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CARDINAL POINTS

Daniel Chavez

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For personal and professional reasons my life revolves around four cardinal points that ultimately are two: the South and the North. The South of Latin America and the North of Europe; Uruguay and the Netherlands; Montevideo and Amsterdam. The South often expands into the East of Asia or the West of Africa, and the North extends to the West of the Americas or the East of the Mediterranean. On both sides of the Equator, my geography is dynamic and assumes new forms all the time. What Huidobro wrote in 1931 does not sound to me as a surreal assertion, but rather typifies my current existence.

In all my travels, for many years already, my camera is always with me. With it I can document images that then feed my work as a researcher. A photograph can explain some realities much better than the deepest social science essay.

According to the official information printed in my passport I am a social anthropologist, not a photographer. My photos are therefore characterised by their very obvious social perspective. It all started some time ago, when I was a student at the University of the Republic in Montevideo. Then the camera was my instrument to record the struggles of the student movement or the land occupations carried out by housing cooperatives. Years later, the focus of my pictures has not changed much. Now the scenario is global, in the context of my work as a Fellow of the Transnational Institute (TNI, a global network of activist-scholars based in Amsterdam), but the approach remains the same: the social and cultural transformation, the environmental crisis, and political and economic changes... The impact of austerity measures in Europe, the living conditions of people displaced by the war in Colombia, ethnic and religious conflicts in India, the legacy of apartheid in South Africa, the challenges of demographic evolution in the Global South, the effects of climate change, the nature and emancipatory power of the left today, the socio-cultural transmutation of the Mediterranean region... are some of the topics covered by the Cardinal Points project.

As the great master Henri Cartier-Bresson already noted decades ago, *“to photograph it is to put on the same line of sight the head, the eye and the heart”*. That is precisely the aim of this project, which will continue to evolve in the coming months.

Daniel Chavez

Montevideo and Amsterdam, June 2015

Trivandrum, India, 2013



The Indian Coffee House is a chain of 400 restaurants spread throughout the country and run by self-managed workers' cooperatives. In the 1950s, the original owners decided to close the restaurants that had been opened during British rule. Encouraged by Communist leaders, the workers started a mobilisation that culminated in the transfer of the outlets to the unions. In the new globalised economy, new initiatives that expand the universe of what is known as the *solidarity economy* emerge around the world. At the same time, many trade unions are undergoing a process of profound changes in their political platform, with new kinds of demands and proposals.

Mumbai, India, 2013



Around 70% of India's population is under 40 years of age, including about 600 million people younger than 25. So huge youth population is unique in the world, offering an exceptional opportunity to use the 'demographic dividend' as an engine for development. It is also a challenge for the design of public policies. Millions of young people try each year to get into an increasingly competitive labour market. One of the great dilemmas of India and many other countries of the South is how to create enough jobs and provide for quality education to meet the new demands of a society that is changing rapidly and radically.

Mumbai, India, 2013



Climate change is the most important global challenge of our time. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has projected that sea level could rise up to one meter in the XXI century. Many of the fastest growing cities are highly vulnerable. Megacities like Mumbai are already exposed to more severe and more frequent storms, with heavy rains that result in sudden and destructive floods. Global environmental changes also contribute to the spread of diseases and cause serious disruptions in local economies. In this context, playing cricket on the beach may soon become a pastime of the past.

Varkala, India, 2013



The global food crisis of 2007 led to new debates about land grabbing and the consequent marginalisation of the rural poor in countries of the South. But there is another less known form of grabbing taking place on two thirds of the planet: in our oceans. The impact is devastating for millions of small scale food producers. A recent study by the Transnational Institute explains how market policies affect local communities through the coastal expansion of luxury tourist resorts, the destruction of mangroves for aquaculture exports, or the concession of large tracts of the sea to industrial fishing firms from richer countries.

Agra, India, 2013



India is the country with the greatest social, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. The federal republic is divided in over 2,000 castes, 8 major religions, 15 language groups, hundreds of dialects, and many tribal societies officially recognised in 22 states and 9 territories. The recent election as Prime Minister of a Hindu radical, Narendra Modi, has deepened the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. Communities that for centuries coexisted relatively peacefully suffer today outbreaks of violence. This is the legacy of latent political and economic contradictions deepened by two centuries of colonialism, which now re-emerge in the context of neoliberal globalisation.

