

**Towards reconciliation
between South and North
in search of an end to white supremacy**

Circular and Linear

Yves de Morsier

This book is different from other books about colonialism, racism and white supremacy. It does not repeat the facts that other books have exposed so well. It examines rather the cultural and human triggers of domination and contempt for the others.

It dares to look into the way we function as people in order to identify the mechanisms that foster our instinctual reactions, when we meet “the Other”. Our reactions may indeed be very powerful and difficult to control.

It will show how the North and the South think in different terms; the North in rational and linear ways; the South in cultural and circular ways. Hence the title of this book.

It will redefine some essential concepts that lie at the base of colonialism and white supremacy. It will investigate the meaning of culture and civilisation, race, identity, whiteness, otherness, truth, primitiveness, development, evolution, enmity, conflict.

This book will demonstrate the importance of choice. It will illustrate the path of personal and collective choices that lie at the root of all forms of freedom. Because of such a wide and rich range of possible choices, cultures are so diverse. It will examine the inner and intimate personal space in which we take these essential decisions: it is called the hidden sphere.

It will finally examine the path of true liberation, against the diverse forms and tools of neo-colonialism; how the struggle for independence is configured; what the functions of violence, of ideology, even of terrorism may be.

In each chapter it will try to open and define this new path of liberation for all of us: Because supremacy destroys us all, it is time we find other ways to relate, and to practise true dialogue, i.e. true ways of peace and harmony.

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ECONOMY & ETHICS

The author, Yves de Morsier,

born in French speaking Switzerland in the 1950s, architect by training, proposes here a very practical approach that draws from about 50 years of experience in forms of gentle development, in Europe and Australia, that aim at a fair sharing of common resources. He lives on the South Coast of New South Wales (Australia) where, with his wife Ursula, he has built an off-grid solar-powered rammed earth house, facing a national park, where they experiment with new ways of sharing and facilitate times of meditation and workshops.

See: www.desertcreekhouse.com.au

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By the same author

The solution is simple ... but demanding:

A strategy for change and a search for meaning, for a creative response to climate change, economic inequity and democratic collapse.

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* * *

A manifesto in six volumes:

The present book is part of a manifesto in 6 volumes – here Nr 4 – about 6 major imbalances of our time.

Each volume can be read separately and in any order.

Vol. 1) Effort and comfort:

*towards reconciliation between nature and humanity
in search of harmony and peace of mind.*

Published: Desert Creek House Publishing, 2022

Vol. 2) Vocation and subsistence:

*towards reconciliation between simplicity and wealth
in search of a new anthropology.*

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Vol. 3) Recessive and dominant:

*towards reconciliation between femininity and masculinity
in search of a new anthropology.*

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Vol. 4) Circular and linear (this present volume):

*towards reconciliation between South and North,
in search of an end to white supremacy.*

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Vol. 5) Knowledge and learning:

*towards reconciliation between subtle faculties and intellect,
in search of a new incarnation of our spiritual aspirations.*

Vol. 6) Spirit and matter:

*towards reconciliation between Reality and appearances,
in search of true being.*

Volumes 0 to 4 are already published or soon ready to be published. Until these books are printed, they can be downloaded for free from our website:

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COLONIALISM

RACISM

CULTURE

CIVILISATION

IDENTITY

LIBERATION

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Circular and linear

To the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, elders and leaders who contribute with their generosity, intelligence and wisdom to the work of dialogue and conciliation on this beautiful continent of Australia and have participated in the elaboration of the Uluru Statement from the Heart as a vision for our future.

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Introduction

A path of liberation

This book is not a usual book about supremacy and racism and colonialism. It is not a history of the past that describes how we have come to the terrible state of conflict in which our world is drowning. No, it has chosen another way. It will offer a severe look at ourselves, at our attitudes, as a Western society, but also as persons. I want to understand how, as ordinary human beings, we came to this quasi obsession with supremacy, domination, contempt of other cultures, racism, colonisation; and I will share with you what I understood in my search.

This study of our own behaviours, anchored in our humanity and in our culture(s), and the examination of how we came to conquer other lands, in order to dominate and exploit them, will lead us on a path of liberation in two ways.

First because it describes how our society has, historically but also culturally, humanly, psychologically and socially, developed tools of supremacy and why the project of colonialism has been so attractive for Northern countries, i.e. mainly Europe.

Second – this is the unusual path that this book has adopted – it will try also to go much further. It will attempt to grasp what incites us as societies and as persons, as human beings similar to many others, to feel so attracted by attitudes of contempt, racism and finally conflict against these others. It will try to explain why we prefer domination and exploitation rather than cooperation and sharing. When our ancestors “discovered” some unknown lands of which they did not know anything, why did they come there in a spirit of conquest and invasion (I declare this land is

mine!) rather than in a spirit of peace and true discovery of the other (tell me who you are indeed)?

This question may seem very irrelevant and utopic because we instinctively think that people (our ancestors as well as ourselves) are not capable of compassion and respect when they meet a stranger or have the opportunity to take advantage of the situation that is offered to them. I believe this is a negative cliché that needs to be examined more carefully because it does not fit reality. Or if this cliché is true, I want to be convinced that it is so.

I remain sure of something: It is for me evident that these attitudes of sharp antagonism that developed between Northern and Southern countries have brought us – and still bring us – much more despair and suffering for us all (us and them) than if we would practise attitudes of reciprocal understanding, of fascination for diversity and complementarity, of feelings of compassion and effort of conciliation. Why then should we prefer what brings us suffering to what brings us happiness? This is a very puzzling question.

And, most important, the response to this question will explain colonialism and racism in much more depth than any other historical fact or analysis, although, of course, history is deeply involved here; it is the material we have to investigate that provides the facts, the reasons and the arguments. But there is more to it than just the facts. There is the question of the motivation. And this motivation remains enigmatic because it involves the whole of human nature and our capacity as persons to choose what we do and why we do it.

Because it tries to reveal the mechanisms of supremacy, and consequently also self-harm, the answer I will bring concerns our own path of liberation as persons. This investigation, if it is properly led, will offer us a path of freeing us from false beliefs, illusions, corrupted myths, and especially from greed and short

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term interest. It will lead us to freedom and authentic practice of our free will.

Yes, I am aware, it is a very ambitious purpose.

When differences meet

The colonial project was born out of the meeting of different cultures and races. The differences between human beings, although we all have much more in common than we think, have triggered very violent fears and reactions.

I will try to demonstrate how these many differences in race or culture are hardly graspable as distinct patterns because they cannot be defined according to precise lines of distinction and they cannot be classified. The range from one to the other is rather continuous because of all the possible combinations of their components. There is no pure race, no pure culture; between two different races one can find all possible intermediate stages of miscegenation or hybridisation.

I will investigate what racism is and we will observe how the foundations of racism are extremely weak and shaky. It is indeed more the concept itself of race (in our heads), although very questionable, that defines the relationships between races, rather than the reality of how we may relate between people of different skin colours. The idea itself becomes then the trigger of our reactions. Race, as a fact that is distinct from the person, hardly exists. And, if it does, it is very minor. Yet appearances, and especially the way we perceive them, are very strongly impacting the way we think; and this is a real fact. They strongly influence our ways of thinking and generate many false ideas before even we can know each other.

Our common humanity is then ignored although it is certainly the dominant common denominator that unites us all, whether we

live beyond the Polar Circle as an Inuit, in the savannah as a Bushman of the Kalahari, as a lawyer in New York, as a farmer in some vast plains.

In this more humanistic approach it is very telling to consider what one could call the other side of the story and to observe how colonised people have first perceived the first invaders. Often they did with surprise, but also too often with a form of authentic contempt fostered by the incredibly primitive way the invaders were behaving towards them. The “civilisation” of the invaders, in its worse aspects of violence, was meeting the “culture” of indigenous people, in its most refined maturity. Hence the critic of modernity by Southern indigenous people seems very relevant and helpful.

The clash between the colonists and the colonised developed as a violent opposition of two extremes. This is a conflict between the Northern “civilisation” and the invaded Southern “cultures”. This is a North-South clash. The word *Northern* in this case emphasises the opposition between North and South but this colonising power will also be here described as *Western* by opposition to *Eastern*. *Northern* and *Western* have yet here very similar significations although the former emphasises more than the latter the geographical polarity which is also cultural.

Culture, civilisation and personal freedom

At the root of the colonial project and the ideology of supremacy there is our notion of culture and civilisation. Considering the facts and following the conventional historical interpretations, culture and civilisation provide usually the general frame to which we refer in our daily choices, whether as a nation or as persons. In this concept of culture and civilisation our sense of identity is also rooted. The concept of identity is generally

understood as a form of identifying with certain common traits of character a nation has adopted.

I will challenge these notions because they belong more to the field of ideology than to the authentic search for truth we may follow in our personal lives, in our private sphere. I will re-examine these concepts as forms of search for truth and for the meaning of life. And this new perspective will open another way to consider culture. As we will see this other approach will change the way we understand these concepts of culture, civilisation, identity and the role they play in our lives. It will also reorient the whole project of white supremacy as it will demonstrate the hidden contradictions on which the concept of supremacy relies.

As an important component of this other way of looking at ourselves and of the way we function as a (Northern) society, we will have to look at the meaning of freedom. In order to well understand the practice of supremacy, it will be important to show that each human community or any society in general is in principle free to choose its own destiny in regard to the constraints it is exposed to; this means the freedom to choose the preferences or priorities which are meant to guide the evolution of each tribe, community, nation. This affirmation may seem theoretical but this possibility for choice is yet the reason why we have such a great diversity of cultures in our world.

Of course diversity is also defined by local conditions of climate, natural surroundings, range of opportunities offered by the environment. But it remains nevertheless true that the real possibility of giving priority to one or another leading value for the evolution of one's community offers indeed a potential of free choice for this society to follow one path or another, beyond what we call determinism. It is clear that some societies have rather opted for the accumulation of wealth; and others have opted for wisdom and equity. It is so evident that I do not need to

give examples here. Where then does this fundamental freedom come from? In what does it consist? On what does it rely? We will have a deeper investigation into this theme as it is primordial in the development of our societies, and also in what concerns our relationships between North and South.

One aspect of this freedom of choice concerns mobility. We have societies which are very mobile and some very settled. But many combine these two ways of living. The slow implementation of agriculture which spans over more than 3000-5000 years is the sign that sedentariness is not necessarily more favourable than mobility. I will propose an interpretation of the way we are used to combine these two components in our lives and see how this potential translated in history.

This reflexion about freedom will lead us on a challenging investigation, because risky, that will try to get an insight into what the search for truth means in our lives as persons, but also as path of evolution for a nation.

The clashing models

We will also examine how the almost antagonistic models of the North and the South, which are the consequences of this freedom of choice, are clashing with one another. The colonial project itself rests on deep contradictions, like for instance the instruction to respect indigenous populations but yet to invade their country. But, beyond these basic contradictions which are so evidently apparent, colonialism has brought havoc to the dominated cultures it has exploited; especially because it has dismantled these traditional societies and has deprived them – and itself at the same time – of the rich contribution they could have brought to all of us.

Circular and linear

The clash of models between North and South is telling. There is a fundamental difference in the way our modern Western society thinks and the ways traditional societies do.

As Northerners we think in linear terms. We are rational thinkers. We act with a clear purpose as a project of control of our destiny; and we progress slowly from where we stand to where we intend to go, in a linear way, usually without feedback. We believe it is mastery, right science, rational technology. Time flows like the digital numbers on the screen, in a linear progression.

By contrast Southern cultures experience life differently. They function in circular patterns. First of all they follow generally the cycles of nature which repeat themselves, yet evolving according to a general trend, never the same. Time is also circular. Talk is circular. Stories tend to repeat the same expressions yet each time with a different nuance.

This tension between linear and circular patterns of behaviour and ways of thinking or perceiving life is so important that it has given its title to this book.

As an illustration of this contrast between the linear and the circular ways, a short historical survey will illustrate how the different stages of evolution of Northern countries have prepared them for domination. Not because they were superior, but because they developed the (mental and material) tools that would allow them to conquer nature, other nations and other lands. And the leitmotiv goes: not because they were more clever or more civilised or wiser, but because they had better ships, better weapons and less moral restraint.

As a development of this historic evolution the questions of what are white supremacy, whiteness, blackness and otherness will surface and be answered in my own ways.

The boomerang effect

Ideology guides the conquest but tools are also needed to make it possible. We will investigate the nature and significance of these tools which are used to assert Northern domination: weapons, cartography, re-writing of history, ecological footprint, finances, statistics.

But the colonial project backfires. I have called this phenomenon the boomerang effect. According to the old adage, what one does to the other, one does to oneself. Colonialism is a fascinating illustration of this adage. The injustice committed in the South does not wait long to backfire and initiate injustice in the mother country.

In fact we are all losers, colonists as much as colonised; yet for different reasons and on different levels.

Examples of development aid and tourism will show how decolonisation is not accomplished today and how we have still to work hard to find the true path of liberation.

Decolonisation and the path of liberation

We will have a quick look at certain aspects of the decolonisation process, not so much in its historical perspective, but rather as a form of cultural revolution, i.e. a deep change of mind or turn-around or rebirth of culture; culture in the sense of identity and meaning of life. These turnarounds rarely happened in the movement of liberation, but they are nevertheless the conditions for the success of the struggle.

This will bring us to examine the role of ideology and of the forces that play a role in any political struggle (whether violent or nonviolent) against the invaders or colonisers. It will be the opportunity of understanding the movements of anger and

revenge generated by conflicts, oppression, dehumanisation. I will also try to propose a different understanding of what terrorism is and of Islamism, as they are too often confused one with the other. And they are important vectors of liberation. It is then essential that we better understand what they mean, even if we do not approve their practice.

In wars or situations of domination and violence, we tend to shift our attention from what is the real cause of the conflict (very often the right to live on the land) to the notion of enemy. The enemy is the actor which we identify with the one who competes with us for certain resources (the land) or purposes (our projects). This enemy is rather in our head, while the conflict has usually real causes. When we focus on the causes of the conflict, we may recognise the “enemy”, which we intended to kill, as a new partner, with whom we learn to talk, for establishing a new deal. This alternative path means evidently thorough and painful concessions on both parts. But this shift of attention opens new ways for peace.

All these considerations will help us to better understand what the path of liberation consists in. True liberation can only happen if both opposed parties are fully involved. This consists more in an alliance of the moderate on both sides (the doves) against the extremists on both sides (the hawks), than in a war between two antagonistic blocks (ethnic groups or nations). This is where courage is needed. How can we dare to ally with the doves of the “enemy” camp when we oppose the hawks on our own side? Is this betrayal? Or is this, on the contrary, wisdom that leads to the path of liberation and full healing? Only our practice can answer this question when peace takes shape in a daily form.

The peaceful harmony of life

This hope for peace brings us to summarise the main message of this book. If there is a message that I wish the reader may receive from reading these pages, this is the following: that, even if life can be pretty brutal, the laws of life, made visible by the generosity of nature and the diversity yet equality of all human beings, tend to offer infinite possibilities for harmony and reconciliation.

If, as persons or communities, we intend to live in following these fundamental laws of life, I believe that we will discover the potentials for generosity and reconciliation of one single and same humanity which forms an interdependent whole. The choice is ours. Do we choose to work for our own egocentric advantage, that is in inevitable conflict with one another? or do we prefer to search how best to adapt to what is a fascinating potential of meeting the others in these many opportunities we can endeavour, experience and make possible when we remain open to what life presents to us. This is then no longer a project of conquest, domination and exploitation that is meant to serve our narrow private interests, but it becomes a construction of a vast network of relationships that enriches everyone, including us.

This creativity of each present moment is in my eyes the expression and follows the orientation of the natural world in which we live. Now, as human beings, we have this freedom of choice that allows us either to follow the path of self-interest, when we divert everything to serve our own greed, or to open ourselves to live a common experience with others, in which we can better communicate and exchange and know each other, not for our own profit but for the wellbeing of all. This is then a common creation.

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This book intends to demonstrate that our happiness is not to be found in the power of supremacy but in the interactions and relationships that allow each one of us to express who they are and contribute in this way to the general wellbeing of all of us. This is for me the true essence of life. Either we live in peace, or we live in conflict. One thing is sure: in conflict we will never win. Then there remains only one way: reconciliation. But this depends of course on our own personal choice and our courage to face life and its laws. Even if it seems idealistic I dare to say: we are “condemned” to happiness, if we follow the laws of life.

But there is something more to this, something essential. Peace and harmony are not pipe dreams. They are reality, but they are never pure; they have to adapt to the harsh conditions of life to become reality. This means there is a high price to pay for peace. It requires that we detach from many of our desires and expectations in order to reach the unfathomable. To make peace we have to make huge and painful concessions in order to join the other and reconcile. This means to detach from what is not essential in order to reach what is essential. Harsh condition which, once again, is in our power, our power to make the right choice.

Will we work against the energy of life or with it? Will we be ready to pay the high price (detach from the superfluous) in order to reach the core of peace? On this answer depends the response to the question I asked at the beginning of this introduction: why do we so often choose modes of domination that bring suffering for all, rather than choose modes of cooperation and equity that bring harmony and peace and allow us all to experience life to the full?

I hope this book will illustrate for you why it is so.

Change as a search for truth

Before we go into the material of this book, I will explain here my approach and methods. This next part of the introduction will be repeated in each volume of this series in seven volumes that deals with six main imbalances of our society.

Altogether in these seven volumes this is the story of our self-destruction and of how we can come back to a more meaningful life.

The books try simultaneously to describe the complex reasons for the disintegration of our modern Western society and propose simple practical ways of transforming our patterns of development, through a change in our attitudes and behaviours in our everyday lives. They describe the many deep imbalances which are causing our living conditions to deteriorate and are generating ever more injustice and suffering. On the other hand, I will try to propose a different vision for our future, through practical ways of changing our behaviours as citizens, workers and consumers.

The necessity for change

Our world suffers deeply and terribly: through exploitation, destruction of natural habitat and biodiversity, climate change and pollution. The poor suffer hunger and precariousness, whereas depression and boredom afflict the rich. Market values predominate over human values, femininity is repressed, older people are rejected, and individuals feel lonely because of the dissolution of community connections. Rich societies drive overproduction and heavy material consumption. This is accompanied by extreme rationalism, domination by technology, devaluation of intuition, reification of the body and a lack of spiritual guidance. The list is almost endless.

The need for change is urgent and there is no more time for talking; it is time for action. Our survival itself is at stake. Our main problem is not about knowing what to change and how to change it. We already know the solutions. They only have to be tested, implemented and improved. The main problem is in fact how to break through our own resignation and initiate the change. We seem to be irremediably stuck on the track of our own destruction. We seem to be incapable of reaction as though paralysed – like rabbits paralysed by the headlights.

This book is a form of psychotherapy for our Western society. I seek to describe our values, attitudes and behaviours by tracing them to their historical roots. However, as this is a work of personal interpretation, it does not pretend to be universal! Any form of psychotherapy is subjective; it is also usually painful and this is unavoidable. Although these descriptions are not very pleasant, they nevertheless should help us see the truth about our common behaviours and the dominant values that lead to them.

Truth is often hard to tell and hard to hear, especially when it challenges us and shows up our worst sides. In this case it certainly hurts, but it is also liberating. We must learn to be tender with people and ourselves, but hard with facts, attitudes and behaviours. We must accept that there cannot be any radical change without this effort to see things as they are, even if it is painful to recognise what it is and how sick we are. Change can only happen when we change ourselves – when we look clearly at ourselves and at the consequences of our values, attitudes and actions.

It could be said that this is a spiritual path in the way it touches our humanity, our deep nature, our vocation, our deepest values on which we orient our lives, our aspirations for happiness and a better life, both for ourselves and for others. Change, when it is so fundamental, cannot be led by material considerations. It must be guided by spiritual values like justice, peace and compassion.

It has to be rooted more in our *being* than in our *doing*. It concerns more the nature of our personal and collective attitudes than the question of the technical means we can employ to correct only minor dysfunctions. It is essentially a philosophical choice: a choice about the meaning of life.

I will show how self-limitation is the necessary path toward change: first, because self-limitation helps to limit the negative impacts on our natural and social environments, but also because it opens us to the unknown, making room for human values and for a personal and collective deepening of what matters most to us. Most of the philosophical and spiritual traditions teach that self-limitation is the way to happiness.

The six imbalances

As a way to structure this research, I have identified six main imbalances which threaten our world. I intend to describe each of these imbalances in a separate book, of which this is the first. Rather than dwelling on the negative, I want to describe them in a positive way, in order to demonstrate that these imbalances are not only threats to our survival but also the key to the solutions. The problem reveals the solution. Each of these imbalances can be expressed as a polarity between two terms, where the first usually dominates the second:

- humanity and nature,
- wealth and simplicity,
- masculine (*Yang*) and feminine (*Yin*),
- Northern cultures and Southern cultures,
- the intellect and subtle faculties,
- appearance and Reality.

In each of these polarities the domination of the first term over the second prevents the second from being fully expressed. Thus

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the polarity – in its imbalance – also represents the key to unlocking the full potential of these neglected faculties; these neglected potentials challenge us to leave more space for the “weaker” qualities and provide greater opportunities for creativity to express what has been lost. It is why these same polarities also point to the instructions for a deep transformation of our society. For this reason they will be described in the reverse order, where the second term (the weaker) will be mentioned first as the guiding and changing force, and the first term will be mentioned thereafter as the energy which must be tamed and adapted, as a form of reconciliation between the two poles concerned.

According to this new order, I have derived the following six imbalances or polarities:

- Effort and comfort: towards a reconciliation between nature and humanity, in search of harmony and peace of mind.
- Vocation and subsistence: towards a reconciliation between simplicity and wealth, in search of caring and equity.
- Recessive and dominant: towards a reconciliation between feminine and masculine, in search of a new anthropology.
- Circular and linear: towards a reconciliation between South and North, in search of an end to white supremacy.
- Knowledge and learning: towards a reconciliation between subtle faculties and intellect, in search of a new incarnation of our spiritual aspirations.
- Spirit and matter: towards a reconciliation between Reality and appearances, in search of true being.

Each of these imbalances will be presented in a separate book which can be read independently of the five others, in any order which suits readers, according to their focus of interest.

The risk of generalisations

In order to make things more explicit, I will use generalisations. Any generalisation is never true at all times, because there are always exceptions or even regular situations which can contradict it. It is only a finger pointing at a major characteristic that is difficult to grasp; it may be a dominant factor, and yet it may not consistently be true. Generalisation is therefore a good way to emphasise a dominant trend which can only be recognised beyond complexity and diversity.

In these books I will try to describe our modern Western (or Northern) society, which does not exist as such anywhere in particular; nevertheless, there are certain characteristics that are identifiable in most of what are regarded Western countries. I understand Western (or Northern) countries and societies to mean the rich nations that consume most of the world’s wealth and have dominated the world economically since the time when they took advantage of the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution and colonised other continents. If we accept here not to make any distinction between colonisers and ex-colonies, one could say that these rich nations are mainly those of North America and Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and a few others.

In the same way of generalisation, I will talk about traditional societies. These are mainly the indigenous societies which developed in the Southern countries as well as the traditional societies which were established in Western countries before the development of the market economy and the Industrial Revolution. Most of these societies still exist in isolated or intentionally self-reliant parts of Western countries. It seems to me that the traditional societies are principally those which consume mainly what they produce themselves locally (relative self-sufficiency) and which are guided by values other than trends of mere materialistic accumulation. These societies,

because they are fragile and usually localised, are probably more transparent – in the sense of being more visible or readable for what they are; by contrast, our Western society has built a façade that hides its true content and processes. These traditional societies should not be idealised but nevertheless represent a more human scale of development that can inspire us.

To be clear, this distinction between Western and traditional societies does not mean Western societies are “more developed” – whatever this means; this means only they are more powerful because of, for example, their better ships and weapons; therefore, they tend to dominate the traditional ones. Nor does this description exclude that some of the so-called traditional societies have developed great complexity, or have even also known forms of power such as empires or kingdoms as it has been the case in China, India, Africa, South America.

A testimony as search for truth

Each of the following statements is more of a point of view, a testimony, a challenge or a call for change than the expression of an objective and absolute truth. Who could say what truth is? There are many expressions of truth (small t). Each one of us has his or her own truth. These individual truths can be even contradictory; they nevertheless remain valid. Together, these form a kind of gigantic mosaic which may represent the perennial Truth (capital T). This diversity results in a complex picture which can only take shape because our individual or collective inputs of understanding and creativity are complementary, though sometimes antagonistic.

Yet it is also important to see that this perennial Truth (capital T) exists independently from what we say or believe. We cannot cheat: our own truth must be in conformity with the perennial Truth. This means that we are not free to invent false discourses

or fake news to defend our interests. We are responsible for searching for the Truth. Luckily, this means we cannot shape the world at will! We can only adapt to it. Once we accept this elementary constraint, we can be open to other expressions, yet remain critical.

Based on this understanding, dialogue is not a confrontation between those with conflicting opinions; on the contrary, dialogue is an attempt to synthesise these diverging differences into an all-encompassing multidimensional picture. As an analogy, at the level of the human body, the hand seems to be in disagreement with the foot – because they are different – whereas, at a higher level, the unity of the body means they are organised according to general rules of composition of the parts into a larger whole. This harmonisation can usually only occur at a level where rules of a higher order can be found that define how elements of lesser order are brought together and can be composed into the whole; these rules of higher order – because they are synthetic – generally allow antagonistic elements to be integrated and to cohabit harmoniously.

There is still a major handicap in our search for multidimensional truth. Our post-modern society has developed a way to respect each expression of truth to be of equal value. This is a very important progress. However, by respecting diversity we tend to accept indiscriminately any forms of expression and thus, instead of searching for truth, we fall into a form of confused acceptance: anything goes. It seems that in the name of freedom of expression, any truth can be asserted even if it is blatantly incoherent or falsified. Fake information and videos are produced on purpose, and the privileges and interests of their authors define the way they are spread. These corrupted elements infect public debate and falsify our potential for real dialogue. The art of public debate has been lost because now it relies on pure confrontation – on mere opinions without regard for the Truth. This has shifted the focus from the all-encompassing

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whole to divided individuals. Humanity is fragmented and has to relearn how to listen carefully and respectfully to others' point of view, though with a critical mind that does not accept cheating. Thus, truth is an inevitable force in our world.

Dismantling systematic self-defence

Questioning our ways of life is difficult because our representation of the world and justification of the way we live are firmly set in a rational construct which accepts no cracks or faults. It is like a fortress preventing the unknown to enter. Most aspects of life continue to be ignored in this representation – as it is an artificial, rational construct made by the addition of a limited number of simple parts without a structuring order. This mechanism of defence seems to be closely linked with the way our brain functions.

Neurological science has described how the left half of the brain tends to reorganise perceptions and generate a rational construct that reinterprets what has been perceived: it tries to order the information it has received to make it coherent, understandable and rational. By contrast, the right half of the brain tends to grasp the whole picture of the information in a form of perception that remains more global and synthetic, in touch with the mysterious dimension of life we cannot grasp but only experience¹. This means these two antagonistic tendencies resulting from the conflict of two modes of interpretation, although they cohabit and complement each other, create a struggle between our differing modes of perceiving the context of our existence:

1 See the remarkable book by Iain McGilchrist: *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World*. Yale University Press, 2009.

the resistance of our left brain – which constructs a simplified, rigid image of the world and defends it as a rational, understandable representation – and the challenge of our right brain – which creates a perceptive experience of life with freshness, openness and sensitivity.

Clearly, it can be understood as an attempt by our fragile faculties of intuition and perception to force open our rational mind to more than reason. We need such opening of our mind not only for our immediate physical survival, but also to maintain our intuitive and creative faculties, because we urgently need to recognise the failure of our attempts to dominate the world, which are based on mainly technical considerations and means. We can only do so if we escape from our imprisonment in the fortress of false representations and privileges created by our rational mind.

It is likely that my description of a better path will seem inconsistent or too idealistic. As the Buddhist saying goes, when someone points their finger at the moon, we should look at the moon, which remains mysterious to us, rather than at the finger, which cannot say what the moon is. We have to allow what our intuition and experience of the world tell us to resonate with what we have deep inside us and which we have continued to ignore. Again, this is a function of our right brain with its intuition, inspiration, creativity and love of globality that will allow us to see more broadly. If we can evoke what the true nature of life is – and who knows what that is? – a more accurate perception of its deep nature could change us completely as individuals as well as our ways of living.

Since my wife and I started living close to nature in Numbugga, on the far South Coast of New South Wales in Australia, we have been trying to put into practice the many options I am describing in this manifesto, according to our ability. The method of reflection proposed here is therefore not mere theory

but based on actual practice and personal experience. Of course we are far from having solved all the problems we encounter in our daily life, and equally far from practising an ideal way of life. One of the major problems that remains unsolved, for instance, is how to purchase local products and forms of transport that fit with natural cycles. Although we are beginning to see roughly how this challenge could be met, it is still not a practical reality. And there are many other questions that remain unanswered.

Statements, patterns and options

Instead of exposing each point as an argument starting with a general premise and then developing its content until reaching a conclusion to express the main idea, I have formulated the main idea as the starting point and then explained it.

This reversed structure seems more challenging as at each new step of my explanation, it starts with a new key statement. Through this method this book presents successive key statements summarising patterns² for changed behaviours. Many of these patterns are the expressions of an alternative understanding of our society and, as such, provide powerful incentives for change. The many options these represent emphasise that their implementation depends on our personal or collective choice (or commitment) and the way we choose to interact with the world. As citizens, creators and consumers, we are the real actors; there are no other actors than we, the people. We have to choose consciously which options we want to pursue, individually as well as collectively.

In summary, the text of this book is built on a series of chains that contain the following links: initial statement – new pattern of understanding – change of perception – option for a new behaviour – choice of action. Please note that I can provide only the first part of the chain up to the option; the second part (the choice and action) is yours.

Concretely, the description of these patterns starts with a heading, followed by a statement of two or three lines that summarise the option. Then the main concept of each option is explained in a few paragraphs. At the end of the book the reader can find a list of these statements (or options) with their titles and their two-line summary. This is a way to summarise the content of the whole book.

The proposed options are often described as lists of characteristics. Where I see five characteristics, someone else might see four or six. However, this is not important. What is more important is our attempt to make reality more understandable and our respective influence more evident. These lists are inspired by the numerous lists in Buddhist teachings which describe, for instance, the Three Jewels, the Four Noble Truths, or the Five Aggregates. Such imitation of wise teachings can seem very presumptuous, but it is more of a humorous wink. Reality is much more complex than the description we make of it. That said, although simplifying our “road map” might make our understanding and actions easier, it does not necessarily simplify reality. Feeling encouraged to act should not lead to an illusion of mastery; it is only a way to break our sense of being overwhelmed by complexity or our feeling of resignation.

² This approach has been inspired by the books by American architect Christopher Alexander: *A Pattern Language* (1977) and *The Timeless Way of Building* (1979), both published by Oxford University Press, New York.

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In a nutshell

The options proposed in these pages align with the following principal orientations, which constitute the “spine” of the way of life based on self-limitation as described in these seven books:

Spiritual orientation: Change cannot occur for material reasons only, but has to be guided by spiritual values such as justice, peace, harmony and compassion.

Self-limitation: We have to learn how to reduce the impact of our way of life by choosing simplicity, by prioritising human values and relationships over material purposes. Such intentional self-restriction is a form of liberation which brings real happiness: as EF Schumacher put it, *small is beautiful*.

Cooperation: We are all interdependent parts of a wider, common social and natural body. Cooperation is the basis of harmonious development. Although competition can be considered healthy when it remains limited, it is only an illusion, a race in which each hopes to be quicker and smarter than the other, but in which there are many more losers than winners.

Local community and consensus: The local community is the scale at which change can take shape, based on a common project which grows with time and with the maturity of its members, in consensus. At its outset this project takes shape slowly, perhaps with marginal outcomes, through the personal action of a few members. Finding consensus is not an easy process; it requires of all participants listening skills and the ability to compromise without losing what matters most.

Cumulative effect: The world is what it is because of the cumulative effect of our respective personal impacts (negligible for each of us) and of our personal renunciations (at a high cost to each of us). There are no other actors than we, ordinary

people, although certainly some people have more impact than others.

Whitewashing and corruption: The goods we consume are generally produced in conditions based on exploitation of the poorest, or of poorer countries, and on destruction of the environment. When these goods are repacked and presented on the shelves of our local supermarket, they have lost all traces of this form of corruption associated with their production. They have been whitewashed (or greenwashed), as have so many other disruptive aspects of our modern society: such virtuality hides the truth or makes it difficult to grasp.

A choice is a vote: Each choice we make – about the goods we acquire, the technology or means of transport we use, the way we travel, the source of energy we consume, or the work we do – is a vote that encourages and reinforces these patterns of production or behaviour, and validates the beliefs or values that have produced these goods, services and behaviours. We are therefore responsible for all of our choices because they shape the world.

A new anthropology: All these options constitute the practice of a new anthropology, that is, a new understanding of the meaning of life based on the pre-eminence of human values over material goods. This new anthropology is necessary not because its values are morally superior, but because it provides the conditions for experiencing the real essence of life instead of keeping us imprisoned in an illusion of material comfort and security which isolates us from others and our natural environment.

The power of truth

The above points closely relate to what I said earlier about the search for truth, which is well illustrated by the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who practised his own truth rigorously and

freely. He called this practice the power of truth (*satyagraha* in Hindi). He showed us the way of integrity (remaining whole) and the importance of our own testimony in fostering the change we want to see in the world. Life has its own dynamic and energy, even its own orientation and maybe also will. This is the energy that animates the universe. We cannot go against this life energy; we have to adapt to it. Truth is then what is compatible with this energy of life and its coherence. What goes against it is not truth. In staying faithful to our understanding of life and truth, and to our own spiritual path, which is a search rather than a ready-made answer, we become more creative and capable of following our own vocation. We take the opportunity of being recognised and appreciated by our own community for what we are. Is that not a more positive path to happiness than trying to conform to the kind of success promoted by our materialistic society and which is merely a frustrating and disturbing illusion? The practice of the power of truth is the most powerful non-violent way to convince others and change our world to be more humane, as well as to change ourselves to help us discover the depth of life and real happiness. Be happy, radiate joy ... and others will follow you!

Chapter 1:

Many contrasting cultures

I intend, in this fourth volume of this series about six imbalances, to describe the relationships between our Northern (so-called Western) society that has originated in Europe and the other cultures of the world (the so-called Southern cultures). I want to investigate how and why they relate to one another in a very imbalanced way.

The Northern cultures have mainly been the invaders of Southern lands, have colonised them in the past and have maintained, with most of them, relationships of domination in the present. This heavy past has marked deeply the way we relate now with one another and the way we understand each other. There remains a strong spirit of supremacy, especially of white supremacy, that prevents harmonious and reciprocal exchanges based on true differences and complementarity. On the Southern side there is a strong justified resentment for this form of more or less hidden imbalance, domination and contempt.

Before we go into this description I would like to reflect on the meaning of culture and propose a few patterns of reference for our next investigation.

Common humanity – diversity of cultures

We know that we all, as human beings, despite our incredible diversity, are all parts of one single and same humankind and are connected to the same source of humanity. We are all built more or less on the same model but we have evolved through time in much contrasted ways. Despite this fundamental original unity,

the diversity that we may observe around us is striking. What is common between an Inuit woman, a Bushman of the Kalahari, an Aymara young girl of the Lake Titicaca, a European builder living in Paris, an Indian farmer in Bihar, an Aboriginal child in Kakadu and a New York banker?

This is a huge question and I do not intend to answer it here because the subject can't be exhausted. But I wish to emphasise a few important parameters we tend to forget, connected with the diversity of cultures.

North – South contrast

The contrast between rich and poor (in material terms) is rather between North and South, according to latitude, but principally in cultural terms.

We mostly tend to speak of Western civilisation, probably by contrast to the Middle East and Asia, which our early ancestors had soon, in the Antiquity, the opportunity to discover and from which they felt racially and culturally different. It is yet very unclear what this word *Western* truly means.

This term is geographically anchored in Europe; these nations are in Western Europe which later, especially from the 15th century onward, invaded the Southern countries in their intense practice of navigation and colonisation: Portugal, Spain, England, France, the Netherlands and partly Germany and Italy.

Despite this kind of imprecise Western belonging we can also observe how the dominant powers, which soon became the most influent and colonising forces that shaped our modern world, were mainly situated in the North. To the list of the countries previously mentioned we have also to add Japan and China or Russia or the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The United States have soon joined this group of dominating forces after having been

itself a colony and later becoming not only independent but even economically and militarily very powerful and dominant. As exceptions to this general pattern of northern latitudes, countries like Australia and New Zealand can, in their whiteness, be assimilated to the North; they are nowadays, as enclaves of white supremacy, kinds of derived Northern continents lost in the South.

By contrast with the position of these Northern countries the lands that have been invaded by these conquering powers were mainly located in the South: in Central and South America, in Africa, in the Middle East and in Southern or Eastern Asia, in the Pacific Ocean. The latitudes of these Southern countries, or ex-colonies, are all south of 30° North latitude of the equator while the dominating powers are all situated north of this line.

The tension I will describe in this book concerns then more this relationship between North and South than a tension West to East, which evokes an opposition between rationalism (Cartesian thinking) and non-dualism (Taoism), or very differently between capitalism and communism, which is not the topic of this book. It is why I will then speak of Northern countries (or cultures) and by this I mean the Western European countries, mainly the ones involved in colonisation, including the United States.

Different relationships with the land

Peoples in the South have developed a different relation with the land to which they belong more than they own it. Territories are more inclusive of diversity.

There is another important remark to be clearly expressed here. When I speak of countries, I mean lands, or nations as ethnic groups, and not nations-states. Northern countries have adopted the form of nations-states but it is precisely a Northern (Western) concept. In the South there is originally no such concept of

nation-state, or, if there is, then in very different terms or in any case defined by Northern ideology. The organisation in the South is rather defined by the people who inhabit it. For instance different tribes can share the same land. Or there are kingdoms and empires that have dominated a group of varied cultures. These are not confined to a delimited territory that would have borders and a government in the way nations-states do.

On the other hand, these Southern lands did not have nation-state forms of government. They were also constituted according to different institutional structures, such as some very powerful kingdoms or empires. These forms have to be understood in different terms from the one of Northern nation-states because they were consisting more in central centres of power, with no clear limits - in space and content - where their jurisdiction finished; and even often cohabiting with other imbricated forms of independent powers inside this sphere of influence, such as nomad tribes or smaller chiefdoms. They were more similar to an added layer of governance on top of the pre-existing tribal or social network.

The Roman Empire was of this type that was composed of local powers (chiefs or kings) under the rule of a centralised dominating authority in Rom that yet could not function properly without a tacit or minimum agreement with these local powers; local chiefdoms tried to remain as independent as possible from Rom and also to reinforce their local authority - tricky and contradictory balance! And so did also these Southern forms of power when they had to face Northern invasions of the colonisers and then dominating presence.

The fact that there were powerful empires in these Southern countries is evident when one speaks of China or India; it is less known – and often denied, even by so-called qualified historians - about South America or Africa. In China there were continuous dynasties of Chinese Emperors; in India the Mughal Empire for

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instance, among others, almost conquered the whole of the Deccan; in Central and South America, there were powerful empires such as the Incas, the Mayas, the Aztecs; and the same in Africa, with the empires or kingdoms of Mali, Haoussa, Benin, to mention only a few.

The presence of these many forms of high civilisation is a very important fact that, in the North, we tend always to forget, to ignore or, worse, to deny. We really refuse to see that these lands were occupied by other cultures that flourished and were thriving. We always imagine, in our supremacist mind, that there was nothing and that the North brought there what we call civilisation. What an arrogance and a stupidity!

This same arrogance is the cause of the denial and the justification for the domination. It denies even domination because, they say, there was nothing to dominate! This arrogance and stubborn will for supremacy - or worse, unconscious spirit of ignorance, contempt and domination - is one of the main causes of this terrible imbalance between North and South that has triggered so much suffering, and still does today. One can observe this tension in the most recent events of world politics.

Different ways of thinking and being

Different living conditions have fostered different behaviours and ways of thinking that are the result of experience and interpretation.

There is another important aspect to this North-South opposition. This polarisation is accompanied by different ways of thinking that rely on very different approaches: the North thinks in linear ways, the South in circular ways. In a few words we can describe this contrast:

- The linear way progresses from one premise to the next by deduction. It is essentially rational.
- The circular way revisits the same place repetitively, like circling over a point to get a better view of it, each time yet with a slight change of perspective. It is essentially symbolic.

This is a tremendous difference between North and South and I will soon return to this contrast between linear and circular thinking. But first I will try to illustrate this fundamental diversity and the rich differences between cultures.

We have first to remember that we, as human beings, have been formed principally and originally by the land from which we were born and which we have inhabited; and by the natural context in which our far ancestors used to live. The truth is that we belong to the land and are formed by it, more than we could own it as a territory. We are its fruits and its children.

These ancestors of a very early time had, anywhere in the whole world, very rudimentary ways for surviving which were depending on their direct natural context. These surroundings had to provide everything they needed: air, water, food, material for clothing and building a minimum shelter, sources of energy for cooking their basic food and keeping warm.

The land used also to provide them with the more subtle energies and resources that had to be integrated and reinterpreted for a better and deeper understanding of their world; i.e. these subtle resources concerning the wider emotive, intellectual, social and spiritual context that contributed to explain the sources, the purpose and the meaning of life.

This way of broader and complex understanding has mainly resulted from cumulated direct personal and collective experience and it has taught them ways of harmony. The experience of what was successful and of what helped to avoid or alleviate pain was soon consolidated as established social

pattern of behaviour; it was then translated into traditional custom. Similarly the experience of failure and suffering became also soon the model of what should be avoided; it was then translated into prohibitions. In this way culture took shape and generated a rather consensual social construct that consisted in an explicit formulation of rules that had to be respected.

Beyond rules and prohibitions, culture principally proposed an interpretation of the world and of the meaning of life, as a general teaching built on past experience and subjective understanding. In our modern world where we do not depend so much for our subsistence on our direct natural context, we tend to forget how customs, as formalised collective past experience, offered important and essential instructions for survival.

These basic rules and prohibition were defining very practical behaviours concerning food, shelter, or similar; they were also defining social behaviours concerning the relationships between people or with the land, determining whom or which places one could relate to and whom or which places one could not. This social frame and teaching was meant to secure the surviving and cohesion of the group, from a practical point of view; but also from a perspective of harmony that intended to avoid conflicts; inside the community as well as with the neighbours. It was also allowing newly born members of the community to be enriched by the past experience of their ancestors and was providing them with the wealth of past experiences; this means newcomers did not need to “reinvent the wheel”. Of course this formalised heritage did not intend to replace personal experience but it provided nevertheless an optimal starting point that was enriched by a lot of knowledge the newcomers did not need to acquire by themselves.

It is then evident that so many constructs arisen in such diversified contexts would be thoroughly different from one another, depending on the nature of the surroundings; whether

the community would be living in a hot desert or in the snow beyond the boreal circle, in a tropical forest or in a savannah, at low altitude in a vast plain, or high on a steep mountain slope. These fundamental differences of context would be sufficient by themselves to generate a wide range of diverse cultures.

These basic differences, born from physical contexts and from the global experience of the best way to fit into them, were reinforced by the subjective interpretations that the community or the leaders were proposing, resulting from the same practical experience of the world but seen on a more subtle level that tried to provide meaning. Culture is basically practical but it always at the same time integrates a higher level of understanding that becomes the leading thread, whether it is philosophical, spiritual or religious.

As this concept of culture is very important, I will come back to this theme. But for now, this very simplified explanation will suffice.

Races, languages, meaning

How race takes form

Race develops in the interactions inside a smaller pool of genetic characters. Not clearly delimited as such, race varies under external influences.

But there is more to this cultural adaptation. On top of this natural difference of respective contexts and variety of interpretations, there is also the genetic component of our own physiology that demonstrates the incredible ability of our human bodies to adapt and to evolve in order to find a better degree of harmony with the context in which we live. Our physical bodies

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evolve according to the external circumstances and their genes register the gains acquired by adapted behaviours: they foster mutation and evolution. It is what Darwin used to call the *survival of the fittest*. This does not mean that the fittest members become dominators, but that they can better survive because they are better adapted to external circumstances. This means that genetics and biology are constantly reshaping our bodies in consequence of our experience of, and adaptation to, the surroundings and given life conditions. We get for instance a darker skin if we live under the tropical sun, longer legs if we have to run after games, stronger arms if we are used to fish and pull heavy nets out of the ocean. It is how species take progressively shape, elongated in the savannah, fatter in the cold, smarter in any case.

Races take shape in a similar way as adaptation to the context when a given community uses to propagate itself inside the same smaller - or at least partly restricted - pool of genetic characters. The dominant and common characters are then reinforced when they combine and re-combine with one another; and the recessive or diverse characters are progressively attenuated or even eliminated. It is what we can observe if we go to a far remove mountain village or an isolated island where every inhabitant seems to be the brother or the sister of their neighbour. They look and are similar because they have the same genetic basic characters that have been shaped by their common experience of the same external conditions; and the reduced range of combination of these similar characters has reinforced their influence through time. Yet these people remain all distinct beings with their own personalities. Is it a race? or just a variation?

Let's imagine a simple example. If you live near the northern polar circle (e.g. in Norway), your skin and hair will not have to protect you against strong radiation from the sun. This means they will not have to develop dark pigments of protection; and

your skin will probably be very light in colour (so-called white); your hair will probably be blond. The partner you'll meet, who lives in the same town and whom you might marry, will probably share these same basic characteristics. Note that you will have more opportunities to meet one another than someone very different – you both live in the same place, speak the same language, were educated in the same culture, share the same services, schools, shops, pubs, clubs, friends. This increased probability of local encounter becomes even more convincing if we place my example in the past, at a time where locomotion and mobility were not yet very developed.

Your children will then most probably also have light skin and blond hair. The amazing thing is that, in a certain way, you and your partner have “started” – or at least continued - a (new) specific race of fair-skinned and blond people, with some additional specific characteristics you both share. Your children will be similar to you both adults: similar head shape, similar smile, similar voice, and different (although only slightly) from your neighbour's. If your children and grandchildren continue to intermarry inside the small genetic pool of your town, your descendants will progressively present the kind of similarities noticeable in the people you could have visited in the remote valley or island I mentioned above: they will all look like brothers and sisters.

Now, it is also evident that you can break this form of relative uniformity by introducing new genes, for instance from southern Italy where you may travel for holidays. For instance, if you travel to another isolated village, say in southern Italy (at the time when it was still isolated), your children might meet a boyfriend or girlfriend from this region. Let's simplify our example by ignoring the role of dominant and recessive genes in conventional genetics. In mixing the respective genetic pools of these two different but remote places, your children will generate a crossbreed that might have dark hair but blue eyes, or a darker

skin and short nose. With the help of the many coming future generations, you will “create” a new race that combines genes from northern Norway with genes from southern Italy. This so-called new race will still be what we call a *white* race, although no longer neither fully Norwegian nor Italian. By the colour of their skin, the descendants of this *new race* will still contrast strongly with people born in Africa or China, say, and yet they will also be (slightly) different from northern Norwegians or southern Italians in the colour of their hair or eyes.

As we can see in this simple example, despite their trend to reinforce their common characters, races exist only as patterns because they are never expressed in a pure form; they are principally the poles of (genetic and cultural) influences that shape the way our diverse personalities combine. Like a magnetic field that will organise the particles that are sensitive to its influence; the field does not define the particles but it only organises them in general patterns or structures in the way they combine. Races do the same: they partly – and partly only – contribute to define how principal (and specific) characteristics combine, not who each individual is as a person.

We, all of us, are consequently hybrids, especially in our modern time of increased mobility, because we are the fruits of the mixture of these different poles of influence. Miscegenation is the rich source of new combinations that enrich our humanity and accentuate the continuity from one race to the next, from one culture to the next, even from one language to the next.

It is amazing to notice that regions that are considered as remote – this means out of reach of foreign influence – for instance because they are situated in a high valley of the Alps or the Himalayas, can nevertheless be on a passage to a pass that allows a crossing through these high mountains. This objective position in space, although it seems remote, is challenging the assumption that the inhabitants of such remote places have of themselves

according to which they believe to be a pure race of authentic mountain people. But everybody can observe in some villages on a high pass of the Alps (for instance the Gotthard) that the population has been influenced by foreign genes introduced by people in transit. It is true that almost all the armies of the world seem to have crossed the Alps there and have left behind Roman or German or Russian or Middle East or North African genes, as these armies had enrolled people from all kind of origins. Who is pure bread?

Races, as general patterns, nevertheless continue to exist as noticeable facts, but only as paradigms. This means that one can see clearly the difference between black or white or brown or Middle-East or South-Asian or Oriental or Aboriginal people, but each individual - although presenting common characteristics with others - remains nevertheless recognisable as a unique person, our loved one, our friend, our neighbour or someone we have never seen.

Racism as a social construct

The social interpretation of racial differences in terms of hierarchy creates a fiction that soon reinforces existing forms of oppression.

But these physical differences of appearances – which are not essential determinants in what concerns the personal qualities of each individual - are yet powerfully reinforced by the interpretations we give them, individually or collectively, this time no longer in biological and physiological terms, but in social and cultural terms.

It is essential here to see that these subjective interpretations, which are the product of our subjective reactions to objective physical appearance, are formed on a completely different level from the level on which these differences physically arise.

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Interpretations do not form on the physiological level but on the level of our perceptions and self-created projections and evaluations, this means of our own cultural setting or ideology. These subjective interpretations are a self-made social construct, which can be shared by others or not and which can receive general consensus from the local community or not.

As such, these physiological contrasts are not very significant. They do not define much of our personality. But – in a positive way and because they emphasise our similarities – they help us to feel connected with the ones with whom we feel to be physically similar. It is true that, whether we are black or white or brown, it does not make much difference for the way we experience our physical surroundings and the relationships with our fellow companions, i.e. the ones who have the same physical characteristics; we are all human beings and it is the common characteristic we all share. Racial differences in this way help us to belong and feel connected to the ones we are similar to.

Yet, when these physical appearances no longer emphasise similarities that unite us but rather contrasts that differentiate us from one another, we socially and culturally tend – this means as a social and cultural construct – to attribute a stronger meaning to these physical differences. We usually attribute them a meaning no longer based on similarity and belonging but on fear, antagonism, privilege, will for domination, denial. We describe the differences in terms of “*Us* and *Them*” where *Us* is perceived (or rather imagined or re-invented) as superior to *Them*.

On the base of what we see (the differences of appearances) we soon create (in our heads and discourse) hierarchies; and we invent criteria of selection or exclusion. But these hierarchies do not exist externally to us; they exist only in our minds; they are our own mere intellectual or emotional (and primitive) creations, disconnected from reality, even if physical differences are nevertheless part of this reality.

In most cases we proceed with this social construct of self-created hierarchy not because we believe we can observe how these differences would naturally generate a hierarchy that would ensue out of nature; but this creation of hierarchy arises rather out of the unconscious need to feel superior because we try desperately, against the evidence of reality itself, to protect our own personal or collective sense of fragility. We unilaterally decide we are superior because we fear that the difference may, by contrast and comparison, reveal some of our possible weaknesses. The artificial hierarchy serves then as a wall of protection; even if it has nothing to do with reality, it creates a feeling of security. Behind the wall we can feel protected and secure. It is all in the mind and it is why we build the wall.

The artificial hierarchy can even go further and attempt to justify a state of domination in which we are involved and from which we take profit. Either we take advantage of this domination of one race over the other (I, as a white person, can buy cheap goods produced by Southern exploited people), or we are directly involved in oppression (I’m myself a slave holder), or we refuse to see how it is imbibing the whole social context in which we live (I live in a society impregnated by apartheid and supremacy).

Racial differences exist as such, almost insignificant and principally at a physical level, but their evaluation and interpretation exist then mainly in the way we look at one another, with condescendence or contempt, through filters of ignorance or oppression. And, most important, we are the creators of these filters that prevent us from seeing what is. We have created a new fictive order to justify our privileges or our position of domination; and the wall prevents us from seeing what is truly beyond the wall. We imprison ourselves in a reduced place of ignorance and a limited view of the world.

In other words, we can describe the same concept with a very concrete example: slavery is not the consequence of any natural hierarchy between races - for instance any objective supremacy of whites over blacks for the reason that black people would be inferior to white people. No! slavery is not the consequence; it is very clearly the cause of this false hierarchy. This talk about superiority of whites over blacks is nothing else than a mere creation by white people, a mere discourse (but sadly a very powerful talk) that tries to justify this form of exploitation of black people by white people. It has in fact nothing (no objective reality) to rely on, except a fictive (and cruel) creation in the mind of the oppressors that translates, consequently and terribly, into, or reinforces, a reality where the white truly oppresses the black. This is made possible with the help of good weapons that unable to reinforce the domination of white people over black people. Is that not dreadful?

This will be the main purpose of this book to illustrate – and which I hope to demonstrate – that domination arises out of contempt or exploitation, out of will for power and domination, and not out of natural order.

Race is not the only criteria of difference that generates false hierarchy; there are many other sources of differences. Let's see a few examples of diversity and show that they also generate different ways of being that are not only necessarily linked with hierarchy. These differences are in fact true sources of cultural and social riches.

Diversity of languages

In their diversity languages express the differences of perception by diverse cultures, showing different ways of thinking and behaving.

Languages are narrowly linked with the cultures that have produced them. Like cultures they are the consequences and expressions of the ways social groups have experienced their context and how they have established their best ways of survival and thriving. Languages are the reflection of how people think and how they express what matters for them. They become soon the tools that forge the concepts that consolidate culture. They consist therefore in much more than means of communication; they are representing ways of thinking and ways of looking at the world. They are world views.

Let's see here a few examples.

English is a language that expresses itself with short sentences, very concise, mainly using verbs as this is a culture of action. The language has been shaped by concerns about the way one can handle the environment and act in pragmatic ways.

French is built with longer sentences, with an insistence on nouns and abstract concept. It is based on rationalist thinking, more than action. Substantives, as concepts and general ideas, are important because they constitute the matter of life. Look at the number of words ending in –tion. Often English has borrowed these words from French; and, in many cases, has slightly modified the original sense they had. You will be able to notice, in the present form of expression I use in this book, that I am expressing myself in a rather French way, while yet using English words, because French is my mother tongue and has forged my way of thinking and expressing myself.

In a still different way German has an incredible ability to forge new words by addition of prefixes or suffixes, or by composing words together as one new word. *Leben* is *life*, *erleben* is *experiencing life as an object*. *Belebt* is what is *made alive*. *Lebendigkeit* is the *ability to be alive*. *Lebensgefahr* is the *danger that threatens life*. *Lebenskraft* is the *energy of life*. In each of these words you can recognise the radical *leben* (*life*). Or, other

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example, *nehmen* means *take*. *Unternehmen* means *undertake*. *Benahmen* means *behaviour*, or literally the *way we take this or that*. Another and probably one of the best examples is *Weltanschauung* which is made of *schau* = *see*, and *an* as a prefix = to look *at*, *Welt* = *world*; this is then the *way we look at the world*, or in other words our *world vision or understanding*. It is even used as such, in German, in texts in other languages, because it has become a philosophical concept other languages have difficulties to express, by lack of adequate means. It is not astonishing that German has become the language of philosophy. This systematic construction helps probably also to develop the sense of music.

Polish is a very soft language that expresses many emotions. For each verb it has two forms: one is accomplished, the other non-accomplished, depending whether the action is finished or not. *Siedzic* means to sit down, and *siadac* means being in sitting position. In English you would just say *sitting*; there is no such nuance of accomplishment. This translates in Eastern European countries into an attitude that is much expecting from the future, as hope for what is still not accomplished.

As we can observe in these few partial examples, a language is not only a means of communication; it is mainly a tool that helps to forge new concepts and to become more aware of what reality consists in. Language generates a world vision and a consequent way of life. It changes the way we live.

Different understandings of life

Different cultures handle life in contrasting ways, although life is common to all; shall we favour pragmatism or intellectualism or a spiritual approach?

I find fascinating how English and French cultures have comparatively developed in very different directions, although they have been both nurtured by similar European contexts.

First there is a major difference. As an island England is a country marked principally by the sea that surrounds it. It became a nation focused on the vast ocean, orientated towards travel, trade and technology which helped to develop pragmatic skills and a mentality of negotiation that led to a form of practice of democracy. By contrast France is a continental country focused on, and rooted in, the land that helped to develop a centralised autocratic political system, more introvert and more intellectual. I will come back later to this point and better illustrate the differences between these two paradigms.

Consequently England is characterised by its attraction for expansion that gave birth to its empire; trade and colonisation ensued out of the development of ships and weapons. It is a nation of entrepreneurial spirit. If you stand at Whitehall in London, most of the statues that surround you are statues of power, especially of army people, whether seaman or generals or kings or queens. England has been the initiator of the industrial revolution, the mother of steam and railways. For a long time the British navy has been almighty on the oceans of the world.

France is characterised by its intellectual life, with its many writers and philosophers who are celebrated in the main statues you can see in Paris. It is the homeland of rationalism (Descartes), of many artistic trends and of political thought. It is the mother of the French revolution that concerned mainly political issues, or more generally how to (not) share and organise democratic power.

As a third and different attitude, we can mention Italian culture which is not so much attracted by pragmatism or intellectualism but mainly by art and beauty. In each small town of Italy you find some beautiful squares, some fine churches, some incredible

paintings. Music has been also the main energy of artistic creation that impregnates art. Everything is created with a care for beauty, it seems. Probably and sadly much less nowadays in our modern time where the market has shaped a new mentality that is no longer faithful to the land but globalised and standardized.

Of course the preceding description of these three cultures is reduced here to very simplified characters in order to make more visible their respective contrasts in their ways of proceeding in life. What I find striking and fascinating in this short comparison of three terms (three cultures) is to see how these modes of being are complementary. On the one side (England) pragmatism and the development of many technical means seem to be only very effective if they can also be rooted in a minimal reflection on the meaning of what is undertaken and its adequate means (rather the French way). On the other side (France) a deep reflection on the meaning of life and a search for the right forms of power seem to be only very fruitful if it does not remain purely theoretical; it needs then to be also translated into practical forms of expression and action (rather the English way). As a third term (Italy) beauty seems to be the necessary complement, because mere functionality without beauty is very sterile and dry. There is no vibration, no emotion. We are no machines, we are human living beings.

This triple statement means that action without reflection on meaning is brutal and inadequate, while reflection without practical consequences is futile; and life without beauty is nonsense. Pragmatism and intellectualism are only fruitful when they combine and complement each other. It is where Anglo-Saxon and French mentalities need to meet in their respective specificities. Yet while Anglo-Saxons despise intellectualism, French people have contempt for pragmatism. This shows how it will go against the general trend to find ways for these two opposed attitudes to meet, nourish and stimulate each other; and

to complement each other. It seems that each one by itself is incomplete. We are all interdependent.

Beauty is of a different range because it is the qualitative aspect of doing what has been described as a marriage of pragmatism and intellectualism. Beauty is the spirit that impregnates the art to do the good, the true and the beautiful. This is the synthesis of all three approaches that brings all the parts together as a whole. The good (England?), the true (France?) and the beautiful (Italy?) are like the three dimensions of space; they can only exist in relation with the other two. Alone, each one is nothing. So is it with Anglo-Saxon, French and Italian cultures: they need each other's complementarity to be complete.

And these three cases represent only a few examples I singled out. The same is probably true for all cultures and how for them to relate to one another.

Religions as worldviews

Religions as differences of perception

Reality is complex; our perception depends on our diverse (physical) points of observation which become points of view; the diversity of religions expresses these differences.

I have illustrated so far how cultures vary in relation to their contexts and how languages reinforce this diversity by allowing each culture to deepen its own specificity. Similarly religions are also cultural expressions yet of higher range because they attempt to describe this part of reality that is not visible: the source of life and our origin.

First it is important to say that religions are not mere artificial systems of beliefs, even if they too often look like it. If they do,

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this is in fact a frequent perversion of their mission. The first vocation of religion is truly to explain the reality of life and to help people to adapt to a context that is then better known and understood, thanks to this more complete teaching about what Reality is (with capital R). The context is then not only perceived according to its mere appearances; but we get a deeper awareness of what it is, in essence, beyond appearances. A better knowledge of the context in which we live, when it includes also the immaterial and invisible aspects, is more complete and allows us to find a better harmony in the way we live; it enhances the compatibility of our intelligence with the physical and social surroundings. For instance when you become aware of gravity, you do not fall so often and suffer less hurt. This is the same with religions when they serve as instruction manual for life.

Religions use mainly stories and myths to describe what is difficult to express with words. Their original vocation is not to escape in theories but to remain rooted in human experiences and especially in practical conditions of daily life that are nourished by our daily connection or confrontation with the natural and social context in which we live. If they are not rooted in reality – and in truth as the way to recognise what is – religions become destructive vectors of fanaticism or fundamentalism.

Religions are like another language than the spoken language we use in daily life. They try to describe another dimension for which there are no tools, no explicit words. Beyond words they forge stories and myths that attempt to describe this other Reality which remains difficult to grasp rationally but which is nevertheless the very concrete and wider Reality in which we live. They need then metaphors to become the carriers of subtle meanings and symbols or they use words beyond their conventional usage and especially beyond appearances. These metaphors or myths are able to express something one cannot define in clear words. For instance the myths of Oedipus or

Prometheus open us to the unknown. Beyond the simple story that they tell us, they teach us something unfathomable about the relationship between the son and his parents (Oedipus) or about the rivalry between humankind and the gods (Prometheus).

In contrast with science, religions tell us about subtle and invisible themes for which there are no tools to make measures or experiments. But each religion does this in its own way because each religion ensued out of a different context and of a different vision and understanding of the world it intends to explain. They are all different but, fundamentally, they speak all about the same Reality which is one and single for the whole of humankind: the reality of life. This diversity is fascinating because each religion describes a different perspective; but all the perspectives, beyond their apparent contradictions, finally meet in the same point, at the top of the Mountain or at the Omega point. Because there is only one Mountain, or one Reality.

To illustrate this, we can use a metaphor. Imagine a house on a hill that has a green wall, a blue wall, a yellow wall and a red wall. Depending where you stand you will say the house is green, blue, yellow or red. All these assertions are right although they seem contradictory. If you are lucky to be in an intermediary position where you can see two walls with each a different colour (e.g. yellow and red), you will have a more complete perspective and you may even deduce, from what you observe directly - two different colours - that the other walls may well also have other colours you don't know, because you can't see them. And if you meet someone who tells you that the house is green, you will understand what they mean, and accept that it may be true from their point of view.

To illustrate this broad diversity of points of view, one could say in general that there are two main categories of religions.

- There are the Eastern non-dualist religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism and similar) that search for wisdom as an experience and daily practice in this world and life.
- And there are the Western prophetic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam and similar) that offer a revelation concerning life and after-life.

Their respective approaches are very different; yet they are concerned with the same issues and the same Reality: the source and meaning of life and the adequate way to live one's life here and now.

There is yet a strong contrast between their respective methods.

- The non-dualist religions are very pragmatic. They do not attempt to describe a divine being (even in general terms) but mainly concentrate on the form and content of the spiritual search. "Meditate and see what happens". They describe the path of liberation. The teaching evokes the Mystery and principally provides ways how to proceed on the path. The personal experience constitutes the essential material of personal evolution. These religions are very cautious and even suspicious about the role of our intellects because our minds tend to create a world of illusion; this fosters the gap of dualism; dualism between mind and body, me and the world, humankind and God. They are said to be non-theist because they affirm that all is one, but it is a short cut; more exactly they refuse to describe the Unknown or the Ground of Being as the Other because it remains a Mystery and all representations can only be false and treachery. They open us therefore to a further dimension that is beyond our grasp in explaining the path.
- By contrast the prophetic religions try to describe, as best as possible, the nature of the divine (God, Yahweh, Allah) and

the rules of behaviour that open us to its presence. More than the path, they describe the target. At the start these religions rely consistently on teaching and on faith. At an early stage of our personal path faith is understood as the acceptance of the basic doctrine; but it is only the starting point. Then the faithful is believed to be able to grow in maturity in discovering this Presence through his own experience. This approach creates a form of dualism between the Ground of Being (Yahweh, God, Allah) over there and us here; although the Ground of Being is also believed to be in us, as He/She is the source of everything in us; as well as around us. Practice is also required but it consists rather in reaching the fruit of personal transformation, in terms of experience that make the path more real as progressive revelation. These religions are said to be prophetic or to be revelations because they explicitly attempt to reveal what is hidden.

Nevertheless, despite these differences, both types of religion (non-dualist and prophetic) are similar in the way no teaching can reveal Reality, except the teaching out of our own personal experience. All religions are therefore meant to be only guides in our daily lives; we have to do the Work. The differences between religions concern then rather the methods than the contents. Although they remain very different, as different points of view or approaches (like in the example of the house with its four colour walls), they have in common that the path is meant to bring us to a point of turn-around where our understanding of reality (and Reality) shifts dramatically. This happens when we suddenly adapt to another vision and understanding of reality, of how to live our daily life, which goes beyond the material appearances of what we see and hear around us. This can be called enlightenment, conversion, metanoia, turn-around, clear-sightedness. It remains in any case an important change of mind that constitutes the everlasting transformation that has then to be

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further deepened. The turn-around is only the beginning of the path; and there is no end to the path.

As said before, the non-dualist religions seem to concern this life and the prophetic religions the after-life. But this is only an illusion. They all concern this threshold between before and after; i.e. before enlightenment there is the old (wo)man; after enlightenment there is the new (wo)man. Enlightenment is a sort of death of the old one when one leaves the old perception behind (detachment) and acquires a new vision (revelation) as a kind of resurrection or new start. Expressed in this way there is no terrestrial life and after-life; there is only Life, here and now, in varied forms, without end. And Life becomes real when one surrenders deeply to it; this is the path of liberation.

Let's come back in more detail to these two types of religions: non-dualist and prophetic. I am not a specialist in religions. I am only an ordinary person who has interest in spiritual matters and feels very inspired by other religions. I will try now to describe what I perceive they are. This is only my personal interpretation that has been shaped by my diverse contacts with them as well as by my readings. It will be necessarily subjective and incomplete.

Non-dualist religions

They focus on the path of personal experience as a means for transformation (breakthrough) that brings us beyond appearances.

In order to make this diversity of religions more graspable, I would like to describe (in my way) the few main world religions in rough traits that seem to me to be the most striking. Ambitious purpose that will be impossible to reach! This is obviously here only a very personal perception that will add to the description a subjective dimension, which is precisely inherent to religious vision. My subjectivity will then not twist the essence of these

religions but add my own perception to a complex set of representations.

Hinduism: Let's start with Hinduism which is one of the oldest traditions - the oldest texts (the Vedas) date from 1500 BC. One aspect of Hinduism that fascinates me most is how it illustrates the diverse expressions of one Reality (Brahman) in so many diverse forms, such as, in disorder, Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva, Parvati, Mara, Ganesh, etc.. One tends to consider Hinduism as a polytheist religion but it is not. Brahman is the One essence. The diverse forms (the many deities) are only the diversified expressions (faces) of this one Source when it expresses itself in the world, or in our lives. It shows how reality is always in mutation and how this one source reveals itself to all people through so many different means.

Buddhism: Buddhism situates itself in a similar perspective. Like Hinduism it focuses on the path of liberation. I feel it describes the path, and rather than the aim. It tells me: meditate and you'll see what happens! This means it focuses on personal experience because enlightenment (the new perspective one gains of Reality that changes one's life) cannot be taught; it can only be personally experienced, in direct life. Teaching is nevertheless useful because it makes the disciples aware of what they have to focus on.

Zen is still more radical; it challenges any concept or representation which can be gained about this unknown and unfathomable Reality. "If you meet the Buddha, kill him!" because this would only be a false representation, not Reality. Koans add to the game by asking questions that cannot be solved rationally, by our intellect. They have to find meaning in our heart-mind, beyond words and concepts. For instance: "What was your face before your parents were born?" or "What is the clap of one hand?" or "Has a dog Buddha nature or not? – Mu!"

These religions are said to be non-dualistic because they see the Universe as a unity of which we are integral parts. There is no dualism: body-mind, me-world; humankind-gods; spiritual-material; here-there, subject-object; observer-observed. All is one. There is only Life as one single flow.

Prophetic religions

They teach us about the essence of the Ground of Being and His/Her will. They intend to enhance our personal relationship with the divine as Source of all that is.

Prophetic religions seem to be dualistic. They describe at first glance the Ground of Being as a different entity that is separated from us. Yet He/She is also the Source of everything and He/She is the energy of Life that animates us. It is distinct from us but it is also in us. It is us but we are not it. I feel that in each of the prophetic religions there is a more contemplative and mystical trend, which is inspired by the early Middle-Eastern tradition and searches for the intimate connection with the divine in terms that go beyond dualism, as a uniting experience. Here also all is one.

It is obviously ambitious and risky for these prophetic religions to try to describe what cannot be described with words, such as the divine essence which is far beyond anything we can grasp, not only because it is invisible but also because it is a very different essence from us. It is yet also very rich to dare to do so, at least to try, because it provides glimpses of what this Other can be and it leads us on the path to His/Her discovery. And this discovery has to lead us to our own transformation because we become then aware that He/She is our essence.

It is then essential that we do not remain stuck in descriptions proposed by the mere doctrine because these frozen representations would soon become as many idols. The path has no starting point and no end. Any insight on the path is meant to

become a new threshold, this means not a final reach point of better understanding but on contrary a new starting point, in ignorance, to discover more; but always in a way that will let reality, not to be grasped, but to flow naturally. When you catch the butterfly, you squash it.

Judaism: Judaism is known to have many strict rules. It refers constantly to the Law. But it seems to me that there is also another dimension in its teaching that has been developed by the prophets, about a more intimate relationship with Yahweh and a dimension of forgiveness and mercy that was not present in the early times of the Torah. Through the whole teaching along the centuries there is a slow progression of teaching, from simple truth to more elaborate forms, in a kind of progressive education of the faithful. It goes from some basic principles of the Torah to a radical call by the psalms and the prophets for a more elaborate, deeper and more intimate relationship with the Creator. He is the Creator because He is the source of all life and of all that is given or happens. Creation, as a flow of Life, happens at each moment of our lives.

Along the stages of this personal education the people of Yahweh receive first the basic principles of the Law; a Law which is very rigid, in ten commands, which describe the perfect behaviour: five concern our relationship with Yahweh, and five our relationships with other human beings. From this basic Law the teaching evolves then towards an attitude of gratitude, thanksgiving and proximity of the divine. The ritual acts, such as the rites of sacrifice, are no longer requested because they are replaced by the direct gratitude for life and for abundance, the surrender and giving of oneself. The rules remain but they progressively lose their dominant power when the faithful become more aware of Yahweh's presence in their lives. Whatever the present day offers, they know that the full accomplishment of the promise will come soon. **Hope** is here the essential energy, it seems to me.

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Christianity: Christianity is less different from Judaism than one tends to say, because it is originally based on the same premises and the same perspective. The difference is that Christians believe that Jesus is the Christ (the expression of God), i.e. the Messiah whose coming the Jews are still waiting for, as final accomplishment. I feel that in general salvation, in both Judaism and Christianity, is not something given by God as by a judge in reward to our good behaviour. On the contrary it rather happens as a personal change of mind in the heart-mind of the faithful searcher than as a change in God's mind. Salvation is the inner transformation of one's own being and heart-mind I have described. God does not change in his essence; one could say humouredly that God AD is the same as God BC, which does not mean he is not in move. It is why it is important to see that the coming of Christ, as a human presence among us, reveals to us another unknown reality, different from the one we have perceived in the past, as shown in Judaism; it is why this is a revelation, or a new discovery for the humankind.

The incarnation of the divine in a visible physical human form changes our understanding of what liberation is meant to be. It tells us that, contrarily to what is too often expressed or understood, Jesus-Christ is not the victim (the scapegoat) of an angry God at war with humankind. God is not this vengeful master who wants to punish us; but he is rather this loving energy that is ready to give himself at any price to help us understand that life is based on compassion and not on competition; on gratuity and gratitude and not on reward and revenge. And therefore Jesus is not the victim sacrificed for our faults; he is not the scapegoat who pays for our cruelty, against his own will; but he is the one who offers his life to be a witness of this free giving of himself, of this infinite compassion - his compassion and God's compassion which are one and the same. There is no limit in the giving of himself. This is precisely the

revelation of God in us as the source of Life. **Love** is here the main energy, it seems to me.

Islam: Islam has impregnated, shaped and transformed the daily life of so many people who live nowadays in Southern countries. It seems to me that it has a radically different context and has participated, probably like Judaism and Christianity at their origin, in bringing also education to its followers. This is a gigantic progress that leads us to a daily practice in which Allah is perceived as constantly present at any time, in any place and in everything. The song of the muezzin and the regular practice of prayer many times a day remember everybody of this constant Presence that animates all circumstances of life, without yet intending to control them. Without this Presence there would be nothing. Allah is the ruler in the sense of the provider of life. He is the Merciful. And we learn that we have to adapt to the laws of the Universe and the will of Allah, not as a will that is tyrannically imposed to each of us, but rather as a perfect design (the path of mercy) that calls us to surrender to its laws because they are the laws of perfection. Obedience becomes then liberation and access to bliss; and it concerns all the faithful who form the Umma, the great community of Oneness. **Faith** is here the main energy, it seems to me.

I would like to add here a general comment. Islam is nowadays often considered as a fundamentalist violent religion, but it is a completely ignorant and erroneous perception. All religions have their fundamentalist trends, which are almost all violent: the Christian religious wars, the Buddhist massacres of Rohingyas, the violence of Hindus (BJP) against Muslims, and of course Muslim fundamentalism too. Yet, and it is very important, the majority of Muslim people are peaceful and follow their religions with their deeper being and their most intimate conviction, as you and me our daily life. This faith brings true peace and joy and compassion when it is authentic.

Now, it is true that Islam has also developed a radical wing, a fundamentalist one, which is violent. We will look at this more deeply later, but I would like to affirm here that, as Northerners, we have strongly participated in nourishing this violent trend, and precisely because of our own fundamentalism that we refuse to consider as such. Two weights, two measures! This will be a leitmotiv of the present book! How do we dare to judge?

At the end of this short description of the three main prophetic religions, I would like to notice that they are very complementary to one another but also bring us all in the same direction. Judaism emphasises more hope, Christianity love and Islam faith, but these three qualities are essential for the three of them. This shows how we have all to learn from one another to form the perfect community of believers, or rather the perfect community of humans, which is called humanity. The divine, when it is fully revealed in us, brings us to fruition: to become perfect human beings, or at least on a perfect path.

This is truly a kind of social project that needs to be brought to full accomplishment.

Composed differences

The cumulative effect of differences

Contextual, physical, cultural and spiritual differences cumulate and accelerate the process of differentiation that increases contrasts between cultures.

In order to avoid describing general patterns of differentiation in theoretical terms, I have here preferred to illustrate how differences of context (nature, climate, topography, biotope) generate different behaviours and foster different cultural and

spiritual patterns; how especially they foster different races, cultures and religions, which become the many expressions of so many varied ways of adaptation to different contexts, without yet having clear delimitations between one another, as they are also the fruits of endless combinations with other influences and largely open to continuous hybridisation. Languages reveal also how much we think differently, even if we live some few hundreds of kilometres away from one another. Such a large diversity of expression allows to develop many different perceptions, ideas and concepts, which sustain in turn different ways of thinking and living. In a contrasting way religions reveal different ways to perceive a glimpse of the same unfathomable spiritual reality.

On one hand we have so many opportunities to be inspired by others. We can learn from them. Early in human history people have roamed the globe, visiting other cultures and being inspired by what they could discover in them, being able to borrow some aspects of them. That has led to a certain hybridisation of cultures. This is what is called miscegenation, although this term is more specifically adapted for races. It consists in mixing many elements of different provenances. It leads slowly to a mixture of cultures. No one is pure. We are all made of mixed components and represent in this way a kind of continuous range of diversity that goes from one end of the spectrum to the other opposed end without clear thresholds in this progressing diversity. In this way we are all sisters and brothers. There is continuity in our humanity despite our differences.

On the other hand, one can observe how the differences that arise between cultures or races or religions tend to be cumulative and to reinforce themselves and one another into more and stronger contrasts with other world views or ways of life. And the different clusters that define themselves according to these lines of contrast with other clusters tend also to reinforce their differences; the components of one world view or way of life

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combine with one another and generate ever more contrasted perceptions and consecutive stands and settings. Once one starts thinking differently one tends to see the world in different ways and everything takes then another meaning that reinforces in turn the way we look at the world. And so on. The differentiation of each one (person, tribe, cluster, class, sect, party) increases in this case by addition of complementary components that stimulate one another towards more differentiation.

But the process of differentiation can also happen, not by addition of more different elements, but simply by contrast or opposition with the other person, tribe, cluster, class, sect, as a direct reaction to the state of difference, which then tends to be reinforced. Because I feel different from you, I tend to become more different from you, in the name of this difference, by opposition to what you represent that is different from me. To become truly who I am, I reinforce the characteristics that make me different from you, by contrast. This is what is called schismogenesis. The difference here is the cause of the accentuation of the separation.

One can observe this process of polarisation in minorities: the sectarian group that believes in specific dogmas will reinforce its internal unity at the expense of, and opposition to, its own link to other beliefs. It is how Christianity has become no longer able to find unity in diversity. Because I declare myself to be Protestant or Catholic I will believe and behave in a way that shows how much I differ from you as Orthodox. And the same between Hindus and Muslims; or Jews living in a ghetto in contrast to their direct social non Jewish surroundings; or Mennonites in their distinct communities. Of course these people have good reason to live together because they intend together to favour some preferred beliefs, behaviours or rites and they need the support of each other. And the near surroundings of people who think and behave differently will be perceived as a menace to

their own security and right to be faithful to their own beliefs and values.

A similar tendency to accentuate differences happens also in dialogue between two persons, in any debate when the protagonists have different opinions. The contrast tends to be accentuated because each one tends also to defend their position in more contrasting ways, than rather to aim at consensus by letting go of minor differences.

This process of reinforcement and acceleration of differentiation is too often ignored; especially in our world of fake globalisation. We are so absorbed by our own ways of perceiving and understanding life and the world around us that we forget that other people around us live in different conditions and perceive a very different world, although it is meant to be the same. Ask your neighbours what they saw yesterday in the evening sky. They will describe to you something you probably did not notice or you perceived differently. Ask the witnesses of a same event to describe who the actors were and how they were dressed. You probably won't recognise the actors you saw.

When we live on different continents, under different skies, different climates, with different surroundings, with different rules of behaviour, with different teachings, with different world views, we evolve in different spheres. As Northerners we tend to think, because our civilisation is based on rational thinking, that everybody should think as we do; and that, if they don't, they are wrong, or – even better - undeveloped. But this is pure madness, because our point of view is just one among many possible stands – probably on one hand enriched by a rational approach that enables us to get a form of logical clarity, but also, inevitably on the other hand, weakened by this same rational approach that tends to exclude so many other rather intuitive aspects which are also part of the picture. And nobody can demonstrate that “we” are right, more than “they” are.

This spirit of blind supremacy is apparently the root of all evils. We believe so firmly that we have the truth and others are undeveloped. But our experience of the wider world – if we accept it in conscious honesty - demonstrates that it is not true. Differences are the sources of true cultural wealth. When we deny this elementary fact, we fall into fanaticism; and mainly into a denied form of fanaticism that hides behind a pretence of rationality, a pretence of universality, or a form of discourse we have just developed in isolation in our little Northern corner. But it proves inadequate in so many cases. It shows that something is missing in our approach. It is why I had to write this book to show how diversity is the source of life and not something to abolish in imposing our unilateral point of view.

In other words, as Northerners, we have to learn to live and dialogue with others, and discover how much richer we can be when we combine our own personal wealth (I mean our world vision) with theirs. Knowledge and wisdom are goods that multiply when we share them. We are in fact like organs such as the heart, the lung, the stomach: each one brings their contribution, ability and skills to the construction of a common human work in which each one is needed and equally precious, despite – or rather thanks to - the fact we are all different. The heart does not contribute in the same way as the lung. And both are needed.

Chapter 2: Culture and the power of choice

As a preamble to our further investigations, I would like to look at some fundamental concepts related to these many cultures and to what makes them so different from one another. First I will try to grasp what the difference between culture and civilisation consists in, because these concepts of *culture* and *civilisation* are not evident and they are even frequently used with different meanings. I will do this in my own way, presenting my own interpretation as contribution to a debate which is far from being concluded.

I will do this as someone who grew up in a Northern context. It is why I will say: our Northern culture or civilisation. It does not mean I identify with it. I just know it has shaped me.

Culture and civilisation

Let's start with the difference between culture and civilisation and the many concepts that are linked with them, such as freedom, identity, hybridisation.

Culture and civilisation

Culture represents the content of what matters most in terms of values and priorities; civilisation is the social construct of these main preferences into concrete and institutional forms.

In our common language, the words *culture* and *civilisation* are used in many contexts with very different meanings, as if there were many ways of understanding culture and civilisation. It is

indeed probably normal that these words can express different concepts according to the context in which they are used, especially cultural context. Paradoxically culture defines its own understanding of culture. Let's try to make some order in these many different forms of understanding of what these two words may mean.

The word *culture* is used in different expressions.

- We speak of *traditional cultures*; this seems to be the most current meaning, in a sense that seems opposed to *civilisation*.
- But we speak also of the *Ministry of Culture* for which culture seems to be rather linked with art and creativity, and in the best cases with truth and beauty, as a product of a given society; and this product is at the same time expression of some meaning.
- We say also of a person: *she is very cultivated* (or *cultured*) or *she has a deep culture*, rather as a maturity in knowledge, wisdom and/or behaviour.

Now about the word *civilisation*:

- We speak of *great civilisations* when we think of Greece, Egypt, China, the Moghuls, Benin or the Incas.
- And, in a similar way, we mention how *civilisation* can be brought to another society, implicitly perceived as savage or primitive according to a colonial perception.
- In this other understanding *civilisation* also means often *development* or *power*.

First about culture: For me *culture* consists in the body of beliefs or representations or myths that embrace the many fundamental values and priorities assimilated by a society or a person. These main priorities will guide the central choices or ethical preferences and will define the content of our personal

and collective daily lives; examples of these leading values are love, care, justice, peace, equity, freedom, ethics, sacredness.

If these values are active in our lives, it means that the main choices, in our lives on a personal level or as a given society on a collective level, are not merely mechanical or pragmatic but that they are guided by overreaching values. These guidelines can be more or less conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit, ready-made or self-made, conformist or extravagant. They can either truly rule the concerned community in its efforts to live in the truth; or they can just remain very formal, on the level of a general discourse of justification; they are then not truly implemented but only rather used as a screen behind which one hides rather than as a dynamic challenge for transformation and improvement. Culture, by its content and by the level of depth it is practised, defines in this way how these main leading patterns are understood, or not, as fundamental choices of life and guiding forces; and how far they have to be translated into daily decisions and behaviours or rules that impact on what we do.

In short, culture is the map that guides the community because it traces the path that expresses these fundamental preferences. It reveals the territory and also proposes how to behave in relation to this territory, which is not simply the physical ground on which we live but also encompasses all dimensions of the land, the community and the social life which we are parts of.

One could say that culture fundamentally is about the meaning of life. It does not need to expose in clear concepts what this meaning consists in; but it embraces the dominating search for truth and teaching about meaning; This form of search and teaching intends also to shape its adherents and initiate them, as more mature and aware participants or citizens, to what a true life consists in – as far as it can be defined.

Culture, in this understanding, principally includes ethics, philosophy and religion, values and fundamental choices, social

conventions and rules of behaviour. These are the main concepts. But it does more. It tends also to propose a practical guide for relationships. Out of this catalogue of priorities most societies elaborate clear and precise rules in what concerns relationships between members of family, between people of different genders or ages, between members according to their social position or their role in the community (especially if the community is stratified). This attempt to procure guidelines into practicalities can go as far as defining forms of behaviours or taboos, or proposing rites, or composing songs and other forms of rituals. It can be very general but it can also be very precise, going far into details.

Culture covers therefore a wide range of inspirations and instructions, from the deeper understanding of the content and meaning of life to the more practical forms and rules it will propose as it tells how to translate this subtle content and its consequent choices into acts of daily life.

Then about civilisation: By contrast with this description that concerns rather the content and meaning of life, I understand civilisation to be a form of social construct that proposes a structuring frame or more visible forms of expressions for the meanings, values, preferences or options culture has defined. Civilisation translates then these preferences into practical means, into material expression or into institutions. If culture is content, civilisation is form.

If we accept this distinction – and contrast or complementarity – between culture as *content* and civilisation as *form*, it nevertheless remains unclear, in a sort of continuity between content and forms of expression, where culture finishes and where civilisation starts. There is no clear threshold but rather a progressive continuity and flowing passage from one into the other.

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Beliefs and rites of celebration belong for instance to culture as well as the calendar of festivals or celebrations or the songs that are parts of these celebrations; rules of behaviour or social customs concerning the relationships between members of the same family according to their age or gender or position belong also to culture. Art belongs to culture as long as it expresses a meaning. Even the form of expression, although it is form, belongs to culture. Only art deprived of meaning and sold as a product of the ego is a consumption good and therefore an object of civilisation. But, when the social construct that is meant to express the cultural content becomes an important structure, it turns to be part of civilisation; the institution of royalty, the organisation of the legal system, the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, the legal system, the school system, the government or the doctrine of any faith are for instance all parts of civilisation as material expressions of a cultural content.

And it is the same – although they are of very different nature – for the railways, the monuments that represent the state institutions or the walls of the city with its reinforced gates and its intimidating guns. They are also material and visible expressions of civilisation. All these material elements represent the social construct and the structure that consolidate the content of culture into an institution or a formal expression or a material tool that has a precise function in the whole, because of culture (or its lack of).

To make this distinction between culture and civilisation more understandable, we can propose here a comparison: the relation between culture and civilisation is like the relation between spirituality and religion.

Spirituality concerns our private and intimate relationship, as a person or community, with the divine; it is something mostly invisible, in principle alive and ever changing, impossible to grasp or to define; it has no imposed external structure; it

develops as it goes, as a personal experience free of any predefined content.

By contrast with spirituality – like civilisation in contrast with culture – religion is the social construct that proposes the structuring frame (the form) elaborated through the centuries to express the cumulated teaching (the content) that results from the many aspects of personal or collective experience inherited from the past. In this way, as translation of an invisible content, religion in its institutional form, restrains the field of spirituality by expressing its content in words or rites or rules – i.e. making it explicit but at the same time also limiting the breadth or depth of this content by restriction of the means of expression.

The doctrine (catechism) of a given faith is for instance the book that tells what should be believed; but it is not the whole truth; it is only a small part that can be translated in words. It has been written by (maybe wise) people who may yet partly misinterpret the core message or, despite their best efforts, may translate it into often awkward, reduced or even deformed teaching. There are many similar examples of distortion in the history of any religion or even of any social movement. The teaching is not the truth itself, but only the finger that shows in which direction one should search for the truth.

Now in more general terms about the comparison between culture-civilisation with spirituality-religion: This reduction of spirituality (culture) by any verbal expression of teaching (civilisation) inevitably happens when one tries to tell with words what cannot be told. But the meaning of the exercise of expressing the teaching in clear words remains yet fully justified because the teaching, as awkward it may be, is also the basic way to transmit the experience and wisdom of our ancestors. It prevents us from starting from scratch, or from a blank page, and it allows us to gain a rich corpus of elaborate doctrine out of our ancestors' experience; but it does not replace our personal

experience. It can nevertheless guide us and help us to better discern and more adequately interpret what we may experience. What is expressed here is only true if the effort of expression aims at telling the truth; that is if it is authentic, by contrast with ways when teaching or religion is used as a mean for power, which happens frequently and then disfigures the discourse as a tool of power that has nothing to do with true content.

Civilisation and religion are both similar as translations of a deeper content, when they try also – as long as it remains anchored in culture and tries to translate it honestly – to construct a social frame around the values that matter most or the priorities that culture has chosen as dominant values and guiding energy.

It is important to see that a civilisation cannot re-evaluate its premises and correct its trajectory without returning to the core of the deeper content that culture has defined and never stops redefining. The formal teaching by civilisation can only remain as true as possible when it remains anchored in culture, as religion has also to remain anchored in spirituality to be truthful and avoid degrading the unfathomable dimension of life experience.

Culture is the soil that nourishes us, and civilisation is the structure that we build out of our own roots in culture. This social construct can only be healthy when it remains well rooted in the soil of the culture that nourishes it and keeps it alive. It lives on the sap that comes from its roots.

As said, civilisation can therefore not correct itself by itself without going back to its cultural roots. But the opposite is also true; it can go completely mad by itself, especially when it loses its grounding in culture; for instance when growth fosters more growth; or when wealth calls for more wealth; or when the mechanisms that lead civilisation become autonomous, detached from their roots and meaning, such as the forces of market, the want for profit or the fascination for technology. These are

perversions of culture because they are no longer guided by culture but they are loose from any attachment and any meaning. They are just mad autonomous forces that are no longer called to account. And too often we succumb to them.

The traps of civilisation

“Civilisation” is caught in two false premises: 1) an inexorable linear development towards complexity, 2) a trend towards social stratification and a quest for power (the empire).

As civilisation is meant to be the structural or material expression of the predominant values emphasised by culture, it tends to be a materialisation of these values by the way that matter makes visible what has given form to it. This means that the material dimension is essential in what makes civilisation, even if this material dimension is only perceptible in a legal frame or in social rules of behaviour. There is indeed in this sense no possible immaterial civilisation. Any recognised civilisation is generally imposing. It is made visible by its powerful institutions, by its imposing buildings, by its police forces, by its dominant materiality, by its monumentality, by its power to impose, coerce and dominate, either internally by social stratification or externally by (mainly military or economic) conquest. It is hard to dissociate civilisation from domination although domination is guided by a will for power which has its roots in culture.

The first cause for this trend towards domination is probably to be found in the implicit conviction that there is in human development a natural trend that should lead evolution from a so-called primitive stage to ever more social complexity, diversity and stratification.

There is a solidly ingrained belief in our Northern culture that the savage stage of foragers-hunters, who live in *bands*, should

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naturally evolve towards a reorganisation into more structured *tribes*, which would recognise some rules of kinship and contrasted relationships between its members; and this evolution should also then further lead into *chiefdom*, which would recognise some hierarchy and authority of power in the hands of a leader; and finally further into *states*, with their institutions and relative monumentality, with their power to legislate and to coerce that would reinforce social stratification, one minority dominating over the majority of the others.

This emblematic evolution seems to be the general natural and almost exclusive pattern in the eyes of our Western civilisation. We believe, consciously or unconsciously, that development means an evolution towards complexity, with accumulation of wealth, development of technology, increase in material goods and structures, increase in intellectual knowledge, improvement of comfort, social stratification, specialisation, uniformisation by integration into a monolithic system that rules the function of the “machine”. Domination is in fact the real hidden force that leads this trend towards complexity.

And, guess what, as Westerners we believe that we are of course at the top of this evolution. In other words, this means that anybody else should do as we do if they want to be developed people: they should form a city state. It is remarkable that the word *civilisation* comes from the Latin *civis* which means *citizen* or *subject*. It means that the concept of *civilisation* explicitly refers to the state and the city as essential entities, which represent symbolically its final stages of evolution, at least according to our representations. The civilisation, in our minds, is by essence of urban nature. It seems to visibly be true when one considers the examples of famous civilisations: from Babylon to Athens, to Machu Picchu, to Xian, to Vijayanagara, to Cairo, Timbuktu or Benin.

It is why the chain of evolution band-tribe-chiefdom-state is such a powerful concept because it drives our subconscious. We sincerely believe that this evolution towards complexity and the form of the state is inevitable; and that more is better: more wealth, more power, more knowledge, more stuff. This is considered as progress and it still leads our present evolution. Growth, it seems, is the key of everything at the stage that, without growth, it seems dead. The main problem with this unconscious belief is that it creates a hierarchy of values between the foragers-hunters and the citizens of a big city or state. It describes development as a single linear track towards more complexity and more accumulation, in terms of quantity and not of quality.

It is precisely where civilisation denies culture or works against it when it becomes a self-managed machine that drives itself without external references. It is no longer the quest for the right values, for the meaning of life, for what matters most, but it is then orientated towards mere accumulation and domination as leading values and mere aims in themselves. The beast feeds itself for its own sake; this is a sad and sterile vicious cycle.

Once it has lost its links with culture, in which it is no longer rooted, civilisation becomes this self-driven body that obeys its own laws and mechanisms. In our Western case market and technology have become dominant and the true leading energies of our common evolution. The taste for power and domination reorganises the society into a monolithic yet stratified body that forces each of its citizens into a pre-defined strata, box and role. It becomes totalitarian in essence.

Of course, in our Western so-called democracies, it does not function purely according to these lines because the process is full of cracks and incoherencies. Some courageous citizens will also disobey because they remain anchored in their own

perception of life, this means in culture, and they disapprove and resist this evolution towards monolithism.

This internal rigidity of the state structure imposes common laws in the name of which coercion – they call it security or order – is practised in a way that does not make exceptions. The law is the same for all. All have to fit into a same form. Yet the law remains also flexible because it can be adapted to class interests. And old laws can be changed or new laws can be written by the dominant class in power to serve its interests.

In turn internal domination (a form of hidden totalitarianism implied by the logic of the state) usually evolves also towards external domination because it becomes often necessary for the system to generate enemies to consolidate internal unity in a common fight against the dangerous “other” that will annihilate civilisation. This other does not need to be necessarily powerful, but it can be; it can be the simple refugee who comes by boat, or a state such as Russia or China (in US or European perspectives).

We can see here how the trend towards complexity (the chain band-tribe-chieftdom-state) leads to a rather totalitarian logic because the state requires obedience to its laws, institutions and power structure, and cohesion to defend “civilisation”. This is also valid for our Western forms of democracy. Although the power is in principle in the hands of its citizens, the state requires obedience. The citizens remain real subjects (subjected to power, coercion, order) as in primitive kingdoms where the king was all-powerful. Of course our rights as citizens have also improved and we have real possibilities to vote or elect our leaders. But is it enough to foster true democracy and master how civilisation may express culture? I believe we need more than that.

The trend to materialism

As a materialisation of culture, civilisation tends to become ever more materialistic unless culture, which inspires it, retrains it in this trend and keeps it focused on values.

If my distinction between culture and civilisation makes sense, civilisation has a role of translation of the invisible into the visible. This is a very important role that allows us to grasp what is at stake in our own society at the present time. We have five senses and a mind that allow us to perceive what we would not perceive without these senses and ability to interpret the meaning of it. What becomes visible, because it is translated into material expressions, can then be perceived and become understandable. What would we know of the world and of the laws of life if there were no matter to make it graspable?

Civilisation has then this essential role to teach us what matters most, as long as it remains anchored in culture, this means culture as a source of guidance for life. As materialisation civilisation becomes teaching but only as far as it remains a true expression of culture. This is probably the knot. Civilisation is caught between the inspiration of culture and its own dynamic, related to its own material constraints.

This means there are, in my mind, two main forces acting onto civilisation. The first force is inspiration that depends on its roots in culture. The other force is materialisation that tends to focus on the visible dimension of what it produces, at the cost of its inspiration. This means that these two forces are antagonistic – acting in contrary directions - although they are also complementary and need one another – counterbalancing and correcting each other. One sustains the other but they also act one against the other, or correct each other.

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As civilisation produces social forms, laws of behaviour, institutions, buildings and technology, it gets easily caught in the narrow and self-defined logic of what it has created. The creator becomes then the slave of the created form; and the logic of the created form becomes the leading logic and energy. The free citizen becomes the obedient vassal.

Our Western society has chosen – did it choose truly? – to privilege market, production, growth and accumulation of wealth, rather than favour values of reciprocal care and equity or implement ways of sharing and helping the weakest members of the community. Because of this priority given to growth, the forces of the market have become dominant and tend to rule our society. The economy becomes the first reference for our development – *don't upset the market!* – in place of the ethical values that we also cherish. This means that the original values of equity have been submerged by the mechanisms of the market.

This is at the same time a choice – the choice to favour growth – but this is also a deep and afflicting contradiction because we all value equity and sharing as primordial values. Maybe we are yet not convinced to implement these humanistic values at the cost of our comfort. Or we feel powerless. The market becomes in this way dominant, because of our ambiguity in our choice to remain rooted in cultural values (equity and solidarity) rather than succumb to the attraction of growth. By being ambivalent we leave the road free for market to dominate us. The power of the market relies more on a void (our absence of courage to defend our values) than on a choice (our preference for growth and materialism).

The same can be said of technology. Technology is the fruit of imagination and creativity and it opens new ways to new tools and new forms of development. But it remains deeply shaped and guided by the aims it pursues. If these aims are not narrowly

rooted in culture, they will dominate the scene and distort our evolution by being led by meaningless self-generated forces.

As a quick way to represent this question of the validity of the aims we pursue and how much they are rooted in culture or, on the contrary, determined by practical mechanism and illusory purposes, we can repeat here the story exposed in a previous book³: a Tibetan monk was said to make many great inventions but he always put them back in his drawer because he could not see how their implementation could help the true development of humankind in social and spiritual terms. He used to ask about the usefulness of his inventions:

- 1) Authenticity: is it true?
- 2) Evolution: is it good?
- 3) Adequacy: is it right?
- 4) Harmony: is it beautiful?
- 5) Need: is it necessary?
- 6) Purpose: does it assist human and spiritual progress?

These six questions represent the anchor in culture we must constantly return to if we want to check whether we toe the line and remain faithful to our core values. Culture becomes then not only the source of inspiration of civilisation but provides also the grid of criteria to check the authenticity of the path of expression we practically follow by proceeding with the materialisation of our intentions and main choices. Civilisation is supported by these six core questions to remain the true expression of what matters most. Thanks to this critical look, it is no longer so strongly threatened by so many possibilities to derail into mere materialism. In this more secure way it can remain the true materialisation of authentic values which are then enhanced and made more accessible for all.

³ See Yves de Morsier: *The solution is simple... but demanding*. Desert Creek House Publishing, 2021.

The glory of civilisation

Civilisations have contributed to major discoveries concerning social harmony, science, art, knowledge and even wisdom. How far is this also a contribution to culture?

I have intentionally chosen to address so far the topic of civilisation in challenging terms – mainly painting a critical image of it – because I intend to question this concept, not to annihilate it, but to truly perceive what it is in its essence and to which laws it obeys.

Yet civilisation is not all black or white. It would be stupid to pretend that it is *good* or *bad*, in sharp simplistic terms. It is evident that many civilisations (plural) have tremendously contributed to the maturity of humankind, despite their trend to materialism and domination. They are not only forms of expression; they are also true contributions to culture. In this way they return to culture what they have discovered thanks to the inspiration of culture. The dynamic becomes reciprocal.

We all admire the pyramids of Egypt, the Parthenon in Athens, the church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, the Benin bronzes, the mosque of Damascus, the China wall, or the Forbidden City of Beijing, the temple of Ryoan-ji in Kyoto, the Taj Mahal in Agra, Machu Picchu, and even the Louvre or the British Museum despite, or because of, the stolen works that they contain. Yet there is something striking in this list: they are all products of empires or at least dominant trends of power and conquest. This list does not mention the Aboriginal art in the Pilbara (in present Australia), the sustainable living in the Amazon, the teaching of the Desert Fathers, the many expressions of the Amerindian cultures. These two lists seem clearly distinct although they are not antagonistic or clearly delimited by a well-defined line between them; one flows into the other.

And, on the other hand, there are also all the personal works of art produced by individuals: from the Sistine Chapel to the St Matthew Passion, to Mona Lisa or Guernica, to the Ninth Symphony or the Magic Flute, to the cathedral of Chartres or the Pantheon in Rom. I intentionally mention here only Western well-known works of art because this third list tends to define what culture is in our Western society: a series of artistic works produced by gifted individuals.

To this list of plastic art and music – which belong more to the content of culture than to civilisation, despite their formal expression – we must also add the long list of scientific discoveries and the deep reflexion of philosophy or sociology, of religion and spirituality. And so on. I will not exhaust this subject. These few examples suffice here to describe the content of this extensive domain.

What concerns us most in this topic is the distinction between the forces that nourish and enrich culture and civilisation, making them ever richer and more subtle, and the forces that contribute to their impoverishment by ways of control and domination in a mechanistic way, as described earlier.

Is civilisation a process that tends to become destructive because it follows its own logic of extension, stratification, domination, accumulation? The present trend to present globalisation through the forces of the market seems to well illustrate this trend that generates injustice and exploitation at the cost of a general flattening of cultural differences. Or is it a process of ever deeper discovery of the unknown? I believe it is both at the same time but the dominance of one trend over the other depends on our own choices. Back to culture.

Culture as the search for truth

Culture as the power of choice

Culture is built on choices. It remains alive when it is animated by our freedom of spirit and our freedom to remain coherent to what matters most for us.

It seems to me that the key of the distinction between the two trends of mechanical destruction and of search for meaning and depth depends on the care we take to make our collective choices. We can at the start admit that we, as human beings, roughly feel inspired by the same values of care, reciprocal attention or love, hope for justice, preference for equity. What makes us different, I would say, is our respective attention to these values and how much we are attached to them and how far we are ready to pay a relative price to implement them, because they are not easy to translate into daily life.

Here we have to make a clear distinction between personal and collective choices, although they are of course narrowly linked. No collective choice is possible if no personal choices have been made previously. And this is also probably partly true the other way.

Practically these cultural and human preferences have to find their translation (civilisation) into very practical issues. Each society is confronted to the choice how they will implement rules for exchanges. What is property? does it exist as a private right? how far does it extend? how will resources be shared? what is the meaning and purpose of sustainability? how does one avoid social stratification, domination or exploitation? what is the role of market? which safeguards are in place to improve equity? is equality possible and in what does it consist? How is it possible

to give priority to human values over the accumulation tendencies we all have and practise? And the list is endless.

It is precisely here that it is important to discern which roles works of art such as the Parthenon or Guernica or the St Matthew Passion play in our choices and whether they are supports that help this translation of sacred or human values into practicalities of daily life or on the contrary prevent it because they rather impose their search for glory or celebrity or financial reward. Or, as for the China wall, they are at the service of domination and empire, this means of social stratification and exploitation.

Of course this is a very simplified way to ask the question which is much more complex. But it remains nevertheless a direct way to show where the centre of gravity of this translation happens: in the link between culture and civilisation when culture inspires preferences which are hard to translate into daily practicalities and mere materiality.

As one can see, the fundamental choice is narrowly linked with the choice between, on one hand, simplicity allied with depth of relationship as well as focus on human priorities (care, sharing, compassion, equity) and, on the other hand, complexity allied with growth, accumulation, comfort, power as well as focus on material wealth and personal prestige. The former model aims at harmony and peace while the latter generates social differentiation based on material belongings or relationships of power.

I'll soon come back to this question when I will examine the distinction between personal and collective culture and how far this culture is called to translate either into rigid or rather flexible structures to shape the society we want to live in.

The right to remain simple

The model of linear evolution, towards stratification and “civilisation”, denies hunters-gatherers a basic right to remain simple and be yet wise and evolved. Who is truly the “savage”?

The frightening aspect of the one-track model towards complexity and state power, as described earlier, is that it denies the foragers-hunters their rights to be also evolved people despite their simple material conditions of living that seem to negate a higher level of evolution and maturity.

This is a crucial point in the way we consider the far past of humankind and how we perceive the specificity of other cultures. Were the people of the Ice Age more primitive than us? Is the Aboriginal culture less evolved than the modern American way of life, as so many people seem to believe? I intentionally ask these shocking questions because I want to challenge the way we judge the degree of evolution of other cultures and how we seem to intuitively establish hierarchies between different ways of living, often according to materialist criteria.

This question cannot be answered in an objectively convincing way because it implies many levels of personal evolution and maturity as well as personal choices and preferences which cannot be rationally demonstrated but only described.

It is why I will start with a very simple statement: people in the Ice Age had not reached our level of physical comfort because they had much less means and knowledge about possibilities to enhance their comfort. This is a statement everybody will probably agree with. It is immediately linked with another statement: people in the Ice Age had emotions as we ourselves have today in our present environment; they had relationships with other members of the same band/tribe/chieftom, with their “husband” or “wife” and their children as we do also today, in

our own ways. They felt cold or warm, scared or confident, courageous or prudent, violent or peaceful, resenting or forgiving, kind or aggressive, fat or slim, inventive or conformist, as we are also today. This means a lot of common traits that we share with them in our common humanity.

It is a strange hubris to believe that they were not capable to accumulate experience, to learn and to think as we do today. Of course we have today access to books and knowledge and wisdom that were not available at that time in the same form. But nevertheless wisdom must have inevitably existed because they had the same opportunities as we have to make their own experiences. Probably, their environment being much rougher than ours, their experiences must have been more extreme, and at the same time more related to a reality that must have appeared in a much more radical authenticity than our present reality which is drastically softened by all means of protection we use constantly: more hermetic clothes, protection of building, heating, security of food, health services, tools and similar.

What matters most in this comparison are not so much the differences in degrees of comfort, security, level of technology but rather the common humanity based on a similar use of our five senses and our mind to accumulate experience, perceive, interpret and collect a form of personal teaching that is made only of what we can learn as individuals or as a group of people sharing a same context and a common destiny.

It seems evident to our rational mind that this commonality of human senses and the operating of a similar mind must have generated similar reactions and conclusions. It has also guided similar reflexions on what is appropriate: it is better to be warm than cold, in harmony with one’s community than in conflict, to be satiated than hungry, to be compassionate with one’s family members, to care for one’s own children. Why would the person in the Ice Age have reacted differently from us to all these issues

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that did not change so radically since then, although the means to respond to these circumstances have evolved and extended?

If people living in the Ice Age had at that time similar opportunities as us today to take equivalent decisions concerning their immediate present and the way they wanted to live, it must also have allowed them to decide whether to move north to find more games or fruits, or to settle down where they were to enjoy the given local abundance. They could also probably choose as well how they wished to relate one with another or which structure of the group they would privilege, whether egalitarian, avoiding social stratification, or under the lead of an all-powerful chief. They could choose how they wanted to define the respective roles of women and men in their community, how one gender would relate to the other. They could also decide whether resources, objects or tools had to be owned privately or remain in common use and access, and also how exchanges would be regulated; how wealth would be accumulated or shared. In a few words, they had choice how they wanted to live, as much as we may have today, maybe even more as they probably were living in less defined, less constraining and more locally adaptable social and economic structures.

Of course we were not there to be witnesses of this state of personal or collective freedom. What I describe here is a guess. But we can yet fairly admit that there is, in our respective ways of living, then and now, a basic common characteristic that cannot have changed so much, whatever the context may have been. This is the human faculty to observe and learn and choose.

This affirmation, along human history, of this apparently permanent and equal human possibility for freedom of choice seems especially realistic because the main contrast between different reactions facing a given context does not depend only on available means and tools but essentially on personal maturity and level of mental and spiritual evolution and the wish to make

use of this freedom. In this logic nothing demonstrates us today that our present political leaders act in a more mature way than the people of the Ice Age? Our present leaders have more means to create a fiction, to impose their power and to promote solutions they believe in; but nothing indicates that they are wiser than people who lived many centuries or millennia ago.

I would like even to go further and affirm that some members of what we consider to be primitive cultures have much more wisdom than we apply today in our daily living. I do not speak here of teaching and wisdom, in books or oral traditions, which, through the whole of human history and by accumulation, has reached the highest qualities humankind could reach. I mean here the wisdom that translates in everyday living.

How can we not see that there is in the simplicity of living of Amazonian people a harmony that we have lost in our Western society; we are engulfed in a dramatic crisis of climate change and observe a growing gap between rich and poor that we not only cannot solve but even deny by our own lack of capacity to radically and immediately change the course of our evolution.

Who is the real “savage”? the people who live in harmony with their natural and social direct context or the people who ravage the whole planet in the name of their own self-declared superiority and effective supremacy?

Wisdom is not something one can consume. It grows in us if we are able to take care of it, as our most precious resource. Is the person of the Ice Age not on equal footing with us in this ability to observe, learn, discern, judge and choose what seems to be the best for them and their dependents? I believe we are all equal at the start. What makes the difference is our maturity and compassion or ability to care and our courage to act accordingly. In this perspective our present Western society seems pretty wild and immature!

The indigenous critic of Western ways of living

When the Indigenous people met the European conquerors of their land, they were shocked by the values that were leading their behaviours: especially money and domination.

When we speak of colonisation we usually tend to describe the conquest of Southern lands by European settlers and we mention how the conquerors in general used to maltreat, oppress, exploit or even exterminate the Indigenous people. This is certainly the dominant trait of the story. However we too rarely mention that these two categories of culturally deeply different people had also the opportunity to meet one another, on a more personal level, and to learn the language of the other as well as to get a glimpse in this other culture; and this both ways. This means that there has been then a European way of looking at Indigenous cultures – and there were even many different ways, depending on the personalities of the onlookers – but there has been also an Indigenous way of looking at the culture of the invaders – and even many. Each one had to make their own opinion about who this Other was.

Not only there has been an Indigenous look at European culture that happened to be very critical of the narrowness of European understanding of life and social life, but this critical approach of European culture came at the right time to generate and nourish in Europe, at least principally in France, a wave of debates about the essence of human inequality and the notion of “savage” or “primitive” society. The topic became relatively alive under the form of debates in many private *salons*; and especially when Jean-Jacques Rousseau produced his piece of writing about his notion of the *noble savage* in his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Mankind* (1754).

To better illustrate this sharp Indigenous critic of European ways of thinking and living, we can quote here a few expressions of

this critic as mentioned by David Gaerber and David Wengrow⁴. They refer to a publication of that time in which a French aristocrat, Baron de la Hontan, who had learned both Algonkian and Wendat languages, reported a dialogue he said he had with an unusually brilliant Wendat statesman named Kandiaronk. The Wendat Confederacy was a coalition of four Iroquian-speaking languages, north of Lake Ontario (present Canada). It is interesting to note that Kandiaronk was often invited by the Comte of Frontenac who was the French Governor in Quebec. At his table they used to have lively debates involving many other guests about the nature and flaws of human development.

Let’s see three quotes, the first about the nature of justice.

“For my part, I find it hard to see how you could be much more miserable than you already are. What kind of human, what species of creature, must Europeans be, that they have to be forced to do good, and only refrain from evil because of fear of punishment? [...] You have observed that we lack judges. What is the reason for that? Well, we never bring lawsuits against one another. And why do we never bring lawsuits? Well, because we made a decision neither to accept or make use of money. And why do we refuse to allow money into our communities? The reason is this: we are determined not to have laws – because, since the world was a world, our ancestors have been able to live contentedly without them.”

And a second about property:

“I have spent six years reflecting on the state of European society and I still can’t think of a single way they act that’s not inhuman, and I genuinely think this can only be the

⁴ David Gaerber and David Wengrow: *The Dawn of Everything, a New History of Humanity*, Penguin Books, 2022.

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case, as long as you stick to your distinctions of ‘mine’ and ‘thine’. I affirm that what you call money is the devil of devils; the tyrant of the French, the source of all evils; the bane of souls and slaughterhouse of the living. To imagine one can live in the country of money and preserve one’s soul is like imagining one could preserve one’s life at the bottom of a lake. Money is the father of luxury, lasciviousness, intrigues, trickery, lies, betrayal, insincerity, – of all the world’s worse behaviours. Fathers sell their children, husbands their wives, wives betray their husbands, brothers kill each other, friends are false, and all because of money. In the light of all this, tell me that we Wendat are not right in refusing to touch, or so much as to look at silver?”

And a third about equality:

“You honestly think you are going to sway me by appealing to the needs of nobles, merchants and priests? If you abandon conceptions of mine and thine, yes, such distinctions between men would dissolve; a levelling equality would then take its place among you as it now does among the Wendat. And yes, for the first thirty years after the banishing of self-interest, no doubt you would indeed see a certain desolation as those who are only qualified to eat, drink sleep and take pleasure would languish and die. But their progeny would be fit for our way of living. Over and over I have set forth the qualities that we Wendat believe ought to define humanity – wisdom, reason, equity, etc. – and demonstrated that the existence of separate material interests knocks all these on the head. A man motivated by interest cannot be a man of reason.”

There is clearly an intentional exaggeration in these words of Kandiaronk, as assembled and composed by Lahontan, to better

challenge the “civilised” interlocutor. Despite this rhetorical emphasis the critic remains not less potent and radical. What I find the most fascinating dimension in this discourse is the demonstration that Indigenous people have their own world view that contrasts drastically with our Western understanding of life. This is precisely the best possible illustration of the capacity of each one of us, all fully humans since the origin of humankind, to think by ourselves and to choose the way we want to live, personally or collectively.

