

The right to difference Beyond Tolerance

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“Tolerance, J’ecris ton Nom” [Tolerance, I write your Name], is a book UNESCO published, whose title was inspired by “Freedom”, a poem by the great French poet Paul Eluard, and namely its first verse which reads “Freedom, I was born to write your name”. The launch of the book represented a part of the celebrations commemorating the 50th year of the United Nations. That year, 1995, was named the United Nations Year for Tolerance, as per request of the UNESCO.

The first essay of the book is by the Mexican philosopher, writer and Mexico Independent University professor, Leopoldo Zea. This was a shocking study for what misconceptions it contained, alongside the right and positive points. I highlight its faults and negative points, all the while noting what I

perceive as an obvious lack of method, present in all the essays of the said book. It manifests itself in the absence of footnotes and references at the end of each essay. Even the quotations are not referenced. Although it is true that this is mere form, but nevertheless this fault in form also affects the content, in my humble opinion.

The American and French declarations of Human rights (1776 and 1789, respectively) were not reason enough to impede the European colonialism, joined later by the United States, rendering the so declared rights exclusive to those who demand them(1). I tell you, how could the colonized demand these rights, when they had not been extended to the colonies after the French revolution in 1789, for the then-colonizers refused to apply them and Napoleon the First [then] allowed them(2). Human rights are, besides, not simply handed out to those who demand them; they are conquered after a long, historic struggle. What matters then are not declared theories as much

as the reality of what is practiced on the ground.

Leopoldo Zea is of the opinion that the adoption of these rights depends on the right use of the mind, which in turn is the affiliate of race, colour, sex, language, religion as much as national and social origins, not forgetting the economic standing and so on. A new factor, or circumstance emerges here: the economic situation is the biggest factor in giving or withholding human rights which necessitates struggling for them(3).

This argument is corroborated by history, which proves that rights are not merely given, rather seized after long historic struggles. The scholar concludes that these universal human rights became some people or peoples' own, eliminating their equality with the rest of the earth's peoples. Furthermore, paradoxically enough, we can assert that all humans were equal, but for some strange or inexplicable events and circumstances, some were "more equal" than others(4).

What were these inexplicable events and during which stage of human evolution were people equal? The scholar does not provide answers to this question, even though according to Engels who quoted Morgan, it was during the primitive communism stage of evolution. Moreover, the scholar is of the view that the expansion of colonialism all over the world provided evidence for inescapable differences between humans; differences relating to race, culture and customs which were unveiled to the eyes of the conqueror explorers(5). This is a fact and a reality well known even before colonialism. It also asserts that this scholar is a bigot.

Zea writes on that the declaration of human rights in 1776, following the U.S.'s independence, as well as in 1789, after the big French Revolution, did not stop colonial expansion; on the contrary, they supported it with new justifications. The first World War was but a struggle between Europeans over dominance, while the second World War was the result of the attempt to halt marginalized

nations' emergence, like the Slavs whose traditions were in the eyes of the Europeans "barbaric."(6).

Adding one, Zea says that there were backward peoples, unprepared to the sound use of their minds. People like the Iberians at the other end of south western Europe, had mingled with others who were less ready to use their minds well, the only factor permitting equality between all. The attempt by some races and cultures to hinder the evolution of marginalized and subordinated peoples was apparent in the 1917 Russian revolution, which claimed equality of rights. While objecting to these rights, the West promoted the emergence, en force, of totalitarian and racial nations, appearing through Fascism and Nazism. This is an example of creatures turning against their creators to impose their own dominance, threatening by the same account both Europe and the world which produced the two big human right declarations(7).

We cannot let these words, of which the conclusion, reality and logic are reversed, go by without commenting on them. The expedience of a summary can only distort historical fact and reality. What is, firstly, the new justification which has strengthened colonialism despite the two human rights declarations of 1776 and 1789?

