

The Globalization of Exclusion

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The issue of street children in Latin America has been quite deservedly calling to itself the attention of the whole world. However, this emphasis on Latin America takes us away from the same problem in the United States, where it has been a social issue since the XIX century. This essay seeks to examine this phenomenon in two North American cities: New York and Santa Fe. With this experience in mind we can begin to consider what “the issue of the streets” in the United States has to tell us about street children, referring both to the case of Latin America as well as to that of any other type of exclusion of the most vulnerable population groups the world over.

For many years it was believed that the problem of street children in the United States and the same problem in Latin America were principally different phenomena but, as it will be proven, in reality they have a number of similar characteristics. The first pages of this essay will portray the life of the streets in the United States as shocking and having little to do with what it is in Brazil or Colombia. However, I would like to attempt to prove that these are the two sides of the same global phenomenon.

Statistical surveys are of little use when it comes to examining the life of the streets, nevertheless, it is worth taking a look at certain figures relating to the number of children who run away from their homes in the United States. An investigation conducted by National Runaway Switchboard revealed that about 1,300,000 children find themselves homeless and living on the street in the course of each year. In New York, the educational workers in charge of street children estimate that some 500,000 children and teenagers are living on the city streets. In Berkeley and San Francisco (California), the large numbers of young drug-addicts and beggars have transformed whole city districts. In Santa Fe, a town with a population of 60,000, the Day Center caring for street children had taken care of over 1100 of those in 2001.

Still, in the North American sociological literature, these children have been given a different name. Rather than ‘street children’, they are usually referred to as ‘runaways’. Here, the temptation is probably to suggest that children and teenagers living on the streets in the United States are there because of rebellion or rejecting their parents’ values, or because of violence that they are subjected to in their homes. In Latin America, on the contrary, the children, who are living on the streets, are there because of an absolute and desperate poverty or because of being orphans and having nobody to look after them. The latest research is bringing these old ideas in question.

Firstly, I would like to consider why these phenomena appear different by looking at the

life of the streets in the above-mentioned cities. Secondly, I am going to examine some of the widespread beliefs concerning street children in Brazil, Mexico and Colombia. Finally, I would like to try to bring to attention certain similarities concealed behind different façades in order to be able to suggest that living on the streets, whether in North or Latin America, is a tool for survival in this globalized capitalist world.

Santa Fe

Santa Fe is one of the oldest cities of the United States founded in the late XVI century as the northernmost stronghold of the Spanish Empire. Both the city and the state of which it is the center, were taken from Mexico in the Mexican-American War of 1846, which was probably the first imperialistic campaign of the United States. Today, the original inhabitants of the State, be they natives or Hispanic, are marginalized and impoverished, and the immigrant white population is exercising control over all the money and the land in alliance with the elite circles of the Hispanic population.

Nowadays, Santa Fe is primarily a tourist center, which draws the vast share of its income from the tourist industry. In this context, one is likely to assume that it is a case of a community of children working as street vendors, whose economic activity is the means of supporting their families' income, and that this is the origin of youth homelessness. A similar situation has been the case of some other tourism-oriented communities, like San Cristobal de las Casas in Mexico, Olinda in Brazil or Quito in Ecuador.

However, it is not the case of Santa Fe. In reality, the majority of children and youth living on the streets come from white middle-class families. There are many that are begging on the streets or in public places but few are actually working and, in any case, none would be doing it in order to support their families. Many of them originally come from the distant cities and states and their own reasoning for living on the streets is entirely different from that of their Latin American peers. As they themselves put it, they are on the streets 'looking for adventures', to get a taste of 'real life', or simply because it is 'fun'.

According to various research works, the reasoning that the street youth give themselves is one thing, whereas their true motives are quite another. According to the government of the United States, 85% of children and teenagers living on the streets are victims of sexual abuse, which is almost always perpetrated by their family members. Following long conversations with them, certain common features, like 'strained relationship with parents' emerge, which helps to discern the presence of a conflict, yet few would openly speak of abuse as it is still held as a taboo subject.

