Global Governance and the Challenge of Stateless Peoples.

Germà Pelayo,
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At the Dec. 21th elections that were imposed in Catalonia, after the institutional putsch led by the Spanish government that was endorsed by the EU, the pro-independence bloc has won again, albeit by a narrow margin. It will be able to govern but it will be difficult to implement the popular mandate concerning the restitution of the ephemeral Catalan Republic proclaimed on October 27, as well as the reconstruction of the autonomy. Madrid has imprisoned one part of the legitimate government and sent another part into exile. The courts have indicted new leaders of the left and the right and civil society, in a general prosecution against the very idea of independence, by using the so-called "crime of rebellion", which is absolutely unimaginable as a part of the European legislation and the values that underpin it.

The strategy of Madrid is to systematically attack by land, sea and air the independence sector. By using courts; occupation forces ready to use violence; overwhelming media intoxication; financial stranglehold on leaders and some citizens; capillarized repression on town halls, schools and activist sectors; different forms of censorship; and conditioning the restitution of the autonomous government and its suspended powers, to the abandonment of the restitution of the Republic, peacefully proclaimed with a pro-independence majority based on the outcome of the referendum. Madrid has also threatened to organize new elections, even suggesting to do it several times until they win. This regime still considers itself a democracy despite having lost many democratic attributes, and it is leading the Catalan society to a dead end.

Maybe the first move of the new government, if it can be established, it would be to turn once again towards Europe so as to force Spain to an agreed referendum. If Europe keeps ignoring it, what comes next could be a brutal or maybe a glorious historical moment, related either to revolution or to permanent occupation and submission.

Beyond Catalonia and Spain, what is at stake is the very sense of democracy that shows itself in two visions: on the one hand, a very problematic neoliberal democracy, limited to nation states with decreasing sovereign attributes, and on the other hand, one possible and necessary democracy without borders, that could extend to the global scale while reinventing itself in depth, and which would advocate the self-determination of peoples and communities as one of its inalienable constituent elements.

In order to understand the impact that this conflict could have beyond the Iberian Peninsula, on the evolution of the world order, I would like to point out the following considerations:

1. This conflict concerns the fundamental values of Europe and the evolution of democracy in the world. The Westphalian order, that is, the division of the planet into sovereign States, is one of the pillars of the world system, and the mobility of the borders is one of the taboos of this order. The world system justifies this immobility in the name of a peace that actually brings more benefits to the elites than did the frequent wars in previous centuries. However this is obviously highly legitimated by the whole society for obvious reasons. The governments of the major European countries want to protect their territorial

and economic privileges and use the EU as an alliance for the benefit of their elites. This is a repetition of the Holy Alliance's mission two centuries later: A coalition of the powerful who protects themselves from their subjects' claims, in the name of peace. Crystallizing borders helps financial stability, putting the interests of enriching a handful of people before fighting the suffering of the majority, and constrains democracy to the confined spaces of nation-states. In the case of Catalonia, they join forces to oppress a peaceful, democratic, cross-sectional ideological movement which is open to immigration and wants to recover a deteriorated welfare state throughout Europe. A movement which defends a culture and a language threatened by globalization, and which dared to advance the cause of democracy in front of the frozen laws of a Spanish power system, that is heir of a Francoist and colonial past.

2. The strategic choice of Gandhian gradualism in Catalonia opens a new path in the history of national-based conflict resolutions. In 2006, the PP government cut drastically the Catalan statute which had been previously by both the Spanish and the Catalan parliaments as well as through a referendum. The citizen and government responses to these facts have been gradualist, democratic and peaceful, crossing several stages in front of Madrid's emphasis in refusing dialogue. In 2010 Madrid rejected the original statute and a fiscal pact designed to curb the autonomy suffocation due to the crisis. As a consequence, the independence camp increased exponentially, but its claims for self-determination were also ignored. After winning a first tolerated referendum in 2015, Madrid turned a deaf ear again. The second unilateral referendum in 2017 was handled through a brutal repression by Spanish forces and over 1000 were wounded. Presently there is repression on all fronts, as mentioned above.

3. Behind the accusation of lack of solidarity with other regions, a low democratic quality of most of the current States and their vertical lack of solidarity, is hidden. Neoliberalism doesn't reduce the size of the bureaucracies but transforms the public institutions into instruments at the service of the powerful and the growing divide between rich and poor. In Spain, the level of transfer between territories required by Madrid is well above the standards of the federal systems (transfer of 8% of GDP from Catalonia, 4% among German *landers*, 1% or less among EU states). This causes that many public services in Catalonia have worse quality than the same ones in the beneficiary regions. Finally, the Madrid government builds a centralizing territorial system that benefits the Capital city as an economic and financial pole and relegates an increasingly deindustrialized periphery to depend on tourism, subsidized agriculture and the income of its emigrants.

Therefore, behind the accusation of the lack of solidarity of certain rich regions, from a moral point of view the question should not be whether all stateless nations or peoples have the right to self-determination, or only some of them (the ancient colonies), or only the poorest ones, given that they would supposedly take less resources from the rest, or none at all. The question should be whether any human community, whether stateless or not, whether rich or poor, has that right. We argue here in favour of it.