Kochi, India, 2013



Kerala, a southern state of India, is one of the politically most advanced regions in the world. Since the 1970s the political landscape of the state has been dominated by two coalitions: the United Democratic Front (UDF), led by the Indian National Congress, the party of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, and the Democratic Left Front (LDF), commanded by the Communist Party of India (CPI-M). The influence of the left is evident in Kerala's successful social policies, including the highest human development index of the Indian subcontinent (0.790), the highest literacy rate (94%), the longest life expectancy (77 years), and the lowest levels of suicide and corruption.

San Sebastián, Basque Country, 2013



In October 2011, the Basque separatist organisation ETA announced a change in strategy, including a permanent ceasefire without preconditions. ETA called for “direct dialogue” with the Spanish government to resolve the situation of ETA prisoners and overcome the armed confrontation. Moreover, they argued that their stance met “all the ingredients for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict, and has the support of broad sectors of Basque society and the international community”, and offered “a historic opportunity to reach a just and democratic solution”. Throughout Euskal Herria, the Basques enthusiastically prepare for the post-conflict era.

Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2014



Since 2008, right-wing governments have been using the international economic crisis as a pretext for the implementation of austerity policies in Europe, with deep cuts in social policies and a marked regression of rights that endanger the welfare state. The cuts in the public budget have particularly affected education, health, social services and employment. The financial powers that generated the current structural crisis have been able to socialise their losses by turning the private debt with profit-hungry banks into massive public debt. Faced with this reality, a significant portion of the citizenry has chosen to abandon apathy and occupy the streets to demand change.

Athens, Greece, 2014



Smiling tourists continue to queue to visit the Parthenon. At the foot of the Acropolis, however, the mood of the local population is much bleaker. The impacts of the austerity policies imposed by the 'troika' (the European Commission, the IMF and the European Central Bank) are very obvious. Since 2008 Greece has suffered a multidimensional and unprecedented recession. The adjustment measures have included wage and pension cuts, tax increases and drastic dismantling of the state. Greece recorded a historic high of suicides in 2012, immediately after the announcement of a new economic package. Hope has been reborn with Syriza's rise to government.

Braganza, Portugal, 2015



Youth from the south of Europe believe they will live worse than their parents and are the most pessimistic about their future careers. Young people in Spain and Italy have the least confidence in their country when looking for a job, according to recent studies. Three out of four young Spaniards believe there are better opportunities abroad and 58% plan to migrate in search of work.

Other official data from Portugal's National Statistics Institute (INE) indicate that about 35% of young adults are unemployed, and that the country is experiencing the most severe economic and social crisis in its recent history.

Braganza, Portugal, 2015



Six years after the outbreak of the economic crisis, a new map of poverty can be drawn in Europe today. Greece is on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe, Spain has three million people living on a monthly income of less than 300 euros, Portugal has 18% of its population below the poverty line, and in Italy the number of poor doubled between 2007 and 2012. The crisis also reaches the richest: in Germany, almost eight million people survive on just 450 euros a month, and in the UK food banks of charitable organisations have multiplied exponentially. The data published by the European statistical agency, Eurostat, match those of civil society organisations fighting poverty.

Gallipoli, Italy, 2013



For decades, speeding Vespas on the cobbled streets of southern Italy have been part of the local scenery. In the hardest years, the Vespas were used tools of trade by local gangsters. Nowadays, the presence of the mafia is not so conspicuous and Vespas have regained their glamour, but the power of organised crime in the economy remains strong. The customs of the *Cosa Nostra* in Sicily, the *Camorra* in Naples, the *Ndrangheta* in Calabria and the *Sacra Corona Unita* in Puglia have been stereotyped in hundreds of films. Today the practices are different, but the mafia is still intertwined with political networks, mainly those of the old politics of the right and big business.