That is the reason why North American sociologists are talking of 'runaways' rather than 'street children' for, as it can be seen, in reality they run away from conflicts inside their families. Nevertheless, many of these young people define themselves with a different name: they say 'street kids' and see themselves as belonging to the same category as their Latin American peers. When I tell one of those in Santa Fe that I am soon going off to Brazil, his reply is, -"Oh, sure. There are lots of us there, huh?"

However, this way of putting things seems to have little to do with the actual situation if one takes into account the major differences that exist between street children in Latin America and the “runaways” in the United States. In Santa Fe, up to 60% of adolescents coming to the Day Center are from the middle, upper-middle and upper class families. Very few among them are under 14 years of age. 35% of them (a percentage far higher than it is in Latin America) are girls. Most can boast of a good education and many are approaching the age to leave school. Nearly a half come from other states and have arrived to Santa Fe incidentally, in the belief that this is an interesting, spiritually-enriching or convenient place for them.

The community itself and the socialization of the “runaways” also differ greatly. Like in the case of Latin American street children, its center of life and activity is the city main square, where all gather for socializing, begging or just to see the place. However, in the case of Santa Fe and, equally, in the eyes of its people, these “runaways” are not always really street children – they are often simply rebellious youth belonging to the higher social levels who chose to associate with street children because they regard them as “cool”, “fascinating” and “adventurous”. It might appear strange but living on the street turns to be a way of earning some prestige. This springs from the belief that ‘runaways’ are more sincere, honest and ‘tough’- the kind of people who are worth the trouble to try and measure up to.

In reality, they are a community of ‘urban tribes’-skaters, punks, rockers, and hippies. Inside each of these ‘tribes’, there are members who have homes and those who do not. What appears really strange is that living on the streets, instead of serving as grounds for exclusion, is indeed quite far from it – it is regarded as a source of power and prestige in the internal hierarchy. It is quite common for the well-to-do children to come to these Day Centers with their street-living mates, and it is often difficult to distinguish the ones from the others.

Another reason for this association, which should also be recognized, is drugs. The rebels from the upper classes need drugs for their parties, yet they have no acquaintances among drug-dealers (many of whom are black or Hispanic) and, though they may be known to their white peers, the institutional racism of the society forbids inviting blacks or Latinos to the parties of the white and rich. Thus, street children often serve as mediators as they know where drugs can be bought without violating the barriers of racial division.

What are the most commonly used drugs? Those who sniff glue are very rare, which is yet another point that makes them different from their Latin American peers. Marijuana, always combined with tobacco and alcohol, is much more popular both with street children as well as with their well-off friends. The drugs that are most in demand are those that are commonly used at parties, such as LSD, ecstasy, Special K, and others that are not commonly known in Latin America. There are some heroin-addicts as well, although this addiction places them in a different ‘tribe’.

Other characteristics may appear strange to those acquainted with the life of the streets in Latin America. For many of these adolescents, their way of living is constant travelling; sometimes they call themselves 'nomads'. Some travel hitch-hiking, but others can enjoy their own vehicles, which serve both as transport and as a home, and this is in a way logical: a small apartment in Santa Fe costs \$500.00 a month and an old car can be bought for the same price. For those whose means are meagre, living in a car is a good option.

Other things will appear strange as well: almost all street children in the United States have an Internet account, and one of the most important services that the Day Center provides is a free Internet cafe. Thus, they can stay in touch with other 'travelling' friends of theirs, but it also serves as a sure and safe way of communicating with their parents. Some of these 'street children' even have mobile phones.

On the streets of Santa Fe one can get money. According to the local youth, it is possible to earn as much as \$50 dollars a day only through begging. One can also find work in the construction and tourist industries, and many of these teenagers work at least some days of the week. Others make good wages participating in drug trafficking. But it is also an expensive city where an apartment costs \$500 a month, a dinner in the city center could be about \$7-10, and a good coffee costs \$3.50. Thus, having money and having home is not one and the same thing.

