**Jai Jagat**

**Social movement leadership**

**Contribution to the debate organised by Jai Jagat,**

**on Social Movements Leadership**

gustave massiah

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1.

The question of the leadership of social movements is a political rather than a sociological one. It is less a discussion about power in general than a debate about the objectives and effectiveness of movements, their nature and role, their composition and organization. The question refers to the strategy of Movements, the culture of Movements and the definition of their alliances. The question of leadership crosses the interrogations and renewals of the various movements.

This question of leadership meets the question of non-violence. It is not a discussion on non-violence as a moral principle but on the role of non-violence in the strategy of the movements, its effectiveness and what it reveals. There is not a dogma on non-violence, there is a plurality of positions and situations.

2.

Movement leadership differs according to the culture of the historical emancipation movements. Each movement keeps its specificities for a long time, but there are exchanges and changes between movements that coexist in the same periods. And in the same period, there are also leaderships that emerge in coalitions and fronts between the movements.

The different social movements are the product of a long evolution, marked by slow changes and revolutionary events. They correspond to different cultures that remain present and build the history of the movements. Among the long historical movements are the peasant struggles and the great struggles of the working classes; the decolonization movement with the transition from the first phase of the States' independency to the current phase of peoples' liberation; the movement of freedoms and rights with a new sequence since the 1960s. Each one create it’s leadership conception.

There are considerable movements on a global scale that characterize the new period and that are creating their leadership conception. It is the women's rights movement that challenges millenary relationships. It is also the indigenous peoples' movement. And today, the movements against racism and discriminatory and racist police violence. These movements refer to the proposal of intersectionality that takes into account the articulation of different forms of oppression: classes, genders, origins.

Another movement has gained great importance and is becoming crucial: the ecological movement for climate urgency and biodiversity.

3.

We will focus on new movements that have developed since 2011. They are motivated by a peoples' reaction to the financial crisis of 2008, which revealed the fragility of neoliberalism and the austeritarian turn of financial capitalism, mixing austerity and authoritarianism. They have taken various forms with the Arab springs, the indignados, the occupyes, the occupation of places, the periodic demonstrations in the cities streets. In 2019, there were massive demonstrations in forty-seven countries.

It is a new generation of movements, with a new culture, that renews the vision of leadership. These movements have been brilliantly analyzed by Zeynep Tufekci . With variations depending on the situation, they present themselves as anti-authoritarian and horizontal movements. They are described as leaderless. Even if leaders or spokespersons appear during the movement, in reality none of them controls the movement. By their form of organization and their use of digital technology, these are movements in the digital era, even when this characteristic is not enough to define them.

Depending on the specific situation, they have similar keywords: the refusal of social inequality, discrimination, injustice, a demand for freedom and effective rights. The demand for environmental justice is becoming increasingly apparent. The war against corruption can be found everywhere. We can assume that this refusal of corruption reflects an understanding of the fusion between the political classes and the financial class, which cancels out the autonomy of politics. This mistrust of politics is expressed in the rejection of delegation and representation and the demand for a new democracy. The writing of a "new constitution" is often carried by demonstrators.

4.

The strategic perspective of this new generation of movements is one of social, ecological, democratic and geopolitical transformation. Each of these four dimensions combines resistance and alternative, urgency and the alternative project. The leadership needed is one that is able to articulate resistance and alternative in each of the four dimensions and in the articulation between the dimensions.

Social movements are confronted with repression and counter-revolutions. And with the rise of racist, security and xenophobic ideologies as well as the wave of decentralized wars. Neo-liberalism is hardening its domination and strengthening its securitarian character based on repression and coups d'état.Reactionary and autocratic governments have taken power in several countries, starting with the United States, Hungary, India and Brazil, not forgetting Russia and China. Social and citizens' movements have been placed in a defensive position. Leadership begins with the organization of social, democratic, political, ideological, geopolitical resistance.

Even to resist, alternatives are needed. Leadership is based on the capacity to propose a perspective on possible futures and on immediate alternative actions to build the future in the present world. Perspectives are in progress for each of the dimensions: social perspectives, with the fight against inequalities and exclusions, ecological perspectives with the climate emergency and biodiversity, geopolitical perspectives with multipolarity and international law, democratic perspectives with equal rights and freedoms, economic and in-corporate democracy, local and national, global. They must be concretized and be made visible.

5.

The culture of movements is strongly characterized by the digital. Digital is a technological revolution that has strong interactions with social change without over-determining it. In mobilizations, digital tools and street demonstrations reflect the same reality. They create a common protest culture that spreads rapidly and in which millions of people can participate. Connected protest movements assume collective identities that transcend the usual political and social divisions. These global networks of protest are creating communities based on common interests rather than the hazard of geography. The occupation of squares and parks underlines the importance of the public good, of shared and non-monetarized public space, of the rejection of merchandise fetishism.

This is not a lack of interest in political, institutional or electoral objectives, but a sign of deep scepticism about the ability to achieve objectives by these means.

Part of the leadership will come down to the ability to mobilize young people engaged in the digital world. They can play a leading role in the fight against GAFAMs and the exorbitant impunity and power of digital multinationals. They can play a role in the development of participatory verification tools that are essential to oppose the counter-attack of the authorities in the field of digital and information (mass surveillance, disinformation, infox, etc.). They can help equip the movements with the digital tools that will strengthen the first phases of mobilization, that will make it possible to resist counter-attacks by the authorities, that will make it possible to resist hegemonic platforms, that will help avoid tactical paralysis, that will facilitate the movements' narratives, that will include the movements in the determination of strategies.

