

The unthinkable is quite possible

Written by Pedro Meyer



Bombs are falling on Afghanistan as I write. Most of you reading this probably have never been exposed to the horrors of having bombs explode around you, just as most of us outside the

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World Trade Center have a hard time fathoming what it meant to run down forty, sixty or eighty floors of stairs only to see everything collapse around in what was an unthinkable scenario of possibilities.

Those who are exposed to extreme experiences are changed for life we are told, and they seem to tell us that we don't really get it what ever it was that they went through. I suspect they are right about this, as otherwise experience could easily be transmitted from one to the other without having to go through the normal pains associated with expanding our awareness by personal efforts.

But, then how do we deal with recounting and making reference to events that fall outside our immediate personal experience? It is after all impossible to experience first hand everything there is in everybody's life, for us to then formulate an opinion. So, faulty as it may be, limited as it must be, we improvise and we feel our way around to discover then for ourselves, the issues we want to contend with.

All of a sudden it seems that we have built a world quite unable, or even willing, to understand the otherness in each one of us. There is truly a clash of cultures or civilizations happening.

During these days "The day of the Dead" is being celebrated here in Mexico, and within this long standing tradition of celebrating the dead, Mexicans have chosen among other things to create little skulls made out of sugar and decorated with small scraps of paper in all sorts of

lively colors. They are placed lovingly on altars dedicated to the person who died, with flowers and all sorts of other items which sometimes include some of the preferred dishes that the deceased really liked. In the end, the sugar skulls are eaten by the people who prepared the altar, with the remaining dishes not consumed by the deceased, or if left around too long, by an army of ants munching away at the sugar.

We have placed on the cover of ZoneZero a picture of such little sugar skulls in memory of all those who died on September 11th in the US, as well as the innocent civilians in Afghanistan that continue to be killed today because of a war that has just started and of which we know that there is no foreseeable end in sight. For us there is no difference in humanity between a prosperous secretary, mother of two, who was killed at the WTC or a humble illiterate Afghani mother, also killed, this time by a bomb, that leaves two orphans behind. I am pretty sure the two Afghani children will have no one to look out after them, while the children of the American mother will surely be able to count on the outpouring of charitable donations to overcome their loss, but in their bereavement and humanity the survivors are one and the same.

During a recent trip, I made to Moscow I came upon a memorial to all those victims of the Stalin era who had died behind barbed wires in Siberian camps. I was taken aback by several similarities that were lodged in my mind when I saw that monument. On the one hand I was looking at faces made out of stone that evoked so many pre Hispanic figures I had grown up with here in Mexico, faces of yet other wars and other nations plundering and killing each other off, then there was that other close reference to the sugar skulls from the Day of the Dead, as I remembered that there were a million people killed during the Mexican Revolution, and lastly the images of all those millions of Jews exterminated in German concentration camps. As all these images of death passed through my mind, I was sure that I could not understand so much destruction, that this is an experience for which one is never quite capable of grappling with, yet we must.

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So many millions of innocent civilians have been murdered, and all in the name of what, I might ask? Some who need to justify so much destruction and put a moralistic spin on all this death, attempt to choose what ever it is that their favorite political or religious credo seems to be. Some say we have gained Freedom, others argue we have Independence, some make reference to Economic gains, while yet some more contemplate Religious motives, and so on. Probably none of the justifications for causing death on to others in the name of those high minded principles turned out to be justified in the end.

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Just think of all those churches for which people have fought and died for, the world over, and which today have become nothing more than an interesting tourist attraction. Empty shells which just give work to some tourism and cultural institutions in charge of their maintenance and upkeep and provide sustenance for tourist guides, bus drivers, sellers of souvenirs, post cards and trinkets. Hardly the stuff worth dying for one would believe.

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