THE CULTURE OF VIOLENCE AND UNSTABLE PROCESSES FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF PEACE

ENTREVISTA

INTERVIEW

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In 2017, Ish-Shalom held a series of conferences at Brazilian universities. The moment of his visit was important to establish the dialogue with his reflections and academic perspectives.

He is interested in issues of ethics and international relations, in the nexus between theorizing the political and politicizing the theoretical, in the political construction of social knowledge, and in exploring and practicing responsible academia.

G.Gomes: Is was your first contact with Brazilan culture through the lectures in the Universities. Well, what did you know about the country and what country did you see or fell?

Mr. Ish-Shalom: Yes, that was my first visit to Brazil. I did not know much, except for some trivial facts and that Brazil is locked in a political crisis and corruption that paralyze and restrict its ability to cope with socio-economic problems. In this sense, and in some others, I thought that Brazil and Israel share some important similarities and weaknesses.

My visit was too short and limited to form a real and informed view concerning Brazil. The visit also proved for me that Brazil is enormous country and nation, too big and varied to be studied in one visit. My tour took me to Rio de Janeiro, Brazilia, and Palmas. Important as they may be I do not know how representative they are of the whole country.

However, conversing with quite a few people did affirm my initial understanding of the troubled political situation in which Brazil is locked, and the distance of the political system from the real problems that burden Brazilians.

G.Gomes: After your lecture, some questions were in need of continuity, I would like to do one for you: - How to think and make democracy in political scenarios that increasingly ultraconservative discourses and practice are strongly growing with great echoes in youth people?

Mr. Ish-Shalom: Democracy is the seminal example of essentially contested concepts (following WB Gallie). To say that a concept is essentially contested implies it has several meanings, many of them acceptable and legitimate, and each of them having a complete moral and ideological groundwork. There is something a priori in the moral and ideological convictions each of us holds, and this a priori dimension also affects the meanings we attach to concepts (there are other dimensions, more reasoned, to those convictions). This dimension is what makes political concepts essentially contested, including that is democracy.

Indeed, the different understandings of democracy are firmly grounded in different normative and ideological convictions. The minimalist and structural understanding of democracy is embedded in a conservative skepticism about human faculties, according to which a mix of perennial desires, instincts, and communal traditions underlies human action; an extrarational mix, which pushes human beings to seek power. The skeptical conservative view warns of two major threats. First, because everyone is interested in power there is always a danger of destabilization in the social and political order. Second, there is a constant threat of a dictatorial concentration of power in the hands of those who succeed in gaining power. The conservative solution for these two dangers is minimal, structural democracy. On the one hand, regular democratic elections guarantee that no power will last forever, and there will be no dictatorial

concentration of power. On the other hand, by confining political participation to elections, structural democracy prevents political and social destabilization. In a more critical reading this understanding of democracy can be understood as a political tool of the elites to legitimize their monopoly over political power. Democracy turns out to be "for" the people (according to readings of the elites of what constitutes the public good), but it is certainly not of and by the people.

The normative and cultural understanding of democracy is more comprehensive than this and is based on an optimistic liberal view of human rationality. According to this liberal optimism human beings are rationally-driven creatures. It is not that they lack emotions, desires, or communal attachments, they surely have them, but they are largely controlled by rationality. It is note even necessary that they perform the rationality presently, but they do harbor the potential for it and democracy is not only the end result of this rationality. It is also the mean to bring forth the rational potentiality of humans. Establishing the conditions for participations and deliberation helps in instituting reasoned political behavior. This view also sees the rational individual as the locus of indivisible civic rights.

Thus, this normative and cultural definition of democracy centers on the concepts of participation, deliberation, and rights, seeking to enlarge the scope of citizens' political participation. There is little fear of destabilizing the polity because political participation and deliberation are believed to be rationally-based. Democracy is truely of, by and for the people.