This faculty for personal or collective choice constitutes in fact the real key to the fascinating and inspiring mystery of cultural diversity; This different approach of diversity, based on freedom for choice and not on level of development, contrasts strongly with the conventional model that says that some cultures are said to be more developed than others. It remains also nevertheless true that some cultures or civilisations have put more effort in developing certain specific components of their own evolution than others, whether this main focus has been technology, accumulation of wealth, search for truth, simplicity, equality, social justice, or anything else. It can consequently be said that this emphasised preference of a group of people for specific privileged vectors of development happened precisely by choice (their choice) according to their own degree of experience, subjectivity, willingness, awareness, maturity, and freedom to follow their own path. This faculty for choice has nothing to do with any measurable degree of development and superiority in their way to be human, as on an illusory unique and linear scale of excellence for humankind evolution as described earlier.

Now that I have explained and hopefully demonstrated that we all have a power for choice and that it belongs to us to define how we want to live, either personally or with our relatives and dependents or collectively, it is necessary to come back to the concept and significance of culture, as culture constitutes the

background on which we build our lives and make our fundamental choices.

The search for truth

Culture is a living process that transmits to us the teaching resulting out the experience of our ancestors; it sustains our search for truth and feeds our life choices.

In our Western minds the word *culture* evokes principally the creative arts: music, dance, painting, sculpture, literature, architecture. It is understood mainly as a production by specialised skilled people who are called artists. The others (the non-artists) come to admire it as spectators or consumers. Artists are more or less famous according to their talents conjugated with factors of acceptance and fashion. As art is a production to be sold or consumed, it involves money, sometimes exorbitant sums of money.

This process of production-consumption does not prevent art from being powerful and beautiful, rich in teaching and challenges, sometimes even threatening in the power of its message. Yet it remains a sector that is disconnected from everyday life, especially in our Western world or market oriented society. It has become a form of profession to be artist; one defines oneself as an artist, or not; there is a clear line that distinguished both, the artist and the non-artist. By contrast, in traditional societies, all members are non-declared artists who are yet actors of art. The gypsies play violin as they breathe; there is nothing separate from life; there is no production; there is no music to be written, there is no product to be sold or consumed; there is only a process in action, similar to the music that flows out of the violin, in the present and the now, and immediately vanishes. This is also music, but integrated differently into life. It is the beat of life.

This contrast between two ways of practising art does not disvalue any of these two opposed forms. It just defines two ways for each of them of integrating into life and the significance it has for this life as a support. When art is rather separate from daily life as a production-consumption, it does not influence life so directly and does not shape its content or orientation as strongly as when it is integrally part of it, as its own lungs or breathing space. I would like to say that this evolution from a breathing energy to an object of production-consumption is a work of civilisation. Given the values rooted in our culture that guide our modern Western civilisation, civilisation has detached art from living to make it a kind of institution consecrated to beauty, truth or expression, depending on who practises it. It has even made of it a mere product to be sold on the market to generate profit.

This is a very far remove meaning from the original sense culture may have in a traditional society. Traditional culture means truth or at least search for truth. Instead of being separate from daily life as a distinct field of activity, it is the root, teaching and inspiration that describe all dimensions of life and provide instructions how to handle all aspects of life. It encompassed the most sublime dimensions of mystery and sacredness and prescribes also adequate responses and behaviours concerning the smallest details and practicalities, from the most spiritual to the most mundane.

One could describe this original form of culture as a search for meaning, as it fulfils, in my mind, seven roles.

- 1) **An experience:** Culture is first a direct experience of life, as an accumulation of human experience in the past and in the present.
- 2) **A worldview:** Out of this collected experience, culture develops a worldview that organises and structures the raw material and proposes at the same time objective explanations

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and subjective interpretations, without making too clear distinctions between the one and the other.

- 3) **A heritage:** In reference to this collected experience and proposed worldview, culture offers a kind of heritage as a fundamental teaching, as the best possible description of the mechanisms of the world which previous generations are leaving to the following ones to reinterpret and deal with in their own ways.
- 4) **An interpretation:** Culture makes order in this description in structuring and interpreting what it has observed and understood. It proposes an explanation of the essence of life, this means it proposes mainly a subjective interpretation of the laws of the Universe.
- 5) **An expression of meaning:** Out of this worldview, heritage and interpretation culture extracts and formulates a deeper sense of meaning of what life is about and what rules it.
- 6) **A treaty of ethics:** This fundamental meaning leads culture to frame some ethics that enhance the principal values that are called to guide daily life. Ethics are a choice that results from a worldview, and not the contrary.
- 7) **A user manual:** And finally culture prescribes rules of behaviour and proposes, as a kind of basic user manual, some practical ways to confront material reality.

First culture is an experience. Before it can take any shape or formulate any statement about the essence of life or the nature of truth and the universe, a culture is initially formed by a collection of experience (singular because global) from past and present generations. One has to live and be confronted to daily life to discover what the fundamental laws of life are. Only experience can allow us to discern the meaning of life; even if it has been stimulated by inherited wisdom. Only a lived experience can

nourish culture with truth. Without experience culture remains an empty jar.

Culture is a worldview. According to past experience and cumulated knowledge of the ancestors, culture does its best to explain a world that nevertheless will always remain complex and mysterious. It translates, in clear teaching, words, myths, songs and rites, the experience of the past and present generations. It is a rich sum of knowledge and wisdom that has been put into forms to be transmitted to the next generations. It describes a worldview. It is very inspiring because it is rich of this unfathomable knowledge, but it is also inevitably narrow because it also prescribes a single vision and, with it, right behaviours and necessary rites that ensue out of this past experience, limiting in this way the range of the possible for the future.

Culture is a heritage. In expressing its own worldview culture becomes a heritage; and what matters most in this heritage is not so much what it tells us as ready-made pack of teaching and instructions, but rather its present level of sincerity and the values that it puts forwards; and especially – this is most important – the degree of passion and sincerity it invests today into this search for truth. This implies our present capacity to discern, from the results out of our own experience, whether our experience fits into the inherited cultural system of perceptions of life and of the universe and confirms this heritage; or whether our experience challenges this acquired understanding, maybe even fundamentally. In other words, through the teaching of what it has learned about the truth, culture defines a path, sometimes a narrow path, but it also nourishes the heirs with the special quality of the spirit of search for truth it has adopted in the past and opens to a similar attitude now in the present.

Culture is an interpretation. It is clear that the absolute Truth (with capital T) can't be grasped; but our personal version of

truth (with small t) can nevertheless be apprehended in the best possible way, as only a pale reflexion of what the unfathomable Truth is. Depending in which spirit they approach truth, cultures may tremendously be in sharp contrast with one another. As partial reflexion of what it has grasped of this mysterious and ungraspable Reality, culture proposes a fundamental explanation that formulates a subjective interpretation. It is not the truth; it is only a subjective position how to stand to the truth.

Culture is an expression of meaning. Some cultures are truly and sincerely animated by this spirit of search for the unknown and the mysterious sacred dimension of life. They are truly focused on discovering – whatever it is, and whether it is pleasing or not – what can be learned about the truth of the Universe, about the meaning of life, about the way the universe “functions”, this means what the main invisible laws are which rule it and define its evolution. In this search for meaning spirituality, and its formal translation into religion, plays a very important role. It expresses whether life is considered as a purely material phenomenon or if, on the contrary, life is before all spirit. This means that life is an invisible process that expresses itself, incompletely, in material expressions that help us to partially grasp its essence. This fundamental distinction between two possible opposed interpretations – either life as a purely material phenomenon or life as a discovery of hidden dimensions – sends us back to our own personal or collective experience because it is in this experience, more than in teaching, that we can find the motivation to adopt the one more than the other, or how they combine. The option remains nevertheless subjective. This is the great fascination of life.

Culture is a treaty of ethics. Having found a meaning in life and in the Universe – at least what it has been able to grasp of it – culture proposes some ethics. It is important to see that the ethics – which formulate which values are predominant and which the main rules of behaviour should be – are not the

dominant frame that defines our sense of meaning, as it is too often understood to be, but it is the reversed movement: the interpretation of the world, according to experience, helps as to grasp a meaning of life and to behave in consequence. The ethics are just the expression (or consequence) of the meaning of life we have perceived.

Culture is a user manual. Then, finally, culture goes into more details. It delivers a kind of ready-made user manual that prescribes how to handle daily circumstances of life. It is indeed impossible for each of us to have to repetitively re-examine each move we make in life. It is helpful to have a code of habits and rules that simplifies our choices between different behaviours because it makes these subsidiary choices quasi automatic instead of being each time fastidious. Of course we have always the responsibility and possibility to review these codes and to change them, whether on the collective or on the personal level.

What I have described here above seems right for cultures that are committed to discover truth, whatever it costs them. But, on the other end of the range of commitment to discovering truth, some other cultures demonstrate a sort of total disinterest for this search and are only satisfied if they can organise the world at their will, using in this way a self-forged version of so-called truth to justify their doing. This is then not the truth as a focus that helps understand life, but it becomes a social construct that produces artificially a discourse whose aim is to consolidate current practices. This is then the reversed movement: culture becomes a product of social construct instead of social construct being inspired and defines by cultural aspirations.

Chapter 3:

Living within the truth

The hidden sphere

The home as the cradle of our social behaviours

We first experience life in our “original home” and learn what is possible: e.g. that male dominance and violence, at the expense of recessive feminine values, inhibit life.

The first years of our life have been the most important for each of us, in positive or negative terms. They have shaped us in a fundamental way, from the conception and the prenatal months in the womb to the first years of our growing autonomy when we have learned to breath, to eat, to stand, to walk, to listen, to talk and to communicate with the people who used to surround us because they were part of our *home* setting; it is also where we learned to interact with our environment.

By *home* I mean here any form of early together-living with other human beings. The *home* is then any form of living space shared by different people where one is used to find protection from climatic conditions and to regularly sleep or eat: the family, the clan, the village, the band, the gang.

The people who took charge of us (a mother, a father, an aunty, a neighbour or just an episodic carer or even street people) have taught us our first insights and demonstrated how the world “works”. They have provided us with our first experiences and proposed ways how we could interpret them.

These first experiences have been so influential that it is difficult, later, to correct them, in a positive or negative way. This is how culture has taken shape in us, partly imposed from outside, partly reconfigured by us in our own ways, according to specific circumstances; and also to an innate mysterious potential we have to find solutions for ourselves, despite difficult conditions.

It is in the home we learn to practise compassionate and not defensive behaviours, when the home is a protected sphere in which reciprocal trust allows the members to dare to take personal risks to live according to these priorities which, to be practised, require to be reciprocated or at least not taken advantage of. The home is the cradle of our social patterns.

I believe that women play an incredible role in this first elaboration of our personality at home because they are the first “containers” of our intimate life. We are originally almost integrally part of them: the baby forms a kind of unity with the womb and the communication between mother and child is then maximal. They seem both, mother and child, to share almost everything. This is the source of an incredible link that works both ways: either as an encouragement for emancipation based on trust in oneself; or as a perturbing or restrictive possessiveness by the mother that inflicts an insidious doubt in the child that will shake any positive perspective.

All this is fostering culture, our own personal culture. As it is a vast topic I will try to illustrate here what I mean by a few examples which will give consistence to the way culture takes shape:

- It is well known, the evolution of our Western society has been based on the dominance of the male figure – whether incarnated by a man or even a woman who behaved according to masculine models. The word *domination* comes from the Latin *dominus* (master) which derives from *domus* (home). This means that, in our Northern culture, the master

of the home is by tradition a male. Nothing new in this. But what is less often expressed is the fact that the early experience of this form of gendered domination implies that the child, or anybody else living in the home, will integrate this pattern of power as inevitable, at the point that any alternative will seem impossible, not even imaginable.

- By contrast the mother who satisfies most of the needs of the children in their early years seems to have disappeared as a distinct entity; she dissipates as a part of the context of the home in a way that is hardly visible; in a similar way as the womb forms the indistinct frame of the early months of intra-uterine life. I'm convinced that this much reduced image (archetype) of the woman fosters a kind of integrated habit that women remain in general invisible while their contribution is yet major. In most of the early stages in the history of development of our societies (plural here because diverse) the contribution of women seems to have been maximal. Despite of this high level of contribution women seem nevertheless to have been spoiled of the recognition of these precious contributions in the way that so many major inventions of that early time have been later attributed to men, although it seems evident that the most important innovations in so many basic trades (planting, yielding, cooking, weaving, pottery, raising livestock) have been principally the fact of women because these were mainly women activities. This is at least what the paintings or the many symbolic expressions found in archaeological diggings tell us which reveal the centrality of the role of women, to the point that women appear to dominate the scene – not in terms of power but of presence. The main divinities are shown indeed with feminine characters.
- There is still more to it: The feminine presence in the home is the warrant that certain qualities of care, tenderness,

attention, welcoming and compassion are kept active where they contribute to make the home a place for harmonious together-living and sharing. These human core qualities are essential to allow our humanity to develop, that is for the children to integrate through their own experience what these central qualities of mean and imply in terms of wellbeing. Without this feminine contribution, the dominance of the master would impose patterns of relationships based on authority and control.

- I don't mean here that only women bring these qualities and that men are antagonistic to them. No, these qualities are said to be feminine but they are not narrowly and exclusively linked with gender. They are rather the gifts of certain members of the home who have better developed their feminine-Yin side, by contrast with the masculine-Yang side that represents rather dominating values – here again not inevitably linked with gender. Despite the fact that these qualities are not narrowly gendered, it remains yet true that the experience of motherhood stimulates the development of these Yin qualities. It is why probably these qualities are called feminine, even if men can practise them, sometimes even better than women do.
- These Yin qualities can be said to be recessive, at the image of these recessive genes in biology which leave priority to other (so-called dominant) genes because, to find full expression, they need to combine with only similar recessive ones. For instance *blue eyes* or *blond hair* are recessive genes because their combination with another dominant gene (*brown eyes, dark hair*) will let the other character become dominant (brown, dark). This is the same with recessive qualities in the home. The recessive qualities of care, tenderness, attention, welcoming and compassion, because they are recessive, need to be protected to be able to express

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themselves fully. If they are not consciously protected, they are marginalised by other interferences. This is mainly the role of the feminine (Yin) in the home to protect these qualities and enact them, whether it is practised by a man or a woman.

- Another last example for the home to be the cradle of our main social practices in the wider society is the practice of violence. Many homes are the theatre of terrible acts of violence, often, but not exclusively, by men on women or children. The home is for so many people a place of utter violence instead of being the place of refuge and security it should be, as a protection against the indifference, contempt or oppression by the external world. As the home is a hidden place, external intervention to protect the weakest members exposed to the violence of their relatives is difficult because, beyond mere physical protection, the solution cannot be external but has to find a solution that involves all members who have to learn to respect each other and act differently. Yet physical protection, generally initiated from outside, is the first necessity to prevent the situation from degrading and destroying these weakest members.

What matters most in these few examples is to illustrate how patterns of behaviour are learned early in life and how they are reproduced later. The daughters and sons will repeat what these parents, partners or companions have taught them. Such patterns multiply or propagate and become the patterns that shape also our relationships with a wider context, in the neighbourhood, at work, with the friends.

But more important, they become also the first reference for our institutions which will adopt the same patterns concerning the relations of power, the role of women, the proportion of recessive qualities which are active or even influential, the degree of (non-)violence, the dynamic between co-workers or

with the beneficiaries or clients. In other words the relationships we learned in the cradle of the home will foster the patterns we apply for our social life and even for the functioning of our institutions. In the government or in the parliament we will find the same type of relations of power, of role of women, of proportion of recessive qualities, of (non-)violence, of the dynamic between people which these institutions will implement.

In the examples we just saw, the dominance of white male supremacy patterns demonstrates that these patterns are already present in the home and that they find their origin not in official or historical institutional settings but rather in our early years of development in the home, as children.

The preceding examples illustrate how the home is the cradle of most social patterns which will extend to the whole society and translate into models of government or ways to manage our common future or relationships with other cultures and countries. These examples – which have illustrated our tendencies to male domination, to the eclipse of the role of women, to the recession of feminine qualities, to entrenched violence in human relationships – are strikingly potent to represent some main distortions of our public life: male domination, recession of women roles, violence are main characteristics of ways of relating to one another we seem to be stuck into. And they generate our attitudes of domination through colonialism, white supremacy, racism, whiteness.

Simply said, the home is the cradle for our models of white supremacy. How did it come to this? Why do we behave in this way when everybody seems to suffer of the consequences? Why don't we learn?

And this says even more: it demonstrates to us that the solutions for the dysfunction of our institutions have to be found not only

at the institutional level, by new regulations or laws, but, before all, in the cradle itself of our public culture; in the home.

Living within the truth and the hidden sphere

Culture is not given by the community; it arises in the hidden sphere which is the field of our search and attempt how to live within the truth.

Beside its function as cradle of our values, the home, as basic unit of life, also becomes the laboratory where diverse possible ways of life can be tested. Our first years of life, as a child, are very empiric. We try many ways and see how it works, sometimes in following the patterns proposed by the family (or home), very often also in opposition to them or at least as alternatives to what is proposed. This is the instinctive search for the right way of living, with its hidden dimension as a search for truth about life (how to live in the truth) which will orientate our first attempts and choices how to practise.

This exercise is made more complete and rich when life in the home is better protected from external violence or disruptions. It is meant to be a safe home, a place when one feels secure. It becomes then the hidden sphere⁵, i.e. this privileged place of security where the world can be investigated, tested, reflected upon. The hidden sphere is our inner and intimate space of maturation and personal growth, of reflection and interpretation, of contemplation and wisdom. If it is gifted of optimal conditions it may also offer an extended space (not necessarily physical) where our innermost being may find opportunities to share its deepest intuitions, experiences, interrogations, search, interpretations and reflections with a few nearest relatives or

companions. The patterns proposed by the way people interact in or around this hidden sphere are fundamental in the way they propose or allow to elaborate different ways of being, which are inevitably rooted in necessary values or priorities that need to be emphasised and protected.

The hidden place is then the place (the true home) where many themes can be investigated and tried in a very secure and practical way:

- **Male domination:** Is male domination the prevailing pattern; or is real authority entrusted to the one who has competency and has demonstrated to have the needed willingness, skills or knowledge, at least better than any other member? Do members have a right to express their opinions or preferences or is the hierarchy clearly authoritarian?
- **Women contributions:** Are women openly participating in creating the common setting and is their contribution valued for what it is; or is their participation reduced to a kind of shadowy presence, almost invisible although in general so effective?
- **Recessive Yin qualities:** Are so-called feminine (Yin) qualities freely expressed without being reduced by the domination of the antagonistic forces: care or competition, listening or dictating, dialogue or polarisation, giving or taking, sharing or grabbing, welcoming or rejecting, peace or conflict, equity or hierarchy?
- **Ownership:** Is there a clear distinction between what in mine and what is yours? Are generosity and reciprocity active practices making sharing very fluid; or is everyone focused on their own property?
- **Money:** Is money prevalent in the relationships between people; or is it only a practical tool to transport value? Is it

⁵ I borrow this expression from Vaclav Havel. See next note.

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freely given to others, i.e. non-members, and without expectation of return?

- **Technology:** Does technology play a major role in everyday life: internet, social media, mobile phones, machines, tools, or others? Or do the members spend a lot of time exchanging or sharing activities like playing music, telling each other stories?
- **Community:** Do the members take their meals together around a table, talking and sharing while they eat and drink, rather than watching television? Is hospitality an important dimension, welcoming friends or people in need or even total strangers for a meal or for the night or even longer?
- **Im/material:** Is the world perceived as a mere material entity; or does it encompass invisible dimensions that are considered as sacred? Is there any recognition of a Ground of Being (God, Yahweh, Allah, Brahman, Vacuity, or any other)? Do members share times of meditation, celebration or worship in any form?
- **Social justice:** Are the members involved in the neighbourhood, in solidarity with neighbours in need or for social justice? Is there a form of dialogue or common shared search for better ways of life, i.e. that allow more solidarity, more equity, more humanity, more kindness, more justice to be shared on a larger scale?
- And the list can go on for ever...

These questions show how much our ways of being and living are strongly influenced by not only the members of the home but also our friends, teachers, football team, parish, party, club.

But the hidden sphere is principally something different that we cannot share fully because it is even mysterious to ourselves. It is the inner place, deep in our heart-mind, where we feel rooted in

something more solid and bigger than ourselves. It is where our main choices and orientations have their source and take shape, where personal growth becomes maturity.

There is like a dialogue between the hidden sphere and the world. In the hidden sphere I recharge my energy, I find meaning and strength, I review what I feel called to be and to express and to do; in this hidden place I find ways to be more solidly rooted in my truth; I learn to delve in my interiority to find peace and trust and hope; I learn to delve in the dialogue and the harmony with my companions if I'm lucky enough to live in a peaceful home where the questions above can be answered in a nourishing and challenging way. I can then offer what I have received in this way to the wider community, outside my hidden sphere.

The hidden sphere is the place where the most influential prophets, courageous freedom fighters or witnesses of truth – such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Alexei Navalny, Vaclav Havel, to quote only a few – recharge their energy; they are the people who dare to take a stand, even a stand for which they know they will have to pay a high price – some years in jail or even the risk to be killed – because they have been nourished and have found a solid ground in this hidden sphere. This hidden sphere can also, by extension, involve some members of what I called *home*; but it is usually much reduced, for instance to a faithful and supportive partner, or even to be just a place of contemplation where one withdraws alone.

In the 1970s Vaclav Havel was one of the founders of the Charter 77, a group of activists resisting Soviet domination in ex-Czechoslovakia; he was what the West used to call a *dissident* and was later to become President of the Czech Republic. In 1978 he wrote a mind blowing text⁶ aiming at defining a new

⁶ It is from Vaclav Havel that I borrowed the expression of *the hidden sphere*. See Vaclav Havel: *The Power of the Powerless*, to be downloaded from:

strategy for the resisting groups in Poland (trade union Solidarność) and Czechoslovakia (Charter 77). In this text he described a spirit of resistance which would not oppose the oppressive power – because it would mean adapting to what this power imposed and therefore not being free – but would offer a positive energy able to create its own dynamic of life, and the corresponding structure and purpose. In this text Havel opposes the capacity of living within the truth – which is an integral part of each of us, especially when we take great care of it – and the lie that surrounds us – whether the deliberate lie of a totalitarian system (as in the case of Czechoslovakia under Soviet influence) or the illusions of our capitalist system that promotes false and illusory purposes by want of profit or accumulation of material wealth. He wrote:

“Individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is something in them to alienate. The terrain of this violation is their authentic existence. Living the truth is thus woven directly into the texture of living a lie. It is the repressed alternative, the authentic aim to which living a lie is an inauthentic response. Only against this background does living a lie make any sense: it exists because of that background. In its excusatory, chimerical rootedness in the human order, it is a response to nothing other than the human predisposition to truth. Under the orderly surface of the life of lies, therefore, there slumbers the hidden sphere of life in its real aims, of its hidden openness to truth.

The singular, explosive, incalculable political power of living within the truth resides in the fact that living openly within the truth has an ally, invisible to be sure, but omnipresent: this hidden sphere. It is from this sphere that life lived openly in the truth grows; it is to this sphere that

it speaks, and in it that it finds understanding. This is where the potential for communication exists. But this place is hidden and therefore, from the perspective of power, very dangerous. The complex ferment that takes place within it goes on in semidarkness, and by the time it finally surfaces into the light of day as an assortment of shocking surprises to the system, it is usually too late to cover them up in the usual fashion. Thus they create a situation in which the regime is confounded, invariably causing panic and driving it to react in inappropriate ways.”

This description seems so true when one considers the action and impact of the courageous witnesses of truth I just mentioned.

It is clear that the acknowledgement of the role this hidden sphere plays is meant to change radically the way we think about social change. It is no longer an institutional revolution but it is a deep transformation of heart-mind. It is why it has to happen bottom-up. Our destiny is in our own hands because the hidden sphere is in us; and nowhere else. There is no other path. What a powerful revelation.

The hidden sphere and our capacity for choice

It is in the hidden sphere (our personal culture) that we find the resources to make fundamental choices concerning the values we want to prioritise.

What has been explained so far demonstrates that the capacity to change our social settings and the values that foster them resides in the hidden sphere, in the people themselves and not in the institutions. Institutions, governments, parliaments are unable to change the nature of what takes root and grows in the hidden sphere. Of course they can take measures of repression; but this

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does not allow them to control the hidden sphere; this is the inappropriate reaction Havel mentions in his text.

But the reverse is true: the power of the hidden sphere can change the institutions. I have mentioned earlier that our institutions are impregnated by the ways we have experienced our early stages of life and the values we have imbibed. The hidden sphere is the container of this energy for shaping our institutions, one way or the other.

When the movement of ordinary people becomes powerful enough because it is nourished by the hidden sphere of which they share the dominant values, state institutions can be transformed. They can only respond to the pressure that new practices by ordinary people will generate. They cannot act, except marginally or they have to react to the will of the ordinary people. But this can go in any direction. Stagnation can be led by the disinterest and indifference of the people; there is then status quo. Change can be nourished by anger and resentment; there is then violence and destruction with harshness of right-wing politics that creates polarisation and marginalisation. Regeneration can be nourished by a deep awareness of the need for peace, equity and inclusiveness; there is then an active energy to counter the forces of domination, of exploitation and of lie. And so many alternatives. This is the power of truth Havel mentions.

This seems very simplistic but it is not. It is indeed very complex because so many factors come into play. This power of the hidden sphere is at the same time the high privilege and the tragedy of our democratic systems. Institutions are captive of the (no-)will of people. Democracy restrains change unless it generates it in a radical way. All depends on the proportion of ordinary people willing to see a change and acting upon it; and which change they want to initiate. One says that, if 3% of the population truly mobilises, change will happen. But for this to

happen these 3% have to become truly active and practise the new ways.

So far our institutions are dominantly the expression of white male supremacy and they can only escape this dreadful destiny if a sufficient number of people take a clear stand and act accordingly. A sufficient number of mature people is needed to initiate change and to reverse these qualities: to put an end to male dominance, to recognise and value the role of women, to protect and favour the expressions of recessive Yin qualities, to practise non-violence, and so many other transformations of this type.

But there is a drastic and painful condition to this: they must all undergo together, each in their own way, a fundamental change in their hidden sphere which must first integrate these regenerating values as personal evidences.

The revolution does not happen top-down but bottom-up. The real transformation of our social texture is rooted in our personal life, in our hidden sphere. This is sadly a point that we abstain to mention and to focus upon. It is also what Marxism and most theories about social change ignored. History has taught us that it is not enough to mobilise people around an issue and an ideology; we need much more; we need people to first transform the way they think and they behave. This cannot be done top-down, unless repressive means are applied and indoctrination is practised. But then it misses also its purpose which is to invite people to convert to more creative and human behaviours. This can only be done by the people themselves, in their own will, by creative and inspiring examples of practice. It is why revolution (transformation) starts at home, in the hidden sphere, at a high personal price.

We saw, about so-called primitive societies, how they were said to have no will of their own or no capacity for choice. I tried to demonstrate that these were in fact normal people like you and

me who had also their own sensibility, their own sense of comfort, their own preferences and that they had also therefore their own capacity for choice. I tried also to show that this ability for choice was probably much more consistently the reason for which these original forms of societies did not follow the pattern of the linear evolution that would mean, according to our Western perception, that a band becomes a tribe then a chiefdom than a state, evolving from a primitive state to a so-called developed state, into ever more complexity.

This capacity for choice we all have is fundamental and much too often neglected or ignored; because we prefer to think according to simplistic patterns which justify the evolution our Western society has followed. But there are many other alternatives; and this is where resides our potential to transform our white supremacist model into a more compassionate one that will allow recessive qualities to come to expression. We can then only be enriched, all of us, when women or non-white races can be full participants and when we, all of us, will practise inclusiveness that will allow people, all of us, to bring their full creative contribution to our common together-living.

Our personal culture, which thrives in the hidden sphere, nourishes our choices and allows us to elaborate new patterns of development, based on egalitarian values, led by the will to care and to share, to see that nobody remains left behind.

We will need courage to do so, first giving shape to the premises of these new behaviours, then practising them at a small scale and finally living in resistance to the existing social settings (living within the truth), sometimes in clashes that will force us to pay for this faculty for discernment that recognises the true paths of freedom; but the final reward will largely compensate for these transitional phases.

The movement bottom-up does not mean we are alone. We need of course to ally with one another in order to form the 3%

necessary to trigger change. But, more than that, we will need each other to give birth to this new culture in the open, so that the hidden sphere gives birth to new ways of thinking and behaving, first at a private level, in the narrow group of like-minded people, then later in a more open and public setting when these more human values can be expressed and practised and transformed into institutional forms.

It seems idealist. But, as Havel mentions it, there is only one path: the human predisposition to truth or our instinctual need for living in the truth. Shall we be courageous enough to follow this path? There is indeed no other that leads to life.

This is how culture becomes civilisation. Civilisation is then the visible or material expression of these fundamental choices borne in the hidden sphere, for many of us. From an addition of multiple personal choices it transforms into a collective option, as much as possible in consensus. This expression of culture into civilisation becomes then the energy to bring civilisation to higher maturity and deeper consciousness. It is a very serious and powerful alternative; a consistent alternative to the illusory linear pattern of development from band to tribe to chiefdom to state into more complexity and more materialism or technology, to which it proposes a remedy. The path of evolution broadens and becomes inclusive of all differences, hence much richer and much wider.

All starts in the hidden sphere which also is the sphere of our personal fundamental choices. Exciting... but scary.

Freedom and search for identity

The 5 forms of freedom

The five basic forms of freedom are: freedom to move, to disobey, to create new social settings, to be enriched in our hidden sphere by wisdom teaching, to care and be cared for.

This freedom of choice, which each one of us may in principle enjoy and practise, can only become active if we are aware of the constant possibility for many alternative potentials – many other choices are always possible – and if the possibility to practise these choices is more or less real, i.e. means at a “reasonable” price – which does not necessarily exclude a part of suffering.

Graeber and Wengrow, whom I have already mentioned earlier when I quoted Kandiaronk, describe in the same book⁷ three forms of freedom, to which I will add two of my own.

- 1) **Freedom to move away or relocate:** This is the basic freedom to go away from where one stays or works and to go elsewhere and stay there. This means freedom of movement. It is more than the right not to be imprisoned or attached to a master or employer; it is unimpaired mobility in space but also in mind. It provides also the freedom to move out of given settings.
- 2) **Freedom to disobey:** This is the freedom not to follow orders or regulations, not to adapt to the existing structure or customs. This means the right to follow the instruction of one’s own heart-mind, according to the inspiration that comes

from the hidden sphere, especially when it is in conflict with the outer settings.

- 3) **Freedom to create or transform social relationships:** This is the freedom to change, or attempt to change, the existing social order, at least at a micro-level. This means the ability to reorganise the social surroundings according to different premises, without being under the pressure of the existing authorities or groups of interests that defend the status quo.

To these three freedoms inspired by Graeber and Wengrow, I would like to add two more which are of different nature because they do not depend on us alone but mainly on the context and on what this context needs to provide for us if we intend to practise the three freedoms mentioned above. You can only move somewhere else if you can be welcome there. You can only disobey if you are not consequently oppressed by authorities or isolated from all others. You can only build another social order if other people are also part of it and cooperate because this social order inevitably needs their participation. Of course true freedom means that you can also act as a prophet, against the odds, without these favourable conditions inviting you to do so.

There is a basic principle of which we are too often forgetful when we speak about freedom. It is more or less generally clear that the degree of freedom we may enjoy depends mainly on our own freedom of spirit and courage to take a stand; or that it depends too on our own trust that our intuition will lead us somewhere, because our fundamental freedom takes root in the hidden sphere. But it is less clear to us that all aspects of freedom do not only depend on ourselves, but that they depend also on what the given context should offer or make possible for us. This means that our freedom rooted in the hidden sphere cannot be complete if this context does not fulfil some of our specific needs. It is realistic to recognise that we cannot deliver

⁷ David Gaerber and David Wengrow: *The Dawn of Everything, a New History of Humanity*, Penguin Books, 2022.

everything because we are all interdependent; and each of us needs the support of others which makes freedom possible.

For instance, we need to be fed, to breath, to be warm, and these qualities depend on the context, not on us, not on our hidden sphere. We cannot be free if the context does not provide these precious basic resources. But we can also admit that such material resources that sustain our bodies do not need to be mentioned here, because they are evidently necessary and it does not add much to our reflection to mention them. Yet some more subtle resources need here to be mentioned to emphasise this dependence of ours on the social context and especially on its necessary maturity to make us able to practise our freedom. Hence, to this list of three forms of freedom, we can add two more, which depend on resources or qualities delivered by our social context.

4) **Freedom to access knowledge:** This is the freedom to be enriched in our hidden sphere by the teaching of shared knowledge and of wisdom that others can provide. This means it is our right (at least our need) to receive our share of this heritage which may open new doors because it makes us aware of previously unknown dimensions of life or practical possibilities. It is also our duty to share with others what we know and what we have understood. Without this two-way teaching we cannot be fed intellectually and spiritually by the common heritage of mankind. Knowledge and wisdom are not identical: knowledge rather concerns intellectual (left brain)⁸ faculties and technical know-how while wisdom concerns the general meaning of life, the understanding of the essence of the universe (right brain faculty) and how life should be surrendered to.

⁸ About right and left brain, see the note in the second part of the introduction.

5) **Freedom to care and to be cared for:** This is the freedom to be able to rely on others, in solidarity and in compassion. This means that life is not a struggle of each one against one another but an alliance on which each one may rely. This is the perspective to find support in others and therefore to dare to practise these five forms of freedom. It also naturally implies that we practise care ourselves because it is the necessary condition for us to be able to receive it.

There is an important aspect in these five forms of freedom: there are all reciprocal. If I practise one of them, it should not restrict others to practise any of these five forms of freedom. This means the practice of my own forms of freedom cannot be at the expense of others. It is why the freedoms of knowledge-wisdom and of care are so important; they foster the perfect reciprocity that is needed.

These five forms of freedom come here at the right time to illustrate how much the real change happens in ourselves, in the hidden sphere, before it happens in a wider circle. This is a fundamental truth which is completely neglected. We become more aware of this negligence when our hidden sphere is richly animated and we consider our future and the real potentials or necessities for change that are offered to all of us.

By contrast, when the hidden sphere is weak and neglected, it is also this fundamental negligence that makes us consider with contempt the so-called primitive people as retarded on the linear line from band to state, into higher levels of market and technology; instead of considering that these early people (our ancestors) had just the same ability for choice as we have it now and they have made the best possible use of it to choose another road.

Why do we deny the one (our own potentials) and the other (the choices of our ancestors)? This is a very puzzling question. The reason for this double denial is less to be found in ignorance than

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in a form of blindness that wishes to receive all goods from above (top-down) instead of participating in providing them (bottom-up); this means in making these goods as integral parts of our own shared reality. Hence the question: how is my personal daily practice in inventing new ways (the 5 freedoms) related with the practice of others? and how do we go from the first (my practice) to the second (their practice) and to a collective movement?

Freedom to be rooted in the hidden sphere

It is our choice to follow the old patterns (generally egocentric patterns of domination) or to develop our own path, rooted in our natural human predisposition to truth.

We saw earlier how the early years of our life in the home foster our being and the values that we will find normal to rule our society. It is how we get too easily accustomed to the practice of oppression such as male domination, marginalisation of women, exploitation of nature, social stratification. Later we will, instinctively and often unconsciously, reproduce these patterns in the way we relate with one another and the way we shape our institutions and develop our social relationships. This is what Havel calls the lie that surrounds us. Either this is the totalitarian regime that tries to control us or this is the capitalism system that tries to extract the maximum of wealth out of us. Even if our democratic society seems to evolve smoothly there is always this dominance of oppressive patterns: increasing gap between rich and poor, white supremacy, neo-colonialism, decay of biodiversity, collapse of democracy, intoxication of information by advertisement and fake news, etc.

As Havel reminds us, this is the lie that surrounds us, but there is also the uniqueness of the hidden sphere where our deepest being finds refuge and identity because this is the cradle of its true

nature. Remember, Havel writes: “Individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is something in them to alienate. The terrain of this violation is their authentic existence. Living the truth is thus woven directly into the texture of living a lie. [Living the truth] is the repressed alternative [which is rooted in] the human predisposition to truth.” In other words the hidden sphere is the space of our inviolable source of life and faithfulness to truth that will challenge the lie because both cannot cohabit and we have to choose either to surrender to the lie, making a pact with the oppressor, or to defend our living space in truth, becoming resistant or, even better, agents of change. The true resistance is indeed not on our side, because we tend to live in the truth, but on the side of the oppressor who resist the free expression of our true nature and the flow of life.

This innate tendency to be rooted in our hidden space and to live in the truth and, on the other hand, the ingrained reactive oppression that it generates from the dominant power as resistance to life are well illustrated by all the movements we can observe throughout history. This antagonism of two forces has shaped the struggles for liberation of indigenous people against their invaders, the uprisings against slavery, the so-called *dissident* movement – who is dissident? – in totalitarian USSR, the abolition of apartheid in South-Africa, the rebellion against racism in the USA.

In this antagonism between truth and lie, the hidden sphere becomes the cradle for change. There is an imperative in our deeper being. We know that equality and equity go hand in hand with excellence. When all people have access to the best possibilities of expression, the global society, and each its members, get the best possible conditions of life.

This is at the core of the hidden sphere. If we do not examine the values we have received from our surroundings, we will fall into their lowest level of implementation, repeating instinctive, or

lazily, the patterns of domination, egocentrism, greed and what follows out of these qualities. But, if we take care of our hidden sphere as our precious garden where we grow our deeper being, we will develop our own form of awareness rooted in truth as our deeper nature (Havel). We will then aspire at living within the truth.

There is in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* a fascinating dialogue⁹ in which the two protagonists share about their past. Kostoglotov is a convict who has lost everything because the state power has taken everything from him. He has in this way, and against the will of the state, been made free because, in depriving him of what he had, the state took also away from itself any means to put pressure on him. He had nothing more to lose. He could act as he wanted, although in a very restricted space. By contrast, the other protagonist, Shulubin, was a librarian. He was forced by the authority to destroy books that were considered by the state power as subversive. He was then, day after day, forced to do what he did not want to do, each act being a minor negation of freedom and truth. In the dialogue I refer to the two men are comparing their two different stories. Kostoglotov has been able to remain free, despite the oppression, because he could remain rooted in what Havel calls the hidden sphere while Shulubin had to align with the lie, betraying in this way his own hidden sphere.

This example taken out of literature is powerful to illustrate how our choice to be rooted in ourselves is essential if we want to remain faithful to our natural vocation of living within the truth. If we do not decide consciously to be rooted in our hidden sphere, we go astray, taken by the dominating flow of the lie to

which we adapt, even without being conscious of how much we have lost our way.

Reactive struggle against or progressive hope for gain

When we struggle to implement essential changes in our society (social justice, climate change, democracy), we have to fight against the status quo; yet we need to foster unity.

The theme of change and how change happens is a much too vast topic to be treated here, but I would like to make a few short comments because this theme is too important to be ignored. Change is the core and mover of this confrontation between truth and lie.

Given the complexity of this theme I have chosen to make here just a few short comments:

- If we do not revise the priorities and behaviours we have absorbed at home in our early childhood, we will follow instinctively the lowest denominator. We need then to revise with full consciousness the values that guide our lives. This is the first step of change, in our own hidden sphere.
- Change, when it takes slowly form at a small scale, tends first to generate resistance in the surroundings because, as human beings, we all have our own interests we want to defend and our own social situation we are afraid of losing.
- In the mind of many, change means that we could lose something, rather than that, in terms of quality, we could gain much more than we have now.
- Change that happens top-down is not integrated. It is only external and formal. Content comes from culture, i.e. from the hidden sphere.

⁹ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Cancer Ward*. Many translations, many publishers. The dialogue I refer to is in chapter 31 "*Idols of the Market Place*".

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- Change happens bottom-up. It starts from the hidden sphere because it is linked with our aspirations for living within the truth which can have no other root than our heart-mind.
 - Change cannot remain indefinitely in the hidden sphere as an intuition or a thought; it soon needs to appear at full light, to take a concrete shape that will materialise and become more concrete, also more visible to others.
 - Materialisation is the opportunity to test our initial intuition and how it can be given concrete shape. Its visibility is also a tool to convince others.
 - Change requires first courage and discipline to confront our own habits, superfluous desires and addictions. It requires concessions and detachment.
 - Because change is so fragile at the nascent stage, we have to find special imaginative ways of expression that enable change to take shape without being directly confronted to the resistance of others, especially when it has to grow progressively.
 - Change is always linked with the context, because our ways of life are interdependent. This means we have to change this external relationship at the same time as we implement change for ourselves.
 - Change is not only about new intuitions, new ideas, new projects; it is principally and before all about practice, and practice at the most mundane level. It challenges each of us to become first experimenters of the changes we aspire to.
 - The fact we have to become its first instigators (practice) makes change so challenging and difficult for each of us, but also, at this price, so convincing. It is doubly proofed: proofed as a necessity (purpose) and proofed as a possibility (reality).
- What if we are alone to see the necessity of change, as prophets do? If our surroundings are indifferent to the need for change, like about climate change, or with supremacy, or modern slavery, or inherent violence in our society. We talk often about it, but who truly wants to change and commit to it?
 - To be convincing change must preferably bring advantages to these exterior spectators or neighbours who may see the nature of change and evaluate whether, in their mind, it is positive or not.
 - There are two different coexisting aspects in change: 1) what it replaces and opposes – this is the aspect of the struggle against – and 2) what it resolves and offers response to – this is the gain. The first has to confront fears and privileges and generates too often struggle or conflict or even sometimes division. Where is true dialogue? And the second uses seduction and creates cooperation and unity.
 - There is a stage when change that happens bottom-up has to be translated into institutions or regulations in order to be consolidated, especially when it concerns the wider society as a whole. This phase is essential to prevent the reaction to undo change. This is often the weak point of independence movements; they do not know how to consolidate their gains.

Two opposed strategies of communication

Dialogue can be linear and dialectical or circular and dialogical. The first increases division and is selective while the second generates union and is inclusive.

The need for change implies that the different possible solutions are debated among all the people who are concerned. This implies dialogue between all the parties that are involved. We

will describe later two main different categories of cultures which are opposed in the ways they think and in the ways they apprehend reality. I will just describe them here shortly although I will examine them more in depth later.

First there is the distinction between linear and circular thinking:

- The linear way is fundamentally based on rationalism thinking. It progresses rationally from one premise to the next. It is principally the way of Northern cultures which proceed according to the progression along the one-directional line of the chain from causes to consequences. The linear pattern of so-called historical progress, towards more complexity and more materialism, that we have examined earlier (band-tribe-chieftdom-state) results from this way of understanding or interpreting reality. Development is understood in this case as a progression forwards that leaves the past behind and follows the development of time which is also linear, like the progression of the digital numbers of the clocks at the airport. The process is selective because it eliminates progressively what does not fit into the representation of reality (image) that it is constructing.
- By contrast the circular way is progressing in circles, like a bird of prey that circles at different altitudes. It is mainly the practice of traditional societies. It reviews repetitively the same place from a slightly different angle, adding then additional descriptions that, by addition of new elements, correct and complete the precedent stages of perception. The process is inclusive because it integrates ever more aspects of reality, even if they seem contradictory; reality is indeed complex and presents many aspects which are often antagonistic.

Very narrowly linked with these two ways of perceiving and describing the world, we can distinguish two different

intellectual discursive methods that reveal also two different ways of thinking:

- The dialectic approach – mainly Northern – progresses in a linear way from thesis (the affirmation) to antithesis (the contradiction) to synthesis (the conclusion) by making order in the facts and interpretations which are considered. Rationalism is here again the dominant energy. The strategy consists in producing a conclusion that is coherent and has integrated most of the precedent considerations. But, to do so, it needs to eliminate everything that it cannot integrate. The conclusion must be coherent although reality is not; everything that cannot fit into the conclusion is marginalised or even evacuated, i.e. denied. The strangest thing in this dialogical and selective approach is that the one who opposes us brings a very important contribution that invites us to widen our spectrum of view and his presence is most needed for this reason. We need our opponent because he keeps us alive, on the move, puts pressure on us to open to the new. The opponent is no longer a hostile presence, he becomes a help; yet the dialectic approach leaves him no space.
- By contrast the dialogical approach – mainly in traditional cultures – accumulates many points of view and paints a picture like a mosaic, by addition of small elements which, all together, will produce a new image that integrates all elements, although some of them may express something that contradicts what other elements say. The resulting image is generally beyond rational grasp but it is inclusive and does not leave in principle any important contributions behind.

It is interesting to observe that each of these two last approaches fits better with one of the precedent pair: the linear perception with the dialectical approach, and the circular perception with the dialogical approach. We will later come back to this distinction between these two ways of being and apprehending reality,

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which emphasises two opposed ways in which we observe and interpret reality. We can see how the first category prepares the way to supremacy while the second one is more receptive and welcoming.

Dialogue as inclusiveness

When a community debates about change, transformation should not be perceived in terms of polarisation (for/against) but in terms of inclusiveness of all contributions.

Let's now come back to the practice of dialogue. As we can see the second way, the circular and dialogical approach, is more inclusive and more able to integrate many elements which can even be contradictory. This is a fundamental aspect we too often neglect.

In our public debates – even when they truly take place and leave space for everybody to express their opinion – there is a dominant tendency to follow the first linear dialectical approach. Differences of perception and interpretation lead very quickly to accentuated differentiation and then later to confrontation.

When, you and me, we talk together and exchange opinions about any topic, we will soon tend to radicalise our respective positions. I will increasingly, along the discussion, defend my own opinion against yours, emphasising in which way it is different from yours. I may recognise that some of your points are right, but my tendency will naturally be to accentuate the contrast between our respective positions, although maybe these differences are minor and we have more in common than it appears in this increasing confrontation. It does not mean we will finish by a fight, but the discussion, instead of evolving towards an inclusive conclusion that could integrate the many aspects of our respective contributions, will rather tend to emphasise the points of divergence or even disagreement. This is the normal

trend that one can observe in most debates. Differences invite to accentuate differentiation instead of finding consensus. This is called schismogenesis.

In our Northern society we are more inclined to follow the divisive path. It is why our modern nations are ever more divided, often even simply polarised between two positions. And all others tend to be rejected because the confrontation necessitates that we find of form of cohesion in adversity and constitute in this purpose coherent opposing blocks. Cohesion, based on polarisation, becomes then priority, even, if necessary, at the negation of truth. Fake news and fake discourses – in their linear progression that never looks back – replace open dialogue and authentic listening. The society is consequently split in many clusters, often opposed by pairs: Conservatives against Labour, Republicans against Democrats, male against female, queer against straight, White against Black, rich against poor.

We can observe how authentic dialogue follows rather the second approach (circular dialogical) than the first (linear dialectical) while the natural tendency to confrontation – which would ensue out of the natural trend I described earlier – would have rather led us to division and rejection of the perception expressed by the other.

Something very important must be added. The trend to polarisation following the dialogical linear path is only the natural tendency, when we follow the slope of egocentric self-defence. By being aware of this trend, we may also both, you and me in our attempt for true dialogue, make an effort of awareness and reciprocal respect to allow the best possible integration of all elements in focussing rather on the diversity and complementarity of our contributions. It is fascinating to observe that this simple awareness and the resulting effort will radically change the way we communicate.

Instead of focussing on our own points of view we will attempt to see, at a higher and more global level, what we have in common or how far our respective points of view are maybe different but, precisely for this reason, complementary; and how they contribute to counterbalancing one another and to create together a much larger picture that we may discover together. Our contributions enlarge this picture and help even to make evident some correlations that earlier were not visible. A more complex representation finds its expression – this is only a representation and not the reality! – that will help us to better understand reality. And this more adequate and multifaceted image will better guide us to handle a complex reality and find ways of common actions. And, more important, it will enhance our level of cooperation because we will need each other to keep in mind this composite complexity we cannot reach alone.

Our attitude depends on the quality of the energy that moves us, whether it is fear and self-defence or whether it is compassion and welcoming. Fear is defensive and creates a wall between you and me. Compassion is all inclusive. It broadens its spectrum in order for us to embrace all points of view, even the ones which are antagonistic. Because of this energy that embraces all parts, compassion opens us to the other and to other ways of thinking and interpreting reality. This alternative and more conscious path can only be richer for each of us. Compassion (as it etymologically means *suffering with*) is a way of embracing the other as she is. It is a way to walk with the other, to accompany her. We need urgently to replace a mentality of conflict in our way to act towards one another by this creative energy of compassion. We are all indeed very similar. Only compassion can allow us to understand each other.

In regard with these considerations we can then conclude what dialogue needs to do to succeed. People should sit in a circle that does not create any hierarchy between them, each one sitting on a similar chair that is equidistant from the centre where nobody

sits because this centre marks the point of convergence that nobody can own or control. Each one of the participants, who sit on the periphery of the circle, contributes with their own point of view or perception. All contributions are thrown into the circle and the agglomerate of all these diverse gifts starts, like a mosaic, to progressively form a complex picture made of many aspects. Note that, contrarily to the dialectal approach, the reality of the arising picture can only take shape out of the multiplicity of contributions. The higher the diversity of these contributions is, the more complex becomes the representation (image); and the better it can integrate many different and even antagonistic aspects. It is why the dialogical approach allows the integration of diversity. By its effort to remain open to all, it becomes inclusive. Each one can express their point of view and be heard.

This is a very different picture from what we see or observe in our modern society, especially in the media or in parliament. Reality is by essence plural and inclusive while we tend to artificially make it monolithic and exclusive.

The fascinating thing about this form of dialogue is that it happens without involving our ability to censor the other in the way we accept or not to agree with him. The focus is on recognition of the other and of who he is. It is in priority about letting him express himself, in order to be heard and recognised for who he is. The effort first concerns listening and recognition, and not our usurped tendency to decide whether we allow the other to be and to express an opinion. The focus is on the other, and not on ourselves. We are “reduced” (in fact enhanced) to be listeners; or even very active listeners, nevertheless listeners who have no ability to discriminate.

This is what the Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa has taught us and demonstrated after the end of the apartheid. The possibility to speak and to be heard was the principal motivation of the perpetrators to recognise their crimes. The promise of

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forgiveness was the condition for them to talk and to be heard and for all to recognise what had happened. As Desmond Tutu¹⁰ used to explain, in a court case, everyone tries to hide the truth in order to avoid punishment. In the case of the Truth and Reconciliation process, it was exactly the contrary; to be pardoned and to find peace in oneself, one had to recognise and say all the truth. What a difference.

And the Uluru Statement from the Heart, here in Australia, aims at the same quality for Indigenous people: to be heard and recognised. There is then no more censor. And the whole purpose is to create unity, inclusiveness of a maximum of diversity, in order to regenerate the social order; and to give back its peace and high range of diversity to the society that wants to heal its wounds and divisions.

True dialogue aims at creating relationships of friendship. We have to discover what it means to be friends when we differ so much. Both aspects (difference and friendship) are not antagonistic. They rather feed one another. But to discover this deep link of friendship we need to discover how friendship needs otherness, but a form of otherness that is at the same time inclusive. This is the hard challenge of dialogue. We need the one who is antagonistic to us because she invites us to open our mind to include her. Of course this cannot be done at any price. It is not a unilateral effort. It is common work of reciprocity but it is yet our personal responsibility to play it in our own personal way. How far can I renounce my own ideas or feelings or perceptions in order to commune with the other? Often my ideas or feelings or perceptions are working more as blockages than as bridges. This is our personal responsibility to know the

¹⁰ See Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report, 1998, especially Vol. 1.

difference. Do I create a blockage or do I build a bridge? Interesting interrogation of our deep selves.

The search for identity

Identity is not composed of individual characteristics that distinguish us from others; but it takes shape through the ways we have to belong and the art we have to relate to many others.

At first glance the description of open dialogue I just made seems to deny our right to be distinct from others and to have a proper individual identity, because this form of dialogue deprives us from the possibility that debate, in its primitive form I described earlier, offers us to oppose the other and to show consequently that we are different, i.e. that we are (identity).

It is true that we are accustomed to understand our identity as an agglomerate of distinct characteristics that seem to make us unique. Certainly we are unique in the way our personal characteristics combine but it is erroneous to believe that these many characteristics form our identity. Our identity does not rely on our gender, our age, our physical traits, our race, our nationality, our culture, our religion, our profession, our class, or many other "things" we are meant or seem to be, although it is also true that these aspects form the person we are; but form and identity are very distinct. In fact we are none of these things I just enumerated, although these are components of our physical or social profile.

Our identity relies rather, in my understanding, on our way of being, this means it does not rely so much on our physical entity (gender, race, etc.) that has its distinct visible aspects, but it relies rather on our own way of being as a living being, i.e. as a person who evolves and therefore constantly changes. Our colour, size, aspect, profile are only minor qualitative aspects

that do truly not define who we are, although it is in this “envelope”, and with its support, that we express our identity.

I prefer to define identity in two ways: the way we belong and the way we relate, which are both not exclusive but inclusive. When we belong, we are part of; when we relate, we are connected with. Identity, in the continuity of true dialogue, becomes a link to the world, a link to the others, and not a confrontation with the other, based on contrast.

Identity in the way we belong: First we belong to the land. We belong to the land more than we can own it. The property of land is a total absurdity because the land has been here millions of year before we were, and, when we’ll die, it still remains here unchanged. The land forms our origin; it supports us and feeds us in a very practical way. But it does this also in a more subtle way: it nourishes our soul and supports our moods. It is truly our mother-father. Indigenous people believe it is a sort of incarnation or expression of our ancestors. I truly believe they are right. Our heritage is first accessible through the land. This is our primordial teaching.

This means that we belong to a place, in the wider sense of it. The land has different energies, according to where you stand. Depending where you stand, you can feel some revitalising energies or, on the contrary, some draining energies. Swamps are known to take energy out of you, while waves or a flowing river contribute to recharge you. The land does the same because it is energised by many veins of flowing energies of all types.

We belong also to a community, whether it is our home that has fostered our early years, as seen earlier, or our local community. When we belong, it is first because we depend on the others and on the resources the land provides. It is also because we contribute and we feel concerned; at least when we do more than being consumers of what is on offer. The degree of our

belonging can be measured by the contributions we make to the wellbeing of our community or to its members.

It is essential to see that this belonging is all-inclusive. It is not based on the opposition Us-and-Them. I can belong to different communities, if I am involved in the dynamic of more than one. I’m even inevitably involved in many clusters: the land I live on, my home, my neighbourhood, my bowling club, my parish, my party, the business where I work, the network of shops I visit regularly. Belonging means then being part of something wider. I belong also to my region, to my nation, to humanity. Although these forms of belonging seem more abstract, they become more tangible at certain occasions, when events make our common belonging more perceptible: a flood, a war, a famine, or a celebration, a commitment to something wider than ourselves.

Identity in the way we relate: The way we relate to a place or to others makes all the difference. As illustrated in the example of the debate that tends to enhance oppositions and polarisation, we can relate to others in a conflicting way which will mark the divisions and emphasis on our separateness. The ego needs often to distinguish itself in order to appear more sublime than it can be. This attempt for self-aggrandisement will trigger competition and conflict while true attention and compassion will allow the ego to recede and the heart-mind to prevail and to foster better communication and unity, at least through more attentive and receptive listening.

The quality of our attention is not only focusing (not being distracted) but it is also opening of our own being to the mystery of the other. We cannot decide who the other is. We cannot measure how much she is right or wrong. We can only try to understand what she tries to express and to remember that it is only the visible part of the iceberg. The essential remains hidden to our eyes.

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Our natural tendency to hide is not necessarily a form of self-defence. It is often the fact of an impossibility to convey to the other what one truly feels or believes. Words are awkward tools for communication; especially because they evoke different things for each of us, depending on our own respective experiences.

We are then responsible for the way we relate. The other does too, but our responsibility is to overcome obstacles of communication and to try to come in touch with the being of the other, i.e. the one who has a depth without limits. It is then presumptuous to judge the other according our own criteria. Of course we need discernment, but discernment is an interpretation, it means a form of processing of what we see, it means something distinct from what is because we have transformed it in our mind.

True dialogue requires also acceptance and tolerance. It is hard to distinguish what we have to accept from what we have to reject because it is harmful. Discernment tends to lead to scission while tolerance tends to unify, to create a link, a way to relate. Tolerance is not a letting go of anything; it is a subtle ability to encompass and embrace, yet with discernment.

The fascinating thing in this understanding of identity, when it focuses on belonging to the land and community or on relating with others, is that the essential does not happen in the people themselves, in the protagonists, but in the space in-between them, in the relationship; in the relationship between me and the land, me and my community, me and you, me and them. This is by excellence the space of friendship. And, most important, this space in-between is free of any constraint because there is there no object and no matter. It means it is completely free to become what we make of it. Here again, this is our choice which is the determining factor. Choice happens in this space in-between.

This space in-between us all is the space of expression of our hidden sphere.

This is probably the highest possible expression of culture, because it is made of pure life, of pure freedom, of love when we are capable of it. It is what we make it, according to who we are: this is true identity, as a movement of flowing life, as something ever changing and never graspable, because it cannot be frozen. Like water it escapes our will to control it.

The energy of Life

Our common humanity

Our mind has difficulties grasping the general picture; it gets hooked on small disturbances and misses the opportunity to perceive what links us: our common humanity.

Let's start with a metaphor. Imagine a large pond with its peaceful surface that is disturbed neither by the wind, nor by any stream, nor by any wildlife. The surface looks like a mirror. Suddenly a fish jumps out of the water. It makes a splash. Your mind will immediately focus on this splash and the trace it leaves on the surface of the water. Your mind is attracted by this little detail, which is completely insignificant and minor in the whole picture. The mind gets hooked by the small disturbance and loses the awareness of the whole. Hence the small disturbance, although insignificant, comes to dominate the general quality of the whole.

This is how our mind works. It cannot grasp a general state of peace and harmony; it cannot embrace the energy of the place as a dominant and major quality that impregnates the whole of the landscape. It can only feel it without being able to focus on what

it is in its essence. It cannot grasp it because it has no hold on it. As soon as the fish jumps out of the water, the attention focuses on it and gets side-tracked and forgets about the general picture that it cannot embrace. It prefers the minor accident to the global smooth context.

This metaphor teaches us something very important about the way our mind (and our attention) work. It tells us that we cannot grasp – or maybe in the best case only with a great effort of concentration – what is smooth and harmonious and what creates the general atmosphere of peace and harmony and well-being which we are sensitive to but we cannot become aware of, as a discernible reality. We only have a general impression of well-being, which ensues out of this special quality of harmony, but we cannot grasp what harmony is. By contrast our mind escapes as soon as possible when a small disturbance happens and catches our attention. The detail becomes central; the general frame dissolves.

Our mind hates to become aware of a general context, but it loves to focus on details, especially on disturbances. This tendency to concentrate on details explains our innate attraction for gossip, for small stories, for small conflicts, for little differences, for anything that distinguishes something from something else, for small contrasts. It explains also why we are more attracted by small stories of conflicts than by big panoramas of cooperation and care. It explains also the success of social media which likes to spread dissension, tension, polarisation, divide. It is why the algorithms that guide the users towards more conflicting debates favour tension, hate speech, abuse, which attract more participants and foster more income from advertisements.

Even in our daily encounters we notice more easily what separates us than what unites us: we immediately notice that the other is smaller, or has a darker skin, or is a different gender, or

speaks with a defect. And we cannot see any longer what unites us, what we have in common and what we share, even when this common origin or state of humanity is much more important than the little detail that makes the difference between you and me.

The metaphor of the pond, with its peace and harmony, represents what we have in common: a planet that feeds us, a nature which regulates all natural cycles of reconstitution of resources and absorption (recycling) of wastes, a universe that rules the alternation of days and nights, of seasons, of moon cycles, a human physiology that relies on the same principles of equilibrium and similar genes, enzymes, organs, processes, and a common inherited humanely oriented culture, despite differences of emphasis or expression. We generally tend to lose the whole picture and get hooked on the detail, especially when this detail is conflicting, at the expense of the uniting perception of our common humanity and of our interdependence.

Our mind is recalcitrant to the smooth, to the plane, to the gentle. It likes asperities, accidents, conflicts, tensions. General qualities scare us because they are impossible to focus on, by lack of asperities or disturbances. They are smooth realities without handles to grasp them. We can only experience them with our deeper being, when the vigilant active mind remains in a certain way pushed aside.

This means that we are constantly side-tracked by what matters least and we cannot embrace what matters most. This is the general tendency of our mind when we let it run free. But, if we want to, we can also tame this wild beast of mind and try to better control what it is processing and the way it does it. This requires a solid determination and a great effort of observation and awareness of what is developing in front of us.

We need to learn how to defocus from the detail and to go back to a wider perception of the general picture, to come back from

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the accident of the splash to the whole impression of peace and harmony of the pond as a whole. To defocus means to embrace the whole lot with all its contrasts, in an all-encompassing way that does not select but integrates. There are no longer details; there is only a whole in diversity.

The great challenge of this essential step towards a wider more inclusive perception is how we defocus from incidents and how we embrace the broader picture. How do we let ourselves be touched by what we cannot grasp in detail? How may the smooth and mysterious penetrate our awareness without being sliced or decomposed in small parts? How do we get the wider picture in one go?

The smooth all-encompassing and the smooth hard recalcitrant

The smooth of natural harmony (metaphor: the pond) is very different from the smooth of harsh artificial pretence (metaphor: the office building in the CBD).

It must be added here that there are different forms of smoothness. I just described the smoothness of the pond as a metaphor for the peace and harmony of life when asperities have been resorbed. This is the perfect image of harmony of global perception.

But there is also an illusory smoothness which is well illustrated by the smoothness of the office buildings in the Central Business District. This is then the metaphor for the urban space when it has been sterilised, that is deprived of life, by an operation of hygienist sterilisation that tries to channel, control or even repress spontaneous expressions of life in a mind of totalitarian rejection of everything that does not fit into the productive machine. It is then hardly tolerated that people sleep outside, or that they organise parties on the street or demonstrate because

the street, in this form of take-over, is then reserved for control of streams (traffic) and no longer for community life.

The façades of the CBD are then perceived as the expression of a business society that is reduced to work, production and profit. Poor people are rejected to the periphery of the town. There is no more space for dwelling in the public space or for spontaneity.

This is precisely what George-Eugène Haussmann, under the instruction of Napoleon III, did in Paris in the 19th century (1853-70) when he proceeded with the sanitation of outlying old dwelling neighbourhoods, considered as too crowded, to create the main boulevards that brought everything in line. Dense dwelling areas with their narrow and labyrinth-like streets were replaced by new buildings of higher standard reserved for a wealthier category. The sun certainly could better penetrate the private space – this is a progress – but the eye of the police did too. It is clear that this kind of projects is not only motivated by disinterested care for the wellbeing of the inhabitants – although it is also part of the deal; it is essential to see that this new setting allowed also the cavalry to charge any potential street demonstration. This new model of hygienist tendency has since then developed in town planning and is very active nowadays, allowing a better control of the public authorities (monarchs or governments) over public space.

In this transformation the buildings lose their asperities. Steel and aluminium replace mud bricks and render. Small courtyards or public squares disappear; the public space is reserved for circulation (traffic and public transport) and loses its function for gathering of neighbours. By defining strict and exclusive functions for each space the new structure becomes poorer and loses its spontaneity and complexity. It is sterilised.

As we can see, the smoothness of hygienism – in its historical meaning in town planning – is very different from the

smoothness of the pond. It is only sterilisation and control, eradication of spontaneity; the progressive eradication of life.

Life as a process

Materialism and domination call for a manipulation of the world. Yet the world is driven by the energy of Life which has its own dynamic and laws.

After our considerations about smoothness and how it (the pond) represents perfect life or how it (hygienism) kills spontaneity, the question arises: what is life?

Very roughly one could say that there are two possible approaches of life, and two possible understandings of its essence, which remains in both cases mysterious.

- 1) The first approach is purely materialist. It says that the world is what we see. It is what science can measure and describe. Beyond its material appearance, there is nothing.
- 1) The second is not in contradiction with the first but it says that there is more than we can measure and that what we see is only an expression of what is behind. It affirms that there is a hidden order (yet perceivable in its material effects); that the universe evolves according to its own patterns, like as according to a DNA that could not be seen or dissected.

There is no objective way to demonstrate that one of these approaches is wrong and the other right because the understanding of what life is depends on more than scientific investigation. It is also the fruit of our own personal and collective experience of life which relies on much more than measurements. It arises from a global apprehension nourished by our rational mind and our intuitions and feelings. Philosophy and religion are expressions of this quest. They escape the field of science.

For me the first approach is very problematic because it makes of everything, including living beings (plants, animals, humans), something purely mechanical. In this model there is no place for beauty, justice, happiness or love because love – it is what I experience – is much more than the product of hormones. In this first model life is simplistically reduced to stuff. If one applies this materialist approach radically, even human beings are not considered as being of more value than a heap of stones, as they are only constituted of matter. They are just more complex, but they are equally material by essence, that is the product of chance and necessity. If my neighbour has no more value than a heap of stones, I can use him for my own purpose as I would use stones for building my house. I can even manipulate or destroy him. This understanding is evidently nonsense because it goes against life itself, and it goes against what I (and most people) understand of reality and of the true nature of my neighbour.

Given the nonsense of the first approach, only the second remains. Note that this second version integrates everything the first approach has, but, on top of it, it opens to a further dimension that is beyond our material world. In this second approach science remains the same serious form of understanding, and reason remains also an important tool to apprehend reality. The difference is that this second approach accepts that there is more than science can observe and prove. It understands that there is a form of energy or power, beyond appearance, that influences and leads – probably without controlling it – the evolution of the world. If this presence or energy is real it must be essential in the evolution of the world. If not, how could we explain the high diversity of life forms, from the whale to the robin, from the platypus to the giraffe, from the bacteria to the baobab? No chance and necessity, even for 14 billion years, could create such an incredible diversity of forms and demonstrate such a power of imagination and creation. Then question: who does this?

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This debate can develop for ever. Let's then stop here and come back to what life may be. This will be subjective, but yet, I believe, worth being expressed.

The reflexion we have here concerns evidently whether, in other words, there is a Ground of Being (so-called God, Yahweh, Allah, Brahman, Emptiness) or "something" similar. To progress safely it is essential to get first rid of any conception of what or who this god could be like because any representation would just be an idol and, to learn more, we need to go beyond false representations. Let's work from a blank sheet. I am aware it is hard to talk about something without projecting our preconceived representations on it. But let's try.

The essence of Life

If Life is the leading energy of the Universe, it is fundamental; and we have to adapt to its coherence and its laws as a permanent creation process.

First it is important to say that the debate about the origin of the universe – the Big Bang versus the Creation in seven days as the Bible reports it in a metaphorical way – is a false debate, because we were not there and we can only make conjectures. Everything that can be said about this origin is interesting but it does not help to know more about this Presence beyond the scene. The misunderstanding is, for me, that what we call creation is not the original act from nothing to something at the origin of the universe. How could the "something" who did it already be present and active if there was nothing? I believe that creation should be rather understood as the constant permanent process of recreating life here and now as we can observe it in our everyday life: spring produces new fruits, the chook lays eggs that give birth to new chooks, etc. This means that Creation (capital C) is a never ending process, in the present, here and now. It is a process

that we can call Life (capital L) because Creation and Life are both names for equivalent forces. Life is the energy that leads the universe. Life is the force of evolution and transformation of everything that mutates, grows, shrinks, arises, dies. Life is then to be understood as the key of everything.

As Life is the main energy that leads the universe, it has to be understood in its essence. It consists evidently in much more than the mere chain of chance and necessity. It has a pattern; it is guided by an inherent coherence and by specific laws that orient and contain its development. As said it has at its core a form of DNA that guides its action and inspires its essence and its intention or orientation; but it is nevertheless not entirely deterministic. It is principally creative; it never stops inventing new forms, as science observes and describes it. It appears to have a tendency towards more complexity and more depth or more consciousness, as Teilhard de Chardin used to express it.

Teilhard understood that the *Within* (the deeper consciousness) and the *Without* (the more complex external physical structure) are always developing in parallel and in interaction one with the other, one nourishing the other and reciprocally. Human beings are indeed meant to develop more consciousness than a heap of stones. It is why this trend toward more complexity and deeper consciousness makes our evolution very different from what it would be under the simple game of chance and necessity. In other words this Life trend is guided by a general Will or Presence (capital W and P).

If Life has its own coherence and dynamic and will, it can be described as an acting force with its own set of laws. These laws range from very palpable and measurable forces – such as the law of gravity or the law of natural cycles or the law of thermodynamic – to more complex and abstract laws such as the law of generosity (the abundance of natural production) or the need for return (the need to nourish what has nourished us).

There is also an inherent law of equity because the fruits of creation are meant to be shared. Remember what was said about change: equality and equity go hand in hand with excellence and the maximum potential for harmony. Beside equity there is also a law of love that says that we are finally not important as separate individuals but we become truly alive when we give ourselves to the ones we love.

Of course these examples are only very subjective interpretations but they show the wide range of these laws which rule the evolution of the universe. Some of these laws can be measured and proved by science; some other laws cannot be proved, like for instance the law of love or the law of equity. This shows that the purely scientific approach can never reach the bottom of the mystery. The mind and the spirit are more adequate to discern these subtle laws of the universe.

One has also to ask repetitively whether the law of love truly exists. It cannot be proved but love nevertheless exists in our life experience and its wider practice will change your life. Your choice.

Hence, according to my understanding nourished by my own experience of life, Life is the leading energy of our constant evolution and transformation. But it is not controlling. It is “only” on offer. You can draw out of it what it offers you, or not. It means Life will not impose its rules onto you. But nevertheless you have to conform to its logic if you do not want to swim against the stream; and, if you do, you have to accept the consequences; it is like not considering gravity; you’ll pay a heavy price; not because of so-called “divine punishment”, which does not exist, but simply because of the chain of causes and consequences. Hence you’ll better use this energy intelligently to help you go further on the path of your own development.

In this way of adaptation to these laws Life becomes the key for truth and for living within the truth. Everything that fits with the logic and coherence of Life is true; everything that contradicts it is untrue. Truth, although mysterious, is then defined by the nature of Life. Nobody can know exactly what it is but we can experience it. Nobody can own it but everybody may forge an opinion about what it is. Of course one has to be thoroughly honest to investigate truth and come to a clean answer.

What matters most in this issue is that we have to adapt to Truth and Life if we want to thrive. This is what our hidden sphere tells us if we listen to its message and deepen its innate teaching. Of course, as Life is not constraining or imposing its own power, it can be opposed. We can ignore its laws and go our own way and develop our own projects, according to our self-centred desires and so-called needs. But we will soon come to a sharp confrontation with the energy of Life – especially if our project is antagonistic to its laws – and with the universe in its evolution. Or we will simply miss the opportunities because we will have been too intensively absorbed in our own narrow space, like imprisoned in a small room.

A general negation of the laws of life is what happens presently with climate collapse, with fake news and political manipulation, with the decay of democracy, with the disappearance of biodiversity. It is what has happened with the colonial project and with the dominant will for supremacy everywhere. All these aspects of the present crisis of our modern society are the consequences or the symptoms of how we did not adapt to the coherence of the energy of Life. We denied its natural cycles, its equilibrium, its generosity, its expression of Truth. It is why my present attempt (or yours or ours or theirs) to better understand the essence of Life – as incomplete as it can be because of our limited means of understanding concerning such a vast mystery – is an essential key in our social evolution (culture) and the way we intend to respond to the crisis. A more conscious search for

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truth and a better understanding of these laws are part of the attempt of living in the truth grounded in the hidden sphere, in a movement of liberation from the oppression by the lie. Sadly we seem paralysed or even indifferent as long as our private interests are not concerned. But they will be impacted very soon, and drastically.

At the beginning was the Word

In the Bible Life is described as the Word, an energy that is the active Principle that leads the evolution of the world. The Verb is the principle that overrules all processes.

I would like to finish this too short reflexion about such a central theme, by a very specific illustration of what I described. I will borrow it from the Christian tradition. This reference is then expressed in Christian language, which is only one way among many other possible ways to express something central.

In this specific language of Christianity, in the Bible (at the beginning of the Gospel of John), it is said: “In the beginning was the Word¹¹”. This is an elliptic formulation that is typical of Christianity because it contents the whole of the Christian message in these few words. There are many other formulations or metaphors, in other religions or philosophy, which express something similar. But let’s concentrate here on these few words, which reveal a lot of content.

First the word *beginning* (in Greek *arche* which, in English, is also to be found in *archives* or in *archduke* or in *architecture*) means more than beginning. It means also the *principle* or the *commandment*; that is the *overarching principle* that defines the

general order. In this sense the content of these few words means also that the creation is an overarching order that rules the past, the present and the future.

And *Word* (in Greek *logos* which, in English, is also to be found in *logic* or in *geology*) has here a very broad meaning. It means much more than the word as you would say: I wrote a few words on this cards, i.e. some nouns and adjectives and verbs as basic bricks that allow us to build a sentence. In the text of John the *Word* means rather *speech*, in the same sense as when you say: please believe my word. *Word* has here a precise content; it says something, and this full content or deep significance is more important and much broader than the “brick” that expresses it.

We have even to go further, because the Word (here with capital W) is active; at least it is what the text wants us to understand. It is not only something that is expressed. It has power to transform. It is rather a *verb* that fosters action, mutation, process, movement. In fact many translations of this first sentence say: *At the origin there was the Verb*. It could be also expressed: *At the origin and principle of everything that is, there was the Verb, the Intelligence* (why not the *Wisdom*?).

I understand that this *Word* or *Verb* or *Wisdom* is the energy that guides the universe. Having a reasonable coherence the Will that encompasses everything is acting in the world, not to constrain us, but to offer us the most sophisticated gifts, if we are open to see them and to welcome them. The Verb or Will or Wisdom is the law of Life. This is the Source. Our choice.

In one short sentence, one could also, by contrast or opposition, describe what evil is, although it would need much more to grasp seriously what it is. In continuation of what has been said here above, one could say that evil is just the negation of the above, as an action without relating to this Source. It can be therefore terribly wrong, when it goes against the stream of Life; it is not the product of this Source. It is just what happens when we do

¹¹ In Greek: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος = (transcription) En arche en ho logos = (in English) In the beginning was the Word.

not draw our wisdom from it, do not conform to Life and its laws.

Evil is like plodding in the swamp and the mud although one knows more or less clearly that the source is not far upstream and can be reached if we make the effort to go where it is. If not we remain in the mud. Our choice.

All this is expressed here as metaphors. Do not take it literally.

Another dimension that Christianity cherishes is the fact that our relationship to the Word or the Verb is a personal one. It does not mean that we can chat as I can do with you. It rather means that I receive from the Source what is most adapted to me. I can also ask and receive. It is a bit like the mother and her prenatal child. They are in a personal relationship with one another. The child is nourished by the source from which he receives food and care and love as well as a whole range of emotions. The difference is that we have freedom of movement and of will.

I know this is a bit short and would need some more comments. But let's leave it at this stage.

Yet I have still to explain here why these considerations about the essence of life have their place in a book about colonialism and white supremacy. The reason is simple. If we adopt the materialist view of reality (the heap of stones as described earlier), we feel we are entitled to use and even exploit fellow beings as impersonal means for our own self-aggrandisement and enrichment. This is then the practice of the lie, as default setting when we do not make the effort to search for truth. Visibly this does not work because it brings violence and it is ethically not acceptable. We have indeed clearly many moral reasons to refute this way of being. But it is not enough to have negative criteria to reject destructive attitudes. We need much more. We need a positive perspective of what life is. Only such a vision can be strong enough not only to help us reject what is harmful but also

to help us initiate what is life giving and creative. It is the Work to be done in the hidden sphere that needs to be nourished to bring fruits. And these fruits bring change.

Hence my attempt to describe my understanding of the meaning of life was meant to emphasise this subtle link with truth, or our origins. I hope it can help, even it is very subjective and nothing can prove I'm right. I wish nevertheless it could talk to you and inspire or help you to discover or refine your own perspective.

Chapter 4: The power of white supremacy

We have so far established the main basics about culture, civilisation, choice, freedom, identity, personal consciousness, will for change, energy of life. These dimensions are not directly concerned by processes of domination and white supremacy but they belong to a higher order that rules other lower orders to which these processes belong. It is why it was important to define these fundamental concepts before we go into the specific subject of white supremacy.

We will now investigate these processes of domination and how they translate in our world, starting from the way they developed throughout history..

I will examine in this chapter how and why our Northern civilisation – mainly originally European - has become so dominant, like obsessed with supremacy. This is a very mysterious phenomenon that has spread havoc onto the whole Earth. Yes, I know it is not a Northern monopoly! I will yet focus on Northern civilisation first, not because it is more important than others, but because it has been dominating an important part of history and has then generated many principal imbalances in this world; once again not exclusively; and it did it not because of its special wisdom, but because of its good ships,

better weapons and a striking lack of moral restraint. This is not necessarily glorious; but it is nevertheless a fact.

The Northern obsession with supremacy

When we observe what we know of human evolution through the millennia and centuries, we may discern general trends that characterise history and the slow transformation of our Northern civilisation. I would like now to try to sketch very roughly this evolution in the way I perceive it, and show how it favours a slow progressive spirit of supremacy and domination over nature, over other fellow human beings, over foreign lands, over different races and cultures.

This evolution happened by stages. Although they are many more stages I will only describe sixteen of them that seem major in my eyes.

1) The discovery of agriculture

When humankind learned to cultivate the soil, it abandoned nomadism and started to control nature and accumulate some wealth. This is at least what we usually are told.

This first step of this evolution towards supremacy consists in the shift from nomadism to the practice of agriculture in settled villages or towns. It does not concern exclusively our Northern civilisation, because it principally happened in the Middle East before it came to us. But it transformed powerfully the way in which, as humankind, we relate to our natural environment.

There is first a very important remark. The discovery of agriculture is said to have been a revolution that radically and rapidly transformed our ways of living. But this is a very great exaggeration. What has been considered as the discovery and

adoption of agriculture happened in fact over more than 3000 years; this means as much as the duration that separates us nowadays from the time of the pharaohs and the pyramids of Egypt. This clearly was not the revolution it is said to have been. The passage from nomadism to farming has been indeed very slow, hesitant and progressive with many kicks back. Agriculture, at its beginning, has rather developed as a kind of complementary and even accessory resource – sometimes temporarily adopted, sometimes temporarily abandoned – often in parallel with a dominant forager-hunter way of life.

We can easily understand that there has been, for the people of the Holocene, some strong hesitations to make themselves the “willing slaves” of regular backbreaking works of ploughing, sowing, irrigating, cutting, harvesting, processing, storing, conserving, collecting seeds and similar. By contrast the resources of hunter-gatherers were immediate and required only a few processing tasks. On the other hand, the irregularity of climatic decisive factors made the operation of regular agriculture very risky, especially when there was still little knowledge of this new activity, by lack of experience. It seems that agriculture started first to develop rather in floodplains where it almost happened by itself, with a minimum of human work; as a kind of secondary almost incidental contribution.

It is also often said that, when human societies started to practise agriculture, they were able to abandon their hunting-gathering ways of finding their subsistence and they could settle down into villages and towns. They could gain a better security of food offered by bigger quantities provided through a more or less regular production and through possibilities for storage. Both cultivation of located fields and concentration of wealth into storage were also reducing mobility and nomadism. But this new practice allowed people to develop a greater confidence in the way they could handle the forces of nature and use them for their own interest. This was the progress.

This description is probably partly realistic. But the mobility of hunter-gatherers remained yet for a long time a dominating practice which contributed to reduce the attraction of definitive settlement. Some societies even used to regularly alternate seasonally between times of sedentary life and times of nomadism. Mobility continued to offer a great advantage. It was easier to move to where natural resources were available than to remain settled and have to be involved in the process of production for which human effort constituted an important contribution.

However the possibility of choosing between sedentary ways of life anchored in agricultural practices over more nomadic ways of hunters-gatherers remained always open to subjective preferences. And different societies have responded in contrasting ways to this possibility of choice. Hence different forms of development took shape generating different forms of settling processes, different rhythms, purposes and expressions, different practices, different forms of affinity with mobility and settlement.

But there was more than this at stake, in terms of choices. If it is true that the progress of the practice of agriculture allowed people to settle and gain in security, it remains also true that they were able at the same time to choose how they would prefer to remain in relationship with nature and how much they felt dependent on it or could become masters of it. Here again there were many different strategies based on the diversity of quality of this relationship or belonging to nature that they wished for themselves.

In many cases the apparent progress of mastery of natural production seemed soon to erase the feeling that humankind remained part of nature and that it had to continue to adapt to its cycles and laws. This necessity to respect these laws and to adapt to them remained essential despite the fact that agriculture

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offered means to take the best possible advantage of these cycles and to relatively control how they can participate to improve conditions of human life. Through this new impression of partially controlling nature, humankind lost some sense of its own belonging to nature and sense of sacredness of the universe. Here also another choice, which different societies managed differently.

Archaeology seems to show that the early stages of civilisation had been mainly matriarchal (Yin) because nature was considered to be the feminine goddess that was nourishing humankind. The discovery of agriculture is often said to have turned the gods into patriarchal figures (Yang) at the image of the transformation that had happened technically which changed the way people perceived their relationship with nature and the sacred dimension of life. Masculinity (i.e. mainly Yang controlling attitudes) became dominant as a way to master the environment.

Yet, in a contradictory way, the new tasks linked with agriculture, as fruitful and nourishing activities, were rather of feminine (Yin) nature; they contributed then also to reinforce a matriarchal role – to be understood as a strong responsible contribution to the social setting rather than as a form of domination over masculine partners. This matriarchal energy mainly developed in tasks of gardening, basketing, weaving, collecting, processing that also reinforced symbolically the image of women, linked with the power to be fruitful, which transcribed into images of nourishing and protecting goddesses. At this time many clay or stone figures appeared that celebrated this aspect of femininity. This major role and contribution by women have been even more reinforced by the fact that, being active in core activities of subsistence, these women have been also the principal instigators of the major inventions of that time concerning these important domestic tasks which were

constituting the essential of daily life. This is a very important aspect of femininity we have too long ignored, and still do.

The male dominating transformation mentioned earlier happened then against and despite this feminine trend and role. It was also mainly the choice of using accumulation and surpluses as means for domination. Here again the transformation happened by the choice for stratification, at the price of equity and conviviality. When this path was chosen, this step towards accumulation and hierarchy represents probably one of the major first steps of development of our spirit of supremacy.

2) Greek philosophy as world view

The 5th century BC was a rich time that saw a deep change of mind take place that, with Plato, Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, considered the world as an external phenomenon.

The first stages of development of Greek philosophy in the 5th century BC changed radically the way this culture and this society were relating to their environment. There was a fundamental shift in the way they were considering the world in which they were living. The mental shift showed that this world seemed to be given, distinct and external to them and with a sacred order where the gods were playing an important role. It seemed also linked with a complex system of relationships and laws of the universe that were affecting life. The Greeks started then to wonder what these laws were and what the source of life was. They were already looking for the explanation that could summarise the whole of reality - as present modern science still does today - of course in terms that were expressed in that time according their then own coherence. This was truly culture.

The Greeks started observing the universe and asking which its essential nature was. Very roughly one could say that there were two major tendencies: one rationalist and anchored in matter

incarnated by Democritus and Aristotle among others and one more metaphysical and spiritual represented by Pythagoras and Plato for instance.

The original stage of Greek philosophy in the fifth century BC represents a fundamental mutation in the history of humanity which translates also in similar and simultaneous mutations elsewhere on our planet, such as Buddhism in India or Zoroaster in Persia or Confucius in China (all rather Northern places).

Yet Greek heritage seems to have later like vanished for a few centuries (especially in what concerns the Aristotelian way), while Neo-Platonism influenced strongly the early steps of Christianity, especially with Origen of Alexandria, and was like integrated (merged) with it. This long eclipse of Aristotelianism lasted for many centuries until the High Middle Age.

The fundamental step in this evolution is obviously the discovery of humankind's ability to reflect on itself and the outer world as something distinct, yet with our humanity being an intrinsic part of it. This evolution is not, as such, a step in gaining in supremacy; at least as long as one still considers oneself as being part of the universe. One does not intend then to use this fascinating power of reflection as a means for domination but only for better understanding and adaptation.

But it is precisely in this dilemma that this important stage of evolution became also a step towards domination, when our mind learned nevertheless to prefer its own power of control over the surroundings and the others. By contrast the other option consisted in rather preferring a more subtle understanding how this heart-mind could better adapt and fit into this universe thanks to this new acquired knowledge.

3) Christianity as state religion

From an inner intimate experience that favoured an egalitarian way of life based on sharing, Christianity turned into a top-down structure based on authority.

Christianity at its beginnings was composed of small communities of people who shared together their search for truth; they were also sharing what they owned. A model of compassion and humility took shape that had a subversive content inasmuch as it was practising love, equality, care and sharing in an unknown way; i.e. especially subversive in the context of the Roman Empire and its authoritarian structure. It became therefore very challenging for all forms of power in place, whether religious or political. The first Christians were soon persecuted either by religious authorities that did not recognise the authenticity of the new Way or by state power that openly feared this alternative way of life and personal freedom as resistance to official authority.

When the emperor Constantine decided to convert to the Christian faith and declared Christianity (Edict of Milan in 313 AD) as state religion, this happened to be a tremendous change for all Christians. This deep social and political transformation protected them from persecutions but this introduced also a relation of power into a structure and a mode of living that were deprived of it. However the whole move towards an official religion was essentially suspicious because there was also a clear political intention behind the purpose of Constantine who hoped to consolidate his power to the limit of the empire. It is noticeable how for instance the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) produced at the same time a statement that tried to clarify theological points but also (and probably mainly) intended to define a clear limit between the believers who were followers (usually inside the limits of the Roman Empire) and the believers

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who were thought heretics (usually outside the borders) such as the Syriac and the Copt minorities.

The constitution of the Church as an official institution formed on the model of the imperial structure with a clear hierarchy and a form of top-down authority – the Pope as a kind of Emperor – changed deeply the spirit of the Christian assembly; it abolished or at least weakened the collegial and synodal structure of the existing body (the *Koinonia* i.e. the Community). It prepared also the path for the schism between the Eastern Orthodox and the Western Catholic Churches in the 11th century that intervened because of differences of doctrine and authority (imperial vs synodal) rather than conflicts of ways of practising.

Hierarchy and stratification took over the whole ecclesial structure. This was the main change in terms of domination.

4) Gothic, Scholastic and early technology

The rediscovery of Aristotle (rather than Plato) nourished analytical or rational thinking at the root of the Gothic and Scholastic era.

The next stage of evolution towards more supremacy ensued in reinterpreting in a new way the content of the Greek precedent stage. This generated the medieval resurgence of this movement of Greek philosophy of the 5th century as a kind of second step of development of this original way of thinking. This later stage of evolution consisted, in the 12th century AD, in the rediscovery of philosophical thinking but in other terms. In an astonishing way, the preference has been to favour the heritage of Aristotle and its rational approach through syllogisms, at the disfavour of the more contemplative and spiritual approach of Platonist philosophy that Christianity had adopted as an inspiring guide how to address the Mystery.

It is how this dominantly rational way of thinking was later reintroduced, or rather reinforced, into European culture by Arabic influences (Averroes) and especially into the Scholastic era at the Gothic time. It was the time when St Thomas Aquinas restructured the whole of Christian theology and dogmas (*Summa Theologiae* 1265–1274) in the same methodical and precise way as, simultaneously, the architecture of the Gothic era was discovering how to adapt the design and structure of cathedrals (rib vaults, columns, buttresses) to the knowledge resulting from the observation of physical forces. Both were structural efforts, one in theology and the other in construction¹².

On both levels it concerned the implementation of a new way of thinking that aimed at mastery of the forces of the universe, from gravitation to theology. The progress was the new way to apply rationality as a new method of understanding of metaphysical dimensions or as a tool that could observe the physical world and propose strategies that allowed solving problems of everyday life, whether they concerned matter and our physical environment (stone building), or metaphysical thought (religion).

At the same time, some important inventions (or introduction from foreign inventions) were made such as the compass, the stern rudder, the hourglass, the astrolabe, the cannon (including gunpowder) that improved or extended thoroughly the technical means whose lack had until then restrained the range of reach of long distance ocean navigation (and conquest by the same way). This was also the time when other main inventions were made: the printing press, the heavy plough, the mechanical clock, the water wheel, the spinning wheel, and similar, that changed the way humankind used to relate to, and interact with, the material dimension of its surroundings.

¹² See for more detail: Erwin Panofsky: *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, Penguin Books Ltd, 1974.

Yet this progress of rationality and its application to technical improvements seemed antagonistic to the experience of intuition and symbolic thinking that had prevailed so far in the earlier Middle Age. Despite – or even because of - its scientific approach of nature, which was deeply impregnated of mystery, the spirituality of the Middle Age had also strongly adopted a mythical way of thinking. Rationality came therefore as a rich complement rather than as a substitute way of thinking. Both ways of rationality and mythical thinking had to marry in order to foster a richer and broader approach. Yet rationalism tended to evacuate intuition instead of combining with it, because these two approaches were perceived as antagonistic rather than complementary. This was one more decisive step for the supremacy of reason.

5) Renaissance and the Demiurge

Science, as a new way of observing the world, allowed new knowledge to arise such as astronomy, anatomy, perspective, technology. The observer became the demiurge.

Soon this new ability of observing the world in a rational and scientific way transformed the relationship humankind had established with its environment. For instance the Copernican new understanding of the universe (*On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* – 1543 AD) showed that the Earth was not the centre of the universe but only a small among many planets which were circling around the sun. And, at the same time, the systematic observation of anatomy helped humankind to discover how the human body was built. These very diverse discoveries allowed to reach another stage of scientific and artistic development when the society of that time became capable of relating to its surroundings as something distinct from

itself; something it could observe, describe, understand, transform and master.

This shift of mind and the discovery of a form of mastery over science, art and technology led to a perception of man as a demiurge, i.e. as a smaller version of God in his creative power. The human being henceforth was thought of as a special superior creature that was no longer perceived as dependent on its context but seemed free to shape its own destiny and adapt the world to its own will, as God was believed to do.

The progress was the discovery and development of science and art as means to understand the laws of nature and the place of humankind in the universe. If it was positive, for the society of that time, to discover the potential that relied on a sharper awareness of its own creativity, it was nevertheless an illusion to believe that humankind was made free to become the master of the universe.

Later the Newtonian model of the cosmos even went so far as to represent the world as a gigantic clockwork whose functioning could be observed and foreseen with a very high precision and even translated into mathematic formulations, which became the language of science.

The mystery of sacredness that feels still very present in the paintings of the Quattrocento vanished progressively and was replaced by a strong ambition of shaping the environment according to human wishes. Most part of the perennial wisdom was then replaced by a mechanical and materialistic representation of the universe. This is evidently an important step of “gain” in (partly illusory) supremacy.

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6) Perspective as self-centred perception

The discovery of perspective shifts human perception from a global symbolic overview to a self-centred but efficient point of view, i.e. from a hetero-centric to an egocentric perception.

In the same new move that becomes able to observe the environment as distinct and external to us, the discovery of the laws of perspective helped considerably to improve the mental representation of our environment, especially by drawing and painting. Renaissance is the time where painting becomes more realistic (because it looks more like what we see) than the rather symbolic paintings of the Quattrocento.

It is amazing to consider how perspective seems to shift the place of the observer. From a place of overview that seems to consider the universe as a global phenomenon that one can externally observe as a system, the position of the observer shifts because he becomes the centre of reference from which the scene is observed. The observation is no longer a global all-encompassing overview; it becomes a subjective point of view, defined in space and centred on the position of the observer. The observer (humankind) becomes the point of observation and centre of gravity. The world turns around him. It becomes a self-centred vision.

It is also amazing to consider that some of the great discoveries of this time had clearly, in essence, the opposed meaning. Astronomy, with Copernicus, had just demonstrated that the Earth was not the centre of the universe but that it was just this small satellite circling around the Sun, one among many others. This new awareness should have set us, as humankind, back into the right position of being one of many species on one of these few planets; in other words, something not so special, although nevertheless not insignificant. It is then surprising that the discovery of perspective overrun the discovery of astronomy. It

seems to turn everything upside down and substitutes perspective (I'm the centre) to astronomy (I'm somewhere there in the universe, among many others).

This is an important step towards supremacy because it affirms the "I" as a point of view that becomes the reference for everything. From a hetero-centric view – i.e. centred on others and with a global all-encompassing understanding – the perception of the world shifts to an egocentric view – centred on oneself as central observer and principal but subjective reference. This is the supremacy of the ego which appears here.

7) Reformation and free conscience

The new human-centred perception allows to challenge religion as imposed from above; it revives the personal free conscience as a central faculty for choice and responsibility.

The excessive power and dysfunction of the Catholic Church in the 15-16th centuries challenges Luther (1517 AD) to denounce these malpractices with the intention to provoke a new consciousness and generate transformation in the existing structure. The first intention was to purify the institution of its flaws in order to go back to a more authentic faith and practice. But his criticisms provoked a powerful reaction in the ecclesial hierarchy and there was a definitive split that divided the whole Church into two main confessions. And this split was soon to be recuperated by the political forces in game (mainly German princes) as a mean to oppose hierarchy (the Emperor).

Yet the content and signification of the theological debate of the Reformation were very serious and essential. They were applying to the field of religion the spirit of transformation which had also simultaneously happened in science at the Renaissance when personal self-centredness became usual practice. This evolution participated in confirming the power of each individual

to observe what is; and to freely reflect upon it. The believers were implicitly invited to (re)discover their personal freedom of conscience; this meant their power to discern what they experienced in their lives and what it meant for them in terms of spiritual teaching in regard to the official doctrine.

This was evidently a form of breakdown of the authoritarian top-down structure of the Church. Small communities of believers according to this new perception were taking form in the actual Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, with their ministers as leaders; they tried to go back to the practice of the first Christians and to share in equal terms.

This enhancement of the personal conscience reinforced the empowerment of each participant and made them responsible for their own perceptions, interpretations, and the resulting faith and way of life and conscience. They were meant to develop their own consciousness. But it participated also in developing the rational aspect of faith because this examination tended to be mainly doctrinal and to follow rather rational considerations than contemplative ones. The contemplative dimension was deeply weakened and the sense of Mystery (the ungraspable) was no longer celebrated as it had been so far. Sacraments for instance lost much of their significance in this arising Protestant tradition.

Like in the Gothic era the increase in rationality provided new means for reflection and discernment. It favoured better understanding of faith and practice but at the expense of the more mystical aspect of faith. As a development of the personal conscience it enhanced the individual awareness of being distinct from other members of the congregation. More self-control, more individuality, more mastery, more power, more supremacy, but less humility, less listening, less surrender, less inclusiveness, less unity.

However Protestantism was also a criticism of wealth and power. Strangely and paradoxically, by its form of chosen simplicity (by

reaction to the Baroque splendour of that time) it encouraged parsimony and frugality, which, in turn and contradictorily, allowed an increase in savings and opened the door to accumulation and then banking! The poor and simple became the thrifty and therefore rich. See how Zurich and Geneva, two cities of deep Protestant tradition, have been thriving thanks to the support of this Protestant ideology. Another form of supremacy, supremacy of money.

8) Colonisation

Geography and better ships and better weapons allowed the development of navigation that led to the discovery, conquest, exploitation of unknown lands.

The next stage I have chosen to describe is indeed simultaneous to the Renaissance time and Reformation but it is interesting to examine it separately. The development of science and the implementation of new technologies in the Middle Age and the Renaissance converge towards a better mastery of tools and a wider knowledge of the world how it “functions”. This improved know-how allowed the development of many forms of implementations out of astronomy, geography and navigation and led to the discovery of new continents.

The discovery of new continents and lands translated this potential knowledge of totally unknown areas and cultures into a new perception of space and time, into a new awareness of the dimension of our planet and of its many lands, races and cultures, especially first with the Portuguese and Spanish, and soon also with the British, French and Dutch conquests of America, Africa, Middle East and Asia.

Discovery gave way to colonisation. Rapidly these new continents became the sources of many new resources and wealth through extraction and looting; and violence, robbery,

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exploitation and slavery became rapidly the principal characteristics of this new form of “trade”.

The progress was the discovery of new continents and of new cultures (either in tribal or chiefdom forms or as kingdoms or empires or simply as traditional societies) that offered a new opportunity to widen the Northern understanding of life. The differences of these other cultures with what was already known in Europe were so radical that it became clearly for the newcomers a high challenge to recognise the common humanity that was linking the them with these people in their indigenous or royal belonging; or what could link the Northern cultural heritage with these traditional cultures or other empires. Still more challenging was the objective fact, which was generally discarded, that Northern civilisations could have learned much from these cultures in terms of philosophy and spirituality.

It is important to keep in mind that, at that time, many traditional (vernacular) cultures were still very present and alive on the Northern continent (Europe) because a simple form of agriculture was still the main source of subsistence for most people; and it was relying on adaptation to nature and its laws and was shaping also human and social values and beliefs. This means that traditional or vernacular cultures were still all around Europe, not only in remote areas but also in nearby countryside or mountain regions. Yet the discovery of new races - that were also mainly of vernacular tradition - and of completely different ways of living, under very different climates and with profoundly different beliefs and customs – challenged the human perception by the newcomers, as if a vernacular way of living would be something completely new for them.

On the other hand the brilliance of Inca, Indian or Chinese civilisations or of some African kingdoms, to mention only a few, was such that it seems Europeans invaders had never seen anything similar before.

The contrast was so challenging that this progress of new encounters, with its own potential for a deep reorganisation of Northern thinking under foreign influence, was quickly rejected – by fear or by ignorance – and transformed into pure one-sided domination, oppression and extortion, at the expense of any possible respect or recognition of, or even inspiration by, these indigenous traditions.

Except a few of them who were fascinated by what they saw, the newcomers in general refused to recognise that these different cultures had developed for millennia into deep and respectful understanding of their own environment and into very sustainable practices. And the same can be said about these chiefdoms, kingdoms, empires that had accumulated an exceptionally rich millenarian wisdom (whether Aztec or Mogul). Of course these traditional or sophisticated cultures were also far from being perfect but they had certainly their own coherence.

Despite unfavourable conditions defined by an evident will to conquer, exploit and dominate, a potentially positive and creative encounter nevertheless took also place, like in parallel or at the margin. It happened that people of very different origins (the indigenous and the invaders) were inevitably brought together and called to live side by side. They had many opportunities to meet one another. Some of the newcomers were, more than the average, able to enjoy diversity and exchanges, even with a certain respect and curiosity to discover unknown forms of material and immaterial wealth; or fascination for the beauty of another race. Some even tried to promote these other cultures. We have described this earlier with Kandiaronk in his dialogue with the invaders and with Rousseau’s concept of the *noble savage*.

In hindsight it becomes now clear how domination could be the only possible and be consolidated because there was no respect

for these conquered cultures. The invaders, in their will to dominate, had to develop some rhetoric about inferiority of the conquered cultures and to pretend that they, as newcomers, were bringing civilisation. Violence, looting and killing did not present a very positive visage of what this so-called evolved civilisation should have been! On the contrary it generated a wish for vindication from the side of the victims and, not least, a deep (hidden and mostly unconscious) guilt or shame on the side of the conqueror. Visibly the practice demonstrated how the talk that justified these violent practices was just an illusory construct and a lie.

The dialogue and possible synthesis of these different cultures were made impossible by the choice to exploit these new territories as if they were not occupied by equal human beings of the same humanity. The invaders went even so far as to consider these other populations as not being human. They declared these territories “terra nullius”, i.e. land that belonged to nobody (empty space) as they did in Australia. This paradoxical unilateral declaration of the inexistence of the others made it paradoxically much simpler to exploit them.

9) Banknotes

The frequent use of banknotes partly disconnects money from gold; it relies on trust that the banknote has value despite it is only paper.

I learned at school as a young lad that the Scottish economist John Law helped establish banknotes as a formal currency in France, after the wars waged by Louis XIV left the country with a problematic shortage of precious metals for producing coins. This was said in my schoolbooks to be the invention of the banknote. In fact this introduction of means of payment that were not directly made of precious metal had happened earlier and

progressively. Already at the time of the crusades some papers were delivered to pilgrims or crusaders that attested their right to get some cash in exchange; and in the 13th century Marco Polo reported about the use of paper money under the Yuan dynasty.

This was an important stage because it provided money with a special power as a value in itself, and not only as practical support for transfer of value (the coins that change hands) in case of sale.

- The difference is that, in the second case, money serves only to transfer value from one person to the next. It allows also to transport value in a practical way. I do not need any longer to take my ox with me in order to exchange it against other goods. Cash allows me to put my ox in my pocket and exchange only one leg with one buyer and, with the resulting income, buy something very different from another seller who is not necessarily the same person as the first buyer.
- When money, beyond a means for direct and practical exchange, becomes a value in itself, it becomes no longer directly related to what it can buy but it has its own way to be used as potential value. I can lend you money and get an interest from you, as an income, although I do not produce anything. I can even play with different interest rates and make more money. I can play on the price and use less money to get more goods. I can keep my money and wait for the time goods are cheaper. Money can in this way accumulate and it becomes a capital, i.e. new means for more investment. Money becomes finally a good you can buy (exchange) at different rates.

The creation of the banknote is not the cause of this evolution but it reinforces it strongly, and is symptomatic of it. Money has henceforth a value as such that relies on the trust people have in it. The banknote is only a piece of paper but the number written on it makes it powerful. It is a strange phenomenon that makes it

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a support of trust when one knows all the havoc it brings and the power for domination and exploitation it represents; and the suspicion that surrounds it. This is here the supremacy of the idea we have of money and the acceptance we have that it is something real and we may use for our own advantage. This belief was an important factor that accelerated production and long distance trade.

This is a huge step of evolution. Imagine we would today abolish money. The whole of our economic system would collapse and we would be brought back to the stage of hunters-gatherers, with nothing more than our own limited time and skills and the ones of our dependents to provide the necessary means of subsistence to survive. No more space for playing with value at our advantage... and the expense of the others.

10) Industrial Revolution

New sources of energy (steam, electricity) and the invention of new machines allowed to (over-)produce more than needed, for profit. Accumulation fostered social stratification.

The further stage of this conquest of the world by Northern supremacy can be seen in the accelerated trend of industrialisation through the 19th century. The import of incredible wealth extracted or looted from the colonies allowed to develop production at home (Europe). The practice of slavery allowed the colonists to multiply the production or benefits from their big land estates, especially cotton at the beginning. And this incredible wealth finished always in the mother country. It provided resources and workforce and capital in almost unlimited quantities. This external input into the economy of the mother country allowed a fundamental transformation that constituted the deep mutation that kicked the next stage of development and growth; firstly development because it

participated in restructuring the means of production; and secondly growth because it multiplied the effect of production and the supplement of wealth it provided in turn.

Structurally the means of production were completely reorganised around three main transformations:

- Firstly the discovery of new sources of energy: steam and electricity; and secondly the invention of new technologies and machines that could profitably use these new forms of energy: steam engines, railways, looms, pumps.
- And the invention and use of new machines multiplied considerably the human ability to transform matter. This new development of new energies and technologies allowed a radical increase of all means of production which generated much profit and excesses in goods and capital. And overproduction.
- A clear social stratification took place that distinguished the owners of these new means of production and the workers who were employed in the process on floor level.

Because of this third term, this tremendous technical progress, instead of offering an improvement of life conditions for all people, has been side-tracked for the interest of the bourgeoisie elite who was able to accumulate a huge range of power and wealth at the expense of the rest of the population. The industrial revolution transformed the existing Northern human society – especially in Britain where it took first place – according to a sharp division along lines drawn by social classes that, more than ever before, were contrasting by their immense differences in terms of privileges and accumulation of material wealth and power for a few and of extreme poverty and exploitation for the majority.

The contrast was so threatening that the state had to compensate the poorer category of the population through a form of

assistance that developed immediately (Poor Law, Speenhamland, 1795). These new special measures designed to alleviate poverty were taken even before the most violent and pernicious effects of this social segregation had destroyed the poorest categories of workers. The fact of antagonism and clash of social classes was already clearly discernible in the process itself, not as a side-effect but as a main feature that constituted the dynamic itself of the process of wealth building and accumulation. The increase in supremacy did not concern here the whole nation but only a leading privileged minority, at the expense of the marginalisation of the majority of the population, used as workforce to be sold on the market.

Beside the aspect of exploitation of a majority by a minority, there was a major aspect we tend too often to forget. The new means of production were so powerful that they were allowing to produce much more than was needed. This was simply the discovery of the power of overproduction as a source of infinite profit and continuous growth.

This was what was most fascinating and attractive for the elite owning these new means of production. It allowed them to produce more at a cheaper price. Both, the larger quantity and the reduction of the cost price were promising increased profits. There were yet two conditions to get there:

- To find further outlets for the overproduction without saturating the market – which would have caused the collapse of selling prices.
- To reduce the cost price by reducing all costs: resources had to be bought cheaper, workforce had to be paid less, machines had to be more effective, and energy used in a more extensive way.

There is, in this double condition, a pure madness that seems to hide yet pretty well behind what we call today globalisation. The

more one produces in order to increase profit, the more one has to find additional outlet possibilities, and the higher the competition becomes, between sellers, that incites them to reduce still more their costs. This means essentially to reduce wages (in the mother country), or use unpaid workforce through slavery (in the colonies).

The great tragedy of this step of evolution is that the change of mind, prepared by the previous steps, translates henceforth in the industrial revolution into economic and technical forces that radically change also the conditions of life of people who yet did not generate them. This is pure supremacy: to shape the lives of others according to one's own design or purpose.

11) French Revolution

At the French Revolution the bourgeoisie becomes the new elite; it forms on the base of wealth (not nobility), at the expenses of the empowerment of people.

Globally simultaneous to the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution brought the transformation that allowed to transit from an autocratic exclusive power in the hands of the King, the Nobility and the high Clergy to a power in the hands of the wealthy part of the population, the bourgeoisie, which would soon own the accumulated capital and the new means of production. This is an important shift from feudal to wealth power, from nobility (by birth) to bourgeoisie (by material heritage).

This was the effort of the later period of the Revolution to promote a further change, beyond the abolition of monarchy, which would allow also ordinary people to be in power in a complete democratic form: one person, one vote. The Jacobins (Robespierre, St Just, Marat, Danton) were in a bloody struggle

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(Reign of Terror and the guillotine – 1793-94) against the Girondins (Condorcet, Brissot and others).

This was the opposition between two main and different political orientations. The Girondins were mainly part of the bourgeoisie (small land owners, traders) and defended a form of power reserved for the owners of relative wealth, as principally promoters of free market (liberalism). The Jacobins tried to promote more equality for all people (farmers and workers). That was a very challenging trend that did not stop re-emerging during the 19th century, especially during the revolution of 1830 in France. It finally brought a result at the Commune in 1870, but just for a few months. At the end this tendency never found its true expression until the next century.

Formally this step of evolution is important because it validates the power of the bourgeoisie and the role of wealth as political power. This was already the case in England since the 17th century. The supremacy of the bourgeoisie consolidated politically what the Industrial revolution has gained.

12) The nation-state

The function of the nation-state is to administrate the society of a population living on a given territory where all citizens are considered equal.

The nation-state has taken shape after the Thirty Year war (Treaty of Westphalia, 1648). The concept was related to a nation understood no longer as a country ruled by a monarch but as a nation, i.e. as a population of more or less same ethnicity living on a given well-delimited territory under the authority of this monarch. The concept of the nation-state meant that the ruling power was increasingly supported by an apparatus that had to administrate the practical problems of daily life of this precise population on the territory of the nation: trade,

communication, finances, and many others. It was therefore complementary to, and slightly distinct from, the ruling function of the reigning power. The question of ethnicity was also dominant to define who was belonging to this nation, and who was not.

The French Revolution instituted later the rule of the three independent powers (executive, legislative, judiciary) and the principle of equality of all citizens as a counter-balance to the power of the elite, whether the degrading aristocracy or the arising bourgeoisie. It redefined in this way the role of the nation-state as an institution whose role was to treat all citizens as equal and therefore to compensate the possible causes of inequality. It had to care for the poor.

The progress was the ruling concept of equality that the French Revolution had introduced in politics as a predominant rule to be followed in the name of justice, and to avoid the corruption of power or the dominance of an elite (decaying aristocracy or rising bourgeoisie). Hence the principle of the strict distinction and independence of the three powers.

The loss was yet that the population was defined according to ethnicity. This means it excluded all categories of people who did not belong to the dominating ethnicity. These were all the minorities: foreigners, immigrants, gypsies, Jews, and many others. The hard question was: how to establish the reign of equity despite of differences?

But, in the 18th and 19th centuries – as it will be illustrated for the next stage of evolution – imperialism transformed deeply this concept of the nation-state whose function was to guarantee equity. In the imperialist project the state increasingly and actively supported main businesses in their exploitation of resources from the colonies or in the transformation process in the mother country, according to the priorities and privileges of the rising bourgeoisie. The Navy and the armed forces were

actively intervening in the colonies as they did in India for instance to conquer the whole continent. This was the beginning of the decay of the nation-state that could no longer play its role of guarantor of equity because the action of the state was mainly aligned with main business interests, i.e. with the dominating rising elite of the rich bourgeoisie. This evolution led to the globalisation we know today, in which the state is ever more under the control of private interests.

13) Imperialism

The exploitation of the colonies provided an extreme wealth which fed a further growth and increase in might for the mother country as well as a shift in ways of domination.

Out of the development of colonisation (stage 8 here above) and of extensive production and accumulation of wealth, a second step followed in the escalation of supremacy I describe here, called imperialism, based on an intensification of the exploitation of the colonies and a shift in the way mother country and colonies interacted.

- Since colonisation the colonies were providing the resources (natural resources and workforce through slavery) that were needed for the new form of production in the mother country.
- And they were feeding the wealth which was necessary to operate the deep transformation in the process of production (new energies, new machines, new chains of production, railways, new capital as potential for new investments).
- With the new phase of imperialism they started, as a new extensive market, to offer new outlets for the excess of goods caused by overproduction.

- They offered also new fields for investment of available capital and new sources for more diversified resources for the industrial process.

Imperialism differs greatly from colonisation although they have both many characteristics in common. They are both linked and mixed approaches and colonisation supports imperialism and reciprocally. There is yet a main trait that distinguished them from one another.

- Colonisation – a necessary first stage, principally from the 16th to the 18th century, and later as a support for imperialism – consists mainly in European people (the conquerors) establishing themselves as settlers in these new countries, under the protection of a military presence, and developing large estates that allowed them in general to live a comfortable life and to accumulate and extract a pretty large wealth in conditions of domination, exploitation and power. Most part of the production of the colonies (for instance cotton) was exported to the mother country where it was processed (spinning and weaving) and then sold for huge profits, given that the resources and the workforce (slavery and low paid work) needed for their production had cost almost nothing. This profit generated wealth in the mother country that could in turn be reinvested into new improvements or extensions of productive activities at home, generating still more wealth.
- By contrast imperialism – arising progressively from colonialism and then more dominant between the 1870s and the 1950s, evolving later into globalisation – involves rather agents from the mother country, more than settlers, who need still to import resources from these colonised countries but also wish to invest capital in further corporations established overseas. Or they produce goods manufactured in the mother country they want to be exported and sold in the colonised

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countries. In this sense imperialism consists in a further grade of conquest of the dominated country. These colonised lands must be kept under control in order to fulfil their new function, which has nothing to do with their own destinies but exclusively with the way they can serve the interests and fancies of foreign powers (the Empire). Imperialism marks an important evolution of the role of the nation-state where it aligns with private interest and cannot assume any longer its full mission of guaranteeing equity for all.

This later stage of imperialism was based essentially on overproduction which was itself a direct product of the industrial revolution that also provided high profits, at least as long as this overproduction could find an outlet. The market had then to extend endlessly. Overproduction was mainly led by the investors at home, supported by national governments and armies in action in the colonies, to reinforce or extend the presence of these new entrepreneurs in the conquered lands and take better control of these lands as investors and exploiters; or just make of these lands some larger outlets for this overproduction.

This stage of evolution is a pure product of supremacy. The pressure on the conquered territories increased in very violent ways. In continuation with the colonial era, indigenous populations were massacred or decimated – Australia and North America – or used as workforce – slavery – or prevented from working in their traditional trades – weavers in India – in order to avoid local competition and to create a form of monopoly in the hands of the mother country.

It happened very often that indigenous people were also killed by epidemics because they could not resist the plagues the conquerors had brought in under the form of new diets or many diseases or alcoholism. Or they died of poverty because their

traditional means of subsistence had been destroyed by the invasion of the new system.

