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# bolo'bolo

**p.m.**

**translated by Lisa Rosenblatt**

*Transcription of a video by O. Ressler, recorded in Zurich, Switzerland, 24 min., 2004*

The original idea for creating this weird secret language came up because the European left-wing terminology was no longer viable. Nowadays when people talk about communism, that's Gulag, no one wants to hear about it. Or, if people talk about socialism, then they are speaking of Schröder's politics – retirement cuts – and no one wants that, either. And all of the other standard left-wing expressions such as "solidarity," "community," they're all contaminated and no longer useful. But the things that they stand for are actually quite good. I don't want to suffer because of terminology for which I am not to blame; instead, I'd rather create my own. It would probably take longer to explain that the communism that I am talking about is not the one that I saw. It is easier to simply say I am for *bolo'bolo*, and then everyone starts to think of the things all over again, to re-think them.

I was born in Switzerland and I live in Zurich. My main job is teaching at a secondary school, and I have always been politically active in my free time. I am an old activist from the 1960s; I was there at the anti-Vietnam demos and all of those things. Later, I

was also there squatting houses and taking part in the anti-atomic movement. I was a little bit involved in everything there was. And then somehow the movement ended; there was still a squatting movement in Zurich, I also know that in Geneva a lot of houses were squatted, but they were slowly defeated by the police. Then there was nothing there. Then a rather depressed atmosphere broke out, as it often does after such cycles of movements. At that moment, I said: I will write down everything that we should still consider as important. I put together a wish list, like for Christmas, a long list of things that we can still consider worthwhile – stocktaking.

And then, I looked at the list and saw that it looks pretty boring now. For example, things like "we want to live together with each other in solidarity," "we do not want any economic growth," or "we want to respect the environment." All of these boring socio-ecological platitudes that can be found in party platforms. I wanted to dust that off a bit, so I thought, okay, I will invent a utopia. But it isn't at all a utopia. I know all of those utopias. The way they are written, there is a certain attraction. But I was also greatly fascinated by the roundness, the submergence into other worlds with their own terminologies. I thought: I can sell these things to people a lot better, these wishful notions, if I cloak them as utopias.

So then I invented this language. *bolo'bolo* really means nothing other than communism. It is simply the translation; those are Polynesian sound systems. I was in Samoa once and I really liked it there. There are certain parallels there, remnants of relatively intact societies, so then that was my book.

I want to emphasize that there is not one single idea in this book that is new. Everything in it is something that I found. It is

possible to arrive at *bolo* from various directions; at the basic unit, how people can live together somewhat sensibly, without destroying the planet, their nerves, and their offspring. One approach is communication: When people cannot speak rationally with one another, then they are dependent on higher authorities; they have to have supervisors to employ communication. We understand, for example, communication theory, which says that communication can function informally with up to about 150 people, which means that no structures are necessary. It is, then, quite comfortable, and there are a lot more arguments than necessary, because of the fact that communication is so easy. That's why I arrived at a basic unit, a gathering, which must be significantly greater than 150. I said 500 wouldn't be bad, 400, 600, 700 or 800. Then there is another threshold that must lie somewhere around 1,000, after which it becomes necessary to delegate in order to organize.

This administration would then require a committee and a certain professional level. Here we arrive at the realm of structurally necessitated bureaucracy. And, I don't like that; the effort quickly increases, because you have to control the bureaucracy so that it really does what you want. And, these control organs are, once again susceptible to corruption, and they must also be monitored; it becomes quite complicated. For me, the window is somewhere between the sensible social organization of the 150-person comfortable feeling and the 1,000-person incipient uncomfortable one. It must be there somewhere in between: That's the one approach.

Another approach could be something more ecologically oriented. The ecological problems on this planet lie in the north, where we have to heat and have created an urban layout, which necessitates automobile transport, for example. If you want to turn that back, if

you want to reduce the energy consumption to a globally acceptable level, then approximately a fifth of the present use would be allocated here. I am not talking about the south; they already use 100 times less energy than we do. In that sense, they don't have a problem; they have the opposite problem, perhaps. They would have to increase to reach a fifth of the energy consumption.