In Latin America we are quite accustomed to the sight of a street child who gets on a city bus with his usual: "My family is from the countryside, and I have ten brothers and sisters. My mother cannot support all of us, that is why, I am trying to earn my daily bread on the streets..." In comparison to that, the arguments of the youth on the streets of Santa Fe sounds most eccentric. When asked why and what for they have chosen to be on the streets, their reply is quite different: "I have gone to the streets because my folks are stupid fogies", "I am here to learn more of who I really am", "I would like to be able to write a story of my life some day". Almost all of them say that the 'bourgeois' lifestyle and values are senseless and boring, and they themselves have gone out into the streets in search of something more true and genuine.

Santa Fe is a well-chosen place for their search. The image that North Americans have of this city (as one can judge from the John Wayne films) is that of the farthest border, the land of adventure, where one can meet 'other' people (Latinos, the natives...there is still a wide representation of different ethnic cultures in New Mexico). In the recent years it has also become a center for arts, dance and opera. The followers of the so-called 'New Age' claim that Santa Fe has 'special energy', that is why, there are numerous schools of Oriental medicine and healing, shops offering stones with 'magic powers' and Buddhist monasteries there. For young people who are looking for something 'different', something special, for the sense of life, Santa Fe is a powerful source of attraction.

But, in the same way, one can say that this reasoning serves as a justification and a post factum explanation. That is to say, once they find themselves on the streets, they need to justify and present this fact in the way that would look best in the eyes of the others,

referring to the special circumstances in their lives. Therefore, to other people they often explain and present their escape as a case of the so-called 'spiritual search'.

This topic takes us back to our basic question: why does it so happen that young people from the middle-class families run away from home into the streets? Their life could be a dream of any deprived child in Latin America, yet they run away from their homes choosing to suffer on the streets. What might be the reason for that?

We have already talked about violence inside the families of these children, but there is another key side of the story: the disintegration of the extended family. Undoubtedly, there are cases of abuse in the middle-class families in Latin America and within the lower class in the United States, but children from those social groups do not run away from their homes. Most often they have other options: their aunt's house, their grandparents' flat... Under these circumstances, the extended family remains strong; in the case of the middle-class in Mexico as much as the lower-middle class in New Mexico, an abused child has a place where to hide.

Now, let us take my family as an example of a white middle-class family. My grandparents are dead - and, to speak the truth, when they were living, I only saw them about twice a year. I have an uncle who lives in Houston, 16 hours' drive from my home. My parents live in Denver, 6 hours' drive from Santa Fe, and my brother lives in Alaska, 15 hours' flight from Denver. The family tree clearly shows that I have grand uncles and cousins once removed in California, Kentucky, Illinois and Alabama, but I have only met them once or twice in my life and am not sure that I would be able to recognize their faces. In a white middle-class family, this dispersion and lack of close ties is quite normal. For the same reason, this type of families enjoys great mobility and this is also important. My family, for example, had lived in three different states during my young years, the fact that also contributes to the breaking of the ties of friendship, which could, in a way, substitute for the family.

Let us then suppose that a child from a family like mine is being abused. He has no aunts or uncles and his grandparents are living on the other side of the country. His parents have just moved into a new city, where he has no friends that he would be able to confide in. And the boy, or usually a girl, already 15 or older, cannot stand violence that s/he is suffering in his or her family any longer. What options do such teenagers have? They can go to the police or they can go out into the streets. The majority, being afraid of the police or the authorities, opts for the streets.

New York

The first complaints concerning street children in New York appeared in the city dailies in the XIX century so, in a way, it is a long-existing and established phenomenon there. Some basic studies suggest that there may be up to 50,000 homeless children and teenagers in the city (a figure that, in my opinion, seems to be slightly exaggerated). However, nowadays, it is the kind of phenomenon, which goes almost unnoticed and hardly receives any attention in the mass media.

In Tomkins Square Park, on the Lower East Side, one finds communities of teenagers resembling those in Santa Fe: white middle-class, greatly afraid of the authorities and institutions. There is also another type of community, more familiar to anybody who is acquainted with Latin America: black and Hispanic youth who live in different parts of the city but who travel daily to Times Square where some NGOs offer their services to this population group. As I have already spoken about white adolescents, here I would like to focus on blacks and Latinos.