The ultraconservative atmosphere you rightly indicates means among other things that the prevailing model of democracy practiced in Brazil, Israel, the US, and many other countries today, is the procedural and elitist moidel. It is, from

my perspective a form of democracy, but a very limited one, that is used to legitimize the monopoly of power held by political and economic elites (very often interweaved together and serving each other interests). How to get to a more substantive is a haunting question. We should understand that there are no shortcuts. The potential for rational (or better still: reasonable) political behvior is conditioned by socio-economic and political environments, such as genuine walfare state, good education system, and operating political parties. It is our role, as citizens, and probably also as academics, to struggle to achieve and secure these environments, these conditions for a true and real democracy, one which is participatory and deliberative.

G.Gomes: What is the role of public universities in fostering democratic practices that you observe from Israel?

Mr. Ish-Shalom: I am not convinced that public universities and professors are all that powerful in the struggle for democracy, but I am also not convinced that they (which include me as well) are doing all they can and should do. We should be more involved in the struggle for a welfare state and real and functioning democracy. There is no higher education without education and so it is not only our responsibility, but also our existential interest in securing a good education system in which children grow to become effective and reasonable citizens.

The model of academic I call for is the theoretician-citizen. This model sits comfortably with the deliberative and participatory models of democracy. The theoretician-citizen role is not to patronize the public; the model recognizes the merits of theory rather than those of the theoretician. Theory is an intellectual accomplishment rich in informative and analytically-processed social knowledge and thus it can be very helpful in shaping policies for coping with the

complexities of the social world. It is this beneficial potentiality that ascribes theoreticians, as constructors of theory and citizens of their polity, social and political responsibilities and a democratic imperative to participate in the political process of policy shaping. Accordingly, theoreticians should be more active in civil society, offering their theoretical insights to public deliberation, enriching public reason. This point is worth stressing: the appropriate and democratic route of beneficially employing theoretical insights is not necessarily through the political system and policy establishment. Rather, we should be more concerned with building bridges with the public, or better still taking down the walls of academia and forming partnerships with civil society. We should concern ourselves with contributing our theoretical insights to the public and doing so in the public sphere where our arguments can be scrutinized and valued, based on their merits, not on our academic credentials. It is a contribution seeking to enrich the citizens themselves and invigorate their political faculties; not by preaching and imposing answers, and not so much by coaching to answer, but by nurturing to ask questions, doubt, and no less important, accept responsibilities.

4) **G.Gomes**: How do you analyze the participation of the Media Groups in the culture of violence and the building of peace from your life as a researcher and citizen in Israel?

Mr. Ish-Shalom: I'm not an expert in media and communication but media groups are: 1. Not made out one skin, 2. Are under enormous economic pressure and they are losing ground to new kinds of media, that are not always bound by the ethical and professional codes of media conduct. Some media groups may cope better and some worse with those pressures. But the crisis of

the print media and other established forms of media does no good to democracy. Investigative journalism is too risky and too costly; advertorial content may be a stable source of income but it undermines the reliability of journalism; rating considerations lead to populism that goes hand in hand with the populism in the political system; and so are the media outlets that are ruled by media moguls that care only for their own individual interests.

Fake news might be a slogan coined by Trump to condemn his critics in the media but we find out evermore that fake news contributed (through social media) to his elections. Fake news can have such an impact where and when established media, bound by ethical and professional codes of conduct, lose ground in our neo-liberal and populist era.

 G.Gomes: Thanks for your words, any recommendation or reminder to share?

Mr. Ish-Shalom: Democracy can be fragile and no one can guarantee success in the civic struggle to promote or even secure it. Nor should we presume the omnipotence of academia, or for that matter of civil society. Yet, theoreticians do possess certain relevant and vital assets and faculties, making them responsible for engaging the wider public. And democracy is too valuable and important for us to give up. Therefore, while we should not be overly optimistic or presumptuous, neither should we permit pessimism, apathy, and inaction to be taken as acceptable courses for academia and civil society.