But if you want to use less energy, then it is no longer possible to have cars or single-family homes; people would have to move in together. Then it is possible to think about the size house that is the easiest to insulate and the least expensive to heat. Buildings will become increasingly more compact, because then the relationship of the outer surface to volume is the most efficient. That means that in the north; e.g., in the U.S., the people in the little suburban houses would have to move into "people's" palaces, or eco-palaces, where it is easier to heat. I always say that it is possible to make a typology there that is overly concrete, that you, naturally, have to look at it ironically. We all have to live in buildings that are about eight floors high, about 100 meters long and twenty wide. This concrete monstrosity is actually an ecological necessity.

I always begin here with this urban, western *bolo*. I never prescribe for other people how they should organize themselves. I simply take Switzerland as an example, but it works the same for all of Western Europe. How do you organize agriculture in conjunction with these urban structures? My suggestion, and also that of many people who have studied ecology and agronomy, would be to say: in Western Europe, for the food supplies of such a *bolo*, we'd need about 90 hectares of the type of land that we have here. If we take a mid-size city such as Zurich, then these 90 hectares can be found in a radius of about 30 km around the city, they would have room

there. That is still available, if we don't build up and pave over everything in the near future. And then it would be possible, seen purely schematically, to assign each *bolo* a farm of 90 hectares. That is calculated quite generously, because in Switzerland, the farms are an average size of only about 15 hectares, in Austria perhaps a bit larger. Although they are relatively large units, that doesn't mean that relatively large surfaces have to be farmed. These would be intrinsically quite diverse structures, where you could produce everything from potatoes to milk. That would achieve a rather sound ecological efficiency, because a small truck – or maybe even a wagon on a train – would only have to travel once a week between the rural area and the urban area. For the return trip, they could take compost.

Then
you could develop a system so that the people who live in the *bolo* could also work in the rural section. That would be a lot more efficient than today's supermarket supply system, because there we are dealing with a whole series of intermediary transports, in distribution centers, and then again in supermarkets, and then I still have to go to the supermarket. Here, every *bolo* would be a supermarket, with a diversified land section, large enough to farm economically. You can't continue today's agriculture because it only functions with a huge input of oil and chemicals and other things. Mixed biological farming is necessary, whereby one combines different plants in the same area so that they fertilize one another. Not these huge, monotone fields; that wouldn't function anymore. But this mixed agriculture requires a lot more human labor than today – which is actually quite nice – perhaps three times as much. But that isn't so much; because in Switzerland, agriculture makes up roughly three percent of the work force, so then it would be

about 10 percent. But in the meantime, all banks would have died out and there would be enough people who could step in.

What I have now described is the system; however, I would make it diverse. It is perhaps a lot more fun when different *bolos* on different sections of land exchange their things with one another, so that you don't always have to eat the same things. Certain things can still be exchanged worldwide. Spices, for example, are quite light and very effective, or olive oil, nuts, dates, and all sorts of cheeses and sausages, wine, of course; these are all highly concentrated products that have no ecological restrictions in terms of transport.

The simplest form of exchange is the gift. It is also the most dangerous, especially for those on the receiving end. This exchange is possible when someone is relatively independent. A *bolo* has a basic sovereignty; in Switzerland we have this saying – independent enough to be generous. In Marxist terms, it isn't necessary to scrutinize whether you have given away too much value. There are a wide variety of gifts. And because, assuming that *bolos* exist everywhere, giving signifies a type of honor for these *bolos*, which means that in return they also get something back. That would be an important form of exchange, which is not specifically tied to any commodity. It is possible to give anything; time, poems, or whatever you want.

Probably, the most important form in this system that I am describing is the permanent exchange arrangement. I call these *feno*. That means, for example, that there are set exchange contracts with neighboring *bolos*. If you want to concretize that in Swiss terms, then: you repair our window because you have a workshop for windows, we will repair your sanitary facilities, so that not every *bolo* has to have every kind of repair shop.

I would tend to see a third form of exchange at a higher level, I call that the so-called neighborhood or city warehouse. It is possible to describe this as socialism or communism. The *bolos* of one city, as a whole, need goods that they can't produce themselves, or that they only need on occasion. They have, for example, a central warehouse for machinery, and when they need a certain machine, they pick it up there. Those would then be communal services, like we have today with water, electricity, and certain commodities such as salt and sugar, which are required in large quantities and have to be somehow centrally produced. It would be possible to distribute them for free, because everyone needs the same amount anyway. That would already be possible today.