In all cases indigenous people have been treated with a form of brutal contempt that was believed to justify any form of cruelty, in the name of white supremacy.

14) Marxism and the October Revolution

A strict critic of capitalism combined with an ideological interpretation of history proposed a strategy for the dictatorship of the proletariat translated later into the Russian Revolution.

By his two main works (*The Communist Manifesto* 1848 and *The Capital* 1867), Karl Marx analysed the mechanisms of capitalism and demonstrated in a brilliant way how they were destructive of the social substance. They were the results of the dominance of the class that owned the means of production and that tended to increase its own power and wealth at the expenses of the workers. Marx understood our Northern society as the fruit of a struggle between social classes, more specifically between the bourgeoisie (the capitalists and owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (the workers). Marx postulated that the economic relationships between these two classes were determining the evolution of our society and that this struggle would inevitably lead to a final clash: the revolutionary process that would establish a new order based on the dominance of the proletariat.

In this approach three ideas mingle:

- A philosophical anthropology that describes how we, as human beings, behave one with another, aiming generally at our own profit, at the expense of the others.
- A theory or interpretation of history understood as being mainly defined by the conflicting relationships between

social classes in the field of economy where one dominant class, the bourgeoisie, oppresses the other, the proletariat, through the process of production. It postulates that the exacerbation of this conflict will inevitably lead to the high point of the revolution, i.e. the turnaround of the situation by the proletariat which will become the new leading and dominating force.

- A political program or strategy that aims at the revolution and the establishment of the dominance of the proletariat. This program has been later reviewed in different ways by the heirs of Marxism: Vladimir Ilich Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Leon Trotsky, Mao Zedong and many others.

As a summary of his general theory, we can say that the following quotation of Marx¹³ formulates pretty well the core of his approach: “The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and intellectual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence; it is on the contrary their social existence which determines their consciousness”. This is a brilliant insight that Marx illustrated in a very clear and powerful way. This new awareness had the potential to open humankind’s future to another perception of human together-living and offered a new chance to reverse human practices into a more human and consciousness-lead evolution. This was the progress.

It is interesting to emphasise that this early insight into human collective psyche came not so long before Sigmund Freud developed his theory about the personal unconscious at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century.

In my mind there are two aspects in Marx’s work:

¹³ Karl Marx: in the preface to Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 1859.

- a brilliant and convincing description of human relationships, in the past and the present, shaped by the process of production and between classes,
- and an elaboration of an interpretation of history understood as an inevitable (almost mechanical) process towards the revolution; this interpretation resulting into a political theory and strategy for the future.

It seems that the progress offered by the former was eclipsed by the elaboration of the latter. The description of past and present social relationships, shaped by the economy and conflicts between social classes, was based on historical observations and was described with a powerful realism. It had an objective realism grounded in the examination of the past of humanity. By contrast the political theory proposed a subjective interpretation – very rich and powerful indeed – that was elaborating as a strategy for the future. This was not an observation but an attempt of theory projected into the future. In this second step one may also distinguish the interpretation and the strategy which are very distinct from one another, although narrowly linked. Especially the strategy, more than the interpretation, was a projection onto the future.

These two aspects are not on the same level and it is important, in an historical approach, that facts (the description) and the theory (the interpretation) be kept very distinct. It is also noticeable that the second aspect became with the time more and more prevalent. The analysis was rejected by the conservative forces of our society while the strategy became ever more ideological and dogmatic in the action of the arising Russian Revolution (1917), giving way to Stalinist practices.

The loss was that the challenge formulated by the analysis by Marx of our present social practices, inherent to the capitalist system, could not open new paths for a powerful social imagination and creativity based on a dynamic participation of

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all citizens. The critic by Marx should have indeed opened the way to an open social dialogue that would involve all participants and classes in order to invent new all-inclusive ways to live together. This other pattern of dynamic social evolution was yet hindered, on the side of the protagonists, by the rigidity of the Marxist strategy – as well as, on the side of the bourgeoisie, by the powerful reaction of conservative forces. The Marxist theory and strategy were caught in the narrowness of a fundamental and inescapable antagonism between social classes that could not find any solution of harmonious balance between all protagonists. Instead of convergence and possible agreement of the parties, the model dictated an exacerbation of the conflict that could only be resolved by the turning of the table, making the victims (the workers) into the new leaders and oppressors: the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yet it is essential to notice that the October Revolution brought a form of new balance into the world. There were consecutively no longer one but two main powers (the USA and the USSR) that were confronting each other. This meant a constant tension and permanent risk of explosion, but also, at the same time, the presence of two forces that counterbalanced each other and prevented each other from acts of excessive extension of their own power or domination or control that would be not acceptable for the other. We'll come back later to this topic.

15) Decolonisation and Bandung

The decolonisation brought hope that the Southern countries may follow their own path of emancipation, conceived in terms of innovation of many new ways of development.

In the 1950-60s there was a powerful movement of decolonisation. The new leaders of the South were very committed to find new imaginative ways of development. The

support of the USSR to Southern countries was important and countered the effort of Northern countries (Europe and the US) to consolidate their power of domination.

Some great leaders of that time created an alliance of non-aligned countries – that is independent of Europe, the US and the USSR – acting by their own means with the purpose of designing a new path of liberation: Nehru (India), Sukarno (Indonesia), Zhou Enlai (China), Nasser (Egypt). This event is representative of a spirit that is also linked with personalities that came later onto the scene such as Nyerere (Tanzania), Nkrumah (Ghana), Lumumba (Congo), Ho Chi Minh (North-Vietnam) and many others. Most of them organised the conference of Bandung where they met in 1955 to unite their efforts.

In that time, there was a great creativity and hope that led these new countries to find their own ways. They invented ways of simple rural development, based on principles of justice, self-management, equity and relative self-sufficiency or self-reliance.

Sadly this movement did not develop very far. I will come back to this topic later; but we can already say in a few words that this alternative form of development was severely hampered by violent interventions of Northern countries which were determined not to let go of their colonies. The troubles in Congo, the wars in Vietnam and Algeria, the putsches in Central and South America are only a few examples of the many forms of interventions of Northern governments in the destiny of these Southern emerging countries.

Many of these leaders have been even assassinated by secret agents. Natural resources (fuel, minerals, wood, food) were “too precious” to be abandoned to these new leaders. The rivalry between the USA and the USSR played also an important role that at the same time envenomed the context (Cuba events) but also brought some force of balance because the Southern countries could take advantage of this competition for their own

advantage. It must also be said that the local bourgeoisies of these emerging countries often took a stand that went against popular interests when they defended their own interests and privileges or even allied with Northern interests and actors.

In this case this stage of evolution rather marked the failure of this independent movement to get back their empowerment, which translated by the increase of white supremacy in the South. Nevertheless the memory of the courage and the creativity of these years remain engraved in the culture of Southern countries and may re-emerge when possible in the future.

16) International trade and neo-liberalism

Trade and interventions in Southern countries have shaped a relationship of domination, North over South, based on power. Globalisation is the expression of economic neo-liberalism.

We can observe today the last stage of this evolution of reinforcement of white supremacy in the general trend for globalisation. The richest industrial countries, that had established their own economic and political power under the cover of protectionism and at the expenses of the southern territories that they had looted and exploited, continue nowadays to act under the spell of eternal growth on a limited planet. At any price they look today for further outlets for the excess of goods they produce as a consequence of a system based on overproduction.

It becomes even more sophisticated: production seems less and less necessary because financial power and speculation seem to make production superfluous as they play ever more on investments, interest rates; and on fictive money that exists only in computers. No more cash, no more goods, no more direct barter on the market place. Wealth becomes virtual... until it materialises into comfort and pleasure, and more power, for an

increasing number of people (us) who remain yet a very small minority: some 13% of world population (us) live on 86% of world's wealth while more than half of the world's population (some 4 billion people) lives on 1% of world's wealth.

Globalisation tends to involve ever more far away countries into wider free market exchanges "agreements" (neo-liberalism) that are meant to profit the dominant interests of this system based on the maximisation of profit. One of the most recent extensions of this trend can even be seen in the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by Anglo-Saxon countries under the form of military invasion that offered a maximum of freedom to private corporations trusted with missions having to do with fields as varied as military forces, strategy, security, construction, education, health, management, government. Supremacy and business are for ever linked, and go hand in hand.

The loss of the essential

Supremacy as destruction of life

Supremacy (exploitation of nature, repression of femininity, exploitation of the weaker) tends to destroy life and relationships.

The description I made of these sixteen stages of evolution has shown how our Northern civilisation has adopted an increasingly harsher attitude about life. At each new stage of its evolution, humankind has revealed its incapacity to integrate the assimilated deep values inherited from the past – as well as the ethical perennial values linked with them (culture) - with the new intellectual, scientific or technical discoveries that, at each stage, were offering better abilities of understanding and enhanced mastery.

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It seems in hindsight that it has been easier, at each new step, to drop the old beliefs and cultural maturity and to replace them by more practical (graspable) skills that tended, at the price of simplification, to allow a better control on life, as if these skills were in contradiction with past more subtle sensitivity; as if the simplification of our understanding of life – because it eliminates the most complex and subtle components that embrace the rather invisible dimensions (equity, peace, diversity, dialogue) – would make life (its practical aspects) more effective (bringing more comfort).

Life indeed, through all these stages, had not changed in its essence but only was later perceived differently, in most cases in a simplified and more materialistic version that evacuated progressively some important aspects of its deeply human and mysterious dimension.

Nowadays - and it was probably the case all along the ages – we remain fascinated by material progress (civilisation) because it makes visible what has changed. We are less sensitive to immaterial values (culture) because they are still mentioned in books and talks, and they are still part of the heritage; but they become less active, less identified with leading values, in our network of relationships and our social construct. Because these invisible dimensions of life translate by their absence, and are therefore not noticeable, their lack of influence is certainly more difficult to discern and to identify as the cause of our ill state. It becomes usually only visible when the negative impact of this lack of understanding has manifested itself in catastrophes, whether ecological (climate change) or political (totalitarianism and wars) or social (violence).

This predominance of material measurements is probably why we remain great admirers of empires. We remain fascinated by the Roman Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the British Empire, although they have been (not only) hugely devastating

enterprises. Our mind remains focused on the flashy aspects of material wealth and accumulation – what we call the glory of civilisation – that express power and prestige; in beautiful palaces, in powerful rulers, in technical progress, in imposing weaponry. Paradoxically it is yet also significant that these same dominating trends have also nevertheless made possible some aspects of profound culture and wisdom such as beautiful philosophical endeavours or artistic expression.

The loss of wisdom

Each stage of evolution has proved incapable to generate a new synthesis of past heritage into the new paradigm of progress, by lack of ability to integrate one with another.

In summary we can say that each progress of the sixteen stages has also eliminated a fundamental aspect of past human heritage instead of integrated with the new acquired skill, discovery or technique. Let's now enumerate these gains and losses and show how they did not combine, although they could have done so because they were compatible; even if they were antagonistic in a certain way, as two poles of opposed forces, by yet both useful to keep the general equilibrium.

- 1) **Agriculture:** The domination over nature has brought about a loss of nature's teaching concerning the essence of life. Mastery of agricultural skills has made people more resistant to, and ignorant of, the subtle demonstration of the laws of nature and life that remain yet fully active.
- 2) **Greek philosophy:** The discovery of our human ability to reflect on the outer world as something distinct from ourselves has opened the door to an awareness of our (sometimes imposing) power to transform our surroundings, although it has also taught us to wonder about the deep meaning of life.

- 3) **Christianity:** The official status of Christianity as state religion protected Christians from persecution and gave a big impulse to its development. But the loss was the dissolution of the intimacy and fragility of this belief anchored in interiority; it was also the loss of the awareness of the poverty of its means of expression and the decreasing sense of community that fostered equality and sharing of common goods and skills. The establishment of a strong institution generated a top-down teaching of a well-defined narrow doctrine that went against the original vocation of intimacy and contemplation.
- 4) **Scholastic:** The domination of rationality has led to the loss of mythical thinking, which characterised the Middle Age and expressed itself through symbolic signs and stories that were able to reveal a more subtle content than what mere rational explanations could provide.
- 5) **Renaissance:** The domination of scientific and technological thinking generated a loss of awareness of the sacred and mysterious dimensions of life. The new power of mastery of science and painting created an illusion of human power as if human beings were self-declared demiurges; god like.
- 6) **Perspective:** The discovery of perspective shifted human understanding of the universe and life from a global, hetero-centric and symbolic vision to a self-centred or egocentric perception which was in contradiction with the discovery that the Earth was “no longer” the centre of the universe but only a small peripheral planet among many others.
- 7) **Reformation:** A self-centred vision allowed people to reassess their beliefs, from the point of view of their own experience and not only official dogma; each one had to be responsible for their own sense of discernment and freedom of conscience. This reinforced the community dimension of faith and the power of personal consciousness but it also diminished the importance of grace, of sacraments and contemplation. Faith was more directly to be found in one’s personal relationship to the divine; but it became also more mundane and a thing of the mind, as if the Mystery could be mastered by the mind. Parsimony tended also to turn into wealth accumulation.
- 8) **Colonisation:** The discovery of other people, cultures, ways of living, worldviews opened the West to new insights but it turned soon into domination over other races and cultures which gave expression to a false hierarchy in humanity, not based on observation of natural or cultural differences, but artificially constructed on the justification of exploitation of the weaker by the mighty.
- 9) **Banknote:** The disconnection between the banknote in paper and its value in gold stored at the bank brings flexibility in this ratio. Money becomes more strongly a value in itself on which one can speculate (interest rate, time duration, location, provenance of goods, penury) by playing on the factor of conversion (price, rate). Speculation, more than work, generates wealth. This led to the loss of the role of money as mere means of exchange, without value of its own.
- 10) **Industrial Revolution:** The domination of materialist forces based on the use of new sources of energy and the invention of new machines has brought about a loss of the experience of being. The focus is on having and controlling instead of opening to the unfathomable wealth of direct life experience in dialogue with others.
- 11) **French Revolution:** The shift from domination by nobility (by birth) to domination by bourgeoisie (by heritage) confirmed that power passed from the monarch to a class of entrepreneurs and business people. This was a progress to become free of the former but not necessary fruitful to fall into the latter. The loss was that the change of the revolution

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did not bring equity and true democracy for all people whatever their class belonging, but rather plutocracy (the power to the rich).

- 12) **Imperialism:** In order to transform overproduction into profit, intensified domination over other continents and people has fostered increased white supremacy as a deep loss in our sense of belonging. Greed has dissolved our sense of community and a practice of solidarity that would allow exchanges to make everyone richer in equality, equity and complementarity.
- 13) **Russian Revolution:** Marxism has delivered a brilliant analysis of the mechanisms that have made capitalism a fundamental injustice which became destructive of the social texture. But this new insight was turned into an ideology that proposed a well-defined and controlled process of social change, aiming at the dictatorship of the proletariat – as if such a concept would exist – based on opposition, revenge, coercion and domination, instead of opening the process to a fair and all-inclusive dialogue of all parties in the purpose of implementing a lively and free social dynamic that could provide, and maintain on the long term, all-inclusive conditions of equity based on care and sharing values.
- 14) **Decolonisation:** The vast movement of decolonisation reinforced the sense of emancipation of colonised people and gave them hope they may reach a status of freedom and empowerment to follow their own path of liberation. But Northern dominating forces prevented by all means this movement that dared to challenge their supremacy.
- 15) **Globalisation:** The domination of the market has worked as energy of standardisation that disempowers people in their local communities. We become cogs in a system of which we are the slaves instead of the system remaining at the service of the common good of a diversified humanity.

The new humankind generated by these many stages has finally become more powerful but nevertheless much poorer in terms of human relationships, of mutual understanding and attraction for true dialogue and fair exchanges; without mentioning wonder and curiosity for the invisible and mysterious dimensions of what makes life so deep and fascinating. Yet, paradoxically, we have also progressed towards better understanding of our differences and are probably more ready to engage in true dialogue. As if our society would run simultaneously on two opposed tracks.

The cumulative effect of wealth and power

Initial extraction and exploitation of the poor by the rich have generated an ever growing gap that never stopped reinforcing the trend of domination.

Briefly we can notice here how the first stages of evolution - in terms of mastery of our direct environment (agriculture, Greek thought, Scholastic, Renaissance, Industrial and French Revolutions) – had increased the power of European societies to dominate their environment:

- firstly, inwardly, by the domination of a social elite over the other classes of the same country;
- further, outwardly, by the supremacy of some powerful Northern countries or empires (Austro-Hungarian, Prussia, England, France, Spain, Russia) over their immediate neighbour countries;
- and finally by the increased exploitation of Southern countries by colonial or imperial powers.

It is important to see how this form of “advance” (these previous stages of social transformation that increased their power) had provided the invaders with a fabulous advantage that never

stopped nourishing their preponderance at the expense of these poorer countries; and still continues today.

It is the wealth of these poorer countries – in form of raw resources or of manpower (slavery) - that was first transferred to the mother country and allowed there soon a powerful development that turned at the advantage of the mother country. Then, in a kind of third stage, these manufactured goods were sold to the poorer countries and the resulting wealth (profit) returned to the mother country.

There is in this process an incredible phenomenon of accumulation and acceleration: the impact of constant accumulation of wealth and acceleration of growth that profits the mother country at the expense of the colonies or dominated lands. We usually neglect to consider this cumulative effect of wealth that never stops increasing the gap between poor and rich and reinforces at the same time the power of the dominating forces and the process of domination; especially when this wealth is initially extracted by force or exploitation.

This is precisely this exploitation that deprives the dominated land of its own potential to develop normally, according to its own culture, choices or preferences and its own traditional network.

Resources, income and profit circulate dominantly in one way, from the colonies to the mother country, in a deeply imbalanced exchange that both spoils the poor (preventing evolution) and feeds the rich (favouring evolution and power). This is no exchange; this is extraction and robbery.

It is also important to notice that this stage of inner growth of industrialisation in the North has happened under protectionism of trade barriers: barriers against import of wheat, against manufactured goods from elsewhere, against free competition, imposing even restriction of production elsewhere. Now these

barriers are no longer required to consolidate these dominating forces in the buds since these industrialised countries have reached full maturity. Consequently globalisation becomes necessary for the dominant actors, and all barriers are dismantled. They are said to be no longer “needed”. This is the reign of neo-liberalism. As one used to say in the sixties: liberalism, it is the free fox in the free chook pen.

This description in sixteen stages has been concise and therefore very simplified. Many other factors should certainly be described and added to create a more complete and truer picture. But it is nevertheless complete enough to demonstrate that our patterns of development run most of the time according to the same tracks of will for power and domination at the expense of human values. They tend to increase the supremacy of Northern and white and male people. One can see in this evolution how the European civilisation has been drastically transformed in content, in spirit, in knowledge and wisdom by this urge to increase its domination on other classes, nations and the world, in the name of a so-called and self-declared superiority. This is the backlash of civilisation against culture. Culture, which is the main cradle of our we understand life, suffers most. We are all impoverished.

Such a terrible imbalance can of course only bring destruction and suffering for all. It is what we will illustrate in the following chapters.

The essential issue of choice

At each stage of this evolution, and for all the dichotomies it created between the new gains and the lost values, resides a deep and existential challenge: the urgency for choice.

Now, at this point of our description of these successive stages of evolution of the Western society and of its progressive shift from the priority of human and compassionate values to the practice of

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more material, technical and effective ways of thinking, there is something extremely important that must be said. Mostly important.

The evolution of the Western society is what it is. It happened mainly in the past and, as people living nowadays, we have no influence on this past evolution. We get today the fruits of it. We inherit the world; or rather the world as it has been marked by our Western society. We inherit it as it is, as result of this evolution. But we do not need to accept it in this way and we do not have to pursue the same evolution ad infinitum.

The important, most important, thing we have to do is to re-evaluate the present situation and become aware of what we have lost and why we did. We have to evaluate whether these losses are important; and, if they are, we have to do our best to regain these qualities; and not only regain them but also to re-establish them in their initial primacy and freshness. It is not about digging out corpses and hanging them on the wall. It is about returning to the right priorities.

This means that we do not need to go back to a previous stage of evolution, turning the clock back. It would be silly. It would be a complete non-sense, because we would lose all the gains. But what we can do is to restore the complete range of qualities we have known in the past.

This sounds a bit like the prayer of St Francis of Assisi!

- 1) **Agriculture:** Where there is domination over nature, let's listen to the teaching of nature concerning the essence and the laws of life.
- 2) **Greek philosophy:** Where there is human ability to reflect on the outer world and our interiority, let's open to wonder about the deep meaning to which we have nevertheless to surrender.

- 3) **Christianity:** Where there is protection of the Christian heritage, let's be aware of the fragility of this belief anchored in interiority, which remains beyond the reach of institutions.
- 4) **Scholastic:** Where there is domination of rationality, let's revive mythical and symbolic thinking.
- 5) **Renaissance:** Where there is domination of scientific and technical inventiveness, let's remain aware of the sacred, mysterious and immaterial energies of life.
- 6) **Perspective:** Where there is self-centred perception, let's revive hetero-centric and global overview on the world in which we are all equally involved.
- 7) **Reformation:** Where the community of faith and the power of personal consciousness are well developed, let's revive the sense of grace, of sacraments and of contemplation.
- 8) **Colonisation:** Where the discovery of other cultures and ways of living has turned into domination and exploitation, let's give space for the wealth of differences and the potential for new teachings to find new ways of expression.
- 9) **Banknotes:** Where there is flexibility for the transport of value, let's not use speculation that plays on conversion but re-established fair exchanges that distribute wealth.
- 10) **Industrial Revolution:** Where materialist forces and mastering of matter dominates, let's re-inject the sense of the fragile experience of being and the practice of fairness in respect for the others.
- 11) **French Revolution:** Where the absolute power (royalty) has been dismantled, let's not reintroduce a substitute (bourgeoisie's power) but equity and true democracy.
- 12) **The nation-state:** Where equity has fostered a tendency to flatten diversity and marginalise minorities, let's allow diversity to combine with cooperation.

- 13) **Imperialism:** Where white supremacy has imposed its domination over other continents and races, let's bring a shared sense of belonging, of community and of solidarity.
- 14) **Russian Revolution:** Where liberation had brought revenge and inversed domination, let's practice a fair and all-inclusive dialogue of all the parties in a spirit of equity, care and sharing.
- 15) **Decolonisation:** Where the emancipation of the Southern countries has opportunities to take shape, let's reinforce these attempts of balanced freedom and empowerment.
- 16) **Globalisation:** Where standardisation and disempowerment dominate, let's practice an economy at the service of the common good and diversified humanity.

As you can see, this list represents a long program for re-establishing the balance that has been lost. My list concerns yet only the 16 points I have examined and only the aspects of them I have described. This list is only a timid embryo that needs to grow and reach maturity. It needs to extend to all the aspects I did not mention.

But what matters most here is that this positive evolution can only happen if we choose consciously and radically to engage onto this path of revitalisation of our world and of ourselves.

This is the great necessity for personal and collective choice. Both, personal and collective. The ball is in your camp.

Chapter 5:

Opposed ways of perception

Whiteness, Blackness and Otherness

The essence of whiteness

This long evolution that consolidated the dominating power of whiteness asks the question of what whiteness consists in. What does it mean to be white?

Let's first define what I mean by *whiteness*. I use this term here to describe the intention that leads the action of people of the white race when these white people express or act according to an ideology of supremacy of their race or when they colonise other countries in the name of the so-called and self-declared superiority of white people. Let's be clear: whiteness, in this understanding, does not look like an effective superiority; it seems clearly to be a myth, a manmade ideology.

The domination of the white race over the rest of the world through colonisation - although domination is not an exclusive "privilege" of the white race - challenges us to better identify what the essence of *whiteness* is. Does one acquire whiteness when one was born of white race? Or is this a cultural concept, an ideology? Does being white confer a true privilege? Is this privilege active for each one who is white by birth?

If my precedent description of the sixteen historic stages, which preponderantly helped Northern countries to establish white supremacy, is correct, we should be able to observe how whiteness and white supremacy are narrowly linked and resemble more a strategy for domination than a true identity or culture of people living in, or originating from, Europe. To address this very large interrogation about the nature of whiteness let's examine a few different aspects of it.

- 1) **Who is white?** The concept of race is very questionable, as I demonstrated earlier with my example of Norwegian-Italian mixing of genes. This means that the fact of being born white does neither define a clear identity nor a precise cultural content, but only a context of influences. It is not even so clear who is white and who is not. Are Norwegians and Italians equally white people although some have blond hair and the others generally have black hair? What is the difference between Sicilian people and their Tunisian neighbours? Or between so-called white people from Andalusia (with their partial Arabic ancestry and genes) and their neighbours from Morocco? Is Judaism a race or a religion or a culture? Are Ashkenazi Jews whiter than Sephardim? Or are they all Semitic people, as Palestinians are too, i.e. non-white people? It is visibly not possible to identify a clearly delimited population with this concept of white race.
- 2) **Which geographic space?** We cannot either identify whiteness with a geographic space. White supremacy originated in Europe (mainly Portugal, Spain, England, France, the Netherland) but it does not mean that whiteness is the culture or ideology of the whole of Europe. Is whiteness linked with a whole nation? or with a class of people? or only with a social and political project? or with an economic way to conceive business or trade relationships? Here again there is no clear spatial identifier.

- 3) **Whiteness, a fact of Europe or an ideology?** Whiteness cannot be identified with Europe but rather with an ideology born in Europe. Through the historical stages that established white supremacy, the concept of whiteness seems to be a broader leading interpretation of the world. It looks very much like an ideology that has supported the colonial project and established the domination of a few European countries mainly over Southern countries, but also over parts of Europe (like Ireland controlled by England, with the Irish population being considered as non-white. or at least non-British).
- 4) **Whiteness, a European project?** Whiteness as an ideology cannot be considered as a truly European project, although it started in Europe. It is a racial project of domination but this project does not involve the whole of the white race or the whole of European people. Many European people were not involved in it or even opposed to it. They were at least not all directly involved in the same way, although most of them, even not knowingly, got a profit out of it, thanks to the wealth and the boost it brought to Europe.
- 5) **Whiteness fully compatible with European culture?** Colonisation is based on white supremacy because the race argument is at the foundation of the ideology that led to the conquest of Southern countries and colonisation cannot be detached from whiteness; nor even from the fact that being white is the key of this ideology. But there is also a gigantic twist at the foundation of white supremacy: the concept of whiteness is also in many ways antagonistic to the essence of European culture as a search for meaning and truth. Whiteness is born in Europe but remains also in conflict with many components of European culture.
- 6) **Whiteness, a reality or a cruel justification?** White supremacy as a project is the purpose of whiteness as an ideology. It is a project based on an idea which has no real foundation in reality except the will of its supporters (in their own heads) to justify their cruel project.
- 7) **Whiteness and the Enlightenment:** Although it is not identifiable with European culture, whiteness and white supremacy have nevertheless been nourished by the Enlightenment. Rationalism, sciences, technology are all products of the trend of rationality that developed in Europe from the Middle Age on, especially during the Industrial Revolution and whiteness explicitly refers to them as its justification. It is in a certain way a product of rationalism and science, but at the price of many important twists which were of ideological nature, and not of scientific nature. White supremacy is then deeply rooted in European culture without yet representing the whole of European culture.
- 8) **Whiteness, a selection of specific tools?** The project of white supremacy, justified by the ideology of whiteness, has used the most powerful tools (knowledge, science, curiosity, technology) that could serve its project (conquest, domination, exploitation) but also ignored the spiritual heritage of European tradition (care, responsibility, conviviality, search for truth) that were working against it. Whiteness in this way is a very selective heritage of European culture that serves a purpose. This is a blind choice that selects the best tools to be used for domination while evacuating the restraining aspects of ethics, philosophy and religion that would oppose this use which had adopted a violent and unjust way. The purpose has deflected the authenticity of a search for meaning, inherent to a major part of European quest, into an expedition of robbers.
- 9) **Which responsibility for Europeans?** The fact whiteness is a twisted interpretation of European culture does not diminish the responsibility of European culture and of all European people to have allowed this to happen. As citizens of nations having initiated, or being borne of, whiteness, we are all

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responsible for what our nations undertake and the way they act on the international stage, as well as inside our own country.

Identification with whiteness

The violence and lies of white supremacy challenge white people to search for a white identity that does not necessarily identify with whiteness.

I was born as a white person. But I personally hate this ideology of white supremacy in every aspect of it: racial contempt, will for domination, deny of otherness, refusal of inclusiveness, use of violence, spirit of conquest, indiscriminate use of technology, will for unrestrained exploitation, greed for resources, belief in money as the supreme value, lack of any moral restraint, and so many other aspects. Not only I hate it but I refuse to be led on this path. I want to oppose any aspect of it.

On the other hand I love Greek culture, the beauty of the Parthenon, Plato, the byzantine churches of Rom, the Romanesque architecture of France, Fra Angelico, Monet, Beethoven, Verdi, Teilhard de Chardin, Victor Hugo, Dostoyevsky, Rilke, and so many others. In this way I identify with what, roughly and globally, could be called European culture and I am proud of having learned from it and benefited of it.

But I also distance myself from so many aspects of European ways of thinking and being and acting. I have great troubles with the dominating ideology of Europe geared towards success, wealth, growth, materialism. I feel often more inspired by people such as St Francis of Assisi, Gandhi, Simone Weil, the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and many others, indistinctively whether they are white or not.

There seems to me to be two (or more) forms of European culture, due to the different translations people have made of it: on one hand a rough and violent one which aims at conquest and domination of the environment or other cultures and lands, and on the other hand a more subtle and sensitive one which aims at searching for truth and the meaning of life. It becomes therefore difficult to identify globally with European culture as a whole because it is not one indivisible whole. It seems to contain different streams that yet form a disparate conglomerate in diversity and complementarity and many of these streams are even in deep contradictions with one another. What makes it hard to embrace European culture as a whole is that its expression has also so many dark sides, probably more than many other cultures. It is not because it is more pernicious than others but because it had the possibility, and chose, to use so powerful means (ships, weapons, technology, market). And these means have multiplied the negative effects of its actions; especially because these more powerful means with harmful effects have been implemented to serve the most negative intentions of this culture.

By contrast and at the same time, more gentle dimensions of this European culture have also fostered beautiful ways of understanding and ways of life in more hidden forms, such as in the art, philosophy, music, literature, spirituality; or in more hidden places such as the monasteries of Europe or in projects of alternative life in more peripheral places chosen for their remoteness.

But, despite these many contrasting and conflicting expressions of European culture, it remains nevertheless true that I am an individual globally white by birth, if *white* can mean something. I need then to take a stand and see how I situate myself in relation with my own cultural (so-called white) cradle. But, as I demonstrated, the fact of being white and the will of accepting the ideology of whiteness as a guide are not inevitably linked.

I have to find my own stand, as a white male who was born in Europe and came to Australia, not to conquer the land but to live here, because of personal relationships and by love of this land. I came also here because I could no longer identify in Europe with its violence, excessive wealth and will for permanent growth on a limited planet. Yet I find also these same components being active here in Australia. While migrating to Australia, I fall from Charybdis into Scylla, from whiteness into whiteness, although the Australian land is here that offers a form of healing and belonging and peaceful together living, thoroughly maintained for millennia by the maturity of its first nation people. Maybe I can find here this peace if I'm accepted by the Indigenous population. To live on stolen land is for me a problem. My wife and I only partially asked some local indigenous elders for their permission for us to settle here and we got a partial (oral) approval. but is this enough?

I can certainly distance myself from the white supremacy project, because I simply hate its leading values and everything it proclaims or generates. But I'm nevertheless white. At least my skin is; and my place of birth relates me directly to European heritage.

It is clear in my mind that, even if I am white, I do not need to be racist. I can embrace otherness, other races and cultures. I can be fully inclusive. My whiteness does not prevent me from doing anything I want, whether the motivation for my attitudes or behaviours is rooted in, or transmitted by, European culture (e.g. my Christian heritage) or, on the contrary, inspired by other cultures (e.g. the deep understanding of the meaning of land and belonging in Aboriginal culture).

In any case my Christian heritage is not especially European, even if Europe has dominantly adopted it or at least it did in the past. The Christian heritage comes from further back and was only introduced to Europe. It is originally not white.

On a wider scale, there is what one calls perennial philosophy, which is the fruit of the global evolution of humankind. This form of wisdom respects neither boundaries nor national borders. Through many centuries, and even a few millennia, it has inspired all kinds of people, beyond distinctions of races or cultures. And any ideology we may have forged has to take this secular wisdom into consideration, either by rejecting it or by being inspired by it. Whether we are nourished and inspired by this perennial philosophy is our personal choice, as demonstrated earlier, which will make us free to follow the trend of our national culture or to become signs of contradiction when we decide to fight against the lie produced by this official culture of origin in its dominant aspects. We have then to find our own roots in our hidden sphere, which is true personal culture.

Even if I am white and male and rich, I can nevertheless treat others (blacks, females, poor) as equals or even as my teachers if I am aware, as it is often the case, that they have more wisdom than me.

The only restriction for me to be able to change the way I feel and think and act is the unconscious part of my heritage I identify with and follow without being aware of it. These unknown dimensions may indeed include some repressed visceral fears of otherness that are ingrained in my upbringing without me being completely aware of them. We never can fully master what triggers us, especially not our unconscious, even when we are hyper vigilant. I can yet do my best to practise the best possible degree of freedom and this depends rather on my own honesty and courage; I can then almost rid myself of all these degrading aspects of my white heritage.

It is often humorously said that an Amerindian can be like an apple, red outside but white inside; or an African like a coconut, brown outside and white inside. This metaphor means that they have adopted the white culture and behaviour for their everyday

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life despite their origin as Amerindian or African. I can in my turn be white outside, and red or black inside. Am I then a watermelon or a passion fruit or a blackberry jam fruit? I had difficulty to find these ones because they are no fruits which are truly white or pale outside and dark inside, unless they are not ripe!

The privilege of whiteness

I am free to choose how I relate to my own white culture; but, even if I prefer the wisdom of perennial philosophy, I cannot abolish my real privileges.

Despite of my will to be free of the negative aspects of my heritage, there is one aspect that will ever remain and that I cannot delete: it is the fact that I am white, I mean with a white skin.

Even if I do not want it to be a privilege, the fact is that I am white and that I will always be perceived as one of white people. This means that I will not be perceived as non-white and I will consecutively not be aggressed because of my non-white skin.

My characteristic as white person will protect me from experiencing what black people experience in daily life. And this, I cannot change. It is not a negative thing that I will not have to suffer what they have to undergo; but I will nevertheless not be able to share their real daily experiences. Less suffering is a positive thing for me. But I will yet remain different and unable to be fully solidary with black people in their daily emotions and feelings. I won't experience the same form of contempt on my own skin, even if, with my heart-mind, I can understand what it is.

Race privilege is like class privilege. If I am born white, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic (W.E.I.R.D.), I

cannot change it. The advantages of this privileged situation at the start will stick to my skin, even if I live among black, uneducated, traditional, poor people, in a totalitarian country. I cannot undo my level of education or consciousness which is linked with my origins and has shaped (positively or negatively) my way of thinking and my choices, including the choice not to identify with whiteness and to live with poor people. I will have made this choice because I believe that it is more conducive to happiness for me and for all to remain open to differences without judging them according to hierarchy. This choice itself is a product of my origin and belonging. I cannot delete this fact.

As said, it is like class belonging. Western education, in its best meaning, has brought me its best fruits – and also its worst – as a consequence and development of my privileged birth. By privilege I rather mean advantage. This do not mean wealth as a primitive want for domination and exploitation or illusory belief in my own superiority as claimed by whiteness. By privilege I mean here this advantage or mere quality which is a gift more than a privilege, as a chance or opportunity or favour of destiny. This is this good fortune some “lucky” families (everywhere in the world) have which initiates their children and makes them sensitive to the essential role of human and spiritual values. This is a great gift or fortune (not an exploitative privilege) which can be found rather in privileged classes of society, especially privileged because of this quality or awareness.

Privilege is not in this case a privilege to defend or protect subjectively against others who threaten it, because it does not take anything away from others. It is objectively a creative and life-giving opportunity which most of the others in general do not have. These lucky families are said to be privileged for the reason that they have received this gift because this gift is linked with an opening of the mind to subtle qualities that make life richer for who receives this gift.

Precisely because of its link with subtle qualities, this gift or good fortune is often absent in materially wealthy families whose priorities are principally oriented towards success, wealth accumulation and power. It is by contrast often present in families which can be materially poor yet gifted with a high moral and intellectual and spiritual heritage that in this case is not antagonised by wealth.

Who are these families? They are probably the real favoured (although often hidden) classes of society, not because they are better or richer or more powerful people, but because they have access to the most performing human excellence that allows to practise qualities such as love, justice, peace, happiness. This can basically be the fact of any family, but it remains also true that having to struggle for survival does not make the access to this well of wisdom easy.

In similar terms, in his writings of the mid-20th century, the Russian philosopher Nicolay Berdyaev¹⁴ used to define the Russian Intelligentsia as a kind of “monastic order” (yet living not in monasteries) formed by distinctive and more or less scattered people who shared a certain common wisdom and social vision and intellectual perspective for a better future for all. He described how this special class of people had prepared the path for the great social transformation of Russia in the late 19th century and had nourished the motivations for change and perspectives that led to the Russian Revolution.

This Intelligentsia was neither an intellectual movement nor a social class. Any worker or serf or farmer or land owner or aristocrat or artist or intellectual or monk or ordinary man or woman could be part of it. It was not a social class of people according to their social profile or economic function or size of

wealth or degree of power. It had a much deeper and broader significance. It was a movement of thought and faith rooted in culture, philosophy or spirituality; a sort of alternative way of thinking or living or way of being (indirect reference here to Havel).

In analogy with this Intelligentsia, in our modern world, some people are lucky (good fortune or privilege) to be born in such a context that opens them to a deeper truth in life which “protects” them from falling prey to the illusions of wealth and power. They have learned to adopt a humble profile because they know that life is a gift and that grace is the key of it. This is a great potential that will help them to have a more thriving life.

What I describe here intends to demonstrate that our social belonging has marked us for ever, in so many aspects and so deeply, that we cannot change nor deny these origins. If we do not intend to exploit these advantages for our own egocentric promotion, we can choose to work with these acquired qualities and get the best out of them in trying to act in search for truth and to practise ethics, peace and justice, for the common good.

This description means also that class belonging, as well as race belonging, has shaped us in an indelible way. When young people leave their family because they refuse to take advantage of certain social privileges their birth has provided for them, they leave only part of them such as wealth, comfort, security. They can also free themselves from the ideology attached to these privileges, such as racial contempt and will for white supremacy – which are not always necessarily inherent to these classes or families. But these young people cannot leave behind what has formed them, such as the quality of education they have received and the values they have been made sensitive to. And these “privileges” will follow them. And even better: not only these privileges should not be left behind as negative trends, but they should on the contrary be used in the best ways, in the service of

¹⁴ See Nicolai Berdyaev: *The Origin of Russian Communism*, first published 1937, or later University of Michigan Press, 1959.

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others instead of for self-promotion. In any case, they will remain.

The impossibility of letting go of all privileges is the reason why it is impossible to deny one's own social or cultural or racial background or origins. One can only try to translate this heritage and skills in the best possible way. I remain white but I do not need to enact the ideology of whiteness. I keep yet in myself the richness of my white origin, whatever this may mean to me.

I believe this dimension of class or racial or cultural belonging is important in what concerns the definition of whiteness. Whiteness as an ideology is not an obliged path. The objective fact of being white can lead to as many forms of expression as there are people. *White* nevertheless remains, even if it is not identical with *whiteness*.

What we do out of it depends on us, on our awareness, on our consciousness, on our interpretation of the world, on our personal choices, on the meaning we see in life, on our courage to take a stand and to risk new forms of life. But we remain who we are.

And what about blackness?

If whiteness is a fiction, blackness is a fiction too. How can a fiction become so powerfully destructive? Why does it have the power to humiliate if it is based not on reality but on a lie?

The colonial project and white supremacy are grounded on the illusory ideology of racial supremacy. Whiteness is the pure invention of an ideology of self-centeredness and illusory superiority. This ideology is a social construct and a power trip, based on nothing except the madness of its creators or enactors.

Whiteness is a fiction, because it was born in the head of some white people, without any direct link with reality. But it becomes

nevertheless extremely real when it is implemented and generates suffering on a world scale. Nazism is of the same type. It is also an ideology based on self-made lies and projections that become real and devastating when people believe in it or manipulate it for their own purpose.

Whiteness is a fiction, but a very noxious fiction, a fiction which harms so many people. In creating itself, it generates at the same time its own counterpart. It creates blackness which is also a fiction. But both become real in their implementation as terrible tools of oppression.

White makes black real, although white and black do not exist as such. In fact humankind is made of all degrees and possible combinations of so many factors, not only colour of skin – which as such is only one of so many minor other aspects linked with appearances. Instead of defining race according to skin colour, we could also decide, in an alternative way, to define race according to other criteria linked also with appearance but appearances of another type such as size or build or gender or language, or anything else. It would be absurd as race is also an artificial construct that does not mean much, except the hierarchy between different races that it allows to build artificially.

In selecting the skin factor as principal criteria of race (or otherness), whiteness defines itself as it defines also blackness. But it is not reciprocal. Blackness does not define whiteness. It even does not exist as such because nobody ever created this fiction. Blackness is only the mirror image of whiteness, or the counter-fiction of a fiction.

Whiteness in its destructive effect, as a pure lie, is not degrading only the black. It is principally destructive for the enactor of whiteness, although this enactor is not aware of it. It destroys the one who makes a reality out of a fiction, out of a lie, because this enactor transforms his own projection or intention into a life

changing and destructive force. The fiction becomes real destruction.

Let's here speak in the masculine form although the following comments are all gender inclusive. In activating for no reason a destructive force, the whiteness actor disqualifies himself. He destroys himself first, even before he acts. The shame strikes him first because he introduces the lie. He degrades himself as non-human. He acts against the truth and degrades himself morally (as human being) as much as, or even more than, his victim. He is indeed his first own victim, even before the one he aims at. He is dead before he acts. But he is not aware of what he does to himself.

In the same way blackness is a fiction, but it is neither created nor enacted by the black person. Blackness is a definition of the black by the white. In reality the black is; he is not this or that; he is (without epithet); simply because he exists and because he is alive. And he is not black. He becomes black only because the white pretends to be white and says that the other is black. The black is then forced to be black through the glance of this other white enactor who tries to soar upon him. He is made black, against his will, although he is not. He is himself, with his many personal and unique characteristics. He is who he is. In the same way as the white is also.

Black is beautiful. I am sure that many white people, as I do, find their own white skin a bit colourless, a bit insipid. It is why they like to be sun tanned. In whiteness there is maybe a form of jealousy for the beauty of other races, of all these people who look so different and so gorgeous.

Why are the nuances of colour of the skin so important? Nobody creates categories according to the form of the hands, or the length of the eyelashes. These side aspects, as the skin colour is indeed, could also become the characteristics to determine a kind

of race. But they do not. Why the skin colour and why not the eyelashes length? Absurdity.

Whiteness is fiction; blackness is fiction; these fictions arise because of a purpose that arises in the white man's head. A twist of the mind, a degrading artifice.

The white says that the black is primitive, uneducated, poor, stupid. In my childhood there was a very childish (and primitive) saying we used to oppose to the one who was calling us any name. In children language we were saying "this is the one who tells who is". It is so true about racism. The white declares the black primitive, but it is precisely the white who demonstrates himself to be primitive because he has such a narrow view of the world that he does not see how diversity and complementarity are the necessary bricks of life. He is then the uneducated one, the stupid one. This is what I will later call and describe as the boomerang effect: the weapon of the racist strikes back and brings the evil back home.

In Australia the most evolved people seem to me to be, not exclusively but mainly, Indigenous elders. They are the ones who offer a generous perspective for our common future, who tell the truth in subtle terms, who grasp the depth of the situation, who describe the cultural and spiritual dimensions which are at stake, who are generous and forgiving despite their terrible suffering in the past. These wise people represent for me the spirit of the nation. Luckily some white people inspire me too. Yet in the difficult time we are going through nowadays, this influent presence of Indigenous people is very precious and representative of the fact whiteness is a great lie, a great impoverishment. As white people we have so much to learn from Indigenous people.

No force can impose racism because it is madness and everybody should know that it is madness, i.e. not insignificant but without meaning. Yet it has a strong significance because it becomes

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power of the one over the other. Instead of the degradation of the white actor to become a shame for the protagonist, it becomes a powerful tool in his hands that transforms reality and imposes violence and contempt onto the other.

Why is racism so powerful?

Although racism is a fiction, it is very destructive. As victims we are shaken in our deeper being. As complacent spectators we are too unaware, lazy or timid to challenge it. We doubt.

As it is a fiction, the power of whiteness is based on pure pretence only. What does make it then so powerful, able to destroy people and all nations as well as the harmony between people? If someone tells me that the Earth is flat, I consider it as a stupid affirmation and I am not hurt in my being. If someone makes a racist comment about me, I am struck in my deepest being, I am hurt. Yet these two comments are both equally lies. Why does the second strike more efficiently than the first? Why can't I discard the second as I do with the first? I wish to try to propose parts of answers to these intriguing questions.

1) I believe we can partially explain the power of racism by the fact that, although it is a fiction expressed by intended dominators, it has a universal resonance in the ear of the victim. The victim hears it as if the whole universe would shout it at her. She perceives herself as being all alone as a victim. The whole universe rejects her because she is no good. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the oppressor will try to hide his discourse because he does not want to be condemned by the majority. Except in extreme cases, the racist usually denies he is a racist. This confirms the impression of the victim to stand alone against the whole universe. When slaves used to rise against their masters, they felt strong. It is why they were able to be the true abolitionists

of slavery; they succeeded in lifting the shame and the silence around slavery and racism.

2) I believe also that, more than the power of weapons that keeps slaves under the yoke of their oppressors, it is the force of humiliation that insinuates self-doubt in the victim. It must have been the same with the victims of the Holocaust. We are all frail and fragile. We all doubt our being, our inner strength. It is why we like to take refuge behind any form of armour that seems to protect us. Whiteness is such an armour. It has nothing real because it is an invention; but the armour that it builds becomes real, as effective as the weapons that protect the weak coward who hides behind it.

The wound of humiliation of the victim is as powerful as the wound inflicted by weapons. Maybe even more because the wounds of the flesh may heal, but the wounds of the spirit and of the soul shake the whole being. These are wounds that attack the essence of the being and its own dignity when one is treated as no-value. It disempowers anybody who is subjected to this treatment. The disqualifying aspect of the action strikes the enactor first but his shame and disgrace remain hidden behind his lack of awareness and, even more, behind his armour; while the victim is openly stricken and naked in its loneliness. This despair is still stronger when it is felt to be inflicted by the whole universe on the single person of the victim. The force of the oppressor becomes then more potent because the enactor is usually richer and more powerful, as slave owner, or as white person who controls the country and its laws which are imposed by him.

This sense of fragility and self-doubt disempowers the victim and paralyzes her. She cannot act because she sees no possibility to resist. She even starts to believe what is told to her. Victims of large movements of oppression become like sheep; they follow the herd and go docilely to the slaughter

house. This seems incredible. But reflecting upon it, one can see how it makes sense. The fact the attack concerns a large group makes it still more powerful, almost more “relevant”, and reinforces the self-doubt and the sense of powerlessness, hence the passivity.

- 3) When the victims of racism become aware how much the discourse that creates racism is a fiction, they may potentially become free, at least in their own spirit, although the situation of oppression remains physically the same. This form of inner liberation becomes more powerful when it is shared by the victims and it breaks the loneliness of the victims. Similarly to the paralyzing effect of the common oppression, the reality of a common awareness changes the rules of the game. This nascent unity reveals that it is not the whole universe against one victim, but it is indeed the whole universe that calls for justice against isolated land owners or slavery masters.
- 4) Beyond the threat of weapons and the reactive resistance of power, the obstacle on the path to freedom is the difficulty to recover the trust in oneself and to recognise that the humiliation belongs to the enactor and not to the victims. It means to recognise that all this fiction has no consistency, except in the role the oppressor plays to create this fiction and to consolidate it by all means. As said, we have difficulties to discern the fiction because we are sadly always weakened by our own doubts, especially when we feel as isolated victims. We live our imperfection from inside and we are well aware of our own doubts.
- 5) Oppression reinforces this feeling of failure and disempowerment; it is even probably its main strength. Our true weakness is our honesty about ourselves, our own recognition of our limits. This is a form of hidden despair. It is why we fall prey to racism, equally as enactors or as victims. But we should not consider weakness as a flaw. This

possible honesty about ourselves is yet also the root of our true humanity. Our own honesty becomes a weakness in conflict but it is a strength on our path into life because we do not pretend any longer to be what we are not. Honesty is the opposite of what makes the enactor so powerful and destructive; first destructive of himself, and destructive of its victims also, even of the surrounding world. He cannot be bothered by his own consciousness.

The great question is why we believe in such a fiction such as racism that is only manmade, and even, on top of this, manmade by a category of cruel people, of oppressors? Why do we believe in racism? Why do we believe in whiteness, or in its shadow, which is blackness? Why did the German nation believe and follow Hitler? Why did they believe in Nazism? Why did they mobilise themselves to destroy their own people (the Jews, the Roms, the disable) and themselves and their neighbours? I ask these questions because I do not believe German people are worse than others. No, they are like us, irresponsible, conformist, shy, and in this case they lacked the necessary discernment and courage, as so often we do too, especially when we are seriously menaced. This remains a mystery. This is the mystery of racism.

In the same way the following points are a mystery for me. I wonder:

- why we all believe bluntly in our common social values, without truly examining them;
- why we believe in capitalism that oppresses so many people;
- why we look for profit at the expense of others and why we want to sell our property at a higher price than we bought it;
- why we continue to destroy our natural environment while consuming too much;
- why we are exhausting natural resources and why we continue flying or driving despite of climate change;

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- why we buy Chinese stuff of bad quality because it is cheap and why we buy t-shirts made in Vietnam in sweatshops when we know full well that workers are not paid fair wages and are maltreated.

All these interrogations represent in my eyes very powerful mistakes we make, or rather these are flagrant signs of our absence of reaction, of our paralysis, of our resignation to go willingly to the slaughter house. We probably do all this because we are too lazy, sleepy, conformist; and we adapt to the practices of our society; and we are egocentric and greedy. We are also afraid and little capable to make our own mind and take a stand, especially if it goes against the dominating trend. If we do all this that is harmful for so many other people, why would we not also succumb to racism as an average lazy practice, not because we are convinced it is right but because we are undecided, in doubt by lack of thoughts, discernment and opinion; we do not bother to think about it and we hide behind our armour. I know, it is shocking to write such negative and disparaging comments but they nevertheless seem in my eyes to reflect what we do. They try to explain our behaviour and our endorsement of such destructive attitudes and beliefs which go against our moral convictions, and even against our wellbeing and happiness. This does not yet justify anything we do; but it helps us to get a better insight into our own fragility; is this cowardice?

We are indeed free to resist racism, as white people or as black people. But we have for this to overcome our own fragility and to become strong in our weakness and resist together. Our strength is in our ability to recognise in one another the same weakness and to overcome it when we see that this weakness, on the side of the victim, is nothing else than our honesty that recognises our humanity instead of hiding behind an armour of fiction and will for power, exploitation, oppression and

destruction. Yet we need courage and the will to dare to get this deeper insight into ourselves.

The great shame and destruction are the facts of the enactor or creator of the fiction. The humiliation is his. But we have also to see that we all are enactors in so many ways. We truly need to turn the table.

Otherness: Us and them

When there is oppression, the dominator is distinct from the victim. This essential distinction is necessary to allow the victim to resist, but it generates the false concept of “Us and Them”.

From the point of view of the colonist, there is a clear distinction between *Us* as “civilised people” and *Them* as “primitives” or “savages”, with a clear hierarchy between the first category which is entitled to dominate and the second which has to obey and serve.

From the point of view of the colonised, there is also a necessity to identify the “enemy” as the oppressor. As Franz Fanon writes¹⁵, “decolonisation is a violent phenomenon”. Violence of “Us against Them” seems to be necessary to allow the oppressed to identify his enemy, to build his struggle and to get free.

Yet violence generates conflict and exacerbates violence. It cannot lead to peace until both parties can meet again and establish a form of dialogue in which they respect each other. There is then in conflict a powerful contradiction. The concept of “Us and Them” is necessary at the start as a base for the struggle (Us) against the oppressor (Them). But it has no future as such; it has to evolve towards “Us together”, when the antagonist parties

¹⁵ Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin, 2001.

may meet and find a common ground. This main contradiction is probably the reason why the main actors of so many conflicts never find a solution. They never or only rarely can arise above this dichotomy of “Us and Them”. They cannot evolve towards a meeting of the parties which one calls reconciliation, or even only conciliation.

For this conciliation to happen, a true dialogue is necessary, as it has been described earlier in my comments about freedom and search for identity. Such a dialogue requires to listen to the Other and to integrate their visions into a wider common consensus that will represent a dialogical composition of all diverse positions. This means that the way the others are perceived has to evolve from “Us and Them” into “Us together” when the image of the Other loses its monolithic nature, i.e. when it evolves from a simplistic perception (the enemy and the bad one) towards a more nuanced perception (diverse people with each their own history, origin and perception).

The “Us and Them” is a vicious circle. It is therefore essential to clarify the distinction between otherness and difference.

Difference is a fact of life, that we may interpret in different ways, depending on how we understand it. But it remains true that we are all different, in some various degrees. Difference is the base for complementarity and is necessary in any system that relies on the good functioning of its many different and specialised parts. Difference, unless it is interpreted as otherness, does not exclude.

But otherness is not the same as difference. It generates opposition and separation. It is said to be otherness, and not difference, because what is only a difference is in this case considered as an obstacle. It is considered as a flaw, or at least perceived as a menace. Otherness means that the other is estranged; that he does not belong; that his identity is rejected because he belongs to another world; that we have little in

common. It means that the estrangement is dominant. What matters most in otherness is the boundary which the difference creates. It is like a wall. You are either on one side or on the other; you are either inside the circle or outside. If you are outside, you are rejected; you belong to “Them”.

This distinction between otherness and difference is very important. With differences we can still say “we” and “you” and “we all together” despite we are not all identical like clones. We have to find a term that expresses these differences, not as oppositions of clusters, but as distinctions of different ways of being, of complementarity. There is difference but no antagonism.

The experience of Otherness

Our feeling of being frightened by otherness generates a feeling of being threatened. This is often more in our head, because of objective deep differences, than in reality.

When we travel through a country where everybody looks different from us (and the skin colour is one of these aspects), where the language is completely unknown to us, the writing undecipherable, we have this strong experience of Otherness that triggers inevitably a reaction of panic in us because it means exclusion. This is deeply human to be frightened by what we do not know, understand or grasp. We can then project anything onto these people, even the majority of the inhabitants of the country we visit. Because we are frightened we can imagine perceiving animosity in them when there is none. The only reason for this feeling of being threatened is that we are frightened, without yet any smallest sign of antagonism on their part towards us. I believe this fear of otherness, which I experienced sometimes in my travels, is a normal reaction but it is important to become aware of it and to master it.

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The terrible thing is that it is a similar feeling of otherness that generally becomes the deep root of racism, as a deep unconscious experience of otherness, of being estranged.

As we are fragile creatures we will then explain to ourselves, in our inner discourse, that there is a threat and that these people are a threat to us. As we tend to think in egocentric terms, we will identify the danger in their antipathy because we feel nothing wrong in ourselves. We build then an image or a discourse about the other that presents Us in a positive light and the Other with a negative profile. We just invented racism.

The Australian Indigenous elder and leader Noel Pearson, in his address to the Press Club in Canberra (September 2023), establishes a fascinating distinction. He says that the discrimination against Aboriginal people is not due to a conflict about race but to a conflict about indigeneity (the essence of being indigenous). He says that what is at stake is the culture of indigenous people, as it is also elsewhere in the world. Elsewhere some indigenous people, like the Saami (Northern Europe), are white and have blond hair or, like the Aleutians (Alaska and Bering Strait) have a fair skin and dark hair. The true conflict is not about race; it is about the land and how to relate to it. It has nothing to do with race, even if it is too often confused and penetrated with attitudes of racism.

What he does not say is that in Australia the conflict about indigeneity is doubled by the conflict about race. Aboriginality is real; the issue about the land is real. But race is not; it is a fiction. Yet they both cumulate in their “negative” aspects of contempt that whiteness projects onto them.

Whiteness preferably opts for the racial conflict, because racism says “they (the Blacks) are wrong, we (the Whites) are right” because, in the mind of whiteness, race defines a superiority of white people over black indigenous.

By contrast the fear of indigeneity says: “they (indigenous people) are right, we (the Whites) are wrong” because the way Indigenous people relate to the land is a true challenge for white people that demonstrates the ineptitude of the way our capitalist system manages the land and its resources. Whiteness prefers then the race issue that comforts its attitude of contempt. It fears indigeneity that contests white practices.

This preference for a positive image (whiteness is better than blackness) to a negative image (the do right what we do wrong) is one of the major reasons why indigeneity has such a difficulty to have its rights recognised, independently of race issues. Rights in the sense of something that is due to (human rights) as well as rights in the sense of something that is adequate and just (the contrary of wrong).

In this way – and it is where Noel Pearson is just brilliant – indigeneity creates a more challenging difference than race does. And indigeneity is an inclusive form of difference that calls for transformation and progress while race creates an exclusive form of difference that builds up walls that separate us.

Here again we notice our general tendency to handle difference as otherness. By analogy we can say the same of gender. It seems the difference between the two genders (male and female) is the cause of a lot of divisiveness when gender is perceived as otherness (exclusive) although it should be considered as difference in complementarity (inclusive). Try to foster a child without having the two genders involved! Yet many people believe they can do it.

In these three examples of race, indigeneity and gender we can observe how much we get trapped by perceptions of otherness as divisive force. We can see how our perception of otherness becomes the source of most divisions, especially of racism. And, to overcome racism, we need to invent more subtle ways to cope

with what we feel is otherness; to rather turn it into a perception of differences that are rich in potential.

The preliminary condition consists in discerning how much our perception is led by fear. We need then to try to see who these so-called “other” people are. The exterior signs of otherness will slowly dissipate and we will discover that otherness is only an exterior “skin”, an appearance; and that we have indeed much more in common than we felt at the start. We need to break this wall of otherness and discover who “hides” behind.

Nobody will do it for us; we are in charge. The sad thing is that racism (the social discourse built on fear of otherness) has impregnated our society and our way to relate with otherness. It is why, each time we think in terms of “Us and Them” we reinforce the divisive pattern and effect of otherness and therefore we confirm our unconscious tendencies to racism.

Each time we think in terms of “Us and Them” we cultivate the ground for racism. This happens even if we do not want to; or if we have not the smallest feeling of racism. But the “Us and Them” concept starts us on a journey that leads to distrust and oppression. This means we have to break the concept of “Us and Them” if we want to get free of racism. Racism is a very sneaky feeling; it is mainly unconscious before it triggers contempt and will for domination. Any racist will deny being racist because the concept of “Us and Them” is so strongly impregnated in them that they do not see it any more.

The monolithic Other or Self

In conflict we tend to build a monolithic image of the Other; but this image has to evolve towards a more complex image that differentiates these others from one another.

Dan Bar-On (1938-2008)¹⁶ was an Israeli Jew who was courageously involved with his Palestinian friend Sami Adwan in a long process of reconciliation between descendants of the Holocaust (between Nazi perpetrators and Jewish victims) as well as also between Israelis and Palestinians. Through his work of reconciliation, in trying to bring irreconcilable enemies together, he has learned to observe and better understand the mechanisms involved in any process of peace making.

He describes first how the image the victims have of their oppressor is first monolithic. *Monolithic* is a geological term that describes a rock (*lithos* in Greek) which is made of one single (*monos*) piece. The perception of the oppressor by the victim is solid and of one block, without nuances. And Dan Bar-On says also that it is the same with the perception of one’s self. The self is also perceived in a monolithic way. There are “Them” and “Us”. There can be even many “Others”, with as many monolithic images of them as they are others.

For instance, referring to the time of the Second World War and how Jews experienced the Holocaust, Dan Bar-On describes the images that the Russian Jews he interrogated had of these Others who were the Russians, or the Nazis, or the Gentiles who participated in the resistance against the occupiers. He shows how these images of these few Others are always simplistic (monolithic) and how this simplistic vision of reality makes the struggle for self-defence and resistance and freedom possible at the start, precisely because it is simplistic. The Russian have contempt for the Jews, the Nazis are cruel, the resisting Gentiles

¹⁶ See Dan Bar-On: *The Others within Us: Constructing Jewish-Israeli Identity*. Cambridge University Press, 2008. Or also: *Tell Your Life Story: Creating Dialogue among Jews and Germans, Israelis and Palestinians*. Central European University Press, 2006.

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are on our side and we can work with them but we are different and we are not sure we can trust them. And the image of the self (the image the Jews have of themselves) is of similar nature, also simplistic: we are all good people, courageous, reliable, loving.

The monolithic image is the starting point that allows the struggle. The same happens, in the case of racism, with the monolithic image (of the Other and of one's own self) which allows the black to resist the white.

But this simplistic image does not integrate the many sides of a more complex image that would better fit reality. When the fight evolves, the image of the Other has also to evolve towards more complexity. Like in geology, monolithic bodies have to break down. The monolithic image has to integrate more complexity and become more diversified. The block of the Other explodes into many "others" and gives shape to a multiplicity of more suited images that also integrate, step by step, the diversity of the diverse members of these others. In the same way the image of the self also evolves and tends to recognise some negative aspects of the self that are inevitably involved in the struggle, like a feeling of anger or a rising awareness of the violence that has been involved and of the crimes committed throughout the struggle.

Dan Bar-On recognises that this evolution towards complexity and nuances is helped by the possibility given to the victims and oppressors to share with one another, after the struggle, their respective stories, the stories of their life, especially of their past life during the time of oppression, the stories of their personal experiences and feelings. This is what one calls the narrative which can be collective or individual.

It is why Dan Bar-On organised some times of sharing in which descendants of Nazis and descendants of victims of the Holocaust had the opportunity to meet together, to tell their personal story and to be listened to, in a place called Neve

Shalom in Hebrew, or Wahat al-Salam in Arabic (Oasis of Peace), near the bilingual village of Latrun in Israel. The records of this meeting¹⁷ are mind blowing. One can observe how the level of reciprocal understanding, at the start powerfully marked by distrust and antipathy, grows progressively, during the few days of the meeting, and enters into a phase of curiosity and desire to connect and understand; how the participants become emotionally involved in the stories of the others; how the listening of these stories breaks the monolithic image they had of the adversary and is replaced by a more complex image that integrates so many more factors; how this evolution creates bridges between people who first seemed irreconcilable.

Some years later Dan Bar On and Sami Adwan did the same with Palestinians and Israelis. And it worked in the same way, generating bridges of understanding and changing fundamentally the vision people have from one another. The monolithic image explodes into a more finely tuned perception that better respects the personal nuances of each person and their trajectory through life. The suffering of the conflict remains but a healing process transforms the perception of this suffering.

This necessary evolution of the monolithic image of the Other and of the Self into a more complex perception shows that there cannot be a "our people" who are kind, loving and joyous, while "the others" are perceived as a stereotyped threat of pure evil. Of course the relationship of oppression may remain a true fact but the respective roles and profiles of each actor have to be perceived in all their diversity, even if they participate together in the same general event.

To do this I believe it is helpful to identify, on the first level, not the persons involved, but the processes which constitute the true

¹⁷ There is a DVD of these meetings. Sadly I could not find any reference of publisher. Maybe Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam can make it available?

vectors of what is destructive; such as for instance the process or attitude of racism as a phenomenon not necessarily attached to persons but as an ideology nourished by a given society; and observe how this force operates. Then, on a second level, there are actors to be identified, but who are persons who act each one in different ways, with more or less conviction and energy, some even trying to resist partially the evil process or at least not executing orders in the most radical ways.

Even in the Nazi concentration camps, according to survivors, there were warders who had more humanity than others, or maybe only less cruelty, despite a regime that would let the slightly recalcitrant warder pay a high price for simple indulgence or just not being extreme. Most of these so-called enemies or oppressors were also suffering ordeal. It is indeed difficult to imagine what these people were experiencing. It is indeed very challenging to imagine what it meant for German people to be enrolled in this tragedy. Only a few have been engaging in radical resistance which has often been underestimated in later historical studies. But the majority must have been struggling how to find the way out and survive or save their life if not their soul.

These considerations about the monolithic image of the Other and the Self and their evolution towards more inclusive complexity ask the question of what identity consists in. We have already examined this topic in the previous chapter. But we can add here that our identity is not like a container that would include characteristics such as race, gender, origin, language, culture, as if it were a kind of bag full of items. No, it looks rather like a stand, a point of perception in space and time that tries to perceive what is around (reality) and to adapt and relate to it. Identity is not like a block of land with its boundaries: this is mine; that is yours. As explained previously it is a dynamic process in our attempt to belong and to relate.

It is why the discourse the white tells about, and to, the black is a crime because it imposes onto the other a false and reductive projection. It forces her to be what one says she is. Identity in this way is totalitarian. Nobody wants to be defined from outside herself. She has not only the right but also the mission to remain free from predetermination and to express her own being, thinking, believing, feeling. Race, gender, culture, language, origin do not define it although they influence it. The identity comes from our inner core, where we experience life. It takes shape in the way we make it alive, in the way we live. Identity is a dynamic process, a life process, not something we store in us.

As said previously, truth is what is in harmony with the process of life. It comes from inside us. Nobody has a right to impose their own vision onto us. It is why all forms of national identity, defined by past events or so-called common aspirations or qualities, are often impostures that cause more harm than good. Such stereotypes prevent inclusiveness and reject the non-conformist into the margin. It is precisely what happens to black people. As they are not seen for whom they are, they feel humiliated and disempowered.

But, as it is a lived process, this identity may be experienced in many diverse ways depending in which context it is lived. It is why I would like here to distinguish two fundamental cultural ways of perceiving reality and adapting to it, that is of being alive and revealing our identity.

Linear or circular - rational or vernacular

I have made so far a kind of portrait of Northern civilisation through the sixteen successive stages of evolution and I have showed how whiteness has become a major leader of the dominance of Northern nations over the South. Now I wish to propose here a similar approach to the Southern cultures. But, as

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they are more numerous and more contrasted in their differences, it is impossible in a short essay to present them in their diversity. I will rather try to show some similarities they have in common and especially in what they are so different from the Northern cultures. Obviously we can only talk here in terms of generalities that are never adequate for all cases but show nevertheless some general tendencies.

I would like to describe two main attitudes that distinguish the Northern culture from its Southern counterparts. These two attitudes are world apart and contrast by the way each one sees the world and interacts with it. These two modes, which I have already mentioned, can be described as follows.

- The linear approach observes, thinks and acts in a rational and deductive approach, progressing linearly forward, without feedback. It is therefore doomed to be in constant opposition and conflict with the surroundings because it is based not on observation of what is but on an intention, on an initial will to actualise a project. This is the linear dominant entrepreneurial approach of the Northern culture.
- The circular way perceives and thinks in an intuitive and symbolic approach that establishes a constant dialogue with the forces in game in the universe and in the direct surroundings. This way of being adapt constantly to what it observes. This is the circular and cyclic approach of Southern cultures.

Let's see in more detail what they are.

A) Linear thinking: the entrepreneurial project

The Northern culture thinks in linear and rational ways, from A to B to C, from premises to conclusion. It adopts the same for its grasp of time and space.

As it has been shown in the sixteen stages of evolution of the Northern culture, analytical thought has progressively replaced synthetic thinking. Production has reshaped human relationships. Domination has prevented equal exchanges enriched by differences.

Most of these stages have involved an increase of rationality at the expense of other faculties such as intuition, symbolic thinking, wonder, contemplation. One can observe how the way of the Northern culture to observe, understand and perceive the world, the universe or the meaning of life tends to be reduced to a linear approach which becomes deductive from one premise to the next; instead of embracing a wider vision that could absorb the many contradictory tendencies that never stop shaping our complex environment and global reality.

Understand me well: this does not mean that subtle thinking does not exist in the North. This means that the pragmatic forces, based on rational and linear thinking, become dominant at the expense of other ways of comprehension. As Marx used to say, but here in my own words, material forces shape consciousness (the meaning of life) instead of consciousness (culture) shaping the way we wish to live and do this. This progressive evolution tends to concentrate ever more on material aspects of our world. It is evident that these material aspects are more easily graspable because they can be seen, touched, measured. This tendency towards a more materialistic approach constitutes also a simplification of our perception and of our global understanding of reality.

The limitation of the perception and understanding create a strong handicap in our potential to adapt gently to reality. The vision resulting of this approach limited to rational and measurable aspects simplifies our understanding of what is, in creating a caricature of reality as the reference according to which we will then act. This will be the new map of the territory

on which we live. It is not a synthetic version of what we see but only a simplified version. It encompasses only the most evident material aspects. Such a map is evidently very problematic and not reliable; it can only mislead us.

We know that the map is not the territory but only a representation of it that is in any case unable to present the whole complexity. Even from the rational and scientific point of view this is a remarkable weakness of the method we apply. And, despite this already inbuilt simplification, we still accentuate this deformation intentionally in order to adapt more and more our perception of the world to our projects. The method of observation changes the context; and our intentions do the same. It is finally like having a map that shows the rivers and forests but does not show the topography and presents the land as flat when it is mountainous. We condemn ourselves to be in conflict with the environment when we refuse to see it as it is in reality.

I believe that the key element of this approach consists in the fact that our representations are no longer defined by a detached observation of what is, but it is geared by our own will to preferably see in the surroundings what serves our interests and purposes, and what we intend to see. It is no longer observation but it is projection; projection of our desires and intentions onto the world. Visibly such an approach can only bring havoc because we will soon be in conflict with the world that remains what it is, despite our “best” intentions to reshape it.

Our insertion in the world consists then in an entrepreneurial project. It starts with an intention to transform the world into what we want it to be. It consists in different successive and linear steps: first of definition of the intention, second of project of the intended transformation, third of design of the process, fourth of choice of the means and fifth of integration of the actors (by free will, wages, or bribes, or coercion), and finally satisfaction (or not) of the result.

One can see how the process is linear. There is no feed-back, except in the satisfaction and self-congratulation at the end. The entrepreneurial project relies on a linear progress from A to B to C. It is focused on the wilfulness of the beginning and it ignores all other components that do not fit into the process or are even antagonistic to it, inasmuch as these components do not prevent the progression of the process. For instance the pollution of the river in which the wastes are thrown will not stop the process nor generate a general reflection about the (in)adequacy of the means. At best it can call for some supplementary measures that will remedy for the most evident aspects of the problem and probably avoid the worst. But it will not accept to review and question the nature of the process, and still less the project itself or the initial desires, motivations, purposes, and means involved.

Such a project is only possible when one acts according to a simplified map, the map that only shows the material components of the context, at the exclusion of many other more subtle forces that can be ignored. These neglected forces can be discarded inasmuch as they do not prevent the project in itself but only impact on the context, as a reactive (often negative) consequences of the fact they have been ignored. It is what we call collateral damages. The colonial project is globally and clearly a good illustration of this linear approach without feedback.

As we can see, the linear approach is doomed to soon or later generate conflict, not because the project is bad as such but because it does not integrate properly into the context or is even in direct conflict with it; or it does not include some important actors who are despised, excluded or left behind. It generates destruction although it is not meant to.

Because it is linear the Northern culture shapes reality more than it observes it - although it does too, but only in a restricted measurable way. Strangely we are meant to be rational people

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with a scientific mind that checks that our science fits with what reality is; and yet we tend to reshape reality in our own ways.

For example, time in nature is a circular phenomenon. It is made of alternation of days and nights, of seasons that come again and again, day after day, year after year. Nevertheless we have transformed this cyclic reality into a linear tool. Time is meant to evolve in a linear way, like the digital count down of seconds, minutes, hours that follow each other as a succession of identic elements, with all the same length, all the same value, all the same impact. This representation is in sharp contradiction with the cyclical nature of time in nature and in conflict with our personal or subjective experience of time. In our subjective perception some days or hours seem endless, while others seem so short. Time flies, time stops.

And the same about space. We have even invented a Cartesian representation of its three dimensions according to a system of coordinates that define the width, the length, the height, each by a simple number that corresponds to a measurable distance from the origin, along one of the three axis (x,y,z). Space is then mastered, like encaged. It loses its capacity to establish differences by creating distances, beauty by generating shapes and textures. Space becomes linear and analytical. It is digitalised into computer maps.

And these two versions combine into space-time. We rediscover now that this is not a continuity, nor a coherent frame as Newton used to describe it. The theory of Relativity has opened new doors to our scientific perception. And we know that our simplistic linear representation is not correct if we want to acquire a true representation of the Universe.

Linear thinking: the takers - exhaustion and destruction

The linear approach is based on the exploitation of the context (resources, people); we behave as takers; we do not return to the context what we owe to it, in a cycle that would nourish it.

The linear or entrepreneurial approach is imprisoned in its wilfulness. It generates destruction because it draws out of the environment all the necessary resources and does not consider giving anything back; i.e. feeding back to the source by returning its own contribution into the context.

The Northern culture considers the environment as a heap of resources that are available to satisfy our wilfulness and our self-centred wish for comfort and pleasure. It ignores – and this is absolutely fundamental – that we live in a context of cycles. Resources cannot be exploited without being renewed, lest they get exhausted; wastes have to be recycled, this means transformed into new resources – like vegetal wastes into compost that becomes food for new growth. This process of renewal and recycling is a constant process in nature. This is an imperative law for equilibrium. And if we ignore this necessity, we destroy the environment that feeds us. We break down the balance when we go on a linear track and refuse to close the circle.

In the linear approach we behave like takers. We take what is suitable for us, what we believe we “need” or rather what we want. Here again our self-centred will is dominant. We decide what we want. We take it until there is no more. Indeed we kill the goose with the golden eggs, because nature - that provides us with everything we need free of charge and feeds us generously - cannot survive if its cycles are broken. These cycles are in fact the dominant laws of the universe. And when the entrepreneurial project develops, it does not consider these laws but imposes its own wilfulness, in complete denial of reality.

This is what climate change, the destruction of biodiversity, the imbalances of all major nature equilibrium (streams, ice cap, glaciers, forests, rivers, oceans) teach us: we cannot continue to act according to our own wilfulness, or our wilful projects. This means that the linear process has to be stopped because it is completely at odds with the context that keeps us alive.

The necessity for us to feed back the source that nourishes us means sharing with our context the gifts we have received from nature and from society: our creativity, our compassion, our skills, our knowledge, our wisdom, and also our belongings, the land we live on, the resources we have access to, the tools we use. All these precious gifts belong to the cycles.

If we look honestly on what we have access to (the material wealth as much as the immaterial wisdom and skills), we notice how it has all been provided by the context. We came to the world naked and weak, and everything we have has been given to us, whether by nature (life, air, water, food), by our family (subsistence, upbringing, respect, compassion), by our social context (schooling, teaching, wisdom), by the facilities we have access to (transport, health, education). Even our skills or know-how or wisdom are gifts of our context. Nothing is truly exclusively ours (except our toothbrush).

The linear way and our environment clash violently with one another but we refuse to see this (no feedback). We believe that more technology will resolve our conflicts. No, it just creates another false belief in another fiction, another project. Let's stop believing in projects, or at least in linear projects that deny reality because they are under the power of our wilfulness. And these projects have also been deprived of being just subtle, humble and receptive willingness, not wilfulness. Let's look serenely onto the universe and life, and let's see what it consists in: not in projections we create, but in a reality that pre-exists and feeds us.

Let's accept also that we need to become not takers but leavers (who leave behind what others need or what the system needs to keep alive and dynamic), or to become feeders (who nourish back the natural and social context that also feeds us) or to become even givers (who give generously back what flows through us).

Linear thinking: the betrayal of the mind

When we let our mind produce ideas that direct our life, we get into conflict with reality; we suffer. Let's learn to love what is, as it is.

The entrepreneurial project is based on our will to implement an idea. This idea is the core of the whole process because it gives birth to this idea and directs the implementation of this initial idea until the end, unless it gets forgotten, lost or diverted (which happens often).

It is essential that we examine in what this idea consists and how it takes shape if we want to understand why the linear way is so often based on false premises and why it inevitably comes into conflict with the context.

To clearly explain this process in which the idea is the leader, the best way is to observe in our own lives how we experience the impact of our ideas; how they take shape and how they guide our lives; mainly without us being aware how they mislead us. It is true, we mainly believe that ideas are great energies and that they help us cope with life and find the way through daily life. Maybe we can compare ideas to seeds. They get into our mind as small potential and they develop when we feed them or even invade our mental space as weeds do.

I believe we can distinguish three categories of ideas:

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- The first category includes most of the ideas (or seeds) that mainly are reactive. When we experience something, we immediately evaluate whether we like it or not. This is essentially how ideas arise, as reactions to what we experience, generally as evaluations of our degree of pleasure or suffering or of ways to escape it.
- There is also another category of ideas that is not so frequent in our daily life: the ideas we experience as intuitions. Instead of being directly reactive, they are rather creative, as new insights or new ways of perceiving what is. These ideas are like plants that grow quickly and seem to take shape by themselves. They are like revelations or insights that change the way we look at the world. They are also generally triggered by the context, or our experience of it, but less with a value of judgement whether these intuitions are pleasant or not. There is rather an evaluation whether they teach us something new and true or not; and what we may well do out of them.
- The third category is very restricted because it depends on the maturity of the person and, when one learns to do so, one becomes capable to apprehend reality as it is. Facts are facts; events are events. It does not matter whether they bring pleasure or suffering. They are received as what they are; and even enjoyed as manifestations of life, of being alive and able to perceive what is. They are freed - either spontaneously or by effort of controlled awareness – of any judgement of appreciation. They are enjoyed as such, as mere expressions or experiences of life. Beauty is appreciated as wonder, non-sense as an amazing trick, physical pain as a sign of our own vitality, suffering as a creation of the mind.

It is evident that the first category (reactive ideas) is at the core of the entrepreneurial process. It is what has led for instance the sixteen different stages of human evolution I have described: for

instance the intellectual turn-around of the Renaissance or the colonial project or the Industrial Revolution. The strong impact of these reactive ideas explains why the project is so much geared by the will to transform the context into something we wish it to be, according to our judgement (desire, pleasure, suffering). The project is the expression of a will (i.e. an idea) to change the context, to “improve” it in order to make it more suitable (judgement).

I find it fascinating and challenging to observe how this move led by will and desire, by the idea of improvement, is doomed to fail if it is not adapted to the context. By essence the idea - unless it is transformed - cannot adapt to the context because it precisely consists in the will to change it, to adapt it to what one wishes it to be, i.e. to what it is not.

In what concerns the intuitions (the second category), we can see how they are of a different type, because they do not impose anything onto the context. They do not define how reality should be. They are just insights, new ways of looking at the same thing, seeing new potentials. The question is of course whether they should be translated into ideas that would lead the next step of action and transformation; whether they are “only” revelations that improve our understanding of what is; or whether they have to become modest forces of willingness (not wilfulness) ready to adapt and to serve the context.

Now, let’s be clear: some changes are not conflicting with the context. When I cultivate my garden I modify the context but I do this – at least if I am a good gardener - in response to what I observe. My effort concentrates then on how to adapt to the laws of nature. I do not act in imposing my will; I act in response to the context, in adapting to what I discern. Of course I have an intention to produce food, but this idea is no longer the dominating force that shapes the process. It is only an intention that constantly shifts in order to adapt. The idea, translated into

intention, becomes willingness and no longer wilfulness. It consists in mental opening to what is; and to the forces in game in order to use these forces in a creative way. This is no longer domination or projection; this is cooperation. This is no longer linear. This makes a huge difference.

One more thing: Ideas are not bad as such. They are just what they are. Ideas never stop arising all the time. This is their true nature to constantly arise. And the nature of the mind is to produce them. We cannot prevent them from arising. And it would be even a great loss not to have them.

So then, what is the problem with ideas? It is probably that they too often take control of our minds and of our lives. Before they are examined, they become the dominant leaders of our behaviours and attitudes, although they are only projections of our minds onto the world. This is, it seems to me, the core of the problem: we have to discern clearly in which way they are helpful as trustworthy indicators that help us to fit into the world, in harmony with what is; or to discern in which way they are on the contrary only fictive creations, or judgements that set us in conflict with what is.

Linear thinking: ideas and judgement

Ideas may arise 1) from our intentions, or 2) from observation or 3) from our ethical stand. They have then different qualities or potentials of impacts.

How do we discern which ideas are reliable? We are indeed at the same time the producers of the ideas and the judges who have to select them, either to trust them or to discard them. We are both judges and judged. This is obviously a very ambivalent and conflicting role to have to do both. I do not believe we can establish a consistent method for this task because this implies an inevitably subjective approach. The criteria for discernment

seems then to consist more in our willingness to examine in which spirit we consider them; rather than in an illusory objective ability to know what is true and what is not.

Maybe we can distinguish three main categories of ideas:

- either they consist in projects and they can be called self-centred intentions because they are conceived in egocentric ways,
- or they consist in broader intentions to learn from context and they can be called world-centric observations because they aim at a global vision of the world (perception of a higher level) that does not depend on a subjective position,
- or they consist in choices between acts of commitment or acts of resistance, because of a general commitment to moral values, and they can be called personal options according to ethical preferences.

These three categories are in contrast with one another: Projects rely on wilfulness, observation on detachment, ethical stand on discernment and courage.

Something is clear: we need ideas and intentions to take us out of bed in the morning. We need an act of will to feed our children. These are necessary conditions for our daily living. On the other hand we know also how our projects have misled us. Climate change and the huge differences of wealth or the contrasting opportunities offered to each of us in our world are here to testify that the linear way has generated a lot of mishaps.

I believe that the different degrees of intention described above (self-centred intention, world-centric observation, general commitment for equity) illustrate three different attitudes about the way we can lead our life, as a person but also as a citizen who is participant in a wider community. They are all necessary to help us progress and make choices in our lives. Between

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hubris, awkwardness and ideal, the path is narrow. Yet, once one sees the constellation of these opportunities and the risks that accompany them, one is twice more aware. As the French say goes: *un homme averti en vaut deux* (forewarned is forearmed).

The perceptions of manifestations of life that are experienced without judgement – just as mere facts of life to be enjoyed in itself – constitute probably the richest depth we can experience; but it is at the condition that we can be free to perceive them as pure gifts offered by the present instant: it is why one calls them presents. They require from the perceiver the ability to receive them without any judgement, whether they are pleasant or not.

The idea they are pleasant or not even does not arise. We can then see how they are not at all ideas; they are direct perceptions. Because they are so direct, they do not impact on the mind as ideas do but just as experiences at their raw state; before any evaluation that in fact never happens. This is at least what the mature person learns to do. And then one can clearly observe and become aware how this is not the experience itself that can be painful; but precisely the idea that this experience is painful that makes it painful. This is a very deep truth that Buddhist philosophy teaches. This teaching is incredibly powerful if one is able to assimilate it. Practise it and you will see how it is true. But to see this you have to practise it first.

There is the following story which can be understood as rough and even cruel but which in fact brings true enlightenment. A young American man – Steve Young who later became the meditation teacher Shinzen Young¹⁸ - went to Japan to be trained as a Buddhist monk. First he had to show how he was ready to pay any personal price to be accepted as a disciple. Then he would be progressively given the most modest tasks to be tested

how much he was ready to detach from his own will. Later, after a few years of broader spiritual training, he had to live in an unheated hut (during Japan's very cold winters) and conducting the thrice daily purification ritual in which he had to douse himself with several litres of bone-chilling melted snow. "It was a horrific ordeal, he would say later; it is so cold that the water freezes the moment it touches the ground, and your towel freezes in your hand. So you're sliding around barefoot on ice, trying to dry your body with a frozen hand towel". The first reaction, he explains, was to try *not* to think of what was happening and to attempt to distract the mind from this extreme suffering. But the more he did this, the more it became unbearable. Young describes that it was on the contrary the thorough concentration on the sensation that avoided him most of the pain. Instead of avoiding the perception of cold, he had to do his best to concentrate on the harsh sensations as much as he could. Then it became much more bearable.

And there is more to this: it is not only about concentration on the real experience; it is about accepting it fully; becoming it fully; living it fully because it is what is. I know, this seems completely mad. But try it. It works. Then the exercise is no longer perceived as a cruel treatment but as a way to experience true life. Yes, by rough and imperative ways, but yet indeed as a real path to liberation; liberation of dominating ideas; liberation of one's own mind's madness. The great discovery of this harsh learning process is that it is not the cold itself that triggers suffering but the idea that cold is painful. The source of suffering is not the fact but the idea about the pain. The idea is more pernicious than the fact; and we can more easily master the idea than change reality (the fact). We can more easily change the way we think than we can change what happens to us.

This is here a crucial point: we have learned to trust our mind because, according to the linear way, it is the leading force but this is an illusion. Our mind produces ideas that never stop

¹⁸ See his website: www.shinzen.org

creating fiction. Of course we need our mind to behave in the material context of our incarnation, but we must yet remain vigilant that it does not lead us into a form of suffering that it generates by itself; i.e. into situations where ideas become dominant and define our experience in falsifying deeply what this experience is; because it never stops comparing the experience with what we project onto it; i.e. our interpretation, our judgement whether we like it or not. Once we have learned to like whatever happens to us, we are free of these projections and we can at least live our life without creating our own misery.

Now a last remark about the linear way. You may notice that I have first started to assess that ideas are at the source of our behaviours and then I have described how these initial ideas generate conflict and destruction. This is precisely the way the linear approach works. It starts with the idea and then gets into confrontation with the world. To describe the process, I had to follow the same progression, from the idea as original project to its doomed failure to fit into the context. In what concerns the circular way - which we will examine soon - it is the reversed process; no more from intention (idea) to reality but from reality to intention (perception).

B) Circular thinking: dialogical process

Southern cultures have developed a dialogical process to interact with complexity; all different forces compose in dynamic dialogue.

In the circular approach, reality (not the idea) comes first with its complexity as its many components. Perception moves and shifts, in a dynamic process, in order to come back constantly to what reality is and adapt again and again as the perception of reality evolves. Ideas are moving concepts that do not become dominant; but they become fluent and evolve ceaselessly in a

circular dialogue between, on one hand, an intention of adaptation to the most recent perception of the context and, on the other hand, an intention of restraint of our behaviours.

I described earlier, in the second and third chapters, the nature of culture and the role of the hidden sphere in our capacity to choose freely our future; and I explained how we need to practise dialogue in an open way that would be inclusive. I introduced shortly the distinction between *linear* and *circular* and between *dialectical* and *dialogical*. I would like here to come back to this essential distinction in more detail. One could say that perception and context are related either in a dialogical or in a dialectical process. These two terms (*dialogical* and *dialectical*) seem similar but they have very different meanings.

- *Dialogical* means that all the components, whether complementary or antagonist, participate in shaping reality. They are in a dialogue where each one finds its own expression. Contradictory influences combine and create a form of balance. All these components are active and remain active; they are all recognised for what they are. They are like vectors. In physics (mechanic) vectors are some kind of arrows representing operating forces, with their orientation (position of origin and direction in space) and their intensity (length proportional to their power). The resultant is the representation of the resulting effect (the sum of all these forces) that does not exist as such but only because of the coexistence and combination of all the forces in game.
- *Dialectical* is a term of philosophy. This is a discursive method that tries to find the truthful balance between all elements that compose it. It uses mainly thesis, antithesis and synthesis as a way to find the true hierarchy and see how elements relate to one another and which of these elements are dominant. It proposes in general a final conclusion as the resolution of the conflicts between antagonistic forces. In

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Hegel and Marx, it describes the game of these antagonistic forces that have to come to a final resolution: the synthesis.

These two antithetic terms and forms of dialogue describe different approaches in the way they treat antagonistic influences.

- The first approach (dialogical) accepts the antagonistic nature of the components and let this antagonism find its own balance. It accepts the multiplicity of the components and their conflicting natures as a rich aspect of their interaction. Balance is not achieved by the synthesis but by the cohabitation of these many contradictory influences. One could say that there is no definitive conclusion but only an everlasting dynamic of change, an everlasting “messiness” that yet brings us somewhere.
- The second approach (dialectical) accepts also the antagonistic nature of the components but, by contrast, it tries to solve the contradiction and come to a conclusion that brings balance back, by the right understanding and argumentation of what these oppositions are. The synthesis plays the role of the resultant that replaces the many components (the vectors). One could say that there is a conclusion that tries to resolve all the conflicts.

Both approaches concern the perception of reality. They both attempt to come to a conclusion that will allow to define the right behaviour based on decision and action. The dialogical understanding belongs to the circular approach; the dialectical understanding belongs to the linear approach. The first one gives more space to intuition; the second one is essentially rational; although both recognise that reality is complex and made of contradictory factors that can never be mastered.

The circular approach is dialogical because it consists in this dialogue where each component remains present and finds its

place. We can observe this cohabitation in the climate: sources of heat, capacities of absorption, differences of temperature, permeability, streams of water, winds, topography, humidity, pressures, colours, and many other factors and forces combine and generate changes that never stop evolving. There is no stability; there is only a constant movement and transformation. There is never any conclusion. There is no resultant that would represent and replace all forces in game. There is yet a main trend that results from all these interactions.

Such a dialogue is rich because it does not reject any element. All are included, whatever their influence is. A true dialogue is not dialectical because it should not lead to a conclusion that replaces the components and in this way would exclude many elements because they do not fit into the whole. On the contrary, the authentic dialogue needs all the parts to be present and to be included. It is like a mosaic where each stone is necessary.

In a group of participants each one can express their own point of view. If people listen thoroughly the combination of all points of view will generate a new perception; not a unified coherent perception that would replace the parts but a global picture that consists in more than the addition of the parts because it is enriched by all contributions. This is true inclusion.

We are used to do the contrary where the dominant image is the one of the strongest who has eliminated the opponents, also through a form of so-called dialogue, when the dominant force eliminates the accessory points of view. This is exclusion.

It is why, to understand the circular approach, it is important to grasp this main difference: on one hand an open inclusive form of dialogue that lets all parts be fully what they are and to be fully encompassed; on the other hand a dominating exclusive form of dialogue that intends to justify its point of view and tends to eliminate all that does not fit into this dominating perspective.

Circular thinking: cycles and circles

The circular approach is based on an imitation of natural cycles, including all the parts; it does not exclude circling nor repetitions.

As already mentioned the circular approach starts from the observation of nature where everything happens in cycles that repeat themselves yet each time in a slightly different mode: cycles of day and nights, seasons, warm and cold, wet and dry, sunshine and rain, freezing and melting, evaporation and condensation, abundance and scarcity. Resources are renewed; wastes are recycled into new resources.

The most fascinating thing in these cycles is that they seem to repeat themselves but, in reality, they evolve yet each time in a slightly different way. This is like a bird of prey circling over the same place again and again but at a different altitude, and also with a slow move to one side or the other.

If you listen to people in the Southern hemisphere talking or telling stories around the fire, you will observe the same circling movement. The story is made of repetitions but each time with a small addition or a slight change of tone that adds to what has been said. The story evolves slowly, not in a linear way but in a circular way. Like the bird of prey it is revisiting the same spot but under a slightly different angle and brings a nuance and a change to what was already said. As people from Northern cultures we notice mainly the repetitions. But if we listen carefully we get the nuances of differences and get enriched by the deep intuition that nourishes the slight nuances. The story is not linear according to the development of time. It goes forward and comes back to previous stages and forward again.

In this approach truth is no longer a content we can define. It is something that ceaselessly escapes; because it moves constantly,

it changes, it evolves; it generates new forms, new expressions. It is a mysterious energy we constantly adapt to when we adopt the circular way.

The circular approach has in my eyes three main qualities which make it fundamentally differ from the linear approach:

- Firstly the circular way accepts complexity and does not try to master it – i.e. to put it into cleanly defined boxes. It lets complexity evolve naturally. Life and complexity are two aspects of reality that one cannot grasp. They are both at the same time mysteries and keys to these mysteries as they are experiences of this more or less invisible reality.
- Secondly the circular way is hetero-centric. It means it focuses on the whole, i.e. on the universe or on the community as a larger body that encompasses different participants who are all more or less equal or at least of equal significance, beyond the many differences that distinguish them from one another. The other-centeredness is an excellent antidote against megalomania and will for power or exploitation, whether exploitation of nature or of fellow human beings. It invites us to a global view, to an overview that is no longer centred on the individual self (the actor), but that focuses collectively on the common good. To acquire this overview one needs to rise to a higher level of perception and of globality in order to get this overview which is no longer linked with our personal position. This is the global view of the bird of prey that circles above reality. “Globality is the consciousness of the world as a single place”.
- Thirdly the circular way practises self-restraint in becoming aware of its own limits. Instead of hubris it is humility that leads the walk. This is a path of relative fragility and modesty.

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Because of these three main qualities, linear and circular approaches are not compatible. These qualities even illustrate in what they are different and opposed to one another. This means they are exclusive. Yet they can find ways to combine in their differences when applied, not competitively at the same theme, but at complementary fields. For instance a circular approach for what concerns meaning and intention; and a linear approach for what concerns the practical implementation, yet under circular supervision.

Circular thinking: the vernacular model

The vernacular world proceeds in a circular way: fragility, dependence on nature, interdependency, reciprocity, relationships.

Let's first explain what the word *vernacular* means¹⁹. It comes from the Latin *verna* which means *the slave born in the house*. The word *vernacular* designates what has to do with home economy, i.e. with the home production that aims at satisfying the needs of all members of the home. This encompasses all the members of this large community: the wider family including further relatives, helpers, servants, even slaves, visitors, animals. Needs are satisfied either by direct production in a form of autarky, or by barter and exchange of goods or services with neighbours or other members of the wider community (reciprocity). The vernacular society relies on its own means without or with a minimal use of money; if it does, cash is used

¹⁹ The concept *vernacular* has been extensively developed in the second volume of this series. This is here only a summary. For more detail, see: Yves de Morsier, *Vocation and subsistence, towards a reconciliation between simplicity and wealth, in search of care and equity*. Desert Creek House Publishing, 2023.

in a marginal way. As one can observe this is a circular pattern of resources and wastes and recycling. Each member gives back to the community the equivalent of what he or she has received, in contrast with the model of the takers described above.

Let's be clear. The reason for this perfect model (this is not an absolute practice but only a traditional pattern of behaviour) is not idealism but the fragility of this vernacular society that relies on its direct environment and the sparsity of its means to provide the necessary means for subsistence. The integration of each activity into the natural cycles defined by the environment is a condition for survival. Beyond its material practice, this ideal pattern may well also influence the human values that the community chooses to actualise. Living in a context that favours generosity and reciprocity will encourage the practice of these same values by everybody. These values are also activated in a circular pattern.

Reciprocity is the basic way of relating one with another when there is no money involved. If I do something for you, you will do something for me later, or for a third one, a fourth one, a fifth one... who will do something for me. Each exchange calls for further exchanges: I help you repair your roof, you teach the son of the neighbour some writing skills, his mother will provide some fresh vegetables to my uncle who will show me how to take care of my goats. Of course each one of these contributions has not the same value (mainly in terms of time and skills). It is why each action will call for the next to correct the imbalance in the exchanges (which can be felt as a debt of gratitude). It is how reciprocity calls for intensification of human exchanges and relationships. On the other hand these intensified exchanges generate also deeper forms of friendship. By contrast, exchanges ruled by money seem to say: you gave me this, I paid you for it, let me now in peace. I do not need you any longer. And you either me. End of the game. As one can see reciprocity is characteristically circular.

What keep the vernacular society alive are relationships. They do not need to be always harmonious and nice. They can be tough, conflicting too, or antagonistic. But they find their own balance, especially because the neighbours are also involved; and their presence breaks the possible deterioration of polarised conflicts. Or these conflicts can also, of course, degenerate into clans rivalries. Nobody is perfect.

C) The balance: linear and circular

Although both ways are antagonistic and incompatible, linear (rational) and circular (symbolic) thinking both have to cohabit.

So far, in order to make the opposed pattern better understandable, I have opposed them one to another. They are incompatible in the way one cannot simultaneously tell a story in a linear and in a circular manner. This is either or.

But these two modes of thinking are yet complementary. I need rationality to build my house. I start with the basement and finish with the roof. I need also my will to direct me and to help me concentrate on one activity at a time if I want to be effective. Yet I need also symbolic thinking. I need some myths to teach me the meaning of life. Stories or myths reveal more than their simple stories because they teach the deeper sense; unless one wishes to live in a purely mechanical world.

- Oedipus is more than the story of a guy who kills his father and marries his mother. It is the myth that describes parents-children relationships and the complexity of the hidden desires.
- Prometheus is more than the story of a guy who stole the fire from the gods. It is the myth that describes ambition and will for power as well as the complexity of our relationship with

the universe when we want to control it instead of adapting to its laws.

Both myths show that we may twist the laws of the universe and survive, but that we have also to become aware of the consequences we will have to pay for. The choice remains ours.

We can see a significant analogy between these two modes of thinking and the description that has been made in the introduction between left brain and right brain, according to Iain Gilchrist²⁰. The left brain assumes the rational linear functions while the left brain interprets and proposes a wider perception that is more synthetic and encompasses also more subjective and intuitive dimensions. In this way the left brain corresponds to the linear way while the right brain corresponds to the circular way. The two half-brain cooperate, even if often in antagonistic ways.

Another thing is also clear in this contrast between linear and circular ways of thinking: Northern cultures adopt rather the linear way, while Southern cultures adopt rather the circular way.

The linear way is a product of the evolution in sixteen stages I have described. It is also present in Southern cultures because they can also act in a rational way but the circular and symbolic way nevertheless remains dominant. The Southern cultures are less analytical, more global. They think with the right brain, the part of the brain that provides the global vision, the wider perception, which is the intuitive approach. The Northern cultures are more rational, analytical. They think with the left brain which organises the material provided by the apprehensions of the right brain. Both are evidently very rich.

²⁰ I repeat here the reference for the book by Iain McGilchrist: *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World*. Yale University Press, 2009.

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And colonisation has powerfully impacted on the way each of them thinks. North and South hybridise ever more.

When we become aware of this fundamental difference in the way Northern and Southern cultures perceive the world and develop different ways of acting in it, we are not astonished that their encounter of one another brought terrible clashes. When we observe how the Northern cultures are rather geared by action and acquisition, while the Southern cultures seem to enjoy more relationships and endless palaver, we better understand that they had terrible difficulties to communicate and understand each other; not only because of will for domination and acts of violence, but also because of opposed ways of thinking (culture).

The tragedy is also that the Northern invading countries were much more powerful. As said they had better ships, more efficient weapons, and probably less moral restraint.

Let's see now how and in which conditions this encounter came to happen.

Chapter 6:

The meeting of two worlds

The purpose of this book is not to retrace the history of colonisation or racism. Yet it is important to situate the transformation of North-South exchanges in an historical context. I will just pick up a few aspects that seem telling to me and describe them.

Mobility: the road to elsewhere

In our time of extreme mobility – when I can fly to London for the weekend – we tend to forget that mobility is not something of our time. People in the past have always moved on this planet, on very far distances despite the slow speed of their fragile means of transport.

The practice of mobility

Mobility has been constant in history, from migrations to travel, trade, pilgrimage. Nothing prevented people from moving far.

Today we are accustomed to travel far and quickly, even for a short time. Planes and other vehicles have changed our perception of space. Speed has abolished distances; and in this way it has also flattened differences. Mobility tends to help the

dominating trends of efficiency, impatience, intolerance, greed, to spread at the same speed as mobility. Contrasts between cultures, between people seem to erode. Globalisation expresses very clearly this same trend.

Yet people have always travelled far. When one thinks of St Paul walking through the whole of Anatolia, sailing to Greece and to Rome, it seems incredible how a little fellow without special means could reach so many people.

Navigation was the easiest way to travel when it was possible to follow the sea shore or a river; it allowed to avoid crossing harsh topography. But when one had to go through a continent, the only way to cover long distances was a constant regular effort, mainly walking or, at best, riding.

St Paul could in this way reach so many places in present Anatolia which he crossed from south to north a few times. And soon later some Irish monks such as Colomban travelled through the whole of Europe to evangelise and bring Christianity to remote places. Later Marco Polo went from Venice to China. What an incredible energy and courage, as these countries were completely unknown, as well as the path to reach them. Travellers were exposed to all dangers, from wolves to robbers, from thirst to cold or hunger. The stories and descriptions these adventurous characters brought back transformed deeply the vision of the world people had at home.

Nomadism and migrations

The mobility of whole ethnic groups has allowed important migrations as seeds of the present different races or cultures.

Nomadism has always been an essential component of subsistence, especially at the age when people were hunters-gatherers. Nothing constrained them to stay at the same place.

Circular and linear

They moved according to resources and especially to cycles of successive times of diverse production: time for fruits here, time for fishes there. They had then to move to go where the resources were available at the time of maturity.

In Alpine cultures, semi-nomadism was practised. There were in Valais (Switzerland) four different levels. First the village at mid-altitude (1000 to 1200m above sea level) which was the main place of residence. In the village you had all necessary infrastructures: houses, barns, granaries, stables, bread oven, gardens, school, church, café. Then, just a bit higher in altitude (1200-1600m), there were the pastures (called *mayens* by analogy with the month of May) where the cattle used to stay at mid-seasons in late spring (May-June) and early autumn (September-October). There the grass was scythed, dried and stored for the needs of later seasons. At higher altitude (1800-2000) there were the third level of high mountain pastures (*alpage*) where the cattle stayed in high summer. And, as fourth level, there were vineyards in the plain.

The population used to migrate, at least the people in charge of the necessary tasks linked with the season, from one level to the next, following the seasons and the cattle, just behind the melting of the snow. The villages remained yet the principal places called home where the people who were less mobile could find refuge or even stay all year through. But the most part of the population would move to the *mayens* where they used to live in very simple conditions for one or two months. Even the function of the school followed. Then to the *alpages*, it was rather the role of a few fittest men and women and children because there was there less to do: no grass to cut, no cultivation, “just” milking the cattle and making cheese. From time to time a smaller group of people would go down to the plain to take care of the vineyards, except for the harvest that required many more hands.

This pattern is an interesting model of semi-nomadism that shows how fragile societies needed mobility to cover their needs, yet remained also partly sedentary to make best use of agriculture which consisted mainly in grass for the cattle and a few fields of potatoes and rye for bread and garden for basic food. The productive season at these altitudes is very short, diminished also by the lack of sunshine due to high surrounding mountains. Bread was produced only a few times a year, in the common bread oven. It was the luxury while cheese was the common daily abundant production.

One finds many similar patterns in other high mountain areas, such as the Andes or Himalayas. Soon these forms of combined sedentary and mobile states and behaviours open onto contacts with other tribes or social groups, i.e. onto exchanges, barter and trade, with neighbours or across passes of high altitude.

Nomadism means also migrations; at short or long distance; quick or slow and progressive, temporary or definitive. It is well known that Africa seems to be the cradle of humanity. Many different flows of migration started from there to settle the different continents and lands. These successive waves of migration have given birth to different ethnic groups or even stages of evolution of our human forms, such as Neanderthal or Homo Sapiens.

Later in history each climatic perturbation or political collapse or invasion generated also flows of people who decided to move to better lands. Julius Cesar tells us in *De bello Gallico* how the Helvetians (present Swiss) intended to move to the South West of France (to Saintonge) but he prevented them, because migrations tended to bring disorder and conflicts when the newcomers were trying to settle down on a land that was not theirs; and they would also have left a void behind them that would have been also the possible source of troubles.

Pilgrimages

Spiritual travels have been an early practice that moved important crowds at certain season to places of high energies.

Aboriginal people used to move following the cycles of natural resources as described here above; but they tended also to move on the land for ceremony or funerals. Structures in Europe like Stonehenge (UK) or Carnac (Brittany) show that celebrations were a major aspect of life, even in so-called primitive times. These centres soon attracted many people who had to move to get there. These became places of pilgrimage.

Santiago di Compostella (North-West of Spain) has drained pilgrims from the whole of Europe. There are many roads to Santiago which start in Eastern or Northern Europe or South of Spain and cross the whole of the continent. On these roads some signs (the shells of Santiago) were indicating the right direction to follow, and a network of accommodation allowed pilgrims to find simple shelter and subsistence on the way. Such a pilgrimage took many months and represented an important spiritual personal experience of effort, silence and encounters.

And many other places (intentionally here in disorder): Jerusalem, Lumbini, Amritsar, Bodh Gaya, Mt Kailash, Chartres, Vézelay, Glastonbury, Częstochowa, Rome, Kumbh Mela, and so many others.

One of the most celebrated pilgrimages is Mecca, essentially because pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of Islam: profession of Faith (shahada) – "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" – prayer (salat), alms (zakat), fasting (sawm), pilgrimage (hajj).

The shore

The sea shore is often perceived as a limit to mobility but it opens to vast horizons, as a call for trade and travel.

When you stand on a Pacific or Greek island, you understand that the sea shore is not the limit it seems to be; it is not really the limit to our mobility although it is where the solid ground stops that carries our feet.

In history the sea has always been the link; as the rivers also did. When you stand at this shore, you understand – not in your intellect but in your guts - why the Greeks or the Polynesians have become seamen. The same with the Phoenicians. It is how the land forms us. We become what it has made out of us, because of the topography, because of the climate, because of all it contains.

The Greeks have become the merchants and the explorers we know. It is very different from what the Romans would do later. It was not about conquering; it was about discovering and establishing links; of course mainly in their own interest.

Similarly the sea has shaped England that would not be what it is without it. Here too the people became seamen, traders, negotiators, explorers, conquerors.

This is true of the sea; this is also true of the desert. Main roads of caravans have generated important relationships through the harshest deserts one can imagine. The Sahara has been a network of these roads where the caravans transported salt or gold from the South side of the Sahara (present Mali or Nigeria) to the North (Marocco, Algeria, Egypt). Along the Nile further roads developed that linked Egypt, Nubia and Sudan, and further South. Even the Taklamakan (Xinjiang in Northwest China) or the Gobi Desert (Cina-Mongolia).

Circular and linear

Main roads of trade developed, either by sea or by land, usually along the sea shore. The tin road linked Greece with South England through Italy and France. Or the Incense Road went along the South Coast of Arabia from Yemen to Petra and Gaza. Or the Silk Road which went from China to Alma Ata, Samarkand, Tabriz, Türkiye.

These roads offered important connections and exchanges between people of very different origins and natures. It brought also miscegenation and hybridization of races and cultures.

The shore and the continent

1) Sea shore cultures turn to the sea, trade, exchanges, negotiation; 2) Continental centralised cultures turn to the land.

This distinction of two forms of society in Europe since the early Middle Age (time of Carolus Magnus around 800 AD) is inspired by Edward Fox²¹:

- A continental society, focused on the land and agriculture, feudal, centralised, warlike; example: France.
- A sea shore society, focused on the sea and navigation, harbours and market places, favourable to trade, negotiation (democracy), peace (?); example: England.

This distinction is fascinating because it describes a fundamental difference between France and England that explains most of what had to happen to them later.

The French society is characterised by a very centralised, administrative and strong power, whether the king or the

²¹ Edward Whiting Fox: *History in Geographic Perspective; The Other France*, Norton USA, 1971.

republic. This culture is marked by feudal traditions with local forms of power as intermediary between the centre and the periphery. This society is very conservative, anchored in peasantry, centred on smaller or larger towns where local goods are exchanged. There is locally a relative tendency to self-sufficiency, in contrast with far trade commerce. The land and the society as a network are the anchors. Rather than on trade the culture is focused on political and social issues. The nation is understood as the unified body that acts as a whole, in a more or less authoritarian form because of its centralised character. It is defined by its borders, rather than by the many regions centred on different towns. Power relies on the army.

By contrast, England is a society orientated towards the sea, because of its situation as an island. The sea becomes the main link that calls for travel afar which soon means also exchanges and trade. Negotiation is the main trend; one learns to negotiate the conditions. This helps develop a democratic practice; although rather a democracy of owners. The traders become the main actors; they have most of the wealth and the power. The importance of the whole dissolves in many clusters of power, each one centred on a harbour or a town where extensive trade is practised, with the accompanying specialisation into banking. Trade brings diversity of products and interdependence - in contrast with the relative self-sufficiency of the continental society.

In regions where trade is dominant, the cities develop; they take control of the territory. The power is spread and shared between many regional clusters; it brings decentralisation. One finds the same model in Germany with the Hanseatic League of cities such as Hamburg, Bremen, Lübeck, Szczecin, Gdansk, Riga. These richer cities become places of power. This happens even also frequently inside the continental society where some local market has developed further to become an important merchant city and a place where wealth concentrates.

Often these merchant cities inside the continental society have two heads that combine the continental with the sea shore aspects:

- One head is the market place where trade happens; not only local trade but also trade for goods from further away, because wealth makes them accessible and the local market evolves into an exchange place of wider range, with increasing economic power.
- Soon there is also a second head that takes shape as a castle. The local lord establishes himself, at the head of the town. In doing so, he has two aims; one to control, tame and use at his advantage the growing power of the merchants, and to participate in this growing power; and the second, to provide local support or alliance to the power of the merchants, in order to reinforce his own position in the feudal order, in resistance to the Emperor.

This model of a two-head town with market place and castle is a frequent product of the late Middle Age one finds through most of central and Eastern Europe, although these are continental societies. It creates a kind of insert of the sea shore society at the heart of the continental one. The towns become in this way the places of counter-power to the centralised empire or kingdom. Trade people form a separate category that is in some way independent from the central power. The nation seems to explode into these many clusters. The development of Germany and Italy has been fostered by these many rival cities, from Lübeck to Nurnberg to Prague to Genoa or Venice or Florence. Because of this composition into many smaller but influent and competing centres of power, Germany and Italy have only found their real political unity in the late middle of the 19th century.

It is interesting to notice that these Hanseatic cities or these smaller towns which live of trade will become in the 16th century some important vectors in the colonisation process, especially

and more strongly when they are part of the sea shore society. This is from these harbours in England (Southampton, Bristol, Liverpool), Portugal (Lisbon), Spain (Cadix) or even France (Bordeaux, Nantes, Brest) that the whole adventure started. Cities like Genoa or Venice had already developed earlier their own networks of trade connections, mainly inside the Mediterranean Sea.

Lastly there is something interesting to be added to this distinction between seashore and continental societies. It concerns democracy. When one says that seashore societies learn the practice of democracy, it must be clear that this type of democracy does not involve the whole population but only the land owners and the class of people with wealth and influence. This is not an autocratic regime but this is not either a true democracy that allows all persons, independently of their social status, to take part in main political decisions..

True democracy that involves the whole population, including the working class and the poorest members, is paradoxically rather a product of the continental society, not because the authority of this strictly hierarchical system has generously decided to confer power to the mass of the people; but because this power has been conquered by popular movements struggling against the hierarchical system to reconquer their rights; principally first through revolutions (like the American or the French revolutions), or later by social improvement and successive amendments of the constitution, under the influence of the bourgeoisie and under the pressure of the working class.

In fact true democracy does not exist anywhere in absolute terms – because it is generally reduced to elections only, and not decision-making – except maybe in very small communities, where people can debate together and vote directly to take main decisions, if possible by consensus. This can happen especially in traditional societies that are not hierarchical, or in Swiss

Circular and linear

“Landsgemeinde”²² (i.e. “country’s assembly” in Cantons Appenzell or Glarus) where all the valid citizens (used to) meet on the market place and take all decisions together, by voting. This process has sadly excluded the women for many years until recently. Australia did not count its Indigenous population, Switzerland did not include its women. Sad panorama.

What is mobility?

Mobility seems to be the fluidity that brings me to the resources or the resources to me, in order to have my needs satisfied, whether these needs are material or immaterial.

In all these considerations about nomadism, migrations, pilgrimage or concerning the differences between sea-shore and continental societies, the concept of mobility seems primordial. It is worth having now a look at what it means.

Mobility is basically the answer to my need of specific resources that are not available where I am. I go to the lake to fish. I go to the bush or the garden to collect what grows there. I go to the market place to buy what I do not produce myself. I come to visit you when I need to talk to you and wish to enjoy your friendship, I go to the top of the mountain or to the exhibition when I have a need for beauty. Yet in doing so I have to make the effort to move where the resources are.

Another way to satisfy my needs without making the effort to go to them consists in having these resources brought to me. I ask for instance the producer to deliver them to my door. I need then some people who are ready to serve my needs. They will make the effort for me but they must of course have an interest to do

so. My friend will bring me my food when I’m sick for reasons of mere compassion, that is without any profit. But the local butcher will have to earn something to deliver his meat to my threshold.

