

Time for Peace

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Time and peace are two realities that are intimately connected. The influence of the concept of time in human life is of such great magnitude that it cannot be taken for granted if we want our lives to be truly peaceful. In this article, we discuss some of the nexus and implications of time, for peace. For maximum possible clarity, it is divided into three parts. First, we briefly outline the hegemonic way of currently understanding time, demonstrating its historical and present-day character. In the second part, we draw attention to how this form of understanding time subtly but decisively undermines our capacities for making peace. Finally, we highlight some ideas that can help us to reframe how we see and experience time vis-à-vis peacebuilding.

Our comprehension and perception of time are complex phenomena that have evolved throughout history. The way we experience time in modern, western societies is neither the only one, nor is it inevitable. It is the product of historical-cultural circumstances, a human construction that we can, and should, reconsider in terms of its contribution to human well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

The origin of our way of understanding time can be traced to the beginnings of industrialization. Since then, time stopped being measured by the rhythms of natural life and “clock time” was introduced; as Lewis Mumford points out, the clock would become the essential tool of the industrial revolution. In 1748, at the dawn of the industrial era, Benjamin Franklin gave his blessing to the union of benefit and speed with an aphorism that is still fully relevant today: *time is money*. And since then, we have been living, in the west, subjected to what Milan Kundera refers to as the “demon of speed”.

Neoliberalism has only reinforced, to an even greater extent, the model of time inherited from industrialization. The predominant and globalized concept of time is basically economic in nature. The key principles of the system – growth and productivity – are, imperceptibly but inexorably, based on the relationship between time and money. We are immersed in a homogenous and global concept of time that is ruled by one idea: moving forward and upward, higher and higher, and if possible, faster and faster. As Robert Hassan notes in his book *Empires of Speed* “Under neoliberal globalization we

live in a world where the commercial imperative of ‘market forces’ has seeped into every realm of life, binding speed and profit together as never before”.

If the origin of our form of understanding time can be found in the industrial revolution, the way in which we live it out today, in a globalized world, has experienced a second twist: the “clock time” of the industrial age has been overtaken by “digital time”, a time that shares with the previous example the element of forced and increasing speed, but to which is added the characteristic of dispersion. It concerns the atomization of time, which demands of everyone that they be constantly active, and furthermore, being and not-being in various places at once: being, ‘virtually’, in many places; never really being in any; and never being able to disconnect. As Jeff Sugarman and Erin Thrift point out, “The supplanting of clock time by “network” time, increasing burdens of individual risk and responsibility, the proliferation of choice, and erosion of the distinction between private and public are accelerating the pace of life. The result is a culture of urgency and shift in the understanding of human fulfillment”.

We are living through what Leonardo Boff calls the dictatorship of the “way-of-being-work”. The different facets of human activity are measured against quantitative criteria of effectiveness and efficiency, and time is organized invisibly in the interests of neoliberalism and economic growth.

This manner of understanding and experiencing time has individual, social, and environmental consequences. In this section we note them briefly, emphasizing especially how peace is affected on an intra-personal, inter-personal and trans-personal level. We will see that our form of managing time proves to be unsustainable, not only ecologically, but also socially and individually. As Harmut Rosa and William Scheuerman note in their book *High-Speed Society* “Globalizing capitalism’s obsession with fast profits and quick turnover times conflicts with the necessities of long-term system reproduction, including its own natural and ecological presupposition; fast capitalism meshes poorly with the fundamental rhythm of human existence, thereby engendering intense stress and unease in everyday life”. The prevailing way-of-being-work not only leaves us unhappy on a personal level, but also puts a strain on the time needed for social change, and endangers environmental sustainability.

The ease and speed of online communications turn people into beings who are promptly fragmented, digitalized, and virtualized, where everything is instantaneous and, hence, submitted to a kind of space-time compression. As Menzies points out in *No Time: Stress and the Crisis of Modern Life*, the echo effect – in unanswered e-mails, in phone

calls returned as voice mail, in unfinished business, and deferred intentions piling up – is creating a miniaturized Tower of Babel in people’s head, a confusion of personal and business priorities. Stress and burnout have reached epidemic proportions, with its tell-tale symptoms: inner disintegration on focus, loss of control and sense of self. It is a hidden cost of globalization. Not just in job losses and deepening inequalities but in disconnection: from ourselves and each other, from family, community, and the earth. According to Menzies, a society whose citizens are exhausted and numbed by too much time spent in front of screens, rather than in face-to-face interaction with other human beings, risks losing sight of its real needs and priorities.

