

Bensaïd's indignation

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This article was written as a contribution to the seminar on Daniel Bensaïd commemorating the second anniversary of his death [1].

"Indignation is a beginning! A way of rising up and getting going. First you feel indignant and rebel, then you see. You feel passionately indignant, even before you understand the reasons for this passion". [2] Written ten years ago, these words by Daniel Bensaïd, who died two years ago on January 12th, have resonated vividly in 2011, a year in which we have definitely lived what one might call very Bensaïd moments. I remember that more than once, during those magic and unforgettable moments when Catalunya square was occupied by protesters, I found myself having imaginary conversations with Daniel, who would certainly have looked with passion on the "untimely" uprisings of the Arab revolution and the indignad@s.

For Bensaïd, indignation was *"exactly the opposite of resignation and acceptance. Even when one ignores what we could call the justice of what is just, there is still the dignity of indignation and unconditional rejection of injustice"*. [3] His was an indignation for the long term; it lasted throughout a life of activism, which turned out to be *"longer than we ever imagined during the youthful enthusiasm of the 1960's, for it is not easy to be a revolutionary without revolution for such a long time"*. [4] As he said in his autobiography. *"we had many more nights of defeat than triumphant dawns. Yet we overcame the Final Judgement which had been dominant. And, through patience, we earned the precious right to begin again."* [5]

It was an indignation which had its roots in an intellectual culture that mixed Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky or Che, with Walter Benjamin, Joan of Arc and Charles Peguy. It was an indignation full of moles - that *"metaphor for those who burrow stubbornly past underground obstacles and suddenly burst to the surface"* [6] - and of Marranos (the Spanish Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity in the fifteenth century but continued to practice Judaism in secret) *whose challenge was to leave Judaism without denying themselves, to find, in their transition, a way out without returning to their identical self, or adhering completely to the cause of the victors"* [7] .. And it was an indignation full of lucid, revolutionary melancholy, since *"political commitment is a reasoned bet on the future. Even at the risk of losing it all and losing oneself"*. [8]

It was an indignation with a passion for strategy, given that *"there is no victory without strategy"* [9], and for revolution, understood *"not as a prefabricated model, but as a strategic hypothesis and horizon"* [10] of possible social change and as a break with an unbearable present. *"Always anachronistic, out of step, untimely, revolution arrives between the 'no longer' and the 'not yet', never on the dot, never on time. Punctuality is not its strong point. It likes improvisation and surprises. It can only arrive, and this is one of its paradoxes, if it is no longer expected"*, as he put it in his book *La Discordance des Temps*.

A conversation on the TV programme *Brouillon de Culture* in 1989, coinciding with the launch of his

book *Moi, la révolution*, illustrates well Bensaïd's "commitment to revolution", and his determination not to yield to obstinate reality. In the book, Bensaïd presents this Revolution talking in the first person, furious and indignant before the rubble and ruins of its "indignant bicentenary", as celebrated by the petrified institutions of the V Republic. One of the journalists, a Mitterrand sympathiser, tries to challenge him: "*what surprises me is that in your book you seem to suggest implicitly that the only real commemoration possible would be to (re)-make the revolution...*". "*Of course*", answers Bensaïd, amused. "*You mean, of course, of course*"...?, asks the journalist, incredulously.

In a world immersed in an incalculable social, economic and ecological crisis, subjected to the ever-present, tyrannical power of capital, the irruption of this wave of global indignation has brought hope and restored trust in our collective ability to "*resist the irresistible*". [11] Even without any certainty of victory and acting "*not on the basis of a guaranteed solution, but under the irreducible contingency of a hypothesis*", we have lived intensely and passionately many moments of this, now passed, 2011, knowing that we were writing an important page of our struggle to change the world.

It's a struggle in which we will always remember Daniel Bensaïd, in a very special way.

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P.S.

* From INternational Viewpoint <http://internationalviewpoint.org/>

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Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 24054), [A seminar on Daniel Bensaïd](#).

[2] Les Irréductibles. Théorèmes de la résistance à l'air dur temps. Paris: Textuel, 2001. p. 106.

[3] Les Irréductibles. Théorèmes de la résistance à l'air dur temps. Paris: Textuel, 2001. p. 106.

[4] Penser Agir. Paris: Lignes, 2008. p. 23.

[5] Une lente impatience. Paris: Stock, 2003. p.30.

[6] Résistances. Essai de Taupologie Générale. Paris: Fayard, 2001.

[7] Une lente impatience. Paris: Stock, 2003. p. 399.

[8] Le Pari Mélancolique. Paris: Fayard, 1997. p.295.

[9] Une lente impatience. Paris: Stock, 2003. p.463.

[10] Le Pari Mélancolique. Paris: Fayard, 1997. p. 290.

[11] Le Pari Mélancolique. Paris: Fayard, 1997. p.294