There is something evident in these first considerations, but there is also more. Without the use of money (or any equivalent) there is no possibility to have the resources coming to me. It means that, without money, I have to remain mobile to get what I need, whether it is material (my food) or immaterial (my need for friendship or beauty) because I have not the means to use what I can call “slaves” – in order to make the contradiction more evident. The rich can then afford what the poor cannot. Or, for a better setting, there can also be a tacit agreement that we help each other and share what we have, bringing each time the equitable share of the others to their door.

There is another important consideration that needs here to be added. When I go where the resources are, I can for instance fish one fish to feed my dependents and care that I do not take more than my share – in comparison to the shares and needs of my neighbours who will also go to the same pond to fish their food. But I can also, beyond any self-restriction, grab more than what is mine, or even take hold of what is yours.

When I travel very far, like for instance to the Southern countries, I will probably do my best to make the travel as efficient as possible. It means I will intend to bring back as much resources as possible, whether they belong to me or not. Note that, as I will travel to a host country, there is no probability that what I will get there is mine. I will have to buy it (using money to pay “slaves”) or I will have to grab it, mostly violently. This is where the colonial project derails and goes beyond the law of equity and justice. This means that any resource is not necessarily available because I have moved there to find it; in

²² For more information, look at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landsgemeinde> or similar.

other words mobility has its own restrictions; they can be physical but also ethical.

Yet our market system denies these restrictions. Most people want everything here and now. The market allied with technology is meant to serve our desires and there is no admissible restriction, it seems. The colonial project (grabbing what is at hand) becomes the law of the powerful. Everything goes. It is then no problem to grab pineapples and sell them in our supermarkets, without considerations how they have been acquired; even if they have been paid for, which does not justify anything. Consumption in this case is no longer restricted by availability or moral restrictions, linked with the cycles of nature; or with ethical limitations linked with the qualitative nature of trade processes.

This is the reason why nomadism remains probably the most harmonious and best response to my needs because it allows me to find a better balance between the availability of resources and my use of them. I have the possibility not to exhaust local resources because I may always move on. Either I learn to leave behind what others need or what nature needs to reconstitute these resources, or I do not touch what is not mine. These two reasons combine and find their solution in my mobility, especially because of fragility of my means of subsistence which depends on the strict respect of natural availability. But this requires a constant effort: first physical but also mental. Yet nomadism, by its essence of intending to be constantly mobile, means also that I am used to restrict the global effort of constantly moving by reducing to a minimum the items I have to drag with me when I move towards resources while taking with me all I need for my subsistence (tents, pots, tools, camels, donkeys... and relatives). Mobility encourages sparsity.

Mobility as defined above is then a form of fluidity. It aims at the best result in acquiring resources with the minimum effort. Yet

fluidity has not only material aspects such as the measure of my own effort. It has also a wider range of subjective needs that may be met which will certainly require effort but will also even bring the joy of effort: the effort to climb the mountain, the effort to visit my friends, the joy to move on, to experience fluidity, to experience movement. It has also a number of moral restraints that make the quest for resources of all kinds a personal satisfaction because it is freely done in harmony with the context (nature, society) or it is the opportunity for self-improvement (ethic, spirituality).

So far I mainly considered pretty concrete resources (food or friendship or beauty). I need still to add the following. Fluidity means also flexibility of mind. It means that, if a resource is not available where I look for it, I can use my mind to find alternatives. The first thought will be also the simplest which will consist of course in going elsewhere to find the same resource. But I can also reconsider my needs and the necessity to get this resource. I changed then my mind in order to adapt my mind to the restriction of availability instead of persisting in my need or desire of getting the same resource. My flexibility of mind helps me then to solve the problem of lack of availability. I learn detachment.

It is evident that, beyond strict survival, my flexibility of mind will offer me many solutions when I do not find what I wish to get. I readapt then my needs. I develop another strategy. I develop also my spiritual perception because I widen the spectrum of the possibilities. These possibilities become infinite and the aim consists then rather in finding harmony in my life than in satisfying all my needs. Note that these needs are often created by my context, either as wishes to imitate the other, or even to compete with him, or because I have fallen prey to advertisement or false promises.

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It is fascinating to consider how mobility is always more or less a product of our flexibility of mind. The mind creates the problem because it gets attached to a need; but the same mind can also find many ways (an infinity) to solve the conflicts we are constantly dragged into when we try to satisfy what we think our needs are. Fascinating challenge for everyday life: physical mobility teaches us mental mobility.

Enough now with these basic considerations! let's see how they operate in the frame of history that we are considering in these pages.

The game of mobility and sedentariness

A hypothesis for an interpretation of history

More than the evolution from mobile hunter-gatherers to complex sedentary states, it is rather an alternation between trends of mobility or sedentariness that leads history.

This is a bold hypothesis that I want to expose here. It is my own interpretation ensuing from my general observation of history. I cannot prove this hypothesis is fitting the whole evolution of history but I want to present it because it proposes another glance on history. And this other way of looking at the evolution of human societies is worth taking the risk. Of course it should be checked by historians who could say whether it makes sense or not. In any case the shift of perception it fosters is worth the attempt because shifting our attention in this way will bring new fruits and allow also to better understand where our Northern culture got irremediably stuck.

The thesis goes like this:

- We saw that there is a belief in our Northern society which affirms that evolution happens in a linear way from bands to tribes to chiefdom to states, from nomadism to sedentariness, from primitive clans to complex hierarchic societies, into more complexity and more materialism, more scientific knowledge and more technology.
- But I affirm that, instead of following this evolution towards more hierarchy, societies are caught in a pendular movement of alternation or hesitation between trends towards more mobility (and more freedom) and trends towards more consolidation (and more accumulation) but more rigidity (less freedom).

The distinction between sea shores cultures and continental centralised cultures, which has just been described, is not only a distinction between two models of evolution that define the characteristics of one society or the other; i.e. one tending towards more mobility in discovery of new lands and trade with colonies; the other tending toward more consolidation in a sedentary hierarchical society aiming at stability. This distinction between sea shore and continental cultures is also very significant, from another point of view, because, at the same time, it reveals also the alternation of two same trends of mobility and sedentariness for each one of these two societies. This means that the contrast is not so much between two types of societies – which exist as such and are indeed different because they followed opposed patterns of evolution – as between two forces (mobility and sedentariness) that act on all, or at least most, societies, in a combined or alternating way. It is then no more an opposition between two opposed models but rather the game or competition of these two opposed forces that, in alternation, dominate the evolution of any society at a certain time of its history.

The first force is the trend for mobility that projects the concerned society beyond its own territory or place of settlement. This mobility requires that the accumulation of goods remains minimal in order to not impede mobility, or these goods remain at home while one travels. Curiosity is a main vector of this development because it attracts people to go elsewhere on discovery of new worlds and new realities or other dimensions of reality.

The second force consists in sedentariness, i.e. in consolidating (solidifying into materialist aspects) what has been acquired materially, intellectually, artistically, spiritually, culturally. This means that the society under this influence builds a structure that is linked with the land and establishes itself in this structure. This structure defines social relationships, trade connexions, culture, art, religion. This move towards materialisation is very representative of what I meant by the translation of culture into civilisation as a form of expression and consolidation.

We have then two forces or trends that are antagonistic – this means working in opposite directions – but nevertheless compatible to a certain degree. For instance a society like Britain has developed many skills for navigation and long distance trade or colonisation, but has also established its metropolis on solid ground, building cities and establishing a powerful industrial production system, probably accumulating wealth more than any other Western country. Both trends of mobility and sedentarisation are here combined.

One could probably say that the combination of these two trends provides the strongest means for white supremacy: mobility to conquer and stability to accumulate wealth. This means that the two trends can combine, simultaneous in the same place, or also alternate, following each other in time.

My thesis affirms that the alternation of these two trends of mobility and stabilisation can explain many important evolutions

of our societies. But they may also cohabit and be complementary to one another.

Different forms of mobility

Mobility can take many forms: nomadism, discovery, trade, conquest, exploitation, travel; or social change, revolution, war, migration, mental mobility.

Mobility has so many forms and it can translate into many very different behaviours or tendencies, whether on the individual or the collective level.

- **Nomadism** is the most evident form, when a population is constantly on the move, usually in the purpose to exploit different resources that are to be found in different places, or following game.
- **Discovery** is essentially motivated by curiosity, before even trade can intervene. When Christopher Columbus went West to prove that the Earth was round and that the Indies could be reached going West, he wanted mainly to demonstrate something that had to satisfy the curiosity of his epoch. The idea of conquering new lands or extending the empire or developing new trades was maybe at the back of his mind but it was certainly not the main motivation for this expedition. Living on the sea shore constituted already a call to navigate in the distance and discover what was beyond the horizon.
- **Otherness** is not an aspect of mobility but it remains a fundamental component of it. It is important to notice that the word *discovery* is very ambiguous. It describes very much an egocentric point de view: the point of view of the seaman who comes in touch with a land that he was not aware that it existed. The fact that it was new for him does not deny the fact that the land already existed before he “discovered” it

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and that its existence had nothing to do with the discovery. When Copernicus discovered that the Earth was circling around the Sun, it did not change the way the Earth was moving. The change was only in the awareness of Copernicus of what already was and always had been, since the origin of time. When Western cultures “discovered” “new” lands, they adopted much contrasted attitudes. For instance the Phoenicians started trading or establishing new trading posts. Or they founded new cities like Marseille where to establish their new activities as traders. But they did not intend to conquer. Other discoverers were much fascinated by the different cultures they discovered and got enriched by them. There was visibly a deep fascination for what was different and so colourful or refined. Such is the case of the Portuguese in Goa for instance. Others, by contrast, declared immediately that the “new” land was theirs, in the name of their queen or king. They thought in terms of empire. They needed to conquer, to possess, to control, to dominate, even at the price of killing the indigenous population or at least subjugating them. Such is the case of the Spaniards or the British navigators.

- **Trade** is a specific form of nomadism that concentrates only on what can be bought or sold. The trader does not go where the resources are but transports them to meet the buyers. Goods or cash become mobile, not people, except the trader. Of course the return trip is often used to bring new items home. This second trend is more like nomadism: go and get the goods where they are or bring them where they are not.
- **Conquest** has often been a component of the development of trade: one exploits resources, exploits local workforce, finds new outlets for home (over)production (new markets). In conquest there is mobility when one goes to the “new” land, but there is again settlement (sedentariness) when one

establishes a new post or when settlers establish their new farm or mine or business. Conquest is mobility, settlement is sedentariness. The conquered land is no longer representing the other, the far removed; it becomes “ours”, as part of the empire. This integration into the same empire denies the otherness, and therefore the mobility that has allowed to integrate it. It freezes the movement of discovery into possession. This is colonisation.

- **Exploitation** of overseas’ lands is a form of sedentariness when only goods move and they do under the power of the conqueror-dominator. Like in trade (mobility), goods are mainly moving, and not people; but this happens under the power of domination which is a force of sedentariness. This is the great distinction from trade, which is meant to be balanced (i.e. equal in value both ways) but is rarely.
- **Travel** is the fascinating discovery of other lands and cultures, the possibility to meet people who live, think and understand life in a different way. This form of mobility opens us to the mobility of spirit and flexibility of mind, to acceptance of the other, to inclusiveness. Travel is an adventure that confronts us with our limits because it confronts us with insecurity and the unknown. Travel by train gives us the sense of distance and of differences in the landscape and in the people we meet. But travel is also the mobility of our modern time when it uses fast transport means (planes) to abolish distance and differences. We can go to Rom or Acapulco for one week and be back home to do the next thing on our program. This form of mobility is mainly accessible for rich people. It is a form of avid consumption of the unusual; it breaks boredom of a too established way of life. Mobility becomes then a dream, an escape into distraction when one lives in routine or rigidity. Fast means of transport (planes) accentuate mobility,

generally at a price (in \$) that does not represent the price we have to pay long term (destruction of the environment). But tourism, as we will see later, is also an abolition of differences when it recreates abroad what is well known at home (comfort, pleasure). This is then a form a displaced sedentariness.

- **Migrations** have always been powerful times of change, caused by economic collapse or natural cataclysms or invasions or tyranny or war: the newcomer chases the indigenous (Genghis Khan, the Tatars). Migrations have shaped history through the centuries. Nowadays migrations tend to correct the imbalances in wealth, through the whole world, as a consequence of colonisation and imperialism. “We” like goods and capital to move freely towards our rich countries, but we do not like people to enter what we consider our private space (the nation), although this national wealth has been partly built on their expenses.
- **Social change** is a form of mobility when a society gets stuck in too much rigidity. This happens when the tendency to reinforcement of power reaches its limits and the machine seems like blocked. It creates social turmoil due to flagrant injustice or revolution when the absolute power of a tiny minority becomes unbearable for the majority (1784, 1789, 1830, 1848, 1870, 1917 and many others). It is important to see that social change is a main form of mobility although it happens in one place. It restores the necessary flexibility (mobility) to the system.
- **Mental mobility** or flexibility constitutes probably the most powerful potential for mobility. It allows us to feel free (not caught in limiting structures) wherever we are. What imprisons us most, especially in our rich countries, is the way we think and the thoughts we project onto the surrounding reality. We tend to judge: I like this but I hate that. This is the

main cause of our unhappiness. By defining strict boundaries of tolerance to what we observe around us or experience in our own lives we limit our freedom. We get stuck, immobilised. By contrast, in accepting the world for what it is, we become free of its burden. Let’s be clear: it does not mean we have to tolerate whatever is (oppression, injustice, environmental destruction, fake news); we have to consider these external aspects as factors we cannot define by ourselves, but it does not mean we should not resist them nor propose alternative for better ways of being. We have to be witnesses of truth. The price for this can be heavy but it does not impact our freedom to be who we are, witnesses to the truth. Of course we can also suffer of the consequences of our stand for truth, but we will not be trapped in our own bitter mind. Truth will keep us free (mobile).

Alternation of stability and mobility

All empires, as powerful they have been, have collapsed and left behind them an empty space that has soon been occupied by newcomers (mobile people).

The best example of this sort is the Roman Empire that has extended through many centuries and, later, was divided and then invaded. The moves of what we are used to call the barbarian invasions have been at the same time the cause of the collapse (destruction of the empire by invasion of new-comers) or consequence of the collapse (invasion by external forces attracted by the void of power in the empire), bringing in any case renewal into a situation that was highly corrupt. There are two simultaneous patterns at game here:

- Too much structure, too much concentration of power, too much rigidity kills a society that finishes being choked by its own trend to concentration (power, wealth). The increase of

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the internal power of the last emperors has led the whole Roman Empire to decay and corruption or even to madness (Nero setting fire to Rome). Often the “solution” is found in revolution that happens at the “right” time and destroys the society from inside in order to rebuild it on other premises.

- Too much wealth attracts also the neighbouring populations (the so-called Barbarians) which want also to have their share in this wealth. This can be the barbarian invasions or major trends of migration as we know them today, because of the destructions caused elsewhere, often by the same dominating powers (in the colonies) as the nations-states they are going to.

Many major empires (Babylon, Rome, China, Spain, Moghul, Britain) have had their times of power and wealth and then collapsed to almost nothing. The end of the empires is often accompanied by movements of important migrations or invasions.

It seems that too much structure or a too rigid corset calls for more mobility. This supplement of mobility can be found in many ways:

- The simplest way is the rarest, when people leave the too rigid structure to become themselves more mobile, when free of the structure. This is the first freedom: the freedom to move away.
- Another way, rare also, consists in changing the structure into a more flexible or more adapted one. The mobility is found in social mobility when there is an upheaval or revolution. The mobility is then internal when the structure is shaken or transformed or even destroyed, without moving away. Social awareness is needed to see the flaws that need to be corrected. This is the second freedom: the freedom to disobey.

- Another way consists in generating war in order to foster social cohesion in creating an exterior enemy. The mobility is then projected to the outside, against the neighbour: the mobility is then in the mobility of the armed forces that attempt to conquer the territory of the other; the mobility is also in the attempt to divert social attention to the exterior.
- Trade and globalisation are a bit of this style, but with apparently less violent means. Commercial and financial mobility allow to find new outlets for overproduction, escaping the saturation of a system that has lost its common-sense, which should consist in satisfying basic needs for all instead of accumulating wealth for a minority.

It is interesting to observe that war – whether military or economic – is a form of mobility that offers an alternative to a too strong sedentariness. The expansion of France through the Napoleonic wars offered a way to propagate the heritage of the French Revolution and generate a kind of popular social cohesion that was difficult to achieve as the new regime had not stabilised. Other example: The Nazi regime needed war and persecution to survive.

Cohabitation of mobility and sedentariness

Traditionally mobile and sedentary societies have cohabited, or alternate, on the same land; often the sedentary body has tried to stabilise the other because nomadism escapes control.

There is, to a certain degree, a possible compatibility between the two trends of mobility and stability or sedentariness. Often there is cohabitation of nomads and sedentary people on the same territory. There is usually a strong tension between these two groups of people, which does not mean that they cannot cohabit. This is the case between nomadic people such as the Peuhls

(Fulani) or the Tuaregs in the Sahel (South Sahara) whose mobile presence more or less combines with the sedentariness of local farmers. These two ways of life are so opposed to one another that they often clash and cause fight.

It happens often that the same tribe will be nomadic for some time of the year and sedentary for the rest when these two ways of life alternate. Some tribe in the Amazon are known to live in villages for some months and then go on nomadic hunting and gathering for another few months. It is interesting to notice that they may adopt very different ways of functioning, whether they are in the mobile or the sedentary phase. Usually the sedentary phase implies a more hierarchical social structure while the nomadic phase implies a more cooperative one.

As I described earlier, in the Swiss Alps (Val d'Anniviers), people are often half nomadic because they move from one settlement to the next with their cattle, following the limit of melting snow in spring or the new snow in autumn. One calls this form of half-nomadism *transhumance* in French, which means going from one *humus* (soil) to the next. The people live in this way on four different altitudes along the year, mainly in the villages (around 1000 to 1400m altitude) but move up in half-season (spring, autumn) to the upper pastures (around 1300-1800m) and in summer to the top alpine pastures (around 1700-2200m). It happens also that they have sometimes vineyards in the plain where they stay when work is needed (pruning, harvesting, wine making). On each of these altitudes they have accommodation, more complete in the villages, more rudimentary in altitude. Even the school follows these internal migrations because children accompany their families, which remain united, and they are also needed as helpers; and this form of help becomes at the same time also schooling because it offers an opportunity for concrete learning of the traditional ways.

The use of different resources to be found in different places is a very old practice. When agriculture was discovered, it remained an accessory resource for a long time, as a complement of food – that was almost growing by itself in the wilderness without any hard contribution in work – in addition to what people use to collect in the wild as hunters-gatherers. Why should I break my back cultivating soil when everything grows by itself around me?!

All these examples, in which the two modes of mobility and sedentariness combine with one another, show that the balance between both is a question of choice by the concerned people according to circumstances. This means there is no progression from nomadism to sedentariness and no specific evolution from one to the other – too often and simplistically considered as progress by our Western way of writing history; nor is the contrary move, reciprocally, from sedentariness to nomadism. Both moves are far from being mechanical or unavoidable progressions towards more or less hierarchy and materialism. They rely on change or general social equilibrium.

The key factor: our relationship to the land

Mobility is narrowly linked with the notion of land. Does the land where we live or the land we “discover” become a place we belong to or a place we conquer and try to possess?

As described earlier, different discoverers had different attitudes towards the land they have “discovered” and the populations which lived on it. I believe the quality of relationship the newcomer establishes with the newfound land is very representative of the kind of mobility that is practised.

When a seashore country such as England discovers new lands and establishes itself there as colonial power, it is pure land grab. There is no longer mobility. It is sedentariness and consolidation

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of what has been stolen. It is indeed immobilisation. It is a good example of what has been mentioned earlier when it was said that the two components of mobility and stability (immobilisation) can cohabit, the second abolishing the first. Mobility leads in this way to accumulation of wealth and to immobilisation. The society becomes stuck in too much wealth and constraining structures (exploitation, slavery, authoritarian power).

By contrast the discovery of new lands can also lead to a gentle, light and respectful integration into the new setting. The feeling is then that we belong to the land, more than we can own it. It is true that the land nourishes us. It is like a mother who provides everything for us. How could we own it? how could we dominate it? It would be absurd.

In 1801-02 the French explorer Nicolas Baudin was mapping the coasts of Australia. He met the Aboriginal people of Tasmania with whom it seems he had many great encounters and even friendly parties. He was shocked by the invasive attitude of the British who did not respect indigenous populations. He even wrote a very firm and daring letter (24 December 1802) to Governor Captain Philip King, Governor of New South Wales²³:

“After responding to your letter as to the Governor General of the English settlements of New South Wales, I now write to you as to my friend Mr King, for whom I shall always have a particular regard. It is in this capacity only that I will enter into various details with you and tell you frankly what my way of thinking is; but nothing contained in this letter will relate to government policy, and still less to your ill-founded claims to Van Diemen’s Land, which

you knew no better than I did when you included it within the modest limits that foresight had you claim for your new territory. On the contrary, everyone knows that Tasman and his heirs did not bequeath it to you, so you should expect that sooner or later they will say to you “Sic vos non vobis nidificatus” [“Thus do you, birds, not for yourselves build your nest” (Virgil)], etc.

To my way of thinking, I have never been able to conceive that there was any justice or even fairness on the part of Europeans in seizing, in the name of their government, a land they have seen for the first time when it is inhabited by men who did not always deserve the titles of “savages” and “cannibals” that have been lavished on them, whereas they were still only nature’s children and no more uncivilised than your Scottish Highlanders of today or our peasants of Lower Brittany, etc., who, if they do not eat their fellow men, are no less harmful to them for all that.

From this it seems to me that it would be infinitely more glorious for your nation as for my own to train for society the inhabitants of the countries over which they each have rights, rather than undertaking to educate those who live far away by first seizing the land that belongs to them and to which they belong by birth.

This kind of language is no doubt not that of a politician, but it at least makes sense in practical terms; and if this principle had been generally adopted you would not have had to form a colony of men branded by the law and made criminals through the fault of a government which has neglected them and abandoned them to themselves. It thus follows that not only do you have an injustice to reproach yourself with, in seizing their land, but you have also transported to a land where the crimes and diseases of Europeans were unknown everything that could retard the

²³ Source: University of Sydney, Baudin archives, translation John West-Sooby: <https://baudin.sydney.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/correspondence-1.pdf> pp 138-143

progress of civilisation, and that was used as a pretext by your government, etc.

If you would reflect on the conduct of the natives since you first settled on their territory, you will see that the distance they keep from you and from your customs was brought about by the idea they formed of the men who wished to live with them. In spite of your precautions and the punishments you dealt out to those who mistreated them, they were able to discern your future projects, but, being too weak to resist you, the fear of your weapons has made them leave their land, so that the hope of seeing them mix among you is lost, and you will soon be left the peaceful possessors of their birth right, as the small number of them living around you will not last for long.”

Here again we have an example how diverse cultures have considered the newfound lands in very different terms, the ones as conquerors and dominators, the others as curious visitors and welcomed guests. When I mean *culture*, I mean this refined development of one’s own soul, as described earlier. Culture is the content, civilisation is the expression. But different people in the same society may have developed different degrees of culture; some are more mature than others. Hence it is not simply French culture against English culture as it seems to be in the previous example of the dialogue between Baudin and Governor Philip King. There are similar (indeed very rare) examples in English culture of stands against invading other countries, such as these interesting instructions given to Captain Cook by James Douglas 14th Earl of Morton, who was a Scott (1702-1768) and the Regent of King James the 1st of Scotland, son of Mary Stuart, and who had been influential in obtaining a grant of £4,000 to finance the voyage of the *HMS Endeavour*. These instructions were very clear:

”To check the petulance of the Sailors, and restrain the wanton use of Fire Arms.

To have it still in view that shedding the blood of those people is a crime of the highest nature – They are human creatures, the work of the same omnipotent Author, equally under his care with the most polished European perhaps being less offensive; more entitled to his favour.

They are the natural, and in the strictest sense of the word, the legal possessors of the several Regions they inhabit.

No European nation has the right to occupy any part of their country, or settle among them without their voluntary consent. Conquest over such people can give no just title: because they could never be the Aggressors.”

This comment about these “human creatures [who] are the work of the same omnipotent Author” reminds us of the work of B’Tselem (In His Image), the Israeli organisation which fight to defend Palestinian rights in the occupied territories (West Bank, Gaza) against right wing settlers and repression.

Nevertheless, despite these few exceptions of British critique, it remains true that the English pattern has been to discover, colonise and invade these new lands, more than others did; hence the power of the British Empire that did not rely on friendly feelings towards indigenous people.

In annexing these newfound lands as their own, seashore societies have condemned themselves to an autocratic destiny and to mind’s immobility, in other words to feudal blockage. They were losing the fluidity life can offer. This is in my mind a form of slow cultural suicide in getting stuck in rigid feudal patterns.

By contrast with an attitude of conquest and domination of the land, a lively relationship with the land makes the territory alive

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as a source of inspiration and vibration. It is made of many layers: the ground, the topography, the rocks, the waters, the plants, the trees, the oasis, the fauna, the wind, the inhabitants, which all act on their level and in their own ways and make the territory what it is, something alive and ever changing. By contrast the conqueror makes of the land a military entity defined by its borders as a dead container out of which one extracts resources. Immobilisation again.

It seems to me that this is the key. The key is how we relate to the land. Do we become parts of this new nation in belonging to the land and its living community? or do we use it as resources we believe to possess? Who is possessed?

We obtain here two models of mobility: the conqueror and the nomad. The true mobility is the one which liberates from being caught in rigidity and too much materialism (too much civilisation). This is the mobility of the sannyasi (Hindu beggar spiritual searcher), not the Armada. It is a true mobility of the spirit that travels through the world or the land as through life, at the search of truth and of the meaning of life.

Choose which approach you prefer... and you get the fruits of your choice.

The great contradictions of colonisation

This description of mobility of all times shows that the trend toward more mobility is something natural and human that does not intend so much to dominate but rather just to connect. This is a fascinating faculty and need.

Independently of this need, the evolution in European society was also accompanied by the evolution of the mentalities and discoveries I described earlier which has opened the door to new endeavours. Astronomy, geography and the development of new

navigation techniques that improved the efficiency, the security and the speed of ships or power of weapons combined to foster an incredible will for discovery. But there is also a radical change in the intention. First it is discovery; but soon it turns, or rather degenerates, into an undertaking of domination.

“Discovery”

“Newfoundland” was the apparition of the unknown, to be conquered, settled, exploited, as if it were Europe’s back garden.

I learned at school that Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492. This sounds as if “his discovery” had given life to this “new” continent. Before Columbus, no America; after Columbus, America started to exist.

This reminds me of the Swiss German children story by Peter Bichsel, *Amerika gibt es nicht* (there is no America)²⁴, in which people who want to go to America are said to be invited to hide in a room where they are told about a mythical land that does not exist but in imagination, with skyscrapers and a Wild West and Niagara Falls. And the myth is maintained because nobody betrays the secret of the phantasm.

When the newcomers discovered these “new” lands, they were fascinated by the land, by its wealth, by its beauty. But these lands were not bare; they were inhabited.

It came soon to confrontation because indigenous people were usually ready to be welcoming under the implicit condition that the newcomers would be friendly, respectful of them and also behave as guests and not invaders. But it came quickly to a clash.

²⁴ See: https://www.pymagix.com/swiss-in-america.info/documents/Bichsel_Amerika_gibt_es_nicht.pdf

The lack of common language, the differences of perceptions, the ignorance by the “guests” of the most basic local rules (and restrictions) of hospitality soon generated a great clash. And essentially the mere hubris and self-centred will for power of the incomers pushed them to behave as conquistadores. They had everything that allowed them to behave in a dominant way that ignored the humanity of local people. They had much better weapons, contempt for traditional cultures, greed for the wealth that was at hand in these new lands, deep ignorance of otherness and also very little moral restraint. This spirit of domination was still reinforced by the false belief that they were on a mission to represent the interests of the king or queen of Spain or Portugal; and, on top of this, an ambiguous sense of Christian mission that was more a later justification for domination than an authentic vocation for shared humanity.

The lands seemed very rich and indigenous people seemed to be thriving and living beautiful peaceful lives. The incomers had visibly found a form of paradise. These adventures of discovery turned soon into domination and extraction of wealth. That was the main purpose and the motive that pushed the Spaniards to conquer the Aztec and Inca empires. They wanted to take control of the land as a resource one could exploit; and especially they were mad about gold and silver that seemed to be abundant in these countries.

But gold and silver were rather, in the eyes of indigenous people, beautifying materials to be used for celebration; and, by contrast in the eyes of the conquerors, as an intrinsic value of mere wealth to be possessed as such. Possession: one wonders who was possessed!

Terra nullius

When Northern invaders conquered “new lands” they denied indigenous people any right to be recognised or defend their lands.

Now, there was a major problem: these lands were inhabited. How could one conquer them and dominate, tame or even, if “necessary”, eliminate their inhabitants? This could not be an amicable conquest. It was Them or Us. In this case “preferably” Us, in the conqueror’s mind.

As It has been explained earlier about slavery that gave shape to racism as its justification, there is a parallel discourse here that finally relies on the same lie. These lands were declared to be either inhabited by inferior beings, almost not human, or even devoid of any human life, when indigenous people were just considered as non-human or even as fauna. This avoided the problem of getting the consent of indigenous people, as required by the Crown, for the establishment of colonial settlements. The Brits declared Australia “terra nullius” which means land of nobody; because, they said, it was not inhabited.

Military occupation or/and trade

Continental societies have occupied “new” lands; sea shore societies rather practised trade, even on the lands they did not occupy.

Although they were excellent navigators, the Spaniards were typically representative of a continental power which, like the previous example of France, was centralised and autocratic, with a queen or a king at its head. They conquered the South American continent in stages, through a lot of violence and treachery. Everybody knows the story of the conquest of the

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Aztec empire (Mexico) and killing of its emperor Moctezuma by Cortes; or the massacre and killing of Inca emperor Atahualpa and his people (Peru) by Pizarro. Both massacres happened as shocking betrayals. The conquerors were few and “had” to use trickery in order to dominate. This conquest was typically a military conquest – according to the continental model and by contrast with the sea shore (trade) model - where the original occupants of these lands were considered as enemies to be either eliminated or subjugated. And the wealth to be looted as spoils of war.

What mainly was attracting the Spaniards or Portuguese was the gold and silver that seemed to be abundant and of which they had heard. Soon they discovered Potosi (present Bolivia) and its silver mines, or Ouro Preto (present Brazil) and its gold mines. The Spaniards and Portuguese were militarily in control of this continent and knew how to extract wealth but were not skilled to develop trade relationships based in this same wealth. It was more about taking and grabbing than making thrive.

By contrast, the British traders slowly and progressively established their colonial trading posts, practising slave trade, exporting to the mother country any resource they could get and, in return, selling in South America the products of home manufactures. Soon the silver of Potosi and the gold of Ouro Preto found their way to London rather than Madrid or Lisbon. “Spain owned the cow but others were drinking the milk” as write Eduardo Galeano²⁵. This is an interesting fact that shows

²⁵ Eduardo Galeano: *Open Veins of Latin America*, New York University Press, 1997. This is an old book (originally published in Spanish in 1971). But it remained a classic. It presents a general history of the South American continent in terms of sociology, politics and economics, in the spirit of this time (1960-70s), strongly influenced by the decolonisation movement, .i.e. marked by Marxist understanding of wealth accumulation. This is also a basic teaching of economy for the profane. A few of the

how military power and trade were destined to cohabit. Without Spanish or Portuguese domination British trade would not have thrived. But a mere military occupation does not provide the most profitable exploitation of local potential – of course understood from the colonist point of view.

There is here an interesting complementarity on which the colonial power relies: there is no conquest without army and weapons. But there is no possibility to extract wealth without private enterprises, because wealth “needs” to be extracted (minerals), grown (plantation), transformed (manufacture), transported and sold. This is an excellent illustration of the principle of socialisation of deficit (army) and privatisation of profits (corporations).

Charles 5th Habsburg: the continent against the shore

In the 16th Cent., Spain was at war with Muslims, Jews and Christians to preserve feudal power against arising capitalism.

There is an explanation to the fact that the British could overrun the Spaniards on their own ground in South America which they had conquered. In Latin America the British were only traders and did not have to worry about security because it was in the hands (and at the cost) of the Spaniards or Portuguese. They succeeded to extract most of the wealth of the colonists in getting access to the enormous wealth the Spaniards had collected in South America.

First the British did this through slave trade that provided them with the gold and silver the colonists used for payment when they bought these slaves for their plantations. But also through

points presented here have been inspired (although only indirectly) by this reading.

trade, the British bought natural resources, transported them to England where they were processed. The manufactured goods went then to South America and were sold there. I would like even to say *went back* because they were made of these many resources that had been extracted from there. How was it possible that all the gold and silver the Spaniards had collected finished in London?

At the time of the “discovery” of America, Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon had united their two kingdoms to form the new imperial Spain that would be leading these many discoveries of the Southern lands. It was also the time of the Reconquista when Isabel and Ferdinand were chasing the Arabs out of South Spain and they were also persecuting the Jews, forcing both of them to convert to Catholicism if they wanted to stay in Spain. Hence, because it was forced upon them, any convert became suspicious of being a hidden Muslim or a hidden Jew. At the same time the Inquisition was revived and started a hunt after the so-called heretic Christians. This was also the time of the Reformation and of the struggle of traditional Catholicism against this new expression of Christianity. These many forms of rejection and antagonism caused many people to flee from Spain and it deprived the country of numerous skills, know-hows, trades, manufacturers in such activities as weaving, sheep rearing, or of diversified artefacts and even banking.

This was soon then the time when Charles the 5th Habsburg was the Emperor, dominating Spain, the Netherland, Austria and the Roman Empire. Although he was also emperor of Spain he did not speak Spanish and was surrounded by Flemish and Dutch nobility who knew also how to take advantage of their privileged position at the Court and extract a maximum of gold and silver from the monarch. The main trades and banking were in their hands. The prolific nobility of Spain was in general only interested in luxury which was not productive; they did not invest their fortune into local economy, into trade, into

manufacturing or anything similar. The Spanish treasure was highly indebted by the huge cost of sea expeditions to the Southern seas and the cost of the armies that were necessary to establish the new colonies. The economy reached a significant low.

By contrast the protestant countries were flourishing because they used the Reformation to reinforce their economic independence from the Holy German Roman Empire and by developing trade. They were belonging to this shore society, even when they were established inland. Charles 5th became the leader of the counter-reformation and, consequently, of the resistance against the arising form of capitalism. His stubbornness to oppose the current evolution cost him a lot despite the fact the sun never set on his Empire.

While Charles 5th exhausted his power in rear guard struggle to save feudalism, England was flourishing in trade and sea domination. It knew how to use the weakness of the enemy to reinforce its own position. The shore was winning over the continent. The continent was collapsing under its old sclerotic feudal model while the shore was stimulated by an incredible growth that opened the doors of material plenty into a capitalist future.

Sovereignty

The British invaders imposed their law on a territory that was declared under the authority of the British Crown. The settler law was meant to replace the traditional indigenous law.

The whole story of discovery and conquest cannot be complete without the concept of sovereignty which is the key of the whole puzzle.

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When Cook came to Australia he declared the newfound land British territory although he had hardly touched it. He had yet received clear instructions from the Crown that he could only declare any new territory to be under the authority of the Crown if it were not inhabited or if he obtained the consent of the indigenous people or if he conquered it. None of these conditions had been fulfilled.

At first the territory was declared to be not inhabited. Banks and Cook had reported that there were hardly a few indigenous living on the land. But the First Fleet had soon to discover that it was not true. Indigenous people were truly alive and occupying the land as theirs.

The second stage was denial: the invaders declared that the inhabitants were too primitive to give their consent. It is why their opinion was discarded. This denial has been for more than two centuries the basic argument for imposing the settler law. Aboriginal people were not even subjects of the crown, and still less citizens. They could not even give testimony in Court.

The British law the newcomers brought with them was declared the only law on the continent. It was the only just one it could be referred to, necessary to clear all cases. The problem was yet that the indigenous people were completely ignoring what the substance of this law was; they did not even understand English which was the language in which this law was referred to and applied. The British law system relied on juries and implied that these juries were meant to be composed of peers – that is people similar to the defendant – to judge the defendant. Despite this important instruction concerning the composition of juries, Indigenous people were judged by white people who referred to a white law which was fundamentally different from their own and even unknown to them. Of course Indigenous people on their part were continuing to live according to their own traditional law (culture).

There were in fact two systems that were competing, being of fundamentally different natures.

- The British system was based on a fundamental choice that favoured, or gave priority to, the concepts of private property and individual freedom. It was mainly repressive in the way it was treating any case of transgression or crime, resorting principally to the authority of police forces, to the Court and to imprisonment as forms of punishment. Justice was at this time, and still is nowadays, understood as a punitive process. People had to behave well because they were frightened of punishment.
- The Aboriginal system had its own traditional laws, with many variations according to the diversity of clans, cultures, languages. It was rather based on consensus (i.e. community or elders judgement) and had as purpose to restore justice, aiming at restored equilibrium or harmony. Hence there were solutions of compensations, payback, expulsion or repair. The process was more understood as restorative.

By denying the validity of the traditional system the settler law was in fact exposing the Indigenous people to a double punishment; the first by the white law as imprisonment, and the second, once released from prison, by the Indigenous community according to traditional law. This was deeply unjust, not mentioning that most condemnations against Indigenous people were (are) often deeply arbitrary, caused by mere racism, the victim being even often not guilty.

Many defendants tried to challenge the tacit acceptance that this was the white law that should be applied, contesting that Australia had never been recognised under the authority of the Crown because Indigenous had never given their consent. Therefore only the Indigenous law remained valid in their eyes.

Hence the authority of the conqueror over the land had no legal basis. It was a simple colonial decree. Even the official clause of necessary consent of the indigenous people was in fact absurd. It was only a pretence that tried to hide the real fact of conquest. The Crown never yet stopped requiring from the settlers that they respect the Indigenous population but, on the other hand, the colonial system consisted precisely in grabbing the land. The settlers were there just for this reason: take possession of what was not theirs and exploit local people.

The British Museum: where is culture?

In the name of civilisation the invaders looted cultural goods they stored in national museums: culture had travelled north, not south.

The newcomers were saying they were bringing civilisation. There is a striking detail to this: The British Museum and the Louvre are full of looted items from these Southern countries. Without their Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Asian, African, Amerindian, Aboriginal sections, these museums would be almost completely empty. There is in this fact a very strong and almost humorous paradox if it were not tragic: culture (they call it civilisation) has not moved South, but North.

If the North had brought civilisation to the South, as they pretend(ed), there would logically be many British museums in Kenya, Nigeria, India, Australia, full of inspiring British pieces of art. But this is not the case; this is exactly the contrary. The many works of art stolen from the South are nowadays in the North: the Elgin Marbles or the Benin Bronzes or the many Aboriginal shields and spears – to mention only a few – come all from Southern countries which want to be returned to them. Civilisation has not moved South; but culture has moved North.

I say *culture* because these items the North has grabbed are much more than civilisation; they are the deepest expression of the most intimate beliefs of Southern cultures. They are beyond mere objects; they are full of significance, of deeper meaning about beliefs and world views. They are civilisation - because they are expressions – but they are more deeply expressions of meaning; it is why they are culture; there are signs of truth.

The conclusion of these considerations seems to me very interesting and meaningful. Not only the conquerors were not able to bring civilisation but they were in fact, probably unconsciously, at the search of true culture, i.e. of deeper signs, in search for truth. Maybe one could even imagine that they became explorers because they wanted unconsciously to learn more about the meaning of life. They became therefore explorers of meaning. They looted what seemed to be significant to them. They looted culture, beauty, faith, because this was what they were hungry for, and in need of. They were thirsty of the culture they did not have. They were thirsty of life they did not live.

Hence culture, as meaning, moved North. And civilisation did not move South. What happened truly is that the circular culture went North; they were looted, grabbed, stolen, expropriated; but also maybe they intended, unconsciously, to teach their own values and help the linear culture get out of its narrow tracks.

There was a deep contradiction in the colonial endeavour: the colonists meant to be superior; but their behaviour and use of violence made them behave like beasts. The Northern civilisation left in the South a very strong bitter, negative and deeply resentful attitude against the North, because of its unlimited contempt for the locals, because of the tremendous violence and crimes committed, because of the betrayal of robbing them of culture while playing the magnanimous lords; a terrible poison that is still acting today, ensuing of the deep contradiction that is at the core of the present clash of white supremacy with Southern

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countries, with traditional cultures, with First Nation people. Beyond all forms of exploitation and looting, the hate and destruction that were the supports of the whole enterprise remain as deep wounds in our common humanity.

This deep resentment is still increased by the maltreatment of indigenous people and the extraction of the whole wealth that could be taken from these countries. And it still does today: fuel, precious tropical wood, furs, fruits, coffee, tea, minerals. Most resources continue to flow North. Wealth continues to be extracted. The poison spreads and goes deeper. Resentment is groaning.

Missionaries

The participation of missionaries to colonisation is shocking; it helped establish domination in the name of “righteousness”.

In this project that pretended to bring civilisation to the undeveloped, the missionaries took an active part. Sadly they also believed, most of them, that colonisation was a great move to make the “savages” human. They wanted to bring Christianity as the message of salvation of humankind. There was probably nothing bad in this intention, except the fact they considered the others (indigenous people) as inferior and in need to be evangelised.

On a higher level, they sadly did not perceive that this encounter with the other was in reality a precious opportunity, for them too, to be reciprocally enriched by the wisdom which had developed in other cultures. These presumptuous missionaries could have been inspired - if they had been ready and open for this – by other forms of spirituality. It would have even enriched their own Christian spirituality. There is a lot of knowledge and wisdom in all these different religions in Southern countries, especially because they are different and have a different perception of the

divine. Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Taoism, Shintoism. Animism, had developed a very different approach to the divine and could have taught a lot to these new incomers.

Aboriginal spirituality had guided its people for many tens thousands of years. It had maintained an astonishing balance and harmony inside the different groups, between the different tribes and between them and the Land. This harmony - because it was gentle and not imposing – was not noticed by the incomers. They on the contrary despised the inhabitants because they were too gentle and did not show aggressive trends. They were not soldiers in the way the invaders were. They were good warriors (in case of necessity) and excellent hunters.

Because of this huge misunderstanding and their preconceived idea of their own superiority, the missionaries participated in the project of “civilisation”. They added their own contribution, teaching and baptising, sometimes by force. In extreme cases even the baptism was the condition to avoid being killed. Convert to my loving God or I kill you!

It is very understandable (understatement) that the colonised were not convinced. The behaviour of the colonists and of the missionaries was demonstrating exactly the contrary of what Christianity was to be shown to be: they showed violence instead of compassion, domination instead of service, oppression instead of care, contempt instead of attention, teaching instead of listening. They were stealing and looting and killing instead of giving, sharing and protecting. This was the teaching upside down. The complete negation of what it should be. Not astonishing that the inhabitants rejected the “offering”.

Yet there were many exceptions. Some courageous religious people did everything they could to protect indigenous people from the oppression and violence of the invaders.

For instance, Bartolomé de la Casas (first half of 16th century) was a Spanish landowner who became friar and priest, and even bishop of the Chiapas (South actual Mexico). He was scandalised by the atrocities perpetrated against the Amerindians. He wrote *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies and Historia de Las Indias*. He intervened with the king of Spain (Charles 1 of Spain) to promote the defence of indigenous people against the violence of the colonists.

Other examples are the Jesuits who were radically defending the enculturation of the new faith, that is its translation in local tradition, language, culture, customs. This meant to bring Christianity but with gentleness as an offer and in a spirit of respect. The new faith, if accepted, had to adapt to local customs, to be retranslated in local cultural terms; to be enculturated. It was their attitude in general wherever they went, whether in South America or in China or Japan.

In South America they have been especially active in the North of present Argentina (Guarani territory in the Misiones Province near the Iguazu Falls). The film *Mission* (Britain, 1986, by Roland Joffé, with Robert de Niro, music by Ennio Morricone) has made this story famous. This is an impressive example how a few consecrated people may have made a great difference, at the scale of their personal influence.

And the railways?

The question is often asked in an attempt to show that colonisation also brought positive lasting contributions to Southern countries.

The defenders of colonisation often recognise that the process had been violent but they insist also to show that it brought positive results. They ask: and the railways? It is true that the British built railways wherever they went, especially in India.

These infrastructures remain as well as many other positive influences they left behind them after decolonisation.

Yet these infrastructures were mainly motivated by the British project in India. They had to answer British needs to transport troops or minerals or goods. They were not generously built for the wellbeing of the locals in a spirit that would bring a positive evolution for indigenous people.

Some contributions to education and health improvements were also significant. But sadly they were implemented in the white mentality, according to white priorities and not adapted to the local culture, not translated into local cultural patterns. Northern people, when they ask about the railways, forget that these countries had also their own health system, based on different understanding of human body, often very subtle ways, such as Chinese acupuncture, Chinese medicine or Ayurvedic medicine. South America and Africa has also their own traditions for healing and teaching. Timbuktu (present Mali) is probably one of the oldest university – if one can call it as such – in the world; it has conserved a very important collection of manuscripts which are maybe as much as thousand years old.

Now about the railways: yes, it is true, they built railways. But is it enough to excuse the terrible violence and spirit of contempt that has proceeded to the whole experience? And the unlimited drainage of wealth to which the dominators proceeded? This form of contempt and this illusory belief in an indelible right for supremacy for white people is one of the most pernicious harms of our modern time. Railways don't matter much, in comparison. They are insignificant.

What remains as major fact is that colonisation was and is based on a deep fundamental triple contradiction I would like to examine now in more detail.

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1) The great contradiction: war is peace

Under the cover of “terra nullius” the invaders hoped to implement their entrepreneurial project in peace; if indigenous people submit.

There is a deep contradiction in the colonial project that is too often ignored. The mother country, in other words the British government, was requiring again and again from the colonists to respect the indigenous populations and to behave tactfully with them. The colonists received instructions that strictly forbid any form of violence against the inhabitants. Yet the ships were sent by the same government with soldiers and weapons and they had for mission to establish trading posts and to declare the land as property of the Crown. They had to invade the land and subjugate the inhabitants while remaining friendly with them. What a double talk! What an incredible contradiction! Of course the government had to present a diplomatic and humanitarian face to the public of the mother country that presented the endeavour of colonisation as a great entrepreneurial project at the glory of humanity. But nobody was fool of these false pretences. It was only a way to cover the exactions that could not avoid being committed if the mission had to be fulfilled.

This seems to be an evident and absurd contradiction that would shock any normal mind. But there is much more to it than it seems. The myth of “terra nullius” is more than a lie, more than a contradiction, more than a crime; because it is insidious and does not tell what happened in reality. It is a cover under which any despicable action can hide. It is the unknown poison that killed the Southern people; that destroyed their lives; that shook their identity and dignity.

This is terrible as such; but there is even more to it. It is what we can call the boomerang effect: the humiliating attitude of violence and contempt by invaders of the South turns again the

perpetrators. At the same time it was massacring indigenous people, the same poison was killing the Northern spirit. It is the poison that destroyed harmony and still does. It is the poison that still penetrates so many aspects of the life in Southern countries. It is the poison that undermines Northern self-esteem. It is the trap into which the West falls again and again, trap of its constant will for domination (still in the 21st century), trap of interventions in Afghanistan or Iraq, trap of its own destruction at home, trap of permanent murder abroad, trap of constant denial of what it transgresses: the identity of indigenous people as well as the identity of the perpetrators. Everybody loses everything. More than that; they lose their own humanity, their own lives.

Once the colonists are established, they want of course to implement their entrepreneurial project in peace. They cannot imagine that their project does not develop as they intended to. They militarily prove to be the strongest. They have the control of the land (in strategic terms). There is then no possible return back to the mother country. They have conquered the land; they have established their trading posts. They have organised their exploitation of land and people. The potential seems great.

But there is a shadow on the picture: the local inhabitants are resisting. They do not accept to be invaded and dominated. It is why it is so important for the colonists to impose their own vision; to dominate radically; to establish a new form of peace: “British peace” – new version of the *pax romana* of the Antiquity - based on British patterns of development, success, wealth, growth. The linear logic.

There are then two possibilities to be successful in this new project:

- Either control, dominate and subjugate the inhabitants as well as the land, without restriction, i.e. make the inhabitants inexistent by the annihilation of their culture, of their dignity,

of their entity, of their sense of being and personal freedom to be who they are. This means make of them slaves, and take the children away.

- Or get rid of the inhabitants. “Terra nullius” - which is not “nullius” - is made “nullius”; “terra nullius” actualised by the colonists themselves. This means to physically massacre all remaining inhabitants who resist unless they withdraw to the back country, until the colonists decide to go there too.

One of these two possibilities is the condition for peace (disperse or kill), in the frame of the great contradiction.

Then, when the indigenous people will be inexistent (rejected to the back country, subjugated or massacred), the colonist will be able to live in peace and implement his project on “terra nullius”. There cannot be a war because there is only one side: the side of the settlers. War is peace.

2) The great inversion: resistance is guilt

Because they prevent the colonists from implementing their projects, indigenous people are made guilty of resisting, of fighting.

I described how the great contradiction is the poison that kills the soul of each one, whether colonised or colonist. Both are victims. But this is also the poison that calls for desperate revenge from the indigenous and, more generally, from the colonial world against the invaders, South against North. This same tension of resentment, of anger, of want for revenge underlies all our relationships between poor and rich countries today as we will see later on. Only the wisest among all people are able to escape this negative energy of resentment and courageous enough to propose a path of reconciliation and peace.

As a counterforce against the resistance of indigenous people, colonial powers have always tried to demonstrate that indigenous people were guilty of attacking the colonists. The locals were the problem. It was said: their aggressiveness is inexplicable; probably due to their lack of civilisation, or to a neurological flaw or lack of brain development. As undeveloped people they are inevitably violent. What a cheat! What a lie! What a devious and evil construct!

This discourse that rejects the guilt on the victims is very insidious and penetrates most of the Northern talk about the South. Not to fall into this logic, it is essential and vital to see that the resistance of indigenous people is “only” and naturally the reaction to the aggression of the invaders. Nothing else.

This false talk that the colonised is guilty of resisting domination by the colonist penetrates so much nowadays our vision of conflicts between North and South. When the Americans invaded Afghanistan or Iraq, they were all the time talking of “insurgents”, i.e. of people who rise against the (new) established order, as if the American order would be the legitimate one. These are not insurgents; these people are simply resisting the invasion of their own territory and home and culture by a foreign power.

In the colonies, each time the locals dared to rise and resist, there was a wave of repression by the colonists; either a squadron of soldiers did the “cleaning”, or the colonists themselves (a few landowners) took the initiative to kill the locals. Terror was strangely the way to impose peace. Local government and colonists were used to work hand in hand. London should and would not hear about it. The great contradiction had to remain hidden.

The essential right to resist of indigenous people was essential but it was denied in the name of the great contradiction. All justifications to massacre indigenous people were expressed

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under the pretext that they had attacked some colonists. Nobody accepted to see that this form of spontaneous resistance was evidently the thing any normal person would try to do if they were threatened in their own subsistence and space and entity. I will come back later to this topic about the role of the Native Police in Australia

Through this pernicious discourse loading the locals of the responsibility to bring trouble, colonial people were made guilty of breaking the peace; the peace the colonists wished so much because they needed it to be able to implement their project of domination and exploitation.

Yes, the resisting fighters are not insurgents although they resist the new order imposed by the foreign power; they are freedom fighters; at the same degree as the fighters who were later glorified when they were resisting for instance the occupation by Nazi forces in Netherland, France, Poland or anywhere else during World War 2.

Hence the great contradiction (pretending that the aggressive invasion is a project of peace) leads to the great inversion: the victim is made responsible for the violence of the conflict. This resembles some totalitarian discourse that made the Jews responsible for the Holocaust. The great inversion was: resistance is guilt.

3) The great provocation: the so-called light is the great Satan

The great contradiction destroys the lives of all: colonised people are deprived of their identity; colonists humiliated as perpetrators.

As explained, the colonist discourse makes the locals responsible for their spirit of resistance and for the conflicts resulting for resisting invasion. This is the top layer, the official talk that tries

to cover, hide or justify the reality of facts. But there are further layers, deep down, to this reality. There were in fact two great humiliations acting in parallel.

The first humiliation is evident. There was the evident eviction of indigenous people out of their own land, culture, customs, subsistence, ways of living, identity. Local inhabitants were deprived of their rights to be who they were; deprived of their own identity.

The second humiliation is much less evident.

As preamble to this second point, there was also another aspect that is too rarely recognised. As already mentioned, the invaders have tried to justify the invasion in the name of the civilisation they were intending to bring to the locals. They were pretending to propose a new model that would enhance the quality of life of everybody. The new order (the colonial order) was said to be the solution for all. Of course it implied that some would be the masters (the whites) and others (the blacks) would be the slaves. But it was also said that everybody would gain; because the Northern civilisation was so great that the colonised could only get enriched by the new model. Obviously, in the eyes of the conqueror, this civilisation had to replace everything which was previously accepted as culture; in the name of superiority of the white race over all others. At least, this was the discourse, not the reality.

This empty discourse has convinced too many. But there is something that it could not justify. If the new civilisation was so great and full of promises, how was it understandable that it behaved in such a way that was the complete negation of its own values. They wanted to bring peace, but they were spreading violence and blood. They wanted to bring culture but they were behaving as ignorant. They wanted to bring Christianity, in principle based on values of love, respect and care, but they were killing and looting, exploiting and humiliating, depriving the

locals of their own means of subsistence, of their identity, of their dignity.

In fact the acts of the colonisers were the exact negation of the “civilisation” they pretended to bring. They were themselves the negation of the values they declared to represent. We too often underestimate this fact: not only the local inhabitants saw these invaders destroy their own world but they were also appalled by the values that led the behaviour of these incomers. The behaviour of the invaders was so shocking that the locals were simply disgusted by such a culture. Instead of being the civilisation that would “save” them from being so-called “primitives and savages”, they saw in it, on the contrary, how this new model was violent and degenerated; and would make of them some real primitives and savages at the image of the invaders.

They not only needed to oppose this project; more importantly, they needed also to find a counterculture on which to base their resistance. This is a very important point we too often neglect. It explains how colonial people not only had to try to resist the invaders and the domination of the colonists or, later, imperialism and neo-colonialism. They needed also, in order to consolidate their struggle of liberation, to ground it in different values that were theirs and, essentially, very different from the values of the oppressors.

We will see later how this is an important component of most liberation movements. It consists in searching in their own roots a cultural identity that would be in tune with the authentic origin of the people who want to resist invasion; that is drawn out of their own traditional culture. The same can be said about present Islamic fundamentalism or jihad, whether in a struggle of the South against the North; or as a means of resistance of Blacks against Whites in the United States. I will come back later to this essential topic.

I just say here that the Northern culture, in what it had best to offer (philosophy, science, spirituality) found such a degraded form of expression in the way it behaved in the implementation of its colonial project that it was objectively and deeply disfigured. It was a deep betrayal of all values that have helped Europe to reach a better level of philosophical and ethical development. Now, from the theory to the practice, there was evidently a huge gap. And this gap was revealed by the violent behaviour of colonialism that went against these founding values.

And, as said earlier, the same can be said of Christianity: the best ideals of humility, love, care, sharing, compassion, forgiveness and non-violence were deeply negated by what was presented of this religion through the acts and behaviours of violent colonists. It is all about the radical negation of this model by the acts of the perpetrators and how this disfiguration has generated an increased will for resistance and revolt, or revenge on the part of the colonised. Or even a legitimate desire – *legitimate* does not mean *justified* in its violent means - to destroy the new Satan.

On the side of the colonist, it is also important to recognise that, unconsciously, the perpetrator knows that there is something wrong in this ambiguity. He knows something is wrong in him. The colonised is obviously prevented from being who he is; but the colonist is also prevented from being who he is. This is the double alienation. The victim is oppressed and disfigured; the oppressor is also disfigured. This is the double humiliation. And this double humiliation weighs heavily on the destinies of both Northern and Southern countries. The guilt of having oppressed; the pain of being deprived of being.

The colonial project has hence created a huge fiction where the aggressors were meant to be the good guys, and the victims the nasty enemies responsible for the mess because of their resistance. On the other hand the degenerated and violent attitude

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of the people who wanted to sell a new model made this model abject in the eyes of the receivers. This was the great provocation: what was originally a high value became the cause of a great revolt because it appeared as its negation.

Even more radically: the new model became the big threat, the ideology to be combatted and the cause of a strong mobilisation of the colonised people to oppose the domination of behaviours that were in their eyes an expression of the great Satan (in their own words). It was indeed a great provocation to present as the new ideal what was perceived as the cause of all destructions and all evil. The model became therefore the symbol to be destroyed, the force to be destroyed, the monster to be slaughtered. It is never enough to insist on this aspect: no means was too small to reach this aim.

The great contradiction (war is peace) led to the great inversion (resistance is guilt) which led to the great provocation (the so-called light is the great Satan). One can well understand how this triple twist leads presently to such violence that we have difficulties to put an end to it today, after five centuries of conflict.

In this triple fiction (contradiction + inversion + provocation) we are all actors who together forge the make-believe. We are all involved, all responsible, all compromised, whether white supremacists or black oppressed; whether in action or in reaction, whether on the (counter-)attack or in resistance. Of course not on the same account; but we are all involved. We better then bring our energies together to solve this huge problem that poisons our lives, whether dominator or dominated.

Chapter 7:

North - South clashing models

Many good studies exist on the topic of colonisation and I do not want to repeat here what they say much better than I can do. I prefer now to describe some main mechanisms or models of this new system that will have shaped the relationships between North and South for a few centuries and still do nowadays. I will especially illustrate how Northern and Southern patterns are in conflict and how the imposition of Northern ways of thinking and acting onto Southern lands could only bring dissent and confrontation.

I will also describe how traditional societies - which live according to the vernacular (traditional) model, mainly in Southern countries but also as “residues” in Northern countries - are originally rooted in very different values and practices that rather privilege adaptation, reciprocity and relationships instead of supremacy, although evidently they know also very well what power and power struggle are.

I will do this examination of the patterns that generate clashes between North and South in three successive stages.

- The first will concern the de-structuring and dis-articulating impact that the Northern institutions and practices, which the colonists impose onto Southern cultures, have on these Southern societies. The emphasis is here on the structures and the mechanisms which form the visible part of the iceberg.
- In a second stage I will describe, one level higher, the models and values that the North imposes onto the South and which are guiding the actions and behaviours, i.e. the choices and

preferences of the colonists; and how they are opposed to the models applied in the South. The emphasis is here on the values and patterns of behaviours that lead the evolution and practice. It concerns a higher level of generality (or globality) than the mechanisms (1st stage) because these models and values are the guides for choices, and structures and mechanisms are only the visible and practical expressions of these preferences.

- In a third stage I will examine how these models and values are far from being universal – as the colonists pretend they are – because they are, each one, only representative of one possible approach among many; while the Southern practices reveal other, and very different, possible ways to solve the same issues. This third approach will soar higher than the level of values and preferences (2nd stage); they will reach a higher level because it will show these differences not as conflicting as a participant would perceive it on the ground, but it will observe them from a more neutral point of view, from above, as many alternative or substitute and contrasting patterns.

These three approaches concern, all three of them, the same topic of domination, supremacy, contempt and exploitation of the South by the North. As you can see we will survey three times the same topic of this conflict between North and South but each time under a different angle. There will inevitably be repetitions but each time the new approach is meant to slightly show other aspects and to shift the view of the same topic with an enrichment that the previous approach did not have. In this way we will, by contrast to the linear way, adopt the circular way of thinking, which is characteristic of Southern cultures, that revisits the same theme each time (on each circle) under a slightly different perspective. It is like the prey bird soaring over

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the same place in circles, but each time from a higher level and a different angle.

The beast of white supremacy is a tough one. It will be hard to slaughter it because it is, like the Hydra of Lerna, the beast with many heads Hercules had to fight; each head regrows more quickly than we can cut the others. The truth is that the monster lives deep in us and it is extremely hard to eradicate it and start to think and see and listen with cleansed minds, eyes and ears. I hope this thorough, and a bit heavy process, will help to eradicate the beast.

26 forms of de-structuration of local cultures

Here is then the first stage of our approach that, on ground level, will consider the institutions and the practices in their very concrete forms. First circle.

De-structuration of local cultures

De-structuration, acculturation, extraction, externalisation, monetisation, segregation, oppression, monopoly, fashions, elites... Colonisation takes many shapes.

When Northern cultures invade the Southern lands, they bring with them another system that embrace most aspects of life: government, army (they call it defence!), land ownership, land use, livelihood, employment, extraction, transport, urban planning, import-export, residence, education, health, segregation, and many others. This new imported system, based on Northern linear thinking and ways of living, will progressively and radically supplant the traditional models these lands had adopted for millennia. This is what one can call the

great de-structuration that covers probably the many aspects we will examine further on.

De-structuration and dis-articulation: This is the head title that summarises all the others. It consists in the dismantling of the network and active cultural forms of the existing traditional society. The existing structure cannot survive because it is overlaid by another system that chokes it and intends to replace it: new ways of thinking, new institutions, new dominant forces in game that prevent the traditional ones from functioning properly. The new replaces the old and the old is rejected, ignored and marginalised. Or, worse, the replacement is only partial. De-structuration means then also dis-articulation which means that the parts do not relate any longer with one another, as they used to do like parts of the body that are articulated with one another. Some grow and dominate, others shrink or disappear or are no longer related to the others in a proportionate way. This is the general frame.

- 1) **Armed forces:** The first component is the army that has conquered the land because of its more efficient weapons (rifles against spears). This is the basic fact. This is a conquered land and the new masters are the invaders. The locals have to comply and obey. This presence of the army as the dominant force remains as hidden as possible but it comes into action as soon indigenous people forget that they live in an occupied land.
- 2) **Police forces:** The police forces are active to defend the new order, i.e. to repress any form of resistance. The US police have been trained in the past, especially in the South, to chase fugitive slaves. This is then principally, and traditionally, a force that applies against blacks. Later, after the civil war, police forces continued to chase blacks, especially the ones migrating to the North, as if they were still and again some fugitive slaves. But these were free

people. This twist of the police function is deeply ingrained in present behaviour of the US police forces. They continue beating and killing black people. There is no law; the police are the law; there are no rights; there is only one executive force that defends an unjust order of white supremacy. Black are guilty, by essence, even if they do not resist; even if they just are who they are. To be black is already suspicious and calls for repression.

- 3) **Decrees vs law:** In the same way the new colonial power does not act according to law, but by decree. There is no formal government, but only an all-powerful Governor that represents the Crown, protects the colonists and defends their interests, which are considered as the same as the interests of the Crown. The colonies are then managed according to other criteria than in the mother country. In the North, the law is meant to defend equal rights for all; in the South, decrees replace the law; they are arbitrary and authoritarian. I'll come back to this later about the democratic system in Australia.
- 4) **Acculturation:** The traditional society is structured according to its own priorities and values which are made invalid by the invasion of the foreign power. What was the fundament of the society becomes obsolete, under the dominating impact of the imposed new forms. Of course they keep more or less their significance in the eyes of the colonised, as long as the locals remain rooted in their own tradition and can resist the new patterns. But traditional forms of living are marginalised by the invasion of forces that reshape the whole landscape. The battle happens not only in the public field but mainly in the minds of the colonised. How much do they have to adapt to survive? How much may they find the force and courage to resist? And if yes, on which basis? Have they a chance to save their traditional order?
- 5) **A new order:** The main fact is that a new authority has been imported that is henceforth in charge of all aspects of life, especially if they concern its own interests. This dominating power discards all existing forms of power in indigenous hands. It ignores also most needs of the local population if they are not necessarily linked with the exploitation of these people by the colonial system, i.e. concerning the taming of the resistance and the survival of the workforce.
- 6) **Conquest:** The newcomers are only interested by what they can gain from their presence in the "new" land. The form of management is often reduced to the necessary minimum for consolidating domination and maintaining the best possible "peace" (i.e. an absence of open resistance or violence). Remember: war is peace! The main factor is the presence of the colonists as landowners and traders and soldiers. The purpose is the exploitation of local resources which include also the local workforce provided by the locals under constraint.
- 7) **Extraction:** Priority is given to exploiting the natural resources of the "new" land. By *natural resources* are meant the minerals but also the capacity for vegetal growth (plantations) and the local or imported workforce (convicts, slavery, low wage indentured work). This extraction is the main purpose for the presence of the colonists on this land; not to build a new society that could integrate the locals.
- 8) **Ecological destruction:** The exploitation of natural resources is done without respect for the local ecological equilibrium. It usually generates deforestation, destruction of local species, creation of gigantic monocultures that are destroying local balance, until the soil is so exhausted that the place is left behind as a desert. See the Nord-Este in Brazil originally very rich in vegetation that has been deforested for sugar plantation and never recovered from this

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destruction that made it one of the poorest regions in South America. Or the present deforestation in Amazonia for palm oil plantations or similar. This exploitation goes on until the land is exhausted, as there is no giving back to the source, no care for sustainability, nor for natural cycles to be taken care of or to be restored. The process of exploitation goes until exhaustion and destruction. Then the colonists move on to another land; as we still do nowadays when a mine, a forest, a fuel reserve is exhausted.

- 9) **Landownership:** The land is grabbed by the squatters and reorganised as a resource to be privately owned and exploited as plantations or mines until it is exhausted. Locals are ejected from their land. Land is no longer sacred. The use of land is very pragmatically adapted to the new production. It has no essence by itself. It is only a thing out of which to get profit. This means unrestrained deforestation and plantation of new “productive” species. Or, for mining, excavation and rejection of unusable material wherever it is suitable.
- 10) **Latifundia / monoculture:** These are very large exploitations, owned by a single owner, usually consecrated to monoculture (only coffee, only sugar, only cotton, only meat). These private land properties are the expression of a composition of mercantilism, feudalism, slavery and ecological destruction that kill the local country. They destroy its potential for harmonious development. Monoculture means impoverishment on all levels for the land and for the locals, except, financially, for the owners. It deprives the locals from cultivating or celebrating the land for their own needs. Traditionally “the land ‘belongs’ to the one who cultivates it” as the saying puts it. Or, rather, as people who live on it, we belong to it.
- 11) **Workforce and slavery:** The whole system relies on the exploitation of local or imported workforce. Mainly this

workforce consists of slaves. But other forms are also possible: servants, indentured workers. Slavery consists only in maintaining the slaves alive and busy as much as possible. There are no wages or only a tiny amount of money for current vital needs the colonist does not want to bother about. Service and indentured work are paid by very minimal wages, when they are paid for. The whole system consists in extracting profit as much as possible. Costs must be reduced to their minimum. As we will see later, the abolition of slavery (first the slave trade, then the exploitation of slaves itself) had as priority not to destabilise the system of production. The UK government finished even by paying compensations to the slave holders, instead of to the ex-slaves as compensation for the having been victims of the system. It even enforced transitory rules that constrained slaves to stay at the service of their masters for seven more years, as so-called apprentices, under the same conditions as slavery; under the pretext that slaves had to learn how to become independent (like kids!). The real reason of the abolition of slavery was that slavery was too cumbersome for the production system and it had to mutate into a form of indentured work with minimal wages. This new imposed status would prevent slaves from becoming economically independent, i.e. out of control. This means slaves were condemned to remain for ever indentured workforce. Such a slow transformation was meant to answer the needs of the production system, rather than to free the previous slaves from a shameful exploitation system.

- 12) **Externalisation:** The newcomers constitute a foreign body that becomes dominant but never integrates into the local society, except their own which they created as new, and adjacent to the traditional one. Their whole way of life and production and wealth are linked with their connection to the mother country of which they remain a satellite. Only the

local resources (land, resources, production, workforce) connect them to the place; by necessity. Resources are exported to the mother country as well as the part of wealth they do not invest in their own entrepreneurial project or in any similar one which is as much externalised. Exported resources are converted into capital that is reinvested for profit or for the needs of the mother country. As we saw the Industrial Revolution in Britain (industrialisation, railways) has been financed by the wealth drawn out of the cotton production in the colonies (ex-West Indies). In the same way manufacturing is exported as source of wealth and growth.

- 13) **Umbilical cord:** As the colony exports all its resources and available capital (resources converted into cash as well as profit) to the mother country, it does not generate new economic relationships with local third parties. There is like only one channel, one single umbilical cord. After being processed in the mother country, manufactured goods will then return to the colony (this one or another) through the same unique channel. The dominated country, except in its reality as a colony, does not know trade and exchanges with other partners.
- 14) **No processing:** Natural resources are sent away to the mother country without being processed (refined) or transformed (manufactured). It means it does not participate in creating activities in the countries. It is only extracted and sold and the workforce needed for extraction remains minimal (no skills, low wages). Despite the poor country provides rich resources these riches do not participate in the wealth they should provide to the producers and to the local economy. Manufactures in the colonial countries were forbidden to develop or even to subsist (in Brazil by the Portuguese, in India by the British). Hence, not only it does not create new jobs, but it destroys even the ones which exist.
- 15) **No local economy or market:** By lack of processing, there is also lack of manufacturing, lack of know-how, lack of economic activity, lack of local exchanges, lack of local markets, lack of stimulation of one activity by another, lack of subsistence economy that could provide a minimum of autarky, beyond mere survival. This generates also a lack of income which means lack of purchasing power in the colony, lack of local exchanges, lack of possibilities for reinvestment and diversification. The local population is excluded from the circuit and has no access to this wealth although it is originally theirs (their land); except an elite that colludes with the invader. Not only the resources and the wealth are exported, but know-how, manufactures, development, purchasing power, local social enhancement are exported too, or at least the opportunities for them, when they happen elsewhere instead of locally.
- 16) **Needs of the mother country as colonial power:** The whole economic circuit is defined according to the needs of the mother country and not to the needs of the local population. The natural resources that are extracted are chosen because they are usually missing (in quality or in quantity) in the mother country: copper, iron ore, coal, silver, tin, gold, or other minerals, or sugar, cotton, rubber, wood. They are usually necessary to the consolidation of the power of the mother country, either for its industry or for its armed forces; or merely as colonial power (catch 22). On top of this, the exploitation and transformation of these resources provide a profit that increases the wealth of the dominator that is reinvested at home and generates more development and increases its advance, in comparison with the colony this wealth come from. In reverse it generates backwardness for the dominated country because, beyond the oppression it fosters, it deprives it of its own means and ability to follow its own path, independently of the colonial power.

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- 17) **International division of work:** Colonisation marked the beginning of international division of work by countries: extraction from poor countries, manufacturing in the rich countries, sales back into the poor countries. For instance Peru exported silver and tin, Brazil gold, sugar, coffee, Amazonia wood, Chili copper, Venezuela cacao, Yucatan sisal, West Indies sugar, Southern states of the present USA cotton. Until exhaustion. The main problem of this illusory pattern is that it depletes – if it does not kill - the goose with the golden eggs. How can people from poor countries buy the products made by rich countries, out of the looted resources they could not process, if they do not get a suitable income (from resources or manufacturing)? In fact any fair and flourishing trade needs two partners, as equal as possible, instead of one exploiting the other.
- 18) **All-powerful corporations:** Soon after the colony has been conquered, the colonists develop their own enterprises, mainly under the form of extraction. Soon also a few major private corporations (whether they exploit plantations or mines) start to dominate the game because of the gigantic size of their means and power. They acquire this exclusive power as principal land owners, with their own militias, in control of local workforce, self-declared state builders, in domination of local elites, under reinforced dictatorship established by them, and they shape local life more or less as it suits them. The power shifts from public authority (the governor or the newly independent government) to private corporations; as a state in the state. One used to speak of *banana republics* in the 1930-60s when corporations such as the United Fruit Co were reigning over Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador; or in the 1970s with ITT in Chile.
- 19) **Apartheid:** The colonist will live in closed circles with other expatriated (white people) who will together form a

dominating social class as an isolated cluster. The locals will interact with the colonists only as servants or slaves, or as a submissive local elite. The colonial society is compartmented. The town is divided: whites live in the best (often gated) well-maintained quarters, with solid houses, sunlight and electric power, smooth roads; the colonised live in dilapidated quarters, in slums, with dirt roads, no running water, no sewage. In South Africa this compartmentalisation has even been institutionally officialised as apartheid. This division according to race and status becomes then a rule, by decree, not by law. English and Spanish colonists used to forbid even social frequentation of the local people. They had to remain pure and could not marry, not even have sexual relationships, although they often did (too often by rape). By contrast French and Portuguese colonists were much more used to share with the locals and even to intermarry. They had, many of them, a form of fascination for the exotic culture, without yet abandoning their privileges. They found often the indigenous women beautiful (the colonists were mainly men). They were more prepared to share also culinary habits or clothes. From the English or Spanish point of view colonies were made to bring wealth; for French or Portuguese colonists it was rather a broader adventure of the whole being (body, mind, heart); and they were more ready to share qualitative aspects, although dominantly one way (their way) and at their convenience.

- 20) **Elites and dictatorship:** The local elite - not the true elders and wisdom leaders, but rather the higher class of people who want to promote themselves and remain influent – tries to collude with the newcomers and betrays the local population by siding with the invaders. They try to please them, to do business with them and to get a share of their influence. They form of course a second range category but they have to cope with this humiliation as a price for their

own promotion. They are also the main beneficiaries who can access the local market and buy the luxury goods, made in the rich countries, that are imported. These goods remain inaccessible for ordinary people who do not get the necessary wages to access this “privileged” share of market. After decolonisation many forms of dictatorship allowed the elites to remain in place, despite their complete passivity as the necessary promoters of new development they should have become.

21) **Language and culture:** The colonist speaks only his mother tongue and will not in general learn the local languages nor be interested in local customs and beliefs. He ignores everything about the local culture he considers as primitive. By contrast the locals will learn the dominant imported language on top of the languages they already master locally (often a few). They will also learn to decipher the new culture and to understand why and for which motives the colonists act as they do. They have then a much better understanding of what is at stake, as they are able to integrate many more and diversified aspects than the colonist does. The colonist will also continue to live like in the mother country and not adapt. He will build in the home country materials and style, as he always did, even if it is not adapted to the local climate. The same with the food, the clothes.

22) **Invalidation and obsolescence:** All traditional forms of life are made invalid because they cannot operate properly or they become obsolete in comparison with the new ways, models, fashions which become dominant and define the new order. The local know-how is devaluated by the import of these new models. Traditional techniques for handicraft or building or cultivation are replaced by more “sophisticated” techniques that depend on imported materials, tools, capital, trade.

23) **New fashions, new goods:** The new power introduces new fashions, new fascinations for new goods (mainly imported ones) that were never relevant for the locals but become poles of attraction. The access to these new items provides status, if the colonised do not remain rooted in their own values and priorities linked with local culture.

24) **Monetisation:** Traditional societies – except for the richest classes of very wealthy societies like in India (the nababs) - were used to practise subsistence economy, based on self-sufficiency and barter; they practised only a minimum of exchanges that had to go through money. The colonial system, by contrast, was relying essentially on money. Everything had to be converted into money to make it “meaningful” and exploitable. Sheep are for wool and not for own consumption; wool is sold for money. As I mentioned earlier about the introduction of banknotes (stage 9 of evolution), money opens the door to all forms of speculation when it is used beyond the mere transfer of value at the occasion of sale. This deep mutation will perturb deeply the local economy and traditional society. Wealth not only arises from exploitation of natural resources and slavery, but it is also increased by speculation on values and especially on rates of exchange, on variations of fluctuating selling prices (wool, meat, sugar, cotton, silver, copper).

25) **Fluctuation in price of natural resources:** Resources see their price rapidly fluctuate. The price of export is not established by the country which it is extracted from but in the mother country, by the market and stock exchange, in the purpose of increasing the profit of the sellers (the colonists who has imported it). Profit is not only based on quality, it is also linked with quantity. It is more profitable to sell three times more at half price. But for the producer, more quantity means more work and more expenses. Many poor countries (if not all) have been ruined by such processes.

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26) **Balance of payments:** Any country exports and imports resources or goods. The value of what comes in should in principle be compensated by the value of what goes out, whether they are other resources or goods, or payments. A country that is bled of more wealth than what comes in (in terms of value measured by the local currency) will soon become bankrupt. Or the imbalance of payments has to be compensated by debts which will increase. This is what happens with poor countries. They are precisely poor because they lose more than they gain. And rich countries become rich because they have not exchanged their imported wealth at the right price. There is no mystery for wealth; it can only be extracted from elsewhere. Special trade agreements aim at regulating these conditions of exchanges, often at the advantage of the powerful.

Let's stop here this enumeration and concise description because there would be many more other aspects of de-structuration. One would need a whole book, or even many, to describe these many aspects in more detail. And it has been done by more competent people than me.

Clashing models

Having described many aspects of the de-structuration and disarticulation the colonies undergo, I would like now to describe something that, at first sight, can seem similar but is indeed very different. This concerns the clashes between traditional (indigenous) and imported (colonial) models. We then do not talk any more about structural contradictions but about the cultural models that lead our choices and behaviours. These models situate themselves on a higher level because they represent the leading preferences. They can be said to be situated upstream, because they are the sources of what happens

practically. Cultural models (as we will examine them now) provide the real preferences that are guiding the choices, while structural contradictions (as we have just seen) are only the concrete expressions that make these clashes visible.

This is the second circle of our approach, one level higher.

Nations and corporation against culture

The colonists introduce in the South the specific forms of state and corporation, with their own logic, which are unknown in the South.

The colonists are mainly explorers, settlers and traders who essentially mind their own business. But they are accompanied by a larger infrastructure that supports them and without which they could not implement their entrepreneurial project. This infrastructure becomes especially visible under the forms of the state and the corporation.

As said the navy and the armed forces are the first to intervene. They are the first expressions of the coloniser state, whether kingdom or empire or later republic. Behind the army there is the government of the mother country that provides support (navy, finance) and gives orders and edicts laws. Portugal, Spain, England, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany are all well-established nation-states that tend to export their own institutional forms.

1) The nation-state as main vector

Northern nation-states were the first protagonists and supports for colonisation in a form that was unknown in the Southern countries.

It is important to see that these political forms to organise public life are pure products of European mentality (rationalism and later Enlightenment). The conquerors came in the name of their king (the Crown). The first thing they did was to declare the “new” land property of the Crown or land submitted to the authority of their monarch. They planted the flag (as Neil Armstrong did on the moon with the American flag). The role of the nation-state is here major.

It is also interesting to note that this concept of the nation-state was introduced in the colonies precisely at the time when it was losing its power in Europe. Imperialism has dissolved this notion when the role of the state was redefined in order to support private interests in their conquest of resources and new markets from and in the colonies. This role was evidently contradictory to the principle the French Revolution had established for the new form of state that had to be ruled by the norm of equity for all.

The colonising nations became also rivals with one another. This is an important aspect of the process of colonisation because these competing nations tried to involve indigenous people in their rivalry; although these indigenous people did not recognise the form of the nation-state. They did not know it and could not identify with it.

The invaders played then with the existing antagonisms between tribes, or even the latent or violent struggles that had involved them, one against the other, before the colonists came. This made the violence of the conquest still much crueller. The skills at war of the Iroquois or Haudenosaunee (the five nations of Cayuga, Onondaga, Mohawk, Seneca, and Oneida at the south of the great lakes between Canada and the United States) were exacerbated and used by the British against the French who were relying on the support of the Hurons (on the north side of Lake Ontario). In many successive conflicts between nations Quebec has been taken back and forth many times, alternatively by the

British and the French. The French also lost New Orleans and the low Mississippi. The Dutch lost or sold New York. To mention only a few, Fachoda in Sudan later saw the conflict between colonist nations explode again. Germany lost its colonies at the end of World War too, which were distributed between the victors. Colonies became goods to be taken control of; or even sold.

Through the person of the Governor General the mother government is represented locally. But this form of nation-state he represents is completely unknown in the South. The basic form is the vernacular culture with some elders and chiefs, or sometimes some king or emperor. But there is no notion of state as we have it in the North. No Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Defence. And more important: no defined territory considered as a nation, no unique ethnicity but many which mix with one another. As we already showed about mobility, the land is generally occupied by different tribes that combine in their use of the land: some sedentary people who cultivate their land, some nomads who migrate ceaselessly with their sheep and cattle. Of course there are often conflicts between these tribes that compete for the same land in different ways and uses. But they nevertheless cohabit and there forms therefore many different nations on the same single territory, or even on territories that differ for each one.

This is in fact the same pattern in nature. Many different systems cohabit: the forests, the rivers, the fields, the mountains, the lakes, the oceans. And the fauna does the same: the territory of the eagle overlays the territory of the deer or the crocodile or the wallaby. They cohabit and their cohabitation is based on complementarity and cooperation, which does not exclude conflicts; or the fact that one can even be food for the other. There is no clearly defined territory that suits all.

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Hence the many tribes that inhabit the same space practise what the laws of nature have taught them. This is the circular thinking I have described earlier. This form of adaptation is much more suitable than the imposing form of the nation-state that is based on control and exclusion; control, because it has to dominate and exploit the land, to keep its citizens in check; exclusion, because it imposes a dominating class (the leaders of the nation-state) that will rule over the others, instead of being based on cohabitation. Even some tribe can well take control of the state's apparatus and dominate the others (for instance the Hutu over the Tutsi in Rwanda). This is the linear way of thinking.

Even if the Governor acts outside legislation, by decrees, he is nevertheless representing the Crown and has to submit to its instructions. His power is supported by the armed forces and the finances for public expenses are provided by the mother country. Although he does not practise a form of power that is legalised and ruled by law, he is nevertheless the representative of the nation-state that has sent him.

Top-down or bottom-up

The form of the nation-state allows to better impose the authority of the King because the form of expression is monolithic, through its institutions (Governor, army).

It is important to notice that the form of the nation-state allows to better impose its authority in a much more radical way, because it is monolithic. The nation-state, nationwide, tends indeed to identify in a monolithic way with the national institutions. What the government undertakes represents and constitutes the action of the whole nation. What the army does defends the interests of the whole nation. There is nothing to be opposed because there is no space for diversity of opinions. This allows the action to be

better accepted, without any nuance because it is precisely monolithic. This is evidently a lie.

This lie allowed in the colonies the settlers to hide behind the presence of the Governor and of the armed forces. This reinforced the polarisation between settlers and Indigenous people. This monolithic aspect helps the state to impose its will.

Yet some settlers (certainly a tiny minority) were much more respectful of Indigenous rights than others. They let them for instance hunt on their lands and they even, some of them, learned the language of the local tribes. They had regular exchanges with one another. This allowed very personal relationships to develop. This was still the colonial model where the settlers had invaded the land but the interpersonal relationships were of a different type, more respectful, more human, more personal.

They were no longer fostered by the top-down image of the nation-state. This image dissolved in a certain way and could convert into a more adequate expression of the diversity of the members of the community. The profile of the nation – a nation, free of the institution, and no longer a nation-state – could rise, bottom-up, when the diversity of the members became the dominant enriching factor. And each one could participate in forging the general image which became then more encompassing and inclusive in diversity. This form of plural identity, as we can see, allows a much better exchange between partners. It offers many opportunities for conciliation; even if it does not erase the fact that the land has been invaded. In the free space of personal exchanges it offers opportunities for the people to weave more personal relationships, beyond the ethnic lines, even if the colonial project remains active in the background. Some settlers have been rare examples of this quality of human respect.

2) Corporations and traders as exploiters

Colonists were motivated by the will to exploit natural resources and local workforce, not for subsistence, but for private profit.

Then, beside the form of the state that imposes the domination of a foreign power, there is the form of the corporation that the colonist introduces in the South, which is unknown to the colonised. Corporations are structured according to their entrepreneurial project, guided by the intention (the idea) that has given birth to the project. Especially in the context of colonisation, the purpose of the corporation is not to produce goods that satisfy local needs but it is to accumulate profit. Its logic is based on the implementation of specific means and tools, enabled by force (at least in the colonies), financed by investment of capital, in the perspective of “creating wealth” as they say.

By contrast the local vernacular economy is mainly based on subsistence and good living, on adaptation to the cycles of nature and social constraints (such as the number of dependents). Barter and minimal exchanges happen too, but as a restricted means to provide what is missing, and not to make profit.

In this spirit of conquest of the corporation, natural resources play an important role. They are not meant to be used for own consumption but to be sold for cash. There is then no end to the extraction; needs and greed can never be satisfied. The more one extracts, the more one gets rich. It evidently soon brings about a sharp destruction of the environment. Its exhaustion leads the corporation to migrate to other sources.

For the colonist these resources seem to be infinite. First, in the eyes of the Spanish, they consisted in silver and gold. But soon it was discovered that other minerals were also available such as

copper; rubber became also an important resource; and plantations revealed themselves to be very productive (sugar, cotton, coffee, tea). Slaves even constituted a resource that could bring profit: first through the profit of the slave trade, then as cheap and malleable workforce.

The logic of the corporation is based on scientific rationalism. The universe is perceived as a great clockwork whose behaviour is foreseeable because it follows always the same laws, they believe. Corporations have hence developed according to the following principles which happen to be at the same time the basic principles of capitalism:

- **Individualism:** It is said that society is best served if individuals follow their own interests without consideration for the common good, instead of accepting the constraint that only the wellbeing of the community may guarantee the best possible living conditions for all individuals.
- **Corporatism:** It is said that society should be most thriving if it organises all its activities in order to best satisfy the needs of the different economic sectors and of the corporations.
- **Market self-regulation:** It is said that justice finds its best balance through the natural and free equilibrium of offer and demand by free market (neo-liberalism).
- **Government’s task as leveller:** It is said it is the role of the government to build the necessary infrastructure and to compensate social and economic imbalances produced by free market economy.

As one can see, the privileged role and freedom left to the corporation to act according to its own interests denies the collective dimension of any society – there is no such thing as society, as Margaret Thatcher used to say – as if the social construct were just made of the addition of individual acts and

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interests. This is typically what Marx called the privatisation of profit and the socialisation of costs.

When such a Northern model intervenes in traditional societies - or outside them but in near proximity to their context - individualism and corporatism break up the local community and rupture the social links of solidarity that used to make it coherent and to allow it to go through harsh time. Money becomes the yardstick and, at the same time, the dominating rule. Its role even replaces social relationships, solidarity and cohesion.

Note that the vernacular community is not constituted of better people than any other. It has just to preserve what is vital for itself (cohesion) because it is the necessary condition for survival. Yet this very pragmatic approach influences also the values that guide the functioning of a traditional society. By necessity it remains more community oriented than the modern society led by individualism and corporatism.

A conflict of interpretation

Northern cultures judge Southern cultures according to two main criteria: 1) material growth and 2) linear progress in time.

When Northern cultures come in contact with Southern cultures they evaluate the stage of development of the “newfound” lands and societies (the “primitive” countries) according to many criteria the North has established for itself. This is a self-declared and unilaterally imposed code of reading.

Two criteria dominate this way of thinking:

1) **Material growth:** Admitting that material factors provide the right measure, the level of development of the local culture can be measured and evaluated. It can be calculated

how much it grows in measurable terms (GDP, capital, investments, trade balance).

2) **Linear time:** Admitting that development happens along a linear axis, the position of local culture on this line of evolution can be defined. It can be measured how far behind the Northern model it stands.

This self-declared code of evaluation presents many problems because it measures the other according to criteria of qualities which are not his and even have nothing to do with the priorities that guide him. It is like measuring how much a fish is evolved by evaluating how much it can walk, because I like walking (and I can't swim like a fish).

Let's examine these illusory criteria in more detail.

1) Material growth

Our Northern yardstick principally measures development according to material components; growth is thought as necessary.

This first criterion resembles a lot the four characteristics of corporation behaviour (individualism, corporatism, market self-regulation, government task as leveller) that ensue out of the capitalist catechism. I find incredible that a so-called evolved society – I mean a society that has so many means for knowledge and wisdom, although it does not use them properly – may choose to reduce reality to so few factors and, on top of this, mostly irrelevant ones.

Any normal society, it seems to me in good sense, should plan its evolution according to quality factors how to implement good life for all members of the community. Life is not about how much money and wealth and growth we have collected or achieved. It is how good our living conditions are. This is a huge

twist to negate quality factors of life experience for just material stuff. The role of economics is not profit and accumulation, as it seems to be in the West, but rather satisfaction of basic needs (material and immaterial) for all.

In the North, we measure the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), which is the sum of all expenses in a country or region²⁶. We also measure how quickly this GDP grows. In this understanding, happiness is measured by, or reduced to, material standard of living. Growth is meant to be infinite on a limited planet. Non-sense.

GDP is not even a trustworthy measure because it does not take into account what expenses have been for, whether for weapon production or for education, for drugs consumption or for social solidarity, for the privileges of any restricted elite or for the wellbeing of the majority of population (common good). Identical activities in different countries are not measured with the same costs (repair of the same shoes in India or in Sweden). And so on.

The measure itself is faulty. But even its concept is faulty.

The financial system that supports and accompanies the extension of market potentials becomes ever more preponderant and therefore its share in the GDP increases. The proportion of GDP due to income through speculation tends to increase powerfully while the proportion of GDP due to income through work tends to diminish drastically. It means that the share of workers involved in direct production, is decreasing while the profit of financial actors (investors, stock exchange, speculators)

²⁶ The GDP is an economic indicator that pretends to calculate the wealth of a country (or other entity); it is the total spending in the country: the total of consumer spending (C) + business investment (I) + government spending (G) + net exports (i.e. exports minus imports).

is increasing. Speculation (unproductive) is slowly replacing work (which is the main productive factor) in all its forms (paid, independent, shadow work, subsistence).

According to the World Bank the average added value from manufacturing for the whole world has been reduced from 21,3% of the GDP in 1995 to only 14.9% of the GDP in 2014; this means it has proportionally lost one big quarter of its relative value in less than 20 years. During the same time the financial sector (personal remittances, received, in US\$) developed from US\$102,4bn in 1995 to 552.0bn in 2014, i.e. more than 5 times more in less than 20 years. It was only 1.9bn in 1970, i.e. almost 300 times smaller than what it is today! This radical change shows how much impact the present evolution has on working conditions: not only on salaries but also on working conditions (security, rights, social protection) and especially on the meaning of the activities and chances for the workers to feel valorised.

It is clear that Southern cultures would appear very weak under this light of GDP because this tool is not adapted to measure their performance. They have little monetary wealth, slow economic growth, inexistent army and weapons except a few spears and arrows, and mainly rather rare conversion of value into money, which is the necessary condition for a transaction to be included in the calculation of the GDP. Subsistence work, barter, reciprocity, generosity cannot be included because they are not converted into money. Knowledge and wisdom and art, as expressions of deeper meaning, do not appear on the list and are therefore discarded as insignificant, unless they are sold for cash. All the very measurable criteria of GDP seem irrelevant in the measure of more subtle dimensions. What a contradiction. And what a poor approach.

The instrument determines what one can measure: a thermometer measures temperature but not humidity. A sieve cannot catch

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water, but it does not mean water does not exist. Adapt then the tool to the task.

In this approach the most precious qualities of the Southern cultures are ignored: their adaptation to the context, their sustainable ways to relate to nature, their inner social relationships, their sense of free exchanges based on reciprocity, their capacity for celebration, for joy in living, their sense of the sacred dimension of life.

2) Linear time

There is only one path of materialist development. It is linear in time; you are either behind or in front. Other cultures are generally behind us.

It is the basic definition of development in Northern terms that it is understood as constant growth and steady move forward on a linear axis that evolves according to time. One progresses on this axis by developing wealth (see previous option). There is no other possible path of development and development can only be measured by our own Northern tools (GDP or similar).

The biggest non-sense in this appreciation is the unilateral thinking that there is only one way. No, there are many branches, many ways in different directions. You can have a totalitarian system or a very equalitarian and empowering democratic system which have both the same GDP, one with starving people and a rich elite or by contrast a large community of people who are all thriving. The quality factor is the decisive one. I prefer to live happy in a simple shelter than unhappy in a palace. Evident!

The idea that the North is in advance of other cultures is pure stupidity; especially when one notices the environmental damage it has caused, the violence of its international relationships based on supremacy, the violent domination of colonialism, the moral

debt of exploitation. If wealth comes at the price of violence, it becomes meaningless. We better be poor and joyful, as long we may have enough for daily subsistence and are able to provide protection for our dependents.

The Northern way of thinking is linear, once again, by contrast with circular, as demonstrated earlier. It means it ignores cycles; it is why we are in trouble with climate change, which demonstrates that the linear pattern (and its linear translation in time) does not work. One major step is missing: the cyclic return to the source.

The description I made in the first chapter concerning the differences of contexts and interpretations illustrates the root of this discrepancy. We, Northerners, cannot see diversity as richness. It must be discarded or another measurement must be forced onto the same axis that puts us in front. This is deeply dishonest, from the intellectual point of view, especially coming from a culture that pretends to be rational, scientific and objective.

How do we situate, on this time axis, values such as equity, justice, peace, wellbeing, harmony, care, compassion, concern, love? They all belong to cycles because they all return something to the source.

Because of the strong lack of these values in our daily practice and the absence of circular thinking, the many attempts we make to repair ill-functioning systems contribute to reinforce the development of our repressive institutions: armed forces, police; or the intervention of intensified social services that have to mend the damages caused by our simplistic representations of reality. All these means of intervention cost ever more; and this increase of costs contributes to increase our GDP. Our blindness makes us richer in terms of GDP; but in fact we are poorer than other societies that do not have this need for intervention of the

same repressive or supporting forces because they have developed their own self-regulating processes.

Reality is not what we see, or invent, but what is. We then better adapt and invent more creative paths.

Many other twists of perception

There are many more factors that falsify the way we look at Southern cultures: aspect, customs, history, writing, technology.

Beyond the two main criteria I just described (material growth and linear time), there are many more ways Northern countries evaluate the degree of development of Southern cultures, of course again according to Northern own values.

- **Weapons:** If the people of the “new” land have resisted the invaders with a strong energy, efficient weapons and an aggressive spirit, they are more respected than if they have welcomed the newcomers with hospitality and trust. Aggressiveness is considered as a higher level of civilisation.
- **Technological development:** Technology - i.e. sophisticated artificial means or tools - are considered as high civilisation. Simple tools are seen as primitive, even if they are perfectly adapted to the needs and conditions. The big fish trawlers are more destructive than gentle fishing but considered as superior.
- **Wealth and prestige:** The gold and silver of the Incas or Aztecs were signs of power and wealth in the eyes of the Spanish conquerors, although they were rather accessories for embellishing worship and celebration in the eyes of the locals.
- **Physical aspect:** Racial appearances were evaluated, and even measured, according to ideas and criteria that were linked with white appearances and representations of “beauty” ensuing out of cultural preferences; and especially linked with the intentions of the invaders that dictated the formulation of new rules and hierarchies, which were “necessary” to justify domination, exploitation and slavery.
- **Documented history:** The invaders have considered that only powerful empires with stunning buildings and extreme wealth were worthy of respect. They decided that oral traditions were poor in history, by lack of powerful acts of domination and by lack of written documents that could testify of a glorious past. But oral traditions deliver a rich referral to past evolution. See Aboriginal traditional cultures that relate facts that happened in geological times and are referred to nowadays by science. Invaders considered Africa as a continent without history. I will come back to this later.
- **Writing:** When the US invaded Iraq they were full of contempt for this civilisation of “illiterate” people. Their poor and stupid President was even ignorant of the fact writing had been invented by the ancestors of these same people along the Euphrates. And when we observe which role writing fulfils in our Northern society (publicity, fake news, white supremacy ideology), we wonder whether an oral tradition is not in some ways better equipped (?) to decipher lies. It probably represents a critical approach of truthful communication.
- **Money:** Many of the Southern societies practise hospitality, generosity, reciprocity in a way that seems so much more subtle and gentle than our use of money. Money seems in comparison a very rough and awkward way to regulate exchanges and relationships; it tends to flatten them, even to deny their true human value.

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- **Customs:** Traditional customs and beliefs are judged by Northerners as primitive. They measure them, once again, to their own criteria and beliefs. And they consider the other practices as primitive and inferior instead of feeling challenged by something they do not do or even do not know but could learn from.

And so many other aspects.

Monopoly of humanity / humanism

Northern nations have taken control of what it means to be human by defining an ethical order that fits European culture.

Northerners take their own culture as the unique possible reference for everything they do; and they believe others should do as they do. They are not aware how much other cultures have also their unfathomable qualities grounded in other perspectives of the meaning of life. They in fact never met these cultures because they were too busy invading them and imposing their domination.

Northern humanism has been marked by the mental evolution of the Renaissance, as self-centred perspective of life illustrated by the discovery of perspective in drawing and painting; and by the Reformation, in its understanding of individual freedom of conscience. These two steps emphasise a more personal understanding of life which becomes ever more self-centred. It generates therefore more exclusion and marginality of the ones who do not conform, in reference to an Euro-centric point of view.

This concept of humanity and of what it means to be human has also slowly and progressively, but deeply, been transformed by the implementation of technology and market, which played also an important role in reshaping this form of a simplistic and

egocentric philosophy. It transformed *homo sapiens* into *homo miles et economicus* (soldier and trader).

This philosophy is also impregnated by so-called Christian values of freedom and respect of the person that are yet not the expression of true Christianity because they are expurgated of everything that could go against war, military conquest, human exploitation, profit making, destruction of nature, to which colonisation inevitably has led. Of course the authentic Christian values of care and justice have been opposed, in disguised forms, by the colonisers who wanted to remain free on their new conquered lands.

There was also another major problem. There was on one hand a version of this humanist thought that made it an ideal paradigm for together living based on democracy, freedom, wellbeing, culture, education, development, economic growth, justice, peace. But there was also, on the other hand, another version; and this other version consisted in the daily practice on the ground, which contradicted each of these noble values. This flawed practice demonstrated the ineptitude of this project of civilisation that was not based on the declared premises but, as described earlier, revealed a completely different project based on violence and absolute lack of the kind of morality and of the human values that Christianity is meant to inspire.

Out of this project based on a form of monopoly of humanity ensued a gigantic catastrophe that negated everything that this humanity pretended to be. This is what I called earlier the great provocation (the light is the great Satan): the worse behaviours in the name of the supreme good!

The pretence to universality

Let's examine now how the North intends to impose its values in the name of universality. We will see which these values are and illustrate, by a few counter-examples, how Northern values are far from being universal, even if they are based, in principle, on the respect of life and the respect of the person, which are both certainly great values.

This is the third circle of our approach.

Universality of human values

Northern nations have established a program of civilisation based on human values they pretended to be universal. But they are not!

The Northern civilisation has been built on a few main principles that are accepted in the North as true values and real priorities in life. Each culture defines for itself this kind of preferences in its own way and these main values help to build up a society that is aware of what matters most for itself. But too often these values and priorities become just rigidified principles that have lost their juice, their authenticity and their ability to inspire. They are like dead letters. Yet the North wants these principles to be universal; this means valid for all people in all conditions. When they are exported, these principles become then vectors of domination and colonisation. They are even evoked as reasons (or rather pretexts) for intervention, like in the invasion of Afghanistan or Iraq.

Five questions can be asked about these so-called values:

1) Can some values be universal, such as life, freedom, love? Or are they all, even the ones we consider as major, only cultural interpretations that would vary from one culture to the next?

- 2) If these values are universal can they be exported? Are they transferable to other cultures? Or are they always linked with a specific context? How can they be translated into another culture or mentality?
- 3) If these values are universal, should we consider that their concepts are valid (universal) but that they cannot be transferred because there are broader than the concepts? There are also all the many diversified ways to translate these major concepts into practice and these ways of translation are as important as the concepts themselves. Then there would be universality of the concepts (e.g. life is precious, love is essential) but many ways to translate these themes (respect of life, expression of love) into daily reality; this is then each culture that has to proceed with this translation, and such understanding of culture would resist transfer.
- 4) If these values are truly universal and transferrable, i.e. accepted by all cultures, do we have to intervene in conflicting situations to impose these universal values to other cultures which do not respect (practise) them? or even in the way we think they should?
- 5) If Northern nations have to intervene to transfer these universal values of which they are the so-called depository, why is it that these nations are understood to be in a better position to implement these values than the others to whom it has to be imposed?

I have identified a few of these so-called universal values that are considered as products of the North and can or, in their mind, even "have" to be exported to "primitive" countries.

1) **Democracy vs consensus:** Empowerment of local people, that provides them with a better control on their living conditions, can happen under very different forms of delegation or participation. In Northern countries we have

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adopted the principle of democracy. But democracy is much more than a count of votes, often reduced to elections, and a domination of the majority over the minority (whether by 51% to 49%). Democracy is meant to be a culture and practice of collegiality that must remain alive and active all the time, concerning critical information, discernment, sense of community, common good, respect of diversity, dialogue, meaning, sense of priorities, ability to reach consensus. If this is true, where is such a form of active and lively democracy really practised? And do other forms of decision making compete when they are practised with wisdom and compassion? And which are the different possible illustrations of how to practise these many forms of together-living?

- 2) **Human rights vs traditions:** Human rights are based on Northern values that have principally to do with individual freedom and free enterprise. Traditional cultures rather favour the cohesion and harmony of the general community. All members are participants at something broader, before they are individuals (notion unknown in Northern terms). And, to survive, traditional cultures have often to find solid bases to resist Northern invasion and they tend to take refuge in a very strict and rigid form of interpretation of their own tradition. The rigidity is there to provide firmness and unity among members which are urgently needed to resist the power of the North. We judge these reactions as primitive, or fundamentalist, but they are very often not more than the defensive reaction to Northern invasive action. Very often the form of totalitarianism that is practised in Southern countries is the fruit or, at least, the by-product of Northern support to these regimes; if they are not just established by Northern interventions to secure Northern own interests.
- 3) **Individual freedom vs community:** Is personal freedom used for fruitful purposes that serve the community; or is it

just personal indulgence? When one grows from egocentric perception to hetero-centric openness, the vision of life and society changes and the priorities are no longer the same. Asian people have a much stronger sense of belonging to a larger group of people of their ethnic group and they are ready to pay a price - a reduction of their individual self-centred freedom - for this form of belonging because they know well the value of it. There is in this sense of belonging - and self-restraint - something very deep we have lost in the North. On the other hand the personal choice of being faithful to one's own beliefs or spiritual interpretation of life drives often people into resistance to the dominating model and into proposing or practising other ways of living. This is not conformism; it is on longer term a form of contribution to the general wellbeing of the community.

- 4) **Nation-state vs diversity of cohabiting groups:** As I explained earlier, the nation-state is an artificial creation that declares the domination of a usually single ethnic group, culture or way of thinking and living over other groups on the same territory; and this culture does not necessarily fit all the people living there. What is essential for a nation? whether it is a continental society? or a sea shore society? The many possible interpretations of power, purpose and relationships are then in strong contrast. What does then mean the concept of nation for such different cases? And if the land is inhabited by many tribes that mix and cohabit in different ways, what is the common denominator? What does unity in diversity mean?
- 5) **Schooling vs personal growth:** In traditional societies children learn new behaviours, values and know-how by living with their relatives or neighbours. There is not always a distinct school system or space where one learns; but only life and the elders who, the one with the others, teach so many aspects of culture and good living. Wherever one goes,

education and personal growth seem rarely to cohabit and to be linked; or to be dependent on one another. In Northern countries, education is thought of as preparing people to fit into the society, especially into the system of production (as cogs), and to be able to earn their living. In traditional societies it is understood as contribution to personal growth and maturity (fitting into the context and allowing maturity to develop). Exporting education would mean exporting culture! which seems non-sense.

- 6) **Health vs body knowledge:** Health is linked with the understanding we have of our relationship with our body and with the way we live. In Northern societies it is the responsibility of professionals (doctors) in institutions (hospitals). In traditional society it is rather the fact of relatives or of shamans; traditional healing is much more deeply involved in everyday life. The body is a subtle book that tells us about life and how we handle it. This dimension has been lost in official medicine in the North.
- 7) **Development vs meaning:** Development is about priorities in life, i.e. related to the understanding of the meaning of life. It is narrowly linked with culture, philosophy or religion, more than with wealth, capital and growth. Investment remains a constant in most cases but investment can be thought of in terms not only of money (capital) but also – and this is very different – in terms of effort, commitment, contribution, knowledge, opportunities. Northern development is plagued by so many flaws, disturbances and evident threats (climate change, natural decay, injustice, increasing violence) that it seems to indicate the North needs rather to question fundamentally whether its false notion of development itself is not the cause of its many ills. By contrast to development, simple ways of living offer generally a better grasp of meaning, when we are not caught in external processes (how to fit in).

After these very short descriptions one sees how much there is a vast diversity of approaches on all possible themes and hence how it is difficult to decide to intervene and to impose any “improvement” onto the other culture; because it is impossible to be sure it would be an improvement. Even most considerations here above show that it would probably even have the contrary and negative effect; and that the intervention could also happen in the reversed way (South to North) and teach us what we so urgently need to learn. This is at least the message of Indigenous cultures. I’ll come back to this later.

And these few remarks are limited to be only a reflection about the mere meaning of such intervention, even without to ask how this possible intervention should be implemented and what should be its conditions of success.

Counter-example 1: Growth and supremacy

The obsession with growth generates inequality and supremacy that are then justified by a discriminatory and racist discourse.

Growth cannot be a universal model because it fosters domination and inequity. This means growth is exclusive and only possible for a minority.

Northern nations have based their development on growth in the hands of a leading upper class instead of aiming at the common good and a good quality of life for all. Growth tends to generate accumulation of wealth for a few, relative material wellbeing for a wider group, and failure for the remaining who struggle to survive. Growth creates in this way major disparities and strong inequities, beyond the fact it also depletes nature.

But this inequity generates another pattern of contempt. The dominance of a leading upper class over a majority fosters a discourse of superiority and an ideology of supremacy. It soon

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transforms into contempt for the inferior classes; as one can observe very clearly in the United States or in the United Kingdom (not a monopoly!); and into racism if it happens that these classes are of different ethnic groups, especially with a different skin colour.

A discourse develops that intends to justify the supremacy which is not caused by the difference (gender, race, culture, religion), as the discourse goes but, in fact, by the will for domination and exploitation. This means that growth and accumulation of wealth, when they are not shared, generate oppression and the discourse that justifies it.

It is usually the case that each society has its own ideology and that this ideology declares its own excellence, mainly pretending that their people are the best. But the Northern trend to growth goes further because it exacerbates this tendency by the inequity it fosters. Inequity generates exploitation and the consequent tensions.

Counter-example 2: Conformism and marginality

The clear definition of Northern values (humanism) fosters conformism and therefore also marginality by a process of hierarchy and exclusion.

The exclusive character of the humanist discourse in the North constrains people either to conformism and integration or to marginality, which is the price for independence of spirit. It is not inclusive and therefore not accepting of all its members.

Humanism in Northern culture, inherited from the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment and altered by the significant impact of technology and market, has defined a Northern (called Western) way of life. Each one has to adapt to these clearly defined prevalence of competition, accumulation, growth and

success in order to survive. People who do not fit into this order are marginalised: principally poor people who do not find their way of insertion in this order, ethnic minorities, immigrants, or people considered as original characters such as artists or alternatives. This means that the clear priority given to materialistic dimensions has excluded many different people and prevents them from taking part in the society.

Traditional societies are much more integrative because they function as a whole. Although it does not exclude hierarchy and privileges, the wide network of the traditional society, precisely because it is a network and not confused with a limited upper class, can better integrate marginal behaviours which are then considered as special characteristics of this or that person, rather than abnormality.

Counter-example 3: Institutions aid or social solidarity

Northern institutions are in charge of “social cases” whose identity is defined by their “fault”; instead of social solidarity as a network.

In the North difference is a problem that must be cared for by a specialised service. The dominant ideology defines disability and the specialised treatment to “heal” it. So-called disable people have to reintegrate the flock. Or they are marginalised behind the walls of the institution.

Northern society has developed many specialised institutions to take care of marginal cases or so-called disable people, i.e. of almost all people who are not economically productive. The home for elderly people, the hospital for the sick, the protected workshop for the disable person, the psychiatric ward for people with abnormal behaviours, the school for kids, the social services for unemployed and marginal people. Even women are discriminated against.

Each category of these special people is then defined by reference to their problem as if it were a form of identity. Note that the problem has been previously defined as a such although the specificity that it defines may well be no more than a difference of character or of behaviour. The elder is declared old if not demented instead of being just slow and forgetful but wise; the patient of psychiatric services is declared abnormal; the unemployed is considered useless; women have to stay at home or have difficulty to reach top positions (luckily no longer so strongly the case); kids have their heads to be filled with official knowledge instead of experiencing life as an endeavour. All this does not mean that these institutions have no role to play; yes, they do have an important role, but not defined in such terms.

In traditional societies, these institutionalised services do not exist at this extent, not only by lack of means, but also for cultural reasons. If they exist they are rather places of last refuge (inspired by Northern patterns) where people can get the necessary support when they cannot cope by themselves with the help of their relatives. But, until then, the sick is cared for at home until it is necessary to get specialised help; marginal people get little jobs that keep them in contact with others; each one has a role to play; so-called mentally disable people are hanging around and considered as parts of the local network. There is no definition of each person according to a systematised diagnostic process that forges a separate identity, marked by a fault.

Counter-example 4: Decision by numbers or consensus

Northerners practise a form of democracy based on numbers (majority). Elders discuss issues and ethics and come to consensus.

In the North decision-making is the specialised job of an elite that is elected and to which power is delegated. At least this is the major pattern of Western democracy.

Decision making is a complex process that should involve all participants and give them a voice. This is in principle the purpose of democracy. But Northern nations have transformed this process into an institutional procedure that is mainly reduced to an electoral system and a numeric count of votes (at least in Anglo-Saxon countries). Politics becomes arithmetic.

The constitutional institution is evidently necessary but not sufficient. Democracy is a culture that involves information, diversity of points of view, education, learning, discernment, debate, dialogue, respect of minorities, capacity for consensus. In most Northern democracies, these qualities have been forgotten in the struggle for power. Fake news and pretence discourses tend to provide a falsified ground for debate and decision; it is all about opinions and privileges of a minority, rather than about truth and the common good.

By contrast, traditional cultures practise rather a form of consensus that is established by the leaders. As elders - whose authority relies not on election but on their recognised wisdom and natural authority – the leaders discuss together any issue and try to find a common ground that encompasses all the main aspects of the problem. Of course this process only involves a minority of people, but they are the ones who are considered as the wisest.

If I have well understood, the Aymara people (Amerindians from Peru and Bolivia) are used to choose each year in turn a couple of people (one man and one woman) who will be their leaders. These people are not necessarily skilled or formed for this kind of responsibility but they have to be trained and to practise with the help of the community. Leadership is not a privilege to get advantage of in terms of power but it is a service to the

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community each one can provide; and an opportunity to learn new skills and establish new relationships. What a fascinating model that relies on trust. What a contrast with the Northern pattern of promotion of privileges.

Counter-example 5: Non-violence

Colonisation has been based on violence. The best form of resistance was generally to practise non-violence and civil disobedience, as Gandhi did in India.

Violence generates violence; conflict generates conflict. Only dialogue and reciprocal understanding allow peace to be restored.

Colonialism is a violent process that negates all values the North pretends to teach the South. It is why non-violence has become an important form of resistance for the colonised, because it dismantles the power of violence and touches the perpetrators in their own spirit. This process of violence is complex and we will return to this topic later in more detail.

Gandhi has been a great defender of non-violence. He has liberated India from British domination by a systematic use of this strategy. He has also taught Indian people how to better live together, Hindus with Muslims. Of course he was not all powerful and could not create the harmony he wished to. But he could nevertheless inspire many people to change their behaviour and recognise the possibility for cohabitation beyond differences and inherited antagonism.

Counter-example 6: Retributive or restorative justice

Northern justice is repressive (retributive) while other forms of justice are restorative, restoring trust and freedom for the culprit.

Northern justice is mainly repressive. It punishes the culprit through fines or imprisonment or even death penalty. Prisoners are usually thrown into prison where they spend numerous years of their life and where they are put in situations of despair. Once they have been in prison there are many opportunities for subsequent offences that bring the person (many times) back into prison. It is a vicious circle. It is also where they learn from other worse criminals all the tricks of self-defence if they do not fall into drug, or are not the victims of rape or abuse. Imprisonment fosters imprisonment and worse behaviours, instead of helping people out of a circle of crimes. Repetitive stays in prison push the culprit down a spiral of personal decay and social exclusion. In Australia Aboriginal people are regularly imprisoned for no reason or only minor breaches of law (unpaid fines, alcohol abuse); or just because they are black as police check them more systematically, out of contempt or mere racism.

Southern societies have usually a gentler way of correcting inadequate behaviours. It does not exclude punishment; which is often physical and not so destructive; such as repay, which is painful but then is cared for and cured by the elders who inflict it. Justice is based on restoration of the dignity of the whole person; beyond humiliation it looks at rehabilitation.