Key elements exist for building a culture of peace, that call for a different conception and use of time. Specifically, this peacebuilding has four basic pillars, in whose interests reformulating our conception of time will be fundamental: moral capacity, dialogue, critical reflection, and socio-political participation.

Velocity, speed and lack of time are factors that should not be overlooked when diagnosing such phenomena as social violence, antisocial behavior, and the trivialization of democracy. One of the causes of contemporary society’s indifference and the impoverishment of the moral conscience, is the shortage of time. Hence the need to make an effort in building a calmer, less-hurried society. The crisis lies in an empathy lack and democratic deficit that further isolates and polarizes people, making it hard to pull together around the common good of society and the planet. Speed distances us from things, from the depth of things, and stops us looking beyond their surface. It is inevitable that a hurried life becomes a superficial one. When we feel rushed, we scratch the surface but do not succeed in making real contact with the world or other people.

Ambition, competitiveness, and professional success at any cost exert a cultural violence on the necessity of dedicating more time to public-spirited activities, to caring for others and nature; in short, what the philosopher Josep María Esquirol calls the time that we offer up: time for caring, for solidarity, for cooperation, social commitment, time for civic responsibilities – a time that is under strain by our “way-of-being-work”, by our lifestyle.

Hathaway and Boff, in *The Tao of Liberation*, warn of how our concept of time, and the way of life that entails, can lead us to paralysis and disaffection, even to the point where these become a greater obstacle to social change than structural violences themselves. Our over-occupied lives make us feel overwhelmed, powerless to face up to any social challenge; they fail to draw us towards the real needs of human beings

elsewhere, indeed they distance us from that reality and they isolate us in a tiny – though seemingly immense – narcissistic world.

As Ende cautions us in *Momo*, capitalism instructs us in the ideology of saving time, which consists in dedicating time to activities that demonstrate economic benefits – the ‘time is money’ ideology. “Surely you know how to save time, my dear sir? Work faster, for instance, and stick to essentials. Spend only fifteen minutes on each customer, instead of the usual half-hour, and avoid time-wasting conversations. Reduce the hour you spend with your mother by half. [...] Above all, don’t squander so much of your precious time on singing, reading and hobnobbing with your so-called friends”.

Ende points out how we experience this reality without analyzing or much less questioning it – amongst other things, because we do not have time to do so! And, Ende regrets, nobody wants to admit that, by saving time, their life is becoming increasingly poorer, more monotonous, and colder.

We forget that time is fundamental, not only to cultivate coexistence, but also good character. As Bertrand Russell said, in his essay *In Praise of Idleness*, in a world where nobody is forced to work more than four hours a day there will be happiness and *joie-de-vivre*, instead of tiredness and restless. We will be kinder and less given to looking at others with suspicion and competitiveness. According to Russell, working fewer hours and having more free time would even make it possible that war would disappear, because we would be happier and calmer, and war is long and arduous for everyone.

Regarding the importance of time for one’s character, it is revealing that one of the differentiating factors between moral values and aggressive or violent attitudes, has to do with the use of time. Tranquility, prosperity, calm, stillness, serenity, level-headedness, patience, and even peace are related to the absence of stress, not being hurried, having sufficient time to give to things that matter. Violence, aggression, nervousness, and irritability appear more closely related to not having enough time to dedicate to things.

According to Carl Honoré our obsession with speed and saving time leads us to irritation and anger. Anger floats in the atmosphere: at the congestion in the airports, at the crowds in the shopping centers, at our personal relationships, at the situation at work, or even at upsets while on holiday. Thanks to speed, we live in the age of rage.