To the scholar, it is found in the first World War, fought among Europeans for personal dominance. This is not completely accurate, since this war was waged to recapture, through conflict, what remained of colonies, without the least consideration to the rights of those inhabiting them, be it old colonies or sought-after colonies. It was also to change the map of colonies. As for the second World War, his account for it is also inexact. He does not see the reality of the non-European world having already been entirely colonized. The only way to go from there was to colonize eastern Europe or even Russia (especially by Hitler's Nazi and Fascist Germany) contrarily to his claim of a

European desire to halt the barbaric Slaves' emergence.

Concerning the quotations, he uses the exact racist talk which sees peoples other than Europeans unworthy of equality, for they are not prepared for the right use of their minds. He talks as if he were oblivious to the fact that it is colonialism which hindered and still does even the development of the possibility for these peoples to use their intellectual faculties as best they can. He also withholds the identity of those mingling with the Iberians. Should he mean Arabs, then reality proves their civilization initiated revival in Europe, a fact which Roger Beacon and others admit. The scholar also shuffles the right historical chronology. Fascism and Nazism attacked revolutionary Russia; how could it be then, that people's revolution for equality brought on Fascism and Nazism?

He is also blind to the real reason behind this, the conflict between Europeans for colonial dominance, as previously mentioned. I do not wish to discuss the fact that in the

Soviet regime and other popular democracies, as they were called, the accession to equality was not completed; the scholar has not mentioned this fact. Nevertheless, I believe that distorting facts and reversing logic does not exonerate him from racism, a smear he attaches to others, while trying to justify his way out of it. Besides, can we say that the European use of their reason for colonial purposes is the right use of this faculty?

The reason being, according to Aristotle, what distinguishes Man from Beast, and bestows upon humans their humanity, if they were social or even political animals. Upon speaking of the second World War, Zea mentions the non-European, non-Western Japanese people. He sees in its ascendance the motivation for Europeans to become just with the inhabitants of their colonies and to give them their due rights. In other words, to give them the equality they kept from them despite the declarations of 1776 and 1789. He also concludes that victory was attained because of

the coalition between the allies and the peoples of their colonies(8).

In the first place, the scholar does not say over whom victory was achieved. Also, why does he not mention who were the forces allied with the peoples of the colonies? Victory was achieved over Fascism in Italy, and particularly over Nazism in what was then-Hitler's Nazi Germany, as well as over Japan. The allied forces, or Allies, had the Soviet Union as an essential partner. Where the peoples of the colonies are concerned, their equality was only gained after the independence they seized following a long, exhausting struggle, upon which the European colonists having ensured economic colonialism, or the new colonialism, decided to give it to them. This new colonialism still lingers to our day, in the ancient colonies which have now become the third world, and not the developing world, as others say.

Concerning the nature of the reunion of independent colony peoples in the U.N., it is crystal clear: a strategy to contain them against

the emergent socialist block at the time, victorious over Nazism along with the allies dominating the U.N. History proved, in the second half of the twentieth century, that this pre-emptive strategy was right. We support the new declaration of human rights, and prove it in what follows, although is it used a pretext to interfere in the affairs of the third world countries, especially by the U.S. whose economic ambitions and interests which secure its dominance intertwine in a controversial way with its politics interests.

The new declaration of human rights asserts that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience.” The second article of this declaration stipulates in all exactitude that “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” (9)

This article fully contradicts the theoretical stand which the scholar embraces in order to justify racism under the veil of his essay's title "The Right to Difference: Beyond Tolerance." Following which, Zea says that human beings are physical beings and distinguished thereof, but not to an extent that renders some more human than others. This physical type, natural to all without any distinction of race or culture, is what gives them a common basis for understanding themselves and each other. This basis should be that of a new and original universality, away from ancient philosophy with its unique and absolute view of man, especially the expression of a universal human being. Men were therefore asked to subordinate themselves to those who spoke on their behalf, from Plato to Hegel and Marx(10).

The scholar adds that in the years following the end of the second World War and the universal declaration of human rights, the latter was to be used as a justification of the old subordination and new colonialism on

the basis of two ideologies: a liberal ideology free of social justice and a socially just ideology lacking freedom.