By contrast with retributive justice it consists in rehabilitating the perpetrator and help him to discover more appropriate behaviours that may help him to thrive in society and in its own life. This alternative model calls for a deep transformation of our justice system. I'll come back to this later, concerning the process of Truth and Reconciliation in South-Africa.

Counter-example 7: Truth and Reconciliation

Northern nations solve conflict through domination and repression. Truth and Reconciliation offers true solutions that bring peace.

Conflicts in Northern or colonial societies are repressed by power and violence. The opponents are squashed or annihilated. Their stands are denied, their rights ignored.

Severe condemnation and retributive punishment of past oppressive acts does not allow true reconciliation between oppressors and their victims, especially if these acts were real and terrible. The culprits (ex-oppressors) will just defend themselves, hiding important facts, denying wrong doing. The victims will not be recognised as people with rights that have been wronged. The conflict is repressed but not solved.

The experience of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa, led by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu in 1990s (report²⁷ published in 1998), has shown another approach where participants, whether perpetrators or victims, were invited to tell all the truth of what they had done and what had happened and for which reasons. In counterpart they – i.e. mainly perpetrators – obtained full forgiveness. The fact they would get forgiveness in exchanges of their confession helped them to tell all the truth because truth-telling became a healing process, for them too. Perpetrators and victims were in this way seen for who they were and recognised as such, and, beyond this, as persons. Opponents discovered also together a common humanity and often, paradoxically, a common ground of suffering, independently of the side on which they were, whether oppressors or victims. This process marked a deep transformation in the South-African society and it allowed it to pass onto a more peaceful and creative process of true recovery and restoration of peaceful and human relationships.

²⁷ Read chapter 6 of volume 1 of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, by Desmond Tutu and collaborators: <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf>

Counter-example 8: Nationalism or international solidarity

Resistance to supremacy goes beyond borders through international solidarity: workers, feminism, decolonisation, racism, multiculturalism.

Nation-states are considered as enclosed boxes that have to function as autonomous systems. They have their own social, political and economic system with its own forms of privileges and oppression. The victims are meant to find a path of improvement in this predefined and limiting frame.

Worker struggles, decolonisation, feminism, and other similar movements of liberation have on the contrary developed an ability to think more broadly i.e. internationally in recognising that similar situations elsewhere present some fundamental common characteristics in these processes of oppression, although they remain also at the same time specific to the region where they develop. In uniting their struggles with people in similar situations elsewhere, liberation movements have extended drastically their power. Internationalism has multiplied the force of workers, of decolonisation, of feminism, of anti-racism, of nonviolence and similar.

We finish here our third circle of approach. I am aware that this chapter was a bit fastidious but yet necessary. Our patterns of thinking are so deeply ingrained in us that we hardly notice them. They are like groves into which we fall and fall back again and again.

All these counter-examples – and there would be so many more – show very clearly that the Northern values are not at all universal although they remain probably rooted in a humanely common fundamental sense of respect for life and integrity, a wish for protecting the weak from suffering, a hope for equity and harmony. But each culture has applied these principles in

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other ways that better fit local conditions and expectations, local perceptions and interpretations. Yet, on the other hands, practice rarely rises at the same level. It is often a pretty nasty corruption of these fundamental values most of us aspire to.

This is what I have tried to illustrate earlier with the differences of context in which each culture has taken shape. One thing is certain: Northern values are not universal; they are not unique; and many other ways seem even more appropriate than Northern ways when these latter are based on force and domination.

The other question that arises out of these considerations is how we may practise our higher values without falling into degraded behaviours for short term profits.

Beyond the “limes”

I believe there is a fundamental aspect of colonisation we too often underestimate. This is the ignorance factor, I mean our ignorance as Westerners. It is so difficult to understand how others think and live differently. We tend to adopt the ways of the cultures or people who are similar to us. And when cultures or people are different we experience this difference as an expression of their hostility towards us. But often this enmity exists only in our head and nowhere else, because of our ignorance or lack of ability to listen to these others with open mind.

Why do China, Russia, Türkiye, Iran, Pakistan, North Korea, or similar extremely different regimes and ideologies, seem to us to be so hostile to us? Of course they have aspects we fundamentally disapprove, especially concerning human rights and oppression of expression or of minorities. But they have also a very different past and heritage, a very different position in the world, a position that situates them in a very different context,

from which they see the world under a very different angle, from the East instead of from the West (as we do), without any common reference with the world view we have adopted.

Their perception of the world, as well as of their position in it, often happens to be in sharp contrast or opposition, if not in conflict, with the options chosen by the powers we tend to follow blindly, such as the USA or the UK. Why can't we then, on one hand, be more independent of our so-called allied in our way of thinking and, on the other hand, understand that these other cultures and people have also their legitimate reasons to think the way they do, which rise out of this fundamental difference of objective position?

Why can't we understand that Chinese people, or Russian people, or Iranian people, or Turkish people, or North-Korean people have also their human feelings and their motivations? They are finally equally human, and they function in daily life with the same aspirations of wellbeing as each of us; as I demonstrated about so-called primitive societies which have chosen their own ways for good reasons which are very different from ours, but yet legitimate. Even terrorist or fundamentalists have their motivations, and they are maybe very justified, even if we do not (need to) approve the path of expression they have chosen. Let's at least recognise their rights to think and live as they do or aspire to do. And, most important, let's first try to understand them before we judge them.

No man's land

The world of the other is often perceived as a desert, an empty land; we cannot imagine how we would survive in such harsh conditions.

How do nomads find their way in the Sahara? How can Maasai people survive in the Kalahari? This is something beyond

Northern understanding. Yet, what we see as an unliveable space is experienced by traditional owners as a normal way of life, full of opportunities.

I am struck in Canada how White and Amerindian people seem to ignore the world of the other. Whites see the forests as a kind of desert where nobody could survive. Amerindian people see the cities as a kind of desert where nobody could survive. Two worlds, two perceptions, two disconnected realities that do not even intersect. And worse, nobody seems to be able to understand how the other can feel and think as she does. Very challenging.

The “limes”

In Roman times the “limes” was the border of the empire. What was beyond was unknown and considered as the threat or enemy.

The Roman Empire was very broad. It was then a problem how to control such a vast territory that went from Spain to the Middle East, from North Africa to Britain. It had the special characteristic to be grounded in a form of reciprocal recognition of diversity. In each part of the Empire there was an attempt to maintain or restore local powers as cogs of transmission of central authority. This meant that, despite the centralised domination by the Roman Emperor, local kings could stay in their function and be in charge of their people, under the explicit condition that they accepted to submit to the central authority and to remain faithful to the central authority and trustworthy in their mission of maintaining stability; and that they would maintain local peace under the recognition of the power of the Emperor. Each local king was then acting in this narrow balance between its own authority and its submission to an external invading force. There were local Roman soldiers and tax

collectors but the local king had also its own armed forces because he needed also to keep in charge of social order in his obligation to Rom and in his own interest, yet defending as much autonomy as he could for himself and his fellow country people.

Yet, beyond this inner diversity inside the empire, there was also a sharp and clear idea of where the line was running that was drawing the border of the empire. This was what they called in Latin the “*limes*”, the frontier. Beyond this limit were the Barbarians, the ones who were not submitted to Roman power and therefore uncivilised and dangerous. Yes, already at this time one had this notion of the one who is different, that is inferior and barbarian.

This notion has extended to present Europe with the Schengen space that allows free mobility inside the “*limes*” but transforms Europe into an inaccessible citadel for people coming from beyond (outside) the “*limes*”. The wall built by Israel around the small and split remains of Palestinian territories plays a similar role. Where is the ghetto? inside or outside this wall. Who is enclosed? Us inside or Them outside?

Us and Them – beyond the “limes”

Each social group tends to think in terms of “Us and Them”, defining its superiority according to a monolithic identity.

This idea of “Us and Them” has been examined in detail in the chapter about Whiteness, Blackness and Otherness when I exposed the theories of Dan Bar-On and Samy Adwan about the monolithic images of the Other and the Self and how these images are meant to evolve toward some more nuanced and complex representations. I mentioned also their experiences of having descendants of Nazis and descendants of victims of the Holocaust meeting one another and telling their own stories, which indicates a path out of our preconceived perceptions.

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But there is a fascinating aspect to this feeling and representation of Otherness I did not mention. This is the deeply entrenched feeling and almost rational belief that, if observed from Europe or the West, it seems that there is nothing much beyond this *limes*; or there is only this Other we cannot understand and we are afraid of. This is indeed a terrible self-imposed reduction of our world view; of which we are the first victims.

In this concept of otherness or nothingness or strangeness beyond the boundary, there is a sharp irony. It seems we still live today at the time of the Roman Empire when we believe that, beyond the *limes*, there are only Barbarians. We do not understand too well the nations and regimes I already mentioned such as China, Russia, Iran, Türkiye, North Korea, and many others. We believe Iraq or Afghanistan are undeveloped countries we have to civilise; that Pakistan and Iran are harsh regimes; that the Saudis are a kind of tyrants; that the pro-Hindu regime in India is oppressive for many. And there is some partial subjective truth in this way of thinking because it is rooted in our Western values of freedom and liberty of conscience; but there is much more we do not grasp.

But the great irony in this way of looking at the Others, is that we do not see where these present nations and cultures come from. At their roots, there were – this list intentionally in disorder! – the Russian Tsars, the Ottoman Empire, the Sassanid Empire, Babylon, Nineveh, the Omayyads, the Abbasids, Persepolis, the Moghuls, Angkor, Genghis Khan, the Chinese Han and Ming Empires, the Incas, the Mayas, the Aztecs, the Mali or Benin or Songhai or Ethiopian or the Great Zimbabwe Empires, the Egyptian Pharaohs, the Fatimids, and the list never ends. I intentionally mentioned here only empires because it is what we value most in our culture: we want to see imposing civilisations which built great empires and impressive monuments. To this long list one should add another long list: the list of indigenous cultures that developed their own

preferences, values and practices. The material simplicity in which they were living does not indicate a lack of development but on the contrary a great wisdom of how to live with little material means, sometimes even very frugal, and consecrating much time to the celebration of life. Hence, out of this double long list, we can see that the “rest of the world”, before the Industrial Revolution, was not less developed than our mainly rural Europe with its centres of power and trade and culture which were generally not more, not less impressive.

This means that the void we perceive beyond the *limes*, as well as the lack of understanding we have of these other cultures, is just the fruit of our own ignorance. The void is in our own head, as a lack of knowledge and openness. It is not at all a void beyond the *limes*.

I feel this statement is very important because it invites us to review fundamentally how we look at the Others; how much we need to discover that they are just other variations of people confronted to the same challenge of living a good life, using the best of what our common humanity can offer.

These considerations about the void beyond the *limes* invite us to review (rethink) how this nobody can become again somebody; how we can learn to see him or her for who they are, i.e. people like you and me. I find this call very fascinating because it calls us to sit in the skin of the Chinese man or the Iranian woman, i.e. not to project our own ways of thinking into their heads, but to observe from inside how they function, what they feel and why they act as they do; it will help us to feel what it can mean to be them. It seems crazy, but it will open a wide door to a better understanding of the Other; much beyond the question of whether their ideology or political regime is right or wrong.

It is indeed not about right or wrong (our judgement); because this is a false question, completely irrelevant in the context of the question I ask about their real identity. How do they belong?

How do they relate? It is about their right to be different, to have other values, other priorities, other preferences, other understanding of what life is about. Personally I would be keen to meet them and to understand them; even their leaders who seem so mad. When I say I wish to meet them, I mean to meet them truly in their authentic humanity, as equal but different human beings confronted to the same mystery of life, and how to practise it best.

And then there is another question. How does what they do teach us about righteousness? How can we learn from them? How can we also review our will for power and domination, mainly aligned on the strategic power of the USA, and change our behaviour in order to generate more peace, yet also to resist bullies. A narrow path indeed that requires from us a lot of courage to review our representations of the world and of how all these different forces may interact.

Chapter 8: The self-harm of colonisation

Beyond the many cultural clashes I described in the precedent chapter, we can also see that the colonial project appears as a sharp opposition, not only between cultures, but also between the two “opposed” fields of economy and culture; “opposed” because this consists in the violent dominance of the economy over culture. The economy, and not culture, leads development. It should rather be a dialogue of two dimensions of very different and unequal respective values; one, culture, guiding the evolution; and the other, economy, at its service. However this dichotomy between economy and culture, and the dominance of the economy, are at the advantage of the invading power that is looking for economic resources, and not for cultural inspiration.

But the justification of this domination does not talk about economy. It paradoxically refers to culture to justify the domination. This economic domination is explained by cultural references, in considerations to race differences and in terms of anthropology (developed vs primitive cultures or races) and non-explicit racism.

In this chapter I intend to examine how the social construct of racism is empty of content and destructive for the society that practises it. It leads to what I call the boomerang effect, when the violence of the colonies hits back home.

The constructs of slavery and racism

As they constitute the nerve of colonialism, we have now to come back to the themes of race and racism in order to better

understand in what they consist and which role they play in the process of colonialism. Of course it is a very complex topic and it is impossible to ever propose a synthetic satisfying theory about racism in a few pages. Many testimonies and observations have contributed with fascinating insights, which have helped to progress in understanding what this frightful feeling in the deepest of our human soul can be fostered by. I would like yet to add here my modest personal remarks.

I will write about blacks and whites. But this is only a symbolic simplification that expresses the caricatured dualism in race relationships. It is an extreme simplification, as if they were two antagonistic figures. The image presents a conflict between black and white, but the reality is very different. By contrast reality is an intense network of relationships between many people, and not a confrontation between two blocks. This complex network develops beyond the “colour line”, as D.E.B. Dubois used to call it. How then to cross this line... which does not exist as such?

The reign of fear

When newcomers discovered Africa, a continent inhabited by black people, they were first frightened; and so were also the inhabitants by the newcomers.

I believe, because I experience it myself each time I meet otherness, that our first reaction to what we do not know is a form of diffuse fear, fear of the unknown, fear of the way it can become a threat for us, precisely because we do not know what it is, whether it is amicable or inimical. Our instinct tells us then to be cautious. Nothing wrong with this first apprehension.

When I write this, I think equally of the conquerors discovering the local populations of the “newfound” lands who looked so different from them; as I am also aware that the indigenous people of these countries felt a similar reaction concerning the

look of these newcomers. How can one be so black? How can one be so white?

Our unconscious, in situations of threat, generates all kinds of imperceptible and immediate instinctive reactions, which we would not intend to produce consciously. These instinctive reactions arise naturally, out of our control. But we can yet, with sufficient awareness, master bit by bit how we receive, treat and interpret these spontaneous reactions; and, further down the track, how we react to them; whether we let them trigger automatically some direct defensive or aggressive behaviours; or whether we welcome them as immature feelings and learn to process them consciously; and then transform and master them.

We have first to welcome them because they are an objective reality that arises in us and which we cannot deny. And neither can we ignore them. But we do not yet need to follow them blindly on the uncontrolled chain of wild reactions they trigger in us. These immature feelings need to be processed and transformed by our deeper heart-mind into creative attitudes that overcome these instinctive feelings of fear. What is needed is a reinterpretation of the perception; and its necessary translation into an expression of an adequate reaction that affirms that this fear is not justified. Trust and peace can then arise.

Racism as a construct

Races exist as genetic poles of formation of physical differences; but the interpretation of what they mean in terms of identity and comparison is a social construct.

I have already explained this assessment in the first chapter. Differences between races - which objectively exist – do not explain the differences of hierarchy we see or rather invent and establish between them. And yet we never stop inventing these

hierarchies, each time we propose an interpretation of their significance.

Differences are just differences. They do not imply, by themselves, that one character ought to be better than another. To evaluate differences in terms of quality – better or worse, superior or inferior – one needs interpretation. Interpretation is not a genetic factor; it is a social construct; it is a judgement that happens in our minds, in contrast to external reality.

A bird can fly, a fish can swim: this is a difference. If we decide that flying is superior to swimming, this is an interpretation, a social construct that is maybe “justified” by the fact I prefer flying to swimming or birds to fishes. But it is a personal interpretation linked with my personal preferences, in my mind, linked to my past experiences and to whom I am. Hence this personal preference cannot be stated as a universal truth that would be valid for all people, for all birds and for all fishes. This is not truth, this is opinion.

Yet a whole society – or at least in its dominant trend - may yet agree that flying is better than swimming, or the reverse, because both are equally possible as interpretations and as preferences. Interpretations depend on social preferences. And such preferences depend on habits, advantages or privileges, not on objective truth.

When blacks and whites meet for the “first” time and discover the existence of the other, they are both frightened. This is legitimate because it is probably engraved in our DNA, as an instinctual protection, or suspicious observation, of what we do not already know. The unknown can be dangerous as it can also be propitious. Better to be cautious and approach it with precaution and awareness. It is how we are used to cope with threats, and it has probably helped us survive. But soon we can see that the danger is not real; and we may then open our mind to the positive aspects of differences.

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If, as an invader, I adopt this more positive attitude towards differences of race, it nevertheless does not mean that I will be welcome. I'll very probably be greeted by the inhabitants with a fly of spears because they experience my coming as a threat, especially if I come uninvited on their land.

But this form of enmity will yet not be because of their blackness or my whiteness, it will simply be because I penetrate onto a land that is not mine, maybe even without the intent to invade it, and they intend to defend their territory. All this is legitimate and has nothing to do with race.

The quality and maturity and nuance of our interpretation depends on how we experience the potential of this difference, in relation to ourselves; that is whether it goes, or not, against our habits, preferences, interests or privileges. It is where the will for domination intervenes as a determining factor.

- When I invade your country I am evidently not keen to recognise you as my equal because it would mean that I have no right to invade your country. I recognise soon this evidence because I have in me a more or less conscious ethical sense that I can only take possession of your country at your expense; and that I have to subjugate you or even to kill you.
- Or, in a very different attitude, I may not be interested in invading your land if I prefer to be simply your guest; and then to behave in a respectful way to you and to your customs, which will define more or less how I may have to behave; what is acceptable on my part, from your own point of view, and not mine.

The first possibility implies, because of its own intention, that I have to demonstrate that you are inferior to me. And I will then consequently lose what I could gain in our exchanges because

this exchange cannot any longer be equal and reciprocal. It has to become oppressive.

By contrast the second possibility opens onto a rich exchange that is precisely nourished by diversity. We have both to take the "risk" of experiencing diversity beyond hierarchy and see what happens; what life brings in this exchange.

The strange thing is that, in this first instant of establishing the terms in which we will relate, I, as a newcomer, will define the rules, because I come with power and you are only the local who is first surprised by my coming. Either you welcome me in a generous and hospitable way; or you may also repel me because you may more or less rightly feel that I'll be your enemy, or at least that my coming is a threat to you.

If we translate this simple example into the history of colonialism, we can observe how the conquerors visibly not only did not behave in a pacific way. They did not come as visitors, as guests. But they very probably imposed their presence in an aggressive way. They soon became dominant, just by their attitude, even before they used any weapons; especially when they had in mind the wealth that they would get out of the land of the "hosts".

I personally (oh naivety) do not understand why the first encounter had to be so violent; why it could not be peaceful, friendly, fruitful, nourished by reciprocal curiosity and sense of respect and hospitality. This would have changed everything. It would have even probably opened new ways for pacific settlement for the newcomers. Do I dream?

And I am also convinced that the locals very often were even ready to welcome the strangers if these newcomers had behaved in more suitable – this means peaceful and humble – ways. Nobody can rewrite history. Nevertheless there are also in the past many examples of compatibility between newcomers and

indigenous people, which demonstrate that my naïve hypothesis is not so mad.

One of my preferred examples is the story of Nicolas Baudin – whom I quoted in the chapter about mobility (chapter 6). This French explorer came, as a scientific (cartographer, naturalist and hydrograph) to West Australia. He explored in 1802 the South Coast and Tasmania. To believe his journal and the testimony of François Péron, the zoologist of the expedition, they developed with Aboriginal people a very friendly and even festive relationship. It must be said that Baudin had no intention to conquer any land. He was just a scientist and geographer; that is a neutral observer of what was. And his “discovery” of the Aboriginal people was for him a joy or a fascination.

This attitude of scientific curiosity is important because he did not come in a spirit of conquest but in a simple spirit of neutral observation. It means he could rejoice at what he was seeing, whatever the was seeing, without being caught in evaluating how much it was (dis)advantageous for him. It seems these French explorers used to spend long days and evenings in festivities, eating and dancing around fires with the indigenous people who welcomed them warmly. Baudin is famous for having even written the letter I quoted, to the contemporary Governor Captain Philip Gidley King, in which he told him that the British had no right to establish themselves on this land; for the simple reason that it was inhabited and belonged to the local indigenous people and that Europeans had to behave as guests and not conquerors.

This illustrates the theory I want to propose here that racism is the consequence of a choice for domination; which, in a second stage, the theory (a discourse based on factice science) has to explain in apparently objective terms, and to justify. The discourse then goes like this. Either these people are inferior: uncivilised, undeveloped, incapable of managing themselves, needing to be educated or “made white”. Or they are even

declared non-existent: less than human, like animals, or even “non-inhabitants of terra nullius” (which offers a double negation of their existence). Which of these discourses is applied does not matter much. What matters is that the justification is then a pure creation (a pure invention) of the mind that attempts to justify what cannot be justified.

The best illustration of this process of justification is that slavery has been the cause of racism; and not racism the cause of slavery. Oppression creates the hierarchy, which allows the exploitation. Slavery generates racism because exploitation, to justify itself, needs the slave to be inferior.

In other words there is no objective reason to racism, except either an emotional reaction to difference (fear) or the self-made discourse which is a pure one-sided social construct defined by intentions (conquest), power (domination by force) and privilege (exploitation – if one can consider exploitation as a privilege!).

The scientific construct

Natural sciences are artificially used as “rational support” to the social construct, establishing racial biological differences to be observable and measurable, they say.

Colonialism and imperialism were especially active and intense at the time when Darwin published his theory of evolution (*On the Origin of Species* – 1859). This scientific breakthrough explained that evolution consisted in mutations that generated improvements for the species that underwent them. The better adaptation that these mutations offered participated in improving the endurance and efficiency of the concerned species. It was called “survival of the fittest”. But the theory did not express that there was any hierarchy between different species. It only observed that the mutations allowed better adaptation which meant better chances for survival. If one is better adapted to a

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given context, one has better chance to survive. The theory did not stipulate that this better adaptation was meant to foster domination or even superiority.

Nevertheless the ideology of a dominant white race – the theory of racism as based on a hierarchy between races – found in this new scientific and objective theory a biological justification to what it had established as its social construct. This social construct consisted in a discourse of justification for domination. This discourse invoked, or rather derailed, the principle of the survival of the fittest as a reason for domination. What Darwin's theory had failed to explain is that the justification for domination was in fact not rooted in genetics (the mutation) but in ethics (the will to exploit). How could indeed Darwin have been conscious of the necessity to explain this nebulous point which did not belong to his theory? Soon a false form of science, essentially motivated by the social construct of oppression, tried to establish, in reverse, some so-called objective scientific proofs for its invented discourse.

They started measuring the skulls of indigenous people and to compare them to the skulls of European people. Many such attempts were used to justify the unjustifiable. This was not explanation; this was calumny.

Later, during the Algerian War of independence (1954-62)²⁸, some French promoters of colonial interests tried to demonstrate that the Algerian man was – by nature i.e. genetically – violent because of his neural constitution, understood as a lack of development of the frontal part of the brain. This was evidently just pure invention. It remained yet true that the Algerian men of this time were more violent at home or in public than average men of other nations. But this had nothing to do with their brain

²⁸ See Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin Books, 2014.

or their genes or their race; But it was rather linked, more objectively, with the context of the war and the conditions of oppression in which these men and their dependents were living, discharging their tension in a more hidden way on their own relatives or in their narrow community; while the French occupant was all around and would have violently repressed any move of open resistance or aggressiveness.

The racial theory

The social construct developed even into racial theories that were some kinds of composite constructions that justified supremacy.

Even before it had exhausted all its possible scientific sources, the racial theory built also itself up in reference to history. The best example of this kind is probably the theory by Count Arthur Gobineau in his book *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*²⁹, published in 1853.

According to Hannah Arendt³⁰, Gobineau was describing his time as the fall of civilisation, although this same era of the mid-19th century was precisely very optimistic (at least for the wealthy) because of the ambient enthusiasm for the new potentials of technical and economic development that characterised the immediate period after the Industrial Revolution. But the fall (at least in the eyes of the aristocracy) was that it was no longer the clear dominance of nobility, to which Gobineau pretended to belong – which is more than

²⁹ Arthur Gobineau: *The Inequality of Human Races*, Alpha Edition, 2020.

³⁰ Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harvest Books, NY, first published 1966.

dubious – in a factice genealogy that led over to the Scandinavian god Odin.

It was a fact of this time that nobility no longer needed to fear the victory of the *Tiers-Etat*, because it had already happened, at least for a part of it. Gobineau could observe, especially after the French Revolution and the following attempts against the French monarchy, that a new class of bourgeois was taking over; or even that a large movement of ordinary people were able to install a truly popular power, with the *Commune de Paris* in 1871.

On the other hand, this same middle and end of the 19th century was also seeing the arising of the concept of *decadence* that, with thinkers such as Nietzsche or Baudelaire, was describing the frailty of all things human.

Gobineau imagined and developed a theory that said, without any solid precise reference, that classes were of racial origin. The rising class of bourgeois was only made of the descendants of Gallic-Roman slaves; while the leading nobility (like himself) was of pure Germanic origin. The caste was then a race. Leadership was no longer a question of merit but of genes. This could explain that this noble race was regrettably no longer in charge because the more numerous classes had taken over.

The destiny of this upper class (preserving the race of gods) became then a widely international issue, by contrast with the evolution in France where the *Patrie* (the Nation) had become pragmatically the main leading idea. Internationalism was the right and adequate terrain where the cause of nobility as a race had to be defended on a larger spectrum. This was the “hopeful” extension of the struggle of a dominating European class of nobility against the *Liberté-Egalité-Fraternité* of the French Revolution and its continuation with the Napoleonic wars.

One can see how such a theory could reinforce the contempt of whites for blacks they kept enslaved in the colonies. Disraeli

himself was a very convinced promoter of racial theories. As he nominated Queen Victoria as the Empress of India, the racial contempt based on a spirit of supremacy became evidently a major force in the colonial project. Fiction became reality.

The theories of Gobineau and similar demonstrate clearly this will for superiority and its corollary, domination. This ideology is not about differences and the true nature of races; it is only about supremacy, especially here supremacy of a class of privileged people over the other classes which used to form the majority of the inhabitants of a given country. It is also about the attempt to restore what has disappeared with the Revolution: absolutism and unilateral self-declared rights to decide who is what and who does what.

Orientalism

Northerners (Europeans) have created a romantic and exotic image of Oriental people: a “science” called Orientalism and fitting their idea of supremacy.

The Palestinian Professor of literature at Columbia University Edward W. Said (1935-2003) wrote a powerful book titled *Orientalism*³¹ in which he described the image that the Northern cultures have created for themselves of the Orient. He shows how this image is a fiction that is more defined by the will of the North for supremacy and its purpose to exploit the Middle-East than by an objective observation of these cultures and the people who live in this part of the world. Orientalism was made out of the fictive version of what Northerners believe (inside their own minds) rather than out of the fruit of observation of reality (what is out there). Orientalism is in this way another version of racism

³¹ Edward W. Said: *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, first published 1978.

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and supremacist ideology inasmuch as it also defines a form of fictive superiority of the North over the South.

Edward Said illustrates his description with many examples. He describes first how Napoléon in his expedition of 1798-99 to Egypt created an *Institut d’Egypte* that had as mission to study and describe the culture and the behaviour of Oriental people and to show how a Northern influence would help to improve the nature of the Oriental. This approach had two legs: knowledge and power. It is clear that the intention of this so-called study was to adapt the image of this land to the conquest by Napoléon to make it more graspable in the terms that were needed.

Other examples: Many writers have been attracted by the Orient such as François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), Gérard de Nerval (1808-55), Gustave Flaubert (1821-80), Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936). And many political figures have been involved in more pragmatic ways in a project of domination such as Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81), Lord Evelyn Baring Earl of Cromer (1841-1917), Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888-1935), Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930). Or scientists such as the linguist Baron Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), the archaeologist Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832).

The image of the Orient that takes shape in this fictive way is defined by the following qualifiers, borrowed from Said’s book: the Oriental is gullible, devoid of initiative, involved in intrigues, unkind to animals, inveterate liar, lethargic, suspicious, irrational, depraved, childlike. And we do not mention here all the comments about Islam as a primitive, violent and heretical religion. Evidently Islam was already at that time the main force of the “Orient” that was able to resist the Northern conquest. Therefore it became the enemy to be denigrated.

Then there is also the fascination and attraction for the seductive and unknown mystery, or rather for the self-made projection that creates this mystery: Orientals are sensual, and the eroticism,

reinforced by the myth of the harem or the Moorish bath – as if each Oriental male had one! – is celebrated by the Northern travellers (Flaubert) as a great attraction; fecundity, sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, and so many other aspects.

Evidently this image of the Orient is a pure construct that has taken shape in Northern brains and have little to do with objective reality or even honest observation.

It continues today to impact on our attitudes towards these regions. We still act in contemporary politics on the base of these general emotive states based on constructed perceptions that are deeply inherited and engrained in will for supremacy. Concerning the Palestinian conflict, the Northern countries have taken side for Israel as an expression of Northern linear mentality against the Arabs perceived as Orientals (circular culture) conforming with the North-made image.

It is important to notice here that, as Napoleon’s Orientalism, this construct is also built on two legs: knowledge and power. Knowledge is not true knowledge because it is a construct; and power is only the fact of effective or even only potential violence (ownership of powerful weapons).

What is striking in this approach of Orientalism is how much it resembles the racist theories. It is just another expression of segregation (fear), contempt (knowledge) based on the exercise of force (power).

The myth of white supremacy

White supremacy is also based on know-how and power, and has nothing real in itself; except its will for domination and hindrance of lower castes to reach empowerment and wealth.

The dichotomy between Blacks (slavery, racism, Orientalism) and Whites (so-called civilisation, knowledge, power) has been so far described on its dark side (domination over the uncivilised). It still needs to be examined now under the “pure” side; while white invaders have built a discourse on the colonised, they have also developed a discourse on themselves as the gods.

It seems to me there are here four major factors to be considered:

1) **Civilisation:** We have seen that they have affirmed they were bringing civilisation and Christian values; but also, as contradiction, that their behaviour and the whole process of colonisation was in fact the maximum possible negation of these values: violent oppression instead of caring compassion. The light has turned into the great Satan (the great provocation).

There is also the fact that Northerners grabbed Southern culture to make it theirs in their museums in the mother country. It has been explained that this can be perceived as a form of unconscious search for truth the colonists satisfied by grabbing the signs, believing they were in this way acquiring the meaning. This shows that the argument of civilisation is a false discourse.

2) **Power:** The second factor concerns power which has already been examined: as the leitmotiv goes, the invaders came with better ships, more efficient weapons and less moral restraint (leitmotiv). They acted outside any legal frame, and imposed their will by decrees as an arbitrary power. It was only by the practice of force (potential violence or imposed suffering) that they could enforce their presence and white supremacy. No comment.

3) **Wealth:** We can observe that whites are, in general worldwide, richer than blacks. It is striking in countries like

the US and Australia or Canada. There are two main aspects that explain this hierarchy linked with race.

- Firstly wealth is the product of exploitation. White colonists have extracted wealth from the poor countries at their advantage and at the expense of the locals. This has evidently nothing to do with culture, intelligence, faculties, know-how or skills. It has just to do with the force of domination and with the little moral restraint, which allowed systematic robbing and looting. It is then purely power.
- Secondly extraction has allowed conversion into capital and reinvestment and further economic development. This is the law of capitalism. In the hands of a minority capital allows the best and quickest general growth of total wealth. Yet there is a small problem: this can only be done at the expenses of the lower classes (which form the majority of the population). I have shortly sketched how the introduction of banknotes, and money as a good on which one can speculate, has helped to extend artificially the wealth of richer countries. It is clear that money can give access to goods, services and profits which are not usually accessible; especially if these benefits are not accessible to normal skills and to the average human organic energy normally available in the timespan of 24h/day, which is equally available to all of us. The segregation between Blacks and Whites is the glass ceiling that prevents the lowest classes from accessing higher positions. The Blacks remain poor, the Whites (relatively) rich(er). Power again!

Yet, despite these two major twists, the attraction of the white model remains powerful because comfort is attractive and material wellbeing seems to be fruitful and necessary for

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thriving. Yet, as we will see soon, it is empty when it has no content (no meaning).

- 4) **Knowledge:** Beyond civilisation, power and wealth, there is a fourth factor: knowledge. I have shown in the sixteen stages of evolution of Northern culture how each stage has contributed to consolidate a notion and practice of knowledge and control, almost systematically at the expense of a loss of inherited wisdom. It is important to be aware of this progressive shift from wisdom to knowledge. And it is also important to see here that knowledge without wisdom degenerates into mere know-how and technicalities. Philosophy, ethics and religion turn into theories that remain in talks and books but lose at the same time their potential to lead or impact the evolution of society. And science turns into technology. These simplified versions of knowledge have then helped to build better ships and more performing weapons (see point 2) and allowed their use at the expense of a “restriction of moral restraint” (leitmotiv).

Knowledge is in this case no longer the reflection of an observation of reality and a search for truth and meaning. It becomes a simplified form of practical construct that favours what is most useful (i.e. advantageous) given the intended entrepreneurial project (the leading idea or intention for exploitation). To this pragmatic and reductive translation of a broader intelligence, the pretence to universality of their values and knowledge by the Whites comes to add another layer of illusion. Dry knowledge, as the reference for action, joins then this category of practicalities that are no longer absolute. They are only subjective and subordinate to preferences. These subordinate values become then only reduced possible expressions, among many other alternatives. This tendency to degradation of knowledge is very similar to the process of entropy of energy, as science describes it. This is a slow decay of a quality that progressively degrades and

vanishes. This process of degradation becomes still more powerfully effective when it is also reinforced by the choice by the Whites to favour efficiency and pragmatism in the double endeavour of their own development and in colonialism. Knowledge becomes then antagonistic to the search for truth, whatever this truth may be revealed to be. It is impossible to cut the tree that is in the way of pragmatism and to yet pick its fruits year after year in future.

These four factors seem to well illustrate that white supremacy is built on the sand. The question remains then to know what makes this form of supremacy so strong.

I believe that the examination of how slave trade and slavery have been abolished illustrates well, and is very telling of, this persistent power of an idea and a social construct; or at least their tireless effort of repetition: the axiomatic superiority of the white race.

The end of slavery as a conversion of mode of production

Rather than to end exploitation for ethical reasons, slavery was abolished to allow more stable forms of cheap production (indentured work for small wages).

Through the history of colonial domination the concept of white supremacy had become a kind of institution, first engraved in the minds of Northerners, and then consolidated in many practices or systems that made and still make it a consolidated reality of our days. Among others the practice of slavery has been, and still is, one of these consolidated practices.

I won't retell here the history of slavery because many thorough studies have described it in powerful ways³². I wish just to concentrate now on the way slavery has been in principle abolished and what it tells us about white supremacy.

At first glance it seems that the moral awareness of a major movement in the United Kingdom has succeeded to put an end to the slave trade and slavery. But when we proceed with a more thorough investigation of the nature of this process of so-called liberation, we perceive that it has happened in a different way and for very different reasons.

The movement for the abolition of slavery became significant when the Quakers started to campaign against it for purely ethical and spiritual reasons. In the Caribbean at that time many uprisings from slaves took place and had a very significant and threatening effect that showed the reality of the problem and, beyond the essential question of the welfare of the slaves, demonstrated the peril it represented for the survival of the production system in the plantations and, consequently, for the growth of British trade and economy.

The intervention of Bonaparte in Haiti had precipitated the success of the arising of slaves led by Toussaint Louverture, from 1791 on, that resulted finally in the declaration of the independent Republic of Haiti, in 1804, where and when ex-slaves took charge of their own destiny. In the middle of this tumultuous context of the Caribbean Sea, an example of success of the rebellion was implanted, which had to remain for many years a powerful paradigm of emancipation for the other slaves of these many islands and the South and North American continents. In the rest of the archipelago and in the North East of

³² Among other studies, see: Padraic X. Scanlan: *Slave Empire – How Slavery built Modern Britain*. Robinson, 2020. The historic data in this chapter are taken out of this book.

present Brazil and the Guyanas, Baptist missionaries played also an important role by the support they provided for the slaves in their rebellions.

In the United States, the Civil War has been later a strong trigger for the liberation of slaves. Their exploitation was an important aspect of the war. As we saw, the role of the police has long been in support of the land and slave owners and its role principally consisted in chasing the fugitive slaves and in bringing them back “home”. This tendency has deeply marked the culture of the police forces. And it is still an important contributor to the oppression of, and violence against, black people today.

In what concerns the struggle for the liberation of slaves in the British colonies, there have been indeed two main stages on the way to the abolition of slavery. The first step was the Slave Trade Bill (1807) which forbid the trade of slaves but did not abolish slavery itself. It was soon followed by the second step which consisted in the Slavery Abolition Act, valid for all the British colonies (1833) that abolished slavery completely, at least legally.

The initial step was mainly led by moral considerations initiated by the Quakers, and lead by William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson and many others. But the second step, for the total abolition of slavery, was of a different order. The turmoil in the colonies due to so many slave rebellions had developed to a stage where slavery had become a difficult practice; principally because of the number of local revolts the plantations owners had to face and repress. If the abolition was first motivated by moral reasons, it soon turned progressively into a form of reconversion of the production system of the plantations, in a way that cheap labour force could be further ensured and employed in the plantations, under a new form to be found. It is why the liberation of the slaves did not happen at once immediately but had to extend on many years of slow adaptation of the

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production system to new employment conditions. The main objective was the durability of the production system, rather than the wellbeing of the slaves or the workers.

The necessity appeared soon that compensations were to be paid. One reasonably imagines that they would be paid to the slaves. But, no, it was not. These compensations were meant for the plantation and slave owners; and this, because of their loss of cheap labour force when the slaves would recover freedom. It is why the British Parliament voted for the owners an astronomic compensation of £20 million of that time, which was the equivalent of some £1.9 billion of today money. An incredible sum indeed.

On top of this shift of interest, the great contradiction was that the slaves were not instantly made free. They had to undergo a time of apprenticeship of seven years. This delay in the freedom process was meant to avoid that ex-slaves could easily escape the will or needs of their masters. The imperative was to allow the owners to reconvert slowly the organisation of their plantation and to transform the workforce inherent to slavery into a workforce of indentured work for minimal wages that would bind the worker to the owner in very similar terms as slavery did.

It was also taken care of the necessity that everything had to be done to avoid giving the ex-slaves any opportunity to buy for themselves a small plot of land. The owners were aware that, in such a case, the ex-slaves would then become independent farmers and would be able to cultivate their own land for producing food for their needs and the needs of their dependents. This means that they would cut in this way any obligation towards their precedent masters. The slave owners were more or less ready to let go of the system of slavery. But they did not want to lose their cheap workforce. What was rather aimed at, from the point of view of the owners supported by the majority of Parliament, was a form of indentured work for the slaves, for

small wages. It is why the period of seven years of apprenticeship became a priority for the owners because it was a way to force the ex-slaves into this new form of employment most slaves did not want to accept.

Hence it can be said that the abolition of slavery was essentially motivated by the increasing tension generated by the many local uprisings in the Caribbean, rather than by truly humanistic ideals, except for a minority of Quakers and a few well intentioned members of parliament. And, most important, it consisted more in the reorganisation of the production process, with new working conditions for the ex-slaves, than in a real liberation for their own good. White supremacy and the interests it defended were kept safe. White supremacy was not even challenged.

A parallel can be evoked here between the liberation of slavery and the decolonisation process. In the same way the decolonisation process would later transform the pattern of exploitation practised under colonisation into new forms of employment and trade in the hands of private corporations and between nations. It is clear that these dominating nations and their ex-colonies were not on equal foot; as also the slave owners and the slaves were not either. In a similar way to the way the abolition of slavery took place, the ex-colonisers would also continue to exploit the ex-colonies, according to patterns equally very similar to the pre-existing ones, which nevertheless had to adapt formally to the new conditions created by the independence of these countries; this happened yet without taking the dominating power away from the hands of the ex-colonisers.

The boomerang effect

As we can see, racism is a shaky theory that does not resist any thorough examination but finally, by the lie it introduces, harms

everybody, including the people who play with it, in their own terms. On the other hand, white supremacy seems unshakable. Yet these two forms of violence in the colonies have also strong repercussions at home, in the mother country. White supremacy is the core energy that leads the evolution in the colony, but this fundamental twist of the essence of normal human relationships does not last long to hit back home and impacts on the situation in the mother country.

The boomerang effect

Colonisation is not only a process of external exploitation of Southern countries. It impacts also powerfully the spirit and culture of Northern countries, in a detrimental way.

The colonisation endeavour is usually understood in terms of exploitation of the South by the North because of the invasion of the South by the North. This is a real fact. It is understood as happening there. But, in this understanding, there is a dominant component that is absolutely missing. The truth is that this powerful evolution of North-South relationships and the link between mother country and colony work indifferently in both directions. It works North-South but it works also, as much, South-North. Northerners think they can exploit the Southern lands without this exploitation impacting on their own world, except through the import of what they have extracted from there. This is a complete illusion. Since the two worlds have been linked by our exchanges, and especially by our will to extract Southern wealth in our advantage, the same qualities or disturbances go one way and bounce back; this at home (mother country) or in the colonies.

There is here a strong analogy with our relationship with nature. We believe we can extract from nature and consume what we want to, without regard for what is available and how much we

suffer from the depletion of nature. We consider nature as an extraction pit. And we do the same with Southern countries.

This backlash impact of the exploitation of the South by the North is what I would like to call the boomerang effect. An impact of Northern action in the Southern countries has immediately a reverse impact onto the mother country, not only in material terms, such as the material benefits of colonisation for the North, but also in ethical and spiritual terms, concerning the mentality and ethics of people, how they think and what their values are, and especially how they cope with the ethical dimension of exploitation to their advantage. And, most important, this boomerang effect is not only real for the ones who are directly involved in the process of colonisation (the government, the settlers, the traders, the bankers), but also for the ones who have stayed at home and have apparently nothing to do directly with colonialism, not even with the indirect advantages the mother has taken out of it.

This boomerang effect has not only radically impacted the general mentality. It has also touched the deep spirit of the nation, the spirit of the ordinary people “at home”. The boomerang effect is this reversed impact of colonisation that fosters a deep change of mentality in the main actor, originally considered as a nation, but also at individual level.

The boomerang effect is not a single reversed impact. It is the start of a chain of consecutive repercussions of the original act, going back and forth between the coloniser and the colonised. In short it can be summarised as follows: exploitation (by the dominator) generates resistance (by the oppressed) that generates more oppression (by the dominator) that generates rising resentment (by the oppressed) that generates guilt (for the dominator) that generates further oppression (by the dominator again) that generates some resistance in the home country, and so on.

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This is of course here only a very simplified description of a much more complex process. What is most interesting in this chain is that it transforms the coloniser not only into a strong dominator but also into a guilt-filled person. This hidden feeling of guilt does not seem evident because the act of domination seems to consolidate without any mention of guilt. But this consolidation does not come only from greed and the intention of extracting more. It is also reinforced by a form of harshness that attempts to hide the deterioration of the soul of the dominator in terms of ethical behaviour and of experience of life as a personal endeavour. This seems to be an important aspect of how colonisation impacts on the coloniser, independently of the material privileges he gets out of it.

The perpetrator may continue to act as a perpetrator, but his motivations shift from direct material interest to more subtle processes of self-defence of the deeper person: the clear-sightedness of the self that finally knows everything about himself, including what he does wrong, even if he does not recognise it consciously, and therefore still less publicly.

This growing sense of guilt can be observed in the colonial newspaper articles, each time that violence arises in the colony because of some killing of indigenous people by the squatters or of squatters by the indigenous people who resist them. The mood of the coloniser oscillates between one extreme, for instance as categorical denial of the indigenous right to defend the lands the squatters grabbed; and it bounces back to the other extreme, for instance as the negative feeling of the colonising society that direct repression goes beyond everything that is morally acceptable or even practically useful. The mood shifts also according to who has been impacted. When the indigenous people have been massacred for “no visible reason”, there is uproar among some of the settlers. But, when the settlers are victims of retaliation, the whole colony forms a unique defensive block. The moods shift constantly between desires to conquer

and awareness of the harm done to the Indigenous people, and to the colonisers by boomerang effect.

But there is no open debate. The shifts of mood seem unconscious or just triggered by events, without afterthoughts, as if without context and without causes or consequences. And, most interesting, this pendulum between two perceptions impacts also strongly on what happens in the mother country.

The boomerang effect is in this way a dynamic and dialogical process that encompasses all aspects in the act of domination. It has many layers. It involves all dimensions and all components of reality, whether material, physical, cultural, ethical, spiritual. All dimensions are involved and participate in shaping reality, in their disparity, in their antagonisms, as in their compatibility or incompatibility, in their accumulation and reciprocal acceleration. Reality is messy, as the consequence of so many factors of so diversified natures.

The most evident impacts are probably the physical and material exploitation of people and resources based on domination by force; as well as the massacres of indigenous people; because these are the two public events, visible above the “floating line”. And the less visible impact, hidden below the floating line, is probably what this immoral acts trigger in terms of guilt in the deeper parts of the unconscious, in the colony and in the mother country.

These hidden effects may well be invisible for the eye; they are nevertheless not less real. They impact in return on the behaviour of the actors and the way they feel. One can see that, even when they are ignored or denied, they are still impacting on the actors who tend to harden their attitude, especially when they feel they crossed the line of what was ethically admissible.

We can illustrate this impact of the boomerang effect on the mother country with a few examples.

- The first that comes to mind is how the new created wealth has generated such powerful changes in the mother country. They imposed a new division in social classes and division of wealth and labour that soon, despite the huge profits they brought to a tiny minority, became a dreadful cause of misery for the majority. It especially condemned a majority of workers to a degrading level of poverty, so extreme that the state had to intervene to provide social support. This major disorder in the Northern society would have never happened on such a scale without the exploitation of colonisation that fed it.
- As another example, we can mention the ambivalence of major beneficiaries of this imported stolen wealth from the colonies who did not know how they had to hide the processes that made them suddenly so rich. They tried to demonstrate that it was due to their own effort, hard work and inventiveness. This was especially true when the profits came from the slave trade. This origin was probably easier to hide from public eye because it developed between Africa and America, far from European observers. Even in peaceful Switzerland, there are debates about the origin of many big private fortunes in Geneva or Neuchatel.
- Or, on a more ethical and political level, how some movements were arising, such as among the Quakers and in the British Parliament, for the abolition of slave trade and of slavery.
- Later in the 20th century, there was also a large movement as support for the struggle of independence of Southern countries after WW2; or support for or against the colonial wars (Indochina, Algeria, Vietnam).
- There was also, in the necessity to re-establish equity and the way to give a new chance to Southern countries, a large

support from Northerners for projects of alternative development – one should rather say alternative *to* development – or for human rights in the South. See Amnesty International, or the fair trade movement.

- And so many others.

All these forces in the mother country were nothing else than the consequences of the boomerang effect, i.e. the repercussions on the mother country of the violence of the colonies. From the beginning of colonisation up to now, there has always been in the North a movement of indignation and shame about colonialism and unfair treatment of other populations and cultures. And the hypocrisy was already perceptible at that time that the colonising government was requiring from settlers not to oppress indigenous people when oppression and violence were indeed inevitable as long as they wanted to grab their land.

This whole general more or less explicit uproar against injustice, oppression and racism has also generated, as a counterpart, a very positive and creative energy that has the potential to invent new forms of development and to put things right. Why should we – globally as rich nations or simply as ordinary people with our own personal discernment and freedom of choice – persist to commit crimes, when it makes our lives poorer and full of tensions and threats? without speaking of the bad conscience we feel. Why should we persist in a dead-end lane when it is also possible, and even simple, to develop more equal and reciprocal relationships that would aim at serving the interests of all partners? with the incredible advantage (bonus for us) that equity and harmony bring peace and allow all people to thrive, instead of generating endless bloody conflicts that never stop resurging. At the end of the game, a good life is better than a bad one.

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The impact on home culture

As we all are whole human beings, who cannot ignore one part of our own being, similarly the profits in term of wealth cannot be separated from the feelings how they have been acquired.

This is a well-known law of the universe. By chains of causes and consequences, what happens here, has an impact over there. Similarly there can be no injustice that is done to indigenous people in the colonies that does not impact also on the way people behave in the mother country. Any practice of injustice will immediately backfire. It starts of course by provoking a reaction of the most humanly motivated people at home. It becomes then soon part of the public debate. People can be partisans by generosity, by personal interest or by fear. In any case national morality cannot be divided into two, one at home and one abroad. This is the same spirit which leads the action and which is also shaped back by the repercussions.

This remains true today - even if colonialism is in principle a fact of the past - when domination has taken another form of expression through the implication of corporate interests and more or less direct interventions, by the most powerful governments, into national issues of poorer countries. The invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, among many others, has well illustrated this fact in the deep repercussions it had in Europe and the USA: moral issues, power struggle, acts of violence, expressions of racism, movements of protest, flows of refugees, acts of terrorism.

This boomerang effect means that domination does not consist only in a way to assert power. Power allows exploitation and profit at short term, but it also shapes the attitude of the actors and transforms their perceptions of the situation. One says that power corrupts. It not only allows domination and control to extend, but it also impacts on the mentality and the psychology

of the dominator when he turns into an ever more arrogant and ambitious actor with ever less restraint.

The boomerang effect consists in the fact that the tendency for extensive domination does not make distinctions between nations, classes, races, genders. We all equally become possible targets of a general will for domination and control. The boomerang effect is precisely based on the fact that the Yang tendencies are liberated without being restrained or controlled or guided by Yin perceptions that would refrain destructive behaviours and care for the meaning and long term consequences of what is undertaken. In the eyes of the perpetrator the effect is meant to be immediate and profitable.

From the human point of view we become all losers in this evolution because, even if we can accumulate more stuff, we nevertheless lose our own humanity and capacity to relate to one another as human beings. We become all slaves of our own interests, of our greed as well as of an anonymous market machine. This does not mean that the machine has its own will to oppress each of us. No, it just means that we are participating in an evolution that finally escapes our control, especially when we lose any critical capacity to evaluate what is truly at stake.

I imagine that, objectively, it can be demonstrated that the colonial experience did not create wealth. It only transferred it and concentrated it in the hands of a few, and not the autochthones, at a very high public cost for the metropolitan state and of course especially for the colonies. Even, one could ask what it financially has cost public powers in the North to subsidise or compensate for all these exactions.

In principle we live in democracies that should offer equal opportunities to all. The usual discourse about modernity promises us opportunities for self-development, for true relationships, for joy and pleasure, for expression and recognition, for wellbeing also. Yet little of all this happens to

each of us when we rely on the market and war machines to provide these qualities.

As Pankaj Mishra³³ describes it, there is a huge resentment nowadays among all the citizens of these rich nations who hardly can ensure their subsistence in a society of abundance. There is a huge anger that is growing and shows itself in resignation and disaffection in elections or expresses itself in far-right votes or in votes for clown leaders who promise greatness but deliver only lies, fake news, disorder and hate. Scapegoats are chosen to side-track popular anger: refugees, minorities, critics here, freedom fighters over there.

On the other hand there is a general hardening of any legislation that may repress the public expression of social dissent. Demonstrations against abuses of power or against the devastating actions of the extracting sector that shows contempt the threat of climate change are ever more drastically repressed. Courageous demonstrators who defend public interest on long term are imprisoned or fined. This is repression that fosters polarisation and prevents awareness from arising. It hinders the transformation of relationships between North and South, or between the richest part of mankind and nature.

Fear and polarisation are thoroughly generated and exploited because people who are resentful and afraid and divided are easier to manipulate. Medias follow the dominant trend instead of becoming the mirror that reveals the true picture. Resentment is the fuel that the far-right uses at its advantage. It is paradoxically accompanied of a deep contempt for the “popular masses”. The promises are never delivered because these false leaders never care about what they promise. They just want to yield the wide-spread resentment to their own advantage without

caring for its causes, still less remedying them. Only remains resentment.

This is the boomerang effect.

The loss of self-esteem

Once the dominant discourse has lost its power, simple humanity remains; through the lie the White has lost his identity and self-esteem.

When the four factors I already mentioned (civilisation, power, wealth, knowledge) lose their potency on which white supremacy is built, the lie of white superiority appears in full light. There is no longer – and in any case never was – any reason for supremacy and no reason for Blacks to imitate Whites. Of course there remains in most people – whether coloniser or colonised – a form of envy for better material comfort and expressions of personal power due to a dominating social position. But the falsity of the reasons for this power has been made evident.

When this falsity is revealed, there comes the point of a clear and well-informed decision how to go on; whether to continue on this false track made of lies and pretence; or rather to change the course and reinvent clear and honest ways that serve the general good and offer freedom for all. If one chooses the path of life and authenticity, far from lies, there is then no longer any attraction for the values that were meant to sustain and justify these false privileges. There is only hot air left.

The myth collapses: the whole history of the conquest, the courage of the valorous settlers, the fellowship of struggling fighters that have to protect their families against the aggressiveness of revengeful indigenous people, the myth of liberty and personal freedom and equality that sustains the new

33 Pankaj Mishra: *Age of Anger – a History of the Present*. Allen Lane, 2017.

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nation are all replaced by a radical and disturbing recognition of what happened truly. This is the purpose of truth and reconciliation.

Reality can then be seen; that these invaders were mainly poor people who escaped from harsh conditions in the mother country where they could not survive decently; that even some of them were convicts who tried to make a new life; that the whole process was ridden with violence and crime; that it was about survival for most of the invaders, except a minority that could take control of the new land and become this privileged upper caste that would organise the form of domination that would lead them to become powerful and rich.

There is no dominant brilliant civilisation in this, but just a rough and violent reality. There is only humanity, at its worst but which allows also, by contrast, humanity at its best to express itself as a defence of what truly matters.

There are in fact no longer Whites or Blacks; because the chances of success are not defined by race. They are defined by the position on which side of the check board one stands. These are just human people, invaders and autochthones, meeting in very unequal conditions that allow the ones to take over the others. In this tension there is no longer any colour line (D.E.B. Dubois as earlier quoted). The discourse that has tried to justify this apartheid has vanished, empty of its content, although one still continues to hear it, unchanged, repeated as an old leitmotiv. The division still exists, even very strongly, but it is no longer along the colour line. It is along the poverty line; on one side a minority of rich; on the other a majority of poor.

It is true that these rich people are mainly white, and that most of the Blacks are among the poor; and that most white people hope to become rich because they are aware that they belong to this category of people who are not confronted to shut doors and a glass ceiling because of the colour of their skin.

It is also true that the explanation of the great disparity between both sides of the check board is explained in terms of race, because, it is said, one race would be superior to the other. Who plays black? who plays white? The second wins.

So, then, what's now? The reality of race divide still exists, inherited from the past, consolidated by the lie. But the real dividing line is the poverty line. Or it is between indigenous people and colonisers, not because they are black but because they are indigenous. This is true for most indigenous people in the world.

Despite all these evidences and the many explanations and teaching we have received, in theory as in practice, we still believe more or less in the discourse of white supremacy. But it does not fit reality; it has lost all its power. We know very well that a common humanity unites us all. Why not recognise it, and adapt our fiction to reality?

But, in this attempt to get rid of the past and have a new start, there is a main problem. When the myth collapses, the white supremacist feels naked. As a white newcomer he had created, with many others, a factice myth in which he has tried to believe. But he has to see that the myth is a false dream (a nightmare) and that reality is crude but simple.

The terrible thing is that, as a White, he is a stranger, stranger to himself. He has lost himself into a labyrinth of false premises. He has lost his own personality, his own personal core, his own cultural references, his own identity as a person and as a member of a larger community. Instead of this top position he dreamt of, he had become a cog in a system of domination that denies humanity to the oppressed; and also denies humanity to himself, the dominator. This simple evidence demonstrates that his attempt for domination means only self-destruction.

When the white looks inevitably and authentically at what has brought him up to his social position and when he recognises that it has been by violence and robbery, by lies and contempt, he loses his self-esteem. He feels even contempt for himself because he sees on which fictions and lies his social identity has been built. He sees his shame. Of course this recognition is not publicised. It is discreet and hidden in himself. It is shameful. Maybe he is even, in most cases, not aware of this inner discovery because the unconscious does its job extremely well, by hiding the process from him in order to help him to survive the dreadful cataclysm. Yes, he does not feel too well in his skin but does not know either why.

But yet there is something positive in all this deep suffering. This painful half-conscious discovery is the necessary step towards recovery. The whole system of justification, of false self-esteem and even the whole infrastructure of supremacy have to collapse in order to allow a new way of feeling, thinking and being to take place, in which there is no longer this false domination of one species over the other. No longer White against Black, but just a common humanity which needs to be rediscovered and practised.

Then there are two main possible orientations:

- Either – this is the negative alternative – one keeps the present system running and gives a bit to the poor Blacks, in a patronising way, attempting to close the gap by merely practical and financial support. This will at best hide the symptoms but this will not heal the sick, both the Black and the White. One avoids in this way the deep crisis of exposing the whole failure into public light and into open recognition of the wrongs of the past. The White can then keep going in his lie and in his suffering skin. The Black remains poor, cut off from real possibilities to thrive freely. We know that this restricted path does not lead anywhere because the crisis is much deeper; even when it is evident that child suicide, death

in custody, lack of education, poor health care, shorter life span are all violent realities that need to be addresses. But these are not the causes; these are “only” the symptoms. The real causes that need to be responded to are the lies, the false beliefs that still impregnate our society from bottom to top.

- Or – this is the other creative alternative – the whole community chooses to be transformed by this new recognition. Each one, Black or White, can reconquer their own humanity, their own dignity, beyond being black or white; being just human beings. And we can build a society where we grow together, no longer against one another.

This is the real crossroad, it seems to me, where we stand now. It is not about help for the poor Black. It is a reconversion of our mentalities: first for the White to recognise his illness; then for the Black to accept to enter with the White into this process of Truth and Reconciliation that will transform our ways of relating with one another.

I am very convinced that this thorough questioning will allow us to see the true light and to solve the majority of our problems in this sick modern world: the antagonisms of race, the growing gap of wealth, the opportunities to access real education and health for all, the possibility to reconcile the parties into a form of restorative justice that help people to grow and get free of handicaps, the chance to resolve our environmental crisis of climate change due essentially to this antagonism between Whites and Blacks, rich and poor. Latent and hidden racism is here clearly the root of all evils: to heal, that is to heal the whole body. Great perspective indeed!

And there is one more powerful argument that may convince us to follow this path of regeneration, rather than to persist in the lie of oppression. Equal societies have it best. This is where wealth and peace are the best shared by all the members of the community and where the whole society globally fares best. This

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is where the average level of happiness is the highest. In their book³⁴, *The Spirit Level*, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett demonstrate how more equalitarian societies (like Japan and Scandinavian countries) have fewer social problems than more unequal societies (like the US or the UK). They show how equality offers better health, a better education, better social mobility, less violence and more trust – and this not only for the poorer categories but for all the social classes. A number of graphs and deep statistical research allows the authors to confirm what they describe. This is a clear sign of how much equality is a bonus for all, from the poorest to the richest.

The unknown knowledge

If Whites recognise their loss of identity and self-esteem and if Blacks are given true opportunities to live fully, a new future opens.

It seems idealistic to write this, but I believe that people (Blacks and Whites) know much more about themselves and reality than they dare to show or we openly recognise. As James Baldwin³⁵ writes about the situation in the US, “the man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it knows, if he survives his effort, and even if he does not survive it, something about himself and human life that no school on earth – and, indeed, no church – can teach. He achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable. [...] It helps to explain how [Negroes] have endured and how they have been able to produce children of kindergarten age who

can walk through mobs to get to school. It demands great force and great cunning continually to assault the mighty and indifferent fortress of white supremacy, as Negroes in this country have done so long. It demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck, and an ever greater miracle of perception and charity not to teach your child to hate. The Negro boys or girls who are facing mobs today come out of a long line of improbable aristocrats – the only genuine aristocracy this country has produced.” As Baldwin says the Negroes know far more about white Americans than that. “Ask a Negro what he knows about white people with whom he works. And then ask the white people with whom he works what they know about him.” There is in these two glances, at one another, a high contrast of knowledge and understanding, beyond the veil of appearances and explicit narratives.

And, concerning what Baldwin writes about this capacity not to hate the oppressor, I feel this is a sign how the oppressor has become prisoner of his own position of domination, because he cannot be free of hate; he cannot be free as the oppressed is. This is a fascinating process that tells us a lot about guilt and obstacle to true freedom. The incredible thing is that black people feel usually very little hatred for white people. They seem always open to reconciliation. They seem so much more mature; because they see the constructive way instead of the destructive one of hate and revenge.

For example, in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people offer to all Australians to walk a path of reciprocal recognition, truth-telling and conciliation (“coming together after the struggle”), of being heard (a Voice to Parliament, a Treaty) and of common building of the nation. This is the best example of this kind of compassion and openness to reconciliation. Their promoters are ready to address the past, not to take vengeance but to rediscover truth and open new ways. I will come back later to this fascinating and genuine offer.

³⁴ Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett: *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*, Bloomsbury Press. New York, 2009.

³⁵ James Baldwin: in his essay *The Fire Next Time - Down at the Cross*, published in *Collected Essays*, The Library of America, 1998.

But, the knot is that there cannot be any liberation without the White; without him recognising that it is about more than just sharing wealth and power. It is truly about the lie and the loss of identity he has undergone, and all of us with him. This requires courage to confront one's own lies and failures. Will the White be honest and courageous enough to confront his own denial of this deep knowledge in him?

This deep knowledge of oneself and of the other remains the main energy for transformation; and this energy of inner discovery is much more powerful, because more real than fiction.

The great inversion revisited: mere being is guilt

The White wishes that the Black would disappear; because his presence makes him feel guilty; the Black stands between him and his life.

We have seen, earlier in chapter 6, the great inversion that said: *resistance is guilt*. The Black was made guilty by the White of resisting white oppression. I would like now to accentuate this statement and to push it further, and to transform it into the present stage of the crisis: it is no longer resistance – although it still does - that makes the Black “guilty” in the eyes of the White of not accepting white supremacy and resisting it. It is now rather his simple presence - his mere way of being who he is - that becomes the problem for the White. Then we can change the sentence into: *mere being is guilt*.

Just the mere presence of the Black awakes in the White this sharp lucidity about the lie, his own lie. And the Black becomes for the White the visible sign or reminder of this lie. The Black, by his mere presence, becomes the obstacle between the White and the white man's true identity. It is objectively true that the presence of the Black hinders the White to reconcile with

himself; and to become himself. It prevents him from becoming himself, not because the Black is acting against him, but because the Black is the living reminder of the false identity that the white supremacist has built on the lie. It is why one can say that the Black stands between the white man and the white man's true identity, or even between the white man and his potential for an authentic life; and that this authentic life remains inaccessible to him as long as the lie is not publicly denounced. Let's be clear: the Black is not guilty, he is only perceived by the White as being “guilty” of challenging the White to see the truth. This is very different.

It is important to make here a distinction.

- On the one hand the White stands in the way of the Black because he prevents him from having access to his full expression. This is the action of the White, not of the Black.
- On the other hand the Black stands between the White and the white man's true identity and life. This is again the action of the White – or rather his non-action, or active resistance, in recognising the lie - who cannot bear that the Black reminds him constantly of the lie.

Both facts demonstrate that the problem is with the white man, not the Black. This is essential because it says also that the solution is in a change of mentality of the White, and not in a change of life conditions for the Black; which is necessary too, but for other reasons; and only as a consequence of the necessary change in white attitudes. Then the conditions will change for both the Black and the White, radically, truly, deeply and effectively.

This does not mean the Black remains inactive. His attitude may indeed constitute a great and precious support for the White, if the Black expresses compassion and forgiveness; especially if the Black refuses to build a new narrative based on the “Us and

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Them”. Compassion and forgiveness come out of the new perception of our common humanity that abolishes these false contrasts of race, or rather restores them to their right place and significance.

The saddest thing is that, as white people, we do everything we can to maintain the lie. Not that we believe in it, but we want to avoid the pain of having to face our loss of identity. Or we do not know how to tackle this huge challenge. Who are we if we are no longer the dominating males of white supremacy? What if we are all equal, if races or genders do not matter any longer, if wealth does not generate a hierarchy that provides status, if only life matters?

This is the question at the core of the present crisis, of social equity, of violence between classes, races and nations, at the root also of the conflict we have engaged with nature in trying to impose our ways of exploitation worldwide.

In fact, racism is the root of two humiliations to be healed, one on each side of the racist divide; even more for the supremacist than for the oppressed.

Racism as a habit and contempt

The tragedy is that we are accustomed to racism: it seems normal that a White oppresses a Black; more normal than the contrary, although this exists too.

In Northern countries, our leaders are mainly white males: most presidents, prime ministers, parliamentarians. Yes, there are a few women, and a few Blacks or Asian, but they are exceptions, even in so-called multicultural societies like Australia. This is still the time of the colony where the government acts more by decree than by law. I will return to this later. What matters here is that the sight of a black President of the United States was

almost an anomaly, although he looked very Northern and he behaved as a Northerner who did not dare to, or could not, shake the (white) establishment.

It seems even a surprise to see a black secretary of State in the US. It is a shame to recognise this, but it is something which remains unusual, and therefore cause of surprise. It does not mean we do not think it is right and good and how it should be. It just shows that we are accustomed to a society where white people dominate and inequality follows the colour line.

If I see a black child cleaning the shoes of a white man in a black suit, I feel it “normal”, i.e. according to what I usually see or I saw much too often. More normal than if the child were white and the man black. This is horrible to state but it would be a surprise for most of us, even for black people, and everybody would notice it, as something unusual (which means not inadequate). This painful statement shows how much we have integrated the laws of racism and injustice. It seems our social fiction has prevailed and vanquished our spirits, our consciousness. We do not see any longer the striking hurt that this “normal” should trigger in us.

The same with oppression. If I see the image of a white US policeman with his knee on the neck of a black man, I understand what is happening; and that it is happening because of racism and the whole evolution of police role and mentality in the US. But it remains shocking that the contrary image – the black policeman with his knee on the neck of the white man - would much more violently trigger my understanding, as if the fact the new image does not fit these too frequent usual images would justify my surprise, and even my shock.

Racism, reduced to its fundamental core, consists maybe only in a form of contempt for differences, by fear of what is unknown; which has been later institutionalised as a system of social relationships. I find it rich to compare this form of

institutionalised contempt along the race line with many other forms of contempt we are used to.

I will intentionally use the word *contempt*, which is here shocking, for the next examples: such as *contempt* for the equality of women, *contempt* for poor people, *contempt* for disable people, *contempt* for minorities, for Gypsies, for Jews, for Arabs, for refugees – but rarely *contempt* for white men - or even *contempt* for animals, for plants, for rivers, for forests, for ecosystems, for nature as a living system beyond the resources it provides. These are so many forms of pre-digested hierarchies we have accepted as part of our culture. In fact it is nothing else than *contempt* for life in its many diversified forms of expression, much beyond its specific human expression.

We have accepted them because they are parts of our daily lives and we do not see them any longer. We know they are there, as the violence of the US police against Blacks, or the death in custody for Aboriginal people.

I write all this with a lot of bitterness, because it is heavy with challenging meaning. Even if we are the *victims* of it – and we are *all* the victims of it - it makes us, by simple connivance, the participants and accomplices of an order that has established supremacy and contempt at its core. Truly supremacy over all of us. It is unacceptable.

This is the real price of racism. The boomerang effect has brought home an ill that is worse than anything else. What are profit and wealth in comparison with this deep and terrible loss of humanity and identity and love?

The psychotherapy of white supremacy

The solution for racism is not to be found in better conditions for the victim (filling the gap), but in a psychotherapy of the oppressor.

When the lie becomes evident for all and change cannot be any longer avoided or postponed, the first attempt of the White is to try to improve the situation of the Black without changing anything to his own. This consists in “closing the gap” or in lifting the Black to a better standard of life, yet without menacing his own state of supremacy. Of course the gap must be closed; everybody is meant to have equally good conditions of life. But the focus remains yet in this way on the colour line. This is what one calls “positive discrimination” that will enhance life conditions for the oppressed, but it remains yet discrimination (although “positive”) according to the colour line. And it reinforces the idea that the problem is race. Positive discrimination is only a first step; it cannot be a solution. And if it persists, it becomes poisonous because it prevents real change, in depth.

The poor or the Black or the poor Black is defined by his problem: the fact he is black or the fact he is poor, or both cumulated. This is a usual practice in our modern society for white institutions to work according to this logic of people’s identity defined by their “handicap” or what one considers as such. Of course black children should not die in custody. They should have access to good education, good health system that guarantees equal life expectancy. But this attempt to improve life conditions for the poor – although the improvement itself is absolutely necessary – does not solve the problem because it does not address the real cause, which is white supremacy, and not poverty as such. Once again it makes the Black responsible for the crisis; he is falsely made the problem.

It is why the attempt to close the gap without questioning white supremacy and the whole context of race relationships and of inherited colonialist mentality cannot bring the right solution. The change does not accept band aids. It needs a radical solution that addresses the core of the problem. This could be done in the four following steps.

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- 1) **Psychotherapy for the supremacist:** The dominator must address the lie on which the system is based. He must recognise that he is estranged from himself as much as the victim is also estranged from himself; and that the solution is to be found in a radical reconversion of social relationships, and especially of the ideology that sustains them. Only his deep psychotherapy can change the White and allows change to happen on the right level, in the right way.
- 2) **Equality for all:** The community must establish the principle of equality of all human beings as a ruling law. This means it is not only an ethical principle or a political slogan. It has to be applied systematically to all relationships. It becomes more than an ethical principle; it is law; because it is the law of life: equality brings more possibilities for all. This means that race, gender, culture, religion, class, wealth cannot provide any privilege or right for power. Power must be shared by all. This is a very radical requirement that will have to find its own forms of expression. A lot needs then to be invented how to do this practically and efficiently, beyond the principle, into daily practice for all.
- 3) **A voice for each minority and true dialogue:** The main discourse is no longer the talk of a dominant ruling minority; but an opportunity to be heard – this means for one's needs to be expressed, listened to and recognised – must be given to each one and especially to each minority. There is then no longer marginal people because all are seen, recognised, included and become integral parts of the community, whether they are numerous or not, whether they belong to the race that is dominant in numbers or not, whether they are young or old, rich or poor, skilled or not, disable or not. It does not mean that everybody will have equal maturity or even equal convincing power; but each one will have their say, be listened to and – this is the great difference – to be

heard. This type of expression requires true dialogue, in the dialogical form that encompasses all parts.

- 4) **Care and sharing for all:** Once these three first steps are implemented, the community must be committed to take care of each of its members in watching that each one can thrive. The maturity of a community or a nation is to be measured in the way it treats its weakest members. There are always weaker members in any society and they need care and loving attention to be reinserted into the network of relationships, according to their possibilities and wishes. But, most important, they are not taken care of to be reinserted, they are welcome as who they are, in their difference, in their specificity, because most often their contribution is marked, and even enriched, by their disability. It is of another type..

As we can see, these four steps are very different from an attempt to close the gap without addressing the real causes. When attempting to close the gap, change happens top-down because the key of the blockage lies in the hands of the supremacist. As long he keeps in his position without changing himself, he remains the true obstacle for change. Of course his material privileges (wealth and power) will incite him to keep a grip on his power position. But, if he is lucid (and wise), or just self-interested in what matters most, he will prefer to reconcile with himself and recover his true human identity which will bring him back to be an equal to all others, to share humanity with his fellow humans and to be reinserted into humanity; and to be rehabilitated in his own eyes.

A new awareness

We have seen how the oppression of colonised people impacts on Northern culture and the way the conquerors feel about themselves. The boomerang effect is too often ignored as also it

is the case with the way the colonial setting generates tensions that are not resorbed. This fosters disorders of all kinds in colonised lands as well as in the mother countries.

Slowly an awareness of the injustice of the domination system grows and generates changes of mentality in the Southern lands.

The awakening of conscience

From the end of slavery to Nazism to decolonisation to Apartheid (South-Africa), the colour line has fostered a deep awakening.

Since it has been developed as a means for domination, racism has been the object of many stages of evolution that followed the necessities of this strategy of supremacy. The terrible thing is that it never seems to have been shaken to the point of dissolution. The conditions have changed and shown the deep lie behind the concept. But the concept itself was never abolished; it was constantly readapted, unchanged in its essence, rather than being radically dismantled. We can observe many such stages of evolution that, for each one, confirmed the basic belief of dominance and reinterpreted the practice of how to justify white supremacy. I will here describe only a few of them:

- **The abolition of slavery:** There was a stage where public opinion in the UK disagreed with the practice of slavery, considering it immoral and unacceptable. The Baptist Church in the Caribbean was an important support for black people to reconquer their dignity and freedom. But the mutation did not happen so radically because, as described earlier, the system of slavery was adapted to the new economic evolution of nascent capitalism without perturbing the practice of production and the interests of slave holders. More evolution, less liberation.
- **The Holocaust:** The revelation of the destructions of Nazi racist ideology (1933-1945) and the unfathomable crimes committed in its name – 6 million Jews and many others slaughtered for no reason except the hate the torturers had for them - forced public opinion to review the justification for contempt established on racial bases. Yet the Jews were not black; they were white people who had also been (and even were or are) in very influencing positions (such as Disraeli, Rothschild and many others in what concerned colonisation and racial domination) and this powerful influence was by itself the proof (if needed) that Jews were equally “civilised” people. They were not to be blamed for their race. It could even be asked whether they ever formed a race, as even the concept of race was challenged in what concerned them. Was Jewishness a race, or rather a religion, or a culture? The demonstration was then a pure denegation of racist theories. Without race as a base, it made the clause of supremacy irrelevant. And, even if it could be recognised as a race, it did not imply any form of superiority or inferiority, and still less a reason for oppression. Only could remain the argument about difference (the religious specificity and ghetto formation) which fostered rejection. Is then the ghetto formation a consequence of rejection? or is it a free choice by the Jews to better live their own difference? More active ways to emphasise difference, more division. More guilt, less reconciliation.
- **The creation of Israel as a state based on race:** To propose a remedy to anti-Semitism and to alleviate their conscience for having delayed their action in resisting Nazism, Northern powers proposed – according to older hopes and promises (Herzl, Balfour) – to establish a Jewish state in Palestine (1948). Yet it was on a land which was certainly the historical and traditional heritage of Judaism but was also nevertheless occupied by autochthone people who had all the

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right to live there because they had done so for millennia. It was made use of the British colonial power to impose a “solution” that served Northern interests at the expense of local inhabitants (Palestinians). Despite the denial that the oppression of Jews in the name of race was “meaningless” because Jews did not constitute a proper race but rather a culture, the state of Israel was built on this sense of belonging to this culture or race, in a form of discrimination that had (and has) everything in common with racist theories and practices. This regime of apartheid was established in this new state. Its cause (discrimination) generated its own consequence (racism) once again. Northern powers became accomplices of Israeli settlers – and are still nowadays – because these newcomers were more westernised (“northernised”) – linear thinking – or more similar to Northern cultures than the Arabs, Bedouins, Druze or other traditional occupants of Palestine. More apartheid, less cohabitation.

- **Apartheid in South-Africa:** The system of race discrimination and hierarchy was officialised in South-Africa under the form of Apartheid. Northern powers were in general supportive of South-African white supremacists because these were the heirs of the colonial system. Any support to black identity and empowerment would have meant to support decolonisation in its true spirit of emancipation which was working against Northern interests. More supremacy, less emancipation.
- **Decolonisation movement:** After World War 2 there was in the colonies a wide movement for emancipation and liberation. The colonised had powerfully contributed in the effort of combatting the occupants (Nazi, Fascist and Japanese occupants). They had directly taken part in the liberation of the lands of Europe itself or of their colonial

territories, where many battles had taken place, as the premise to their own independence from colonial power. But, in cruel wars based on false ideologies, the Northern power resisted for a long time this legitimate aspiration for independence (Indochina-Vietnam, Indonesia, India, Burma, Malaya, China, Egypt, Congo, Algeria, Cuba, Angola, Mozambique). More antagonism, less cooperation.

- **The India-Pakistan partition:** The tension between Hindus and Muslims in India was so strong at the time of independence (1947) that it was decided to divide the ex-Indian Empire into two states: the Hindu part as India under Nehru and the Muslim part of Western and Eastern Pakistan (present Bangladesh) under Jinnah. The split occurred not along colour but along religious lines. The division of India generated powerful migratory moves accompanied by a lot of violence that are still active (and reactivated) today, like at Ayodha. More division, less complementarity.
- **Black lives matter:** The struggle of Black Americans for emancipation and dignity has long marked the history of the United States, since the early times of colonisation and slavery. I’ll come back later to this important stage of evolution with such leaders as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King under many others. Today the tension is still strong and the repression very violent. More repression, less recognition.
- **Flow of refugees:** Many conflicts in the Southern lands, often connected with Northern interventions, exploitation of natural resources or lack of assistance, foster important migration moves that Northern countries resist in protecting their borders as if this were a plague that would destroy them. These migratory flows are in fact (not exclusively) the direct consequence of the de-structuration caused by colonialism of which Southern countries have not yet recovered. More rejection, less inclusiveness.

These few examples demonstrate that the racial issue (or any similar line) is omnipresent in our world history. Each step of evolution shows that we seem unable to dismantle this powerful destructive trend that appears to be incrustated in our genes. The fear is also present – and maybe understandable but yet not justified in its violent expressions – but, more importantly, the nature of contempt seems to be resisting any questioning and erosion.

The most frightening aspect of these examples is that the tendency is mainly about division and reinforcing discrimination lines, instead of creating unity and harmony between different tendencies and actors. Humanity as a general quality has been monopolised by Northern cultures as their own belonging that denies human nature to others, instead of recognising it as a unifying force that makes us all richer when we open to what the other is and that we are not.

Yet, among the oppressed, a growing awareness of the injustice becomes ever stronger. There is visibly a slow move towards emancipation. But there is also, on the other side, a tendency to harden the tension between opponents, with ever more mad leaders building on resentment, without other perspective than to be in power. How much time will it take? How can we all become agents of this movement of true emancipation and return to life? and not remain, as Northerners, the archaic defenders of an out-of-dated order based on injustice and violence? but rather contribute to the emergence of a new mentality that recognises humanity for all and abolishes the great lie of supremacy.

In a nutshell, one could say: there are two ways:

- the way of egocentric pursuit of individual wellbeing (including one's own dependents), based on greed and accumulation;

- or there is the way of hetero-centric search for peace and harmony in together-living.

The second path is much harder because it requires making harsh concessions (detachment) all the time in order to generate inclusiveness. Peace has a high price, but it is the price for living in the truth. Peace brings everything into place and leaves space for life. This is the only way. Others bring conflict and death.

If there is only the path of peace that is viable, we have no choice and we have to accept that the price for peace is the minimal price for life. This can seem harsh. But it is also evident that peace opens onto life, and that without peace there is no life.

You have the power of choice. You choose which way you want to walk.

Good program! When do we start?

Chapter 9: The tools

We have so far examined many aspects of the process of domination, how it develops and how to counter the non-sense of it. But this reflexion cannot be complete if we do not have also a look at the tools white supremacy uses as means for establishing its domination. These tools represent a large range of all kinds of means that go from weapons to cartography. Some of them, such as weapons, are very directly tools that help to impose force as the dominating factor. Others, such as cartography or history, are more subtle because they are tools that shape the general frame of mind of the dominating nation and forge a different perception of the world that will enable domination to act without generating mental resistance at home, on the side of the dominator, or even on the side of the oppressed.

Let's see, among many, what a few of these tools are.

The use of weapons

The fleet in being

The power of the fleet relies more on its potential ubiquity than on its factual domination, more on the way its presence or absence is managed than on the losses it inflicts.

The concept of *fleet in being* was coined by Admiral Arthur Herbert, 1st Earl of Torrington, in 1690. The theory was that, in naval warfare, a *fleet in being* is a naval force that extends a controlling influence without ever leaving the port. It means that, in order to impose its power, it is sometimes better for a fleet not to leave the harbour than to fight. In this way its power relies on

the fact it is perceived by the enemy as being invincible and on the conviction of the enemy that this fleet would win the battle if it would leave the harbour and combat him. The fact of effective military dominance becomes less important than the way the presence or absence of this force on the ocean is managed. The battle becomes an accessory of the war that relies mainly rather on the potential presence and potential power to strike than on the effective capacity of inflicting losses.

The *fleet in being* represents then the power of the dominating force on sea, even when it is not present, but just by the possibility that it could be present and inflict a loss.

Inspired by this concept of the 17th century, Paul Virilio, an architect and writer of the 1970s³⁶, developed the theory that the increasing power of missiles is of this type because the possibility to strike a faraway target makes the potential attacker very powerful even if he does not use his weapons.

It has to be noticed that this power relies not only on its own striking capacity but also importantly on the psychological effect the acting power has on the mental dispositions of the enemy. The reality of how the respective powers of both antagonists really compete remains unknown as long as they do not fight one another. This can be favourable for the dominator not to show weaknesses in a possible disadvantageous battle, because to be shown inferior would irremediably weaken the impact on the enemy who so long tends to accept the fact of domination. Hence the theory developed by Admiral Herbert.

This theory becomes very meaningful when one considers the power of the British fleet over the oceans worldwide in the 18th

³⁶ Paul Virilio, *L'insécurité du territoire*, Stock / Monde ouvert, 1976. Not translated into English. But many other books in English exist by Paul Virilio as well as many extracts or commentaries on the internet.

and 19th centuries and the wider expansion it allowed for the colonial power because its power was of this type. The excellence of the British Fleet made it a dominating power over the oceans and it was therefore important for the Crown to maintain this reputation and to avoid battles that could contradict it. The battle of Trafalgar (1805) was probably the last major battle that confirmed this power.

Of course the reality of the battles which forged this reputation, and the threat that ensued out of it, cannot be contested. But the power of victory is still greater if it does not have to rely on its constant demonstration. Yet reminders (real battles) are nevertheless necessary but opportunities can be chosen in the best possible conditions for the dominating power.

The conquest of the West Indies, the infiltration of British forces and traders throughout South America – although this was not an English dominium – as well as the conquest of India are historical facts that are narrowly related with this power of the *fleet in being*.

Weapons for power

The most important weapon producers and exporters are the five permanent members of the Security Council. Weapons are by nature offensive tools of power.

One can imagine that, at the dawn of humankind, the first weapons have been invented for the purpose of a more effective hunt or, if necessary, for self-defence of the community when it was felt that the neighbour tribes were becoming too invasive. Soon these same weapons would have also appeared to provide the best possible tactical advantages and the straight forward means for extending the power of the community, that is for conquest. From a necessity for daily life it became the tool for a wider project that involved more than the clan; it involved also

the neighbouring tribes; either as allied to cooperate with; or as enemies to defeat. It aimed then at getting hold of the wealth of the competitors; or at taking control of specific resources used by competing tribes; or at simply invading the territory of the others. It seems evident, because it is their nature, that weapons are principally aggressive means. They cannot be neutral or only defensive.

I find striking how the development of weaponry is narrowly linked with the level of might of a nation and especially with its will to become a dominant power on the world stage. The United States or Russia or China have developed powerful armies and weaponry because they intend to use them beyond the borders of their own territory. Their increasing power is not aimed at defending the vulnerability of their own territory; it is directly linked with the will for domination or intrusion into, or even invasion of, the space of other nations. Again, weapons are mainly offensive, of aggressive nature.

History illustrates this fact in a very clear way: it is the power of the Spanish or the Portuguese fleet that turned the discovery of newfound lands into conquest and allowed the Spaniards or the Portuguese to conquer South America, even if these men were very few in comparison to the large Amerindian populations they invaded. As my leitmotiv says, good ships, devastating weaponry and little moral restraint have been the main tools of colonisation.

The data of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)³⁷ show the following:

³⁷ Source: SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace research Institute) <https://www.sipri.org/databases> concerning 1) the 100 largest arms-producing and military services companies; 2) the arms exports from the top largest exporters as countries; 3) the military top expenditures by country; 4) the top expenditures in relation to the GDP; 5) the top expenditures in relation to population. All data for the years 2013-2022.

Arm production and export + military expenditures per year (average 2013-2022)

Rank	Arm production		Arm export		Military expenditures		Related to population, only > 2m				
	Country -	Nb corp. - In US\$m	Country -	In US\$m	Country -	In US\$m	Country - In % GDP	Country - In US\$/Inhab. Popul.			
1	United States	457,673	United States	10,411	United States	764,110	Saudi Arabia	9.45%	Israel	2,359	9.2
2	China	272,727	Russia	5,471	China	244,296	Oman	8.26%	United States	2,247	340.0
3	Japan	50,675	France	2,517	Saudi Arabia	75,107	Ukraine	6.04%	Saudi Arabia	2,154	36.9
4	United Kingdom	55,436	China	1,637	India	66,660	Algeria	5.75%	Singapore	1,780	6.0
5	Trans-European	44,838	Germany	1,457	Russia	63,254	Kuwait	5.25%	Kuwait	1,706	4.3
6	France	41,006	United Kingdom	1,116	United Kingdom	53,670	Jordan	4.52%	Norway	1,365	5.5
7	Germany	30,616	Italy	889	France	49,985	Azerbaijan	4.46%	Australia	1,107	26.4
8	Italy	19,752	Spain	722	Germany	48,672	South Sudan	4.45%	United Kingdom	902	67.7
9	Russia	20,978	Israel	700	Japan	43,215	Armenia	4.28%	South Korea	813	51.8
10	Israel	12,062	South Korea	514	South Korea	29,872	Russia	4.20%	France	789	64.8
11	South Korea	9,901	Netherlands	491	Italy	28,523	Bahrain	4.10%	Denmark	780	5.9
12	India	5,059	Ukraine	317	Australia	22,824	Namibia	3.59%	Finland	694	5.5
13	Türkiye	3,227	Türkiye	252	Canada	21,852	Morocco	3.54%	Netherlands	667	17.6
14	other countries	91	Switzerland	230	Israel	20,271	United States	3.53%	Switzerland	611	8.8
15	Sweden	19,097	Sweden	230	Brazil	20,271	United States	3.53%	Switzerland	611	8.8

Data SIPRI www.sipri.org/databases/2023

In grey: the same 8 top countries

High population, further down: Russia 22th, China 58th

- 1) The most important corporations that produce and export weapons are mainly situated in the five or six nations that form the main strategic powers of the world. The 100 most important corporations (in US\$) that produce and export weapons are all situated in the United States, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Israel, South Korea, except 2 countries with 2 corporations each (India, Türkiye) and 9 more countries with one single corporation each. 40 of these top corporations are in the United States.
- 2) The 15 countries as top-exporters and suppliers of weapons are (in decreasing order in US\$): the United States, Russia, France, China, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Israel, South Korea, the Netherlands, Ukraine, Türkiye, Switzerland, Sweden. In this last list it is interesting to note that the five permanent members of the Security Council of the UNO are at the same time the top providers of weapons. It tells a lot about the type of security we have to be satisfied with or we aim at. And second remark: two small countries which have the reputation of being very peaceful (11th the Netherlands and 14th Switzerland) are among these main weapon providers. Do not trust appearances!
- 3) The 15 countries with the highest military expenditures are (in decreasing order in US\$): the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, India, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Italy, Australia, Canada, Israel, Brazil.
- 4) Now as a counter-example we can consider the 15 countries with top military expenditures in relation with their gross national product (in % of their GDP). The order is then different because we do not find only dominating powers of the world but also countries whose leaders are driving an aggressive politics of conflict or are highly involved in

warfare, by choice or not. The chain is then the following (different from the precedent): Saudi Arabia, Oman, Ukraine (a special case because of the present war that loads the year 2022 to 33% of its GDP), Algeria, Israel, Kuwait, Jordan, Azerbaijan, South Sudan, Armenia, Russia, Bahrain, Namibia, Morocco, the United States. This presents indeed a very different picture that also gives evidence of where the main points of conflict are in the world.

- 5) Another comparison is also interesting: This is how these military expenditures are related to the size of the population of each country. We are used to establish these data according to the logic of nations. But then a small nation like Israel (9.2 million inhabitants) or Switzerland (8.8 million) are compared to a nation like China (1425 million). This is non-sense. This way of addressing the comparison by nations demonstrates how it is truly about power! The order is then the following (only the countries with a population of more than two million people): Israel, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Kuwait, Oman, Norway, Australia, the United Kingdom, South Korea, France, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland. Here the Netherlands and Switzerland again.

Only two countries are present in these five lists: the United States and Israel.

All these data show how far weapons are mainly in the hands of the mighty or the rich. This is not a surprise but it demonstrates with statistics what has been said earlier, i.e. that weapons are clearly by essence offensive. Even weapons used for self-defence are offensive; even if they are said to be only counter-offensive. Any form of defence using weapons is not possible without being at the same time offensive because, if they are used, weapons have as main purpose to destroy the harming capacity

of the enemy. This is a destructive aim; this means they are by nature offensive.

There is consequently a deep contradiction in wanting to develop weaponry in the purpose of establishing a defensive army. This is yet the pattern most armies of rich Western countries affirm to follow when they justify themselves that they have to increase their military power in order to protect their independence or security. They call their armies *the defence forces*.

One can observe how any effort of any country to extend or modernise its own weaponry is soon perceived as an act of aggression by its potential enemies which this weaponry is more or less explicitly aimed at. And this is an understandable perception. Hence the more a nation develops its own defensive weaponry, the more the tension increases in its relationships with these so-called potential aggressors, or especially with nearby neighbours.

This is the reason why the arm race in our world does not lead and cannot lead to peace but generates increasing tensions or new reasons for conflicts or exacerbates existing conflicts.

The game of alliances that form compact blocks of belligerents still reinforces this trend into an increasingly more acute menace because the effects cumulate by aggregate and even multiply proportionally to the number or the power of the specific members of the alliance. Weapons participate in accentuating the demarcation lines between antagonistic alliances. This is clearly the further significance of the alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS). It can only lead to major conflicts.

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The contradictions of weapons

Weapons generate conflict and destroy what has value. They are ill-adapted to what they are meant to do. Most powerful armies are held in check by a few freedom fighters.

Weapons are in deep contradiction with the aim of keeping peace or defending security. Not only they generate conflict but they are also in deep contradiction with the purpose they are meant to serve.

- 1) **Security and power:** World powers always invoke the reason of their security when they enter into war or warfare. But it is a lie. They are rarely menaced in their own territory. They are usually rather challenged in the extent of their controlling power, outside their national sphere.

The war in Ukraine has recently demonstrated how the escalation between two myths: on one side the United States wanting to extend NATO by including further Eastern European countries and on the other side Russia invading Ukraine in order to defend or reconquer what was (previously) its sphere of influence (ex USSR).

Ukraine has always been considered by Russia as part of its “empire”. Kyiv was indeed the capital of the Rus’ Empire (Ruthenia) around the 9-10th centuries. Later, between the 14th to 17th century, Ukraine was sitting between two major zones of influence, i.e. Poland and Lithuania on the West, as dominantly catholic, and Russia on the East, as mainly orthodox. The border between these two main poles of influence was running near Kyiv, this major city sitting then in-between the two forces, but belonging rather to the East. Yet some other forces were also in game such as the

Cossacks (with Bohdan Khmelnytsky and Ivan Bohun³⁸) who tried to maintain their own independence but later rallied the Russian camp; or more to the South, the Ottoman Empire. Presently Russia tries to reconquer this space that, according to its own version of the myth, “belonged” to Russia so long ago.

Both the United States and Russia have been caught in their own game of wanting to be world powers. There was evidently no necessity to reinforce NATO in an aggressive move against Russia, as there was no reason to “reconquer” Ukraine... in order to defend what?

- 2) **Totalitarian or democratic:** It is often said – at least in the West or more exactly in the pro-American sphere of alliance – that democratic powers are defending democratic freedom and human values against the bullies of totalitarian regimes. But this is a non-sense. The United States have invaded Afghanistan and Iraq under the pretext of bringing democracy to these countries “at gun point” as they were saying. But it was only the pretext (the discourse) because they did nothing to do so, as busy they were to manage their own agenda and interests.

What was at stake was rather for the United States to reinforce a position in the Middle East, at the door of Iran, and of Saudi Arabia. The fuel abundance in these countries, especially Iraq, is also a precious resource for a power such as the United States. On the other hand Afghanistan had been the site of the invasion by the USSR (1979-890), at the Southern border of its ex-empire. The American presence in

³⁸ Read the fascinating novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz: *With Fire and Sword*, which presents the Polish perception of this tension between two or even three forces.

this zone evidently intended to reinforce US power in the region.

- 3) **The backyard:** The United States have always considered South America as their backyard. They intervened in Guatemala, in Nicaragua, in Chile, and in many other countries, in very powerful ways, changing the democratically elected governments. They manipulated also the evolution of these countries by supporting right-wing regimes. They pushed their economic agenda in order to reinforce the privileges of their own corporations and local elites in the extraction of resources. They used even strategies to weaken the popular power in introducing rules of economic austerity inspired by the Economic School of Chicago (Milton Friedman). This is what Naomi Klein³⁹ calls *the Shock Doctrine*. I'll come back to this later.
- 4) **The imbalance between world powers:** When one looks where the United States have military bases, we notice that they are almost everywhere in the world. Here are a few examples among others: from Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, to Guam or Okinawa or Hawaii in the Pacific, to Pine Gap in Australia, to Djibouti or Niamey (Niger) or Garoua (Cameroon) or Manda Bay (Kenya) in Africa, to Guantanamo (Cuba) or Aruba or Puerto Rico in the Caribbean Sea. It is then understandable that China is not keen to see American warships passing by along its coasts. By contrast Russian bases seem to be rather mainly situated in their previous sphere of influence (ex USSR) although Russia tries also nowadays to increase its influence in Africa, especially in the Sahel for instance. About the power of China later.

³⁹ Naomi Klein: *The Shock Doctrine, The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Penguin Books, 2007.

It can seem partisan on my part that I describe here more the American side. But I do so because, in the West, we are accustomed to the ideology (or belief) that the United States are defending our interests and security. But it is a complete illusion. One can see how the logic of this network of bases is indeed principally guided by the will to maintain an influence in the whole world, as “the policeman of the world”. If, as a small nation, we are their allies they believe they can count on our support – as it was the case for the war in Iraq despite a strong movement of opposition by a few allies. Or they believe they can use our facilities; but they seem to have no obligations in return.

This is the tricky discourse “in the name of democracy” that we have to get free of; especially if we want to see reality in its bareness and act as independent nations and citizens. It is highly time to question old patterns and to invent new means for peace-keeping than to succumb to an easy discourse.

- 5) **Too powerful weapons:** Modern weapons, as they have developed to an extreme efficiency in their destructive power, have become unusable, precisely because they are too powerful. It is why they are deeply ill-adapted to their function. The Vietnam war, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated how the most powerful army in the world is unable to keep in check the freedom fighters of the countries it wanted to invade or control. It had finally to leave. Its presence in these invaded countries has only served to make the situation worse, such as reinforced the power of the Talibans, and generated the strong antagonism from the part of the local population to their interests.
- 6) **Illegitimate wars:** The war in Vietnam has lasted for 30 years, since its beginning under French occupation unto the peace when the Americans left and Vietnam was reunited; without counting the long years which were and are still

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necessary now for the slow recovery of such a dreadful conflict. The worse is that there were no reasons for opposing the will of independence which Indochina expressed just after the Second World War.

Ho Chi Minh was not a cruel and totalitarian leader; he was just the expression of the will of his people for the independence of French ex-colonies. He was a moderate and wise leader who was asking for negotiation. Yet, as response to this justified demand, the French Navy remained deaf and, at the beginning of the war, bombarded without restraint the villages around Hanoi where the Vietcong freedom fighters hid or rather simply lived. The war evolved then later from the worse to the most horrible.

Even the powerful weapons (orange agent and their terrifying helicopters) that the Americans used against civil population did not allow them to control the situation. They were widely challenged by very skilled freedom fighters who had the motivation to liberate their own land and country from foreign domination.

The communist ideology served them as a social construction to resist the enemy who was deeply anti-communist. In this way the war turned into a sterile ideological fight although it had, at the start, only to do with a justified wish for emancipation and self-management in embedment of their own culture. The will for freedom finally prevailed.

- 7) **Inadequate means:** The same can be said about the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The most striking aspect in this war was that the most powerful weapons were completely inefficient. In general freedom fighters tend to adopt strategies that avoid direct confrontation with superiorly armed invaders. On top of this they mix with the local population for the simple reason that these are the same

people. There is no longer any sharp and clear line between enemies as it was still the case in the Napoleonic wars when armies used to affront each other in lines, facing the enemy. In the 19th century, because war was the fact of soldiers, no population was involved except by the exactions of the soldiers against civilians.

By contrast with this clear demarcation line between enemies, the line, in guerrilla, has disappeared and each person in the occupied country can be a “hidden” freedom fighter. Resistant fighters were even called *insurgents* by the Americans as if they were rebelling against the established order. But this order was not their order; it was imposed by a foreign country that had invaded the land and had no legitimate reason to be there nor any legal justification of representing any authority. This imposed order was indeed illegal, introduced by the force of weapons. One may call this piracy. There were then all the reasons to fight against this imposture. I will come back to this point later.

- 8) **A totalitarian approach:** The principal argument against weapons is that their use is always linked with a form of totalitarian power, either as action of a totalitarian regime that in priority dominates its own population, such in China, in Russia, in Saudi Arabia, in Iran. Or they are also the game of so-called democratic countries that yet adopt an oppressing strategy oriented towards external countries, such as did or still do the United States, Britain, France, or Israel, which still think in colonial terms and believe they are entitled to extend their zone of influence (or even territory) and to control or dominate the destiny of other countries or ethnic groups. Their interior national situation is in fact deeply impacted by this will for domination.

Stunning situations of injustice are at play in their social network: a sharp social division and polarisation in the

United States with a shocking contrast between rich and poor, a deep resentment in Britain and also division in a vague nostalgia of past colonial power, a disrupted social fabric in France with a lot of violence, a sense of entitlement in Israel for occupying the whole land of Palestine. All these powers confronted with a never stopping flow of immigrants or refugees, who have been either ejected from occupied territories or are looking for refuge from the previous colonies of these same dominating countries. This is precisely what I have called the boomerang effect. Oppression overseas brings oppression back home which fosters endemic social violence.

- 9) **Destroying what is coveted:** The war in Ukraine has also demonstrated how the most powerful weapons remain inefficient because they are too powerful. Hence the strategy returns to “traditional” fighting with guns and bombs and tanks, in their more sophisticated versions, killing people individually or by clusters defined by their location. Civilians are the main victims. For instance the numbers of children and women killed in Gaza provide a clear illustration of this form of war that negates the mere humanity of the killers.

The most striking aspect of the Ukraine war is that Putin, as an attempting conqueror, is destroying what he wants to conquer. He creates rubble out of what he covets most. If he would succeed in invading the country, he would inherit a destroyed land with its inhabitants who would be deeply antagonistic to him, a kind of desert he would have created himself by radical destruction. What could be worse?

The attempt for conquest has also other purposes such as to foster a kind of unity of the Russian population in solidarity with their conquering forces. But this does not seem to have

happened as people remain lucid of the madness of the operation and the danger it represents for each of them.

- 10) **The nonsense of wars:** If one looks with hindsight on past history one notices how futile, although tragic, the wars have been and how they never succeeded to impose the will of the conqueror. They all, soon or later, collapsed into a deep and humiliating defeat that demonstrated the non-sense of these whole operations. Empires never lasted. They all collapsed whether Roman, Mongolian, Ottoman, Russian, British, Nazi, American.

Of course they have impacted the world in a tremendous way but their positive heritage is very restricted. And even this tiny positive part of heritage could certainly more harmoniously have taken shape and extended under peaceful conditions, such as the transmission of cultural or spiritual knowledge or wisdom: Greek philosophy, Middle-East or Chinese wisdom, different religions (Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam or other). They would have been transmitted without being linked with imposed hostile powers. Hence they would have been better received as creative complementary contributions instead of being perceived as means for colonisation and dismantling of traditional cultures.

The alternative to armament

We live in a dangerous world because there are always mad leaders or ideologies that lead whole populations to go to war... and to regret it later. How to resist?

What was said above means that there is no other alternative to the arm race than comprehensive disarmament and peace. Peace at any price. True disarmament to happen, even in the frame of negotiations and international agreements, must be first initiated

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unilaterally, generally by the most powerful side, in the logic of allowing the disarmament of the potential antagonist.

This truth seems very naïve. Yet it is precisely what happens with the consensual strategy of arm limitation. It has been paradoxically adopted by the main powers, i.e. the protagonists of the arm race, to reduce the risks of exacerbation of conflicts. They are aware that they have to refrain themselves from being caught in this infernal cycle. They have recognised that their strategy of arming themselves ever more, and with ever more destructive vectors, leads in fact to self-destruction.

They also recognise that the use of modern armament requires quick decision which, in order to be quick enough, must be instantaneous. It means decision needs to be decentralised and taken at the place where detection happens, without delay. This evidence deprives the central power of its power to decide; even to decide whether the local military command must be in charge.

This double requirement for limitation and immediate decision means that self-defence has to rely on very different means than powerful and long-distance weaponry if it truly intends to ensure the security of the nation with the most possible efficiency. And these different means cannot be of military nature, based on long-range armament, although the classical military threat remains in any case real. Despite the evidence that armament leads to destruction, dominating powers maintain indeed their intention to use weaponry as a tool for domination and, if “necessary”, threaten to invade the territory of other nations and to subject them to their own power.

This means that the menace and means of aggression remain the same but the means to defend the nation must be thought in other terms. This is a very important statement: the means for defence do not depend on the means for attack.

The strange thing is that the solution is not in the competency of military elites. It is rather a philosophical or psychological choice or, more exactly, a kind of national rational bet that relies on another approach of the dynamics of defence. It consists in looking for what the most secure path is. This other strategy does not depend so much on technical means, but rather on a social consensus and commitment. Therefore it will mainly depend on the understanding we have of life and of the mechanisms that generate the world in which we live.

The lesson we got from past conflicts, or the observation of the present evolution, tells us that armament leads to war and to the polarisation of the world into a few major superpowers and blocks of alliances competing one with another. This so-called “equilibrium of terror” does not bring peace. The atomic bomb belongs to these illusions that generate more risk than security. It makes one stronger but does not prevent conflict from arising. On the contrary. The polarisation of forces only generates and exacerbates more tensions and stronger opposition and further polarisation.

I’m not a specialist in the study of war but this issue is certainly not the matter for specialists to decide. Because it is an option that relies on consensual commitment, it is rather a collective choice to be made by the wider population in full awareness of what it implies. There is no total security; there is only an optimal option: for peace or for war. Therefore it is important that everybody may take part in the debate. I add here my point.

In my mind the key for peace is in relationships. The more we can develop cross-relationships, especially across the demarcation lines that delimitate the blocks of the different (opposed or conflicting) coalitions, the more we weaken the polarisation effect of these conglomerates and the more we offer chances for peaceful negotiations. In the same logic, the more each nation acts freely as an independent force in this intense

network of relationships, the less these multiple initiatives appear to form blocks of alliance. They blur the edges of these compact clusters of alliances by creating links between potential opponents and weaken in this way the antagonism by blocks. Relationships are the key.

Let's first imagine the pattern. It consists in many networks of cross-relationships between nations. Basically the talk goes like this; each nation says: I talk to you, I listen to you, I'm aware of your needs, and you of mine; I develop balanced and equitable exchanges with you and you with me; these exchanges we develop together are in priority meant to answer our respective needs and care for one another, more than our will for profit; we agree to give priority to peace and cooperation; I help you in case of cataclysm and reciprocally; I'm concerned by the problems you meet in your social life, and you with mine; we are all solidary in face of common issues and we do our best to cooperate and share our skills and means. This is the basic message, a kind of basic pact. This is a declared intention of reciprocal kindness that goes so far as possible; and even preferably weaves links with the potential opponent. And, most important, each nation does this with as many other nations as possible, in order to weave this tight tangle of knots.

But this network is also impregnated by conditional love. If you try to trick me I'll stop selling you what I'm used to. I will stop providing what helps you to harm me; or even to harm others I want to be solidary with; even other nations I'm not especially concerned with but I want yet to relate to, in care for stability; because it is also my own interest and intention to ensure general stability, even if I'm not personally involved.

There are then, on one hand, some creative encouraging measures (the creation of so many links as possible) but there are also, on the other hand, some restrictive (censoring) measures that intend to discourage the partner from being antagonistic to

others, me or them. This is a form of sanction; but most importantly it is not meant in adversary terms; it is rather the reduction of what was meant as a support or help or cooperation. It is then rather a withdrawal of kindness than an aggressive step towards the other.

There are here four major factors that have to cohabit:

1) **A network of positive qualities:** Firstly it is essential to propose and to share as many possible qualities (interest, understanding, compassion, cooperation, help) before one can withdraw some support. If one does not offer help and support first, one cannot withdraw them. It means that we need to weave all these threads that will link us if we want to be in a position of influence. Without these links or relationships there will be no possibility to express disagreement, except in sterile words of dissent or condemnation expressed from one's own corner that cannot have any effect because they have no concrete content. These words will have power only if they are linked with a loss for the friend who tends then to become adversarial.

And the corollary of this statement means that we have preferably to weave the strongest links with our potential enemies. But generally we tend to do the contrary; we develop our links with the nations that resemble us the most. Australia is linked principally with the United Kingdom and the United States when it preferably ought to develop links with the neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Pacific islands.

2) **A high and dense multiplicity of links:** Secondly these relationships must go in all directions and create links between all the nations. It is important to multiply these links of interdependency because they are the cement of peace. When there are "too many" of these links, nations are caught in a kind of spider web that prevents them from attacking each

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other because it would mean attacking oneself. It is also vital that these relationships go across the lines of demarcation of the different blocks of alliance. They are in fact a remedy and an antidote against antagonistic alliances. The more we have cross-relationships, the less we will have alliances. Alliances and polarisation itself dissolve into these many networks that finally create a form of unity between nations.

- 3) **A freedom of spirit to do the right thing:** Thirdly the freedom to act on these relationships – if they are to be used as effective tools of influence or defence – depends of course on the degree of freedom of the acting nation to renounce or cancel some existing advantageous economic deals in order to exert pressure and protect itself; and this means risks too. It is evident that this form of action and courage requires a great freedom of spirit and detachment, in a clear awareness that will be able to favour action for equity at the cost of one's own immediate or short-term profit. These relationships can become levers of conditional love only if there is the necessary will and freedom to use them, often at one's own short-term expense in order to defend a long-term requirement of peace.

One can for instance observe in international relationships how Australia sells incredible quantities of iron ore to China and, at the same time, some leaders of the country declare that China is a threat to Australia and that there is a danger, even a high risk of war. But Australia nevertheless continues to sell iron ore to China because it brings huge profits. On the other hand Australia plans to build powerful submarines, meant to protect the country against this potential aggressor, while the iron ore it sells to China is probably used in armament that could harm Australia.

In short, the message is in this case: I provide to you what you need to harm me and I feel you grow antagonistic to me. Yet I

will continue to do so because it brings money. But I will also build mighty submarines to be used against you, showing that I'm preparing for war because you are my enemy. This is non-sense.

In this way I contribute in a double way to the escalation of the conflict: on one hand providing what you need to harm me, and on the other hand preparing the conflict between us so that you will also prepare it. Hence I participate, myself and spontaneously, in a double escalation.

Note here that the pattern of conditional love goes exactly the other way. It should declare: I don't like what you do with the iron ore I sell you, so I will not sell it to you any longer. But I'm happy to sell you corn or wine, in order to make you happy and to reinforce our friendship. It is important that the conditional love does not oppose relationships but on the contrary reinforces them in a more adequate way.

- 4) **A need for relative self-sufficiency:** Fourthly, from this pattern of interdependency ensues, in a very paradoxical way, the necessity for relative self-sufficiency. This means that trade exchanges with international partners must never weaken the capacity of the nation to produce what is most needed for its own subsistence. It means the national autonomy and freedom should not be threatened by a lack of capacity of the nation to answer its own needs by itself. This form of relative self-sufficiency does not need to be absolute but nevertheless must remain strong enough to allow the freedom of choice to renounce some very useful imports when it is needed in order to maintain one's own independence and freedom of responsible action on the international stage.

Of course nobody can be sure that the strategy works perfectly well. It is a kind of bet; but a bet which is "objectively" less risky than the one of the arm race. There is of course always the risk that the "blackmail" can degenerate into war. But at least the

strategy is based on solid premises that make the price of war as high as possible for each one; and the price of peace as valuable that it is worth losing some relative advantages.

The multiplicity of relationships, combined with a multiplicity of nations on a multiplicity of categories of possible fields of exchanges, constitutes the network of these intense flows of cooperation balanced by measures of conditional love (restrictions or sanctions). The more these relationships resemble, and are truly, friendship, the more effective they are. And their efficiency depends principally on the density of these threads which link each other.

Each of these topics of exchanges becomes then an opportunity to talk and listen; and these many channels create at the same time narrow interdependency and reciprocal understanding. Friendship and reciprocal understanding nourish the positive conditions that consolidate cooperation and dialogue.

These are vectors of peace which are nonviolent, based on human relationships and exchanges. The more they grow, the less the nations that are linked by this network have opportunities to become antagonistic. And when disagreement arises (which is inevitable), all the tools are in place to offer a solution because there is already active reciprocal knowledge and deep understanding of one another. Dialogue remains here the key. When these exchanges are intense, the interdependence is too strong to be broken. It would cost too much on both sides.

Sadly we tend to do the contrary, that is to develop narrow links with our allies and also to break our relationships with the regimes which seem antagonistic to us. Look how we talk about Iran or Russia or North-Korea. Sure they are no angels. They have other stands and it is their own right. We have a natural tendency to condemn them because they think differently and they adopt positions that seem antagonistic to us. But there is also a lot of projection in our own ways of looking at them,

because we do not know them except as enemies. And we judge them in reference to the positions adopted by our leaders, such as the US and the UK.

We never stop indeed thinking in terms of “Us and Them”, instead of thinking in terms of “all of us together”. And this prevents us from understanding the ones who seem antagonistic to our positions. Our individualism and our stubborn focus on our subjective perceptions and on our material profit prevent us from developing harmonious links with all nations. The true treasure for our daily life is peace, not material wealth in excess. And for this treasure it is worth paying a lot, even in terms of renouncement.

What is here true on international level is also true in social relationships, in our own local society, how we act as individuals. It is the same: we create peace where we weave many links with as many and diverse persons as possible. The network is the material of life. If it is dense, it is solid and resist tear.

An international open debate about truth

The international community must be the guarantor of the truth. This process consists principally in a common search for justice and peace as a ruling principle.

Now we have to add something very important to this description of a new strategy for peace based on networking. As I described it, it seems very individualistic, in the sense that each nation seems to act in its own interest or without coordination with others. This is an inadequate impression. We certainly need each member of the community to weave an unlimited number of links with as many as possible other nations on as many as possible varied topics and concerns. This is the responsibility of each nation. But this is not an individualistic process because it

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aims not only at weaving relationships one to one, but also and principally at building a strong international community as a whole. This can only be done in cooperation with others, on a higher level of coordination and in a collective process that generates global harmony. The whole is more than the sum of the parts.

It would be insufficient to leave this necessity to weave international solidarity only to the initiatives of the single nations. In order to give deeper meaning and stronger cohesion to all these separate parts and initiatives, there should be an organ of international understanding that would help nations to come together to reinforce this international solidarity it aims at. This international assembly, similar to the UNO or even rather probably the UNO itself, would regularly assess the international situation and the degree of respective national responsibilities in order to be able to judge what is acceptable in terms of behaviour of each nation. It would be like an international Court of Justice and Ethics that would evaluate the behaviour of each nation. The difference with the present system is that it would be done collectively, beyond any formation of alliances.

As the main dominating powers constitute the principal obstacle to this process, the other nations could be inspired by the movement of the Non-Aligned countries, in the 1950-70s. They form in opposition to the two main powers of the US and the USSR. They were mainly constituted of so-called Third-World or developing countries. The interest in this concept of non-alignment is that it joins the present intention I try to describe of creating an independent movement that may foster peace. The non-alignment is in this case the expression of this freedom of action I described earlier. And being generally disempowered on the world stage, these nations have the power of independence and freedom to establish new links with whom they wish to.