A relaxed conception of time is substantial to reinforce our moral capacity. It is essential for civic participation that moral values such as patience, serenity, respect, or close attention, should flourish. A slower pace of life, although not always sufficient,

always proves to be a necessary condition for altruism. The alternative has to do with what Kundera calls the wisdom of slowness.

Furthermore, time is necessary for our capacity to communicate: slowing down and dedicating whatever time is necessary, is at the heart of dialogue and listening. Listening to understand the other and to put oneself in their place – the source of meaningful dialogue – is no friend of haste or stress. When we engage hurriedly in dialogue, we treat our interlocutor as a means; we do not hear their words, we are only interested in ours. Time is the key factor that guarantees the quality and sincerity of our listening, fully present to the other and not just to oneself. Any dialogue degenerates into mere drill if participants do not mutually give the time to be authentic dialogue partners. Only unruffled listening can create empathy, one of the pillars of a culture of peace.

A relaxed conception of time is also important for critical reflection. This calls for rest, time, and dedication; however, reacting rather than reflecting is the order of the day. Slowing down the mind may result in a greater capacity for concentration and in more creative ways of thinking. In this respect, the British psychologist Claxton differentiates between two forms of thought: Fast thinking and slow thinking. Fast thinking would be in relation to the effects that the internet and new technologies have on our way of thinking, as Nicholas Carr also warns in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. It is our response to pressure, when the clock is ticking; it is the way that computers operate, and how the modern workplace functions. Slow thinking, meanwhile, is intuitive, creative. It is what we do when pressure disappears and we have time to let ideas simmer on a low heat, in their own time, in the back of our minds.

Both our education system and the media promote the disconnected capture of data instead of free reflection. We receive more data but perform less analysis, which is an obstacle to developing critical thinking and, therefore, commitment to and solidarity with the world's problems. One has so little time that there is scarcely enough of it to deal with one's own difficulties, and news from other places and cultures appear far-off. Nonetheless, we need time to think of others – those who suffering, those without a voice. This dearth of time for critical reflection, says Kundera, is often unconsciously sought, so that this hurried lifestyle that we construct helps us to block out the horror and the aridity of the modern world. Today we are obsessed with wanting to forget and, to achieve this desire, we accelerate our rhythms and submit ourselves to the demon of speed. For this reason, according to Kundera, velocity is the form of ecstasy that the technological

revolution has bequeathed contemporary men and women – a non-chemical drug, but equally pernicious and addictive; and thus, humans who run, do not want to stop running.

Promoting critical reflection, and the concern for and knowledge of the planet's social problems, is the first step to encouraging civil society participation. But the shortage of time impacts on individual social and political involvement. Had we more free time, so that we did not reach the end of the day thoroughly exhausted, we might occupy ourselves with activities in which we should take an active part. To further a more participative democracy, it is necessary not only to stimulate concern for others and a sense of responsibility for events that occur in the world; we also need time to take care of one another and of nature – in short, to build a culture of peace.

The “way-of-being-work” has led us, at the hands of technological development and a thirst to control nature, to responsibility for a deteriorating environment, unprecedented in the history of planet earth. We cannot ignore the implications and consequences of our rushed way of life on our natural surroundings. *Turbocapitalism*, Honoré tells us, offers a single ticket to exhaustion, for the planet and those of us who inhabit it. It took three-hundred million years for the carbon in the atmosphere to be captured and deposited in fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas. Meanwhile, our society is using this energy so quickly that in only three hundred years we will have sent all the carbon back into the atmosphere. Three-hundred million years to produce the energy and only three hundred to use it all up!

Thus, the logic of the “way-of-being-work” has resulted in manipulating both nature and human relationships. Not only does it cause environmental damage, but it also creates social injustice, as well as personal unhappiness. The economic value of time, and its design in the shape of an “ever-ascending arrow,” is a concept that is ultimately unsustainable, as it runs contrary to human nature, to the way we experience time in normal life, and of course, it is detrimental to building peace.

Fortunately, there are alternatives available: taking stock of the contemporary nature of our way of understanding and living out time reminds us that it is not inevitable, and calls us to construct a model of time on a human scale and in harmony with nature. We are called to rebuild and apportion new meanings to our concept of time. Beyond time as a resource, or as money, new hermeneutical horizons reveal themselves to us: time as rhythm, time as a gift, time as an opportunity...A new way of understanding and living time is required, whereby we transition from the value of speed to the value of slowness, from a “way-of-being-work” to a “way-of-being-care.”