In both lies a paradox, obliterating the human to justify new orders along with dominance and control which partition human differences among contradicting ideologies, as in the case of true communism and liberal capitalism(11). My stand in this point is the same as Zea's, although from the historical perspective of these two ideologies, and especially concerning the newest one, communism, he fails to interpret the facts of historical causality in an objective manner, as we have already seen and proved. Further on, on the subjects of freedom and justice, Zea implies that he naturally advocates freedom in the context of admitting to the freedom of the other, and also naturally advocates justice when it is not the opposition to liberties, but the mutual acknowledgement of all people's rights. Thus emerged the talk of a communism with a human dimension and a capitalism bearing a human face(12).

I agree with what this view, but I see in it the end result of mixing the people's acquisitions through communism (working class first, followed by the peasants) with capitalism which sought to prevent the working class revolution in its countries by increasing their social security benefits. This action had the effect of shielding it from communism through a wall of China manoeuvre. This shows that capitalism excelled in coping with necessity to confer a social dimension upon capitalist economy. Thus the big development of social security benefits in the capitalist countries, rendering capitalism of a more "human face, even for a certain partial extent. It seems that capitalism was more understanding of Marxism and its dialectic than was communism itself, which turned into an ideological straightjacket, refuting dialectic contrary to its presupposed model.

Nowadays though, things have differed and capitalism has taken off its "human" face, what with the globalization headed by the U.S.

Despite all the European attempts to save its economic and social roles, capitalism is no longer of a “human face,” it has become an overbearing capitalism, an opinion shared by many.

In the wake of the collapse of the USSR, the western world, i.e. western Europe and the U.S., have began promoting the human recognition of different ethnic groups, cultures, religions, nations, customs and traditions that were long stifled by both ideologies. This is when economic needs intervened and the big movement in labour immigration took place, particularly affecting the third world to the developed west direction. The result was the tense situation we know today, leading the scholar to say that Marx spoke in 1848 of a phantom looming over Europe, which for him was communism. Presently, there is a new phantom looming over the whole world and it is none other than the phantom of the dejected(13).

These are frightening, rightfully placed words which do not seem nevertheless to rise

to the position of the old fear of communism. The phantom of the wretched looms chaotically, whilst communism was more nationally organized. If the fear is well placed, it is because it leads and indeed already has, to a rise of racism in the world, particularly in the U.S. and Europe.

It was this reality that brought on the awakening of the conscious of the U.N. which sought, through UNESCO to solve the bloody conflicts ravaging most continents. This desire opened the debate on tolerance as starting point, inaugurating a phase we should pass before reaching a deeper dimension. Upon this basis, 1995 was declared year of Tolerance and UNESCO conducted a series of consultations on the matter.

The philosophical convention held in Moscow in the same year [1995] ended with most philosophers rejecting the term “tolerance”, an inappropriate word not conform with the desired solution, in their opinions. There is no novelty in this rejection, as it is a position recorded by preceding

philosophers, but it initiated the quest for a different word, which does not hold racist and demeaning implications.

I shall not delve into all the definitions of this word that can be found in my book *Highlighting Tolerance and Racism*, particularly in the second chapter. Notwithstanding, I will focus on the scholar's words about it. He says that the term "tolerance" fully defines the conquerors' and colonials' position, insofar as they sought to make their conquests acceptable. They are the ones who speak to the peoples they conquered of tolerance and accepting the other to impose themselves. This means that it is but suffering to accept the foreigner, a stranger to our physical identity. This tolerance was to stop the others (if we cannot bear their presence) from acting violently and disturbing the world order they know not the first thing about, in other words, a pious justice so these strange people may align themselves with the existing order. This happens by framing them in a context of civilization and being tolerant with

their strange identity. Naturally, all this does not bring them closer to their “civilizers.”(14).