The question is of course how such an organ, on the UNO level or just among non-aligned countries, could remain just and impartial; how it could make decisions that would not defend partial interests but be the expression of the world community, in ethical terms or terms of justice and equity. The most powerful nations would be in line with the smaller ones, without getting more power of influence than others. Given the peaceful aim, does it seem right that a small state like the Dukedom of Luxemburg or the Principality of Monaco could weigh as much as big nations such as China or India? Should the weight of each nation be equal or proportional to their population?

Another variant would be to nominate a Council of some 20 to 50 wise Elders whose function would be to assess the international situation and its trends as well as to judge the behaviour of each nation. This would then be like a recommendation or a sentence expressed by a body dotted with authority.

Or one could have both in parallel: the Assembly of Nations and the Council of Elders.

I think that the question of how the different nations are represented is not so essential. The real need consists rather in having a wider examination and debate about what is acceptable and what is not, about what is fostering peace and justice and what is working against the implementation of these qualities. It consists more in a dialogue than in a judgement. Then, if it is a dialogue, it aims at a certain form of consensus or respective agreement. Democracy, in a different form, can also avoid the ambiguous logic of the majority, when the majority imposes its options onto the minorities. Consensus, or the attempt to reach it, allows a broader approach than a vote count; it relies more on truth-telling than on personal opinions; more on search for the just and equitable process than on forms of competition in imposing the stand of a dominant trend.

If I am allowed to dream here a bit, I would say that such a large debate about truth and justice and equity is important as such, in order to generate a reflection and to incite nations to take a stand and to defend a commitment for peace. It is not about power and numbers, but it is about truth, which exists independently of us. The simple fact to practise this form of open debate is already a progress. What will come out of it will be just the resultant of the energies in game. No institution can guarantee that the process will be fair because the quality and fruits of such an open debate depend on the honesty of the participants and their common will to guarantee international stability.

Of course the possibility remains open to all forms of pressure and bribery behind closed doors. Then, it seems, such deviations would defy the whole purpose of such a process. But they do not mean one should give up. On the contrary, these attempts to pervert reality constitute as many more reasons to try to enforce a path of true dialogue.

Such an assembly or council of Elders would also have, as part of their mission, to regulate arm trade or arm production. The same measures would have to apply for all countries, powerful or not. Conflicts would be also examined by these wise people. New opportunities of dialogue would have to be organised and reinforced. Dialogue remains in this way the main motto of such a council or assembly.

As a starting point we should make our first attempts on local or national level. This would be an excellent level of complexity to make our first experiences. Then rich of these first steps, we could share it with other nations and start building this wider network and propitious context for true dialogue.

Remember: what is at stake is the peace of the world. This is something valuable enough that it may influence the position of each member. This is the carrot. And there is no baton, except the threat of relative banishment or sanctions for one or a few

nations that do not want to comply. Banishment or sanctions are not the tools; the real tools are the positive effects of multiple relationships and of dialogue that serve everyone. It is much more than sanctions because it opens new perspectives; it is what sanctions cannot do because they rather close doors to communication. This is the purpose of the whole process: to exert a positive collective pressure (conditional love) on the different members to help them to conform to well established norms of justice and peace. Who will participate?

The same with your family, your friends, your neighbours, or the ones you do not like so much.

All this seems like a dream. But I deeply believe such a way of thinking is essential. It is not a dream; it is a vital necessity. Just by its own existence as an alternative to the arm race, it demonstrates the folly of the arm race. If there is only yellow, you ignore the other colours. But when you see different colours, you see also the different possible ways to combine them. It is the same with the arm race. We have accepted that it is a fatality. This is half of our ill, if not more. As soon we see it is not a fatality, because we are aware that other ways exist, it stops to be the only possibility. We restore in this way our capacity to choose, and to better master our destiny. We restore our capacity to be agents of our own present and future. Is this not the proof that it is indeed the only possible path that offers of way into life?

Re-writing history

White myths for an old continent

The conqueror has re-written the history of Australia in celebrating his own people (the invaders) “forgetting” to mention the Indigenous people who lived here for 60000 years.

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When I walk up in Sydney from Hyde Park along Macquarie Street, I see the following statues:

- 1) First, **Captain James Cook**, in the park (born 1728 in the United Kingdom, died 1779 in Hawaii), British explorer.
- 2) Then, **Major General Lachlan Macquarie** (born 1762, died 1824, both in the United Kingdom), Governor of New South Wales.
- 3) Further, at the corner of the street, **Queen Victoria** (born 1819, died 1901, both in the United Kingdom), Queen of the United Kingdom and of Ireland, Queen of the British Dominions and Empress of India.
- 4) With, on the other side of the street, **Prince Albert** (born 1819 in Saxe-Coburg, died 1861 in the United Kingdom), Queen Victoria's husband.
- 5) Then further on, on the right, **Captain Matthew Flinders** (born 1774, died 1814, both in the United Kingdom), navigator and cartographer.
- 6) And, at the end of the street, near the access to the Botanical Garden, **King Edward VII** (born 1841, died 1910, both in the United Kingdom), son and successor of Queen Victoria, as King of the United Kingdom, King of the Dominions and Emperor of India.

Yes, believe it, these are (officially) the main figures of Australian history. Yet none of them was born or even died in Australia. They are all foreigners, invaders, intruders. They represent the genuine enactors of whiteness and white supremacy.

The same can be described about the names given by the colonisers to the different places or cities in Australia. I will mention the Aboriginal name of each of these places which

remains yet not clear as such places are broad and probably cover many places with different names.

- 1) **Sydney:** Thomas Townshend, 1st Viscount Sydney (1733-1800, both in the UK), British Home Secretary who devised a plan to settle convicts at Botany Bay. Original Aboriginal name: Gwea.
- 2) **Melbourne:** William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne (1779-1848, both in the UK), British Prime Minister under Queen Victoria. Original Aboriginal name: Naarm.
- 3) **Brisbane:** Sir Thomas MakDougall Brisbane (1773-1860, both in the UK), Governor of New South Wales. Original Aboriginal name: Meanjin.
- 4) **Adelaide:** Queen Adelaide (1792 in Germany - 1849 in the UK), Queen of the United Kingdom and wife of King William IV. Aboriginal name: Tarndanya.
- 5) **Darwin:** Charles Darwin (1809-1882, both in the UK), British naturalist and evolutionist. Original Aboriginal name: Garramilla.
- 6) **Cairns:** Sir William Wellington Cairns (1828-1888, both in the UK), Governor of Queensland. Original Aboriginal name: Gimuy.
- 7) **Murray River:** Sir George Murray (1772-1846, both in the UK), British soldier from Scotland who became a South Australian politician. Original Aboriginal name: Murrundi.
- 8) **Darling River:** Governor Ralph Darling (1772-1858, both in the UK), military officer and Governor of New South Wales. Original Aboriginal name: Baaka.

All these figures are rather insignificant people, made powerful by their social or official position and the support of the colonising country. None of them seems to have achieved any special contribution that would have been significant for the

authentic and original Australia, except, negatively, they consolidated British domination, leaving no space for Indigenous people and local cultures to thrive, even repressing them or supporting their killing although affirming one should remain respectful of their lives. What a shocking irony! Of course some of them have been more restrained, other more offensive, but none of them was able to initiate a new way to relate with this land that would not be based on conquest but on listening and adapting to the land and its inhabitants. The fact that none of these people was born or died in Australia is an interesting sign that they did not belong to this land, not even to the place where they lived.

We can see how history has been completely re-written. This is like deleting the local landscape and replacing it by a view of the so-called mother country. It is a pure negation of what was. This is a form of cultural, geographic and social genocide of the spirit and whitewash, without speaking of the mere killing which was its main instrument.

It is urgent to re-re-write the true history of Australia, which includes the colonial impact but cannot be reduced to it. This country has been inhabited by the oldest cultures in the world. It has a lot to reveal to us of what it is, and a lot to teach us about how we may live harmoniously on this continent.

It seems evident, we have to rename the places, rivers, lakes, mountains with their original indigenous names. And much more essential, we have in the same way to revive Aboriginal languages because they are integral parts of this land. They are part of the anchor of people and culture in the land. Locally one should have the traditional indigenous language – if it can be revived to the degree it can be used as a full means of communication – and English would be only used as a common language through the whole continent, which does not prevent its use in everyday life. In national institutions, such as the

Parliament or the state services, some main languages would be recognised as national languages in which each one may express themselves. One would have then at least two languages active in one place, and a few nationwide. This is the main idea. How it should be done is another question which I cannot develop here by lack of competence and space.

What matters most is that we have to tell the truth about the past: about the Indigenous people, about the frontier wars, about the shocking sense of entitlement and violence of the invaders, about the clash between the newcomers and the people who inhabited this land, about the original heritage that survived the 200 years of colonisation, about the denial of the original cultures of this continent. Truth telling is the important step and best way to bring people of all origins together. It can be mainly done through story telling as I have described it earlier, in relation with the topic of whiteness.

Courage and determination in resistance

We know the names of the white conquerors but none of the indigenous resistance fighters. White twist of history, as it is sadly still taught today despite a rising awareness.

The demonstration, here above, of the falsified version of our past history that is exhibited shows how much we ignore everything about the true history of this continent. Many historians have yet made a remarkable and considerable effort to re-establish justice. They have recently tried to rediscover past reality and to tell this corrected version of history. Many figures appear of which we had never heard.

For instance many Aboriginal fighters have courageously tried to resist the British invaders. In most cases they could not prevent the invaders from conquering this land, but they plaid a very

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significant role in defending their land, their people, their ancestors, at an extremely high price for their persons.

Let's shortly evoke now the presence of a few of them. It can only be done shortly as it is a whole subject as such which I do not have the knowledge to develop here:

- 1) **Pemulwuy (1750-1802)**, Bidjigal man of the Eora nation around Botany Bay in New South Wales, resistance fighter against colonisation at the time of the First Fleet (1788).
- 2) **Musquito** (1780-1825), tracker and resistance leader in Tasmania.
- 3) **Yagan** (1795-1833), a Noongar leader and resistance fighter along the Swan River (WA).
- 4) **Tummerinnerwait** (1812-1842) and **Maulboyheemer** (died 1842) two freedom fighters from Tasmania, hanged in Melbourne.
- 5) **Tarenorerer** (c.1800-1831), a woman of the Tommeginne people (Tasmania) who trained her men and women warriors in the use of firearms.
- 6) **Windradyne** (1800-1829), Wiradjuri warrior and resistance fighter during the frontier wars between British settlers (NSW) and his clan.
- 7) **Jandamarra** (1873-1897), man of the Bunuba people (Kimberley - WA) who led armed insurrections against the European colonisation.
- 8) **Truganini** (1812-1876), from Tasmania, probably the most famous Aboriginal woman of that time.

As we can see, except Truganini, all these people lived a very short life (an average of 35 years not including Truganini) because, as resistant fighters, they have been systematically chased and killed by the colonists. The people of the two first

categories have together, by contrast, an average life length of 65 years, i.e. 185% longer than the people of the third category.

When we compare the two categories of people who have been mentioned in these three lists of names, we are struck how much the two first ones completely disfigure the third one, because they project onto it a negative image, impregnated of a spirit of contempt. There is such a contrast between the two categories. The two first lists belong to a small elite of rich people who are, because of their class belonging and their role of power, completely ignorant of the situation they have to handle, without mentioning their will to dominate and to ignore.

The last examples, just above, principally concern warriors of the frontier wars. It is evident that many other Aboriginal people have made history and illustrated themselves in other fields than the fight against the settlers. This would be the topic of another book.

Many versions of history

History has many faces because it is lived differently by the diverse actors or witnesses. Let's tell it as it has been experienced, in its many versions.

In these two antithetic descriptions of the Australian past, we have two different stories which have nothing in common: one of domination pretending to bring civilisation to savages or even to non-existing people; and one of resistance and self-defence of one's own land and identity. The history forged by the first category is pure ideology, a creation of the mind to impose white supremacy. By contrast the history of the inhabitants of this continent who resisted the invasion is deeply grounded and rooted in the land and in a long presence of many millennium.

We have here two versions of history which clash with one another. One is at first glance a lie; the second seems nearer to reality. Yet history, by essence, is always made of different sensibilities, of conflicting perceptions that precisely bring upon social tensions, conflicts and wars. Without these tensions and apparent contradictions, there would be no history. History is even, probably by essence, the study of these conflicting visions and experiences. It is then interesting and rich to accept this fundamental truth about the diverging ways we perceive our past, depending on our respective positions in the story, and how we may tell it. A unified history does not exist; there are only many versions, not always necessarily conflicting, but yet never fully compatible.

I have already mentioned earlier the work of the Israeli Dan Bar-On and Palestinian Sami Adwan who used to organise meetings of protagonists of both sides of the conflict, or their descendants, in order to give an opportunity to each of them to tell their own stories to the so-called adversaries. These meetings demonstrated to be extremely powerful in the way they could bring these antagonistic parties together and offer them the possibility to come nearer to each other. It allowed them to better understand the story of the other and why this other had behaved in the way he or she did.

Dan Bar-On and Sami Adwan⁴⁰ published even a kind of history of the recent years of Israel-Palestine since the partition of 1947. In this book there are two stories running in parallel, one on the left page, the other on the right page. They are not even related to one another; they are just running side by side; because they are so different that they cannot be compared. I find this way of

⁴⁰ See PRIME (Peace Research Institute in the Middle East): *Learning each other's historical narrative: Palestinians and Israelis*, can be downloaded from: <https://vispo.com/PRIME/narrative.pdf>

approaching history very fascinating, convincing and truthful, yet without flattening reality, while remaining nuanced and complex.

There are two main remarks here to be offered:

- 1) **The first is about truth telling.** It is urgent that we learn to share our visions and to listen to the others, with full respect of what they say. This is probably valid for all conflicts in the world, whether on national level or just between individuals. This is true in what concerns the past, but also in what is weaved in the present, just now, at this present instant. We need to learn that each one has their own version, their own past, their own experience. It means that there is no absolute truth that would fit every experience. But there is yet truth in the facts, and this truth remains, even if each protagonist has experienced these circumstances in a different way.

It is why truth-telling is a fundamental necessity that recognises that, on one hand, each one experiences what happens in different ways but that, on the other hand and concerning the same events, anything cannot be freely reinterpreted in any way that suits the interpreter. Experience can be subjective but interpretation cannot. The events cannot be freely reinterpreted for the simple reason that facts exist and cannot be changed. In this, there is objectivity, even if the perceptions continue to differ.

And, on top of this form of indefectible reality of facts, there is also an ethical aspect in each event. Ethics cannot be changed as it suits us. There are fundamental concepts of truth about justice, peace, equity, respect. Killing is not a neutral thing that anybody can do as they wish to. Oppression either. Theft either. Violence in this approach can be understood in many ways in a subtle process that involves all types of factors. Yet it remains important to observe who initiated the violence or who generated or inflamed the conflict by creating

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a situation that would bring (more) imbalance or even oppression and, consequently, the need for self-defence on the side of the victim. Here again there is a form of truth that has to be recognised.

- 2) **The second remark is about processes.** We have the tendency to vilify the actors (the perpetrators), and we are probably (partly) right because they are in general the initiators and therefore they are responsible for creating situations of conflict. They can be found guilty of doing harm. But this approach turns to be divisive in a stereotypical way, as I explained earlier. It generates a monolithic approach of the “Us and Them”. It is evidently simplistic and sterile, although emotionally understandable, to consider that the people of the clan of the perpetrators are all bad and the people of one’s own clan (“our people”) are all good. But, even if we know that this primitive division is understandable, we know also that it is not acceptable, that it is not suitable; but we nevertheless do this all the time.

We truly need, and urgently, to consider rather processes; considering processes by opposition to considering people, i.e. perpetrators or victims. All white people are not supremacist; all indigenous people are not angels and victims in the same way. Our common humanity means that we all have qualities and flaws which mingle: there are also good white people and bad indigenous, if we can express it in this simplistic, almost childish, language in order to better reveal how this way of dividing people into good and bad is sterile and leads nowhere. I believe that we all indeed have qualities and flaws and that the context, the circumstances and the way we perceive them as well as our level of maturity, and the interests which are involved, determine how we react, whether we act in peace-making or conflicting ways.

This statement that we cannot create two categories of bad perpetrators and good victims invites us to bring this argument further and to develop to a further (higher) level what has been said earlier about the relation between whiteness and the European culture when I have expressed that whiteness and white supremacy are not mere European projects in the way that they are not expressions of European culture; but that they arose out of Europe and that European people have full responsibility for it, although they are not all involved in it.

This further step could be formulated like this: I believe also that a long phenomenon and evolution happened that made Europe the place and culture that, from early on – and for reasons we won’t examine here – have developed powerful technology and means of production. The power of these new means has triggered something in European people that exists almost certainly in our common human nature, such as an inner fragility, a doubt about oneself, greed, wish for recognition, avidity for power. These rather negative trends exist in probably all human beings but they do not express themselves in the same way everywhere because they are not always triggered in the same way, especially when the means are not available to seduce and change our basic human behaviours of respect and compassion.

It is then not astonishing that such means have fostered different attitudes in European people and even changed fundamentally the way they were acting in life: some perspective and will had arisen that consisted in conquering the world and turning it into a heap of resources out of which one could make a maximum of money, at the price of the oppression of others and destruction of the environment. Once again this does not diminish European responsibility but this tries to explain why it happened there in Europe and not elsewhere.

This understanding seems to me pretty realistic, especially if we honestly recognise that we are today more or less all involved in such a process, in our rich Westernised modern world. We all have become, at least in our rich countries and at least globally if not individually, some kind of exploiters. Of course at very different degrees, depending who. And it is also true that some more powerful people remain in power and hold the strings of the purse and the handles of power, while others are suffering in misery. We have to recognise here the complexity of the process at play, and not be seduced by the easy interpretation of “Us and Them”.

My thesis is the following: If we learn to concentrate on processes, and not on people, we can better distinguish what is at stake because we can then focus on the true source of our problems, in a way that distinguishes clearly the process from the acts of the persons. This is a very simple thesis. But this is an extremely powerful thesis.

Of course the persons remain engaged with their full responsibility how they are involved and in what their motivations are and what they do. It is for instance evident that there are still nowadays white people acting according to the ideology of whiteness, aiming at consolidating white supremacy; and there are also victims suffering in their state of disempowerment because the system (the process) forbids them to have access to, and practise, what their human rights are.

In this approach, the process is central. It is why we have to concentrate on processes, and not on people who are only illustrations (incarnations) of what the processes are.

Truth-telling in 4 stages

These would be: 1) story-telling, 2) identifying / understanding processes, 3) identifying perpetrators, applying retribution or forgiveness, 4) inventing a better future.

Having formulated the two precedent remarks about the role of truth-telling and the importance of concentrating on processes, we can now better examine how this process of truth telling should be implemented. I am not a specialist and I am aware that many people are much more competent than me and also in a better position to define this process and implement it. For instance the South African process of truth-telling delivers many best inspirations. And Australian Indigenous people with their experience of *Makaratta* (the coming together after a struggle) would be better teachers. Yet I wish to describe here how I see this process of reconciliation in four stages.

- 1) **Story-telling:** It could start with the story-telling mentioned earlier. This would open the participants to the diversity of points of views and perceptions. It would bring understanding and empathy despite the inevitable division along two sides. How not to be touched by the suffering of a mother who sees her child deprived of access to basic conditions and cares for health and education? Empathy can only bring reciprocal understanding and respect, if it is done in honest ways. This first stage of story-telling would open the minds and the hearts and bring reciprocal knowledge of one another.
- 2) **Processes:** Then the processes in play in these stories could be identified and examined, as if we were not involved; from a point of view of the external observer. It is the scientific detached eye that is needed, deprived of the subjectivity that is inherent to our perceptions when we are directly involved. The emotional perception remains yet an important factor but not as a prism that deforms our involvement, just as a prism

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that makes us sensitive to the values which are involved. This attitude of detachment corresponds to the healthy distance we adopt when we study the history of another country that has nothing to do with us. We remain neutral (detached) in our involvement, but emotionally involved when it consists in discerning and evaluating what has happened; and becoming aware of the ethical nature of the processes involved. This difficult stage would identify the processes and the way they work, in order to get a clear view and understanding how things have happened in the way they did and why.

- 3) **Personal responsibilities - retribution or not:** The next stage would consist in identifying personal responsibilities because processes are anonymous and they find their translation in reality through the perceptions, choices and acts of precise protagonists. Things do not happen by themselves; they happen through people who are precise persons. Each one of us can be involved in the facts and processes of our society. Each of us is generally exposed to the same kind of pressures. But each one has to be aware of what is at stake and each one has to take a stand, that is to choose what matters most and act accordingly. Hence the responsibilities of precise persons (maybe each of us), whether central actors or passive side participants, can be identified and these (non)actors may be declared guilty. This is the phase of judgement which is distinct of retribution. It consists in identifying responsibility and guilt.

Then comes the question of retribution which is distinct from that of establishing responsibility and guilt. Guilt does not necessarily call for retribution. It can alternatively be followed by forgiveness. The question is then: Is there a sanction in the form of a kind of retribution (fine, prison, compensation, compensation work) or is there general forgiveness? The option for retribution or amnesty is a key factor in the truth-

telling process because it will define the quality of the truth which will be told.

As it has been said earlier about the North-South clash of thinking patterns and as Desmond Tutu explains it in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa⁴¹, the option to promise forgiveness in exchange of complete truth-telling allows the perpetrators to tell the truth as it happened, without trying to cancel some aspect of it, because what they will express will have no influence on the penalty, as this penalty does not exist. They are free to tell all the truth. The truth-telling process becomes in this way for them a kind of therapy that allows them to find a relative freedom of spirit, a form of healing from guilt, after they recognise publicly the acts they have committed or the dishonest compromises they have undergone. Systematic forgiveness allows them not to be frightened of the retribution that would ensue out of recognising their guilt. In this way it brings more material to the surface, more revelations of facts as they happened. The auditors learn more.

On the contrary, if there is no promise of forgiveness, the perpetrators would try to hide what makes them most guilty or at least to diminish their own responsibility; because they fear retribution; and the therapeutic path is then hindered.

It is why the South African process of Truth and Reconciliation has clearly opted for forgiveness, under the influence of its most influent initiators, especially Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. It was very clear for them that the process should deliver forgiveness against truth-telling. That was the initial agreement and the promise from the start,

⁴¹ See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, 1998, to be downloaded with the link:
<https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/volume%201.pdf>

which were not easy to establish. And it was not easy either to have them accepted by all, many feeling anger and desires of revenge, or at least of spectacular punishment, that would also act as formal recognition for the suffering of the victims.

This third stage establishes the responsibilities and the eventual retributions. It concerns the persons involved, especially the perpetrators, but also the victims because they can hear the truth being told, which is healing for them. And they are also concerned if there is compensation.

- 4) **Which future:** Then, in a fourth stage, when everybody could see and understand what has happened and what went wrong and who was guilty, the participants would have to invent new solutions, that is other processes that would propose remedies to the past or present situations and transform them into what they dream of as a future for them all together, in cooperation.

I have to repeat here what has already been said: this is a dialogical approach that is needed because only such a pluralistic approach is able to bring all parties together and integrate all contributions into a whole that will maybe not be very coherent but at least will be the reflection of what all participants are wishing. This is a form of amalgam, of composite picture, of mosaic of many parts. It is maybe not a work of art and coherence but it is at least an expression of life, here and now, based on compassion and respect.

Is this image of dialogue and of the mosaic not an excellent definition of what truth is: an uneven process that aims at consensus and is in harmony with the energy of life, nourished by love? This fourth stage is creative and oriented towards the future in an attempt of restoration of relationships, peace, justice and equity.

Now, of course, truth-telling is painful. It is not a sweet cosy process. It hurts; and if it does not, there is something wrong. I

feel there is an extremely touching example of a positive experience of truth-telling, in this South African model that I just mentioned, led by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. I recommend the reading of the report of 1998. It is a considerable document of a few thousands of pages, difficult to read integrally. As I read only some extracts, I recommend what is for me the most instructive part, in the first volume, chapter five “Concepts and Principles”, written by Desmond Tutu. You can also read the inspiring comments about the necessity of forgiveness in their book by Desmond Tutu and his daughter⁴².

Forgiveness

The victim may forgive her perpetrator or not. It can be done unilaterally, without the perpetrator being sorry or asking for forgiveness. But reconciliation needs contrition.

It is important to come back here to the theme of forgiveness as part of reconciliation and truth-giving. It has been described how both are linked and how the promise of forgiveness allows truth to more fully be told. It is telling to give now an example of what forgiveness allows. Here is the terrible and inspiring story⁴³.

Auschwitz, the largest of the Nazi concentration camps, has come to symbolize the singular horrors of the Holocaust. Eva Mozes Kor (Romania 1934 – Poland 2019) and her sister Miriam were among some 7,000 prisoners liberated from the notorious Nazi concentration and extermination camp by the Soviet Army in January 1945. She is also among the few child prisoners to have

⁴² See: Desmond and Mpho Tutu: *The Book of Forgiving*. HarperCollinsPublisher, London, 2014.

⁴³ Diverse extracts from <https://www.rferl.org/a/auschwitz-survivor-eva-mozes-kor/26812368.html> that have been edited.

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survived Auschwitz after being subjected to disturbing medical experiments by one of the most infamous Nazi criminals, Josef Mengele.

The girls joined the estimated 1,500 sets of twins subjected to medical experiments at Auschwitz under the guidance of Mengele, whose grisly practices earned him the nickname "Angel of Death." The sisters, like many of these twins, were subjected to torturous examinations, injections, and other genetic experiments.

Eva and Miriam managed to survive the medical experiments and the last-ditch efforts by the Nazis to exterminate the prisoners of Auschwitz before it was liberated by Allied forces.

The sisters immigrated to Israel in 1950. It was there, Kor says, that she was able to sleep peacefully for the first time since the Hungarians occupied their village nine years earlier. "I finally slept without the fear of being killed because I was Jewish," she said. Both she and Miriam built careers, married, and had children, and Kor moved to the United States with her American husband -- also a Holocaust survivor -- in the 1960s.

"Echoes from Auschwitz were a part of my life but I did not speak publicly about my experiences until 1978 after the television series *The Holocaust* was aired. People would ask me about the experiments but I couldn't remember very much so I wanted to find other twins who were liberated with me. I wrote to newspapers asking them to publish an appeal for other survivors of Mengele to contact me. By 1980 I was sending out 500 letters a year -- but still no response. Finally I was able to find other twin survivors and exchange memories. It was an immensely healing experience."

It was in the years following her sister's death in 1993 that Kor embarked on what she describes as another form of liberation: forgiving her Nazi torturers.

"In 1993 I was invited to lecture to some doctors in Boston and was asked if I could bring a Nazi doctor with me. I thought it was a mad request until I remembered that I'd once been in a documentary which had also featured a Dr Hans Munch from Auschwitz. I contacted him in Germany and he said he would meet with me for a videotaped interview to take to the conference. In July 1993 I was on my way to meet this Nazi doctor. I was so scared but when I arrived at his home he treated me with the utmost respect. I asked him if he'd seen the gas chambers. He said this was a nightmare he dealt with every day of his life. I was surprised that Nazis had nightmares too."

Kor asked Dr Munch to confirm details of the horrors committed at Auschwitz. "It was important for me that it was a Nazi doctor, not a Jewish survivor or a liberator, because the revisionists always said that this was a story invented by the Jews, and if I ever met one of those revisionists, I could shove that document in their face. That was my idea." She asked him also if he would come with her to Auschwitz to sign a document at the ruins of the gas chambers. He said that he was ready to do it.

"In my desperate effort to find a meaningful 'thank you' gift for Dr Munch, I searched the stores, and my heart, for many months. Then the idea of a Forgiveness letter came to my mind. I knew it would be a meaningful gift, but it became a gift to myself as well, because I realized I was not a hopeless, powerless victim. When I asked a friend to check my spelling, she challenged me to forgive Dr Mengele too. At first I was adamant that I could never forgive Dr Mengele⁴⁴ but then I realized I had the power

⁴⁴ Since 1949 Dr Josef Mengele had been living in hiding in Argentina and Brazil where he had moved to in 1979. This means nobody had contact with him although the Mossad (Israeli Intelligence Agency) had tried to locate him without success.

now...the power to forgive. It was my right to use it. No one could take it away.”

“On 27 January 1995, at the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, I stood by the ruins of the gas chambers with my children – Dr Alex Kor and Rina Kor – and with Dr Munch and his children and grandchild. Dr Munch signed his document about the operation of the gas chambers while I read my document of forgiveness and signed it. As I did that, I felt a burden of pain was lifted from me. I was no longer in the grip of hate; I was finally free.”

“The day I forgave the Nazis, privately I forgave my parents whom I hated all my life for not having saved me from Auschwitz. Children expect their parents to protect them; mine couldn’t. And then I forgave myself for hating my parents.”

“Forgiveness is really nothing more than an act of self-healing and self-empowerment. I call it a miracle medicine. It is free, it works and has no side effects. I believe with every fibre of my being that every human being has the right to live without the pain of the past. For most people there is a big obstacle to forgiveness because society expects revenge. It seems we need to honour our victims but I always wonder if my dead loved ones would want me to live with pain and anger until the end of my life. Some survivors do not want to let go of the pain. They call me a traitor and accuse me of talking in their name. I have never done this. Forgiveness is as personal as chemotherapy – I do it for myself.”

This testimony is deeply moving. It explains everything. No comment should be added, except the information that many survivors of the Holocaust were angry against Eva Mozes Kor for her act of forgiveness. Very challenging.

A few remarks need here to be added, to lift any ambiguity.

- 1) First, it is important to notice that, in this example by Eva Mozes Kor, forgiveness is offered unilaterally, without conditions. You can forgive your enemy without your enemy asking for forgiveness or even being sorry. It is what Mozes Kor explains: it is one-sided, hence it is a free choice of the victim. It is what also gives her power and makes her free of this burden of the past and of her own suffering. Forgiveness is one-sided liberation offered to oneself.
- 2) Forgiveness is not reconciliation. For reconciliation atonement on both sides is needed. This means recognizing the past, the responsibilities on each side, the acts and their consequences. It means also contrition, that is regret to have acted in this way, saying sorry with all one’s heart and mind and being. Then there can be reconciliation.
- 3) Before reconciliation, there must be conciliation, which consists in “coming together after the struggle” (*Makaratta*). There can be only reconciliation if there has been conciliation before. The prefix *re-* in *re-conciliation* means that there is a return to a previous state of harmony that maybe did not ever exist.
- 4) Reconciliation means that there is recognition of the past, acceptance of history that cannot be changed. A new approach and interpretation of history does not change it. It only changes the attitude of the observer. A new understanding of the past can open new paths to reconciliation, especially when one shifts from denial to recognition.
- 5) Truth-telling is part of reconciliation because it changes the way people (perpetrators, victims, observers, judges) look at the past, at what happened, at what they have experienced. Truth-telling shows also that there are different points of view, different experiences. This diversity does not deny there are objective facts and truth. Despite the diversity of experiences there are limits to the range of these different

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interpretations. Some are justified because the experience makes our perceptions very subjective. It explains a certain degree of limitation, of partiality, of emphasis, but it cannot be in contradiction with the facts; it cannot deny them.

- 6) Truth is then this subtle balance between the subjective perception and the objectivity of facts. The perception (the experience) can evidently only be partial, because it represents only one point of view among many; but it has nevertheless to respect the facts. One could say that subjectivity, as a partial perception, must be integrated into objectivity, as the context, even if subjectivity is only representing one part of reality. Truth cannot deny subjectivity.
- 7) The question of compensation is not contradictory with forgiveness and reconciliation. It is compatible but not necessary for reconciliation to develop. It depends on the parties. Forgiveness tends to imply that there is neither retribution nor compensation. After processing the past and coming to (reciprocal) forgiveness and reconciliation, the parties have to agree about eventual repair. Compensation can make the process more consistent. But it does not, by itself, generate consensus and agreement. And especially the question arises: is there any possible compensation when the harm has been so powerfully destructive, as it has been in the case of the Holocaust or colonisation? Compensation can also be simply a sign of good will, or even contrition, and hope for forgiveness.

Cartography

Geography

Geography, this is used for waging war. Cartography is the technic that allows to plan domination over other nations and exploitation of resources.

Initially geography is the understanding of how our planet Earth took shape and what triggers its evolution as a geological body with all what grows on top of it: plants, animals and people. This is the original side of the investigation about the nature of Earth. It has yet also another more hidden side when the knowledge acquired becomes a vector for exploitation. Geography mutates then into cartography. It means it creates maps as representations of what one can see on the surface of the Earth. It tries to represent reality but in this representation there is inevitably a large part of projection, in the double meaning of it.

- 1) Projection in the sense that maps are flat surfaces although the Earth is a sphere; then there is the problem concerning the best possible method how to project a curved surface onto a plan. This is trickier than one thinks because it consists in a deformation of reality.
- 2) Projection also in the sense that we project our ideas and intentions onto the body we observe and we wish to exploit. And we can use the deformation of the first type of projection to provide what we expect the land to provide for us.

Let's examine these two forms of projection in more detail, especially how the first one may serve the second one.

Projection of our greed

When the Earth is perceived as a heap of resources, maps become the tool for accessing these resources, which means also how to go there where they are.

Cartography becomes the projection of our greed onto the surface of the Earth which loses its sacred meaning when it is reduced to a mere heap of resources. We lose sight of its deeper dynamic as a living body that nourishes and harmonises us and provides everything we need. We consider it as an object at our service although we belong to this universe whose laws are extremely complex and subtle, which influence our bodies and also our souls and spirits. This is a terrible simplification that reduces the Earth to its physical appearances. This simply deprives us from our essence which is rooted in this Earth as a living entity.

Cartography becomes then the tool for conquering other countries. It shows us the physical paths to these other places; but the way we perceive these paths to the others is impregnated by our intentions. We do not only intend to visit these far neighbours by curiosity of how they live. We do not intend to meet them as persons and as inspiring cultures and alternative ways of living that are so different from ours. We are more interested in getting hold of their resources. It is how cartography becomes a strategy. Geography, this is used for waging war. Cartography and the *fleet in being* become then two complementary tools that support each other.

Transoceanic routes become the trade routes on which wealth circulates more in one direction than in the other. The perception is ethnocentric, that is centred on the nation of the protagonists. The route goes from Southampton or Bristol to the West Indies – one should rather say the Caribbean Sea to avoid this terribly

colonial denomination – and then back to the United Kingdom. This is called traffic, in both meanings of the word.

Mercator and Peters

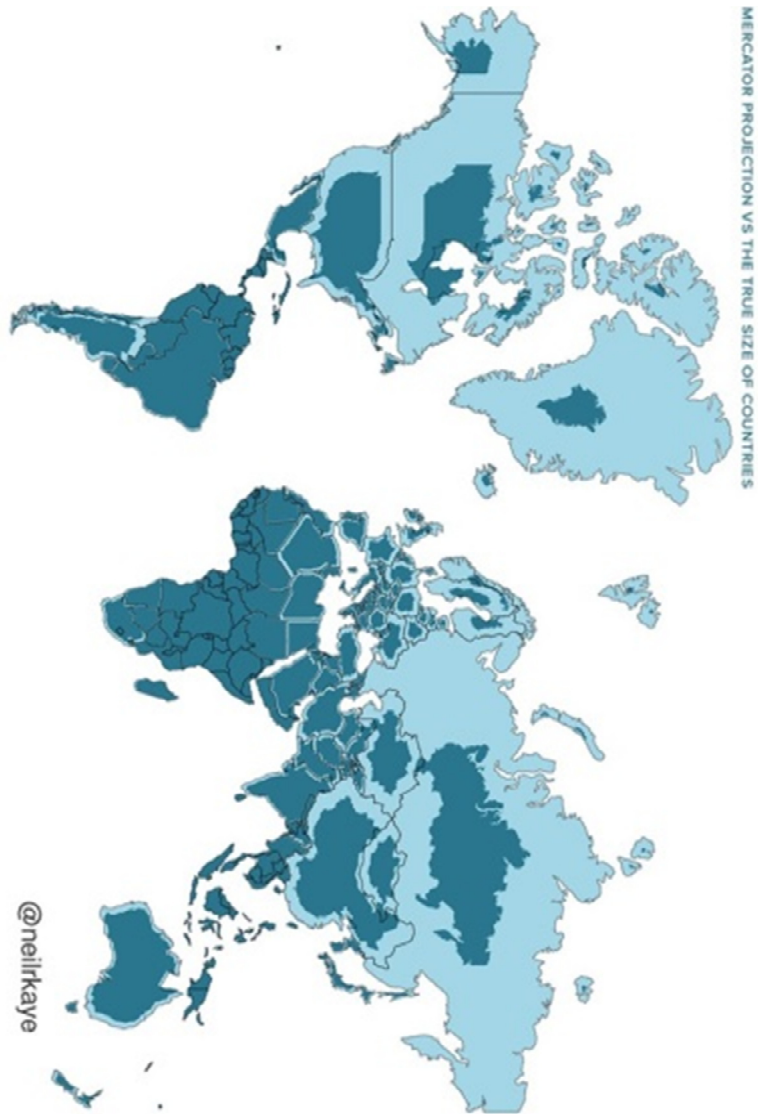
The Mercator projection of the sphere onto the plan deforms the proportions between South and North countries; the Northern countries look much bigger than they are.

The Earth is a sphere. Its surface is curved. When we want to represent this curved surface on a flat map – that is to project the curved surface onto a plan – the process necessitates a deformation of what we want to represent. There are different methods how to do this; principally two.

1) Geraldus Mercator invented in 1569 a way to project the surface of the sphere onto a cylinder that surrounds the globe and is tangent – the cylinder touches the sphere which it envelops – at the equator. The problem of this projection is that distances are exaggerated the further one goes away from the equator where the distance (the length on the map) on the projection is equal to the distance on the globe (the length of the equator).

In the real materiality of the Earth, the circles of latitude decrease in length when one goes away from the equator (proportionally to the cosine of the angle of latitude). But, in this type of projection onto a cylinder, all circles of latitudes, although they decrease in length, are all represented by an identical length, equal to the length of the equator (or the circumference of the cylinder). This means that circles of different lengths on the Earth (the different latitudes) are nevertheless represented by the same length on the map. For instance a circle of latitude near the pole is represented by a line of the same length as the equator, although it is much shorter in reality. Hence the deformation which increases while one goes away from the equator. This deformation means then that the further one goes away from the

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Mercator projection, in clear; proportional surfaces in dark.



Arno Peters projection

equator, the scale of the projected map will also vary in an inverse proportion to the same ratio (ratio between the size of each parallel of longitude and the length of the equator). This same inverse ratio increases then the distances for the countries set further away from the equator.

On top of this first deformation, the Mercator projection intends to keep the proportions of the countries. This means that the distances south-north have to be kept in the same proportion as the distances east-west. This means that the coefficient of deformation that is applied east-west is also applied south-north. Consequently the surface of each country (product of the length east-west by the width south-north) is multiplied by the square value of the coefficient of deformation.

For instance – all the following measures are rounded – the radius of the sphere of the Earth is 6400km. At the equator (Equator, South Columbia, North Brazil, Congo, Kenya, Indonesia), the length of the parallel of 0° latitude is 40'000km. At 30° North latitude (Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, North India, China, Mexico), the length of the parallel is reduced to 34'800km, that is the scale of the projection will comparatively increase the distances by a factor 1.15. Similarly at 60° North latitude (Oslo, Helsinki, St Petersburg, Russia, Southern Alaska, North Canada), the length of the parallel is reduced to 20'000km, that is the scale of the projection will be double (factor 2). As the proportions of north-south and East-West distances are kept in the same proportion, the surface of each of these countries is multiplied by the square of these factors, that is $1.15 \times 1.15 = 1.3$ times at 30°; and $2 \times 2 = 4$ times at 60°. In other words, the surface of Russia looks four times bigger than it is in reality while Kenya remains as it is.

The interesting aspect of these considerations is that all of what I have called the Northern countries are situated North of the 30° latitude and extend often to the 60°. They seem then much bigger

(1.3 to 4 times bigger) than they are in comparison to the countries of the South. It is a way to appear more powerful. Geography has been here twisted at the advantage of the rich countries.

Mercator: The scale of the map increases the further away one goes from the equator. Here⁴⁵ is a map that presents the disproportion of surfaces of countries between what they look like with the Mercator projection and what they are in real surface. On this projection of the world map according to Mercator we can see how the map size of Northern countries is powerfully exaggerated (in clear) in comparison to their real size (in dark) and in comparison to Southern countries which do not profit of this same ratio of exaggeration. The regions which are mostly blown up are further away from the equator: North America, Europe, Russia and, slightly, China.

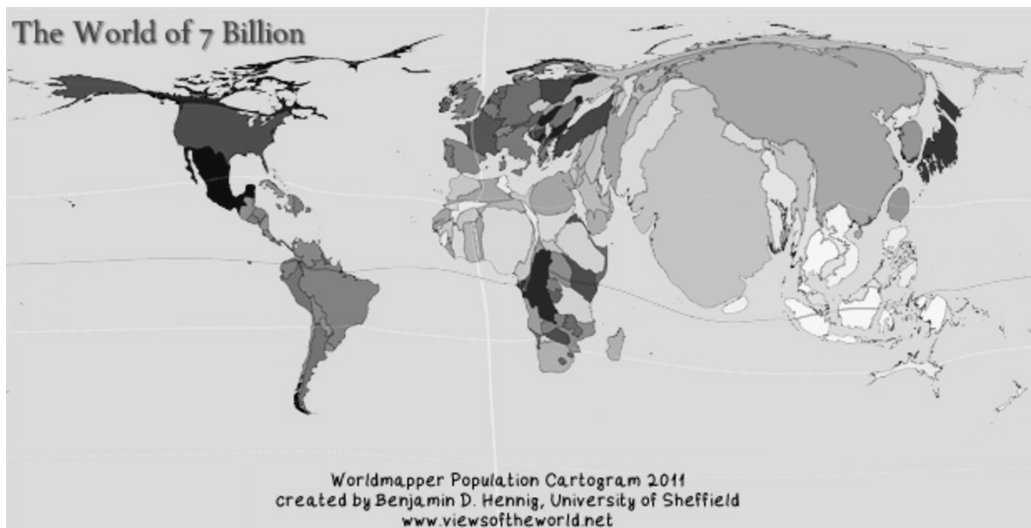
Another deformation of the Mercator projection is that the equator is situated at 1/3 of the height of the map instead of 1/2. This means that the Northern hemisphere is twice bigger than the Southern hemisphere. There is no Antarctica and this diminishes the size of the Southern oceans. Islands which are situated more to the South than the point of Tierra del Fuego (extreme Southern end of South America - 54° South) simply disappear.

2) Arno Peters proposed in 1973 another projection⁴⁶ that would respect the surfaces while deforming the shape of the countries, that is also the distances. This projection where the surfaces are comparable shows a very different picture of our world where the Southern countries seem huge in comparison to the

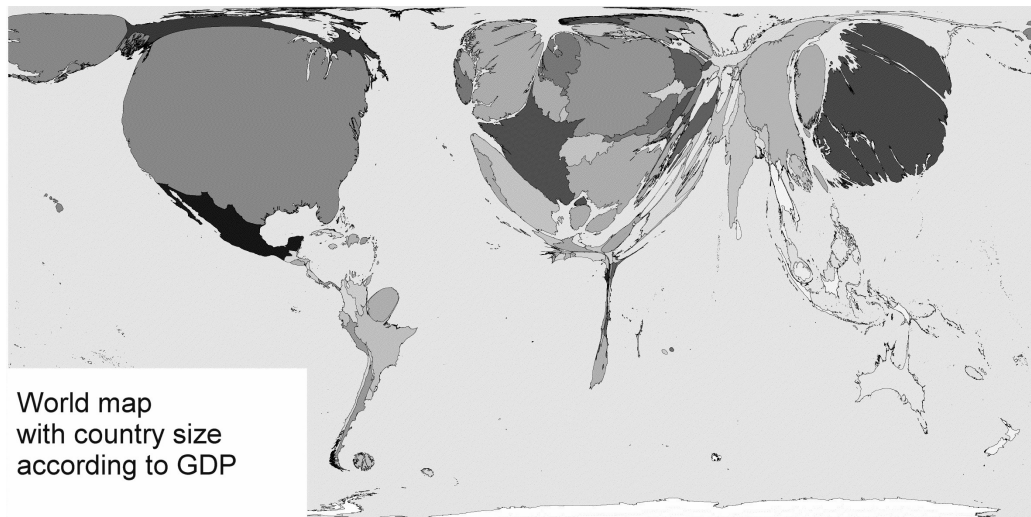
⁴⁵ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/mercator-vs-truesize.png> is the link that allows to access this map (the source).

⁴⁶ <http://cartography-huber.com/p42/know-how-solutions-and-products/the-peters-world-map>

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1 - Surface of the countries proportional to population



World map with country size according to GDP

2 - Surface of the countries proportional to GDP

tiny dimensions of the Northern countries. It is evidently without ideological impact when one considers the tiny size of England in comparison to the size of India.

The equator is here situated at mid-height which is the correct representation. The two hemispheres are then rigorously equal in surface.

Other scales, other proportions

Cartography can also represent countries, not as surfaces of land, but as surfaces proportional to other data, such as population, or wealth.

Here another view of the world map where the countries have a size proportional to their population . We can see India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia much bigger than we are used to. It means they have high densities of population. Europe is still looking pretty big because there is a high density of population, despite the relatively small territory.

And another view where the countries have a size proportional to their GDP⁴⁷. Of course the United States look gigantic as well as the rich European countries; with a very thin almost not existing body for Latin America and for Africa. This is another very powerful representation of the world.

⁴⁷ Source: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/>

Ecological footprint

Our footprint on the Earth

The footprint represents the surface of the Earth each of us is using for providing the necessary resources for their consumption.

The calculation of the ecological footprint⁴⁸ attempts to represent, as correctly as possible, our impact on the Earth, on its resources and on its natural cycles. Practically it is a calculation, according to official data (mainly from the UNO), of the quantity of resources we use each year, in total nationwide.

It is then translated into a surface of land per person (ha/capita) measured in hectares that represents, in average per person nationwide, the surface of 1) cropland, 2) grazing land, 3) forest, 4) water ways, 5) build areas each one of us needs yearly, depending on the range of consumption we practice. 6) The quantity of energy we consume is also translated into the theoretical surface of forest necessary to absorb the CO₂ that its consumption produces.

In parallel, a similar calculation is made for each nation concerning the biocapacity of the Earth. This represents, also in hectares/person, the biocapacity of the land to produce what it does, either for consumption by the inhabitants or for export. This second measure represents for production what the previous footprint represents for consumption.

Effective consumption by the national population and Earth biocapacity to produce the necessary resources are then

compared to see how much our consumption exceeds in average the ability of the Earth to satisfy our needs or greed; either globally for the total Earth, or nationwide. For each country a corresponding quantity of needed planets is calculated, proportionally to the national consumption level, admitting that everybody on the Earth would adopt the same standard of consumption. There is in this way a distinction made between the ecological footprint of national consumption and the ecological footprint of national production that intends to show the impact of international trade. Thanks to import, the national consumption can increase without impacting on the national Earth capacity, because it is taken from elsewhere (another nation); and, similarly, the production impacts on the national Earth biocapacity even if the goods are exported, i.e. not consumed at home.

These data demonstrate the gigantic contrast there is between the different levels of consumption of each country, depending on how rich these countries are. The calculation is done on the level of the nation which does not make any distinction between the different social classes. Rich and poor are all considered as average consumers in equal parts in the same undistinguished whole, although enormous contrasts of standard of life exist inside each nation. The data only represent an average level of consumption, without considering the extremes or the contrasts between the poorest and the richest.

The ecological footprint is also presented in relation with the size of the territory of each country, of its population, of its GDP, of the group of countries to which it belongs. It is then possible to classify the data according to these same criteria and to observe how the ecological footprint is related to them.

⁴⁸ Present data from the 2023 edition (data year 2019).

You can download the data for the footprint from:

<https://www.footprintnetwork.org/licenses/public-data-package-free/>

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The footprint understood as mode of colonisation

As an expression of the level of consumption and the surface of Earth needed for it, the footprint can be understood as a form of colonisation of the resources of the Earth.

We can order the nations according to the size of their national footprint of production in hectares per person. If we ignore the small nations (population smaller than 3 million people) which present a distortion because of their very small population, we obtain as the 15 top consumers (biggest footprints), in decreasing order: Finland (11.4 ha/pers.), Canada (10.8), Australia (10.4), Uruguay (9.4), Norway (8.7), Mongolia (8.7), the United States (7.7), Kuwait (7.6), Sweden (7.2), Russia (7.1), United Arab Emirates (7.0), Oman (6.6), Czech Republic (6.3), Kazakhstan (5.8), Saudi Arabia (5.6). The 15 smallest national footprints (the smallest consumers) are, starting with the lowest, Yemen, Haiti and Timor-Leste (0.4 ha/pers.), Bangladesh, Gambia and Rwanda (0.5), Burundi and Nepal (0.7), Eritrea, Angola, Congo RD, Pakistan, Mozambique and Malawi (0.7), Afghanistan (0.8). For comparison the average biocapacity of the Earth worldwide is 1.6 ha/pers. while the average footprint of consumption is 2.6 ha/pers., that is 163% bigger. These lists show extreme contrasts.

As the world is one, the exploitation of resources should be in average equal for all nations (in ha/pers.). There is no specific right for one nation to exploit more land (have a higher consumption or standard of living) than the other. The extraction in other countries remains still the usual process that allows richer nations to live at the expenses of poorer nations. This reveals how the colonial system has been transformed into a transnational trade in the hands of the ex-colonisers, or of the nations that play today the same role; especially if their economic power relies on natural resources such as fuel or

minerals or tropical food which constitute resources exploited by private corporations that have also become transnational.

The calculation of the ecological footprint demonstrates that we worldwide need 1.7 planets to produce what we globally consume, and this despite the fact that more than 50 countries do not consume on a rate that would request more than one planet worldwide.

Now, if we consider the countries with the largest population, it is interesting to notice that India with its population of 1.4 bi people has an ecological footprint for consumption of only 1.1 ha/pers. (i.e. below the average biocapacity of the Earth). China (with approximately the same population) has a footprint of 3.5 ha/pers. which represents 219% the average biocapacity of the Earth. The United States (319m people) compare with an ecological footprint of 7.7 ha/pers. i.e. 481% the average biocapacity of the Earth. And this is only a national average that does not represents the inner disparities between rich and poor in the same nation.

We get here a pretty good image of what we could call the colonisation of the Earth: who takes what?

Debt and exchanges

Another important tool of oppression of poor countries by dominating economic powers from the North that maintains these countries in a state of dependence and prevents their empowerment is the debt.

Debt as artificial creation

The poor countries have an enormous financial debt to the rich countries. But it is an artificial consequence of (creation by) the dominance of colonisers and market forces.

Many poor countries have an exorbitant financial debt today that prevents them from investing in creative improvements because they have to pay each year astronomic amounts of interests and compound interests that divert their already very limited financial resources into unfruitful expenses.

Of course there are many different types of debts and many debts that have originated in many different contexts and for many different reasons or motivations.

In the case of Japan, the most indebted nation nowadays (200% of GDP in 2022 according to the IMF), the debt corresponds to investments in a nation that is one of the leading economic powers of our time. Behind this extensive debt there are, as well, a huge power of production and a powerful potential for futures profit. And this remains true independently of the question whether the borrowed capital that has generated this debt has been invested wisely or not.

In the case of the United States (96% of GDP), the role that the USA play economically on the world scene and the use of the US dollar as international currency both change radically the significance of this debt and the impact it has on American and world economy.

By contrast, in other cases such as Eritrea or Sudan (respectively 176% and 152% of their GDP), this is a very different situation. Sudan wastes 7% of its annual income for the payment of interests without even counting any repayment of the debt. This evidently prevents Sudan from evolving according to its real needs.

Poor nations with a high debt are very much handicapped by this situation. As they are poor, loan conditions are usually very drastic and expensive. Because of their economic fragility they fall easily prey to borrowers or to international institutions like the IMF or the World Bank or to international corporations.

This is a heritage of the recent past centuries. Colonial powers have largely, in their own interest, exploited the land of these colonised countries, or their natural resources, or their social potential, or their workforce, for a very small or even inexistent return. From the point of view of these poor nations, this meant underpaid resources, privatised profits to be exported by foreigners to richer nations, underpaid work, even slavery. In other words this means today that these poor countries have provided goods and services at a price that was completely under-evaluated, or even at no price at all. This systematic deprivation of past income for many decades and even centuries explains the lack of a present form of development that could compete with the North. The disarticulation of these poorer economies, consecutive to the colonial impact, makes things still considerably worse.

Another important factor is that the form of development according to colonial processes and market standards is not necessarily the only possible or best solution for poorer actors; and certainly not the best possibility for traditional societies in which monetised exchanges are limited in range. Beyond the process of mere exploitation, the terrible destruction caused by colonialism has principally consisted in the fact that these Southern countries have been deprived of their own path of evolution, based on their own humanity, culture, skills, potentials and priorities, when they have been forced into international exchanges and market relationships formatted by, and according to the interests of, Northern powers. This means that they could not develop their own skills and faculties. They could not follow their own choices. They were deprived of their own

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empowerment, of their own laws, of their own land, of their own resources, of their own human vitality, of their own anthropological options.

And there is still more to this. All the goods and services these poor countries have provided, which were essential and very consistent and very profitable for the coloniser, have been, for these countries, deprived of their real direct essential value. This essential value consists in the fact that food can nourish people, materials can help build houses, combustible can provide heat, intelligence and creativity can educate the future generations; and this without being converted into money, i.e. sold on the local or international market. This means that these resources provided by the colonies have lost their real utilitarian value, or what they really were as directly usable resources, when they have been artificially converted, under constraint, by traders or exporters into financial value or capital, this means into money, which is an artificial creation of humankind.

It happened also that the huge value of what has been delivered to Northern countries has not been paid at its right value, if it has been paid. It has been amputated of what has not been returned to them (as a part or as the whole), as it would be natural in normal cycles if no part of value were retained by the exploiters. This (remaining) amount, which has not been paid to them, has been converted into an abstract amount of capital that remained in the pocket of the exporters and could not be used by the real producers at home.

Another aspect: The resources extracted from Southern lands have been converted into capital. And this capital, which escaped completely the control of these Southern countries that were its real source, served to finance new investments in the mother country. It even served this development of the mother country in a cumulative way because each previous investment (financed by what had not been paid to poorer countries) helped to make

more profitable the successive investments in the mother country financed in the same way. The effect of investment is cumulative.

It is interesting to make here a short digression. Money as such does not exist in nature and cannot be consumed and cannot satisfy any need. One cannot feed on money; one can only, with money, buy food. The only real and irreplaceable value is food, and money is only an artificial intermediary that has no value if it cannot be converted into food. And the same for other goods. The value of money remains in all cases dependent on the quality of what it can acquire. Without this counter-part it is worthless.

And the irony is that, where there is no money for exchanges, there is yet often a lot of wealth in terms of resources that are directly available and wait to be used to satisfy needs, without going through money conversion and exchange. These resources are made of the food that grows nearby, naturally or cultivated; or skills that people have but cannot sell on the market because there is no market for these skills which are nevertheless much needed; or knowledge that can be transmitted but the infrastructure for transmission is missing. This means that the enforcing of money as the necessary, unique and exclusive means for exchange prevents this natural potential from being used properly, although it is available, here at hand, even often abundantly.

Having said this, in hindsight, we can observe how the so-called poor countries of the South have provided real goods in the past which have not been paid at their right value, but these countries are now deeply indebted because of this lack of retribution in the past that hindered their normal development as a self-sufficient economy, and even more. This means they are nowadays forced, in order to get access to similar goods as the ones they have provided in the past, to repay the full value of these goods (this time not diminished); and on top of this, with means (money)

they do not have. They do not have them because the payment that was due to them for resources extracted in the past has not been paid to them; and they continue to provide these resources that are most needed, but that they cannot exploit by lack of the necessary capital to invest into autonomous forms of extraction of these resources.

In short it is required from them that they use on the international market the exclusively necessary currency on which this market is based but which was refused to them when they provided the same kind of goods. Money is then not as polyvalent as it is pretended. It is only based on a convention for exchanges, but it has become the necessary condition to access the available goods on the market, whether one has money or not. Money remains in this case an arbitrary condition (a convention) imposed by the rich, who has access to money; who can even create it almost at will, because money generates money. Resources and skills in these countries can then only be exploited by corporations that rely on the necessary capital that only money can provide, at the exclusion of other means (the resources themselves or the skills to exploit them). Dead end for the poor countries onto which this game and convention of money are imposed.

The real wealth provided by Southern countries consists indeed in the looted resources that have been (in past and present) extracted out of their lands and in the exploited workforce through slavery or exploitative work conditions that has contributed to make these resources available. This is the unrecognised effective wealth of the Southern countries that has been stolen from them. And this is still the cause of the blockage today for Southern empowerment.

Inversion: the real debt

The countries which are truly indebted are in fact the Northern countries which extracted their wealth from Southern nations without repaying it at its just value, or even not at all.

If it is true that the real goods and services provided by poor countries have been these natural resources the Northern countries grabbed and the workforce that has been exploited, then the real debt today concerns these goods and services. This constitutes not a debt of the poor countries to the rich. But it is a debt of the rich to the poor. This is the factual truth of these past centuries that reveals the great inversion in the wealth repartition today, made possible by the denial of the real contribution of the colonies and by this artificial creation of debt and money, consolidated by the imposition of the laws of international market onto poorer economies.

We have to remember that it is not home production but cotton produced in the Caribbean Islands that has made the wealth of England. This cotton, because it was provided in huge quantities for an insignificant price, made the whole start of the Industrial Revolution possible. Cotton, this cheap wealth acquired at cheap rate (but at high levels of exploitation), allowed, in England, to develop a whole new and very profitable industry for the production of cotton cloth. And the sale of these goods, in an incredible and previously unseen quantities, provided also an inconceivable margin of profit that allowed the constitution of the necessary capital for further developments.

There was so much capital available in England at that time, which was looking for possibilities of investment, that these rich entrepreneurs decided to finance whatever was on offer, indifferently of potential productivity, like for instance the development of the railways. And these new sectors were developed, or at least financially so largely supported, for the

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single reason that they offered possibilities for reinvestment of unused capital. The necessity to reinvest this “superfluous” capital was much stronger than the weak motivation that the railways seemed at this stage to offer such useful, productive and promising returns; which they revealed later to do powerfully.

Hence the wealth of England and the whole process of the Industrial Revolution were started by the production of resources extracted from these same poor Southern countries which are today so indebted and still in a weak position on the international market although they are at the source of most of the wealth of the present world. These natural resources from the South have become, more than ever, parts of our daily life, as products we consume or as parts of tools we use: product from rich farmland, cotton, sugar, coffee, tea, bananas, pineapples, meat, fish, timber, fuel, gas, coal, copper, zinc, nickel, bauxite, cobalt, uranium, platinum, silver, gold, diamond, and many others.

On top of these material resources, there are also, most important, some qualitative resources such as care for country and biodiversity, balancing ecosystems that maintain good conditions for life on Earth (the Amazon or Congo basins and forests, the Gulf Stream, Antarctica). These are Southern free contributions to the balance of our present world. These goods cannot be extracted, sold, exported or consumed but they are just providing life, without which nothing would be possible.

This is the real debt inherited from the past: the stolen resources that made the wealth of the North, the constant providing of these many precious resources and minerals we never stop to use for our modern comfort in the North, the present contribution to the stability of the ecosystems, which has not been destroyed as they have been in our “developed” world. This debt is then truly a debt of the North to the South.

The deep inversion of the definition of who is indebted is a powerful lie that has deeply falsified, and still does, the

relationships between the different nations of the world, at the (so-called) advantage of rich countries. One could think that the denunciation of this deep inversion of truth is a question of fundamental justice in what concerns the past. But it remains also true today: Shell is still exploiting fuel resources in Nigeria for instance, or the minerals of Congo are still extracted by mainly Northern corporations.

There is nothing negative for a corporation (even a Northern one) in providing a service that helps to use good and useful resources, at the condition that natural equilibrium is respected and the environment thoroughly protected – which is rarely the case – and under the constraint that healthy social conditions are offered to local populations that allow people of all categories to thrive. In theory at least, the international corporations could well provide their services and know-how. But the problem is that they are not only the providers of services. They become also the owners (rather the grabbers) of these resources that they sell on the international market for their own profit. The high value of these resources escapes then the land of its origin to fall into foreign hands. If the extraction of these resources could in priority involve the participation and creativity of local people and if this wealth could remain the wealth that could serve local needs, it would be very different.

Nevertheless it remains also a tricky ethical question to know to whom natural resources truly belong on this Earth. They are just natural resources given free of charge by nature, in specific locations. To whom belongs nature? evidently to nobody. Or rather to all, to be shared and protected worldwide, in balance with natural equilibrium and social justice.

This historical inversion of the debt of poor countries – that calls for the recognition of what rich countries truly owe to poor countries – calls also for the cancellation of the debt of these poor providers of infinite resources, or at least for an attempt to

bring justice into this matter. Each case is different and needs to be examined along different paths and feasibilities. In any case the use of compound interests and interest rates is also a condemnable practice. Why should I make money when I sleep, just because the wealth I have acquired (in which conditions?) is made accessible to others at a high price?

The 9 dimensions of the hidden debt

The debt of rich countries to ex-colonised nations consists in the many diverse dimensions of the relationships we establish with the land, the resources, the inhabitants, etc.

I would like here to describe shortly the many dimensions of this untold debt of the rich countries to the poor countries or ex-colonies.

1) **The Planet:** The principal cause of a debt of the Northern countries to the Southern nations consists in the major impact the Northern countries had on the natural equilibrium of the Earth. This translated into strong collapse of biodiversity, deforestation, erosion, desertification, pollution, exhaustion of vital resources. Climate change is the principal expression – but only as a symptom and not a cause – of this overexploitation of common resources to the point it destroyed the core itself of the natural cycles of reconstitution (renewal) of resources and absorption (recycling) of wastes. Rich nations (10-15% of world population) produced their wealth at the expenses of the population of the whole world (the other 85-90%). Because of this debt we are now confronted to the general collapse of natural systems. It means our survival is severely at stake, including for the 80-90% who did not profit from this overexploitation, especially the 50% poorest who hardly survive.

- 2) **The Land:** Beyond this first act of destruction the most important dimension of the debt concerns the Land. For traditional cultures the Land is sacred and it defines the relationship of people with the universe and the sacred dimensions of Life. It is not a practicality to dominate and to exploit. It is the teacher from whom to learn and to whom to adapt. Yet the invader occupies the land to make it produce.
- 3) **The resources:** Northern invaders have seen in this rich abundance of natural resources (productivity of the land or mineral resources) some material stuff to be extracted, exported and sold. They saw these resources as commodities. Resources were exported. But, in most cases, Indigenous people do not want even to exploit them because they do not see the need of them and are far aware of the impact it will have on the Land (called environment by Northern cultures) and the Land is too precious in their eyes. They want to adapt their needs to what is available instead of forcing the resources and the environment to produce what they want. It is why and how these wise cultures have remained sustainable. In most cases their restrained way of life is a conscious choice, not a fatality, as Northern people think.
- 4) **The Laws:** Traditional cultures respect the Laws of nature and the Laws of the universe or Laws of life. In the Northern society we recognise only the laws of physics as we have formulated them: the law of gravity, the law of thermodynamics. The invaders have imposed their own jurisdiction, the Northern law that has to replace the traditional Law. But the Northern law as jurisdiction is not a harmonious synthetic system. It is made of an addition of rules that can be changed and are even often in contradiction with one another. The Northern law is very poor in comparison with the traditional one. Comparatively it often lacks wisdom and flexibility, discernment and creativity or

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imagination. Through this impoverishment and disempowerment Indigenous people are deprived of their rights.

- 5) **The people and their culture:** In colonisation there is no room for the Indigenous culture to teach the coloniser about the Land and the rights of people and their traditional culture. People are considered as subhuman and therefore nobody listens to them. It is said that they have to be initiated to “civilisation” and that the light of reason must be brought to them. It is evident that this attitude prevents local people from living a normal and meaningful life and from thriving according to their own culture, solving their own issues in their own ways; as well as it prevents the coloniser from being inspired by so much wisdom.
- 6) **The workforce:** Local people are used as slaves or cheap workforce to extract the local resources: cotton, sugar, minerals, timber. Slavery or underpaid work is the rule. There is no consideration for the human dimension of each being. They are cogs to be used. It would be telling to calculate the amount of the wages not paid to slaves. It would be an astronomical sum.
- 7) **The colonised bourgeoisie:** The local upper class tries often to adapt to the regime of colonisation and find their own place with (usually mediocre) privileges that buy their willing cooperation with the invader. This is a form of bribe.
- 8) **The wider market:** Soon after conquest the colonised nations constitute an external extension for the saturated market at home. Products made at home, often out of raw materials from the colonies, can be sold to the richer part of the population; or even to all people as basic goods such as clothes made out of the cotton that has grown locally. This is a way to resell to them what has been stolen from them. Double profit.

- 9) **The debt and the compound interest:** Poor nations, being deprived of their own resources and potentials, had to borrow money to pay for what was no longer directly available to them because of this form of extraction in foreign hands. This generated a financial debt which never stopped growing since then. This debt has been contracted at high interest rates that have pumped out of these nations the little remaining financial resources they had. Every year they spend an important part of their income to repay the debt or even only to pay for the interests, and for the interests on the unpaid interests of previous years (compound interest). This is a mode of extracting still more wealth from them without yet providing them with any service or good. This is pure extraction without return.

The sum of all these partial aspects does not look like a debt of the poor to the rich; but rather of the rich to the poor. The discussion should not be about cancelling the debt of poor countries (which is an evident need) but to reverse the obligation of repayment. Let's now calculate the real debt rich countries owe to the poor. If it is not feasible, let's at least try to roughly estimate the range of what it could be. Just for interest (in both meanings of the word).

The bancor for balanced exchanges

A self-regulating system, proposed by Keynes, to maintain the best possible equilibrium in international exchanges intended to avoid wealth to accumulate on one side.

At Bretton Woods, at the end of WW2 (July 1944), the British economist John Maynard Keynes (with the effective support and common reflexion shared with E.F. Schumacher) proposed a system that intended to bring equilibrium in economic exchanges between nations. The accumulation of wealth is indeed made

possible by the disparity of reciprocal exchanges when they are not of equal values both ways. The proposed system intended to introduce a currency (called the bancor) that would help compensate the imbalances that cannot avoid arising in economic exchanges. Wikipedia explains the system in these terms:

“The ability for capital to move between countries seeking the highest interest rate frustrated Keynesian policies. By closer government control of international trade and the movement of funds, the Keynesian policy would be more effective in stimulating individual economies. The bancor, a new supranational currency to be created, would not be an international currency. It would rather be a unit of account used to track international flows of assets and liabilities, which would be conducted through the International Clearing Union (ICU), a new institution to be created. Individuals could not hold or trade in bancor. All international trade would be valued and cleared in bancor.

Each item a member country exported would add bancors to its ICU account, and each item it imported would subtract bancors. Limits would be imposed on the amount of bancors a country could accumulate by selling more abroad than it bought, and on the amount of bancor debt it could rack up by buying more than it sold. This was to stop countries building up excessive surpluses or deficits. Each country's limits would be proportional to its share of world trade.

Once initial limits had been breached, deficit countries would be allowed to depreciate, and surplus countries to appreciate their currencies. This would make deficit country goods cheaper, and surplus country goods more expensive, with the aim of stimulating a rebalancing of trade. Further bancor debit or credit position breaches would trigger mandatory action. For chronic debtors, this would include obligatory currency depreciation, rising interest payments to the ICU Reserve Fund, forced gold

sales, and capital export restrictions. For chronic creditors, it would include currency appreciation and payment of a minimum of 5 percent interest on excess credits, rising to 10 percent on larger excess credits, to the ICU's Reserve Fund. Keynes never believed that creditors would actually pay what in effect were fines; rather, he believed they would take the necessary actions ... to avoid them”.

I wish here only to notice the challenging proposal to impose a negative interest on credits: the one who accumulates wealth has to pay a fine, proportional to the wealth. This is genius!

Another remark concerns the prices on which the whole system relies. In my mind they would be a need for a sharp control of prices, for most of essential resources at least, because underpaid resources would be the equivalent of an excess of import.

I won't further discuss here this proposal because I do not have the necessary knowledge to do so. But what I find interesting in this attempt is the intention to find means to correct exchanges imbalances, that is on longer term the transfer of wealth from poor to rich. Wealth is no longer something to accumulate but something that has to circulate, something to be shared. Again, this is genius!

Of course this system proposes also a solution which is of monetary nature, that is based on conversion of the resources into an amount of a given currency (money as a yardstick). This is evidently the delicate conversion or translation that still relies on the myth that money has the polyvalent value into which land, skills, resources, infrastructures, tools, work, can be converted. This is the great lie as we just saw earlier.

Statistics

All the “tools” of domination I have described above have something in common, beyond their diversity: they are all means of changing a reality into an ideology. Weapons use force to change a relationship between two parties, in principle in equal positions, into a form of domination of one by the other (the strongest or the most violent). History tends to change facts into a narrative that proposes a more advantageous interpretation for the story-teller than what is. Cartography changes the proportions of reality to make them look more in favour of the dominator. The ecological footprint reveals the imbalance that is hidden and that nobody accepts to recognise, i.e. that the indecent contrast of wealth between rich and poor, in the use of common natural resources, becomes the main leading force in our relationships that foster domination instead of harmony. This same injustice is also frozen in exchanges and debts which consolidate the state of dependence and appear to justify it. Now, to these many tools of domination I would like to add here a last one: statistics.

Statistics as ideology

Statistics seem to be an objective science of collecting data but they are loaded by a way of looking at the world (an ideology) that defines how they will be used

Statistics collect data. As this consists in counting what is, it seems very scientific and objective. But there are in my mind two main problems (and probably many more other I will not describe here):

1) The choice of what is evaluated or measured, and how it is done, is already a subjective selection among major factors that will exclude many aspects which are yet dominant and

essential in the process that needs to be measured but will be ignored because not measured.

An example of this exclusion of important aspects is climate change. One measures parts of CO₂ in the atmosphere (in ppm) that are meant to show how much we have perturbed the quality of our atmosphere. This measure is the measure of a symptom and this symptom is really a significant symptom of climate change and what is measured is also real. But it does not relate this symptom to the real cause which consists in its link with the difference in standards of living between rich and poor. This excess of CO₂ production is in reality only the fact of maybe 10-20% of the richest part of world population. And this disparity is not measured. The increase in CO₂ is then not a process that concerns equally all people in the same way, except that the ones who are not the producers are often the victims of this evolution.

In this way statistics play a distractive role. They shift the attention from the challenge of equity to the challenge of average harmony with nature. This does not mean that the latter is irrelevant but this shift from disparity to average nevertheless changes fundamentally the way this challenge has to be interpreted and practically addressed. If it is a problem of wealth and standard of living, it should not be addressed only by a search for technological forms for alternatives of production but it should also concern standards of living, especially for the 10% richest, and transfer and sharing of wealth and resources with the other 90%. And this is rarely or even almost never mentioned; and even least done; because the strategies are defined by these same richest nations.

2) Another major aspect of statistics is what can be said of data in general. They describe facts, perceived under a specific perspective (in quantitative terms) that remains very

incomplete until these data are reinterpreted. These are only data, certainly useful to describe the facts but nevertheless not in an exhaustive ways. Data are not explanations; they provide only a partial description. They still need to be set into context, examined through many different filters, more broadly interpreted and translated or understood as dynamic processes; that is understood in a global way that rises to a higher level of perception, a global overview.

And this is the tricky step. As shown above about climate change, the data do not provide an explanation. If climate change is related to the excessive use of energy, it has to be tackled in a certain way. If it is due to strongly contrasted standards of living, between 10% of privileged people and the 90% remaining population, the challenge looks then very different. This does not mean that these two ways are in contradiction; it means that an action reduced to the first approach is delusively incomplete and therefore inefficient.

Data need interpretation but they are also subjected to ideological twist. This is why the interpretation is the necessary step but this is also the most complex and fragile. Without it there is a twist; and with it there is also the danger of a twist.

I believe this contradiction is too rarely expressed. This is even one of the most important contradictions in the indistinct use of internet. Internet provides incredible quantities of data (if they can be trusted) but rarely proposes an interpretation. We get ever more accustomed to use these data without interpreting them, as if they were the final representation of reality. They are taken in their brute state. This is a huge twist that leads us astray. This twist is indeed the real foundation of all fake news because only a trustworthy interpretation gives significance to the processes we undergo. Without this quest for truth, fake news have it easy.

By the twist they bring, which is narrowly linked with their quantitative approach, statistics, or simply non-processed data in general, become the cause of a twist of (lack of) interpretation that turns into ideology. For instance the poverty of the colonised is said to be due to his laziness, or the lack of opportunities he encounters is due to his poverty, and never to exclusion or racism. Facts seem to remain facts, as if they had no cause.

Deficit data

Deficit data are the data that try to demonstrate that the colonised is the problem; they refuse to recognise that the white settler society is indeed the real cause.

Another aspect of statistics I wish here to comment concerns what Russell Marks in his book *Black Lives, White Laws*⁴⁹, describes as *deficit data*, expression he borrows from Maggie Walter, a Palawa woman and professor of sociology at the University of Tasmania.

What they call *deficit data* are the statistics that describe the Indigenous *problem*. I intentionally use this word of *problem* because the way these statistics are collected and presented and used presents the situation as a problem to be solved. And there is evidently a problem when most Indigenous people have a shorter life expectancy, when young Indigenous people have more chances to be found in prison than at university, when the rate of suicide among Indigenous people, and especially youngsters, is much higher than for any other category of Australian population.

⁴⁹ See Russell Marks: *Black Lives, White Laws – Locked up and locked out in Australia*. La Trobe University Press, 2022.

Circular and linear

These data are said to be *deficit data* because they show a lack, a lack of opportunities for Indigenous people to live a normal life like many other Australians do. It is then perceived as a problem to be fixed; as a problem that concerns mainly Indigenous people. The problem seems therefore to be linked with indigeneity; in other words Indigenous people are the problem to be fixed.

This is the terrible shortcut that *deficit data* imply. And it evidently deeply influences the way one looks at the *problem* and the way one intends to solve it. Of course there is an urgency to allow Indigenous people to live a normal life as they wish to, to have opportunities to thrive.

The great twist in this approach consists in the untold acceptance that the problem is on the Indigenous side and that the white settler society has to offer a solution, a form of assistance. This gap in living conditions between white and black people is very real but the cause is not on Indigenous side. White institutions do not radically question why and how we came to this situation. The true cause of this deep injustice is not only to be found in the disadvantageous position for Indigenous people but principally in the dispossession of the land, in the deprivation of sovereignty rights that Indigenous people have always enjoyed for thousands of years before the day of conquest.

If this is the real cause, then the solution of the problem is not on Indigenous side. But it consists in a deep transformation in the relationship between white and black Australia. This means that the solution is principally on the white side. It is with the white settler society, with its culture, perceptions, interpretations, institutions, processes of decision-making, that is also with its whole broader philosophy and religion or anthropology that define what matters most and why it matters and what are the priorities and the subjective choices, out of aspiration for truth

but more probably out of priorities given to rough and violent privileges.

When the white society will recognise this elementary truth and necessity for change, it will be able to establish a different type of relationship with this continent, this land, and especially the First Nations. The white society will be able to recognise the primacy of Indigenous cultures on this continent; and this for its own good as well as for the good of these First Nations.

In other words, the terrible aspect of the *deficit data* is that they invite us to adopt a false approach because they focus on the lack that is defined according to white premises instead of seeing the unrevealed potential there is in Indigenous cultures, with their own laws, their own fundamental values, their deep respect of life and their elaborate knowledge of this land.

This is the crystallisation of the colonial approach that imposes its own view in replacement of what is. The “Indigenous problem” is defined by a white mentality in reference to white preferences and habits, although the deep situation of injustice should be related to the cause of the destruction: how white Australia has conquered this land, and has evicted his inhabitants, denying them the right to practise their sovereignty and to be empowered to live their own ways of living, with their own laws; intending to make tabula rasa of what was, in order to impose a new order, a white order.

The real cause is that white Australia has cancelled Indigenous culture and wisdom in order to impose its own laws, behaviours and privileges. But there are many ways to understand life and to practise it; many ways that, in their diversity, call for many forms of expressions. And especially for the recognition of the first inhabitants of this continent as a model to be inspired by. Then the problem of a minority transmutes into a new potential for all.

Chapter 10: By law or by decree

An “ethical” conquest

Conquest under “ethical” conditions

The international law used to define under which conditions a newfound land could be taken possession of. The practice remained yet in deep contradictions with the rules..

When Captain Cook was sent to Hawaii to observe the transit of the planet Venus and to New Zealand to situate and explore a new land in the South Seas which had been seen by the Dutch seafarer and explorer Abel Tasman around 1642-44 (one and a half century before Cook), Cook received very precise instructions for his mission, of which some were secret, showing the importance of the mission. Here is an extract⁵⁰:

“Whereas the making Discoverys of Countries hitherto unknown, and the Attaining a Knowledge of distant Parts which though formerly discover’d have yet been but imperfectly explored, will redound greatly to the Honour of this Nation as a Maritime Power, as well as to the Dignity of the Crown of Great Britain, and may tend greatly to the advancement of the Trade and Navigation thereof; and Whereas there is reason to imagine that a Continent or Land of great extent, may be found to the Southward of the Tract lately made by Captn Wallis in His Majesty’s Ship the Dolphin (of which you will herewith receive a Copy) or of the Tract of any former Navigators in Pursuit of the like kind, You are therefore in

Pursuance of His Majesty’s Pleasure hereby requir’d and directed to put to Sea with the Bark you Command so soon as the Observation of the Transit of the Planet Venus shall be finished and observe the following Instructions. You are to proceed to the Southward in order to make discovery of the Continent abovementioned until’ you arrive in the Latitude of 40°, unless you sooner fall in with it. But not having discover’d it or any Evident sign of it in that Run you are to proceed in search of it to the Westward between the Latitude before mentioned and the Latitude of 35° until’ you discover it, or fall in with the Eastern side of the Land discover’d by Tasman and now called New Zealand.”

The message was clear: it was about the glory and maritime power of Great Britain.

Further, in the same document, there was a clear restriction defining the minimum conditions under which this land could be taken possession of. It said:

“You are also with the Consent of the Natives to take Possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain. Or: if you find the Country uninhabited take Possession for his Majesty by setting up Proper Marks and Incriptions, as first discoverers and possessors”.

Captain Cook chose the second possibility and declared the country he “discovered” as uninhabited. He well mentioned a few indigenous but considered them as negligible quantity. Hence the theory of *Terra Nullius* (the land of nobody = with no inhabitant) was used that allowed the discoverer to take possession of the land in the name of his King.

The international law of that time (end of 18th century) in Europe was very clear in what concerned the legal conditions to apply for taking possession of “new found lands”. There were three possible conditions:

⁵⁰ https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/nsw1_doc_1768.pdf

Circular and linear

- Either the country was uninhabited and the land could be declared by the discoverer to be a new possession of his king and to be settled.
- Or the land was inhabited and it was allowed, only with the consent of the inhabitants, to use some of their land.
- Or the land was inhabited and the country was taken over by invasion and conquest, i.e. war. Nevertheless it was stipulated in this case that the rights of the indigenous had to be respected. Whatever this may mean when indigenous people have been robbed of their land and of their main rights!

As we can see the option of *Terra Nullius* (first condition) seemed to make the process much easier for the conqueror while in fact the third condition (war) was applied in most cases.

Settlers vs the Crown

Instructions from the mother country always stipulated that Indigenous people should give their consent. Yet the mere nature of the project of settlement made this impossible.

There is a huge hypocrisy in the colonial project: all instructions that came from the mother country stipulated that the settlers should respect the right of the Indigenous and only settle the land with their consent. There was evidently a deep contradiction in these commands.

Staying far away from the colonies the administration of the mother country tried to ignore what the project of conquest really meant for the original inhabitants of these conquered lands. The Governor himself, who was its official local representative and law enforcement in the colonies, usually fulfilled the same function of hypocritical moral caution, although he knew too well what was happening at the frontiers.

In the frequent process of extension of empires, there are, through history, roughly two opposed models for conquering a country that can be defined as follows:

- Either, in the first model, such as in the Roman Empire, the legions of the imperial army would conquer new territories through war and then militarily occupy these new countries. They would establish there some local representation of the imperial power, usually under the form of an administrative entity with the power to enforce Roman law. This local imperial representative would usually not act alone to assert his authority. He would try also to rely partly on the collaboration and subordination of the original local power of the place, that is of the local king or chief. This local chief would keep some personal power thanks to this support but would also have to compromise with the occupier in order to remain in place. He would be subdued to, and collaborate with, the Roman representative who would clearly impose its own domination and control.

It is then only in a second stage that new settlers would come and establish themselves and exploit the local resources, but yet under conditions strictly controlled by the central power through its local representation. They had to submit to Roman law and imperial order.

- Or, in the second model, as soon as the land would be discovered, the descriptions of its potentials or resources would attract new settlers; or convicts would be sent there in exile. The newcomers would then establish themselves, mainly by their own means, i.e. conquering for themselves these new territories on which they would tend to establish their own laws, generally laws of violence, and domination by the superiority of their weapons. The representative of the colonial authority would provide the legal frame and a “discrete”

military support for this action, as general protection against “aggressive locals”.

The main purpose consisted in conquering the land and taking possession of it with the intention of exploiting its resources or establishing a farm or plantation. The settlers would for this purpose chase away, or rather eliminate, any indigenous inhabitant or tribe that stood in their ways. The authority of the state, i.e. the Governor as local representative of the King of the mother country, was officially the authority in charge but he was usually not able to have the settlers respect the order of law of which he was the representative. The reason was that the settlers were the real protagonists of the colonial project and they were acting as it seemed in their own advantage, which was indeed conforming to the perspective of colonisation itself. The Governor had then to compose with both parties: the settlers on one side and the King on the other.

We can recognise in these two opposed models a great similarity with the two contrasting patterns of continental and seashore societies. This is not a coincidence. Roughly we may say that the first model was rather the pattern applied by Spanish colonisation (a continental society) while the second was the model for British settlement (a seashore society). The first brought state order; the second implemented settler’s “laws” (enforced by weapons).

It is interesting to note that the second model demonstrated to be far more efficient because it brought some imposing wealth back home. It is how the British trade people could in a certain way progressively take over Spanish conquests in South America. Although they were not the settlers of these countries, the seashore traders were able to divert the acquired wealth of the continental society. The silver of Potosi and the gold of Ouro Preto finished in London, thanks to an incredible power of trade and extraction of resources from the colonies of others that

brought an incredible wealth back to Britain. This shows the great interest (economic efficiency) there was in leaving settlers or traders dictate their laws in the colonies. Their rough methods were bringing profit, huge profits.

Officially, when the discoverer would initially declare the possession of the land in the name of his King, he would also declare that the land would be integrated into the Empire. The authority of the King was in this way established on these faraway countries. The British law would in this way become prevalent and replace and erase any other previous local law, custom, habit, social order. They would replace and erase the indigenous customs and laws, which, since centuries or even millennia, were explicit and very solidly established on these conquered lands. They used indeed to regulate all relationships between the locals. This same process of eradication of what originally existed was also applied to the presence of the indigenous populations: the concept of *Terra Nullius* made them irrelevant, like inexistent. Even their existence was denied, by mere obliteration of their presence.

The new situation of the incomers (new settlers, authority of the King, British laws) would make *tabula rasa* of the existing situation and replace what was (indigenous culture) by what was called *civilisation*. The pre-existing people, culture and land were denied and replaced by the new imported model. Indigenous people were even physically eliminated in order to implement this concept of *Terra Nullius*, i.e. to make it become reality.

3 antagonistic ways of thinking

Indigenous people, the local Governor and the settlers have three very different sets of laws they refer to, which are conflicting: the land, the Crown, the conquest.

Circular and linear

With the three groups of people in game (the Indigenous people, the Governor, the settlers) we have then a very complex situation:

- 1) Indigenous laws have been declared invalid but the Indigenous people were not aware of this change; first because they would not have accepted this new domination and such an official annihilation of their culture and of their own being; and, second, because even nothing had been explained to them and they knew nothing of these new regulations and laws that had to apply. They were not informed nor instructed. One can see how the clause of consent was completely ignored although it was officially affirmed.
- 2) On the other hand the new authority was not really in control because the initiative was mainly left to the settlers who generally behaved as if there were no law. The official law seemed rather like a moral cover that yet was in complete contradiction with the real intention of colonisation by the Crown. The same Crown had sent armed ships and soldiers to the colonies to conquer “newfound” lands and support the invasion. This was the real project.
- 3) The settlers on their part had free latitude to behave as they wanted, although it was expected that they would try to justify their acts in the name of the imperial order. The reason for their freedom to act as they thought adequate for themselves was that the mother country had great interest in the wealth they were producing that allowed the mother country to thrive: mainly wool and also other resources.

These deep contradictions between these three different systems and ways of thinking and acting (indigenous, local representative and settlers) could only exacerbate the conflicting tension between all protagonists. The settlers wanted more support and

protection from the state for their initiative of stealing the land from Indigenous people and extracting wealth.

They wanted even the Native Police to protect them in their invasive action. This institution of the Native Police was by itself the expression of the deep contradiction and hypocrisy of the authority. It had a white head with indigenous people enrolled to do the dirty work. David Marr⁵¹ did a very well documented description of the acts of this Native Police and the way the settlers were pushing to more repression (massacre) of Indigenous people. The cruelty of the Native Police is well-known and shows the deep ambiguity of the stands of the official actors who were hiding behind great principles but were acting, behind the screen of their pretended entitlement, in unrestricted cruel ways that negated all these principle.

The law of the sword

The mighty has always tried to justify or consolidate his power with the help of the law that tried to demonstrate his domination was legal. Law is power.

As we can see in the description I just made of the ways the rights of settlers and the authority of the Governor act against the rights of the Indigenous people, there is an incredible level of hypocrisy that tries to demonstrate that the principle of respect of indigenous people applies although it does not at all. This is just the exercise of shear force. Yet it is repetitively referred to these first instructions given to Captain Cook that conquest can only happen in agreement with the local population.

It is astonishing that, in the expansion of the British Empire, there is such an insistence on this principle when it is yet

⁵¹ David Marr: *Killing for Country, a Family Story*. Black Inc. 2023.

systematically denied. We can notice here again how it is typical of a seashore society that lets the settlers free to conquer the land, in a form of private initiative, while the official power hides behind regulations. “We did not do it”.

It is also interesting to compare this approach with the approach of a continental society, such as Spain. The Spaniards did not make such a fuss over these principles. They just grabbed the land as the British did, but without rhetorical or legal attempt of justification. In the 16th century, before the expansion of British power overseas, Spain was the most powerful state in Europe or in the world. It had just conquered South America. The sun was never setting on its new empire.

The Spanish theologian Francisco de Vittoria⁵² tried in 1530 to find a justification for the conquest of these newfound indigenous lands. His new juridical construction was based on the elementary concept of the “right of people” (*jus gentium*), inherited from Roman law, that used to define how people in our society may relate to one another and which are their respective rights and obligations. Although he was a theologian, Vittoria had no restraint to describe new ways of thinking that would adapt to dominating interests. The justification of conquest was not to be found in the kind of instructions the British Crown was trying to claim. It was not either in the fact these lands were uninhabited, or that the Pope has attributed them to the Spanish Crown, or that it was a duty of Christians to convert these poor pagans. No, it was what he called the “right of communication” (*jus communicandi*) that made it an right for the Spaniards to invade these lands.

⁵² The two references in this comment to Francisco de Vittoria and Hugo Grotius are borrowed from Perry Anderson in the *New Left Review*, n° 143, London, Sept-Oct 2023.
<https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii143/articles/perry-anderson-the-standard-of-civilization>

This right consisted in the freedom to practise travel and trade wherever it pleased the newcomers. As the “Indians” resisted the exercise of this right, it was legal for the Spaniards to repress this form of unlawful resistance, which denied the elementary right of communication, and to deprive these people of their lands. If they persisted to resist they could be punished and even enslaved. As we can see, this was typically a way of thinking and a process that were proper to a continental society in which the state was the main agent of conquest. But all this was finally made in the name of the traders. Then this minute difference between two mentalities (British and Spanish) finally amounts to no big difference. This is just a difference in the discourse.

Later, in the 17th century, the Dutch diplomat Hugo Grotius developed another juridical theory. He called it the “right of capture” (*jus praedae*) which consisted, in the wider concept of Liberty at Sea, in the freedom to pillage any ship one could meet in the free space of the ocean where no law applied, except this right of total lack of restraint. One of the cousins of Grotius, who was a captain in the Dutch East India Company, had just seized the freight of copper, silk, porcelain and silver of a Portuguese ship, the worth of which exceeded the annual income of England. Later Grotius extended even this right further to what he called the right of the sword (*jus gladii*) that consisted simply in the right to attack and conquer and kill anybody or any land that could resist European expansion.

What matters in these examples is the ability of lawyers, or rather of people in power positions, to develop theories that are able to justify anything. The discourse shapes the understanding of fundamental rights and transforms these rights into something more suitable for the dominator. And it translates them into written laws that allow the powerful to do what he wants to. Even the producer of this false discourse finishes by believing in it. One tricks oneself.

Circular and linear

I won't develop this topic further but I want just to notice that the present Council of security with its five permanent members that dispose of a right of veto (US, UK, France, Russia, China) is built on the same principle. It had already an ancestor. The Treaty of Vienna (1815) declared, after the end of Napoleonic Wars, that the five nations of the United Kingdom, Russia, Austria, Prussia and France were major powers and had therefore a privileged status in the international society.

After the First World War the Paris Peace Conference (1920) gave birth to the League of Nations. A similar system of unequal powers was installed that declared the special status of the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Japan and the United States. The United States had the Monroe doctrine recognised, which made of South America the back garden of the USA, as an instrument "that ensures the maintenance of peace".

When the UNO was formed in 1945 the exceptional status of the United States in this organisation was confirmed; the successive violations of its rules by the USA would not bring about any thorough investigation into their irregular interventions against other independent countries, such as in South-America, or even in their military invasions of Afghanistan or Iraq. Some are above the law.

If I dare to be crude and tell what seems evident to everybody, but is rarely said, this is the following. The whole construction of the juridical system that rules international relationships is based on the power of the sword (*jus gladii*) as Grotius suggested it. It is a construction that legitimises the domination of the powerful. Without this incredible distortion that overrides the law, the UNO would be today able to fulfil its role as a democratic egalitarian assembly of nations; the stand or position of each one would be of equal weight to the one of others, whether small or big, weak or powerful, or maybe simply proportional to its

population, but certainly not to its (military) power. No sword, but law. No domination but equity. And open dialogue.

Sadly one can observe the same evolution towards increased domination of the powerful, in most democracies where the power of influencing corporations shapes the legal frame for democratic expression. Although they constitute elementary means of democratic expression, public demonstrations tend nowadays to be punished by heavy fines or even many months of imprisonment when they dare to challenge the issues of climate change or the interests of main corporations generating pollution or practising land grab and environmental devastation. The powerful has means to define the legal system whose purpose is not to establish justice but to protect private interests at the expense of the public good.

In fact, to be clear, there is only one fundamental law. This consists in the power of compassion, in a general aspiration for sharing and equality. This power of compassion – which is also a real power that yet does not dominate – should be the core of any human legislation. On this base one could rebuild a very different juridical national and international system that would allow every nation and every ethnic group to have their rights recognised and defended by the common power of all nations when they agree to work together. This seems an ideal. But it remains nevertheless the only possible path of common sense to reach happiness. This is not indifferent.

The idea of nation-state

Taking possession of these faraway lands would mean to integrate them into the vast Empire and to force their traditional structure into the pattern of a nation.

The greatest aberration or contradiction of the colonial project was the will to replace a much elaborated traditional social

system based on a diversity of clans, as well as a network of communities narrowly connected with one another, by the imported abstract concept of a nation-state that was meant to represent the wider body that would embrace all people and control their destiny.

The concept of the nation-state was born at the time of the treaty of Westphalia (1648) when the different parties came to the awareness that royal power was not sufficient to consolidate the leading role of authority over a country. A further dimension was needed that consisted in the need for a country to manage the way the country was evolving as an identifiable body. The nation-state was then a model – or a form of container – that demonstrated how people of all classes and origins, settled on a well-defined territory, could live together.

This abstraction of the idea of the nation-state defined by the boundaries of its territory has allowed dominant state powers (such as Portugal, Spain, Britain, France, the Netherlands) to consolidate their authority on their own population; and also to reinforce their domination over faraway countries (the colonies). But these nation-states never could be representative of all their citizens, given the high diversity of them, i.e. at the same time the citizens of the home country, the convicts, the settlers in the colonies, the indigenous populations of the colonies.

By essence – and this has not changed in modern history – the concept of the nation-state is based on the domination of a restricted elite in power in the mother country over a larger mass of people, at home and abroad. This elitist pattern excludes and marginalises most inhabitants who do not fit into the mould: first, at home, the lower social classes, strangers, migrants, refugees, travellers, marginal; and, in the colonies, the Governor, the squattocracy, the settlers, the convicts and the most despised and rejected indigenous people or nomads. There is a clear hierarchy, in the mother country, between the leaders, the

aristocracy, the wealthy classes, the workers, the marginal, and also, in the colonies, between the representatives of order, the settlers, the ex-convicts (after they had been set free), the convicts serving their sentence, the indigenous people who worked for colonists, the indigenous people who fought the invaders. Visibly they do not all “enjoy” the same level of inclusiveness. So many cannot be heard. They have no voice.

Spatially this nation-state is delimited by the occupation of a well-defined territory within its well-defined boundaries. There is a strict line that separates an inside and an outside. The nation is defined in terms of Us and Them; hence the difficulty to link with others in harmonious terms, as everything oppose the ones and the others.

The symbolic representation of the nation, as an abstract self-image or as a unifying myth, also does not answer the needs or sensibilities of all inhabitants, for reasons of personal experience, destiny, choice, philosophy, ideology, religion. It cannot represent all sensibilities. It cannot include everybody because it cannot satisfy the needs of all. It is then an image artificially imposed, top down, onto the personal culture of the inhabitants in order to constrain them to belong to a body that does not respond to their aspirations. Because it is enforced from the top this image cannot resonate with, or become the expression of, aspirations that would rise, bottom up, from the experiences and choices of local communities.

This leading national image or myth translates usually in different forms of celebrations of the national day, of glory of the past. It relies on patriotism, on the national pride, on a common glorious past, on the history of the nation which are meant to activate a cohesive force of solidarity; although so many aspects of daily life at the same time create conflicts of interests between its members. Principally and practically, this national body is defined and experienced in institutional terms, before it can

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become alive and take shape according to the aspirations and choices of its many diversified members and actors.

This concept of the nation-state develops principally at institutional level; and not locally among the people concerned. This pattern of unification and domination is deeply in contrast with the traditional model of tribal living which is based on cooperation and local power, although this traditional model is also stratified and clearly structured, but yet integrated in daily life.

As ordinary people we cannot relate to this abstract image of such a vast collectivity (the whole nation). It makes no sense. There is in this concept of the nation-state a tremendous problem of scale. As human beings who experience their immediate environment, we can only grasp what we can experience or perceive on our own skin, at our own level, even if it is abstract. This means that we need a personal connection to this dimension and we can only perceive it if we can feel it is active in our lives.

Evidently the management of collective issues such as education, health, management of resources, equity of access to wealth, and so on, are important issues that have to be dealt with. It is indeed only when the leadership of these fields of action meet the people on grassroot level that the dimension of the wider level of together-living takes shape and makes sense.

This is where democracy is meant to insufflate a new spirit in these institutions. Let's see then what happens on this level.

By decree or by law

In the mother country decisions are taken by law; in the colonies by decree. Many aspects of democracy in ex-colonies are still impregnated by this dissonance.

The following text is intentionally challenging. The insight that gave birth to the considerations I will express here came to me when I listened to Gillian Triggs, President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, in a lecture she gave (November 2018) in Bega, South Coast of New South Wales, and then I read her recent book *Speaking Up*.⁵³

Gillian Triggs describes how the Australian government practices a form of authoritarian way of governing by decrees in many fields that principally touch human rights; such as rights of Aboriginal people, of refugees, of vulnerable people, or similar.

Thanks to her my insight was that this way of governing is a typical form inherited from the colonial system. I am not a lawyer, I am just an ordinary citizen who observes what happens in our country and tries to make sense of it. The following interpretation is only my own.

To make what I mean more explicit, I have first to describe where I come from because, being born in another culture with a very different democratic system, I have integrated other values and have had other experiences. I was born in Switzerland which has, like Australia, a federal system, yet based much more on direct democracy and management of issues at the lowest possible level, i.e. at state level or even local council level. Nevertheless nowadays with the growing complexity and interaction on all levels, there is a tendency for centralisation and globalisation that impregnates also the evolution of the Swiss system like everywhere else. I'm aware that the Swiss system is far from ideal, yet it presents in my eyes (maybe because I know it better and am accustomed to it) many positive aspects that could inspire other countries.

⁵³ Gillian Triggs: *Speaking Up*. Melbourne University Pub. 2020.

The deep contradiction is the following. In the colonial system there are mainly two entities that are governed according to very contrasting principles: the mother country on one hand and the colonies on the other hand.

- The mother country is meant to be ruled by law principles and law is meant to be the fruit of democratic debates and choices. Democracy at the time of the Empire was not as developed as today. It was mainly the privilege of land owners. Yet the principle remains as a process of some participation of a wider range of citizens in the elaboration of the juridical frame.
- By contrast the colonies are ruled by decrees. The Governor is in charge and takes decisions that suit his mission (defined by the mother country) and his intentions. Of course the government of the mother country keeps an eye on him. As we saw earlier, in early Australian history, the British government did everything it could to put pressure on the Governor and the settlers to behave in respect of the Indigenous people because the mother country did not want to stain its own image. Yet these Indigenous people were considered as inferior or even non-existent or non-human and the logic itself of colonial invasion implied violence and oppression: taking the land and killing the ones who would resist.

There is evidently a deep contradiction between the rule of law at home and the force of decree in the colonies although they are both meant to deal with the citizens of the empire they should treat in equal ways. This difference is based on discrimination that establishes a clear distinction between “us” (white supremacists) and “them” (Indigenous people or convicts). Listening to Gillian Triggs, I came to the conclusion that most of the forms of discrimination today in Australia (especially concerning Aboriginal people, but also refugees or vulnerable people in general) are still today penetrated with an ingrained spirit of colonialism that could not be eliminated along the two

centuries of white presence in Australia.

It is true that, over more than two centuries, the system has evolved towards a parliamentary system that seems to represent the best forms of democratic process. Yet the spirit has remained of colonial domination i.e. impregnated on the one hand by the notion of Empire (imposing power over the “other”) and on the other hand by the practice of decree. It seems urgent to me that a deep critical review should be made of all Australian institutions in this perspective. The main question is: what should be radically changed in order to eradicate all traces of colonialism and how can Australia become a true democracy, based on the practice of law and human rights?

Triggs claims we need a Charter of Rights to provide a legal and ethical frame to the way decisions are taken. A Charter of Human Rights would give a frame which all decisions should respect. A Charter of Human Rights would set out a list of human rights and assign the executive, legislature and judiciary specific roles in protecting those rights.

In Australia the preference is given for parliamentary processes rather than judicial interpretation. As Gillian Triggs writes⁵⁴:

“[This] is entirely consistent with the government’s suspicion of the judiciary as activist lawmakers and its insistence upon the sovereignty of parliament. This makes some sense in principle. Australia has evolved an essentially parliamentary approach to the protection of liberty. As parliaments enact the laws, they should be guardians of common law freedoms and rights. The practical reality, however, is that federal and state parliaments have repeatedly failed to protect human rights and have legislated to restrict even the most widely recognised freedoms. Parliaments continue to chip away

⁵⁴ Gillian Triggs: *Speaking Up*. Melbourne University Press, 2018.

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our rights, creating a new norm of tolerance for human rights violations. The Scrutiny Committee has splintered along party lines. [...] The failure of parliament and our courts to protect human rights is clear, whether we look at the indefinite detention of asylum seekers, of people with cognitive disabilities, of Indigenous juveniles or of violent criminals, Aboriginal deaths in custody, domestic violence, racism in the delivery of health services, and gender inequality are witness to a dysfunctional parliament and disempowered courts.”

This means that the Parliament is free to pass any law, depending on the majority of Members of Parliament who vote for them. The decision can be what the majority of the Members of Parliament decide it to be. There is no exterior frame to guide them. There is no Charter they have to respect and which would restrict or constrain them in the practice of their power.

Given, in Australia, the adoption of the Westminster model with its two party system (about which we will comment later), there is almost inevitably a sharp polarisation between two groups of influence. Luckily a third force of the Greens and Independents seems to emerge progressively because this bipolar system does not seem to function properly. Unless both parties agree about a strategy (as e.g. for the “stop the boats” strategy against the welcome of asylum seekers) or just have no interest for urgent issues (e.g. Aboriginal essential needs and death in custody, or urgency of a decisive reaction against climate change), parliamentarians undergo no constraint that would dictate minimum standards of equity concerning either urgent issues or even minimum tolerances of certain situation of imbalance.

There is almost no frame – such as for instance general guidelines adopted by consensus – that could restrict or inspire their action. Political interests, rather than ethics or social norms of equity, become prevalent and shape our conditions for daily living. There is little room for a vision in this approach. There is

no overarching legal frame that would constrain the practice. As such, by absence of a wider legal frame, this opens the way to the practice of decree because any majority in the Parliament can decide anything that suits its interests. There are no longer checks and balances.

It must be added that the contradiction of two antagonistic systems, between the mother country, ruled by law, and the colonies, managed by decree, implies not only a degradation of human relationships in the colony but also, as we saw earlier, a boomerang effect onto the mother country because the unjust treatment of colonial people by nationals of the mother country corrupts the spirit of the mother country.

This is precisely what has very positively provoked the anti-slave movement in England or similar social anti-racism trends that reacted very powerfully against these forms of corruption in the mother country as well as in the colonies. The interdependence of these two antagonistic behaviours and sets of values could not escape the attention of anybody. This is here a strong statement that can yet be easily justified. Britain has adopted democratic forms that are still today very much marked by the spirit of the Empire, i.e. a spirit of domination. It is certainly an important factor in the crisis which Britain goes now through. The spirit of the Empire generates state institutions that are all-powerful and refuse any form of control by a third party. This is also part of the present political crisis we experience in Australia.

I believe we have to distinguish between the imperial and the colonial ways of understanding the world because they both rely on significantly different statements.

- The imperial model is one of domination of the world by a commercial and military power that believes (or only pretends to believe) that it is culturally superior, although its superiority

consists only in the use of better ships and weapons, and less moral restraint.

- The colonial model consists rather in discrimination and arbitrary egocentric or ethnocentric ways of unilaterally deciding by decrees of the destiny of others (the Indigenous, the strangers, the minorities, the disable, the poor, the weak).

What I observe in my direct environment in Australia is the following. The role of the federal government is indeed very powerful and does not accept any resistance (Empire mentality). Access to state services is in general made difficult for the users. Calling a state or federal service is an act of courage and patience if it even can be successful and not turn into vicious circles of automated responses. There is no personal name of contact, no direct phone number, no mention of a physical place (address), on usual administrative decisions (taxation, social security, registers). The extension of computerisation makes it more difficult for users to be heard. The relation Commonwealth- or State-citizen is only one way (top-down power). Regulations are drastic and extremely constraining. Forms to be filled (tax return, declaration, application) are extensive and complex. many fields are often already filled and cannot be changed. The imbroglio and complexity of the administrative system seems to increase with time instead of aiming at simplification. Discrimination and arbitrary decisions are characteristics of public life (decree). Many authoritarian procedures are illegal, without appeal (detention, refugees). The elementary right of expression is often restricted (like for people in charge of asylum seekers on Manus Island or Nauru, demonstrations, activists). It seems there is no easy procedural way to contest or resist any state decision, except a heavy legal procedure.

A democratic system

Bipolarity of the Westminster model

Colonisation imposed on the colonies a parliamentary system that triggers black and white polarisation. It prevents true dialogue and reaching of consensus.

As it has been imposed by the coloniser or rather inherited from it without much deep reflection on the model to be applied – the real priority being to become an independent and sovereign country - it is interesting to examine the Westminster model and see why it is triggering the same flaws that prevent direct democratic control by the ordinary people at grassroot level.

After years of British colonisation, when Australia became independent as a sovereign country (called the Commonwealth of Australia) in January 1901, the Westminster model was adopted, straight from the mother country, as the form of parliamentary democracy that would apply. The Westminster model is characterised by the fact there are two parties (such as Conservatives and Labour, or Tory and Whig): one in power which forms the government, and the second in opposition. Note, for the humour of the situation, that these two terms of Tory and Whig were originally abusive terms used to call the opposite side.

There is here a very crucial aspect. The Government is not formed independently from Parliament but its members are exclusively chosen among members of Parliament. The independence of executive and legislative is then powerfully weakened. I'll soon come back to this point.

The first problem with this Westminster model is that it creates polarity. Members of Parliament are expected to align with their own party. It creates then two groups that affront each other. If

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one says *white*, the other says *black*. There are little opportunities for collaboration between the two forces because the priority is to be faithful to one's own group and to defend the interests of one's party. The expression *crossing the floor* – when one Parliamentarian dares to vote like the opposed party – is very telling of this contested possibility for personal freedom to express another opinion, which will be resented by the colleagues as treason.

It means that the long-term common good of the nation comes second, behind the short-term opportunities of the party. The role of the opposition is almost forced into preventing the Government from doing what needs to be done. Most issues are turned into confrontation of two competitors which makes the real topic of the debate almost irrelevant, or at least the debate is adapted to the short-term interests of the parties.

The debate, by its absence, cannot open new ways of understanding or of broadening the spectrum of possibilities through a constructive dialogue. These are the worst possible conditions to stimulate a true democratic process that would address the real measures at stake and their foreseeable consequences. In these derailed conditions it is very difficult to engage into a true and honest discussion with an open mind in the search for truth and the best possible solution. There cannot be consensus either. There cannot even be dialogue, not even as confrontation of ideas. The bi-polarity leads to the blockage of authentic dialogue. One even does not dream of the quality of dialogue I have described earlier.

It seems this bipolar system has yet, at present in Australia, the tendency to evolve towards diversification. A third force appears and strengthens its position such as the Greens who propose a kind of third way that yet is more similar to the Labour strategy than to the Conservative orientation. On top of this, many

representatives present themselves as Independents, who precisely bring the necessary diversity into the game.

This narrow attenuation of a two party system impacts also on the way elections are processed.

The winner takes all

The electoral system in Australia is falsified by the fact only one candidate by electorate can be elected, collecting 50% of the vote using preferences = votes given to other candidates.

The electoral system in Australia is caught by the rules inherent to a two party system. It is surprising how the electoral system needs to twist the results of the elections in order for the system to produce a result. Let's see how. I will explain the system in my own way. In the present footnote you'll find the official explanation by the Australia Electoral Commission (AEC)⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ The Australian Electoral Commission explains it as follows (on its website – Febr. 2024) https://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/counting/hor_count.htm

A House of Representatives candidate is elected if they gain more than 50 per cent of the formal vote.

First, all of the number '1' votes are counted for each candidate. If a candidate gets more than half the total first preference votes, that candidate will be elected.

If no candidate has more than half of the votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded. This candidate's votes are transferred to the other candidates according to the second preferences of voters on the ballot papers for the excluded candidate. If still no candidate has more than half the votes, the candidate who now has the fewest votes is excluded and the votes are transferred according to the next preference shown. This process continues until one candidate has more than half the total number of formal votes and is elected.

For the elections at the House of Representatives each electoral division needs to elect one and only one member. For this member to be elected, she needs to have more than 50% of the votes, which is almost impossible, given there are often at least a few candidates, among which almost always at least one Conservative and one Labour, or even, on top of these two, a Green or an Independent, and a few other representatives of minor political formations. In order to ensure that the elected candidate collects more than 50%, a compulsory system of preferences is introduced. Each citizen has not only to vote for the candidate of her preference but she has also to indicate in which order she prefers the other candidates to queue behind her preferred candidate. It means she is forced, through these preferences, to transfer her vote to other candidates if her preferred candidate is eliminated because he has too few votes. This transfer happens according to the order of preferences she has chosen on her slip. Her vote will then go to another candidate, following the order of her preferences; even to the candidates she does not want to be elected if the transfer happens further down the order of preferences. It means that the only way she can influence the final result is by changing the order because all candidates have to be listed in the preferences, and only once each.

A distribution of preferences takes place in every division, even where a candidate already has an absolute majority of first preference votes. The result of this full distribution of preferences is used to calculate the two-party-preferred (TPP) statistics for divisions that have the Australian Labor Party and Coalition representatives as the final two candidates.

In divisions that do not have the Australian Labor Party and Coalition representatives as the final two candidates, a scrutiny for information is conducted to determine the TPP result. A scrutiny for information, in such cases, is a notional distribution of preferences to find the result of preference flows to the Australian Labor Party and Coalition candidates.

Her ballot paper will be treated in the following way. The first vote will go to her preferred candidate (first preference). This means that, in the electoral division, each candidate will collect a certain number of votes. At the first count the candidate who has the least votes will be eliminated. The votes this eliminated candidate has collected will be transferred to the other candidates, according to the list of the second preference indicated on the ballot papers voting for him (and his only). Then a new count will include this new contribution (after transfer). Then the next candidate will be eliminated according to the same process and his votes also transferred in the same way, but this time according to the next row of preference (that is now the third) and distributed to the remaining candidates. And so on, to the fourth or even fifth preference or even further if necessary, until one of the candidates crosses the threshold of the 50%. This candidate who gets first the 50% of the votes will be elected, but only after having collecting enough transferred votes that allow him to reach the 50% threshold.

This means that no candidate can be elected without receiving votes taken from his competitors (the further preferences), or only, very exceptionally, if the candidate collects 50% in the one first go, which probably never happens. The more one goes down the order the preferences, the more important are the contributions from other candidates, because the candidates with less votes have been eliminated first and the remaining candidates have an increasing number of votes to be transferred.

The illustration hereby shows a real example, taken from the same webpage of the AEC. In this concrete case we can see that the candidate Wilkie, who will be finally elected after the necessary transfers, had only 21.3% of the votes in the first count. It means that all other electors (78.7%) will not be represented by their candidates of their first choice because they will have been eliminated. In this example the elected candidate got more votes from other candidates by transfer (19'429 votes)

Example of a distribution of preferences: Division of Denison (2010 federal election)					
Total Formal Vote: 64 8591					
Absolute Majority (50%+1): 32 430					
	WILKIE Andrew (Indep.)	JACKSON Jonathan (ALP)	BARNES Mel (SAL)	SIMPKINS Cameron John (LP)	COUSER Geoffrey (GRN)
First count	13 788 votes 21.26%	23 215 votes 35.79%	856 votes 1.32%	14 688 votes 22.65%	12 312 votes 18.98%
	+269 votes	+229 votes	Excluded	+98 votes	+260 votes
Second count	14 057 votes 21.67%	23 444 votes 36.15%		14 786 votes 22.80%	12 572 votes 19.38%
	+6 635 votes	+4 888 votes		+1 049 votes	Excluded
Third count	20 692 votes 31.90%	28 332 votes 43.68%		15 835 votes 24.41%	
	+12 525 votes	+3 310 votes		Excluded	
Fourth count	33 217 votes 51.21%	31 642 votes 48.79%			
	ELECTED	Excluded			

than he got originally for himself (13'788 votes). Note that other candidates (e.g. Jackson with 35.8%) had even more votes on the first count than he did. It is necessary here to go down to the fourth preference to push the candidate through. The last transfer to the winning candidate amounts at 12'525 votes i.e. almost the same quantity as what he got truly for himself at the first round. As there are only five candidates, the last transfer comes really from a transfer of votes from his opponents or at least from candidates the voters did not wish to give their votes to. In rounded figures the elected candidate of this example got elected thanks to 40% of the votes for himself, 20% from second and third preferences, i.e. by transfer from probably not too antagonistic candidates, and finally around 40% by transfer from his opponent, on the last row. Is this not a complete contradiction with, and negation of, the purpose of the vote?