If there are so many homeless children and teenagers in New York, it is worth asking why they seem to be invisible. The answer is easy: they go to great lengths in order not to look like street children because their survival directly depends on their invisibility. In the U.S. it is considered to be a legal offence for anyone under 18 years of age to have no fixed abode, as it belongs to the category of the so-called 'status offence' – an offence which is considered to be such only in cases where minors are involved. If the police come across a street child, s/he will either be returned to his or her family, or imprisoned, or else handed over to the state social care system. Some of these options can turn into a nightmare for the child himself. This equally explains the fact why children do not choose begging as the source of their income, as trying to appear poor is simply not worth it.

Therefore, the children and teenagers who are living on the streets of New York dress themselves fashionably, no matter whether their clothes are stolen, received as a humanitarian donation or bought at a cheap shop. Every morning they go to the Day Center in order to take a shower and wash their clothes, which then allows them to move freely around the city. They may sleep on the streets, in abandoned buildings, in the subway, or in the park, but ordinary citizens would not distinguish them in the crowd because of their careful disguise.

Many of these young people work – some in the black market but most quite officially. They work in shops and restaurants and may well make a good salary there. In fact, from the point of view of Latin Americans, these salaries would appear enormous: the minimum wage of somebody who works 8 hours a day would be about \$1,000.00 a month. But it has to be remembered that the cheapest apartment in Manhattan costs \$1,500,00 a month – the price that a person receiving the minimum wage could never afford.

From all this one is likely to assume that the problem of street children in New York is similar in its nature to the same issue in Latin America: it stems from poverty and the high cost of living. It has to be admitted that these children and teenagers also come from the poorest backgrounds, mostly from the families living in Bronx and Harlem, the most deprived and marginalized parts of the city. Just like the street children in Latin America, and to a much greater extent than their peers in Santa Fe, they suffer from a notable lack of education.

However, it is not poverty that forces these children and teenagers out into the streets. It is violence. The relations inside their families, just like in the families of the street youth in Santa Fe, are extremely violent, and almost all of these children and adolescents mention having suffered some kind of abuse. It is not only a question of problems inside the family itself, as the Child Protection System in New York is very well-established and effective and would always immediately take the child away from the abusive family. Quite regrettably, these children speak of abuse and exclusion this time within this very state social system: oppression and harassment on the part of social workers and the staff of the shelters for the homeless, physical and emotional abuse that they suffer in the foster families, as well as the general perception of being regarded as a 'problem' and not as a human being.

It is equally significant that the arguments, with which young people living on the streets of New York explain their present situation, are almost identical to the reasoning that one hears from their peers on the streets of Santa Fe. They claim to be on the streets searching for a new life and adventures, wanting to reject the traditional bourgeois values. In their view, the streets offer something more honest and real, a chance to prove that life is worth living it.

Myths and Realities in Latin America.

I have to presume that those who are reading this essay are already acquainted to a certain degree with the problems confronted by the children on the streets of Latin America and I will, therefore, refrain from giving the actual situation more coverage. However, I would like to examine certain myths concerning the problem of street children and suggest that, in some instances, the phenomenon observed in Latin America is no different from the one described above.

First, it is important to point out that in Latin America the existence of the problem of street children is not only due to poverty. Many children from the most deprived families never run away from their homes and, on the contrary, the children who are living on the streets do not always belong to the poorest classes. Numerous investigations held in Bogotá and Brazil prove that violence is the essential condition for children to run away into the streets: it can be domestic, gang violence or atrocities caused by the war or a local armed conflict, but violence as such is the fundamental factor.

Secondly, it must be remembered that the goal of a child who gets on a city bus to beg is, first of all, to make a profit. Whether his words are true or not, they help to obtain the desired money. A story told to a social worker or to an educational officer in charge of the street children has a very definite objective: a dramatic story has to rouse to action. Quite often, when a Latin American kid sees that this trick does not produce the desired effect, he or she changes the story beginning to talk rather of adventures and fun that the streets have to offer. Just like in the United States, not only do the streets serve as a refuge from poverty in the eyes of young people; it is also a place that offers pleasure and entertainment.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that in some cities and countries of Latin America, the features peculiar to the North American situation with street children are already beginning to emerge. In Bogotá, both the civil war and the economic crisis, together with the previously existing threat coming from the death squad' who attack "gamins" (street children), have put an end to the practice of begging, and that is the reason why today such children often seek to disguise themselves. They dress up as private schools students and earn their bread by means of robbery, not begging. With the money obtained in this way they can afford to rent a room in a residential complex in order to bath themselves and to escape from the death squads.