First, I would describe something like that as socialism, or even as communism: everyone takes what they need and produces what they can. Then there would naturally be the variant of exchange with money; that would certainly be present. I think that money is important for goods that aren't used all that often, that are specially made or individually tailored. That would function most efficiently at the level of neighborhoods, districts, villages, or cities, so that it is possible to have effective markets or bazaars where people can bring things like jewelry, clothing, CDs, art, special substances, drugs, cosmetics, and all kinds of interesting things. They could be either members of *bolos* or traveling salespersons, and that's where you have money. The type of currency doesn't really matter, it could be a local currency or a global dollar or credit card, if someone wants. It doesn't really matter; money is not dangerous as an object. I would say that money is only then a problem when it is allowed to develop its own dynamics in a necessary sector, such as the food supply, for example.

If we have now achieved these ecological conditions, for example, 20 percent of the energy consumption, then there could still be a

few cars around. In a *bolo*, perhaps there will still be 20 cars; people can rent them. That would be sufficient if you have to drive once in a while. But it will hardly be necessary to drive, because there will be almost no reason to go anywhere. That means that the number of cars has been reduced tenfold, the automobile industry has nearly collapsed and also all of the banks that financed it. At the same time, the oil industry has collapsed and no longer exists. Concurrently, the household appliance industry has shrunk proportionately; because, for example, it is possible to wash all clothing in one washing machine in the bolo, which is eight times as efficient as a normal washing machine. All the entertainment electronics that are still lying around, you can still use them but you don't need so many. Actually, the hi-tech industry will be reduced only in terms of consumption. You need 10 times less of everything.

And then, there is only the question of where and how to produce the rest most efficiently. And the answer here is entirely clear: sub-continentally. For example, trucks would be produced at one location, let's say south of Warsaw, for all *bolos* or cities between the Ural and the Atlantic. And they would only produce modules. They would produce a medium, a large, and a small module, a motor, and then in *bolos* or cities they would be put together into whatever is required. This already occurs today in the "Third World." All of these public buses are built there. The chassis is built there and all that is delivered are the motors and gear system. That is already an efficient technology. How would it work? I would simply do that with money, you pay for them.

Naturally, you can now ask: How it is possible to acquire money? There is, of course, only one option: either you pay for them, or have a quota. We need a certain amount of trucks and then the workers, who produce trucks, are paid by us indirectly through

money – but actually not much is needed. You can acquire money, if necessary, if you choose to sell part of the commodities, part of the work force or the agricultural products for money. This automatically creates a sub-continental market if you do this.

When people live close together, then there is an intrinsic social control that does not require any organized enforcement. It would just be a type of: What are you up to again? The surveillance is simply much greater. That is beautiful in the sense that it prevents a lot of damaging social behavior, and it is possible to cut down the police force. I would assume that the police force could be reduced to a tenth of its current size.

The problem would then be the reverse: if I present myself as *ibu*, as a person, how much of this social control can I stand? That might also be a problem. The question is one of the proportions in the mixture. When there is no social control, then you have ghetto conditions; chaos, and anarchy – in the worst sense – and you need a police officer on every floor. That is not at all good. But there must likewise be some leeway so that it is possible to defend yourself against this internal control. One area for leeway is the size. If there are 500 people, then a fundamental anonymity is assured. Then it is possible to do things, *bolos* can have several entrances and exits, so that no one sees you. For smaller *bolos*, this control would probably turn into a nightmare; the larger would be better.

The *bolos* have a global *bolo* contract. I can move out at any time after giving notice, and every other *bolo* has 10 percent free capacity for people who simply want to come as a guest, but perhaps will want to stay. I can move out of everywhere and into everywhere. That would stop people from being all too strict with the social control, because then they would have to fear that I will leave.

When you begin to speak of *bolos*, the danger is that you see them as isolationist constructions, a bit like the large communes of the 1970s. But I would like to distance myself from that dramatically. For me, *bolos* are effectively civil member organizations, you could say. You enter with a contract, and can leave the same way. Perhaps you bring your wealth in with you, but you also take it out with you when you leave. They are not communes. Also, inside, there are perhaps families or collective groups and single persons; they have their own private spheres. There might also be *bolos* where people want to sleep in huge sleeping quarters, you can't really do anything to stop them – it's also okay. But there could also be monastic arrangements.

What you need, naturally, is a planetary *bolo* contract, and for me, what belongs in that would be that 10 percent of the living space and the food in every *bolo* is reserved for guests to counteract this isolationist tendency. Every *bolo* has to open itself up to a certain extent.

*The text has been edited by Harald Otto in the course of the project* transform *(http://transform.eipcp.net)*.