6.

Social movements are confronted with the question of their forms of organization.

In the governance of the leaderless, digital tools facilitate work and a more horizontal and egalitarian organisation of tasks, as well as real-time communication. The idea of functioning without formal organizations, without leaders, without important infrastructures, originates since the 1960s. It favours an "adhoc" form of organisation, with those who present themselves and who want to participate. This form of organization reinforces commitment, spontaneity and inventiveness.

The lack of decision-making structures, however, leads to what Zeynep Tufekci calls "a tactical paralysis". This makes it difficult to resolve disagreements and makes the ability to negotiate problematic. Lack of leadership limits the ability to negotiate at the right time. No one can engage the movement towards new tactics. It facilitates the irruption of de facto leadership that attract attention but are not formally recognized and are under heavy public attack on social networks. These movements are organized online and only think about their sustainability after they have gone online, unlike older movements, such as for example the civil rights movement in the United States.

The will to politically define the modalities of organization is not secondary. It concerns several necessities: the preparation of movements; the management of movements to avoid tactical paralysis; the response to repression; the sustainability of movements. The questioning of delegation and representation makes it difficult to define legitimacy. Leaderless Movements have no designated spokesperson, no elected or institutional leader. But, they are also less vulnerable to being decapitated by arrest, co-optation or corruption. They are experimenting new forms of political leadership. This is a critical re-examination of the function of leadership.

7.

In the political culture, since the First International, the leadership of the movements was provided by the political parties. Social movements in the digital age are political movements. They directly assume some of the organizational tasks that were traditionally under the responsibility of political parties, such as recognized leadership and negotiations. This traditional organization is largely contested because of the great defiance of activists, and more generally of the mobilized populations, towards political institutions and particularly towards political parties.

The questioning of the party form is much more fundamental. It is linked to the questioning of the formerly dominant strategy of social transformation: to create a party, to conquer the State, to change society. Parties built to conquer the state become party-state before they have conquered the state, and as such become obstacles to movement and cultural and social change. The conquest of the state has allowed the bourgeoisie to impose capitalism, and it is doubtful that it alone will be able to get out of it.

Social movements are also being redefined. For example, the peasant movement with the Via Campesina, which has promoted mobilizations based on a radical renewal of its watchwords around peasant agriculture, the rejection of transgenic crops, and food sovereignty. Moreover, social movements are confronted with the difficult negotiation with the powers in place and the risks of NGOisation that accompanies them.

Since the 1960s, the movements have demanded their autonomy and refused subordination to political parties. This was expressed in world social forums around horizontality and diversity. This is what has been extended by the generation of movements after 2011. The search for a new synthesis, or at least a better articulation between the movement form and the party form is on the agenda. It implies questioning the forms of party organisation, both parliamentary and vanguard parties. What is at stake is the definition of a new strategy for political transformation.

8.

The most difficult challenge for the movements is the redefinition of democracy. From the point of view of the alternative and the strategy, it is relatively clear what can be proposed for the social transition and for the ecological transition. The social movement has put forward perspectives and proposals for a world without social inequalities and discrimination. The climate movement has opened a vigorous debate on ecological transition. It is on democracy that the challenge is the most difficult to face. It is on this dimension that progress is essential.

The issue of democracy is constantly on the agenda. It begins with demands for guaranteed freedoms, refusal of repression and authoritarianism, demands for effectiveness and equal rights. It is present in the need for dignity, in the questioning of institutions, in the priority given to public services. Horizontal movements highlight the questioning of corruption and they even go as far as the refusal of delegation and representation.

Representative democracy is under question. Is it necessary but not sufficient? How to find guarantees that it does not serve as a simple covering for the powerful. Movements are intended to be forms of democracy in action. However, they have difficulties in resolving questions of internal democracy. It is in order to invent new forms of democracy, both internal and external, that a philosophical and cultural revolution is needed.

Several questions require the reinvention of democracy. Thus, the leadership of movements must take into account the renewal of the relationship between the local, the national and the global. Furthermore, experience has shown that there is a continuity between the methods used to win power and the resulting organization of society. This was illustrated by the debate, which has not yet been concluded, on the use of armed struggle during the first phase of decolonization. Finally, the debate is open today, in relation to democracy, on the actuality of the forms of populism that propose to build the unity of movements and/or nations around charismatic personalities.

9.

Movements are confronted with the battle for cultural hegemony. The leadership of the movements is challenged by this situation. Social movements in the digital era face repression and counter-revolutions. They are counterattacking the current reactionary cultural hegemony.

This reactionary counter-offensive is first of all directed against equality.Inequalities are seen as natural, which leads to a security concept: repression against claims. The movements are confronted with the violence created by the monopoly of violence by the dominant institutions. The forms of how to reject this violence are the subject of debate within social movements. What the different movements have in common is the denial of social inequality and discrimination and the condemnation of corruption. In this, the social movements are the promoters of a counter-offensive against the dominant ideology of neo-liberal globalization.

A revolution that is still underground, but whose localized, massive and repeated movements form the major focal points, is driven by the globally shared idea that inequalities, injustices, arbitrariness and corruption are unbearable. And that revolt to put an end to them is legitimate. Particularly legitimate because it concerns the future of humanity itself, which is facing a major climate and ecological crisis that the existing powers refuse to take into account. Revolts are not just uprisings of refusal. Revolts become revolutions when outcomes appear possible. If inequalities, discriminations and injustices have become unbearable and unacceptable, it is also because a world without inequalities, discriminations and injustices appears possible.