In Medellin, the city that has probably the toughest conditions for those living on the streets, very close ties between the children from the higher social levels and street children may often be the case, primarily because of drugs. All over Colombia, the ideas of both children and teenagers concerning adventures are very similar to the kind one hears in Santa Fe. The same tendency is beginning to be observed in San Paolo and Rio de Janeiro.

The process of globalization of social exclusion.

I would like to point out that, in my belief, there are four factors within the present socio-economic situation that contribute to the increase in the number of children living on the streets, making it a survival strategy in the United States and Latin America. They constitute endemic characteristics of globalization and it is difficult to suggest how they can possibly be avoided. But I also believe that there is a dialectical aspect to the global causes of the issue of living on the streets, and that helps to find some positive effects in the present situation as well.

Violence. Whether it is New York, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Santa Fe or San Paolo that is under examination, violence always constitutes an inalienable part of the dynamic of life on the streets. Poverty alone would not be enough to force children out into the streets, but violence is. It is quite true that a child who abandons his home for the sake of living on the streets, does so in search of security – the case of Medellín is a good example of how the violence of the deprived districts can be so tough (with over 100 murders a day), that the street actually becomes a safer place. One is not as likely to be tackled by criminal gangs and guerillas or be killed by a stray bullet on the central streets as in the poorest and equally criminalized suburbs.

A North American family where violence occurs is just the same. Violence exists on the streets as well but it is not as perpetual or regular, and not so inevitable. At home, you get beaten and raped everyday with no way to escape it, whereas on the street you can find a relatively safer place, or else, violence is easier to control there.

The undoubted fact is that there exist many types of violence. One is domestic violence, another is gang violence, or the violence generated by war (war refugees, both in Colombia and in Peru, seem to be particularly predisposed to living on the streets). They

flee from one type of violence, but, instead, another interesting dynamic begins to reveal itself: the victims of violence are more often than not themselves predisposed to looking for violent and extremist solutions. If the parents always resort to physical abuse for resolving their conflicts, and the school practices corporal punishment, the child can no longer think of any possibility of negotiation as a solution to problems in the family. Escaping, therefore, seems to be the only effective and possible solution.

Violence is undoubtedly a global-scale phenomenon but is it, therefore, a phenomenon prompted by globalization? In my opinion, it is, but the issue here is much more complicated than we are usually inclined to believe.

Let us take one case as an example for consideration: that of Mexico after signing Free Trade Treaty with the U.S. Because of the competitive advantages and the subsidies that industrial agricultural workers receive from the U.S. government, it turns out to be cheaper to import corn and rice than to grow them in Mexico. Thus, Mexican farmers cannot survive in the countryside and are forced (even if not at gunpoint) to leave their native lands. They consequently move to big cities and settle down in the most deprived areas. They do not benefit from the State Social Care System and have no friends or relatives that they had in the country. The social care services that used to protect the child from domestic and institutional violence or that served as a refuge from this violence, have already disintegrated, and the street seems to be, therefore, the only option. There is no doubt that this 'commercial' type of violence is what many Mexican children are suffering from.

During this lecture at the University of Brazilia, one of the students, who was deeply affected by the way the extended family is disintegrating in the U.S., asked me why families have to move so much around the country. When I replied that in most cases it is due to work situation – i.e. getting a new job in a different place or the whole business moving to a new location – he said that to him such forced moving seemed to be profoundly violent in its very nature. However, a typical North American family would hardly think of this phenomenon as being violent, in the same way as it has been observed that many abused wives do not see themselves as victims of violence.

Quite often, it is more difficult to recognize violence within the globalized system of drug trafficking than in the field of business and employment. Drug trafficking introduces money and new type of consumer and production relations and reorganizes the whole arrangement of power in the deprived district. For this very reason, it becomes a threat to the former instruments of power, such as police, government, the Church and other institutions that are equally fighting against it. We can mention the civil war in Colombia in this regard, as well as the internationalized corruption in Mexico and Central America and the armed conflict in the slums of Rio de Janeiro.