Monopoli, Italy, 2013



The idea of Italy in the world is intrinsically linked to superb food, good taste, intelligent conversation, elegance, art and high culture. All that is in crisis, as Paolo Sorrentino has warned with his film *La Grande Belleza* (2013). This magnificent remake of Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) describes the decay of Italy as a society as modern as it is stuck in the past. The sybaritic Italian lifestyle shows signs of exhaustion, while the economy goes into reverse and the political system laboriously moves into a post-Berlusconi era. Nevertheless, Italy is still one of the preferred destinations for global tourism, with around 50 million visitors per year.

Monopoli, Italy, 2013



Every summer, millions of tourists from northern Europe invade the shores of the Mediterranean. According to the World Tourism Organization, 1,138 million people travelled for leisure in the year 2014. A *New York Times* journalist, Elizabeth Becker, published in 2013 *Overbooked: The Exploding Business of Travel and Tourism*, a book that shockingly exposes this industry. The savage urbanisation of the Mediterranean coasts, the destruction of historic urban districts to make room for shopping centres, or the drying of aquifers in archaeological sites to meet the water demands of hotels or golf courses, are some of the legacies of globalised mass tourism.

Madrid, Spain, 2014



The Spanish development organisation Oxfam-Intermon, together with FAO and Caixa Forum, organised in 2014 an exhibition called *Food Justice - Seeding Hope*, which included a pile of garbage (photographed here). The installation highlighted the problem of food distribution and access on a global scale. Hunger is concentrated in the poorest areas of the South, where local communities are systematically deprived of the resources they need most: water, technology, investment and credit. Huge tracts of land in Africa and Latin America are transferred to large investors. In the North, consumers waste a quarter of the food they buy and at least 50% of the population is overweight.

Khayelitsha, South Africa, 2014



Khayelitsha is a township on the outskirts of Cape Town inhabited by around half a million people, of which approximately 95% are black. It emerged in 1983, during the last days of apartheid. Since the end of the racist regime, the government of the African National Congress (ANC, the party formerly led by Nelson Mandela) argues that the living conditions of the population have improved. However, in Khayelitsha, 70% of families live in sub-standard houses and one in three residents must walk 200 meters or more to access safe drinking water. At the same time, travel agencies offer daily tours for tourists interested in observing and photographing how the poor survive.

Medellín, Colombia, 2014



The ongoing peace negotiations between the government and the FARC have reinvigorated hope within Colombian society. For five decades, the poor suffered serious abuses committed by all belligerents: soldiers, guerrillas, drug traffickers and paramilitaries. More than five million Colombians have been forced out of their place (including the family that appears in this photo). The war has made Colombia the second country in the world in number of internally displaced persons. Even as the peace negotiations advance, human rights defenders, trade unionists, journalists and indigenous and community leaders continue to face constant threats.

Montevideo, Uruguay, 2014



In September 2014, three social researchers from Uruguay (my country) published a book with a title that is a true invitation to in-depth reflection: *The Dare of the Future: Challenges for Development in Today's Uruguay*. The authors identify some of the major changes required to achieve the long sought 'leap to development'. The book discusses the prospects of the country in three basic areas: diversifying the productive matrix, reforming the education system, and deepening democracy. Uruguay is undergoing a process of transformation that could mean the country in which our children will become adults will be much better than that we inherited from our parents.

Paysandu, Uruguay, 2015



Demographic projections predict that in the near future many countries will have a much more aged social structure. My own country is now entering a process that sociologists have characterised as 'the aging of aging'. This means that within the demographic group of the above-60s the proportion of people aged 75 and over will substantially increase, with the consequent challenges for securing pensions and granting appropriate health and care service provision. Recent studies also confirm that the people that require care not provided by the State or by the market fall disproportionately on the shoulders of women.

Coyoacan, Mexico, 2013



The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky was assassinated in Mexico in 1940. Trotsky had been one of the main leaders of the October Revolution of 1917 and then was forced to exile as the main figure of the left opposition to Joseph Stalin's rule. Many young activists born after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, to whom the terms 'communism' or 'socialism' might sound distant, visit his Mexican house today. In Latin America, the left has been in government in several countries for several years; and in Europe, new organisations such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain express the new emancipatory political project of the new left.

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