Recovering and rebuilding the “way-of-being-care” is the antidote to paralysis, indifference and disaffection. It is the antidote to the devastation of the fragile balance of the biosphere and our fragile equilibrium as humans. It may help us transit from paralysis to reconnection, salvaging our most essential humanity. To concede the centrality of care means imposing limits on our obsession with efficiency at all costs. It means bringing down the dictatorship of cold and abstract rationality. Beyond time for work, there is a need for civic time, neither commodified, nor sleep-inducing in front of the television, but a time at the service of human quality. Maybe the recent coronavirus crisis helps us to advance a "way-of-being-care" putting the sustainability of life at the core of human concerns, rethinking the way we organize our time and priorities.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Paul Lafargue was defending the right to laziness, arguing that the passionate interest in working represented a deceptive ideology to keep the proletariat in its place. Years later, in 1932, Russell would deconstruct and denounce the ideology that had turned vigorous work into a supreme virtue. All the same, the road to happiness and prosperity will encompass an organized reduction in working hours. Free time is essential for civilization, it is what makes the arts and sciences possible, it is that which sees books written, philosophies invented, and social relationships refined. In times past, only the work of the majority made possible free time for a few. However, with modern techniques, time spent at work could be reduced considerably, and it would therefore be possible to fairly distribute free time amongst all human beings. Unfortunately, despite the fact that everyone could work fewer hours right now, the system forces us to work the same number of hours, with injurious personal, social, and environmental consequences.

Today’s sociologists, such as Ulrich Beck, agree with this proposal – reducing time at work for everyone employed full-time. This would represent a fresh approach to working time, in order to promote a harmonious relationship between work, life, and political action, reconciling three areas: work-, family-, and civic life.

There are increasing numbers of people who adopt what has come to be known as *downshifting* or *voluntary simplicity*, a shift whereby individuals voluntarily reduce their working day, even if this involves putting limits on consumption. This is an intermediate step while the entire system is reviewed vis-à-vis the working day. These proposals should manifestly be accompanied by education to move towards values whereby, for example, greater importance is attached to care than to consumption.

It is essential to provide education about the value of care as a civic value – personally, socially, and environmentally – and the importance of dedicating time to it, re-envisaging our priorities. In the ethics-time pairing, a phenomenon occurs that we could term “cognitive-practical schizophrenia.” On the one hand, if we are asked what we value, we mention friendship, family, solidarity, compassion; but if we are asked what we invest our time in, we reply, work, study and competitiveness. There is a serious disconnect between our values and the way we use the time we have. As the philosopher Adela Cortina points out we must reconsider our conception and management of time, to reduce the gulf between that which is worthwhile, but for which time cannot be found, and what matters less, but for which there is time.

By reconfiguring the notion of time as part of a culture of peace, we will not only reclaim a less overwhelming and more relaxed approach to time, but also a more collective conception thereof. Generally, it is necessary to provide education about the value of time spent interacting, of social time, where we coexist with one another. Time in western societies has not only significantly gathered speed, but has also been privatized. The “way-of-being-care” regains this time for otherness, for interpersonal relationships – the source of emotional stability and life-giving richness, and whose basis is mutual care.

In short, it is necessary to restructure our notion and experience of time. It constitutes a key and defining element of the values that constitute the foundations of a culture of peace (moral values, critical reflection, dialogue, social participation, attention to nature, and care); and the way we live it out, has personal, social, and environmental consequences. The use of time is not only an individual, private matter, but a collective and public one. Time is a social category that we all help to construct, and that we will consequently have to rethink if we want to create a happier, more peaceful, and more sustainable coexistence.

We do not pretend that these considerations are in any way conclusive, or that they are complete in themselves, and no longer subject to further analysis. Therefore, by way of conclusion, we would like to suggest that the theoretical tools presented here about time may serve for future analyses about peacebuilding at all levels, so that we might advance towards a world in which people can live together, and with nature, more harmoniously.

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