Here we have a simplified explanation that everyone can understand, in the language the whole essay is written in, with a simple and smooth style, especially since he speaks of the theoretical evolution to the definition of the word “tolerance” in a historical context. The scholar resumes explaining the word on the preceding fashion(15). He nonetheless introduces a novelty. The Greek and Latin humanists(**) used this accepted bad expression “tolerance,” to bear the peoples who refused to yield to them. Herodotus said that one tolerates these people on the basis of their own physical existence, always different that ours, in other words, barbaric. The scholar adds that Juan Genes de Sepulveda saw in the inhabitants of the lands the Spaniards conquered, half-humans, in other words, people beneath humanity, who can wiped out if they refuse to yield to the culture and mostly to the religion brought to them. Otherwise, one tolerates them as they are the natives(16).

The colonial expansion in the seventeenth century, however, following the Spanish one, will be less tolerant than this. When need had not risen for these people, they were gathered and killed. The doctrine of the puritans stipulated that these were strangers to humanity, and it is only natural to use them or tolerate them if they lent themselves to that. Tolerating them would be like tolerating a domesticated animal(17).

Such was the gift the carriers of civility and civilization brought forth to these peoples. Therefore, its dishonourable history thereof, the word tolerance bore in the past, as it still does a negative connotation: the implicit unforgiveness.

Arnold Toynbee examines the meaning of the word “native” in the western colonial expansion context. He says that when we call those strangers to us, “natives,” we are but implicitly protecting the cultural image according to which we see them. To us, they are a part of the local fauna and flora, not human beings endowed with feelings like us.

For this reason, we may treat them as if they did not enjoy common human rights(18).

Elimination or bearing (tolerance) was then the policy of the West to expand and preserve the fruits of this expansion. In Latin America, the inhabitants of the Pampa prairies were wiped out, whereas the townspeople were instead tolerated on account of their cultural progress. They were culturally and ethnically absorbed, and that made for half-breeds, present and widely expanded in today's world. This tolerance was also imposed on big cultures as the Asian ones, without any cross breeding however. African peoples, on the other hand, were captivated and kept as slaves(19).

This panoramic view the scholar presents is a concise, accurate and good account of the colonial behavior in the Americas, Asia and Africa. The conduct of Europeans, carriers of "the torch of civilization", was not as much as to spread it in the spheres where it is most needed, but to use it as a justification of their brutality in the

inhumane and uncivil subjugation of these countries and in the similar treatment of their populations.

The end of the twentieth century brings with it the European decision to seclusion; Europe's scientific and technological advance, alongside its stock in raw material allow a self-sufficiency that does not require more stocking of material from its old colonies. The same goes for the cheap third world labour, since the production operations were complete(20).

First, it is false that Europe did not need raw materials from its colonies anymore. This is only a relative perspective; should it have been true, what is the reason behind the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, and other regions, over oil?

Secondly, the cheap labour is employed in the domains where Europeans refuse to work, such as mines, transportation of radioactive materials, public transportation during the holidays, etc. Europe was the one to bring this labour from colonized countries

then. What is the European solution to these different ethnic, national, religious and cultural groups of workers crowded in it, when new racist movements are emerging throughout all its member countries? What is the European solution to the social and economic crisis its own workers as well as these immigrant workers are suffering from? If Europe gets caught up in the web of violence, then it shall reap a problem increased tenfold, contradict its democracy, freedom and noble tolerant view of the Human rights.

The scholar moves on to market economy, where the western competitiveness imposes an increase in both production and consumption. In this fashion, old and even unnecessary colonies (even partially) become markets; not so much as exporters of raw materials or cheap labour in here he contradicts his previous view on the need for raw materials, which I responded to by their need for oil, but as consumer markets which absorb the Western overflow. Bearing, or tolerance, is required so these vast areas

(precious colonies) whose fate was unknown, would have a possibility to evolve. It becomes necessary to coexist with the populations of these places, not in the frame of the old colonial relationship, (classic economic scissor effect), but a vertical subordination relationship(21).