The same consequences of introducing new money and new relations of consumerism as well as of transforming the arrangement of powers in the slums can be observed in the case of McDonalds. New masters bring in new values. The restaurant on the corner loses its clientele and a producer of passion-fruit in the country loses his market. In the same

way will the appearance of a supermarket affect small shops, and it is difficult to imagine how an independent tailor or seamstress could survive in the midst of a cheaper and more plentiful market of clothes imported from Indonesia. Both the government and the commercial structures are supporting this change. Strictly speaking, there is no blood on the streets, but would it be true to say that the process, which is taking place today is not violent in itself?

What would be the first changes to take place, when the IMF assumes the control of the country's economy? Privatizing state enterprises and sacking its employees, eliminating social care services, cutting the education budget, eliminating all public health services and programmes. Now the worker has no job, his daughter has no medical attention, his son's school building is literally collapsing and he has no hope of ever installing a sewer system in his house. There is no war, no armed conflict, but the result is ultimately the same.

Observing the growth of violence, which pushes children out into the streets, we can, in my belief, speak of globalization being the generator of violence.

Mass Media

It is certainly very easy to blame all the evil in our post-modern culture on the media (it is indeed the favorite practice of the North American Left). In the same way, I am, by no means, trying to suggest that there is a plot between CNN and Disney aimed at forcing children out into the streets. For I believe that the relation between the media and the issue of street children is much more complicated.

For a long period in the history of the mankind it was quite difficult to imagine the possibility of significant changes in the life of an individual. The farm worker knew that the master, who was living in a grand mansion on the hill, had a different life but he was unaware of the details concerning this life and could never imagine that he himself could be living like his master. With the arrival of television (and shanty towns and poor communities always have TV!) this dynamic changed. Suddenly a child learns the private details of the life of the rich, and television tells him that the rich are much happier than himself. Further still, and still more complicated, is the fact that the commercial propaganda tells us that we all deserve the same happiness that the rich enjoy and that our dream is only a few inches away from us.

This is how dissatisfied children learn that it is not at all necessary to put up with the sad and deplorable conditions of their lives and that they too may have other options. The only thing is to try hard and earn a different life for yourself. Thus, the life of a shanty town appears even more miserable and that, which one can eventually earn for himself on the streets - even more desirable.

Values

It is not only drug trafficking and the media that can transform cultural values. Capitalism consolidates certain values or creates them in order to increase the wealth and profits of commercial enterprises. One of the consequences of this change in values is the increase in the number of children who are forced to go out into streets in order to survive.

We all recognize that individualism and personal freedom are the hegemonic values of the capitalist culture. Personal pleasure and benefit have to occupy a more important position in the life of an individual than the well-being of the family or any other community, because this helps selling more consumer goods. A large family, whose members live together and use public transport, does not spend as much money as a family living separated, where each of the children has his own car and a house. The capitalist ideology likewise depends on the selfish human nature, which could always easily take over the dominance of everybody's thinking.

In this context, the parents' selfish behaviour, even when it is detrimental to their children, appears more pardonable. 'Personal realization' and self-help prove to be more important than loving and caring for others. That is why it should not surprise anyone that there has been a significant growth in the number of cases of violence against children, who always pose a threat for complete and total egoism.

Invisibility.

I believe that this similarity is of great importance. In spite of a huge difference existing between a boy from the Brazilian slums and a girl from a middle-class family in the United States, they share the same experience of appearing to be invisible themselves and of the seeming invisibility of their problems, needs and desires.

We all know what the 'invisibility' of a slum is. The state does not want to admit its existence, except during election campaigns or (once in a long while) in order to exercise social control. The rich strata of the society live far away, and the media, just like the government, also pretend to be unaware of its existence (unless a scandalous crime occurs). A child from such a district may be regarded as an object of pity or fear if the society does remember about him. In order to be noticed, to be able to count on the help of the surrounding world with regard to his life, his problems and his hopes, this 'suburban' child has no other option but to run off to the city center where he can attract other people's attention.