4. Behind the resistance to the mobility of the borders, the fear of the loss of corporate and institutional power of the few, is hidden. This fear uses the excuse of balkanization and the deterioration of the public sector. Criticizing the integrity of the neoliberal states then becomes a way to criticizing the system. This claim of freedom for stateless nations is protected by the universal right of protection of minorities. Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, recently stated that he would not like to see a Europe of ninety

states in the future. This fear of balkanization is based on two arguments: historical imitation, and the eventual preference of the elites for a fragmented map of weak states. The first argument is contested with facts: recent isolated independences (Eritrea, South Sudan, East Timor) did not cause chain effects, while the recent successive or simultaneous independences (decolonization of the 1960s and the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989) happened as a result of historical events unrelated to a nationalist contagion. The decolonization process culminated the European defeat in the Second World War while the fall of the Berlin wall led to the collapse of the socialist system.

The second argument is based on the belief that fragmentation in weak and small states benefits a globalized and powerful capitalist system. This argument ignores how some of the most efficient countries in the world are small. It also ignores that a local strong civil society like the Catalan one, can crush the global forces in its territory. Therefore, what is relevant is not the number of States but how fair or unfair are the relations between them, and within them, and to what extent these relations benefit or not all of their citizenship, from the perspective of the satisfaction of their needs and rights: peace, food, health, housing, resources.

5. The fear of violent nationalist forces leading to wars, encourages the prevalence of the *statu quo* and undermines peaceful initiatives against the system. The ghost of war delegitimizes secessionism. Europe looks back and is afraid of its own history. Even those who acknowledge the fully peaceful nature of the Catalan movement, reject its claims because could unleash less peaceful movements elsewhere. Nevertheless, revolutions are risky by definition. They dig a hole where the best or the worst of human nature can go through. So, in front of this risk, we should ask ourselves if the cause deserves the revolution to be made. Is the will of minorities a universal right that must be defended? The great contradiction and the great challenge for geopolitics would be for the international community to accept new States as a result of democratic and peaceful citizen processes, and not as the result of armed conflicts anymore. But is Europe ready to take that step? Maybe so, maybe not.

6. By contrast, the stateless nations can contribute, paradoxically, to the emergence of a peaceful, citizen-based post-Westphalian vision of global governance. The diversity of stateless people around the world challenges the Westphalian corset in different ways. In the era of globalization, the fact that these peoples seek autonomy or independence, can contribute, not to a world of conflicting nations, but conversely, to the emergence of a post-national narrative of the global political order. They can weave the world map from below, proceeding as follows:

- a) The sovereign States would cease to be the central actor of the international political organization, and would share their prominence with other actors.
- b) Ultimate exclusive sovereignty over the territory would be shared horizontally with different administrative levels while sharing some common values.
- c) Thanks to this, in the future, new peoples and communities can be recognized in confederations, federations, associations, autonomies, areas of co-sovereignty and sometimes full independencies, all through peaceful and democratic processes.
- d) Current states maintain a fictional equality through the principle of exclusive sovereignty. This can be transformed in the future into a universal citizenship founded on peace, solidarity and empathy, represented through different identities, and organized in fully democratic multi-scalar authorities and networks' systems which articulate their competences, offer their

services, establish rules, celebrate diversity, and manage conflict resolutions in a peaceful and creative way.

e) Every future self-determination act can cease to be a conflictive exception, and become an ordinary aspect of international citizen political life.

f) Establishing democratic rules internationally would lead to rethink the very nature of modern representative systems.

7. In addition, they open the door to proximate sovereignties. Beyond communities that recognized themselves as stateless peoples or nations, there are other communities without a common past, but sharing a vision of the future, who could also aspire to self-determination. These can be societies planning or practising how to put their institutions back at the service of the people and not of the regional or world elites anymore. The eventual proliferation of these experiences could lead to a different type of world governance. In these small territories, citizens would rule directly and would leave the representative regimes and their political parties mostly kidnapped by the system. The replication of these proximate sovereignties would advance the global democratic agenda and disintegrate the power of the largest countries over the affairs of the world, confronting their warmongering and neoliberal agenda, and thus improving significantly the world governance from the perspective of peace, justice, equality and environment. In politics, proximity in decision-making is essential to ensure a real democracy from below, the same way as in commerce, proximity enhances peoples' control of production and distribution, and in consequence, more quality of goods and services.

Under this scenario, regional organizations should be reconverted radically. They should stop being agents working for big business like EU, whose public policies are dictated from above to its 27 members. In case a proliferation of new countries occurs, the EU could become an instrument at the service of a tool at the service of the will of its people and the satisfaction of their needs, among which is the goal of ending discrimination between first and second class peoples and nations, whether they are nation-states or stateless nations.

In conclusion: Catalonia is an opportunity to keep burning the fire of the much-needed peoples' subversion to the world order. Each blow to the geopolitical rigidity of the Westphalian order, if it happens from below and democratically, as is the case in Catalonia, is a seismic movement that challenges the current system of the few, by attacking one of its pillars: the hieratical 195 provinces of its world governance. Perhaps it is not the most visible opportunity or the one that attracts more followers outside its borders, because it is confusedly interpreted as a nationalist revolt. But in fact, as it has been argued, all this is about a broader struggle for social and civic rights. It is not the perfect revolution, but it is *the possible revolution* of our day, because it has allowed in Catalonia the alliance of different sectors and social classes. A cross-sectional coalition of parties and ideologies has been built behind the people who are united in their will to change the map. And this effort can be understood as a way of trying to break the perverse rules of the global game. The political awareness of small peoples is a historical phenomenon which can transform societies internationally. It goes beyond the defence of ethnic diversity towards a full range of social and environmental needs expressed from below. In this way, they can be one of the key points of a future movement towards real universal democracy that goes far beyond the precarious structures of the current global peace.