I wonder about the nature of such a relationship. Is the vertical subordination not essentially similar to its predecessor: the economic scissor effect, despite the developments it is experiencing on both sides because of technological advancement, scientific discoveries and the historical struggle for liberation mentioned above? Is oil not, as a raw material, the origin of unarmed conflicts opposing the U.S., Europe, Japan as well as other countries (where there are armed conflicts)? Is it not the pivotal point in the Middle East crisis? Is oil not the main artery in industry and communications, despite their technological development? Is there no development or evolution in the quality of goods exported to third world countries as well

as to backward countries that started evolving with the permission of the developed world, for its own interests in exporting its overflow in foods (strategic goods like wheat for the U.S.), processing or even heavy industries for transportation (not mentioning the products of the military industry with its extraordinary profits to the West along with the solutions it provide for social and economic crises, while the third world can go to hell)?

I conclude from all this that the scholar made a hasty judgement, as if he does not see the evolutionary and dialectic movement of history, which finds solutions to all crises, particularly where there is the good, human intention for it. I shall not be driven into extreme optimism, but keep a pessimistic view, if relatively so. My position is the result of the persistent economic interest the West holds towards the third world.

For this end, I recall LaBruyere's words: "interest justifies all our actions." I assert however, the role society plays in these solutions through dialectic, even if by means

of inescapable historical violence after a long wait. Nothing is eternal and permanent in this world or its history. Relativity is a law that governs both nature and society, and appears to us as the product of the dialectical movement of history.

Zea adds that the wretched of the earth mourn true communism, despite all the criticism it faced. Castro announced, for this reason, that he will no longer be the guardian of the United States' borders. Such was the role of the USSR: to guard the interests, prosperity and happiness of the Western world(22).

A few facts must be clarified in here: The Soviet seclusion was the result of Stalin's rule. In the days leading up to his rule and following it, however, there existed a (not small) desire to open up which was faced by a western barricade, especially in England, and by the fear of communist contagion. The seclusion or better yet siege was enforced to an important degree by the West. We must recall the Churchill's words, upon the end of the

second World War, on the necessity of building a wall to separate East and West. All of this notwithstanding, the wretched and secluded have worked ferociously towards breaking this imposed rein of seclusion on them in order to contribute as human beings to what is common to all. They take a violent stand against the doubt cast on this humanity. The wretched express their humanity and force its acknowledgment. They are real creatures and therefore differ, they are individuals, people demanding their reality to be treated on an equal standing with those who pretend to be the champions of the Human(23).

To address this necessity, it is no longer a question of bearing and tolerating. The current question is the preservation of the natives, the preservation of their identity and particularities in the face of civilization and progress, which means preserving the identity of these natives as extinct species are preserved(24). This focus by the scholar makes of these secluded people a part of nature, as Toynbee said. In convincing them of

this, they will no longer be the subjects of use and manipulation. Religious missions defended the identity of these natives and called for it not to be lost to civilization. Nevertheless, civil and rich people also suffer and cry; and the strong are not necessarily happy while natural people are constantly at a closer range from happiness, and far away from the problems of civilization. This was the best expression of tolerance(25).

I can only see this expression, even in the religious context, as that of the interest of the dominating on the dominated and subjugated. Who are the native populations and what is Indignity? To for the former, all the peoples are natives, the French, English German etc peoples are those of France, England, and Germany etc... As for the latter, according to the dictionary it is the “the study of Indigenous peoples who are a part of the European-dominated nations today.” This definition applies first and foremost on Latin America followed by Asia, Africa, and Oceania, the regions which after 1492, fell

under west Europe's influence. The situation presenting itself is of native populations convincing other native populations that they are happy, so they hold on to this happiness. This way, they can be accepted, tolerated and borne. This form of pious tolerance leads to holding onto marginalization, by working in all tolerance, to convince them of stopping all pursuit of goals which will only make them lose their customs, traditions and mother tongue(26).

In my opinion, this attempt to convince the marginalized of the above mentioned as their best interest is an entirely naïve one, not devoid of malice.

The proof to this is that the people of the Pacific, the Japanese per example, showed their ability to keep their identity all the while entering the era of modernity and compete with their old colons. The Samurai replaced thus their sword with the computer and other machines and devices borrowed from the West to face and getting ahead of colonial states. His old customs and traditions became

folklore, but he has not lost his identity and instead adjusted it to the times(27).