The invisibility of middle-class districts in the United States is however less widely recognized. Big houses with large yards mean that the established code of behaviour in the neighbourhood does not insist on two neighbouring families being acquainted with each other and, quite often, they would not even know each other's names. Every household is like an isolated island or a castle, as the old saying goes. All children need recognition, a look coming from another that would reassure him of his existence and value. But in a middle-class district this look turns out to be very far or comes from parents only.

Let us imagine then what happens when violence takes place in such a household; the child remains invisible and neighbors know nothing of the problem. The big house or the shanty town turns into a big prison. In order to be acknowledged helped or simply to get new experience, one has to escape.

We have already had an opportunity to see the logic of the globalized economy and the way it excludes a deprived kid and makes him appear invisible – the case of Mexico and Free Trade Treaty seems to be a very good example. But why does the global economy have to ignore the existence of middle-class children and teenagers in the United States? In my opinion, there are two reasons for that:

1. The economy ignores all things that have no market, in other words that cannot sell, and all the people who are not consumers. Thus, TV is probably doing a significant instructive work with children, preparing them to their capacity as good consumers through commercial propaganda for children (even between the cartoons in the TV Saturday morning programme). However, children themselves do not buy anything and, consequently, do not receive any recognition from the market in return. And, what is probably more important, trying to attract the attention of the smaller members of a household does not really help selling anything and, therefore, both the government and the society have no interest in offering this attention.
2. Another very important aspect is the logic of identity that exists within the post-modern market. Marx had given a description of the transformation of a culture that focuses on the value of a being into a culture focusing on the value of possessing, however, I believe that Guy Debord is quite justified in saying that today the prevailing value is that of ‘seeming’. The image is a very important thing, and children do not always shine in everybody’s eyes. They may often be dirty, snotty or not quite well-behaved... For a North American who is obsessed with the image that he or she has to project upon others, a child can be a source of shame and embarrassment (and, of course, a source of pride as well but always only as accessory to the image of his parent).

So, what can such an ‘invisible’ child do if he or she wants to be recognized, to call attention to his problems and needs? He or she has to run away into the streets.

The problem, as we all perfectly know, is that the street only serves to provide another type of exclusion.

Other examples of the globalization process?

This story seems horrible because the aspects of the globalization observed here are inevitable and are becoming more and more observable in all parts of Latin America among all social classes. However, I think that this is a dialectical process, which has its good effects as well as the bad ones.

Let us, for example, think of the dynamic of desire, ambition and emulation promoted by the media. Undoubtedly, they represent a constant memory of the suffering and deprivations found in the slums and offer the consumer goods that are unattainable for a deprived child. But they also prompt the desire for a social change (the peasant was never capable of desiring it or of imagining the possibility of anything like that). Naturally, today's media are affecting the culture in such a way that would only contribute to the growing power of the rich and those who already possess this power, but it is not at all certain to always remain like that. In certain regard, street children are a sign of hope because they choose to go out into the streets in order to change their world and as a sign of protest against the injustice that they have to suffer in their lives.

It is, nevertheless, equally certain that the disintegration of the family and the loss of family and community values is a deplorable process, as all of the above-mentioned constituted very important aspects of life. But we should not at the same time forget what the life of a village or a small town was always like: "Pueblo pequeño, infierno grande," - "a small village is a big hell", as they say in Spain. The lives of women and the poor in such communities were far from being anybody's dream. As for children, even though they were given a lot of love and care, there was no such thing as 'the rights of a child'. The truth is that it is better not to put up with the negative aspects of life in the past but, at the same time, not to ignore the fact that today it still confronts us with its duality between its positive and negative sides.

Charles Dickens, the author of "Oliver Twist", the famous story of the life of street children in London, spoke of his time as "the best of times and the worst of times". We can say the same about our own time as well as about the present circumstances, which force children out into the streets. And it is true that today's process of neo-liberal globalization only contributes to the spread of poverty on the scale that had never been observed before but it also offers new chances for freedom, hope and change. The question is how we can work under the present conditions in order to make this new globalized world itself work for freedom and justice. This problem is not new: a famous contemporary of Dickens wrote, "It is true that men make their history themselves; it is simply a question of their making it under the circumstances that they do not choose".