And we can add a quirky comment. The two remaining candidates, at the end, got each 51% and 49%, despite the heavy transfers of votes that have been done. This is a very small difference that results from the arbitrary will to force one candidate across the 50% line. Imagine now that each of these two candidates, on this last row, would be exactly equal and have both 50% of the vote. This is of course very improbable but the hypothetical case can yet be imagined to test the coherence of the system. The last transfer, on the fifth row – from which one of the two remaining candidates to the other? – would provide 100% of the votes for the winner although he had only around 20% at the start. From 20% to 100% just by a stroke of the magic wand. This is a better electoral result than in any imaginable totalitarian country. You will say: this is a mad idea to imagine such a thing. No, it is just the next possible step, according to the logic of the present system. Is the Australian electoral system one step away from the practice of totalitarian regimes? It seems indeed very near, at least in this example proposed by the AEC that concerns the logic of the system which is not meant to stop

before getting the end result and having pushed the last candidate across the line.

A tricky aspect of this system is that you do not know how to write your preferences on your ballot paper because the impact of your vote will vary according to when your preferred candidate will be eliminated. And you cannot know beforehand when it will be. The rule of thumb can be the following: if you vote for a strong candidate X, X will not be eliminated after the first row when your first preference is used. It means then – what a contradiction! – you should write in this privileged position the name of the candidate Z you absolutely do not want; you do this in order to avoid that your voice may go to Z (because the first preference will very probably not be used). But if you vote for a weak candidate Y, you have to put Z much further down to be sure Z does not get your preference. You do not know which preference will go to Z and when it will be used, but you know that this preference that will replace your weak candidate will be used soon (first? second? third?). But what if your candidate is then eliminated later? If his name is written further down the order, Z risks getting your vote, against your will. As we can see, election becomes like poker... yet without any chance you win the jackpot.

And finally, after the results of the elections have been published, you even do not know for whom you have voted; because, when you hear who has won the representation of your electoral division, you do not know when your candidate has been eliminated or in which row it did, this means which line of your ballot has counted to be given to another candidate than yours. If your candidate held long, you probably have given your suffrage to an “enemy”. Troubling! If you want to know, you have to contact the electoral commission and ask them to give you the detail of the vote and the number of suffrages for each candidate on each row of preference. I am not sure whether you can get this kind of information.

For instance, in our example, if you voted for Cameron Simpkins, you can see that he has been eliminated on the third row and then, if you remember which name you wrote on this third line (third preference) you know to whom your ballot went (this third line candidate). It was probably not the one you intended to give your vote to. Especially as, in the example, there were only five candidates and it was needed to go down pretty far in the preferences to collect the necessary number of votes (more than 50%) for the elected candidate. And to make it trickier, the transfers are also later transferred again, once or even twice. It is like ping pong; votes fly from one candidate to the next and then to a third.

They call this system “the winner takes all”. There is only one winner and he has to represent the whole electoral division, even if he collected only 21.3% of the votes in the first round as in the example. It means that the remaining 78.7% have lost their votes. They represent the 4/5 of the electors but they are not represented. The expression “the winner takes all” is very relevant. It shows the trickery how the whole lot is given to the one who got only 20% of the votes. The winner takes all: this is the slogan of colonialism, of capitalism, of totalitarianism, not of democracy. The winner takes all that is not his. Sad system that looks for what it is not.

To allow a true representation, it would be enough to abandon the system of preference and to form larger electoral divisions, regrouping them three by three, or even five by five. The system would then offer respectively three or five seats for the same electoral division; and these seats would be shared by three or five candidates, each receiving a part of the representation, proportionally to the votes given to him or her personally. The representation will then be proportional and be a more adequate representation of the trends in the electoral division. There would be also three or five times more votes for one division. But this would work against the two party system, because it would

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introduce – and this is precisely the gain – a more diversified representation that would better illustrate the positions of the voters.

The three independent powers

As the Government is composed by members of Parliament, there is not sharp separation between executive and legislative powers. These are the same people (for almost one half).

This is a principle that was established at the French revolution that democracy needs the three powers (executive, legislative, judiciary) to be distinct and independent from one another. It means that they must be enacted by distinct people who cannot be actors in more than one; at least at the same level, i.e. local, state or federal.

The Government (the executive), as first power, is the acting arm of democracy. It is the one which initiates and acts and transforms the society by concrete measures or initiatives: it defines a strategy, translates a vision into practicalities, implements technical measures.

The legislative, as second power, is the Parliament (the two chambers when there are two). Its role is to define the legal frame of action for the Government which has to obey these rules. The Government for instance elaborates the budget but this proposal of budget must be sanctioned or adapted by the Parliament (as a legislative act). It is also the Parliament which votes about the proposals of the Government when the executive needs some different legislative frame to act, such as a supplement of budget, a law to be changed, a decision to be legalised. The Parliament can also initiate some action or change of attitude when it votes a constraining obligation for the Government to implement some principles or practice a different

politics, like redefine the principles that define the tax system, or impose a strategy that protects some vulnerable categories of population. The Government has then to adapt to this kind of constraints imposed by the Parliament (the legislative).

The judiciary, as third power, is the Court that checks that the Government acts according to the present legislation. It can also initiate inquiries. It is the guardian of democracy as a watchdog that prevents any distortion of the principles. It checks that everything runs according to the legal frame.

In Australia, there is no clear distinction of the three powers, especially not between executive and legislative. These are the same people. It means the Government proposes a project and most of the representatives will probably support it because they are part of this same majority that forms the Government. The ones who propose are the same as the ones who give their consent. They agree with themselves, which is evidently absurd. Although they have also to consider the stand of the opposition if these opponents threaten the Government to get the majority on some topic, which is not easy for them as they form the minority. It is where alliances between different parties should intervene; but this diversity is missing, because of the two party system.

In a truly democratic system that respects the distinction and independence of the three powers, the head of the Government (whether the president or the prime minister) will be elected separately from the Parliament, either by the population (direct suffrage) or by the Parliament (indirect suffrage). In any case the so-elected head of Government has to form her Government by choosing the ministers among ordinary citizens because the functions of being a Parliamentary or a member of the Government cannot be cumulated. When the head of state chooses its own cabinet (the ministers), different forms of alliances between parties intervene which the different forces in game may form. The Government has to be more or less in tune

with the forces which are active in the Parliament in order to have its proposals accepted by the legislative. But it is also necessary that they are different people, belonging maybe to the same parties, but remaining independent from the Parliament.

In such a democratic system that respects the separation of the three powers, the Government will have a “small table” in a very distinct corner of the Parliament where the ministers and their collaborators will sit who will have presented the project earlier under the form of a petition addressed to the Parliament. They are only present in the Parliament hall as guests to answer the questions asked by the representatives. They will not defend their project except by the way they answer the questions. They can even do this only with restraint. They will not take part in the debates, concerning their proposal, which will only involve members of Parliament. They will not either take part in the vote or the decision or the amendments. They will only propose and wait for the Parliament to decide about its position which will happen through the vote of the representatives and of them alone. And they will then go home and review their copy if it did not pass; or go into action if they were successful.

The role of the Parliament is also to check that the Government does not use subterfuges to avoid asking the Parliament for the legally compulsory authorisations.

In summary of the precedent comments, we can see how the two party system contributes to maintain a system inherited from colonisation that relies on decree more than on law. All the aspects we mentioned contribute to this, especially the contradictions inherent to the election system and the mingling of executive and legislative powers. And the absence of a bill of rights that would define the general spirit of democracy and the limits of the power of the Parliament, does not impose a clear definition of human rights. Without this bill of rights the Parliament can decide anything they want; such a

parliamentarian system left free to the appreciation of its members could even turn into a very repressive tool if it were conquered by destructive forces. It would need only one if the two parties to become a bit totalitarian. Of course it is not the case today because there is still a minimum of restraint; at least I hope there is. But we need to protect our democracy and especially resist the present evolution of democracies all over the world towards more polarised or more authoritarian forms of power. It depends on us to correct these flaws for the general good of all Australians.

A counter-example of grassroots democracy

Although I do not believe the Swiss model is perfect, I think it will be helpful to describe it here as counter-example and feed in this way our reflection about democracy.

I will here below present some of the qualities I see in the Swiss system. Please do not misunderstand my intention. I do not mean that Switzerland is better than Australia, because I love dearly the country where I live now and I can also see the many flaws of my country of origin. I know also how much people who work here for state administration are dedicated, kind and diligent.

I'm just here comparing two systems that have long developed through past centuries in very different contexts: one is the powerful British Empire with its many sea connections; the other is a small local shepherd-citizen community that established itself in Alpine valleys which were often cut off from their neighbours for many months of the year (because of the snow). These two models – which could not be more contrasted – have given birth to very contrasting forms of government and social collective living. The former as a form of extensive centralised state power on world scale; that intended to exploit the resources of many foreign lands in the most effective way; and the latter as

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a tiny community (originally traditional society) that tried to invent forms of living together on a very small and local scale. The former has a world ambition against rivalries of other nations; the latter aimed at simple management of local issues while defending its own autonomy and independence from external pressures.

At least that was the original pattern, many centuries ago. The situation is indeed more complex because it appears that Switzerland acts also in many ways as an imperial power with its banks, its international institutions, its weapon trade, its harbouring of many main multinational corporations such as Nestle, Ciba-Geigy-Sandoz-Hoffmann la Roche, Bührle, Sulzer, or others. It is clear that in both countries people of equal human qualities are today involved who wish the best for themselves and their families.

Once again the Swiss model is not here described as the model that should be implemented in Australia. I believe nevertheless that it is rich to compare different approaches, different mentalities or spirits because the comparison emphasises, in accord or in reaction with the proposed models, in what the main qualities and differences between them consist. It feeds the reflection and the debate; it helps us to better see what the real potentials are and it brings material for the design of what we want truly; not because it would bring ready-made solutions but rather because it allows us to become more aware of what matters for us here in Australia. It helps us to choose what we want.

I wish to describe a few aspects of the Swiss system, without special order to keep it simple:

- There are in principle three levels of government: 1) a local level (about 2'400 municipalities or councils in total), 2) a regional level (26 cantons or states in total) and 3) a global level (federal). The principle is that each issue (social welfare,

education, roads) should be treated at its lowest possible level, i.e. the most local. Yet coordination implies also that higher levels are also involved in a complementary way or exclusively (e.g. for higher education or health services, national roads, defence). The lowest level (municipality) can involve sometimes not more than some 500 or 3'000 inhabitants (a village, a valley, a town), exceptionally some 150 to 500'000 inhabitants in main cities (cities are small even Zurich, its biggest city, has 400'000 inhabitants while Geneva has 200'000). The state level (canton) some 20'000 to 500'000 people, or exceptionally more. The total Swiss population counts some 8.7 mio people (among which 25% of foreigners). that is Australia is only 3 times bigger in terms of population (while 190 times bigger in terms of land).

- Each level of government has in principle its own executive and legislative and judiciary powers which are clearly defined, distinct and delimited; and independent from one another. For reasons of costs, size and effectiveness, some neighbour municipalities have regrouped their respective services into one. This happens especially for schools, health services or justice. The separation of powers (executive, legislative, judiciary) on all levels allows each of these independent powers to challenge the two others on the same level, as well as the population can do so too by referendum or initiative, or appeal, collecting a necessary number of signatures among citizens..
- Because each issue is treated at the lowest level the access to state authority is local, direct and personal. Taxes are collected at all three levels and provide directly resources for each level of governments (not including subsidies and indirect financing from a higher level). The involvement of citizens is very direct because people are mainly concerned by local issues and everyone may see the impact of personal or collective

involvement on the decisions and the local context. Proximity, visibility and decipherability are important factors for a lively democracy.

- Any decision of any executive power (even the smallest) can be challenged by any group of local citizens who can collect a given amount of signatures to require that a given project or concept be submitted to referendum at the same level as the one on which the decision has been or should be taken (municipality, state, federal). Any citizen may also propose new laws by initiative, collecting also signatures requiring that the proposed project be submitted to public vote. On top of elections, the population is accustomed to vote a few times each year on different topics varying from the building of roads, the status of foreign people, education, energy, economics, finances, defence, foreign affairs, humanitarian issues, or all possible issues. All topics can be proposed, by the governments or different levels, or parliaments, or ordinary citizens. For each vote or election each citizen receives by post a pamphlet where the protagonists and the opponents present their respective points of view, in equal weight. The media are of course involved. Public debate on these issues can be powerful, sometimes sadly twisted by manipulation, false information, threat or undue pressures, given who are the actors and interests involved. That's life!
- Elections and representativeness are proportional; it means that, according to the proportion of votes collected locally, each party may be represented in this same proportion, because each electoral division is represented by a given number of MPs (i.e. not only one). Minorities are in this way well represented and their rights are protected.
- The federal Government is constituted of 7 ministers who are chosen by the Parliament among citizens who are not members of Parliament (ordinary Swiss citizens) or among

Representatives who have to abandon their seat in Parliament as the executive function is incompatible with the legislative one, at least on the same level (local, state, federal). The choice of these ministers by the Parliament aims in principle at representing the diversity of the population, i.e. the 3 main languages, the 26 cantons (states) in turn, cities and country, the different political sensibilities. The Government (executive) tries to take decisions by consensus despite the diversity of perspectives it represents. The federal parliament discusses issues in the three national equal languages (German, French and Italian).

This short description shows the principles of the institutional system. Yet democracy is much more than an institutional system; it is rather a living culture that has to remain alive to make the system effective and this is precisely the delicate point. This culture is (in principle!) based on mutual respect and acceptance of the roles of other powers. Balance is indeed better acquired by the game of antagonistic forces rather than by the unilateral game of one dominant homogeneous leader. Democracy means also discernment, political imagination, creative perspective, capacity for listening, integration of diversity, consensus. It is a dynamic process that has to re-evaluate constantly the aims and the means, reorienting the evolution of the social body understood as a complex compound that includes many different parts that think differently and have different interests.

Debate and dialogue, as described earlier, are meant to constitute the bone of such a form of direct democracy. Yet this practice cannot be defined by institutions and legislation. It is a lively practice that depends on the maturity of the participants and on their faculties to listen and integrate the opinions of the others to make a synthesis that represents the whole diversity of point of view. This is culture.

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Consensus and sense of community are better developed when they are the true fruits of care for one another, of concern for equity and of ability to leave space for the minorities to find their own ways of expression. The well-being of each one depends on the well-being of the general community on each level and reciprocally. Despite what one can consider an ideal institutional structure, Switzerland is far from representing all these qualities, although the regular practice of debate tends to maintain a lively positive pressure to abide by these positive principles. But principles are effective only when they are active, i.e. practised; and this depends on the maturity of the actors, not the principles.

Once again, what I described here about Switzerland is not the solution to be implemented in Australia; it just expresses qualities of proximity and consensus in diversity that are foreign to the imperial and colonial model. Switzerland indeed is nowadays dominated by far-right tendencies which show that the institutional model is not the simple ready-made solution. We need a lively democratic culture to be active and dynamic. Institutions are not capable to provide the solutions; they are only the bones on which we, as ordinary citizens, can bring flesh, life and spirit.

An alternative model to the Empire

Democracy is nowadays in a sharp crisis triggered by polarisation, individualism and loss of the sense of truth. We need urgently to develop new forms of together-living.

Nevertheless, out of the preceding description, a few qualities ensue that we can define in the following terms here below. I will try here to show how Australia can implement these qualities. It will probably look like describing a utopia but the purpose is not here to define a program of reforms. It is rather to catch the main characteristics of the “right spirit” that can lead the

transformation. It is truly about a change of mind, from the imperial mind to the democratic mind. The question is: what is true democracy when it has to enable the expression of anybody who is part of the community and to allow consensus? How to avoid also extreme tendencies to dominate the debate and derail the community process?

I wish here to enumerate a few points which are important for me and see how they can answer the needs I identify in the Australian situation as I observe it. It is evidently a very personal and subjective stand. I hope it can be helpful despite its limitations.

- 1) **Cutting the umbilical cord and being independent:** The first step to find a new identity as an independent nation is to cut the umbilical cord with England and with the Anglo-Saxon world, especially the United States. How can the queen or the king still be represented on Australian stamps? Australia needs to become an independent republic and to develop international relationships with different nations (including Britain of course, etc.).
- 2) **Rootedness in this continent as land:** We need to change fundamentally the way we look at this land (Australia). It is not the material environment we exploit (farming, mining, forestry) but it is a living entity that nourishes us materially and spiritually. We have in this way everything to learn from Aboriginal traditions. We belong to the land more than it belongs to us.
- 3) **Multiculturalism and the expression of diversity:** The first step towards true multiculturalism consists in recognising Indigenous cultures in their diversity and giving them the right for expression, i.e. for modelling our Australian society. Multiculturalism is not about integrating the many Aboriginal traditions and the many foreign migrant minorities into an

Anglo-Saxon way of living but it is an attempt to forge a society based on diversity and complementarity.

This is more than having a diversity of food traditions. It is about the recognition of different languages (i.e. other than English) becoming the normal form of expression for many people and the means of communication at official level (education, parliament, trade, law, others). Some main Aboriginal languages (at least for the ones which are still alive) should be reintroduced as official languages. All official communication, or descriptions on milk cartons, or instructions in public transport or services, should appear in these official languages.

Language is not only a means for communication. It is also an essential tool to apprehend the world, to understand it and to describe it. Language is the first step into observation, conceptualisation, philosophy, metaphysics and world vision, and then communication. The care for diversity is the first step out of racism. In Australia the prevalence of white Anglo-Saxon male society (especially in politics and sport) goes strikingly against the principles of true multiculturalism. Gender issues are a reflection of this state of mind.

- 4) **Being part of Asia – Pacific among many other nations:** Australia is no longer a floating British boat in Pacific waters. It is a continent that is rooted between Indonesia, Timor, the Indian Ocean, the many Pacific Islands and Antarctica. It has to play its role as one of many nations, not dominating the scene in the name of white supremacy but integrating among many as an actor among others that does not impose its will but yet defends principles of equality and justice. This means also resisting other dominating influences such as Western, US, Russian and Chinese trends of expansion, control or exploitation.

Another practice of democracy

As an independent nation we are able to design our democratic system as we feel adequate. To create something new we need to be free from past patterns.

- 1) **A bill of right and basic leading principles:** Gillian Triggs proposes a bill of rights for Australia as the foundation of basic human rights. This is certainly a first priority to formulate what the rules are that will guide our legislation and our decisions as well as our relationships in terms of equity, justice and social peace.

This should even go further; this should clearly define the road we intend to walk, that is the qualities which have to lead us on the way into the future. This intention should stipulate very clearly the bases on which Australia has to be built that do not rely on imperial or colonial models. Our practice should for instance be anchored on principles of sharing and care for all members of the community and of protection for the weak and the poor.

This is not a law; this is an intention concerning a quality of life. It means that the right pattern of development should not be accumulation, growth, competition and domination but rather values of sharing and equity. Finland especially, and the Nordic countries in general, have shown how these principles can foster a very different educational, health or social system that cares for the personal well-being of each member.

As it has already been said the well-being of each one depends on the well-being of the whole, and reciprocally. When goods or qualities such as knowledge, wisdom, know-how are shared, they multiply. On the other hand qualities like justice, peace, love are values that need to be shared

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freely in order to expand and bring happiness to all people. The sad thing is that we believe always that sharing deprives us. It is indeed exactly the contrary that is true. Hence the necessity for a deep change of mentality that is unescapable if we want to get out of the present crisis. This principle of sharing should become the leading motto of our Parliament and political life. It is why we urgently need a bill of rights. This will also bring clarity into the Parliament.

It means in other terms that any nation needs a few parameters to guide its evolution and these parameters should be the product of a deep debate about the major values that will lead us into the future. Consensus is a major dimension of this basic agreement. To reach consensus one needs compromises that are minor in order to reach an agreement that becomes major. What cannot be included into this consensus will simply escape local control and be controlled by external factors or actors, very probably against the interest of the national or regional community. This is the basic rule for peace.

- 2) **Democracy as a dynamic and living culture:** The institution (the constitution) must define the purpose of the machine and how it functions. Institutions provide power to the representatives in charge. But the major dimension of democracy consists in its spirit that is alive. The community gets it or does not; this makes all the difference. Only the people (the community) can channel these powers into their right measures of expression. No law, no counter-power can restrain excesses, although evidently institutional restrictions of power will help. The first basic principle of democracy is that it relies on debate that allows everybody to express their opinion. It is based on listening and understanding, on diversity and complementarity, and not on confrontation, domination, power and control. Dialogue is the basic

principle because only the interaction of antagonistic forces can bring equilibrium. Antagonism does not mean conflict; it only means combination and complementarity of different natures that keep each other in balance. Our own arm is moved by a few muscles that act in antagonistic ways, for the best effect of our personal balance. Social forces are not very different.

- 3) **The separation and independence of the three powers:** This point has already been examined at length.
- 4) **Local life: accessibility, transparency and reciprocity:** The major problem, in my eyes, of Australian politics is that it happens mainly on federal level by professionals. The game is far removed from everyday life. To be meaningful for normal citizens the democratic system has to be experienced in everyday life. The local dimension of this everyday life is evidently the major component of social together-living. This is why the principle of solving each issue at its lowest possible level is in my eyes the best rule. Most issues find their solution locally and find also the best competence locally because it is where people experience what is at stake and find solutions how to solve problems and promote equity.

Local life is the field where relationships develop and relationships are the core of our daily experience. This statement means that local issues must be treated locally. Only locally can one well understand the impact of problems and how solutions can solve them. Only locally can one know who is involved and how each actor behaves. Therefore the three constitutional powers have to find their representation locally and the technical, financial means and knowledge must also be provided locally. It means taxes must also be collected on the local level (council level). This can be done very simply without too heavy institutions.

The question remains of deciding what the right scale of a local community is, i.e. what is the ideal size for a local or regional executive council with its related parliamentary and judicial entities. Each corresponding service should also be then, if possible, represented locally and be accessible for each one. Australian administrative power (taxes, Centerlink, Medicare) are today anonymous and seem to work only one way (top down): they impose their decisions and it is impossible to contact the people in charge because they hide behind anonymity and an impersonal computer system. As it is the case for the balances of constitutional powers, each decision taken by a service must also be able to be discussed between the user and the civil servant in charge of the file. This means local agencies where real people can take decisions and be accessible. Centralisation is indeed a tool of the Empire. It is why it is powerfully practised today in Australia.

5) **Representation of all and protection of minorities:** In the present electoral system, minorities never can be represented. If each electoral division would be wider and be represented by let's say some ten representatives, each one of these ten representatives could then represent proportionally a portion (e.g.10%) of the total electoral division. Minorities would then be better represented and a form of consensus would have to be found between the different representatives because they would not only belong to two or three parties but would be much more diverse and be able to defend more numerically marginal positions. It would change radically the content of parliamentary debates. This debate would not be any longer the struggle of one half against the other half but it would have to compose with all the forces in game. It would also participate to re-establish the separation of constitutional powers because the Parliament would become again what it is meant to be: a platform that discusses the future possibilities

for the nation. This is in my eyes the only way the complexity, diversity and complementarity of a given community can be represented and consequently in a position to express most of the many perceptions by civil society. Is it not finally what we wish?

6) **A new anthropology as a search for meaning:** I believe we need today to (re)discover a new anthropology, i.e. a new search for the meaning of life and the rediscovery of the main values that should guide us, at institutional level. What is the meaning of life and what are the essential conditions to be provided for the majority to be happy? The desire to question these issues is sufficient. We do not need to agree about the answers. The need consists in asking the right questions and accepting that we have to make human and philosophical or spiritual choices in order to progress and evolve. These main values can be then leading forces of the debate, or even the topic of it. We will never find the end solution because there is probably none; and life remains a mystery. But at least we will have tried our best. Is it not what the Finish people do when they decide to make the educational system accessible for all in order to train people to become who they are meant to be; instead of forcing them into the roles of cogs of production, consumption and competition one against the other? The future is in our hands. We have and will have the society we build in our everyday lives. Let's start to get rid of the imperial and colonial models and be free to become an evolved and democratic independent society aiming at reciprocal care and sharing. This is not a utopia. It is just normal life.

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Two councils for being rooted in truth

The institution is not sufficient to maintain the right spirit. Democracy is a dynamic that is fed by the maturity and awareness of its citizens.

1) **Citizen councils:** As said a major problem of our democracy is that it happens on the top, in Parliament or in the national Government, far from the everyday lives of the citizens. We have to vote once every few years to elect people who do it for us. We may assist as spectators, watching the news on the television; usually with despair. We remain, as citizens, completely disempowered. We know also very little about the issues unless we are very motivated to educate ourselves, which is not given to most people and requires a lot of determination and skills to know how to find the right sources of information, beyond the screen of the political show. But there is a simple solution to this problem. It consists in shifting issues from the level of Parliament to a more local level, in the hands of ordinary citizens.

Local citizen councils can be this institutional local form. In the usual practice (when they exist) these councils are assemblies of ordinary people who share their points of view. They can together, in a spirit of true dialogue, come to clear conclusions and interesting propositions. They are then in charge to take a stand and propose to official instances such as local government or national parliament some deep and rich contributions to the evolution of the country, either in terms of analysis of the present state, reflections, considerations, principles, or in terms of concrete proposals, projects, initiatives. They can also act by themselves.

The essential question is of course how far they may be recognised as a representative power and why their opinion

should be respected. This is a question of social or political option to recognise, formalise and legalise their real power.

Another question is to consider how much they are representing the average population. Maybe they do not need to be. They may also represent only themselves. Participants even do not need to be elected or selected; they can just participate. And their voice is then representative of the people who are motivated to express their point of view. As it is a form of direct democracy, they do not need to represent anybody else than themselves or their own social group.

The major interest of citizen councils is that it brings each urgent issue or topic of reflection back into the social arena on the local level where it can be treated. The practice of such forms of direct democracy in other countries shows that participants are highly motivated, that they engage a lot of energy to train themselves to their new role, to find the adequate information. They have in general a great mastery of their topic, often much more than parliamentary representatives do. They not only become competent but they also make proof of special imagination, proposing original solutions. They may also show incredible aptitudes to develop a true form of dialogue and show skills to reach relative consensus, especially if they are guided, in their assembly, by a few wise people who act with recognised self-asserted moral authority. For these many reasons the practice of citizen councils could solve many problems linked with the crisis of our democracy in its tendency to create polarisation and conflict rather than dialogue and consensus.

2) **A council of Elders:** A last proposal could consist in instituting a kind of council of wise elders. These people would not be politicians but rather ordinary people who have demonstrated a high level of wisdom and whose ethical authority may be socially recognised. We know a few such

examples in our Australian society. I won't mention names because the question is not about their personal identity but about their possible authority as recognised wise people. We do not need even to agree about the wisdom they express; we just need to recognise it is wisdom; with which we may disagree.

Together they would give advice to the three powers (executive, legislative, judiciary) in an independent form that would not be liable but would only consist in giving advices and being the guardians of truth and wisdom; a critical glance of committed search for truth, justice and peace. Each interlocutor (the three powers) would be then free to listen to them or not. The principle here is the natural authority of truth. Their official position and moral authority would make their advice strongly influential. But the independence of each power would nevertheless be preserved.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart

Australian Indigenous People have designed a generous path how to come together and rebuild our nation in cooperation: a Voice to Parliament, truth-telling, Treaty.

In 2017, after long years of consultation and dialogue, there was a large meeting at Uluru, the Heart of indigenous Australia, that led to the widest ever consensus between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They all together wrote a very powerful short text (one single page) that proposed a path for the future of Indigenous People in Australia⁵⁶ and for the nation of Australia. I intentionally translate, here below in four points, the proposal of

⁵⁶ This text will serve as conclusion to this book. You can find it in the last paragraphs.

the Uluru Statement from the Heart in other words, not to impose my vision but to make more explicit some points that have been topics of conflict during the campaign that has led to the referendum. This referendum was necessary because the implementation of the proposal required a change in the Constitution. Although the proposal has been rejected in the referendum by a majority of voters, I believe it remains a very deep and mature path for our common future today. The purpose of the proposal consists in four points:

- 1) First it consists in recognition of the Indigenous People as the first inhabitants of this continent and as the oldest culture in the world. It will be a testimony to their sovereignty on this land and to the wisdom of their culture that is the result of such a long experience how to live on this continent. This reveals the enormous potential this oldest culture means for all of us in terms of creative and positive contribution to the evolution of our nation.
- 2) Second it consists in closing the gap that exists between the life conditions of Indigenous people and the rest of Australian people. As the statement says: "Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future." All the measures and false promises of the past have not succeeded to close the gap. This gap will irremediably divide our nation until it will be closed and Indigenous people have equal rights and chances in our Australian society.
- 3) Third, it consists in instituting a Voice to Parliament that will allow Indigenous people to express their will and propose solutions to the issues that concern them. It will empower them to be the main actors and manage, bottom up, their own

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situation instead of having to rely on federal and state services that act top down, in ways of assistance. Only empowerment can propose new ways that are not relying on assistance.

- 4) Four, it consists in a process of coming together after the struggle (*makarrata*) and truth-telling as well as a Treaty between the nation and the First Nations that lived on this continent for more than 60'000 years. Only a clear recognition of the past (colonisation, white supremacy) and what it has meant for Indigenous people and for white Australians can allow us to go forward.

It is essential to emphasize here the generosity of the proposal that offers a path of possible forgiveness, reconciliation and cooperation. The proposal ensues out of such a high level of maturity and deeper understanding. It is very moving. I'll come back to this later.

Rejection of reconciliation

This inspiring call for inclusiveness was rejected by the Australian people. The teaching of this result reveals a country still deeply marked by the ideology of colonisation.

After a long destructive campaign where the opposition tried to discredit the project and throw doubt into the mind of the voters, the project has been rejected by 60% of the voters (3 against, 2 for), despite no solid argument was even made against the Voice to Parliament that would show its problematic sides.

The vote is very revealing of where the nation stands in relation to its origins, with an extremely old indigenous culture and a process of violent colonisation, imbibed by the values of white supremacy as I described it earlier. The result of the referendum is still very fresh and it is too early to make an analysis of the process. Yet, without going too much into details, I would like to

make here a few remarks concerning the different attitudes that are revealed by this vote. Many fake affirmations and threats have also participated to twist the real issue of this proposal and hidden the positive future that the proposal was offering.

- 1) **Fear:** The campaign has been impregnated by fear, a fear carefully instilled and maintained by the opposition. A fear of the unknown, especially of the implications the proposed process could imply that we will not know before we engage into it. The Voice is only a tool we have to learn how to use; it would require some time of practice and fine tuning. Also fear of what Indigenous people could draw out of their own culture and practices which the non-indigenous people did not know from their own experience because they never lived with Indigenous people. Fear of change.
- 2) **YES or NO:** The YES means clear support for the proposal and acceptance of the offer to walk this path together; it is active. By contrast the NO expresses both either a fearful opposition (a NO-NO) or just a non-decidedness (a not YES). The second answer is then passive. It is difficult to decipher what is the real proportion of these two attitudes in the NO vote. The opposition has thoroughly exploited this ambiguity, with the humiliating slogan for its followers "if you don't know, vote NO". Many people were undecided until the last moment, especially because of all the ambivalent affirmations that had been spread against the Voice. Yet it reveals a clear stand to remain undecided; that is the question does not trigger an energetic response, sign of indifference or ignorance.
- 3) **Disinformation:** A constant flow of false information or interpretations or projections that could not be corrected and was amplified by the role of social media and algorithms that accentuate the attraction for conflicting affirmations. Fear

(again) of any false projection, invented threat, conspiracy theory.

- 4) **Constitution:** A fear of changing the Constitution as if this legal frame – inherited from the early years of infancy of the nation and attempts for national independence – were so sacred that it could not be modified. The ignorance of what this Constitution is and of its function. A great confusion between leading principles (constitution) and details (legislation) to be fixed later by the democratic processes of the parliamentary institution.
- 5) **Denial of history:** A deep denial of history, of what colonisation had been and its consequences and marks left on our society: the violence, the invasion, the killing, the exploitation; the humiliation, the contempt. A denial of what this meant for the First Nations and the heavy impact it has nowadays on the nation as long as it is not openly discussed and recognised and processed. Here again fear, fear of revenge, of compensation, of losing the land.
- 6) **Ignorance:** The ignorance of what was at stake, made intentionally more confuse by the opposition in order to spread trouble. Self-centeredness in refusing to consider what concerns in priority Indigenous people, more than non-indigenous.
- 7) **Narrow personal experience:** Striking how participants in the campaign were very much the reflection of their own experience,
 - for instance as Indigenous people, experiencing daily the heritage of colonisation, the hardship of the gap or having regularly to deal with them, who were directly concerned by the proposal as a part of solution to their own situation;
 - or as Indigenous leaders or elders, having a deep knowledge of the issues concerning their people and

having acquired a special wisdom, who were the main support of the proposal;

- or as Indigenous people, having on the contrary succeeded in their life to overcome the gap and thinking others should also do the same, who were affirming that there were no structural problem linked with indigeneity, that colonisation had nor harmed Indigenous people; saying: pull up your socks;
- or non-indigenous people as heirs of settlers fortune and mentality or farmers, having direct interest in owning the land, both refusing to recognise how their attitudes and privileges are opposing fundamental rights of Indigenous people; these people had advantage to resist change;
- or as new Australians, establishing themselves recently in this new land while being free of this heritage from the past and free to think differently, who were very positive to the proposal because it brought more justice;
- or as educated and wealthy city or academic people, having an overview of the situation, not feeling threaten in any way by the proposal, who believed in its implementation;
- or political leaders with narrow views dictated by short term political or economic interest, who opposed the proposal for reasons that did not have anything to do with its content;
- or so many others...

Of course each of these profiles is a caricature, and some of these categories or people are more mature and more truthful than others. Each experience is an opening to a part of reality, especially if the experience is processed intelligently, and it is also at the same time a conditioning restriction to opening one's mind. Each experience is narrower than reality and calls for listening to other points of view and

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other experiences or points of view to get enriched and grasp a wider range of the spectrum.

- 8) **Essence of Indigeneity:** A confusion between race and indigeneity, as explained earlier. The question was how Indigenous people could live in their culture and contribute with it to the wellbeing of the nation. This is the same issue as in so many other places in the world where indigenous people have been marginalised (Haudenosaunee in the USA-Canada, Saami in Finland-Norway, Kalashas in Pakistan, Aymaras in Bolivia, Buryats in Siberia, among thousands of other indigenous groups throughout the world). Indigeneity is not necessarily linked with race.
- 9) **Racism:** But race comes yet on top of this distinction of indigeneity. Both characteristics then cumulate. Racism has been a strong undercurrent (often denied) in the campaign that acted as a kind of prism that was rarely expressed openly but disfigured so many affirmations.
- 10) **Jealousy:** People who struggle in their everyday life (cost of living, health, unemployment, housing) found it unjust that something would be done for improving the destiny of a category of people they did not belong to. Affirmation that Indigenous had it easy because they were systematically “favoured” and the support offered to them impacted negatively the lives of non-indigenous people.
- 11) **Division of a nation:** The affirmation that the proposal was dividing the nation when it precisely tried to bring people together after the struggle. An act of inclusiveness and forgiveness that was treated as if it were an aggression.
- 12) **Division by the gap:** The denial of the gap in life expectancy or incarceration or education concerning the chances of Indigenous people to have living conditions similar to the ones of non-indigenous people. Many were

pretending that this gap was not related to race or indigeneity.

- 13) **Race line:** The opposition had claimed the proposal would divide people along the race line although the division is clearly marked by the gap itself, independently of the race (confusion here again between race and indigeneity).
- 14) **Two opposed ways:** The proposal intended to implement empowerment for Indigenous people (bottom up) while the opposition wanted to maintain a system of assistance of Indigenous people (top down). For instance the opposition spoke of the accountability (to be supervised by them) of the social services that are meant to assist Indigenous people.
- 15) **Complementarity:** The fantastic potential of a true cooperation between two forms of cultures which are so different from one another has been denied. The Indigenous identity (“issue”) is reduced to a problem, although it reveals such a rich potential.
- 16) **Reconciliation:** The death of the process which was called reconciliation being no longer possible when there is such a contempt for Indigenous people, such a denial of what is at stake and such an antagonism between parties.
- 17) **Trust:** It is difficult in these conditions to see how trust of Indigenous people in non-indigenous people and in institutions, in what concerns their own future, could be re-established soon. It will take time to heal. The whole proposal was an open hand reached in trust to Australian people.
- 18) **Art of dialogue:** The lack of debate and dialogue on the proposal itself in order to see how it could be improved or adapted. The opposition tried to find arguments to reject it without accepting to even consider the content of the proposal.

- 19) **State of democracy:** The terrible decay of our democratic system, or rather the way we practise it, if we are not, nationwide, capable to have a debate on such an essential dimension of our together-living. How parties act toward one another, mainly in terms of enmity, polarisation and antagonism. What is good for the other is bad for me.
- 20) **Rejection:** And finally and in summary, the terrible hurt and rejection felt by Indigenous people when their generous proposal of coming together and cooperation is rejected so abruptly, whatever the reasons for this rejection were. Especially when no real solid argument has been made against this project of instituting a Voice to Parliament.

In summary all these different aspects of the campaign reveal the state of a country which is not very different from the mentality at the time of the frontiers wars. The methods have softened but the spirit remains the same. This is the shocking teaching of this result; we have not matured. A long time will be now needed to digest all these aspects and integrate them into a new strategy, if it is still possible. Probably Indigenous people will look for solutions that depend only on them, no longer on non-indigenous people or institutions. Sad teaching of a missed opportunity for true reconciliation.

Chapter 11: The struggle for independence

Decolonisation as rebirth

The time after WW2 saw a major trend of the ex-colonies becoming independent. This movement had already started in Latino America in the precedent century. The war had involved the colonies in the fight against fascism. They had paid a huge price for the defence of freedom and peace in Europe, for the essential gain of the powers that had conquered them. Through the support they had provided they got a form of recognition and empowerment. They felt it was time to have their own rights respected, that is their rights to independence and self-determination.

Yet it is important to be aware that decolonisation is much more than a process of political independence. It implies a long and deep metamorphosis in the way we experience life and we feel and think. It involves the fields of culture, social dynamic, economy, empowerment, self-determination. It implies that a free nation may be able to choose its own future in terms that are its own. It implies that no other should intervene to prevent this from happening.

The topic of decolonisation is a huge theme that I cannot treat here in details although there would be so much to say. The present chapter will yet try to indicate very briefly a few points which are often neglected when we concentrate too much on the aspects of political and economic structures.

The Bandung Conference (1955)

The Bandung Conference attempted colonial countries to unite and design a new strategy of empowerment that would remain non-aligned, i.e. independent of the USA and USSR.

The Asian-African conference of Bandung in Java, Indonesia, in 1955, was a vast project put in place by the leading figures of what was then called the Third World. The expression Third World was coined in 1952 by the French sociologist Alfred Sauvy by analogy with the history of the French Revolution, with its three main forces. The two first had complete control of power: the Nobility (First State), the Church (Second State); and the third force, i.e. the people, as a vast majority, was also called to emancipation, that is to have part in decisions; this was what was later called by historians the Third State. The French Revolution allowed, at least in principle, the Third State to regain its own power of control. Similarly, at the end of WW2, there were also three forces: the First World (the USA and their allied), the Second World (the USSR and their allied) and the ex-colonial countries which formed the vast majority of world population and had no power (the so-called Third World or developing countries).

The image of this Third Power was powerful at that time and called for a redistribution of might. It called especially for a non-aligned movement of these many countries which were all very different and had very different interests in the game. It is why the principle of Non-Alignment gained so much sense. It was the common denominator that would allow these countries to remain independent of the two dominating powers and even forge alliances between them against the two dominating forces, despite their great diversity of interests.

The concept of non-alignment was the product of a common reflection between the leaders of the main colonial countries

which were involved in the movement of independence and decolonisation. These leaders were principally President Sukarno (1901-70) of Indonesia, Premiers Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) of China, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) of India, U Nu (1907-95) of Burma (Myanmar), President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-70) of Egypt, Prime Minister Nkwame Nkrumah of Gold Coast (Ghana). The core principles of the Bandung Conference were political self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, and equality.

The participants were Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), China, Cyprus, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Sudan, Thailand, Türkiye, Vietnam (South), Vietnam (North), Yemen. This list includes roughly all the countries situated between Libya and Sudan to Japan and Indonesia, with the addition of Ghana and Liberia.

What is fascinating in this movement is that it brought together so many and such different countries, all yet united in the idea of non-alignment and will for independence. This was a kind of alliance, which intended to encompass all aspects of development, against the domination represented by the two blocks (USA and USSR). It was also, for these non-aligned countries, a promise of support to one another on the path of liberation. It cleverly played also on the ingrained antagonism between the two blocks. It forced them in a second range position; they had to compete with one another for offering their respective support to these non-aligned countries, because it was for both of them important to consolidate or even increase their own ideological and socio-economic-political influence; and this although the purpose of these non-aligned countries was precisely not to fall under the influence of the one or the other. It was a competitive way to get help and financial support without having to fall under domination.

It would be interesting to investigate how this first start led to further developments but it is not the space here to do so. Yet it can be said that this project of non-alignment did not bring the promised fruits and soon turned into dissensions. But it had yet a considerable impact on the self-confidence of these emerging governments to believe in their own future.

On the other hand we can keep from this example the notion that it was possible and preferable for this movement to weave a great number of cross-relationships in order to resist the two dominant masters. These many cross-relationships were offering a great potential of stability because each contract between a few partners could play on the potential that other contracts were also possible as alternatives with other partners. This meant that no small alliance of this type could have a major impact. The whole stability consisted in a great number of many small connections between a great number of actors, rather than in a few exclusive alliances between well-defined and opposed blocks. This was the genial idea of non-alignment.

Decolonisation as rebirth

Decolonisation is mainly a deep transformation (liberation) in ways of feeling-thinking-living which restore the potentials of original cultures to design new ways of life.

More than independence of institutional structures, decolonisation means a form of rebirth and reawakening to one's own traditional ways of living that still need to be reinterpreted in regard of recent evolution. There is an unavoidable form of violence in decolonisation as for instance there is in birth for the baby that undergoes it. This does not mean necessarily violence against the people or the surroundings; this means yet violence against oppressive mechanisms and also violence in the process of transformation; in any process of transformation there is a

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need to break the natural inertia or resistance of the body and the mind against the new arising patterns. We are all recalcitrant to change, although change – as painful as it can be – is often the path of true restoration and liberation.

There cannot be real decolonisation if there is no deep mutation in the way people feel and think and live. For colonised countries this means not only liberation from the ideological and political patterns imposed by the coloniser concerning the active political and economic structures which are active, but also, most important, liberation from all the patterns that concern culture and life, its functions, its mechanisms, its meanings. This remains still true for countries like Australia which have still not gone through this process, despite their formal status of national independence.

This first step of liberation calls then for a second step that consists in the reinvention of new patterns and new structures, anchored in traditional culture but also enriched by what can have been learned from colonisation experience. This experience of colonisation, even if it was very painful and destructive of self-confidence, has nevertheless revealed a lot of new aspects of reality or potentials that can be considered in a new way that can be completely different, if necessary, from what colonisation has tried to impose. If this past experience does not reveal or concern a content inherited from the colonial power, at least it may have awakened an inspiration and confidence in one's own culture and power for following one's own path of liberation. This is the start for the second step of reinvention.

The first move, as process of liberation from imposed patterns, concerns themes like racism, whiteness, exclusion, rejection of differences, blindness to complementarity, destruction of relationships to the natural world, to the cosmos. The second move, as a process of reinvention, involves any traditional skills, any traditional patterns linked with the vernacular tradition, any

spiritual teaching that tries to explain why the world is as it is. All these contents are only tools that teach the people about the meaning and purpose of life. These meanings have still to be translated into new patterns of behaviour and new social and political structures, into new institutions.

Decolonisation is a form of cultural revolution, although the expression is very risky as these two words evoke the memory of the violent processes of the 1960s in China, to which what I describe is radically opposed. The fundamental difference is that true decolonisation is, for all people of the nation, a common and free reinterpretation of their own traditional culture and of everything that could be learned; and – most important – this new interpretation is not imposed top down by a totalitarian process. It is on the contrary bottom up. This movement bottom up cannot be controlled from the top and it is precisely in this bottom up movement that it is a radical alternative to what the process of colonisation had initiated.

A truly human process of decolonisation reinterprets the traditional culture. It restores the traditional laws, not as a rigid legal frame, but as a flexible set of guidelines open to a new interpretation for each new case it will consider. It reconnects with the land as the nourishing mother and the teacher of truth, as the memory of the past and of the origin. It describes the laws of nature and the laws of life as patterns that rule the universe, nature, the cycles of birth and death. It celebrates the creative energy that is at the root of life; it traces a spiritual path to rediscover the mysterious depth of life.

In more concrete and practical terms it redefines the significance of material processes and the role of technology. It attempts to control the economy as a process that has to equitably satisfy the principal needs of all people instead of being an artificial means to accumulate wealth for a few. It redefines the roles of development and growth in terms of evolution that will bring a

deeper quality of relationships, more than an increased quantity of everything to be consumed or an increase of GDP.

It restores a healthier relationship with time as a cyclic process and not a linear progression. It rewrites also the history of the past in terms of truth that allows each participant or victim to feel recognised and understood in their grievance. This is a path of truth and reconciliation that cannot be separated from forgiveness and the intention to have a new start. It provides more space for relationships, for time of sharing in the Parliament or around the dining table or the fire. The list could continue for ever. It is evident here that these are only examples to be reinterpreted and that this reinterpretation can only follow the contributions given by the participants. It is not a program how to reach this or that final conclusion; it is a process that remains open to any evolution. Social awareness is the key.

Indigenous vocation

Indigenous cultures are the guardians of a tradition that understands the universe as a whole led by an Intelligence whose general laws we have to adapt to.

I am aware that these comments about decolonisation are very general and seem therefore mere theory, or even wishful thinking, without grounding. What is here most important is the affirmation that decolonisation is not an institutional program but rather a human process anchored in our very concrete human lives and hearts. It happens not as state building in the poor countries, but as a cultural and spiritual mutation that concerns as much the colonisers as the colonised. It is also a constant process that should still today animate and nourish our present social and political life.

To better show how it should have a powerful impact, it is essential to emphasise the primordial role of the indigenous

cultures in this transformation. From despised and marginal forms of knowledge and wisdom that have been ignored and pushed to the side, they should become our principal leaders because they have maintained alive the vitality of truth in their traditions and knowledge and practice. Truth and wisdom are not precious gifts or accumulation of treasures one owns and manages like a capital; they are not made by addition of partial investigations nor out of acts of rationality and mere science. They are rather global experiences that arise from living opportunities and never ending processes of discovery and transformation about the nature of the world, the others and ourselves, in the present as much as in the past.

In my mind it is also important to see how this indigenous vocation joins the similar call of perennial wisdom that tries to initiate us to the most interior common core of all religions and to celebrate the essence of life. What one calls perennial wisdom consists in the fundamental message that all religions have in common beyond their great diversity and their specific representations of the divine. This message speaks of the sacredness of life and the mysterious source that reveals itself to be its origin. In this way both the call of all religions and the vocation of indigenous traditions meet in a common mission, which consists in awakening humankind to its original and essential source and vocation. And this double mission offers precisely the content that gives consistency (a body) and meaning (a purpose) to the characteristics of decolonisation I just described earlier in too general terms.

The indigenous or spiritual characters of the mutation I described are what gives it a different meaning for the (re)conversion I call for. This process needs to be alive and to be led by indigenous traditions, all over the world, that have integrated the dimensions of wisdom. This wisdom knows how to give priority to human relationships over material acquisition. But, more than that, this is a global approach of life and the universe. It is a

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fundamentally different understanding that the world (the universe) forms a whole of which we are all parts; and that we are all interrelated because we depend on each other and we depend on nature. This is one single whole. It has its own laws we cannot, or it would be foolish to, resist. We can only adapt to this whole and to its laws. We have to integrate into it in playing our role in relationship with the whole and the other parts of it. This integration is in its spirit fundamentally opposed to the logic of colonisation. This transformation offers a radical change of mind, a true revolution, a fundamental turnaround.

If we adopt this indigenous vision of the whole to which we belong – which seems to be a common denominator to all indigenous cultures in the world – and if this vision becomes the leading thread on the path of liberation, we cannot exploit the Earth any longer as a heap of stuff. In this other global vision everything becomes a precious resource and we are parts of these resources as human beings and every part is depending on the whole. As the rest of creation – creation means here a continuous living process of transformation – we have to contribute to the evolution of the body of which we are a small part. And – this is the deep transformation – we have to do this in respect and harmony with the laws of life which rule the whole system. The main law is compassion for, and respect of, the other parts and the whole.

But there is still more to this: the system is not a rigid system that is ruled by permanent immutable laws. No, there is in this system a general Will and a Presence that drive it. There is an Intelligence in action that gives impulse to the evolution without yet determining it. Even in 14 billion years mere probability and necessity could not have generated the complexity of life we can observe around us. This is the evident sign that there is a kind of orientation and order in the evolution of the universe. Which one? This is the question. As the Canadian astrophysicist Hubert Reeves used to say, “Man is the most insane species. He

worships an invisible God and destroys a visible Nature. Unaware that this Nature he's destroying is this God he's worshipping”. Or also: “We're at war with nature. If we win, we're lost.”

What I find fascinating is that this Presence or Intelligence is not a controlling force. S/He does not impose, S/He only offers new potentials. We remain completely free to receive these potentials and to develop them, or to ignore them and do nothing. Our choice. This means that nature is not just an inert body but an expression of a deeper Reality to which we are freely called to collaborate, or not. If we ignore this Reality, we are doomed, i.e. lost as the quote says. The only path of liberation is to adapt to what is bigger than us, and to discover the art of wonder of what it is. This is called bliss.

It is why the indigenous teaching implies a complete reversal, a cultural revolution, a radical turn of mind. It is also why indigenous traditions become our teachers. It is no longer a perception of life focused on material conveniences but it is a wider all-encompassing vision of life which remains principally an experience of relationships: relationships with other human beings, with all sentient beings, with nature, with the universe, with the invisible and mysterious realm of life. It consists in being in relation; instead of doing and having. This is a fundamentally new program; certainly ambitious, but also the only one that can be worth living. A true liberation, decolonisation of our beings, of our hearts-minds.

Metaphorically the art of being can be compared to a bike. It cannot stand alone by itself without falling if it does not move. Being is a movement that is initiated by life. If the energy of life is not present as the force that moves us forwards, we cannot practise the art of being. Being “falls” like the bike.

The most fascinating on this path of liberation is that we are all sent back to our roots, indistinctly whether we are Northerners or

Southerners, white or black, colonisers or colonised, rich or poor. We are all human beings confronted to the same question: what is the meaning and purpose of life (being) and how do we express this meaning in our lives?

We can finish this comment with the quote of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss: “There is no primitive civilisation, no evolved civilisation; there are only different responses to fundamentally identical problems⁵⁷”. Yet I would add that there are responses which are more thorough and more mature in their understanding of what is at stake because they involve all our faculties and intend to find true answers, instead of being falsified by just a few elements of reductive egocentric interest. The key difference in this level of maturity is much more linked with intention and honesty, with commitment to the search for truth, than with objective so-called scientific knowledge. The intention defines the content.

Decolonisation in the mother country

The decolonisation process returns to the mother country (boomerang effect) and challenges the institutions or domination processes that have fostered colonisation.

Colonisation for centuries and its new translation – globalisation more recently – have weaved a network of narrow interdependences and flows of material, capital and people between North and South. The intensity and diversity of these flows demonstrate the importance of relationships between almost all parts of the world. In our rich countries that profit from the imbalances of these relationships, we say: *yes* to

resources, *yes* to goods, *yes* to capital, but we say *no* to people, *no* to refugees... unless they bring skills or capital.

The de-structuration of local economies in the South, generated by colonialism, cumulated today with the destructive effect of climate change – another process initiated by Northern countries for which the South has to pay – or with the deterioration of the terms of exchanges and conditions of life in poor countries (e.g. collapse of price of natural resources, heavy level of debt, deregulation and open market, ravaging oligarchies, violent wars, natural cataclysms, epidemics, unemployment) has fostered important flows of refugees who legitimately try to reach the countries where life is possible, despite their deep attachment for their country of origin. They try to reach the Northern countries (Europe, North America, Australia). Against their numerous arrival these rich countries have developed cruel strategies of rejection (“stop the boats”) or offshore treatment of refugees. There is like a wall around our rich countries that is impossible to cross for people of the South who come as migrants and who have often lost everything in poverty, wars, draught, earthquakes, tsunamis. This is very precisely what we can call the boomerang effect of colonisation. The patterns of oppression and suffering return to the mother country as a backlash.

The same attitude of rejection translates also into the policies concerning the poor suburbs of our Western cities when we deny new generations of young immigrants any possibility to identify with their original culture and religion, despite the fact they came recently from dominated countries and still identify strongly with their culture of origin. We expect them to adapt totally to the Western way of life, abandon their own identity, imitate us fully - as if this were for them the only possible “salvation” - and adopt our own values.

If (when) they don’t, we feel threatened. Governments and forces of security intervene in these poor suburbs, as around Paris for

⁵⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss: *La pensée sauvage*. Plon 1962. My own translation.

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instance, in a form of war that requires from these “insurgents” total submission and enculturation under the pretext they are considered as marginal and criminal. But this repression is evidently perceived by these young people as a terrible form of violence that denies them the simple right of being themselves. France, with its dominating principle of secularism and its indistinct wish for a French identity to be adopted by all without distinctions, generates for these young people, much more than in the UK, a feeling of being denied and aggressed.

The debate about the hijab is a good illustration of the degree of understanding of one another to which we are called. In France there is a strong tendency to forbid any sign of expression of religious belonging, especially if it is Islamic. In which right can one forbid people to express what matters most to them? Do we have truly to become all similar as clones, dressed in the Mao dress of the sixties or any uniform that prevents any personal expression? How else could we on the contrary allow other people (for instance immigrants) to do the same thing as we do (such as dressing) but in their own way, without creating conflicts?

This was only a short parenthesis about the expression of traditional core values from elsewhere. Back now to the theme of refugees. It is probably true that it would be wrong to open the doors to all newcomers because the reaction of local populations, stirred also by right wing ideologies, would generate new conflicts and new tensions that would profit nobody. But it remains nevertheless true that Northern countries are responsible for the consequences of colonialism and of its more recent translation under the disguise of globalisation. Northern countries must be committed to repair the imbalances they have generated in the Southern countries. They have first to restore relationships of equity with these countries, to not invade them (Iraq) or to not support corrupt regimes that suit Western interests (e.g. yesterday Chile, today regimes that control the taps

of major fuel production). This means not to go against the aspirations of the local populations (e.g. Western support or indifference to the strong regimes issued out of the Arab Spring).

There is a charming and very inspiring example of welcoming refugees that took place in the South Italian small town of Riace, Calabria⁵⁸. The town was slowly dying in the 1970-80s because people were leaving in droves, heading to northern Italy because there were unable to earn a decent living back home. Domenico Lucano, the courageous mayor, recalled how the transformation of Riace began when "a boat carrying some 250 Kurds men, women and children was brought by the wind to our shores," he said, referring to a boatload of people who had probably set off from North Africa in the hope of reaching Europe. "At the time, Riace was dying," he added. The Mayor decided to welcome them and to offer migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers free board and lodging as well as electricity in Riace's empty houses so long as they agreed to work for a living and learn Italian. After the Kurds many other refugees followed, from Syria, Afghanistan, Ghana, Senegal, Ethiopia and elsewhere.

The main goal was to create a different socio-economic environment characterized by welcoming refugees and by actively combatting the exploitation and exclusion of migrants, which unfortunately were standard practices in the region. Riace's refugees also perceived the town as a place where they were received with warmth and hospitality and had the opportunity to pursue a normal and dignified life. Also, their experiences in Riace stood in sharp contrast to the overcrowded asylum centres and to the exploitation and discrimination that they faced elsewhere in Europe. The newcomers have been

⁵⁸ See <https://www.unhcr.org/au/news/> + search “Riace”, out which extracts of the following description has been borrowed.

repaying the faith shown in them by helping to revive the fortunes of Riace.

The reception of refugees has combined with the revival of the local community. Various initiatives were started by local Italians and refugees together, such as the 'laboratori' (workshops) to revitalize local ancient crafts, the sustainable agricultural projects, and the restoration of the old town. The women made handicrafts while their men were involved in construction and opening shops; both were helping to bring in the tourists, who can now stay in renovated town centre buildings.

Interestingly, the changing social climate, the decreasing power of mafia related-forces, and the improved socio-economic conditions in town also inspired older Italian emigrants to come back to their town of origin. One of them (a young social worker) vividly remembered the story of his father who was forced to leave Riace 'back in the old days, but who by now had safely returned to his family in Riace.

Today, about 250 of Riace's 1,700 citizens are foreigners. They include many Palestinian refugees resettled recently in Italy with the help of UNHCR after spending years living in dusty Al Tanf camp in the no-man's land between Iraq and Syria.

The German cineaste Wim Wenders made a half an hour film out of this true story, "Il Volo", i.e. the Flight, which is worth watching.

Alternative forms of power

Decolonisation invented new creative paths of development and together-living that could open new perspectives of equality but were sadly repressed by Northern powers.

In order to illustrate the vitality of decolonisation and the diversity of its attempts in different countries, I wish here to present a few significant people or initiatives in these Non-Aligned countries. Sadly most of these attempts of liberation finished in the violence applied by dominant interests to repress them. I have chosen here a wide range of a few different characters that show the great diversity of strategies. The presentation of each of these leaders is partly borrowed from Wikipedia which I modified in my own ways to give shape to the message I want to bring through.

Muhammad Mosaddegh (1882-1967) was the Prime Minister of Iran from 1951-53. His administration introduced a range of social and political measures (social security, land reforms and higher taxes, including taxation on the rent of land). His government's most interesting policy was the nationalisation of the Iranian oil industry, which had been established by British Petroleum (BP). The intelligence agencies of the UK and US removed Mosaddegh by a coup in 1953 which returned Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to power. Mosaddegh was imprisoned and then in house arrest until his death.

Emiliano Zapata Salazar (1879-1919) was a leading figure in the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920, and the inspiration of the agrarian movement called Zapatismo. He was born in an era when peasant communities came under increasing repression from the small-landowning class who monopolized land and water resources for sugarcane production with the support of dictator Porfirio Díaz (President between 1877 and 1911). Zapata early on participated in political movements against Díaz and the landowning hacendados, and when the Revolution broke out in 1910 he became a leader of the peasant revolt in Morelos. With other leaders, he formed the Liberation Army of the South, of which he soon became the undisputed leader. Zapata's forces contributed to the fall of Díaz, defeating the Federal Army in the Battle of Cuautla in May 1911, but when the revolutionary leader

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Francisco I. Madero became president he disavowed the role of the Zapatistas, denouncing them as mere bandits. Movements in the Chiapas today invoke affiliation to Zapatismo (subcommander Marcos).

Sukarno (1901-70), born Koesno Sosrodihardjo, was a revolutionary leader of Indonesia's nationalist movement during the colonial period and spent over a decade under Dutch detention until released by the invading Japanese forces in WW2. He led then the struggle for independence from the Dutch colonialists and became the first president of Indonesia as well as one of the principal leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement. Because of his narrow links with the USSR and the increasing tension with Western interests, in 1965, General Suharto largely took control of the country in a Western-backed military overthrow of the Sukarno-led government.

Patrice Lumumba (1925-61), born Isaïe Tasumbu Tawosa, was a Congolese independence leader who became the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from June to September 1960. He was the leader of the Congolese National Movement (MNC) from 1958 until his execution in January 1961. Ideologically an African nationalist and pan-Africanist, he played a significant role in the transformation of the Congo from a Belgian colony into an independent republic. He was executed by the separatist Katangan authorities of Moïse Tshombe, with the help of Belgian partisans.

Kwame Nkrumah (1909-72), a Ghanaian Marxist politician, political theorist, and revolutionary, was the first Prime Minister and then President of Ghana, from 1957 until 1966. An influential advocate of Pan-Africanism, Nkrumah was a founding member of the Organization of African Unity and winner of the Lenin Peace Prize from the Soviet Union in 1962. Under Nkrumah, Ghana played a leading role in African international relations during the decolonization period.

Julius Nyerere (1922-99) was a Tanzanian anti-colonial activist, who governed Tanganyika-Tanzania as prime minister and then as president from 1961 to 1985, ideologically an African nationalist and African socialist. In campaigning for Tanganyikan independence using non-violent methods, Nyerere was inspired by the example of Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi. His government promoted a political philosophy known as *Ujamaa* (*fraternity* in Swahili). It nationalized Banks and other major industries and companies; education and healthcare were significantly expanded. Renewed emphasis was interestingly placed on agricultural development through the formation of communal farms, yet these reforms hampered food production and left areas dependent on food aid. His government provided training and aid to anti-colonialist groups fighting white-minority rule throughout southern Africa. Nyerere stood down as president in 1985.

Thomas Sankara (1949-87) was a Burkinabe military officer, Marxist revolutionary and Pan-Africanist (President of Burkina Faso from his coup in 1983 to his assassination in 1987). His foreign policies were centred on anti-imperialism and he rejected aid from organizations such as the International Monetary Fund. His domestic policies included famine prevention, agrarian self-sufficiency, land reform, as well as a nationwide literacy campaign and vaccinating program. His government also combated desertification of the Sahel by planting over 10 million trees. He outlawed female genital mutilation, forced marriages and polygamy. Sankara set up Popular Revolutionary Tribunals to prosecute public officials charged with political crimes and corruption. This led to criticism by Amnesty International for human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions and arbitrary detentions of political opponents. On 15 October 1987, Sankara was killed by an armed group in a coup d'état organized by his former colleague Blaise Compaoré who stated that

Sankara jeopardized foreign relations with former colonial power France and neighbouring countries.

Fidel Castro (1926-2016) was a Cuban revolutionary and leader of Cuba from 1959 to 2008, ideologically a Marxist–Leninist and Cuban nationalist. The United States came to oppose Castro's government and unsuccessfully attempted to remove him by assassination, economic embargo. Cuba remained symbolically a stronghold of resistance to imperialist powers. The power of its model was reinforced by its physical presence less than 300km from the coast of the United States, in the Caribbean Sea, which will always remain the symbol and cradle of slavery and oppression. Cuban doctors constitute a model of aid in health to poor countries throughout the world. Castro's supporters view him as a champion of socialism and anti-imperialism whose revolutionary government advanced economic and social justice while securing Cuba's independence from American hegemony. His critics view him as a dictator whose administration oversaw human rights abuses, the exodus of many Cubans, and the impoverishment of the country's economy.

Ernesto Che Guevara (1928-67) was an Argentine Marxist revolutionary, physician, guerrilla leader. A major figure of the Cuban Revolution, his stylized visage has become a ubiquitous countercultural symbol of rebellion and global insignia in popular culture. After the Cuban Revolution, Guevara played key roles in the new government. He left Cuba in 1965 to foment continental revolutions across both Africa and South America, first unsuccessfully in Congo-Kinshasa and later in Bolivia, where he was captured by CIA-assisted Bolivian forces and summarily executed.

Frantz Fanon (1925-61) was a Francophone Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist, political philosopher, and Marxist from the French colony of Martinique. His books (especially *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*) have become influential

in the fields of post-colonial studies, as he was concerned with the psychopathology of colonization and the human and cultural consequences of decolonization. As chef de service in a Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria, Fanon developed methods of treatment as socio-therapy that connect with his patients' cultural backgrounds. Following the outbreak of the Algerian revolution (1954), he became responsible for treating the psychological distress of Algerian torture victims and of the French soldiers and officers who carried out torture in order to suppress anti-colonial resistance. In 1956 Fanon realized that he could no longer continue to support French efforts, even indirectly via his hospital work, and he submitted his letter of resignation⁵⁹, which later became an influential text of its own in anti-colonialist circles. Shortly afterwards, Fanon was expelled from Algeria.

Paulo Freire (1921-97) was a Brazilian educator and philosopher who was a leading advocate of critical pedagogy. His influential work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is generally considered one of the foundational texts of the critical pedagogy movement. Working primarily among the illiterate poor, Freire began to develop an educational praxis that would have an influence on the liberation theology movement of the 1970s. We'll come later back to see what this movement consists in.

Don Helder Câmara (1909-99), Brazilian, was the Catholic Archbishop of Olinda and Recife in 1964-85 during the military dictatorship. Câmara was an advocate of liberation theology. He did social and political work for the poor and for human rights and democracy during the military regime. He preached for a church closer to the disfavoured people. He is quoted as having said, "*When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.*" In his work *Spiral of Violence* (1971), a short tract written when the United

⁵⁹ In French: <http://indigenes.free.fr/spip.php?article69>

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States were immersed in a still escalating Vietnam War, he linked structural injustice (Level 1 violence) with escalating rebellion (Level 2 violence) and repressive reaction (Level 3 violence). In it, Câmara called on the youth of the world to take steps to break the spiral, saying their elders became addicted to those escalating steps.

Oscar Romero (1917-80) was the Archbishop of San Salvador. He spoke out against social injustice and violence amid the escalating conflict between the military government and left-wing insurgents that led to the Salvadoran Civil War. Seen as a social conservative at the time of his appointment as archbishop in 1977, Romero was deeply affected by the murder of his friend and fellow priest Rutilio Grande and thereafter became an outspoken critic of the military government of El Salvador. As a supporter of liberation theology, Romero is said to have faithfully adhered to Catholic teachings on liberation and a preferential option for the poor, desiring a social revolution based on interior reform. In 1980, Romero was shot dead while celebrating Mass at the instigation of the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) political party.

José Alberto "Pepe" Mujica Cordano (born 1935) is a Uruguayan politician, former revolutionary and farmer who served as president of Uruguay (2010-15). A former guerrilla with the Tupamaros, he was tortured and imprisoned for 14 years during the military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s. An outspoken critic of capitalism's focus on stockpiling material possessions which do not contribute to human happiness, Mujica has been described as "the world's humblest head of state" due to his austere lifestyle and his donation of around 90 percent of his \$12,000 monthly salary to charities that benefit poor people and small entrepreneurs.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders leaders: They are many and I do not intend to select a few of them because they

work together in an inspiring unity. What strikes me most is the incredible wisdom and deep humanity and compassion they express each time they talk publicly. Their wide and hopeful vision is motivated by a great spirit of trust, generosity and forgiveness. I was especially impressed by this quality in the (non-)debate about the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the referendum.

I intentionally did not mention Gandhi or Mandela. There would be still so many other examples of people who did their best to contribute to the movement of decolonisation and open new paths of liberation.

In the examples given above there is a striking dominance of reference to socialism and revolution. The reason for this is evident. The struggle for liberation was about justice and equity and socialism is precisely based on these values and awareness of a common destiny, of resources which have to be shared, of a better possible quality of life for all if there is equality and sharing and caring. Then arises the question what revolution means. I have shown how decolonisation (or revolution) concerns a radical change of mind but this is evidently not the common meaning of this word. More essentially revolution happens always in specific conditions that will shape it in different modes according to the location and the conditions linked with it.

There is yet a dominant factor in the process of decolonisation. There are two sides and this to a caricatured level. There is the side of the oppressor with the leading forces as the colonial powers such as the USA. On the other side we have the colonised countries and their advocate, the USSR. It does not mean that the USSR is an ideal model; it means only that it represents symbolically, and also strategically in terms of ideological and concrete support, a model that encourages and reinforces the decolonisation movement. I will come back later

to this dimension of liberation because it is essential if we want to understand what happens.

I would like now to come back to the three levels of violence that, among the above examples, Don Helder Câmara described and called youth to fight against. Remember, he linked structural injustice (Level 1 violence) with escalating rebellion (Level 2 violence) and repressive reaction (Level 3 violence). We have investigated level 1 (structural injustice) when we examined the notions of racism, whiteness, supremacy. I would like to present here one example of each of the two other levels. We have to be satisfied with one of each only because this is a too large field to be described here; it can only be evocated in an illustrative way.

Neo-colonialism as repression

The attempts of rebellion

Structural injustice generates escalating rebellion. This can take many forms, from coalition of developing nations on world level to local guerrilla or nonviolent resistance.

The attempt of rebellion constitutes the second level of violence, which is the natural response to the first level (structural injustice). Decolonisation has always been linked with the notion of revolution because it is about emancipation of oppression and the right to change the general order of the world. This principle had to translate in so many diverse ways.

In the most ideal form we have the liberation of India as a nonviolent struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. On the other opposite we have guerrilla as a violent process. But, in-between, there is an infinite range of much diversified strategies.

For instance, during the 1973 Arab-Israeli (Kippur) War, Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decided to impose an embargo against the United States in retaliation for their support to Israeli armed forces. They intended also in this way to gain leverage in the post-war peace negotiations. Arab OPEC members also extended the embargo to other countries that supported Israel including the Netherlands, Portugal, and South Africa.

The embargo banned petroleum exports to the targeted nations and introduced general cuts in oil production and severe increase of prices of the barrel. This initiative aimed also, long term, at extending these measures to other natural resources in order to weigh more heavily in the international context and to get better control, as a coalition of Southern nations, on the role of the main exports which were so essential for the economy of rich countries.

This was a world premiere that attempted to initiate a new order of economic relationships worldwide and to empower Southern nations to become general actors on the world stage. The oil embargo of 1973-74 generated an intense crisis in Western economy that proved the power of Southern countries to unite and increase their influence through a better control of the production of resources that were extracted in their own lands. In consequence of these drastic measures some Western governments went so far as to declare an interdiction to drive on certain Sundays of the month, probably also with the intention to make their citizens more sharply aware of the significance of what was happening.

In this new strategy innovated by the OPEC and envisaged by other countries in their policies of extraction of natural resources, a further stage was foreseen for later in which the benefits provided by increased prices of these natural resources were meant to be used to support projects of development in Southern

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countries to reinforce their independence towards the North. This was, at least at the level of the intention, a great step towards solidarity and reciprocal support, in an unforeseen attempt to share the great wealth, provided by some most important sources of income in Non-Aligned countries, to generate this increased power of solidarity. But this positive intention could never find a real coherent and durable expression. Probably the initiators lost this incredible opportunity by lack of ability to maintain the necessary level of unity and consensus in their movement as they were caught by their national priorities and not capable to let go of minor interests to defend major potentials. Sharing a strategy and sharing wealth requires great wisdom.

At first glance the use of the economic weapon can seem harmless. It is probably the case when it consists in resistance to exploitation but the effect of embargoes in the hands of the powerful can have devastating effects. Hence this second level of violence (rebellion) can operate as violently as guerrilla or armed revolution.

The attempts of reactive repression

The colonial powers never accepted that power and wealth could be redistributed; although this could have provided general conditions for all to thrive. They opted for repression.

Now we can look at the third level of violence according to Don Helder Câmara, i.e. repressive reaction in response to rebellion.

Salvador Allende (1908–73) was a socialist politician who served as president of Chile from 1970 until his death in 1973. As a socialist committed to democracy he has been described as the first Marxist to be elected president in a liberal democracy in Latin America. Allende tried to reform Chilean economy in depth. That included nationalization of large-scale industries (notably copper mining and banking), and government

administration of the health-care system, educational system, a programme of free milk for children in the schools and in the shanty towns of Chile, and an expansion of the land seizure and redistribution already begun under his predecessor Eduardo Frei. Allende also intended to improve the socio-economic welfare of Chile's poorest citizens; a key element was to provide employment, either in the new nationalized enterprises or on public-work projects. The whole reform was successful for the first semester but soon turned into general galloping inflation and social unrest. Despite his solidarity, Fidel Castro was reportedly critical of Allende's policies. He was saying that "Marxism is a revolution of production", whereas "Allende's was a revolution of consumption." The debate remains today open of what went wrong in the approach of this experience.

Nevertheless the presence of a democratic socialist regime at the core of Latin America represented a great ideological and practical threat for the power of the United States in whose creed this continent was meant to be its back-garden. US President Richard Nixon and his national security advisor Henry Kissinger considered Allende as a dangerous communist which they had to prevent from consolidating his power. They feared that the model of democratic socialism would be confirmed, develop and spread out through the continent; and that it would undermine US economic interests and reinforce the power of the USSR in this part of the world or, in general, among developing countries. The CIA mobilised and, with the active cooperation of some main corporations involved in Chile such as ITT which owned a major share of Chilean Communication, it supported the coup d'état of September 1973 masterminded by the Chilean army which eliminated Allende and installed his general Augusto Pinochet (1915-2006) at the head of a military dictatorship. As troops surrounded La Moneda Palace, Allende gave his last speech vowing not to resign. Later that day, Allende died by

suicide in his office; the exact circumstances of his death are still disputed. Pinochet's rule was to last until 1990.

The coup d'état brought about the persecution of many Allende's supporters, through torture, murder and exile, and the later strict censorship and repression of cultural and political expression. Soon Pinochet's military government implemented economic liberalization following the doctrine of neoliberalism, including currency stabilization, removed tariff protections for local industry, banned trade unions. It privatized social security and hundreds of state-owned enterprises. Some of the government properties were sold below market price to politically connected buyers. The association of social repression and economic liberalisation demonstrated that, in this new model of development, terror and free market formed one and single strategy.

The Shock doctrine

Neoliberalism became the main tool of repression to impose a new economic order based on free-market ideology. It dismantled/privatised social services. The price became king.

The School of Chicago, already very influential at that time, was proposing a strategy based on neoliberalism, as a counter-model to socialism and to the liberation of national economies from external domination. Neoliberalism believes in relaxing constraints due to state control or social policies in order to allow the maximum freedom for entrepreneurs and the strongest possibilities of growth for the economy. The leader of this school of economic thinking, linked with the University of Chicago, was Milton Friedman (1912–2006) who was an American economist and statistician who received the 1976 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for his research on consumption, monetary history and the complexity of

stabilization policy. The Chicago Boys, as the disciples of this school are generally called, form the backbone of economic and political free market theories. They promote systematic privatisation and restriction of social services wherever they go. Free market, they affirm, is the shaping force of our relationships as human beings to promote productive efficiency; and the price is the key.

Chile of Pinochet's dictatorship was one of their most consistent fields of experimentation. The remedies prescribed by the Chicago Boys proved in this case soon very effective. They stimulated economic growth and allowed the richest upper class of Chilean society to considerably increase its wealth.

This is the strength of capitalism that systematic deregulation allows a larger profit, a quicker general growth and increases wealth's accumulation. But this basic statement does not say that this wealth remains in the hands of the same few and that the implementation of the rules prescribed by the Chicago Boys generates also long term a slow degradation of living conditions for most part of the population, especially for the workers. It participates also in the restraint of social liberties. In other words such rules stimulate profit, which is based on what we can call speculation as it concerns not production itself but the margins of profit on work contracts, investments and trade.

By contrast it is well known that social measures concerning healthcare, education and social welfare, as well as social means for improving equality and sharing of common wealth, will slow down growth but will yet prepare better foundations for future conditions of living for most part of the active population. This is where, by its own purposes, socialism opposes neo-liberalism.

The neoliberal economic strategy proposed by the Chicago Boys was in Chile part of the establishment of the dictatorship. It was reconverting the economy for the profit of the upper class. This was the process of violence type 3 of reactive repression. This

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strategy became in fact a classic model for the re-conquest of domination (level 3) in countries where the leftist movement of decolonisation and socialism has started to trace new paths of liberation.

Naomi Klein, in her book *The Shock Doctrine*⁶⁰, describes in a fascinating way how the Chicago Boys were called everywhere there was a possibility for restoring neoliberal power. The *shock doctrine* consists in using situations where the economy is in tater for severely deregulating and dismantling social services in order to impose the laws of free-market and the rule of prices over all other priorities, especially against the practice of civil rights. This is the belief (or the pretext). This means that these measures do not only aim at economic reform but are used, in a combination of neoliberalism and repression, to counter policies of solidarity and equality that are usually central to alternative social or political practices that aim at justice.

Klein demonstrates how this strategy promoted by the School of Chicago was not only used in Chile but extended later systematically to further cases or countries where neoliberalism was intended to be implemented, under the guidance of Jeffrey Sachs who became one of its best protagonists. She illustrates how this universal remedy has been in the past applied to very different cases which have all in common that they represent situations of social movements that are precisely resisting the neoliberal mode. They all constitute originally movements that are attempting to consolidate civil rights in limiting the power of the oppressors. But it happens also, in these cases, that they find themselves at a turning point (crisis, freedom from gaol of its leaders, new elections) where strategies have to be adapted.

⁶⁰ Naomi Klein: *The Shock Doctrine, The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Penguin Books, 2007.

The intervention of the Chicago Boys worked then against these attempts in using neoliberal practices to dismantle initiatives of collective power and social solidarity. Klein exposes, one after the other, the cases of Bolivia in 1985; of emerging Poland of 1988 when the era of trade-union Solidarność, with Lech Wałęsa at its head, was resisting Soviet domination; of South Africa in its struggle against Apartheid when it was time for the elaboration of ANC's program between 1990 (liberation of Nelson Mandela from prison) and 1994 (ANC elections); or of Russia in 1991 when the power of Boris Yeltsin needed to be consolidated after the Gorbachev era and the last elections that had brought him to power; and of many other cases. It appears clearly in these cases that the intervention of the Chicago Boys was very effective in dismantling elementary civil rights and reinforcing the domination of the elite.

This neoliberal strategy became soon the universal remedy it is presently for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were its best supporters when it started to become a dominating doctrine. And it is still today the trend, with globalisation, which follows the same logic: free market and free prices are meant to solve all problems.

There is a famous short talk by Milton Friedman who explains his theory of neoliberalism in two and a half minutes. He takes the example of a pencil⁶¹ he pulls out of his pocket and describes how it is made of many parts and materials: wood out of the USA that implies steel and iron ore for the saw to cut the tree, graphite probably from South America, rubber, for the eraser at the end tip of the pencil, coming from Malaya from trees imported from South America by some business men, brass for

⁶¹ You can watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67tHtpac5ws>

the ferment that holds the eraser from somewhere else, and the yellow paint on the surface or the glue that holds it together. He claims that some maybe thousand people have worked for the production of this pencil who speak different languages, practise different religions, do not know each other and could even hate each other; that no centralised office or command is able to organise the production of such an item, which is then the result of interactions of the market; and especially of the magic of price. He affirms that human beings are not capable to be motivated to do anything together, except by the mechanism of the price that only is capable to produce harmony and peace.

As you can see this short lecture implies a very rich, deep and nuanced perspective of life!! no human effort can help, only the price is real! Gone all motivations of hope, courage, compassion, care. This means also that it is worth cutting all the trees of the Amazon forest if the costs are lower than the earnings. This is the rule of the price. And we can see where it has led us. Good luck!

Structure, hierarchy and domination

Life generates diversity and complementarity of the parts that relate to one another according to a given hierarchy; which soon translates into relationships of domination.

Self-sufficiency was basically the original mode of production. But soon diversification took place that allowed different people to produce different goods that became complementary. Barter and trade developed that allowed the exchange of these goods. This gave birth to market places in bigger villages that developed soon into towns because diversification attracted more diversity with supplementary trades that provided services (pharmacist, lawyers, doctors) more than goods.

This evolution is similar to the evolution of the body which is also made of different organs that all provide different services. The heart pumps the blood but it needs the lungs to re-oxygenate it. There is a circuit that is made of parts: the heart and the lungs, combined with a network of vessels, provide the necessary resources for the organs to absorb them. The whole system has only sense as a system. The heart, although an essential organ, cannot declare it is the master because it needs the lungs, the vessels and the organs to have meaning.

In our humanity, it is the same. We are all interdependent and we need each other to survive. We need the complexity of diversity and complementarity organised in a network of reciprocal relationships and functions. In each complex system there is a hierarchy, that is an order that organises how the parts relate to one another. A relates to B in a different way from the way B relates to C. This is the hierarchy.

Hierarchy does not mean only order; it means also that certain parts are more essential than other parts, and this is the tricky thing. My heart is for me more important than my arm. I can live without an arm but I cannot live without a heart. Yet it is not a reason for me to cut off my arm. My arm can do what my heart cannot do. In fact I need them both equally if I want to be complete, even if my arm is not as a vital function as my heart.

This means that the general order and the specific respective importance of each part define together the role of each part in the whole. But, most essential, it does not imply that these more vital functions should rule over the whole. The hierarchy is there to tell us how the parts relate to one another. To understand the whole setting well, one needs to integrate the whole logic of the system with all its essential as well as accessory aspects. The hierarchy defines a global view which cannot be decomposed in simplified versions. Each missing part, even accessory, will mean that the whole is no longer a whole and cannot function

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properly. In other words the hierarchy does not imply that A has power over B. Yes, A has power to stop delivering its service to B, but it nevertheless needs B to be able to deliver its service, so, this is no real power, except the power to destroy one's own subsistence.

On the other hand we can observe, through the history of humankind, how hierarchy generated centrality, and by contrast periphery. In the evolution described above, the market place becomes soon a central point because it is where people converge to meet each other and exchange. The countryside becomes then periphery, but according to the principle of hierarchy, periphery is as important as the centre. There is no hierarchy that says that the periphery is superfluous. The periphery, such as the countryside, then organises itself around places that become some sorts of centres such as the small marketplace town, which in turn looks at the larger city as the main centre that provides more services and in a greater range of diversity. More complementarity means more centrality. This is still hierarchy, especially if hierarchy does not disvalue the periphery. Periphery and centres work together, until the concept of hierarchy decays into relationships of power and dominance, instead of specialised reciprocity.

Such systems not only may decay but they in general always do, in our society led by market forces. This means that the system organised by hierarchy tips over (degrades) into a system of domination with its own laws of power. And this is the mysterious step. It is as if the heart would take control of the whole body. Of course it can stop pumping and punish everybody that would not obey it. But it would die at the same time. So the heart continues to do its job without claiming power.

The big difference is that the heart has neither money (market) nor weapons (technology). These are the two artificial means that have been invented by human beings to transform

complementarity and hierarchy into diverted power. What is power for? It is used for diverting life forces, for extracting submission or wealth from the weaker. But this happens at a high price. The harmony of the whole setting based on diversity and complementarity is conquered (invaded) by the powerful actor who uses the whole system for his own interest, at the expenses of others. He diverts the whole river to bring the water that belongs to all into his own garden for his own private use and benefice, depriving any other of this precious good. Harmony is broken... although Friedman pretends that the price is its guarantor.

Since the origin of times this trend to confuse centralisation and domination has been developing. Major cities extend endlessly. Urban population is now more important than countryside population which become unilaterally dependent on work in the city. Big corporations dominate the economic scene. Market forces rule our lives as human beings. Some starve, more than half of the world population lives on 1% of total the total wealth only, while others (a tiny minority) do not know what to do with their excessive wealth.

The madness of converting diversity into domination has fostered our relationships between owners of capital and workers, between men and women, between city people and country people, between colonial powers and the colonies, between races, between religions. It has reshaped the whole relationships of production, of exchanges, of trade, of together-living, of human relationships. Some world powers develop and dominate the world, or at least struggle against one another to do so, if alliances do not temporarily offer a better way to reach this end. War and violence has invaded all dimensions of life. Is it worth it? only because of the price?

The price for this transformation of the society into slavery at the profit of a few is the negation of humanity. It is a huge price to

be paid by all, not only by the oppressed but also by the oppressor who reduces his own range of life experience to a single parameter. It reduces life to the price. A price in dollars to win from... or a deadly human price to pay.

Neo-colonialism and hegemony

Decolonisation did not bring about liberation for all but rather a transfer of power from the public sphere to the private one, with an attempt to conserve the previous areas of influence.

We can say that the process of decolonisation is similar to the process of abolition of slavery in the way both have abolished the institution without abolishing the practice.

The slave trade has been abolished and the ownership of slaves has been abolished. These are the two “institutions” of slavery which were abolished. But the practice of slavery has been maintained. There are no longer formal slave owners; but sweatshops still exist in Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Bangladesh, and many other countries. This is where our T-shirts are produced in similar conditions as the sugar was produced in the Caribbean Sea. And everywhere in the world some forms of slavery are still practised: restricted mobility of the workers like in the Arab Emirates and low wages, absence of any security. People are used for their workforce without any compensation. Slavery just changed its name and the way it is practised.

It is the same with decolonisation. The institution of colonialism has been abolished when the ex-colonies acquired their status of independent nations with their own government. That was the institutional change. But the relationships of domination of the North over the South did not stop so far. The formal independence of the ex-colonies prevented the coloniser to use the same methods of domination such as the presence of metropolitan armed forces, of a governor that would execute

orders from the mother country, or similar forms of presence of the dominator on colonised ground. The old system was just transformed into a new system, honestly called neo-colonialism, that was meant to maintain similar processes of domination, yet in a different appearance.

There is in this transformation a main shift from public state power to private corporation power. Coloniser states were no longer able to intervene bluntly in the colonies. New form of domination had to be invented. This happened in the way that the states of the ex-colonial powers slowly transferred to private corporations the initiative to reorganise and maintain profitable relationships with the South. The corporations became then the main actors in the exploitation of Southern resources and workforce.

It is evident that there are no more British ships or British guns to directly back up Shell in the extraction of fuel in Nigeria or openly French troops to defend the interests of French corporations in West Africa. Yet Western armies are still stationed there. There are many American, British and French bases in ex-colonies. But – this is the difference – economic interests are now rather in the hands of private corporations. And these corporations are so huge and powerful that they can put enormous pressure on the local governments. They constitute almost a state in the state.

And the state institutions of the ex-mother-countries are still very much involved to defend an international scene that serves British or French or American interests. They work in cooperation to defend private interests that mainly profit these private corporations and their shareholders. Even often the defence of these private interests goes against the interests of the ex-colonial nation as a community of people of all categories. In the responsibilities and the objectives followed by the State institutions there is a main shift from public interest to private

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interest. The public institution of State has been diverted to serve the interests of the main private corporations involved overseas that bring wealth to a minority of (national) elite instead of serving the interests of the whole nation, i.e. its whole population.

This is evidently not only a continuation, or reorganisation, of the oppressive forms of exploitation of the colonies, which should have been abandoned at the time of independence in order to establish with Southern countries some fundamentally new relations of equity, reciprocity and balance. But it is also a direct way to hijack public institutions of the North and of the South in order to have them serve private interests at the expense of public priorities and collective wellbeing, whether Northern or Southern. As Marx used to say, this is the process of privatisation of profits and socialisation of losses.

The power of choice

As workers-citizens-consumers we are the main actors because the choices we make in our lives are the tiny forces in great number that define what happens.

We could say: yes it is not fair what happens here, in this process of neo-colonisation, but what can we do, as ordinary citizens? we feel powerless. In fact this is not true that we are powerless. There is in this process of shift from public to private a very disturbing but yet promising reality we too often want to ignore. As workers and citizens and consumers, it happens that we are all directly involved in this process much more than we think we are. As a national community we are even, all together, i.e. globally, the main actors.

- First, as workers, we participate in the production of these goods that rely on resources extracted from the South or

destined to Southern markets and that generate so much greed and concupiscence. By our direct participation we offer our energy and creativity to support these processes. Of course we have to earn our living and we have to accept the jobs which are available. But the question remains: how many people ask themselves which interests they will support when they postulate for a job? And how, as workers, can we put pressure on the managers to inflect the processes towards more equity and fairness? Because, as we are the main actors, we have also the main power if we are able to unite our vision and our effort.

- Then, as citizens, we offer also our support to this type of policies. We do not oppose our governments when they are involved in unjust policies with Southern countries; or when they cooperate with Northern governments in a common inertia to (not) solve refugee issues; or when they are slow to implement restrictions on oppressive regimes; or when they do not support initiatives that help correct imbalances inherited from the past. We would be able to create small groups of influence that would oppose these destructive policies and long term impact on the orientation of this corruption of democracy. But do we? We generally prefer to let do or at least ignore what is really at stake, which impacts us as much by boomerang effect as it impacts Southern populations. It is true that such actions of pressure on our leaders are difficult to initiate.
- And finally, as consumers, we are also the ones who buy the products generated by these processes. You can call it white-washing. On the shelves of our supermarkets these products look all good, because the injustice that has participated in their production is no longer perceptible in the product. If not us, who would then buy them? The power of the consumers is incredible if they can get themselves organised. I like to

say: a choice is a vote. Any choice we make plebiscites the process, whether the source of the resources, the function of the good, the mode of production, the work conditions offered to the workers, the financial deal linked with it.

We have then in these three powers of control over production as workers, empowerment as citizens and choice as consumers, an incredible potential to correct this fundamental diversion of democratic power. This is the positive aspect that here depends on our faculty to discern the real dimensions of the whole.

There is still more to this. Some very powerful corporations have also developed that have become major players in the culture of our society because they are in charge of controlling information, which is the principal necessary tool to justify the present practices and to confirm public opinion in order not to endanger the processes I described. Most of the main newspapers are now in the hands of the owners of the main corporations that produce these corrupted goods.

It is fascinating to examine which media belong to whom. The public information and potential democratic debate is then linked to the interests it should make accountable for. Your local newspaper is for instance owned by the main national weapon producer or by an important resource extractor that provides most of the energy consumed in the country. How could they objectively provide equitable statements that respect all aspects and dimensions of what is involved. These disturbing links provide the clear proof that the information we get is twisted and cannot play the impartial role it is meant to, as a radical critique of acting procedures. This means that the media are then an important field to reconquer. This is the necessary condition if we want to be able to see clearly what is.

But we do the contrary: most people also participate in it through social media which tend to amplify the impact of fake news or the spreading of racist or violent states of mind and ways of

thinking, through the manipulation of algorithms that involve us in ever more conflicting and violent exchanges and generate a deep polarisation of our society. Where is truth? And more importantly where is the will to search for truth?

Competition for private hunting grounds

As inheritance from the colonial time the main powers have kept their own zone of influence where they feel entitled to intervene when “necessary”.

In this context of our relative indifference the partition of the ex-colonies as respective spheres of influence has remained almost what it was at the time of the colonies. France has what one calls *Françafrique* as a protected hunting ground in West Africa, which is the territory where it used to exert its colonial power and where it still intervenes to maintain its influence, sending army corps into action, under the name of intervention for the maintenance of peace, as it did still recently in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The USA do the same as Afghanistan or Iraq have illustrated it. If not through an open military intervention they know how to play in the background to put pressure and influence the scene in their advantage.

Luckily, we can say, the unipolar world of pro-American diplomacy, which arose after the collapse of the USSR, is over since other counter-powers are entering the international scene. China becomes a world power and resists American presence that dares to spread not far from its coasts. India follows behind. Russia tries also to reconquer its role of influence on the world stage or for instance in West Africa, generating a counter-power to France colonial power. The BRICS start slowly to form a fourth main player. Yet the five permanent members of the Security Council of the UNO remain the same five – the USA, Russia, China, Britain, France – and one of them can block

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decisions of the UNO as an assembly of all nations. But the perspective of a balance of antagonistic powers is probably a good thing as equilibrium is never achieved by one force but by the combination of many.

What is thoroughly missing is a movement that reinterprets these relationships, bottom up. As non-aligned nations; or as people. This is our role as workers-citizens-consumers. Shall we enter the game? We need urgently to reorganise our international relationships in the form of so many as possible cross-contracts that could counter-balance each other in a flexible pattern. Flexibility offers the potential to play on many different issues that combine and form a network of reciprocal influences that are more powerful than solid blocks. Remember water erodes rock although water is so fluid and rock so solid.

Chapter 12: The second invasion

“Development” aid as imposed pattern

The description of neo-colonialism we just read was pretty severe. But remember, this book is about white supremacy and the need to put an end to this destructive attitude. Now, luckily, our relationships, as Northern powers, with ex-colonies are not always so bad. There are also some very rich exchanges that take shape and allow each partner to learn more from and about the other. The field of humanitarian and so-called “development” aid is of this type, although not always in perfect ways. It is a complex field constituted by many contradictory factors, hence the difficulty to provide adequate solutions. But, through trials and errors, we learned a lot about ways to support each other; and especially what real aid is meant to be, not as a patronising and controlling process, but as an open research full of questions and hopes. Let’s see what we can observe.

“Development” aid as preconceived idea

The concept of development aid says it all: it is about helping poor countries to follow the Northern pattern of development. This concept can yet have other more subtle translations.

“Development” is a Northern concept, impregnated with the belief in eternal economic or material growth. This concept, in the eyes of the ex-coloniser, was the answer to the necessity for poor countries to find their own balance after having undergone the de-structuration of their local social life and economic relationships under the regime of colonialism. But it was not understood in its link with, and compensation for, colonialism or

neo-colonisation. It was thought of as something distinct as so-called technical aid. This could be implemented separately through a series of concrete projects, such as building hospitals or schools, providing dwellings, stimulating businesses, creating a network of roads or railways or sewage, or giving access to sources of energy, and financing these forms of aid.

The mission was marked by a deep inner contradiction. After plundering these countries of their resources and their autonomy the ex-coloniser intended to make these countries more self-sufficient; but they intended to do so without completely renouncing in maintaining neo-colonial relationships of non-reciprocity. In other words the mission consisted in providing means for these countries to acquire better conditions of subsistence and even relative self-sufficiency but without daring to radically question the causes that had prevented an harmonious development or without questioning the models of development that this aid was meant to promote. At the same time, from the point of view of the aid provider, it was important not to risk either to endanger the sources of wealth that were still extracted from these poor countries. Delicate equilibrium.

The models were taken out of the Northern toolbox, in reference to Northern sense of priorities and selfish needs, such as the need to find new partners for economic exchanges in order to find outlets for overproduction. In a similar way, Northern technology was offering Northern techniques with Northern materials which were not adapted to the local conditions of these Southern countries.

The material used, for instance as building material, was not produced locally. The techniques were unknown of local trade people. Local finances could not afford to pay for this kind of technology. Therefore the necessary finances were brought from elsewhere (as aid or debt). And, expression of these contradictions, the buildings produced in this way did not adapt

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to the climatic constraints. The forms and processes did not correspond to traditional customs and cultures.

In other words these models of development were typically of Northern type and did not fit into Southern contexts. They were imported and generated objects that were in major contradiction with their context.

An Indian example

Although thoroughly planned as an economic process of development, this building strategy based on production of simple elements does not provide the expected results.

In 1998 I visited in central India a project of development aid that had for purpose to ease the integration of workers and independent trade people into the economic circuit. The basic idea consisted in providing these trade people with a training and a know-how they could practise and sell as their earning activity. This activity was linked on one hand with the production of simple building elements (bricks and roof tiles) and on the other hand with the professional activity of using these elements for building dwellings. The materials were meant to remain simple as they had to remain financially accessible for a majority of buyers or users for a small price.

The managers of the project had designed two basic elements: a type of concrete blocks and a type of tiles that could be both produced locally, with the help of two types of simple hand presses. The users could then propose their services as bricklayers and roofers in using these standardised elements. And the building process aimed at providing people in need with very simple newly built houses for their families in small village settings.

As one can see the intention was really to allow the process to use a minimum of means and therefore remain affordable for a majority, yet using the channels of the normal economic circuit of market, i.e. of money. This was the general intention of the project that consisted in developing the market to provide simple elementary services. The basic idea was very interesting as a promotion of necessary activities that would integrate into the local exchanges and solve issues of penury in providing work for the trade people and dwellings for the local families.

Yet there were in my mind a few problems with this project that the observation of the end product could easily confirm.

The building elements (bricks and tiles) were produced with materials that were not accessible locally in nature. These materials had to be provided beforehand by industrial production processes that, although very simple and relying on hand tools, needed elaborated materials such as cement that could not be found in the direct surroundings. These materials needed high energy to be produced and could only be purchased with money on the market. The tiles also were of the same type.

The design of each house was very primitive, as a simple box of some 4m x 3m with one door and with, on top, a two-slopes roof that did not extend out further than the walls; that is the roof did not provide any external covered space.

In what concerned the composition of the houses with one another (the village setting), each house was built independently from the others with empty space between them and no relation of one to the next. There was no interest in the planning for the general composition of the village as a network of positive volumes (the buildings) and negative spaces (the streets and squares) that are meant to form a whole (the village).

These few lacks of thorough design had very evident consequences. The basic unit (the house) had no special

attractive character (just a box) and especially no good protection against the heat which was scorching. By lack of thermal mass (hollow-core blocks and thin tiles instead of full mudbricks or roof vegetal insulation) the choice of the materials was inadequate for such a hot climate. By lack of a more creative composition of the houses with one another no external space was defined, such as street or yard or intermediary space between the houses. With more attention and inventiveness, and no supplementary cost, a simple outer space could have been designed and shaped without any addition of any supplementary element, just as proportional space between neighbour houses. This would have made the continuity of the network more interesting and more welcoming for people to stay outside and meet the neighbours.

In other words the design of the whole consisted in just the addition of these two basic elements (bricks and tiles) and not much more. There was no care for the general composition or the climatic conditions or the social setting. This poverty of design was a direct consequence of the main intention of the project that mainly consisted in providing incentives for the market: basic elements (bricks and tiles), work (bricklaying), housing (boxes).

We can see that, in this example, the intention to develop market relationships and the concept of the elements are very much impregnated by Northern culture and do not suit traditional societies where money is scarce; or do not fit poor societies that have preferably to find the necessary material in their direct surroundings.

In observing what was happening in the new settlement I could notice how all the people who were meant to live in these houses had escaped far from them and were all assembled near an old traditional half-decrepit mudbrick house with a long sloping roof made out of vegetal materials (branches and thatch roof) that extended far out and offered protection from the sun to all of

them, in front of the house. And it shaped an external space where all people were meeting and chatting and laughing. This basic house was made of natural material that one could easily find in the surroundings and that required no skills to be assembled.

In summary, despite an interesting idea, elaborated with care, that had led the concept of the project, it failed to reach its aim by lack of imagination and more thorough development, further than the basic idea. This initial idea still needed to be worked out at a higher and more global level of design that would have also involved many other aspects such as structure, better relationships with the direct surroundings, climate, customs, culture.

Foreign help in this sense is understood as a form of domination of the idea “we know best and we will teach you” instead of involving more directly the users and people concerned by the project who would bring an interesting contribution to the concept as they know best the local conditions of life which are theirs.

An Egyptian example

A research for traditional techniques using natural materials allows the architect Hassan Fathy to create a harmonious setting in tune with climate, culture and economy.

There is an interesting counter-example⁶², this time in Egypt. The general context of this experience, in the late 1960s, was

⁶² See Hassan Fathy: *Architecture for the Poor, an Experience in Rural Egypt*. University of Chicago, 1973.
Or download: https://www.academia.edu/42325392/Egyptian_Architect_Hassan_Fathys_ARCHITECTURE_FOR_THE_POOR_1973

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characterised, at this time of first experiences, by typical forms of imported development aid for the building of dwelling units intrinsic to programs implemented by the UNO or the UNESCO, applying principally industrial techniques using concrete. The materials, the technique, the economic processes, the culture applied were all very inadequate, especially in regard to the poor social context, the traditional use of simple crafts and an arid climate that was very harsh. This was probably the necessary first steps of mistakes in international aid that allowed later technical support to evolve towards better models.

Hassan Fathy⁶³, born in 1900 in Alexandria, Egypt, was an Egyptian architect, artist, and poet who had a lifelong commitment to architecture in the Muslim world. He was a cosmopolitan intellectual, with knowledge of Western and Eastern literature and philosophy, absorbing the influences of very different traditions. He used his knowledge of mathematics and music investing them in simple domestic constructions with the dignity of harmonic proportions. He worked to create an indigenous environment at a minimal cost, and by doing so, to improve the economy and the standard of living in rural areas. In his works, Fathy wanted to pay tribute to nature, traditions, and man while seeking spirituality. All these qualities distinguish him from the traditional notion of a modern architect.

Commissioned to rebuild a village (Gourna) in Egypt, near Luxor, he engaged in an inventive search for traditional techniques that would allow him to build houses, and especially roofs, without using wood, which is a material that is not easily available in arid countries. This meant to find a form of vaults and a technique for building them that could be applied without even using wood scaffolding for supporting the vault until it is

finished and self-supporting. He found in Nubia (High Egypt) some traditional bricklayers who could demonstrate and teach him how to do this. He then brought the technique to Gourna where, with the help of the Nubian bricklayers, he formed local Egyptian bricklayers, using mudbricks for these vaults. The material was freely available in the direct environment. This meant that the technique needed only intelligence and work to be applied.

He designed then houses that would be well adapted to the hot climate as the walls and the roof were very thick and offered therefore an excellent thermal mass that prevented the extreme of temperature to impact on the inner climate of the house. Using traditional features he designed also the flow of natural ventilation to allow cooling. As in the precedent example he could train bricklayers who acquired skills they could use long term for earning their living, but with a better integration in local economy, given the free access to material and the absence of sophisticated accessories. He revived also a craft that was in tune with culture and traditional practices, and with the usual way of life of people who would inhabit these new houses.

The village was planned as a whole with a careful design of its narrow streets protected from the sun, and outer space where people could meet.

The whole process revealed to be extremely effective and the building very resistant and durable, and beautiful and comfortable on top of this. This is an inspiring example that shows that freedom from colonial patterns can generate fascinating forms which are much more adapted than anything else, especially when they are inspired by the traditional heritage of know-how and human values.

⁶³ See <https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/know-your-architects/a425-15-projects-by-hassan-fathy/>

10 principles against failure

Aid is very insidious and propagates the same diseases it wants to cure. The qualities that are most missing are reciprocity and a sense of complementarity between different cultures.

As we can see everywhere around us, aid is necessary, not only for the one who gets it but also for the one who proposes it. It is in fact a reciprocal connection that opens the look of the giver onto another reality and another way of thinking and living. It awakens our conscience to the reality of injustice as well as to our potential for solidarity. But it is too often geared by our own will to impose our own patterns. If the gap between rich and poor increases it is because we fail to bring the right support that would correct the mechanisms of injustice, and that would address the dysfunctions in the structure itself of our exchanges. Equality and equity are made possible by our care for them.

I would like to propose here ten principles that try to formulate main rules that make help better possible when it is balanced.

- 1) **Equality:** All human beings are equal, independently of their race, their religion, their social belonging, their gender, their age, their wealth. Nobody is superior to the other but we are all complementary.
- 2) **Degree of evolution:** There are no primitive people or developed people, but there are different options of development and they cannot be measured with one single yardstick such as level of technology or GDP. We can compare the different levels achieved in different fields but this has no sense as long we do not relate these differences to the contrasts between cultural options that have favoured one way rather than the other. There is no one single path of evolution, but many.
- 3) **Reciprocity:** Aid can only be reciprocal, because each one contributes with their own genius. If one person has more to teach on some topic, it is because this same person has a lack in another field. Reciprocity is based on complementarity.
- 4) **Domination:** The North has dominated the South. But it did so only because it had better weapons, better technology and less moral restraint (leitmotiv). The cause is not wisdom or any form of superiority; it is just violence.
- 5) **Supremacy:** Since the conquest of the colonies the North has never stop preventing the independence of Southern lands because it wanted to keep control over the resources. Very little, or even nothing, has been done to help the South to truly practise empowerment and self-determination.
- 6) **No two-speed development:** Usually aid proposes solar energy, bikes, water tread pumps, mudbirck for the poor countries, but nuclear energy, planes and cars, running water, concrete and air conditioning for the rich countries. Why this disparity? What is good for one is also good for the other. And “small is beautiful”.
- 7) **False prestige:** The treachery prestigious status of the consultant brings an ambiguous message. He comes by plane, lives at the hotel, stays only for a short time, gives his advice and disappears again. With his computer and his money he is the model of wealth, speed, efficiency, material wellbeing, technical knowledge. But his model cannot be implemented, by lack of access to these qualities which are indeed no real qualities. The good teacher practises what he teaches.
- 8) **Social dynamic and awareness:** Northern aid usually believes in technology as the solution to all problems. But any technique is linked with the crafts and culture that have fostered it. It cannot be applied elsewhere without this

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specific relation that has forged it. Technology, if it can offer a solution, needs to be reinterpreted in a new relation with the way local people live, think, perceive life and understand their social setting. Technology is only a support for awareness and social dynamic which both form the core of the experience.

- 9) **Avoidance of market:** The insertion in local or world market is usually believed to bring the solution. Aid almost always tries to link the region it will help to connect with the international market and to integrate into it because there is an (unconscious) belief that market brings wealth and happiness (see Indian example). But these poorer countries are precisely poor because they cannot compete with richer countries on the same market. The balance of their exchanges is in deficit; wealth drains out. They need first to find their own inner equilibrium in a form of self-sufficiency and, for this, they need protection. Exchanges represent a great potential but they must be made accessible to all, in equity, that is according to rules that have to correct the sources of deficit. Aid that helps to escape the pressures of market (local currency, barter, solidarity, reciprocity) are the best means to prevent exploitation. It is true also for our rich economies. These alternatives forms of exchange protect us from the ills of market and the power of finance.
- 10) **Aid at home:** The true causes of what we consider as underdevelopment in poor countries are mainly linked with mechanisms that have their origin in rich countries (the previous colonial powers). It is then rather at home (in the mother country) that solutions can be found and fundamental change can be implemented. Of course this does not solve problems linked with the direct environment, when its degradation is not the consequence of global climate change.

These few remarks are just sketching a timid beginning of reflection. The path of the deep transformation that is needed is long.

Tourism as supremacy

Tourism is an important dimension of neo-colonialism because it exports to poor countries Northern ways of life and types of infrastructures and ways of thinking which are in contradiction with indigenous cultures. And it exploits these Southern cultures for the own enjoyment of the wealthy.

Tourism has hugely developed in these last decades, thanks to a significant increase in mobility. So many far countries become so easily accessible. Increasing wealth for the rich allows them to organise short trips to faraway countries where they enjoy new sights, new landscapes, new food, new activities.

Tourism is mainly a form of leisure. It is rather an escape from where one lives than a true discovery of where one goes. The contact with the country of destination is meant to be easy, smooth and comfortable, instead of being a challenge to our ways of living. Cruises are probably the best representation of this hedonic way of having holidays: travelling without leaving one's own bubble of comfort.

Mobility as the flattening of distances and differences

Easy accessibility (speed) destroys differences. Tourism transports its own comfort bubble and destroys the host country. It exploits its inhabitants as slaves.

It is almost a pleonasm: mobility has shortened distances. But it is less evident to our eyes that this shortening of distances also

destroys the richness of differences. Distance and difference are indeed narrowly linked; when one shrinks, the other does too.

When two different cultures are in direct proximity, they tend either to imitate one another (the mimetic instinct) and merge into an average way of being, a kind of hybridization, in which each one disappears; or they tend to oppose each other in accentuating their differences but then fall into caricatures of what they truly are..

Difference is what makes tourism so exciting. It opens us to something different and new. Exoticism has long been an important vector of tourism as the attraction for the unknown. People who live in countries where rain is frequent, dream of blue skies and turquoise sea, even of dark skins, and kind hospitality, although they remain impregnated by the values of supremacy and whiteness.

There is a fundamental and deep contradiction in tourism. The purpose is what they call in French *dépaysement*, which literally means *de-country-ing oneself*; or, in other words, taking oneself out of the country one knows to provide a change of scenery. It consists in changing the surrounding settings in order to refresh the mind which is weary of everyday living, generally because of degraded conditions of work and life at home, or simply of boredom by routine.

This is where exoticism intervenes. It relies on *dépaysement*, that is more on contrasts of what is known than on reality of what is new. But exoticism is an artificial creation. It does not exist as such. It does not consist in showing what this other country is. It consists in creating a fiction out of the country where the tourist is transported to in order to seduce and please him. What is here important is what is thought to be the need (the desire) of the tourist, and not the reality of the country to be revealed to the visitor.

Edward Said, as mentioned earlier, has shown how Orientalism was a fiction that was created by the West in order to answer the needs of *dépaysement* of the West and justifying seduction, domination and colonisation. It has not much to do with the Orient as such. It is the same with exoticism. As Orientalism exoticism is a creation meant to please the visitor. This fiction hardly needs the country or rather reuses elements of it to redraw a new picture. I'll soon come back to this later.

On the other hand tourism intends to provide a change of setting and mind but there is another important factor that plays a major role. This change has absolutely to be easy, smooth and effortless. This means that most people, despite their need for change, need not to have their habits disturbed. They need the same level of comfort, or even more luxury. They want to swim in a beautiful place, in turquoise seas, but it must be effortless and not challenging. These requirements of comfort and pleasure represent indeed qualities that are exacerbated by the Western way of living, and not related to the host country. Tourism has to become a celebration of leisure. These expectations of comfort are in fact in complete contradiction with the simplicity, with the struggle for subsistence, with the reality of daily effort of ways of living in poor countries, which are the countries of destination.

Therefore tourism is a double compromise: it generates a false image of the visited country (exoticism) and, in order to provide comfort and easy living, it changes the effective settings of the destination. It creates the cocoon of the hotel to adapt the host country to Northern taste. The tourist and its agent transport therefore with themselves the mentality that has forged our Western way of living. Even they try to exaggerate the level of comfort as a celebration of luxury and easy life. Quick means of transport, luxury hotels, air conditioning, clear water, soft bedding, relaxing chairs, personal service have to follow the tourist where he goes although these elements do not correspond to the reality and standard of the host country.

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This complex infrastructure that is needed for the comfort of the tourist is also in complete contradiction with the intention of offering a change of scenery, because it reproduces, in exaggerated qualities and quantities, what the tourist already knows, or aspires to know, at home. In other words, only the external scenery (the landscape) changes, that is what the tourist sees through the window or in front of him, beyond the limit of the terrace or beyond the edge of the beach. The personal inner experience does not change, as the focus for pleasure remains the same, unchanged.

There is then no change in what the tourist discovers: he continues to sleep in similar beds, sit on similar seats, eat at a table, swim in a pool, have beers and wine and coffee at the table, and be served by people who speak his own language. Like a snail the tourist transports his own home (world) and habits with him, with all the necessary paraphernalia. In this sense the image of the cruise is the perfect model of tourism.

It is evident that this establishment of a white infrastructure into the vernacular landscape betrays the true spirit of meeting the local people, who are the Others, as they are. We can observe worldwide how this systematic westernisation of the welcoming infrastructure has destroyed all the countries where it has established itself. We know too well how many beach resorts in poor countries have been destroyed by too many hotels and a culture of indulgence. We even do not wish to go there any longer.

Once the country has lost its beauty because these Northern infrastructures have destroyed the natural and the social environment, the tourism agent moves on to other places, further away, deeper into the wild, to other countries where it starts anew the same strategy of destruction on a fresh ground that soon becomes also polluted by the falsification of materialist

comfort. Exoticism is a resource than can be exhausted as natural resources do. The corporation moves on to other grounds.

More than anything or anybody else, this process of conquest destroys the local people. The local people are no more the traditional people the tourist intended to visit. They have never been what they have become now. Because of the invasion by the tourists these local people have fundamentally changed. In these conditions they can no longer be who they were or who they are in their own depth. But they act as it is expected from them, to serve the tourist in conformity with his habits. This is their job, necessary for their subsistence. On the side of the tourist there is no curiosity for the indigenous people, except for shooting exotic pictures to bring back home. He even does not see them because they have mutated into servants. He sees only their readiness to serve him. He sees only their smile and their exotic look that charm him.

This is a new form of slavery, especially because profit can only be made on the back of these committed workers. Hence they are underpaid and have to submit to the conditions imposed by the “client” who is not much different from the coloniser who used to impose himself onto these colonised. What has changed? Is that not supremacy?

The worse examples of all is probably sex tourism that invades a country and exploits and destroys, not only the landscape and the culture, but directly the people and this without respect for their humanity, for their integrity and without ethical restraint, as if the tourist could not see that they are equally human beings.

Consuming the left-over

The traditional tools or features of the host country are re-interpreted as decorations, devoid of content, to artificially create an exotic setting that can be sold to the tourist.

Other customs, culture, religion, language, climate would be too extreme, too rough and challenging for the tourist, as poverty and dysfunctions would be too difficult to contemplate with open eyes and mind. But the quality of exoticism, even if artificially created, remains essential to the business, as a form of dream of this other world of myths that the leaflet of the tourism agent has promised.

The setting needs then a special “stage design” and “arrangement of actors” that could recreate the atmosphere of exoticism without necessarily to be too real or perturbing for the spectator. Too much reality would frighten the client with what could disturb him, such as a set of values or customs that would confront his conventional views or such as a harsh practice that would seem violent to him or too much pestilence and striking poverty in too much proximity.

The stage setting is then reviewed and reorganised according to what the tourist agent thinks will please his clients. It is indeed a show, an artificial projection on the screen. This new stage design is a fiction. It consists principally in reusing traditional items for their appearances and beauty (beauty mainly generated by the exotic look) but disconnected from content. Reality has been turned into symbolic items: the coconut tree, the thatched roof, the beach, the exotic food, the charm of the traditional woman who dances, local artefacts, shells found on the beach.