Herein lies the answer to the persistent repetition to convince people of staying on the margin. It is for this reason that tolerance is not enough, we must embrace individual differences and the particularities of the other and consider them in the same view we reserve for our own differences and particularities. The West is tolerant of many forms of human expression under its authority, but the latter were forced to do the same with what imposed on them. It is not a question of tolerating but one of understanding the other and respecting him, so we earn the same respect and understanding in return. The respect and understanding of individual differences and diversities enriches our own identity. Our identity gains in coming across the other's and similarly, the other's identity is enriched by our own and this can only be the case through understanding, comprehension and mutual respect(28).

In reality, marginalized peoples have been demanding for a very long time now the right which makes all that was in the various human rights declarations: the right to difference, i.e. the people's right to be themselves and tangibly so, in addition to the duty lying upon other people and peoples to respect this right(29). Upon which, the year 1995 was declared the year of the right to difference, through a proposal making the opening words of the universal declaration of human rights, declared by the General Assembly at the U.N. the following: "all human beings are individually different and therefore similar. They differ in race, color, sex, culture, religion, language and other forms of expression of the humane, which are embodied and render all people similar to each other. They are creatures with the talent to think and thereof, to understand and make themselves understood. On the basis of this invaluable mutual understanding that the right to difference must be asserted, a right which engenders the respect of the subsequent rights of others."(30).

Should we link this proposition with the racist-smear ideas preceding it, we shall see it is only a euphemism, through the word “similar”, despite the fact that its implicit meaning may differ. Still, I say the following: This is a nice and serious proposition reminding us of the one already formulated by the great Muslim philosopher Averroes, even though his formulation was meant for the obligation to respect others’ opinions. Has anyone embraced this proposition? In truth, theory is not similar to practical application, a major rift we experience when it comes to all organizations and agencies of the U.N. These bodies perform in depth studies, backed with statistics, but are unable to apply their theories because of the social divisions of local, regional and international societies and the contradiction of what should be enforced with the interests of the big powers. For this reason, good propositions remain wishes.

Nonetheless, we shall not lose confidence and hope in evolution and change

towards the best for the human being and the human community, even on the long term.

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***) From Humanist, a classical scholar, a believer in Humanism, pertaining to Humanism, a philosophy centered around the Human being, his thought, literary and scientific cultures; the philosophy of the European Renaissance scholars who wanted to revive old sciences; it is centered around the human being and his reality.

1- ZEA Leopoldo, "Droit a la Difference, Au Dela de la Tolerance", in Tolerance, J'ecris Ton Nom, ed. Saurat/ed. UNESCO, Paris, 1995, p.87.

- 2- For more details, review my essay on “The Economic Origins of Racial Discrimination”, in al-Irfan, 5th & 6th issues, August 1996.
- 3- Zea, ibid.
- 4- Ibid, p.87.
- 5- Ibid, p.88
- 6- Ibid, p.88-89.
- 7- Ibid, p.89.
- 8- Ibid. p.89.
- 9- Ibid. p.89-90.
- 10- Ibid. p.90.
- 11- Ibid, p.90.
- 12- Ibid, p.90-91.
- 13- Ibid, p.91.
- 14- Look in Highlights on Tolerance and Racism, Dar Al Fikr Al Lubnani, Beirut, 2003.
- 15- ZEA, ibid, p.92-93.

16- Details can be found in *Tolerance and Racism*, second chapter.

17- Zea, *ibid*, p.93.

18- *Ibid*, p.93-94.

19- *Ibid*, p.94.

20- *Ibid*, p.94.

21- *Ibid*, p.95.

22- *Ibid*, p.95-96.

23- *Ibid*, p.96.

24- *Ibid*, p.96

25- *Ibid*, p.96-97.

26- *Ibid*, p.97.

27- *Ibid*, p.98-99.

28- *Ibid*, p.99.

29- *Ibid*, p.99.

30- *Ibid*, p.99.