The Swiss sociologist and ethnologist Bernard Crettaz calls these items, which are reemployed for a different purpose, the *left-over*⁶⁴. The case that he studies, and uses as an example, concerns the culture of mountain regions in the Alps, but the same applies to all forms of tourism. In mountain areas, the

⁶⁴ Bernard Crettaz: *La beauté du reste. Confession d'un conservateur de musée sur la perfection et l'enfermement de la Suisse et des Alpes*. Editions Zoé, 1993.

mode of subsistence consists in a form of meagre living in a sparse economy of cattle raising and cheese production on the steep slopes of Alpine valleys, at the price of a huge effort generated by the effects of relative scarcity and of steep slopes and ubiquitous gravity. This form of subsistence means, among other tasks, the necessity to cut the grass on the fields, to transport it and store it as hay for winter, for the cattle, climbing up and down the slopes, transporting big quantities of hay up and down on people's shoulders. These activities necessitate simple tools such as scythes and rakes and sledges.

The term *left-over* is in this case very appropriate because the traditional items (generally tools) that are chosen to evoke and celebrate the exoticism of mountain areas that the tourist wishes to contemplate have progressively lost their traditional use and meaning. These activities to which they correspond have been abandoned when people started to work as employees in small industrial settings or when the region converted to tourism. And therefore these objects and tools have become recently void of content, except as reminders of the past.

Such are, in the case of the Alps, the scythe, the rake, the sledge. These symbolic items of rural life are then exposed on the walls of the houses as decorative items that are used to evoke the traditional past. They are used as symbols because, as objects, they are of no use and no utility. They are the *left-over* of a culture that used them in everyday life for its subsistence. But there is no longer any practice of traditional ways of living and the tools connected with traditional life have lost their significance; they are just *left-over*.

But the tourist sees beauty in them because these items represent for him the traditional way of living he has come to visit, without being involved in this traditional way of living. He does not need to cut the grass or to lift these huge weights of hay on his shoulders up and down the slope. He is just a spectator, an

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onlooker, in a form of false celebration of what he will never know. He is then the spectator of a fiction that celebrates the beauty of these items as a show, not as reality of effort for subsistence. This is pure exoticism.

The whole setting of tourism is in this way re-created as a whole, as a new landscape, as an invention that pleases the visitor. If we look at touristic leaflets and study how they present a region, it is striking to see how the vision they propose transforms radically the region it tries to “sell”. It recreates a whole world as a product for consumption, to be bought with money. There is no participation of the visitor in this fiction. The qualities of this region they describe have less to do with the effective characteristics of the host region but more with the lacks the tourist is thought to experience in his own city life.

The tourist resort is then not defined by its own qualities but rather by the negation of the negative qualities of the city where the tourist is thought to live and which he wants to escape when he takes refuge for his holidays in exotic areas. The silence of the mountain appears as the negation of urban noise, the purity of the snow as the negation of pollution, the hospitality of the locals as the negation of urban anonymity. Therefore the Alps are presented as a space of revitalisation, of light and purity, of freedom and vastness, of health and joy, of hospitality and conviviality, of traditions and human scale. These new artificially celebrated values become real symbols which are very powerful. The snow evokes the infinity of death and eternity, i.e. the abolition of the constraint of time. The light is bliss for the dweller of polluted streets and squares. Alpinism is the reward for mastery which most people do not experience so often in their lives as employees. Holidays become sublimation.

But, supreme contradiction here again, as tourism needs to bring comfort to the villages where the tourist intends to climb mountains or to ski on white powdery fields, it slowly, year after

year, progressively but not noticeably, consumes its natural and traditionally built capital of beauty; it builds the city into the mountain. And, with it, it introduces the same urban nuisances of traffic, noise, crowd, anonymity, excesses. The villages are progressively transformed. Streets are asphalted; parking areas are built for the cars; the small old villages are invaded by huge constructions that try to mimic traditional architecture with wooden cladding and sloping roofs, but ten times the size of traditional habitat. This is evidently a deep non-sense that destroys the quality of the traditional built environment characterised by its narrow streets, small size and human vitality.

Tourism in this way recreates, beside the necessary infrastructure of comfort (hotel, swimming pool, airport, shopping mall) a scene of apparent traditional living made of *left-over*: a local exoticism that translates worldwide into thatched roof, bungalows, women in traditional costumes, folkloric dances, local market with spices and handicraft, natural souvenirs made of shells or out of the last pieces of coral, local art gallery where tradition has been depicted as art. These are no natural extensions or expressions of local economy but these are artificially installed scene enhancements as a false setting that evokes any form of exoticism.

One can understand how these false settings can mislead not only the tourists but also the local inhabitants who do not any longer know who they are and what they are doing, as they adapt continuously to a role they play for the tourist.

They become actors and as actors they adapt to their roles. They are imprisoned in an image of their land and of their whole culture that has been projected onto them from outside. They are the living creatures of a myth. They are also willing to do so and to adapt because it offers them a new form of subsistence and they dream they will maybe become as rich as the tourists they serve. Some of them can even “succeed”, buying land, building

new accommodations, renting many flats. Yet this is also a form of slavery because they cannot be who they are. They cannot break out of the picture. They become slaves, slaves of profit for the tourist agents and shareholders, instead of being free human beings, free to live their lives according to their own choices, priorities and values. This reminds us, in another form, of the colonial past.

But this process of adaptation to a change of representation is more complex than it seems. The whole process of creating a new environment with new symbols representing the traditional world in a way that will please the tourists is in fact not only enacted for the tourists. It serves also the aspirations of the indigenous people because it helps them to adopt a new identity that they can also, at least partly, forge in their own manner. It is for them the opportunity to experience how they can fit into modernity, into a form of modernity that they interpret as a widening of the own space of life, that is as an alternative to the traditional world they know, or rather they knew, as this world belongs now to the past.

The local inhabitants find in this new myth of the “exotic savage”, which is different from what they were as traditional people, an opportunity to escape the constraints of their traditional culture. This traditional culture has very strict rules that dictate the right behaviour and restrict the freedom of the local inhabitants and is also characterised by a certain violence peculiar to any enclosed social circle. The “urbanisation” of the mountain or the “exoticisation” of the tropics – as these artificial substitutions of the image for the reality can be called – are both offering a wider way to play with identity, that is to forge one’s own. This wider range allows the inhabitants to adopt different behaviours in imitation of the tourists or as experimentation of “modernity”, or on the contrary as convinced heirs of their own culture. These multiple combinations between tradition and modernity offer a wider range of possible identities which they

can play at will with. Hence also the disorientation in playing with such a wide range of possibilities when they do not know any longer which one corresponds to their true being or aspiration.

On the other hand, and at the same time, they have also a form of nostalgia of the harmonious traditional society they knew when it was not “corrupted” by external influences and the invasion of all these strangers who are nobodies to them. They reinvent for instance new ways of raising cattle in collective stables, i.e. in shared forms of work and obligations that allow each of the owners to take alternatively charge of the cattle in turn, while the others consecrate themselves to their main income earning activity, either in the field of tourism, or in employment in urban activities in the next city, at the bottom or exit of the valley.

Hence they have to navigate between attitudes of escape, of recreation and of nostalgia. And, at the same time, they remain confronted with the role they have to play as actors to earn their living. On top of this, and most important of all, is of course their own wish to be whom they want to be. As we can see, the situations with which the colonised is confronted are not simple because they have to play with many components out of different worlds, while the tourist lives on one single register. Maybe these complex situations speak to all of us and interpellate us. We are all confronted with “modernity”, with the gains we can get out of it and with the nature of our true self which we do not know and for which we search endlessly.

Living like an Inuit

True visit to one another is possible as a form of friendship. This is then no tourism but only a form of visiting each other and participating in one another’s life.

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Instead of being a tourist, one hopes one could be just an honest visitor. This is something fundamentally different. Personally I would not like to be a tourist; but I become nevertheless one, each time I travel to tourist resorts. I would prefer in fact to meet the people and the land as they are. I wish to share their way of life, if they accept me as a guest.

One problem is that hospitality is always shaped by generosity which tends also to spare the sensitivity and flexibility of the guest while it attempts to create a world of wellbeing around him. True and generous hospitality tends to hide reality from the guest and to offer pure kindness. I remember travelling in Middle East or African countries and being invited by people who did not know me. They offered me as a stranger what they had best, such as the best possible meal, although they knew they would not see me again and they would never get anything in return of what they had offered me. It was pure generosity and hospitality to celebrate our being together. And when time had come that I left their welcoming home they grabbed on their shelves an item they had exposed in their living room because it was significant to them, which means that they valued it much, and offered it to me as a farewell present. Incredible!

I dream now: would it be possible to visit the Inuit and live as he does, sleeping in the same conditions, in his own house, walking outside on the snow, being cold when it is freezing, eating what is available. I do not mean here living at their expenses but truly sharing their life conditions to know who they are, staying for a long time, learning their language, discovering their beliefs, working with or for them, listening to their teaching. This would be the only possible way to truly learn about these people and who they are.

We had similar experiences here in the Australian bush, welcoming European youngsters who stayed and worked with us for a few months, sharing all aspects of life. They were rich

encounters, to the point it was difficult to continue to do this... because we were spending most of our time exchanging around the table about the fascinating themes of life.

To ensure the best possible reciprocity between you and me, this kind of thorough way of meeting each other could be organised as a kind of exchange. I come to your place and stay with you for a long time. Later you come to my place and stay with me for a long time. There is no money involved, no business. There is only time spent together in different settings that belong to everyday living.

I remember we used to do this as young people when we went to a foreign country to learn another language. I was then part of the family as the boy of the family I visited was later part of my family, for a short duration of one or two months. Or we did even the same in exchanging holiday houses in other countries for the duration of one or two months. But we then did not meet the people we exchanged with, because they were at our place when we went to theirs. Nevertheless we discovered the place where they used to live and the way they did, which books they read, which pictures they liked, how they furnished their rooms, how they organised their kitchen; and they did the same in our home at the same time. What a rich experience!

The obstacle for similar types of exchanges between poor and rich countries is certainly the problem of wealth. If, as a Westerner living in a pretty wealthy setting, I invite my Inuit friend to spend some time at my home, it may well have the contrary effect. Instead of inspiring reciprocal relationships between him and me, it can well be perceived as a show of prestige: prestige of my well heated home, of my car, of my comfort, of a way of life that is enabled by accumulated wealth and by a developed economy that has drawn much of its resources from similar countries to the Canada my new friend comes from. The experiment may well then turn into a new colonial link in which

there are a poor guest (my Inuit friend) on one side and a privileged host (myself) on the other. The seduction of wealth risks preventing a true exchange. Who is indeed wise enough not to be seduced by material wellbeing?

By contrast, if I welcome my new Inuit friend in a hut I can have built in the forest, we could then find more opportunities to connect truly, away from wealth differences. Let's be clear: this does not mean that I should hide my better material standard of living, or that I have a right to it but he does not. No, I just mean here that the difference of material standard can only throw ambiguity onto the whole experience and the way we meet. But, paradoxically, if I hide from him the reality of my daily life, I refuse also to show myself as I am, and the whole experience of meeting each other collapses into non-sense. This is a sad but very realistic assessment.

This negative example shows how differences, especially if they are of material order, can be badly interpreted unless there is an exceptionally high level of wisdom on both parts, so that material conditions become irrelevant as a fatal aspect of destiny. And these material differences of standard may then not impact so much on our friendship.

On the other hand – and this is very important – it tells us that only very simple conditions of subsistence on both sides will allow us to connect without ambiguity, in truthfulness. It tells us also that real communication is hampered by material clutter.

The problem of our wealth is a double one. It has been created out of unequal exchanges; it is why wealth can accumulate on one side only, and not on both sides of the exchange. The second aspect is that our Western wealth is not sustainable; it is made out of excessive extraction from the surroundings that the environment cannot supply. Wealth imbalance and excessive extraction are the two problems that hamper true sharing between rich and poor, even when there is reciprocal respect.

And these two excesses represent the debt we have, as Northern countries, towards Southern lands. To remedy this great injustice we have, as Northerners, to reduce our standard of living and we have to share wealth with the poorer nations. This is a big challenge. This is also the key for fairer exchanges and the possibility to truly meet the other, my Inuit friend. This is also the way we can shift from exploitative tourism to respectful sharing of our common humanity.

Does it mean there is no possibility for honest tourism? Yes, it is probably what it means because tourism transports its own values with itself and prevents true meeting and exchange. It cannot be open and listen. If it does, it is no longer tourism; it is mere human encounter.

It means also that I can only visit the unknown person who can become my friend if I go where he lives as a visitor, as a participant, and not as a tourist or client. And he also visits me reciprocally. But then it is no tourism; it is just shared humanity. And sharing can only happen in simple relationships, without clutter.

The example of the Kogi People

The Kogi People teach us how to relate to the universe that is a whole where every part is related to and in interaction with one another. Life is nothing but adaptation to these cycles.

We saw earlier how tourism is an exploitative way of taking advantage of the host countries. We saw also the alternative of true meeting when we dare to visit each other and are interested in the persons and not so much in the “things” around them. I would like now to go further on a steeper path that requires more from us and offers also much more. I would like to investigate a third possibility that tries to go deeper into the complexity of human relationships.

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I will describe another way of relating with cultures of these so-called poor countries, which are often much richer than us in terms of subtle knowledge and wisdom. These Southern or traditional or indigenous cultures have much to teach us if we, for a while, may swallow down our stupid feeling of superiority and learn to listen to them. In this case we become the disciples of some new unknown teachers. We may then discover how much we can learn from them, despite the fact we are materially richer. Once more the wealth circulates from them to us, but, this time, it is not exploitative; it awakes in us just a sense of recognition and gratitude for who they are.

To illustrate this too often unknown potential, I will describe an exceptional case of a South American traditional culture that feels called to teach us what we do wrong and why we do it wrong. Be warned: it is not because they pretend they have the true wisdom they have to teach us. No, it is about our own survival. They know what we do awkwardly. And, if we accept to listen to them, we will understand something fundamental that will radically change the way we think and we act. It will be a kind of cultural revolution, like the path of liberation I will describe later, a thorough change of mind, a turn-around of our understanding of the world.

I'm here very serious; I believe deeply that this kind of turn-around is absolutely necessary for our survival. This whole book is just about this: we cannot continue to relate as we do and, to change our ways, we need to change the way we think.

The example of the culture, which I have chosen because these people feel called to teach us, is the culture of the Kogi People. The Kogi People are Amerindians who live in the north of Colombia in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a mountain massif which stands, isolated from the Cordillera de Andes, in the plain between the Magdalena River and the Lake Maracaibo. It is not very big (about some 50km across) but very high (it

culminates above 5700m, the highest mountain in Colombia), and this some 40km away from the Caribbean Sea.

The Kogi People have been chased from their traditional lands by the Spanish invaders and by later mining companies and the state power. They took refuge in higher altitude or remote areas and they try to reacquire their ancestral lands, with the financial help of some supportive Western associations. Their ancestral wisdom remained very alive because they continue to practise the traditional teaching which they pass on from generation to the next.

Their training is very serious and requires a deep commitment. The children who are destined to become elders stay for years in the darkness of caves where they learn to listen to the Earth. Be clear: they are not animist. They have a vast knowledge of the origin of the world that is absolutely in conformity with the discoveries of science. They have also a spiritual understanding of the universe. The origin is the Mother (called Se), as a feminine entity that gives birth to life. Nature is understood as a whole where everything is connected to one another and works in cycles. Because they learned how to listen to the Mother, they understand what is at stake in the landscape around them and perceive these subtle connections between the parts and the whole and how they interact.

In our present time of decay of biodiversity and climate change they feel called to share their wisdom with the wider world and with us, the Northerners, their little brothers as they call us affectionately.

They try to teach us how to listen and how to respect the cycles and the energy that is at work in the Earth and the Universe. Water seems to be for them the essential presence that reveals best the processes. As a flow it represents life, which develops in cycles when it flows down to the ocean and then rises back by evaporation to the mountains where the Kogis live. Everything is

then linked with everything and the whole must be considered, with all its inner and external connections, to understand how it works. As human beings we have to adapt to these cycles and to protect them because they are the sources of life for all of us, wherever we live. They are the representation of a wider invisible reality which arises from the darkness of the universe.

But there is something more to water. It is loaded with the energy of the place. It is sensitive to the way we handle it and the state of mind we are in. If we are angry, water is charged with our anger. If we are grateful, water expresses gratitude. This seems incredible, and even a bit superstitious. But it is indeed what the Kogi People want us to understand. They speak about the bubbles in the water that allow them to read the message of the water. The bubbles are here in fact only the metaphor for what the water emits as an energy, but also much concretely the message that the Kogis learned to read.

This reminds me of the work of the Japanese scientist Masaru Emoto⁶⁵ who used to photograph through a microscope the crystals formed by water. He illustrates these different states of water and shows that water imbibes the atmosphere that surrounds it. If water is clean or polluted, the crystals will look very different, the former harmonious, the latter hideous. If you play beautiful music the crystals are regular and luminous. If you play violent and aggressive music the crystals transform into ugly shapes. The same if you write love or hate on the bottle. This seems weird. But it is indeed similar to the principle of homeopathy that a message may be inscribed in a very tiny quantity of material because the message is energy. And water is a support of energy that transports it and distributes it.

⁶⁵ Masaru Emoto: *The Hidden Messages in Water*, Hado Kyoikuska Co. Ltd. And many other editions and translations.

To respond to their vocation the Kogi People have often travelled to Europe where they are asked to explain the landscape of the Alps and how it has been negatively impacted by the interventions of humankind. It is striking to observe how these people, who have never been in the Alps, can observe, decipher and understand the cycles of evolution over millions of years and explain how it came to the present formation.

It is then strange to observe how European scientists are happy to listen to them as far as they say something that fits into the picture the scientists have formed for themselves. Scientists are amazed to see what Kogi People are able to say and wonder how these people, who cannot read and did not learn their science in books, may demonstrate such deep knowledge of evolution.

But the capacity of Western people to hear clearly their message seems also, too often, to stop there when they cannot any longer integrate the vision of the Kogi People into their own rational and scientific knowledge and frame of mind. There is then a blockage in the exchange that is reduced to the recognition that all parts are linked and only the understanding of the whole allows to act in conformity with the laws of nature. But this sadly remains only an intellectual recognition that does not dare to challenge the way we think and we live. Westerners seem to refuse to enter into the process of thinking of the Kogis. They reject these ways because the mental processes of the Kogis imply we may go beyond what is directly perceptible or measurable; and that we may accept that there is a more subtle force of evolution, the Mother, who gives impulse to the whole process, to life.

This is where the contact with the Kogi People becomes in my mind the most powerful and the most enriching for us. Their understanding of the real energy that animates nature is narrowly linked with their spiritual belief in the Mother as origin of the world, of a universe that is infinite. This Mother is called

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differently by different traditions: the Ground of Being, Brahman, Emptiness, God, Allah, Yahweh, the Ancestors, the Spirit, or whatever. What matters most here is that the Kogi People are not animist people who live in tune with nature. They are much more. They are deeply spiritual beings, some kind of seers, who learned to listen to the source of life during the training they followed in dark caves, in their early age, at least for the elders who did. When they listen they not only hear and learn but they also adapt and obey the laws of life. This is much deeper than mere knowledge, even spiritual knowledge. It is simply practice and life and deep consciousness.

This changes everything. And this is precisely what Western scientists refuse to hear. Yet these same scientists are deeply amazed and challenged. For instance there is this British astronomer who shows them a photo of the universe taken by the telescope Hubble that is so powerful that it reveals what cannot be seen with naked eyes. But the Kogi seer indicates him without hesitation on this photo which one is the star. And the astronomer to be gobsmacked. How does the seer know what he has never seen?

There are a few documents that allow us to better understand the teaching the Kogi People want us to receive. One is a video⁶⁶ they made themselves in which they try to reconnect the parts together and heal the broken links. This is a very touching and powerful teaching. But this constitutes of course only a very superficial approach of their deeper teaching.

This example of the Kogi People demonstrates how much we can receive from Southern cultures when we are ready to listen. The Kogi seers are very worried we cannot receive their message. They say, as our Western scientists say, that we come to a critical

⁶⁶ The title of the video is: *Aluna - An Ecological Warning by the Kogi People*. A link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftFbCwJfs1I>

stage of our evolution and that we have to change the way we do what we do. This is a very urgent message that joins also what has been said about wealth in the precedent comment and how it needs to be fundamentally reoriented; that is shared and made sustainable by integration into natural cycles. The message of our own science is joined here by their message which is rooted in a deep spiritual understanding. Is this not powerful?

Now, I have to add here something important. By contrast with the depth of the message I just exposed, we can observe how tourism has flattened differences, in the poor way I have described when it turns everything into something that can be consumed. This is sadly also the case with the Kogi People. If you look on the internet what is told about them, you see that they are reduced to simple traditional actors in traditional dresses in villages that become a stage for the tourists to visit shortly and quickly without grasping what is at stake. Once again, it is here the depth of a whole culture that is reduced to a product of consumption in order for tourism agents to make a maximum of profit, and for tourists to have a good time made of factice exoticism. This form of travel does not involve more than immediate pleasure, before these hurried visitors go back to their own habits, unchanged.

I feel the situation of the Kogi People can be compared with the situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Australian Indigenous people are also reduced to be “objects of curiosity”, as “strangers in their own land”, as problems how they should be recognised, more than as rich agents of a new potential of truthfulness for all of us. White Australians and tourists can buy their boomerangs, their paintings, but they do not accept to be taught and challenged by them. Sad story because they have so much to tell us that would completely change the way we live, in a very similar way as the Kogi People do. Of course they all do not have acquired this ability and reached this level of maturity. To attain this superior level, one needs to work hard, as the Kogi

seers do in their caves, to develop this faculty of listening and of understanding which is wisdom. It is not offered to anybody, according to the fact they belong by birth to this or that tradition. No, much work and effort must be added to reach this level of awareness, of consciousness and be able to teach. But, on our side, can we listen? are we ready to try to listen to what we ignore? Are we deaf, or simply unwilling to hear, condemned to our ignorance, or even a form of self-inflicted stupidity?

Maybe, dear reader, you can hear here the message of the Kogi People and let it resonate in your deeper being where life will distillate it and assimilate it and transform your own way of being. I hope you will.

Chapter 13: The “duty” of intervention

In the discourse of Northern countries appears often the affirmation that Northern countries need to intervene in Southern countries for the general wellbeing of them. Is it true that there is such a need? Why do Southern countries need so much our help? Is that not rather a great lie that tries to justify what we do to them?

The dehumanisation process

Palestine-Israel

A story of dispossession and partition of an existing land into two entities that are both entitled to this land but have conflicting narratives that tell true yet incompatible stories.

We will soon examine the topic of the resistance of autochthones or indigenous people to Northern intervention or colonising forces and try to define in what terrorism consists and which kind of resistance is not terrorism but rather what one calls insurgence. Many examples of conflicts can illustrate the mechanisms that are involved, such as the Vietnam War, the Algerian War, the US interventions in Chile or Bolivia, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and many others.

Yet the example of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians presents so many aspects that it will help us better understand what is at stake when a Northern power takes control of a Southern land. In itself it presents most of the dimensions we

will describe later. I find therefore appropriate to present here the case of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

I understand this conflict in two ways:

- First, on both sides, as an illustration how the perception of the Other (the “enemy”) may reduce a whole population to a homogenous cluster of identical and hostile people. This representation fosters a monolithic image that is a caricature of these others.
- And second, on both sides too, as a case of dispossession of traditional land, for the traditional inhabitants as well as for the immigrants who claim to have an ancestral right to return to the land of the Fathers (the Patriarchs). This generates a sharp competition for this same land between the two parties.
- Under this double perspective self-defence appears on both sides unavoidable and necessary for the people who, on both sides, feel that they are the victims of these processes. Each party contests the rights of the other.

I am neither a specialist nor a journalist nor a historian but I will just propose here a much shortened presentation of the situation as I understand it. It will allow me later to illustrate my comments. The presentation that follows is inevitably incomplete and probably partial or partisan although I did my best to be fair and equitable in my comments. I will take a clear stand which is, in my eyes, the only possible stand, for truth and justice and peace. Both parties have a right to, and have to share, the land as well as to live together. The following summary does not present the many aspects that make the complexity of what happens today. But I hope it will nevertheless be helpful.

It is first very telling to notice that, in the Bible, the names of places such as Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Jaffa appear a few times and designate places that are on Philistine (Palestinian) land and

strongholds, mainly along the Mediterranean Sea. This is what we can call the lower country.

On the other hand the same Bible mentions also the names of places such as Beersheba, Hebron, Shechem, Jericho, Jerusalem which were in the upper country or Jordan Valley. It is where King David and King Salomon, among many others, settled and reigned over the Jewish people. It was composed of Judea-Ephraim which extended along the upper country of the Judean and Galilean hills, or even farther to the East, lower down along the Jordan River. The Jewish part of the land was then at that time more on the upper country and north of the land of the Philistines.

It is clear that both Palestinians and Jews are mentioned as inhabitants of these regions at the time of the Bible (first millennium BC) but they were not alone to live on these lands. There were many other ethnic groups that used to also mingle with one another. The territory was not exclusively belonging to only one single ethnic community. The Bible mentions the Perizzites, Amorites, Jebusites, Hittites among others who used to live on the same land and to share it. The “nations” were not living clearly side by side but they were mingling too.

We skip now to the 20th century. In 1947 the Assembly of the United Nations voted the creation (or restoration after many millennia) of a Jewish State of Israel on this land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. The UNO decided the partition of the British Mandate of Palestine of that time into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. The idea of creating a Jewish State was not new but the project was reactivated at the end of WW2 as a direct consequence of the Holocaust. The purpose of it was to provide compensation for the excruciating suffering of the Jews, in order to offer a place of refuge for all of them who had been on the flight.

But it happened – and this essential dimension of the situation was completely obliterated - that the land which was chosen was in fact already and densely occupied by numerous people of Bedouin or Arab origins. The choice to entrust this land to the Jewish community could be considered as a wise solution but this meant inevitably for these autochthones a very direct and radical spoliation and eviction.

On top of this, in contradiction with the original settlement of the different ethnic groups in the past millennia, the partition attributed the lower land, and not the upper land, to the Jews and the upper land to the Palestinians. In rough contours the Palestinians inherited the historical land of the Jews and the Jews the historical land of the Palestinians.

Strong of this international support by the UNO the new State of Israel declared its independence in May 1948 and the war broke out with the neighbour countries (Jordan, Egypt, Syria) on whose land the new state had been created. The battle finally provided military advantage for Israel which succeeded in even extending the territory that had been affected by the UNO to its new existence or reconstitution. Consequently 750'000 Palestinians had to flee from these portions of land that became Jewish territory. They were expelled from what were their own land and their traditional places of residence. They became homeless or refugees in the surrounding countries, especially in Lebanon where refugee camps formed some kind of cities.

Simultaneously new waves of Jewish people migrated to the new country and settled down in cities they extended or built, or in moshavim or kibbutzim they created as new forms of collective farming and living. Violence and numerous fights between autochthones and newcomers accompanied the successive stages of the settlement of the immigrants.

Zionist paramilitary organizations such as the Hagannah (Jewish Militia), the Palmach (elite fighting force), the Irgun (National

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Military organisation), the Stern Gang (extremist) had prepared the ground by their clandestine and violent (so-called terrorist) action since the 1920s to consolidate the position of growing Jewish settlements in what they considered to be exclusively their own country.

The Balfour Declaration – in 1917, some 30 years before the official creation of the state of Israel – had been issued as a general frame of intention by the British government announcing its support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. This declaration had soon initiated a wide move of migration towards the Promised Land. It said: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country".

This kind of considerations reminds us of the instructions given to Captain Cook by the Crown more than one century earlier when he was sent to take possession of some Southern lands in respect of indigenous will. It shows how the creation of Israel by the UNO has many aspects that remind us of colonial settings, with the same Crown in the background. These instructions were indeed in contradiction with the real intentions of the project which could not avoid depriving the original owners of their land. The conquering move did not go without an immediate and strong resistance on the part of the Palestinian population which soon organised itself in both political and military forms. The project conceived in these terms could not avoid building up a great tension and animosity between the belligerents.

In 1964 a coalition of various Palestinian freedom fighter groups formed the Palestine Liberation organisation (PLO) under the

leadership of Yasser Arafat. Many different groups were parts of this organisation and they were not in agreement about the way the fight should be fought. Some wanted to fight the invader (Israel) on the land that was contested. Some others wanted to target also international interests, through terrorist attacks such as they did at the Olympic Games in Munich (1972). In their mind the European nations were considered as accomplices in the way they had supported the creation of the State Israel. This meant, in the eyes of these radicalised groups, that these nations were equally enemies.

Each side of the conflict (Jews and Palestinians) had constructed their respective and contrasting narrative which accompanied and supported their action. The Holocaust was the justification for the creation of the new State of Israel in the name of past Jewish oppression and anti-Semitism. On the other side the eviction of the Palestinians that had followed the creation of the state of Israel generated what they called the *Nakba*, i.e. the *Catastrophe*, which became the narrative that explained their struggle to expulse the newcomers and to get back a control on their land. As we can see, both narratives were founded on true events, but they were incompatible.

In 1967, in a rapid six day war that demonstrated the technological superiority of the Israeli Defence Forces, Israel invaded Cisjordania, that is the part of Jordanian on the West side of the Jordan River, called today the West Bank, which includes East Jerusalem, Hebron, Jericho. It conquered also Gaza, the Sinai (Egypt) and the Golan Heights (Syria). The whole Palestinian country was then occupied by the Israeli armed forces. It is important to understand that the Jews had in this way conquered the part of the land (the upper country of Judea-Ephraim) that traditionally mattered most for them. They wanted to make Jerusalem their capital city and establish themselves in the upper country, yet without abandoning the lower country.

An exacerbated conflict

The two protagonists are inflexible to defend their own rights, without any tolerance for the rights of the other party, although the attitudes are very different from one another.

Consequently to the great differences between the respective parts of new land Israel had conquered, the situation evolved very differently in the two distinct Palestinian territories formed on one part by the West Bank and on the other by Gaza.

- In the West Bank, despite it was not their land but an occupied land under military rule, the Israelis resettled in Jerusalem and took progressively hold of the most fertile and best agrarian lands (especially in the Jordan Valley). They got also an exclusive control of the principal water sources they managed in their own interest. They created step by step many settler colonies (some 144 settlements such as Ma’ale Adumim, Beitar Illit, Kiryat Arba) that progressively deprived the Palestinians of most of what was left of their land in the West Bank. There are nowadays more than 450’000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank and some 220’000 in East Jerusalem (for 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank). Under the pretext of protecting themselves from the Palestinian violence that was in fact the direct consequence of this grab of land, the Israelis even built a tortuous wall which shredded the leftover land into small pieces and prevented the Palestinians from moving freely through the West Bank or to Jerusalem.

In 1987 the first Intifada (uprising) broke out, principally as a revolt initiated by the youth who started throwing stones onto the occupying forces. This form of self-defence was hard to repress openly. It forced the Israelis to the negotiation table and the principle of a two state solution started to emerge

according to which the West Bank with Gaza could become an independent and free Palestinian State.

- In Gaza, which forms the second distinct Palestinian territory, the situation evolved in a very different way. Since 1967 when it was occupied, the Israeli had controlled it. But in 2005 General and then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided to abandon the city to itself and withdrew the armed forces from there. Gaza remained yet an occupied territory but without direct Israeli presence, except as a strict control (blockade) from without that was filtering all external exchanges the enclave would try to establish. It became a sort of “open air prison” whose access was under the control of the occupier.

The Egyptians, for their own reasons, happened to be a kind of accomplice of this strategy because they had concluded a treaty of peace with Israel which had returned the Sinai (but not Gaza) to Egypt, in exchange of the recognition of the existence of the Jewish state. On its part Egypt feared that the influx of refugees from the Gaza strip could generate a long flow of migrants who could bring with them violence and disorder into Egypt.

In 1987 in Gaza Sheikh Ahmed Yassin founded the Hamas as an Islamic freedom fighter group. This new political and fighter entity was initially very committed to implement effective public services for health and education. But they were soon also directly confronted with the deterioration of the living conditions in the Gaza strip under blockade with some two millions inhabitants on 365 km² (one of the densest populated land in the world), with dominantly young people (half under the age of 18, and 70% under 30).

In consequence of these two different evolutions, the Palestinian resistance evolved in following also two contrasting trends. The Fatah, mainly established in the West Bank, and Hamas, mainly

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based in Gaza, were in sharp and violent conflict with one another. The former was secular and gave up the practice of terrorism as a weapon to defend its rights. It preferred to open the path to negotiation in order to formalise the two-state solution. The latter was Islamist and radicalised its means of struggle into ever more violent acts of what was considered as terrorism – we will examine later what this term means.

Both groups (Fatah and Hamas) had been democratically elected in 2006 as political authorities in their respective parts of occupied territories. The evolution, which ensued under the strong influence of the dominating control by Israel on these two distinct territories, impacted deeply on the dignity of the Palestinians.

Especially the progressive settler invasion of the West Bank extended intensively and fostered ever more active and intentional violence of the settlers against the Palestinians who responded also with violence. This caused an increased number of casualties, mainly on the Palestinian side.

The level of violence increased also strongly in Gaza, due to the elementary lack of basic resources (food, water, health, dwelling), especially because of the blockade and the constant destruction of infrastructure due to regular iterative bombing by the Israelis. In response to this violence the Hamas launched attacks on neighbour civilians or sent rockets onto the neighbouring Israeli cities. This fed a long cycle of reciprocal revenge that started to develop and escalate, each aggressive act being a response to the precedent.

Yet the positive energy of the first Intifada, as a help to bring a balm to Palestinian identity, allowed Yasser Arafat to envisage some larger concessions to the Israelis in order to come to a peace solution. This led to the Oslo Accords (1993), between the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, which established the National Palestinian Authority as the organ of

self-governance on the West bank and Gaza Strip and also prepared the ground for a two-state solution.

Yet the Oslo Accords had a major flaw. They did not make the Palestinian Authority a fully empowered government over the land that was imparted to it. There was no real Palestinian self-determination because the Israelis kept full control over the use of the land. This is what has allowed the colonies to extend presently so profusely and has reinforced the present power of the Israeli government over the West Bank. Soon after the agreement Rabin was assassinated (1995) by Yigal Amir, an extremist Jew who was opposed to the Oslo Accords and to the handing over of control of portions of the West Bank to the Palestinians as a part of a landmark peace agreement.

The failure of these agreements led to the second Intifada in September 2000. Since then the situation has constantly worsened. The Israeli government slid ever more to the right to get the combined supports of the most radical political forces, especially of the orthodox right-wing, and of the settlers in the West Bank. The anger of the Palestinians reached a level of deep despair which led them to commit violent actions that called in turn for more repression. The cycle became infernal.

According to the statistics by the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem⁶⁷, since September 2000 (2nd Intifada) to September 2023, there were 1'330 Israelis killed by Palestinians and 10'655 Palestinians killed by Israelis, i.e. 8 times more casualties on Palestinian side. These numbers throw a different light onto the security argument that the Israelis invoke

⁶⁷ See B'Tselem website: <https://statistics.btselem.org/en/all-fatalities/by-date-of-incident?section=overall&tab=overview> . The name *B'Tselem* (which means *At His Image*) has been taken from the verse in the Bible where God is said to have created humankind *At His Image*. All human beings are made *At His Image*. It is why they are all equal and merit same respect.

repetitively. During this period there was a peak in Palestinian acts of suicide bombing in 2002 (around 270 Israelis killed). Suicide bombing is a terrible and deceiving threat for people living their daily lives.

Since then the conflict comes regularly to a new temporary paroxysm with immediate retaliation from the other side: usually Hamas attacks neighbour civilians or takes hostages and the Israeli armed forces intervene in Gaza, bombing the city and trying to kill Hamas fighters who cannot be distinguished from the rest of the population.

Since 2000 the worse years for reprisals were the 2nd Intifada from September 2000 to February 2005 which cost the lives of some 3000 Palestinians and 1000 Israelis. Then there was the second Gaza war (so-called “Operation Protective Edge” - July to August 2014) in which some 2300 Gazaouis lost their lives and some 7000 homes (for about 10’000 families) were razed. Then there was the Gaza war of October 2023 which started with the killing of 1450 Israelis by an attack by Hamas on surrounding Israeli kibbutzim and villages and abduction of Israeli hostages taken by Hamas to Gaza. The Israeli Defence Forces invaded then Gaza, killing some 30000 people among which half were children. Israel said it tried to cleanse Gaza from Hamas fighters but it was impossible to distinguish Hamas fighters from the rest of the population because they all belong together.

Anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism or ethnic therapy

When Israel is criticised for war crimes, they call for anti-Semitism; it is rather about anti-Zionism or simply anti-crime. A deep therapy is needed in Israel concerning the Holocaust.

In each war, on each side, crimes happen due to the excessive violence of one side against the civilians on the other. It is

normal and just for the international community to denounce these acts of unnecessary cruelty that prevent peace, more than any other evolution. The reflex of self-defence of Israel, since the end of World War 2, is to declare these accusations as acts of anti-Semitism. But this is not; they are just well-founded accusations of having done the wrong thing, as it could be addressed to any perpetrator.

Like any other country Israel has its own laws that condemn crimes. When members of its society commit a crime, they are condemned to normal sentences in prison. This is not anti-Semitism. This is condemnation of actions that go against human rights and dignity; and Israel is right to condemn these criminals. There is no reason why it should be different for what concerns war crimes. Israel itself should condemn them spontaneously.

The same should be also possible on the international scene. War crimes must be openly and officially condemned by all parties. If these anti-humanitarian acts are committed in the name of an ideology, such as Zionism, they have also to be condemned. This constitutes of course a sharp criticism of the ideological line that Israel, and especially the right-wing in power, follows in its conquest of the territories of Palestine. Again here, this is no anti-Semitism but a sharp criticism of Zionism. Zionism is based on the conquest of the whole of Palestine into Israeli hands and on the promotion of Jewish interests, excluding the participation of other ethnic groups. This is called apartheid.

The claim of anti-Semitism seems to be at first glance an easy defence of the Israeli people, justified by the events of the past that nobody dares to deny. It is widely supported by the Jewish diaspora, with yet some important restrictions, and especially by the fundamentalist Christians in the US. But it is done without real justification of the claim. It is just self-defence talk playing with guilt feelings and confusion of the opponents.

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One can certainly understand the hurt inherited from the Holocaust and how Jewish people have the tendency to read their present in the light of this heavy heritage. One can even understand the extremely sensitive reaction that any criticism of Israel can provoke and how these challenges are too easily translated into interpretations of anti-Semitism.

But anti-Semitism is objectively based on the attack of Jewishness because of Jewishness. This is a terrible attitude of contempt and oppression that relies only on the fact the person who is attacked is of Jewish origin. It remains nevertheless difficult to define who is Jew. And even if it applies to Israel. Is Jewishness a race? is this a religion? is this a culture? is this a mentality? Probably not strictly any of these; but also probably a bit of all of these. Yet anti-Semitism remains in any case a pretty clear concept, even if Jewishness remains ill-defined.

I believe important also to distinguish two very different attitudes:

- on one hand, the authentic reaction of being molested because the criticism seems to be of anti-Semitic nature;
- and, on the other hand, the strategic use of this argument to cancel any form of criticism of real destructive and criminal attitudes or acts. The second is too often used in cases of war crimes. This is simple lie and treachery.

On top of this the accusation of anti-Semitism for criticism cancels something very important that is told to Israel and that would help Israel to find a better balance in its integration in the Middle-East. But this invitation to change a behaviour cannot be heard because of this abusive strategy of making the accuser culpable of sentiments he does not have. The destructivity of the criminal act can in this way be negated, but the act remains yet unchanged and equally damaging, for the victim but also for the perpetrator. This is like saying: any accusation against a person

of Jewish origin is a crime as anti-Semitism is a crime. This means then that no criminal law can apply to Jewish people... who are by excellence the People of the Law, according to the Torah. The accusation of anti-Semitism turns then into negation of Jewishness. Absurd.

But there is here another major aspect that must be clearly explicated. This is the heavy burden of a past that Israel refuses to recognise as a powerful factor, still very active today, that defines its many present attitudes and actions and especially attitudes towards the Palestinians. This is this still an unprocessed part of the heritage of the Holocaust, which was a deliberate project of annihilation of the Jews; but which – most importantly – despite this terrible reality, should yet not define the politics of Israel today.

I am aware that writing this is a kind of non-sense because the power of this heritage is not something one can treat lightly and say that it should be processed and forgotten. It is normal that this past of suffering impacts today on Israeli politics and attitude of domination in its region. But, on the other hand, the acceptance that the heritage of the Holocaust will always, in the Jewish spirit, determine the present action of Israel is another more drastic non-sense, especially when it is called to justify any wrong-doing.

A deep therapy of the national soul of Israel is needed, to be implemented nationwide, for the own profit of all Israelis. The terrible past of the Holocaust has been what it has been and cannot be changed. And the settlement of Israel in Palestine has been implemented on the basis of this past. This decision of the UNO constitutes an official recognition by the international community that the fact of the Holocaust has been attested in its reality and horror. But it has been forgotten that the land where Israel has established itself was occupied by a Palestinian population that used to live there for centuries; that is for a

duration equally as long as the tradition of establishment on this same land that Israel can invoke for itself. And this land used to be shared by necessity between these two populations, and even by a few more other ethnic groups.

In the present conflict between Israelis and Palestinians it is often made mention of the Holocaust and of anti-Semitism; but the establishment of Israel has also fostered the Nakba for the Palestinian population which represents a similar traumatism for the Palestinian as the Holocaust has been for the Jews. These both narratives are presently their respective reasons for defending their rights, even if these two events were of very different natures.

There is yet an evidence we have to come back to. Something at the time of the establishment went wrong that has not stopped degenerating since then and needs absolutely to be addressed now, in order to open new ways of peace. Presently violence seems to increase and possible solutions to the conflict seem to fade away. This is the real tragedy.

The therapy that is needed for Israel to undergo has in my mind two aspects. It involves equally the Israeli and the Palestinians. But Israelis are more concerned because there is an unprocessed dimension in their own memory of the Holocaust that must be revealed and treated. This non-processed dimension is made patent by the systematic accusation of anti-Semitism that Israelis claim again and again.

1) The first aspect of the therapy concerns directly the past history of the Holocaust and how it impacts today on the behaviour of the Israelis, and especially how it is used to justify the unjustifiable. It is essential that the Israelis can be exposed to criticism by anybody, in the right and legal way, as ordinary people who are normally exposed to human justice. It is evident that the past of the Holocaust, as cruel as it has been, cannot justify any wrong-doing today. It can explain

some unprocessed behaviours but it cannot be an excuse. The Israeli nation must then process this past in a way that it does not any longer foster from its part some aggressive and destructive behaviours today. And this, first for the wellbeing of all Israelis.

2) The second aspect concerns the way the Israelis perceive the Palestinians. In my mind, a true therapy, as mentioned according to the first aspect, should rather reveal to the Israelis the true present and past suffering of the Palestinians than obliterate it. As ex-victims of the Holocaust they should be made very sensitive to any form of oppression, especially when this oppression is exerted onto a population as a whole; this means when the oppression of the victims is the consequence of its ethnic belonging.

Because it is so similar to the oppression of the Holocaust, any form of oppression based on ethnic belonging should be perceived, by the Israelis more than by anybody else, as an unacceptable attempt of genocide. I mean here that the past of Jews having experienced genocide as victims should make them solidary with other victims of genocide, especially if there is a risk that these victims could be oppressed by them and if this genocide could be committed by them. A true therapy should bring to the surface a hyper-sensitivity to the act of genocide; and a radical solidarity with the victim and a systematic intolerance for anything that could resemble it. And this, whether the Israelis are external spectators of any similar type of genocide committed by others; or if they could be at risk (even at a smaller risk) that they may act as perpetrators.

This hypersensitivity is a major aspect of the therapy; and this sensitivity is lacking today; and it will be lacking as long as the therapy has not proceeded. Once the Israelis can clearly identify their tendency in them to replicate as actors the

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conditions they have undergone in the past, a new awareness will arise that may allow also to see the so-called “enemy”, I mean here the Palestinians, as a complex and mixed population, which may certainly encompass some dangerous elements but which yet cannot be treated as an ethnic group to be eliminated globally. This new awareness will be a fundamental revolution that needs to happen in order to open new ways to a genuine peace process.

To this first remark, another important element must be added. After the experience of the Holocaust and the experience of the settlement of the Jews in Palestine since 1948 or even the Balfour Declaration, it is understandable that the Jews feel threatened by the Palestinians, because the whole process has soon turned in a sharp conflict between the two entities and there are many good reasons for the Palestinians to defend their land against the newcomers. The source of the threat is not, in this case, the Palestinians as antagonistic actors, but rather the awkward circumstances which have given birth to the whole process. The conflict is more about the way to settle the land than between two adversarial populations. This is essential.

But, as we will see later, this sharp antagonism between two populations (the Israelis and the Palestinians) is rather the fact of the two minorities, one on each side, of the most extremist factions, whether it is the aggressiveness of the Israeli far-right on one side, or the violence and will for revenge of the Hamas on the other. Except these extremes the general state of mind of the average majority of people on both sides is rather a wish for peaceful living combined yet with a strong wish of self-protection of their own security that does not necessarily mean aggression. Therefore the two extremist tendencies need to be strongly resisted and dismantled, on both sides. And more: for the clarity of mind that such a common struggle against extremism is necessary to arise, the

therapy I described is absolutely an obligatory step. Solidarity for all victims of any attempt of genocide can only bring both sides together, in resistance against the aggressive extremists of both sides who want to sharpen the conflict for their own interest. I'll come back to this later.

Now that we have exposed the example of a conflict that regularly dominates the international news and, for almost a whole century, has become one of the major leitmotifs of our time, we can go back to our more general examination of supremacist war and oppression.

The chains of injustice

The narratives that justify oppression, slavery or colonisation are based on faulty links that transform a chain of deductions into a chain of genocide, exploitation or denial.

What I have described as the burden of the Holocaust, on the Israeli side, translates the present situation of conflict into a claim for righteousness and defence of one's own interests. There is, on both sides of the antagonistic camps, a kind of symmetry of this process. This translation follows here a chain of deductions which are mainly faulty and it is worth examining them in order to detect where the faults reside. As a conclusion of these considerations about the therapeutic process of the main protagonists, I wish to establish here a kind of comparison of these decisive issues with the colonial process, in three examples. In these three cases the chain of deductions becomes a chain of enslavement.

1) **The case of Israel-Palestine:** In the Israeli case, the chain goes like this. We, Israelis, have always been threatened, in our survival, by anti-Semitism. The Holocaust is the proof of the fundamental antipathy of the world against us. The Palestinians are not different. Since 1948 they want our

annihilation. This means they are our most direct threat and we have to get rid of them, the best way consisting in taming them into submission, or, maybe even better, in having them deported out of this territory that is ours, by tradition (look at the Bible).

The faulty links are the following:

- As long the therapy has not proceeded, the Holocaust is the reference that justifies any act of the Israeli nation. It works as a universal justification.
- The experience of the Holocaust, if it had correctly proceeded, should generate solidarity of all Israelis with all victims of genocide, especially if there is a risk that the genocide can be practised by Israeli people. This solidarity demonstrates that no anti-Semitism is involved.
- There is no recognition by Israelis of the Palestinians as people. They are all the enemies, without distinction. This is a patent example of the monolithic view I have explained earlier.
- There is no responsibility endorsed by Israelis for the grab of the land and settlement of colonies in the West Bank that deprive the Palestinians of their own land and place of subsistence and daily life.
- There is no recognition of the responsibility that the present position of control over the whole of the territory and the clear military superiority acquired in past years confers to the Israelis to initiate a process of peace-making. Nobody else can do this.
- The victims of the Nakba and of the loss of their land are made responsible for the whole conflict. They are the enemies to destroy.

- The present chain of thoughts shifts the whole responsibility from the Israelis onto the Palestinians. There cannot be any issue to the conflict than its exacerbation.

- 2) **The case of slavery:** The chain goes like this. The slaves have been brought to America to serve as workforce. They are offered work and subsistence. Yes, it is not an ideal deal and slavery has to be abolished; and has been. Hence the two acts of abolition of the Trade and of Slavery itself. But the ex-slaves become then a threat for the productivity of the plantation and for the stability of the country. The police have to chase them and bring them back home. And the landowners have to receive compensation for the loss of cheap workforce. A form of apprenticeship is organised that allows the slave owner to mute into an employer without main changes for himself... and for the ex-slaves.

The faulty links are the following:

- The justification is centred on the privileges of the landowner.
 - It ignores the interests of the ex-slave as a free human being.
 - It makes the ex-slave responsible for the unrests that result from slavery, presenting him as a danger for public security.
 - It intends to prevent its independence as a free human being.
- 3) **The case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:** The chain goes like this. The continent was not inhabited or only by people who were hardly recognisable as human beings. The new settlers needed to conquer their land to establish themselves. Indigenous people were opposing the newcomers, representing a threat for their peaceful

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establishment and even survival. They had to be submitted into docility or even eliminated. Still today, as the memory of the Holocaust seems for the Israelis to justify any wrongdoing of the past, the memory of the conquest is told as a narrative of courage and audacity that has created the present-day Australia. There is yet a feeling that the rights of the indigenous people should be recognised, but it should be done in a way that does not threaten the Northern patterns of development we have adopted. Any wide concession to Aboriginal rights risks allowing later claims and compensations that would be unacceptable. They have to pull up their socks and enjoy the modern way of life that colonisation has introduced on this continent.

The faulty links are the following:

- The myth of Terra Nullius.
- The reversal of responsibility: Indigenous people did only defend their land. They were not a threat as such. The invaders were the cause of the frontier wars.
- There is no recognition of the rich contribution the Indigenous culture represents for Australia. There is only Northern cultural ethnocentrism.
- There is a deep denial that colonialism was destructive.

As we can see, these three examples resemble each other by the twists they introduce in the narratives and especially by the shift of responsibility from the perpetrators to the victims. In these three cases we can recognise the hard-line of colonialism.

No more a clear front

In modern wars there is no longer a clear front that separates the two enemies. Modern weapons can strike anywhere and the enemy can be in the crowd.

The time is gone of the Napoleonic wars when one had soldiers in a regular row, progressing at a regular pace towards the enemy lines, usually with the drums in the first row, until they reached the distance of gunshot. Then the soldiers started falling. They were killed or wounded by the soldiers of the other side. Tragic scene, but at least one saw clearly what was happening and who was playing which role. It was evident who the enemy was and where he stood. And no civilians were involved on the clearly delimited battle field. It looked like gladiator “games”.

If you read Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, you get a good idea of this setting in his descriptions of the battle of Austerlitz (1805) or Borodino (1812) when Prince Andrew is in both cases wounded. The only indents into the frontline were due to the charges of the cavalry when they used the effect of speed of the horses to break the front line and penetrate rapidly into enemy compound.

In the later centuries the further evolution of war made it more unclear where the front was. Weaponry developed in a way that made the front line meaningless. Shells and bombs, even missiles today, could reach far removed positions. In his descriptions of the battle of Stalingrad (1942-43) the Russian journalist and writer Vassili Grossman – in his novel *Life and Destiny*, which can be seen as the 20th century’s version of *War and Peace* – shows a much more complex picture of the war, with many clusters of fighting, each one with their attacking forces (the Nazis) or resisting forces (the Russians), and the front splitting into shorter lines that surround these many clusters which are all imbricated into one another.

In Tolstoy the civilians remain far from the battle field. War is the fact of soldiers which one distinguishes clearly because of their aspect and what they do and who they are and to whom they belong, i.e. on which side of the front they are fighting. In Grossman the distinction is blurred but the war nevertheless remains the duty of the soldiers. Civilians can be victims,

especially when there is bombing by planes or shelling in a city, but they are not meant to become active, except as part of the Resistance.

In France occupied during WW2 by the Nazis the clarity of this distinction between civilians and fighters was abolished because the French Resistance was not an official army. The Resistance fighters were ordinary people who were living in their homes or hiding in the country side, among other ordinary people, as they were themselves too ordinary people. Nothing could distinguish them from other ordinary French people. These Resistance fighters were simply some courageous and active members of this indistinct population. Their strength relied on the fact they were not visible or not at least distinguishable or easily identifiable. Anybody could be part of it: older men, women, adolescents, even children, the worker, the farmer, the baker, the doctor. They were able to strike the occupying forces when it was the least expected and then disappeared again into the crowd, unless they were taken or killed. Direct confrontation with the occupying forces was avoided because there was a great imbalance of might between the two sides, in the number of fighters and power of weaponry. The fighters were not hiding in the crowd; they were part of it; they were expressions of the will of the crowd to resist; these were the same people who were suffering together under foreign occupation.

We can observe now, in contemporary conflicts such as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq or in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, that, in a similar way to the French Resistance, the evolution of warfare has dramatically blurred the distinction between soldiers and civilians which has been in some way abolished. The pattern of the Napoleonic wars has been replaced by the pattern of a clandestine resistance as in the French example.

The situation has even become more complex because there are no longer two armies that confront each other. But there is rather one army occupying a country and having to repress the local population. There is no front, no uniforms. It is like a one-sided war, against the social, built or natural environment (whatever it means), where the other side remains undistinguishable.

On one side the invader is clearly visible because it is a real army with its tanks, helicopters, vehicles, soldiers in uniforms and heavy weaponry. But on the other side, one does not know who the enemy is, who these resistance fighters are because they are undistinguishable from other people who form the local population. Here again they are part of this same population and seem to hide in the crowd. But they do not hide, they are simply part of it, as they already were before the invasion. We have in fact two forces in game which are of very different natures, one visible, the other not.

It would evidently be mad on the part of the fighters to confront the powerful invading army with the same visibility and same weapons. As in the case of the French Resistance a few men with guns, a few handmade bombs and at best a few rockets cannot defeat one of the most powerful armies in the world. They have to find ways to destabilise this powerful force without direct confrontation.

Many commentators call this latter strategy with the name of terrorism. But it is an inadequate word that expresses a false message and twists reality. This form of combat has to be understood in the wider context. The pattern of domination, and the form of resistance it implies, is indeed typical of the form of colonial occupation practised in Southern lands.

And there is still another recent evolution that also blurs the line of the front. This is the ever more frequent use of drones in war that allow an attack at long distance without involving soldiers or fighters, not even the pilot. A few people, official soldiers,

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freedom fighters, clandestine resistance fighters, or terrorists, can threaten a whole army or a whole population with unmanned drones that may generate powerful depredations. They can destroy a building or sink a boat with the help of a tool which is so tiny that it becomes almost not detectable by conventional means. And there is nobody that drives them, or the person that pilots them sits in a place unknown. Powerful weapons cannot do anything against this form of attack. These drones cost a fortune but anybody can acquire them. The front has truly disappeared. It is nowhere.

Two incompatible forms of fighting

The armed forces form a rigid anonymous machine that uses too powerful weapons to adapt to guerrilla strategies. Soldiers are left to their own destiny facing invisible mobile fighters.

There is not only a deep imbalance of power between the two forces in game (national army vs resistance fighters). There is also a fundamental difference in their respective natures and even a kind of incompatibility of the means they use.

The principle of organisation of armed forces is that it is a kind of impersonal machine that has no mind of its own. It has to be highly depersonalised to be effective. It is why soldiers wear uniforms. The uniform is used to hide the humanity of each soldier and make of each one a kind of puppet that the high command can “manipulate” or use as a pawn in his own way. All soldiers are identical pawns on the check board. It is a gain for the high command because all soldiers can be used in the most suitable way.

Apparent uniformity makes it also easier to kill the soldiers in the opposite camp because they are also only identical pawns in the same uniform. At least it is the logic that organises armies worldwide. Soldiers are made as if they were no more human.

Long distance weapons, beyond the advantage of their far reaching efficiency, play a similar role of rending the enemy anonymous, i.e. deprived of his own humanity. It is easier to send shells onto far enemies we never see than to kill the person who is in front of us. One single pilot can throw a bomb on Hiroshima but he could not kill each one of its inhabitants, one by one; even if enough time were given to him. It is humanly not feasible, even for the greatest murderer.

By contrast with this uniformity pattern, the local resistance takes inevitably a more human shape because it is made not of identical pawns but of individual persons who have freely decided to fight and chase the invaders. Each one has a name, and no uniform. Although it is also the case between soldiers of a national army, it is a specific characteristic of freedom fighting that they need to trust each other as persons, each time they work together or organise the next step of active resistance. Probably more than the soldiers they relate to one another as human individuals who have to face an impersonal machine. But this form of humanity stops at the boundary of the group. For these fighters the personalisation is limited to their own people. By contrast all soldiers of the invading forces are in their eyes only pawns in their uniforms. Anonymity of the invading forces makes resistance “humanly more possible”.

What matters most in this description is that the strength of each side resides in very contrasting characteristics. And this fundamental difference – or even incompatibility – between the invading forces and the resistance fighters makes it almost impossible for them to meet on their own ground, except in trying to destroy each other.

The armed forces are also organised in a way that allows them to act and strike on a wider scale. It has usually powerful weapons that are meant to reach far situated targets (shells, missiles, helicopters, planes). Each of them is extremely efficient and

destructive and is difficult to use on a smaller scale such as of single human beings as individual targets. The armed forces have in this way an excess of power that makes them less effective when they have to fight against a form of guerrilla lead by individual fighters. It is why an army as powerful as the US armed forces could be defeated in Afghanistan and Iraq and had to withdraw.

By contrast the resistance fighters are very flexible. They have precise single targets at the scale of their own type of weaponry (light and mobile) which has usually only a reduced impact. Their main objective consists in killing as many soldiers as possible and to use their own threat to create stress and panic among the soldiers. Their major strength is that they can appear and disappear at will. They emerge out of the crowd and go back to their place and daily life of ordinary citizens as soon as they have accomplished their mission. What matters most for them is to avoid direct confrontation. One cannot push the elephant when one is a mouse.

Therefore a highly insecure situation characterises the position of the invading soldiers. They are highly visible in their armoured vehicles and tanks and helicopters and they are directly exposed as targets. Everybody can see them and target them. But these soldiers do not know where their enemy is, or even who the enemy is. The high command has it then “easier”. It can give general instructions and orders but it is not directly confronted to the ambiguous practicalities of what happens on the ground. The individual soldier is indeed in charge; in charge of himself first, but also in charge of shaping his action because this has to be improvised as the mission consists, minute after minute, in an faculty to react immediately to what happens or seems to happen in the immediate environment.

The invading soldier constantly wonders whether each person he meets on the street is an enemy (i.e. a fighter) and whether this

person will kill him. He is under constant stress, under constant exposure and danger to be killed by anybody can see him. But he cannot identify with certitude who this “anybody” is. Hence the soldier is left alone to decide by himself whether the person in front of him represents a deadly danger for him or not. This necessity to take such a decision in a split of a second constitutes a terrible choice for the soldier. He has to decide whether to kill this person first, or let this person live, or be himself killed. This is the price of his own exposure when the enemy fighter remains hidden, even clandestine. This is, for the soldier, the price he has to pay for participating in the invasion of a country that his government has decided to occupy. The stake of this risk is his own life.

It is why there have been so many cases of “collateral damages”. Some soldiers who came back from Afghanistan or Iraq – some of them were criminal but most of them were ordinary soldiers – have been inculpated of criminal action and human slaughter, because they had killed some disarmed people when they had felt that the people around them were not only antagonistic to them but were really representing a serious threat to their lives. Having thought they had identified the enemy, they took action and decided in a split of a second to kill this other fighter before they were killed. This was in their mind the right solution to the contradiction that they were exposed to, while the enemy could remain hidden. Maybe also it could be a mistake. Who knows? This other was maybe only a civilian. And, if the mistake had happened in reverse – not acting while being in presence of a real fighter – what would have happened to the soldier? He would be dead; but of course not guilty. Terrible stress. We understand they come back with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Of course, despite the terrible pressure imposed by this constant stress, it has also happened in many cases that some of these soldiers acted with cruelty, in a spirit of revenge or mere contempt for the life of the others, as effective war crimes. There

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are also many such cases that come to justice. They are in this case the terribly humiliating expression of a conquering attitude which is the fruit of the invasion itself.

But, whether they are just scared soldiers acting for their self-defence or war criminals who act by cruelty or will to destroy, they both do some judiciary killing without trial. They kill by decree; that is they are at the same time police, judge and executioner.

Most of these soldiers came back (maybe even all of them) with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). One can understand the tension and the impossibility to solve this kind of enigmas. The PTSD trauma is part of the fight-or-flight dichotomy when there is no clear indicators or even no choice and one hangs in the constant tension in-between and without sign how to solve the problem. And there is also the rampant guilt of pursuing innocent victims. As we can see, this exposure of the soldiers to such inhuman situations is also part of the dehumanisation of their own soldiers by the armed forces.

It is also noticeable that the freedom fighters are called “insurgents” by the invader, which means the ones who “rebel” against the established order, i.e. the new order established by the invader. Or even they are called “terrorists” because they do not have the official character and anonymity of a national army. The freedom fighters have to strike real people (soldiers or symbolic figures of the enemy or its allied). This form of clandestine action means that, in the war, the freedom fighters have no recognised status for fighting a just cause, i.e. the cause of their own freedom or self-defence. No international law protects them; it is why they are said to be terrorists.

As the army is conceived to strike on a larger scale, the freedom fighter knows that he won't escape large attacks because they would aim at destroying a large part of his habitat, including its inhabitants. The invader will probably bomb in this case a whole

part of the town or village in order to “dislodge” the fighters as if the fighters were distinct from the population; as the Israeli Forces repetitively do in Gaza. This is indeed the argument of the invader that “insurgents” are hiding among the population as if using other people as human shields. Armed forces strike always larger than necessary because their weapons are not meant to aim at single individuals.

And armies want to protect their own soldiers from too much exposure. Far reaching weapons allow this necessary protective distance. Invading the place, house by house, while distinguishing the fighters from the inhabitants, is dangerous and even politically inconceivable. It is why the army just bombs the area saying they do their best to avoid “collateral damage” while yet destroying their enemy, especially striking some civilians. They do not explain how they may distinguish the fighters from the rest of the population. They do not know themselves how they could do this. The high number of civil “casualties”, especially among women and children, is proof of this incapacity to make any distinction. They affirm that it is the responsibility of the freedom fighters (they call them “terrorists” or at best “insurgents”) if they hide among the population and expose innocent people to be killed. At best the army invades the place, town or village with its tanks. The shooting remains yet hazardous because no distinction can be made who the real target is. This is another ethical puzzle which loads heavily on the psyche of the soldiers.

The case of the Vietnam War provides a good illustration for these double standards and ways of combatting from each side; on one side the invading US army with its helicopters and its napalm bombs; on the other side the Vietcong, resident in the villages and hidden in the forest and in tunnels or bunkers. The two enemies were so different by the means they used and the level on which they acted that they hardly could meet and fight each other.

1) Dehumanisation through the institution (armed forces)

The invading forces use a form of dehumanisation of the act of war which is very different from the dehumanisation practised by the resistance fighters.

It is important to see that each side acts according to a different paradigm or image of their respective enemy. Both paradigms imply yet a form of dehumanisation of the enemy that relies in both cases on different premises. Dehumanisation is absolutely necessary to allow the war to happen. Without dehumanisation, there is no “possible” killing.

The invading army is a kind of monolithic machine that represents the nation-state. It is an institution that has a legal function to defend the security of the motherland, hence its unlimited authority and power. Its legal foundation is very important because it represents the nation at its highest level. The anonymous and legal frame of this institution does not tell us who the army is constituted of, who is in charge and who the citizens are that the nation is representing because they are both, the armed forces and the nation, impersonal collective bodies that have no distinct personality or ethical responsibility. These concepts of armed forces and nation-state are yet very well established and have great authority. It means ordinary people believe in these institutions to protect them but they have no control over them. Out of this high degree of legality the army draws its representativeness and uncontested authority, but also its ability to act without concurrent accountability. Its responsibility is dehumanised because it dilutes in an impersonal body nobody truly controls; hence the possibility for each army to commit the worst crimes without having to report about them, except, as a subterfuge, in bringing some of its (scapegoat) soldiers to court.

The institution of the army constitutes the acting arm of another institution which is the nation-state, with its government, which in turn represents its population which is real but yet only an amalgam of indistinct and not well-defined people as long they are considered as a whole, i.e. a melting pot of people.

And it is the same process of representativeness with the police corps that ensures also the security of the state including in occupied territory; in principle as an internal force of defence of the security of the nation within, while the army rather acts as an external force of defence without. All action of “security defence” is always entrusted to an institutional body: the police, the intelligence agencies, the armed forces, private anonymous action groups. Their action cannot be contested without the critic being considered as an attack against the nation.

When the army acts, it does in the name and under indirect command of the government. There is a legal frame that regulates the way it will intervene. In a democracy the order of the government given to the army to act against another country will be legally justified and official.

On the other hand international jurisdiction will regulate the legal frame of its intervention and set clear limits to it, such as no unnecessary destruction, no civilians killing, no torture, no killing of unarmed people, obligation to treat prisoners humanely, interdiction to starve a population or deprive it of the necessary for survival, and many other limits to human madness. Although there is no effective means (no international armed forces) to control that these regulations are strictly followed, this frame reinforces the anonymous authority of the armed forces more than it limits it because it can be referred to without these regulations becoming active or even being respected.

For the army the “insurgents” are not really legal fighters. They are not supported by a state and they are considered to act as lawbreakers. In most cases the state institutions of the invaded

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country (government, parliament, judiciary, police, army) have even “disappeared” because the country is occupied by foreign forces and its executive and legislative powers have been dismantled or are in exile. Fighters do not constitute an army; they do not have uniforms, they do not have real weaponry. They are rather considered as vermin. The analogy in the vocabulary used to describe them is often very telling because it refers often to the animal reign: they crawl, they breed, they infest, they hit when unexpected.

As “insurgents” cannot be caught, they need to be eradicated by massive measures; in clear by destroying their habitat, although international laws forbid to destroy cities or dwellings in order to indifferently destroy their inhabitants. But here again the metaphor of the animal reign predominates.

“Insurgents” are not real humans in the eyes of the invader. They are subhuman. This is what leads the whole system of domination to turn into a colonial system as we will see later.

The army as an institution that has no mind and no soul of its own forms a screen of good conscience for the population of the country that invades the other. For instance the population of the United States did not oppose, as a whole, the invasion of Iraq, but only individuals did. It is not me, it is not you who did it; it is our government; it is our army. Ordinary people (citizens) do not feel involved or rather they have no direct grasp on the matter. The thing (the invasion) happened; nobody knows how it did. On the other hand this screen of good conscience creates a distance that makes every freedom fighter insignificant. It is as if they are killed by an invisible force. The responsibility dissolves.

The mission of the armed forces, in invading the other country, consists in radically repressing or annihilating what has been declared a threat to the nation. The population of the conquered country, the whole population becomes a threat as an undistinguished whole. And the mission of the invading army

does not consist in ensuring order and security as a defensive task; but it consists in making its presence felt as a threat and a work of humiliation. Yehuda Shaul, an ex-soldier of the Israeli Defence Forces who served for many months in the West bank and founder of the movement “Break the Silence”, describes⁶⁸ how their mission in the occupied territories, and especially in Hebron (West Bank), consisted in irrupting at night into Palestinian houses, chosen arbitrarily, checking the identities of the inhabitants, humiliating them, just in order to manifest the unlimited power of the invader as a state whose main role was to prevent Palestinians from living a dignified life. This evidently creates accumulated anger, on the side of the victims, that does not wait too long to explode into destructive acts of rebellion and expression of understandable anger. Even for the soldiers who behave in this way this loaded charge of humiliation represents a serious threat that explains the state of PTSD they experience as I mentioned earlier. This shows also how the invasion turns into a global war against the civilians, against all civilians and the milieu. i.e. the built areas (towns and villages in Iraq) or even nature (the forest in Vietnam).

And Shaul adds a most important comment. He says that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are not the problem. They just do what is requested from them. No, the problem is the definition of their mission that consists in humiliating the Palestinian population, in letting their constant presence and threat and unlimited power felt; and this is a political problem.

As we can see the whole system leads to dehumanisation. And this is crucial for the project of invasion to have a chance to

⁶⁸ Watch the video of Yehuda Shaul’s interview on France 24 (in English):

<https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/media/96736>

See also the many testimonies by different soldiers who experienced the same traumas of being forced to commit acts against basic human rights.

succeed, even if it is, like always, doomed to fail on the long term.

2) Dehumanisation through the image (fighters)

As the struggle of the freedom fighters involves them in a more direct and personal way, they “need” a very stereotypical (monolithic) image of the enemy to combat him.

On the side of the resistance fighters the process of dehumanisation develops along a different path. First the “insurgents” usually are at the start victims; that is they do not initiate the conflict; they respond to it. Their land has been invaded and occupied by a foreign power. They have been evicted from their land or at least disempowered in their everyday life. Their houses have been probably damaged or even completely destroyed and they have nowhere to offer shelter to their families. They are despised. They have lost their humanity or at least the invader does not see them as human beings or as persons who are distinct from one another. They all indistinctly represent the large anonymous mass of the people the invader has to master without knowing who they are.

As victim who has lost almost everything (land, housing, freedom, dignity, responsibility, empowerment), the autochthone person feels spoiled. The whole world seems to be against her and all of her dependents or neighbours. Nobody supports her. She is alone among the crowd. No foreign government has clearly taken her side. It is true that some nations have declared that the invasion was not legal or that it should happen in respect of the laws of war. But what does it change to hear declarations that are not followed by action and by concrete support to the victims; and even less by physical defence of their interests or of their mere lives and the ones of their relatives.

There is understandably a lot of resentment and violent anger in the heart of the “insurgent” and of his dependents who are all deprived of all necessary means to defend their family against the aggression of the invaders – we will see later an illustrative example of such a case. The autochthone people are disempowered and can do nothing to ensure the minimum conditions that are necessary to their own people for subsistence and still less for thriving. She feels humiliated because she cannot assume her basic human and social responsibilities towards her own family, her neighbours and friends. Her image is disfigured and her self-esteem deeply damaged.

Because of this anger the image of the other (the invader) is reduced to its simplest expression and turns into a narrow and monolithic representation that encompasses all the others without distinction. They do not belong to her tribe or to her people. All these others seem to stand and to act against her. Who does not belong to her tribe becomes the other, i.e. the enemy. This enemy is perceived in very dark traits without any distinction of persons. It is why this image of the other is said to be monolithic.

Hence, in summary, we have two images that radically oppose each other and leave no space for reciprocal understanding:

- On one side the armed forces become an impersonal expression of the nation-state and they can act without accountability because there are no checks and balances. For this army-machine the victims are impersonal. They just represent, all together as a mass of people, the threat that has justified the invasion. The whole population of the occupied country becomes the threat to be squashed.
- On the other side, the freedom fighters feel they have to fight against the whole world because nobody supports them. They are guided by the monolithic image they have of the enemy as the Other, as any other. This Other has no face, no identity. He is just the great Satan.

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This strong dualism of two worldviews or monolithic images that oppose one another – but have nevertheless in common to dehumanise their enemy – is an important necessary condition to allow the conflict to escalate. In this narrow logic the escalation is the only possible way out (or in fact deeper in), because these two images see the Other as the only perpetrator who is the cause of, and responsible for, the conflict. Even worse: the two images need to be protected and consolidated because they are the reasons why both sides are fighting. They reinforce each other. At the limit they need each other to exist and have effect.

Destroying the image would kill the fight. Imagine if all these people would start to consider the others as ordinary human beings like themselves, like their partners or children. The conflict would immediately come to a stop.

The core: conflict or enemies

Two mentalities opposed in a colonial pattern

When a Northern power intervenes in, or invades, a Southern country, the same patterns as in colonisation characterise this intervention and the situation that ensues out of it.

The foreign armed forces that invade the land and the freedom fighters who try to oppose them are, one with another, in a relationship that is characteristic of colonisation.

- In the name of their own self-affirmed superiority and legitimacy (called the duty of intervention) the conquerors want to acquire the control of the land, as if it were their own land, as a strategic asset or for economic purposes of ownership, exploitation, extraction, in an act of domination of the people. In their action they usually ignore or show

contempt for the existence of the inhabitants who have lived there for centuries.

- On the other side, in the name of their own aspiration to freedom, self-defence and empowerment, the inhabitants of the invaded land defend their rights of living in their own country.
- Independently of the reasons (their respective narratives) why they want to occupy this land, this is the land, which both parties intend to control as their own, that constitutes the object of the conflict; and not the enmity of the inhabitants who are “only” the defenders of this land..

Both parties are moved not only by very different motivations but also guided by opposed mentalities and contrasting attitudes. Motivations and mentalities cumulate and multiply each other. In a previous chapter (chapter 5) I have described how Northern powers tend to function in linear thinking while Southern cultures proceed in circular thinking. As we saw these are two very different ways to grasp reality and the values of reference that lead us into life. The former has been said to be a left brain approach (analytical and rational) while the latter is rather right brain perception and expression (synthetic and intuitive).

But there is more to this. In case of the conflict we describe, these two ways of thinking are put in action in two very different positions of power. Between the invader-coloniser and the fighter-colonised, there is also a deep gap that these two opposed mentalities and positions generate and which opposes each other. These respective ways of thinking seem to be so deeply ingrained in respectively Northern and Southern mentalities that they work as unifying factors on each side of this gap.

All Northern countries seem to regroup behind the Northern invader while the Southern cultures take side for the invaded land. There is no more nuanced position. According to this false

logic every nation has to belong to a clearly defined camp. And usually the division is drawn according to the North-South dividing line. Hence you are white, you have to align with the US, UK and similar. You are black, you have to align with antagonistic powers to the North, such as China or Russia or India. This polarisation is absurd. It excludes all possible independence and mature autonomy.

In the same way powers that oppose the North are declared by the North to be “rogue states”: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq, North Korea or Cuba are nowadays, or have been earlier, considered as dangerous actors (so-called “rogue states”). I do not mean here that these “dissident” powers are right; I mean that their position is always evaluated in terms that measure how much they work for or against the interests of the North; as if the US were the true and objective reference of what truth and justice is. But the US are pretty good in their actions as a so-called rogue state, if this term means a power that creates destruction on a wider scale and acts against the common good. I believe it is urgent, as Northerners, that we learn to better understand the position of these so-called rogue states, before we judge them. They have also their own logic and interests, which are indeed very different from ours.

Autonomy is essential and needs to be encouraged because it is the energy that allows to balance forced alliances and proposes alternative ways, which would be ways for more peace and less confrontation.

This sharp dichotomy between the “good” and the “bad” states was very clear in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq when the United States succeeded involving most Northern powers into their hazardous expedition of invading a country (Iraq) which had no responsibility in the 9/11 event of the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York by Al Qaida.

These two towers were neither a childcare centre nor a hospital but the symbol of Northern economic and financial domination over the Southern lands, worldwide. This is as such that they have been targeted. This is a terrible crime against humanity to attack such infrastructures where innocent people work. But it remains nevertheless true that they were a symbol of oppression. It was equally insane to engage into revenge after such a crime. Some 3000 people were killed in these attacks. It is much too many and unacceptable. But it seems also that, if one dares to compare, some 243’000 people (70’000 civilians) have died in Afghanistan/Pakistan and some 300’000 in Iraq from direct war related violence caused by the US, their allies, the local military and police, and opposition forces from the time of the invasion in 2001 or 2003⁶⁹. It represents a reprisal of 1 to 180 as if an American life would be “worth” the equivalent of 180 Middle Eastern lives. It is pure madness. Nothing has even finally been achieved. These numbers of course do not include or reveal the terrible destructions and negative impacts long term on the land and infrastructures as well as on the state of mind or the social dynamic and resilience of the local population and all the ethnic groups that compose it.

It is consequently hard to understand that almost all Northern nations have followed the US in this apocalyptic adventure. More than a common intention and vision, it was a narrow spirit of imperialist mentality that created the unity of this improvised coalition on the coloniser side; a common way of thinking that belongs to the left brain.

On the other hand there was also a common contempt for the local cultures. The official discourse (the screen of dishonest justification) said that the Allied intended to bring democracy, at the point of a gun, into these “uncivilised” countries. President

⁶⁹ Source: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians>

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W. Bush did not even probably know that it was the place where writing has been invented; that it was the cradle of many of the world most stunning civilisations, from Babylon to Nineveh to Akkad without mentioning the beauty of the later local indigenous cultures. Baghdad has long been a long flourishing capital city of the Abbasid civilisation (8th to 13th century).

And, in what concerns Afghanistan, it is true that it does not really fit into the artificial mould of nationhood that has been established by colonial powers. But it is rather constituted of many diverse ethnic groups or cultures with their own systems of government – which do not exclude forms of kingship – such as Pashtun, Baluch, Hazara, Nuristani, Aimaq, Usbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Turkmen. Here again a great diversity of cultures and cultural wealth that can express itself freely when these ethnic groups are more or less cohabitating (or competing) as long they are not disturbed and used against one another by external forces of interference (British colonial power, British interventions of 1842, 1878 and 1919, Russian invasion of 1979, US invasion of 2001). Tell me: who are the true peacemakers?

Another example: Palestine. A similar artificial Western unity, which forms between nations of same ways of thinking, interests and positions of power, is made visible in the deep understanding and unconditioned support for the Israelis that are found in Europeans and North Americans. There are many sides in this cultural and ethical coalition.

- The first is probably that the leaders of Israel have grown up in Western cultures. Trained in Europe or in the United States, they know how to address Western mentalities which understand them well because of these deep similarities in way of speaking, culture, training, values of reference. They know how to talk to one another and to understand what the other means because they use the same language and similar priorities of reference; here again, linear thinking.

- It is striking, when there is an increase in tension in the Middle East, how Western powers take instinctively side with Israel without questioning the causes of the tension. There is also a deep similarity in the means which are used for action. Israel has a rational project of domination and colonisation that reminds the West of its own “glorious” past as coloniser. The way to implant new colonies in the West Bank, although it is completely illegal and against international laws, meets the unconscious thought of Westerners that these lands should be “better exploited and economically enhanced” by rational minds instead of left “vacant” by small traditional farmers. The worse aspect, in this negative image of the Palestinians, is that it is completely a fiction because these are also in average highly educated people. This preconceived perception of the traditional owner is a clear illustration of the view of contempt by the coloniser.
- Northern powers side also with Israel because they better accept the logic of an armed, broad and violent military intervention (shelling, bombing) as they are used to do in Southern countries (see above the examples of the number of deaths in Afghanistan or Iraq). Southern casualties are in their minds much less worth than Northern casualties (Israelis). This fundamental twist in warfare attaches Israel to the Northern camp.

In all these different aspects it is strange how the relationship between Northern powers and Southern lands tends always to reproduce the colonial pattern. We recognise in these interventions the same spirit of domination, of contempt, of imposing the same narrow rationality aimed at profit and domination.

- The newcomers take control of the land from which they evict the traditional owners. Settlers in the West Bank evict

the Palestinian owners and build their new colonies with a system of self-defence against any form of resistance or counter-attack by the local inhabitants (frontier wars).

- They take control of the natural resources which they extract without restraint. The new settlers control the sources of water and redirect it towards their own settlements, depriving the locals from what is absolutely essential for their survival. In Iraq war has even become itself a business that involved many US private corporations in which the US President and his acolytes had main financial interests such as Blackwater and Halliburton without mentioning the profits for Lockheed, Boeing, and similar.
- The local treasures are looted, such as precious relics from the Mesopotamian, Abbasid and Persian civilizations out of the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad.
- The local population is considered as subhuman and its basic needs are not considered. The health and education systems collapse under the bombardment and the blockade of external vital resources such as water, food and electricity (Gaza, Iraq).
- The blind violence of military retaliation fosters escalation that translates into forms of despair and acts of suicide bombing by Palestinians in Jerusalem.
- The local traditional cultures and people of Iraq are despised when they do not fit into the materialist patterns of the conqueror. They can be massacred without the power doing anything to protect them.
- Privileges are reserved for the local elite if it accepts to collaborate. Most services are privatised and serve a minority of privileged people.

- Decisions are taken by decree. There is no framing law such as a bill of right or a constitution. There is no parliament or similar democratic institutions, although the invaders had pretended to bring in democracy. It is simply military administration.

It is noticeable that the action of the coloniser comes first. The reaction of self-defence of the “insurgent” comes as self-defence, as a consequence of this first initiative. Then there is a long chain of “hens and eggs” whose beginning becomes indistinguishable. This chain reminds us of the three stages according to Don Helder Câmara.

In this frame of mind of colonisation, there is nowhere space for true dialogue and cooperation on issues which are so real and which become ever more harmful in long term. The principal way of acting is based on top down institutions that act with violence or by decree against resistance movements that act by cooperation bottom up, alimeted by anger and despair.

Two opposed camps at war

On each side of the mentality gap, two camps engage in war without envisaging other options or other ways of relating with one another.

Blocks seem then defined more by mentalities and sense of belonging (so-called identity) than by dispassionate observation and clear thinking or imagination of more constructive alternatives.

Alliances are in this polarised context the worse form of support one could imagine. Allied never act in the interest of the protagonist that they are meant to support. They act in their own interest and influence the conflict in the way they are interested to see it evolve, even if this aim disserves the assisted allied.

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Each time Israel is under attack by Palestinians freedom fighters or Hamas (considered as a terrorist organisation), the US provide more subsidies and more weapons to Israel and support the escalation of increased military interventions. In doing so they only throw oil on the fire and work against a solution that would help reduce the number of deaths and long term suffering on both sides.

It is the same with the support of Iran to Hamas which is only self-interested and does not consider the life of Palestinians in the West Bank or in Gaza. The support of Iran to Hamas or Hezbollah is mainly motivated by the intention to counter the position of Israel in the Middle East or the extension of US influence.

True alliance is the alliance of love. It is what you can observe when people have their relatives exposed to intense bombing or when they have their friends caught as hostages. It is striking how the dominant reaction among the victims of bombing is an aspiration for peace. Their patience and lack (or controlled restraint) of hate is inspiring. They seem to have no energy to waste in anger and hate feelings; the urgency is elsewhere. They do not want revenge. They want their loved ones to be protected or freed and come back home. They do not want violent intervention. They want subtle negotiations to make the survivors safe and the hostages free. This is then true support and true alliance; alliance and support that care for the well-beings of the victims or for the evolution of the conflict on a long term; hoping to find also peaceful solutions or at least to reduce the degree of violence. This is a creative stand nourished by love and not by self-centred interest.

It is then difficult to understand why the United States behave in the way they do, supporting an immediate violent reaction of revenge before it could be thought through in considering all possible long term consequences. And why the United States are

unable to promote true solutions of pacification – although they did too at another time – instead of increased support for more killing? There are many aspects linked with, or explanations for, these attitudes.

- The first can be the need for US presidents to cajole their Jewish electorate because it constitutes a large range of voters as well as the fundamentalist Christians who adopt similar views.
- Many Jewish Americans are very keen to support Israel because their own Jewishness – rather as a cultural expression than a religious form of belonging – represents an important part of their identity. They recognise that Israel is an expression and coherent extension of the past common Jewish history; that this expression represents a significant cultural and ethical dimension in their eyes. They are used to send their children, when they become young adults, for some prolonged stay in Israel where they learn some basic Hebrew and become more familiar with the Jewish culture in its modern form of laic expression. But they would not wish to live in Israel themselves because they are well settled in North America or Europe where they find the necessary nourishment for their minds and hearts; far from a conflict that does not imply them directly..
- They are also generally highly educated (at least more than the average population) and they have also reticence to assist the right-wing trend that is slowly developing and reinforcing in Israel. They are also probably disapproving the colonisation process that, intentionally but surreptitiously, takes place in the West Bank and constitutes one of the major factors that participate in degrading the general situation. But they do not dare to be antagonistic to this project as it also represents the symbol of accomplishment of Jewishness.

- The weight of the Holocaust is still acting in the consciences, as we saw previously. Israel knows very well how to manipulate these feelings and plays (awkwardly) with the notion of anti-Semitism, as if any position against a choice made by an Israeli leader would be motivated by anti-Semitism.

In all this, given the means and the potentials which are at work, it remains astonishing how little imagination there is, and especially how little courage Northern world powers have to dare to envisage new forms of praxis and coexistence. What a poverty of spirit among our richest nations and main world leaders caught in a narrow mentality based on materialism and individualism!

Enmity vs conflict

The challenge is not how to beat the enemy but how to solve the conflict that opposes people of diverging groups of interests. Enemies exist in our minds; only the conflict is real.

This next comment will ask where the key of peace is, and whether it is to be found in the behaviour of the enemies or in the causes of the conflict. I would like to start here by telling a story that is full of hope.

A few years after the failure of the Oslo Accords, some courageous and free-spirited Israelis and Palestinians who believed in a possibility of living side by side came together and sat at the same table to engage together in a new process of peace. They were representatives of the moderate camp on both sides who were aspiring to living side by side in peace. These were all competent and high positioned leaders in the Palestinian or Israeli society, high ranking officers in the army or the intelligence agency Mossad or the PLO, members of Parliament,

ex-ministers, representatives of political parties, professors, business people, writers. These free spirits (about fifty people) met in Geneva at the end of 2001 to start to define the necessary conditions for a peace process based on the two-state solution.

In order to make their proposal really convincing, they decided to leave no stone unturned and to go into the minutest details and propose ways to solve all possible points of conflict. As far as it was in their reach to find an agreement, they addressed all aspects of the conflict; such as for example major issues like the destiny of existing colonies in the West Bank; or more minor details such as the status of some buildings in Jerusalem. They also defined the minute details of the map, especially the border between the two future states. They proposed rights of transit between the different zones, especially between Gaza and the West Bank.

They came finally to an agreement in October 2003 under the name of Geneva Accords⁷⁰. This exceptional result shows that even a struggle as violent and extreme as the Palestinian-Israeli never ending conflict can find a solution when the parties are ready “to come to an historical compromise that answers the vital needs of each of both parties despite the painful concessions that it requires”.

Now, having exposed in a few lines this positive example of a creative and courageous solution concerning one of the hardest possible conflicts, I would like here to explain my thesis. The thesis goes like this:

- After acts of violence we tend as human beings to react also violently, with anger and despair because of the losses that

⁷⁰ See the full text of the accords: https://geneva-accord.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/The-Geneva-Accord_-Full-Text.pdf and many other documents such as maps or annexes on the same website.

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we have supported. The vicious circle of increasing violence can only lead to destruction. Destruction means here destruction of the enemy but also self-destruction because both parties cannot be dissociated until one of the protagonists stops acting violently.

- We tend to focus on the persons of our enemies because we perceive that they are the causes of our tragic destiny. But is it really the case? It is vital to examine this question in more detail, because, if it is not the case, we walk the wrong path when we try to kill them. When we question ourselves honestly, we can notice that the perception of the Other as an enemy is a concept that has in fact developed in our minds and we have to check its veracity. It remains true that these “enemies” act against us and harm us, even in dreadful ways: they take our land, they kill our children, they oppress us, they humiliate us, they ignore our rights, they make our life unbearable. But are they truly the sources of all our troubles or is there another major reason, upstream, that incites them to act as they do?
- The true motivation in their action was not originally to harm us for the “pleasure” of harming us. The need to harm us only came later when they felt also harmed by us, or at least impeded in their project, maybe even by our mere presence or at least by our resistance to their project. The true reason why they, from the beginning, act against us is because they are in conflict with us. We must open the eyes and recognise that, them and us, we compete in fact for the same resources, whether these resources are the land we live on, the water we need for our subsistence, the rights for self-determination we claim, the independence we want to enjoy. Whatever the cause of the conflict was, the conflict came first; and then later only the violence which opposed us and fed the

escalation of further violence in an endless chain of reactions with ever increased intensity.

- If the conflict came first and the violence arose only as consequence of the conflict, because one of the protagonists resisted the project of the other and frustrated him, our enemies are not the free actors who have initiated the process of violence as we seem to perceive them. It is possible that they are at the source of the oppression we are subjected to, because they have also a direct and undeniable responsibility in the way they practised this oppression against us. But, nevertheless, the violence was not the initial purpose. It was only the means that was used as a consequence of the conflict. If the conflict came first, before the use of violence, the source of our problem with our enemies is not their attitude and action against us but the conflict that opposes us and them, as adversary actors.
- Conclusion: to escape the infernal cycle of escalation of violence and endless reprisals, we have to go back to the source of the cycle which is to be found in the nature of the conflict. This is, in the future, the awareness that has to guide us. I am aware that there are many obstacles on this process of going back to the original source of the conflict. There are many hurdles on this path and we will examine a few of them later. But the great insight that matters here is that the way out of violence is in the solution of the conflict and not in the destruction of the enemy.
- We have to come back to the conflict itself and examine in what it turned out to be a conflict; that is in which ways we are competing for the same thing and clashing with one another because of this competition.
- When we will have identified the points of friction and found solutions to the conflict, we will still, but only in a later time,

have to quieten the rampant violence that will still for a long time impregnate our feelings and our relationships. A therapy of our deep resentments and desires for revenge will be necessary.

- As we intend to come together with our adversary to the same table in a nuanced attitude, our image of our adversary (our “enemy”) has to evolve from the monolithic view (Us and Them, the good and the bad) into a more nuanced and complex view that sees no more caricatures of these others, as people with weapons that intend to harm and destroy us, but as the much diversified versions of the real subtle and different human beings they are and we all are.
- In this way the image of the threatening enemy as the cause of all our suffering vanishes and the conflict itself may occupy the centre stage. In concentrating on the cause of the conflict, in sitting at the same table and in searching together for solutions, we can hopefully find compromises that can help to dissolve the points of conflict. If the conflict is solved, the enemies will vanish.
- To address the conflict at its source the protagonists have to rise to a higher level of understanding that goes beyond their own egocentric self-centred perception and interest. They have to acquire together a global vision in which each side must include the perceptions of the other and find what is essential for each participant. This means strong and painful concessions.
- Our present enemy will become our partner with whom we will invent new solutions together. Yes, it will be a difficult path that will require a lot of sacrifices, a lot of renouncement, a lot of concessions.

The thesis can then be summarised in a few words. As long as the conflict is not addressed at its source and the parties do not

collaborate to solve it in a vision that rise at a higher level (global and not egocentric), the protagonists won't stop killing one another in an increasing cycle of violence. And the more they wait to solve the conflict, the more violent the struggle will be and the harder it will be to dismantle what has been built up that creates more antagonism. The antagonism will ever more shift from the conflict to an escalation of war. The harder it will be to come to the table of dialogue. This is on short what the Accord of Geneva demonstrates very concretely, by its own practice.

The thesis can be summarised in a single equation. At the beginning there is the conflict. Anger or resentment or hate makes it into war. The difference between a conflict that can be solved and war is anger-resentment-hate. The equation is: war = conflict + hate. Or in a positive way: peace = conflict solved = war – hate. That is that, if you take hate away, the conflict remains that can be solved in peaceful terms. Peace = war – enmity. Or more positively: conflict + forgiveness = war – hate = peace. I believe it is important to express it in such simplistic terms in order to make this truth more powerfully challenging.

Instead of taking side, the ideal role of the allies should consist in putting a maximum pressure on the protagonists to come to the table. This means they should take no stand for one side but work on both sides for reconciliation because finally all people are seen again as ordinary and similar human beings.

This path seems a dream in your eyes? It is why I have started this general comment about the enigma “enmity vs conflict” with the positive story of the Geneva Accords. It is precisely what these courageous Israelis and Palestinians did from 2001 to 2003, in a radical break with the cycle of violence. During two years, they worked with intensive effort, under a great tension due to their passion to succeed, but also explicitly threatened by opposing parties that wanted them to fail. Again and again they

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came back to the same table despite the price it cost them to make important concessions. But they knew, in the deepest of themselves, that it was the price to be paid if they wanted to put an end to the cycle of violence and hate of which they were all victims. Once the object of the conflict was solved, they were no longer enemies. They were even, after sharing so much of their own humanity, united in this tremendous effort of proposing a peaceful resolution. Is this not true friendship?

A need for an alternative to war

Weaponry, armies and armed resistance to invasion are based on an illusory logic that cannot bring positive fruits. It provides destruction and escalation of enmity.

If my thesis is correct I have to go further into its development. This is a risky path because it proposes a road that is not based on usual ways of thinking. It will probably shock you because it will look to you like a dream. I will yet try my best to convince you that this path, although based on a very different logic is probably much more realistic and fruitful than what we do usually to handle situations of armed conflict and the risk or reality of war.

To situate the present context I have to say that I write these lines (Easter 2014) while the conflicts in Ukraine and in Gaza are in full blows. I will intentionally not mention here the names of the political leaders because these are mainly ignorant people or even criminals who do not merit fame; they are finally insignificant characters, although they remain very harmful. And on the other hand these situations of war are very representative of the way we act, as ordinary people or as nations, in conflicts and in international relationships. The tragedy is that we believe in the power of armies to provide what we want or even to protect us from what we do not want.

What I observe in the conflicts in Ukraine and in Gaza sadly justify my thesis. They demonstrate the natural tendency to escalation and increased violence. Armed conflicts lead to further extensive destructions, to stronger polarisations and to exacerbation of hate. The adversary becomes ever more strongly the enemy to be annihilated. The more war develops, the more peace is driven further away. And so it goes. The only illusory “hope” is, on both sides, to impose one’s own will through the power of weapons. This is called victory. This is evidently an illusion. How could Ukraine vanquish Russia? It can resist and the war may last for ever, until the regime in Russia changes and gives up its project of invasion. But how could war and armed resistance create the conditions of peace everybody wishes to be restored?

The logical corollary of my thesis is the nonviolent path that proposes nonviolent action to restore peace, precisely because war is unable to offer any solution except radical destruction of the country and of its inhabitants. It is what we see: the towns are annihilated and the people killed. A huge suffering overwhelms the whole population. Division seems to creep in slowly as there are different categories of citizens: the ones who fight on the front and get killed or wounded for the safety of the nation; and the ones who continue to live an almost normal life in Kiev or Lviv.

In Gaza this is a process of pure annihilation of the other, the so-called enemy, who is constituted mainly of women, children and innocent men; while only a minority of fighters try to do their best to defend their people; sometimes with inadequate means. But who are we to judge people in despair facing such a powerful process of annihilation?

There is in our human culture a wide spread conviction that military invasion must be resisted with weapons. The paradoxical logic of this conviction is that destruction is the only

solution towards peace and that one has to destroy, or let destroy, what one values most in order to prevent the enemy to grasp it. It is what Russia does in Ukraine. It destroys the cities it wants to conquer. This is evidently a non-sense.

I understand in the deepest of my heart the feeling that such an aggression should be resisted. But the question remains: what are the most adequate means for this purpose? Armed resistance seems to generate, only short term, a form of solidarity, but it has in itself the seeds for its own destruction. We can observe also how it generates grief and many feelings of despair that are, on the long term, destroying the soul and the cohesion of the nation and even its practical capacity for resistance. It is destroying the nation from inside. It is why an alternative must be invented how to resist foreign aggression.

The road of nonviolence

Nonviolence is the only possible path to re-establish peace. This means renouncing armed conflicts. Resistance to the occupier consists in systematic opposition to its authority.

As alternative for this never-ending war, and the obliteration of all that exists on the coveted territories, we have to imagine another strategy.

Let’s imagine that, instead of trusting weapons to prevent the invasion, the people themselves, as citizens and inhabitants of the land that the invader wants to conquer, will decide to exert nonviolent resistance on the whole scale of what is possible for them to do. Instead of giving their life on the front they will give it at home in a constant struggle against the occupying forces. This will mean that armed resistance will be replaced by mainly civil resistance.

This renunciation on war on the front will evidently open the way to the invader to penetrate the country he wants to invade. And it will request from him to organise a new regime of domination and control: at the same time an armed presence everywhere in the occupied country and an administrative apparatus of control over political power and people. For the inhabitants of the place, the difference will be that physical destruction of their environment will stop and be replaced by the repressing presence of the occupier. The physical frame (land, buildings, streets, people) will remain the same as previously. The social frame will change. This will be a hostile regime.

One gains in clarity. The adversary is no longer the unknown poor soldier on the other side. It becomes clearly this regime that occupies the land. Destruction, which did not bring anything, is no longer needed. What is needed is resistance against the true adversary, the power that wants to repress.

The battle will no longer happen at the front but everywhere in the country. As explained earlier there will not be two armies affronting each other on the two sides of the same front line; but there will be one occupying force facing the whole population everywhere. The invader will not know who the fighters are, or who the people are who are actively resisting its domination. No more a single front, no more a clear line; but the “enemy” of the occupier can be seen in potentially everybody. The success of this form of resistance depends of course on the will of the people to resist truly and radically; and on their number. But the same can be said of the armed fight on the front.

Civil resistance can take all possible forms, from open mass demonstrations on the public squares and streets of the city, to nonviolent sittings, to civil disobedience or strikes, to even attacks on buildings and occupying forces if restricted violence is accepted in this strategy. The resistance develops in this way on

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as many fronts as possible according to the imagination and the courage of the population.

In a nonviolent way we can remember how Gandhi could chase the Brits out of India and establish Indian independence. Remember also, in a violent way, how this strategy has been effective in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has vanquished the most powerful armies of the world which had finally to leave.

We can see how a nonviolent strategy, when it relies only on pacific means, may generate positive energies of solidarity and courage, and a spirit of freedom among the resisting people. It contributes to develop civil and civic qualities that help to build the nation, even to rebuild the unity and equality it probably never knew before. It develops trust in people, intelligence in observation and understanding of what is at stake, sense of responsibility towards other members of the community. It develops even personal initiative, political culture, curiosity, awareness, sense of the meaning of life.

It does even much more. Maybe more interestingly, it contradicts sharply the narrative of the invader. The Russian leaders of this offensive against Ukraine have created a myth of the old Russia that had its head of state in Kyiv around the 11th century. They have invented the need to re-establish its authority over this lost land of theirs. The narrative tries to create a hostile antagonism between Russia (Us) and an enemy (Them) called Ukraine of which it wants to reconquer the land. This is a traditional way in totalitarian regimes to divert the attention of the citizens from internal matters (a totalitarian system) and to attempt to create a form of solidarity against the imaginative external enemy that threatens the country.

What is interesting here is that the new strategy dismantles this narrative. It reveals its bluff and shows the reality as it is. It shakes the totalitarian power because it transforms a conflict between two nations (the myth) into a conflict between an

oppressive regime and the people it dominates (the reality), whether in Russia or in Ukraine. The conflict is no longer delimited by the national border where the military front used to be when the enemy was meant to remain beyond this border. It translates the external conflict against a foreign army into a popular resistance of the whole population against the tyrant. And this resistance has no border. It is no longer a vertical front at the border between two countries, but it becomes a horizontal front, between the population and its top leaders. In this way the original weapon of the invasion is turned back against its instigators (the Russian oligarchy). The weapon of invasion reveals their true visage, their true nature. And the invasion happens in reverse. The Ukrainian energy of resistance will invade Russia and strike back. It will join and reinforce the existing resistance in Russia. That is it will have the contrary effect of what was intended by Russian leaders.

Of course this is not enough to provoke a large movement of resistance. But it nevertheless reveals what is, as it truly is and in full light. It will depend on the people to decide whether they want to resist and to mobilise their energy in this struggle of popular resistance. But this resistance will potentially involve the whole of the population in Ukraine and in Russia, if it can spread. It offers then the best chances to provoke a change of regime which will be a form of liberation, of transformative liberation because it will put an end to the whole system of oppression. It will implement what is needed as a solution to the conflict, because the problem is not the enmity between Russia and Ukraine but the totalitarian system in Russia that deprives everybody of their own freedom of spirit if they do not adhere to the myth.

Personally this new strategy seems to me much more fruitful. It relies on much smaller means. It does not foster destruction and enmity like the other. On the contrary it builds a positive energy of building up solidarity. And the people can remain where they

live. They do not fear to receive bombs on their houses while they sleep. They keep their own relationship with the land and with people around them. This is an invaluable strength.

In Gaza the situation looks different because there is only one aggressor that now destroys systematically the whole city of Gaza. If the Gaza strip would be declared open territory, it would be much more difficult for the Israeli Forces to continue destroying the whole enclave, killing indistinctly people. It would put an end to what looks like a genocide, which happens with an explicitly declared will to get rid of its inhabitants. It would put an end to the open war we know now.

Yet, in this Israeli war, the main problem seems to be the fundamental contempt of Palestinians by the Israelis who defend their colonial project of integral occupation of the whole land. Against this deep entrenched contempt the nonviolent strategy seems powerless. Yet by its powerlessness it remains more able to have a life-changing influence as a model of wisdom that reveals what goes wrong by its own force of contrast. Light reveals shadow, heat reveals cold. Compassion reveals the incapacity to love and to respect.

The Easter model

The Christian belief in the life of Jesus Christ offers a strong example of how to fight evil. To renounce violence is the most powerful way of resistance that liberates creative life energies.

As I write these lines at Easter time, I can see a powerful parallel between what happens in Gaza and the story of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in the same country, some 2000 years ago. For people who do not believe in this story or reject the Christian understanding, I may propose here a symbolic interpretation that remains very significant even for the ones who do not believe in the story told in the bible. The story can be told in other words,

which you can read like a fairy tale or like a real fact. Your choice.

In continuation with the Jewish tradition Jesus was teaching in Galilee and Judea a path of compassion and forgiveness; and his own behaviour was the direct illustration of how to practise what he was teaching. His teaching was perceived by the authorities of the Temple as subversive. They felt challenged because it was revealing how these authorities were abusive and how, by their attitude ruled by a literal reading of the laws, they were in fact preventing people from accessing the true path of spiritual liberation. These leaders decided to arrest Jesus and to kill him by the cruellest way they could imagine: crucifixion. Instead of escaping and starting a movement of armed resistance against their authority, Jesus surrendered voluntarily to their power and let them kill him. This seems at first sight a strange thing to do. But it revealed to be the most powerful way to challenge the power of the leaders. Because Jesus gave himself totally, and at a high price for himself, he showed the path of nonviolent resistance and proved it to be the most powerful way to reveal reality as it is and therefore to oppose oppression. Love is the only energy that may generate situations of harmony and peace. Surrendering to what is becomes the way to real freedom or the path to a new life. It is what is called resurrection, or more prosaically salvation. This is the path of liberation from false premises that opens us to a new quality of life.

You can read this story as the Gospel tells it, in Christian terms. Or you can read it as a myth that tells you something about the essence of life that only a myth can tell in poetic ways. Or you can see this tale as a teaching of a practical way how to live a true life. You can even, if you prefer, understand it as a manual for nonviolent guerrilla that proposes instructions how to vanquish an oppressive power. All interpretations are probably true, although not on the same level.

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If we apply this teaching to our modern reality, we can find many illustrations of this same truth. I would like here to illustrate this new path with examples taken out of recent history.

- My first example will be St Francis of Assisi. Following the pattern enacted by Christ he renounced wealth and power early in his life; and he was made free by this choice to experience life to the full. His powerlessness enabled him to search for truth wherever he could discern it. Since then his model and authority have been paradoxically strong influences in our ways of living. We will see further in this chapter how, in the turmoil of the 5th Crusade, he dared to visit the Sultan Malik al-Kamil (the so-called enemy of the Crusaders) who welcomed him with warmth. This aptitude of the Sultan to listen to St Francis was certainly deeply related with the fact Francis had let go of any power. He came to visit the adversary as a powerless pilgrim and was therefore seen for whom he was.
- The next example concerns a Jewish Dutch woman. Etty Hillesum died in Auschwitz in 1943. As she was of Jewish origin she does not refer to the model of Christ but to her own experience of God which she deepened intensively as a core essence of her whole short life. This is indeed the same unfathomable Reality one finds in all religions. The teaching remains true whatever its form is. Before she was transferred to the extermination camp she had to stay in the concentration camp of Westerbork in the Netherland. In a letter to her friend Tide (18 August 1943⁷¹) she describes her gratitude for her life in the present. Incredible testimony of freedom. Etty was known in the camp to console and take care of everybody.

⁷¹ See Etty Hillesum: *An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork*. Many editions.

- Another example is Gandhi. He was not a Christian although he knew very well the teaching of Christianity. His life has been a constant renouncement on power. It is because he was powerless that people, during the clashes between Hindus and Muslims before Indian independence, accepted his moral authority and his order to stop the fighting.

These three examples – there would be many more – reveal this other deeper reality and this other dynamic in our human relationships. They demonstrate in my mind how our conviction that conflict should be fought with weapons is erroneous. They give also substance to the alternative path of nonviolence, showing that what gets destroyed on the violent path is restored on the nonviolent path. The former prevents life; the latter gives it full expression. Why do we then choose the former? This is proper suicide.

I want here also to share my personal experience. It happened that I knew pretty well many of the main leaders of the movement Solidarność – the Polish trade union which fought the communist power aligned on Moscow. In 1981 the *state of war* was declared in Poland, which abolished all personal freedoms and established military law on the whole country. Many of these leaders or activists were good friends of mine and we used to spend long nights talking about the situation in Poland. They shared their own experiences of living under this system. They had all been imprisoned at a time or another. But they all were very joyful and had a great sense of humour, without mentioning their courage to do what they were doing. They had to pay a high price for their commitment to freedom, but this price seemed to be small in comparison with what they were gaining for themselves in terms of human dignity and life intensity and meaning. They were also building together a form of solidarity (the name of the trade union) that was extremely rich. Nonviolent resistance is not glamorous. It is pretty messy

because it is made of a lot of meaningless measures of repression and of as many acts of small resistance. In these daily gestures life is the main energy that reveals to be indestructible. More recently the example of Alexander Navalny has shown the power of individual freedom, of this inexhaustible force to live free, even under a totalitarian regime. You will say: but he was finally killed. I will say: but he could finally live.

I believe the nonviolent path opens all the doors we need to open. It proposes in fact the only realistic path out of conflict and wars. Its main characteristic is that it depends on our personal choice. If we are focused on our egocentric material life conditions, we have all the possibilities to adapt, even to a totalitarian regime, because the moral fibre does not matter much as long we can get what we want. We live then as takers. But, on the opposite, if we are mostly concerned by the meaning of life and aware that life and compassion and justice and peace matter more than anything else, we are inevitably involved in the fight for truth. Is it not also what should happen in our rich society, given the huge injustices that surround us?

Nonviolent resistance is truly here the only possible path, whatever the context. It requires courage. But more than anything else it requires the awareness that life cannot be traded. It is the law of the uniqueness of life that guides us. The model of Christ becomes then powerful, whatever its expression is and the way it is understood (truth, myth, instruction). Life is to be found in compassion and peace. This is where it can thrive. This elementary truth requires that we dismantle anything that fosters enmity and war. The only possible path is conciliation and peace, whatever the price for this.

Land and faith as calls for unity

The land and the sacred places of three main religions are the objects of the conflict about Palestine. But they are precisely the forces that may bring us back together.

In Palestine-Israel, since the Crusades and much before the partition of 1947, the conflict has always been about the land and who controls it. This is the real core and origin of the conflict: between newcomers have invaded the land of people who have lived on this land for centuries. These people have then been evicted. Two peoples compete for the same land.

- The Israelis have a right to this land because their tradition refers to it as their homeland and the narrative of the Holocaust justifies that they need security and a place where they can live without being threatened.
- The Palestinians have a right to live where their ancestors lived and there is no justification to evict them from there. The Nakba is the narrative that tells how they have been evicted in 1948 and why they have the right to reconquer their land.
- These are two stories that confront each other and which are incompatible. Both can be true but both cannot be translated into the present without the rights of the other party being denied. There is only one land and there are two peoples who affirm this is theirs. This is the conflict which is real and has to be solved. There is nothing more at stake. The rest is history how this original knot evolved into endless reciprocal destruction. Since the time the conflict broke out a lot of tragedies have happened that have loaded this issue with a lot of suffering and intentions of revenge.
- Nothing in the nature of Palestinians or Jews should prevent the cohabitation of both peoples side by side, except the

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conflict itself, and the conflict only, that opposes the ones against the others.

- On top of this issue about the land, there is a more subtle issue. Israel-Palestine is also the land where the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) meet because they are sister faiths. The site of the Temple with the Wailing Wall is essential for the Jews. In the same place and time the Omar Mosque, or Dome of the Rock, and the El-Aqsa Mosque on the Al Haram Ash Sharif (which is also the Temple Mount of the Jews) represent both some of the most sacred places of Islam. Further to the West you have the Holy Sepulchre which represents one of the most sacred places for the Christians. If these three main religions are so strongly represented in the same space of Jerusalem, it is not the fact of a coincidence. It is because they have same roots and are weaved together like warp and weft. We can see this juxtaposition as a form of competition of three rival religions or we can see it on the contrary as a common call to come together.

In fact, together, the land and the three religions call for unity because the land is one and cannot be owned. It is unique and it remains unique through the centuries and we belong to it, even when we divide it into yours and mine. It is the global container that sustains us and nourishes us; it holds us; it encompasses our diversity. Religion is also the container that holds us together on a spiritual level. If we can see this, we are then fully contained and encompassed, whoever we are.

A change of mind

To enter a process of peace-making, a deep conversion of mind is necessary: i.e. a change of orientation and of way of functioning. I see 5 main hurdles on our way.

To break the present active cycle of violence we must recognise our own limits and failures. We have also to revise the monolithic image of our own self we have built. And we need to transform it into a nuanced representation that reveals the complexity (and ambiguity) of our own attitudes and behaviours. We are indeed not these righteous people we would like to be. We have to identify our mishaps, our failures and our human weaknesses. To go back to this state of humility and recovered innocence (accepting of not knowing and being humbly led) the question is how we can, in the present situation, reverse the evolution of ever growing hate and violence into a process of peace-making and reconciliation? In my mind five main hurdles stand in the way:

1) Our own rage. 2) Public expectation of strong revenge. 3) The image of our self and of our enemy. 4) Our egocentric and self-interested perception of the conflict. 5) Our narrative.

Let's in more detail examine what they are.

1) Our own rage

Our rage to be hurt is the main motor that leads us to commit more violence as blind revenge. But the cycle never ends. The only way to break it is to search for conciliation.

Violence hurts. It generates harm and suffering, and the gut desire of retaliation. If I lost my wife or my children in an attack by the enemy, I instinctively wish to get revenge. I will feel hurt, despair, anger, rage. I will feel like exploding. I will feel deeply the injustice that struck me: why me who did not do anything? why have I been aggressed? And the same with the constant humiliations I may experience in my life in occupied territory, especially when I feel the invader is taking ever more of our land.

There is a cycle of anger and retaliation that is liberated when these two forces take shape and reinforce each other. Left wild, this energy of resentment is destructive. The anger is legitimate but its use, as mere life energy, needs to be channelled in the right way, not in a destructive but in a constructive way. It cannot be left free and wild; it needs to be controlled. I can either use my anger to harm the other, even to destroy him, in an uncontrolled way. Or I can master and channel this force into a better outcome, like using the energy of anger as a force against the injustice that has ensued out of the conflict. I may try to use it to remedy this injustice, even if possible with the cooperation of my enemy.

This significant transformation from a destructive blind force into a creative better mastered and more focused energy requires a great maturity. It requires at least a great insight into the nature of the process that would, if left wild, create more destruction. This clear insight in the nature of violence, with its tendency to escalation, and this willing shift of attitude need both much courage not to let impulsive reactions dominate our actions. We need to learn new ways to stop for a while, to dare to take distance and reflect on what the most appropriate action is that would restrain the expansion of violence and even generate more peaceful settings.

I feel even that there is, in our unconscious, a kind of intention to perpetrate this cycle of violence because it is the easy way to go, the most spontaneous reaction if we have been hurt. It is also a way to maintain and reinforce the primitive monolithic image of the enemy as the bad guy. It is a way to consolidate the inner unity and cohesion of one's own group under attack, facing one common enemy. Strong powers love to have a clear enemy because the fact to be under attack generates a form of inner cohesion. It partly dissolves inner dissent. External threat has always been a diversion for inner forms of totalitarianism. The

former helps the latter to consolidate or at least not to be fought against.

2) Public expectation of strong revenge

Public pressure to retaliate and to demonstrate strength and power, in response to harm, constitutes a difficult pressure to resist. It pressures the leaders to do the wrong thing.

This important shift of mind that leads from reactive violence and revenge to mature initiative that fosters pacification is made very difficult because there is a very strong public expectation that the power in place will have to react in an energetic and strong manner that will prove that it is in control and it is mastering the situation. And that we, as a nation or a population, are powerful. It is called primitively the “right to defend oneself”, which means, in clear, to retaliate. The public pressure for a strong form of revenge – which will have to retaliate against the harm undergone by more harm inflicted to the enemy – has an extremely deciduous effect; it is very hard to oppose. No rational discourse can dismantle this kind of patterns. It appears that only a very clear and strong action can demonstrate that the power in place does not accept to be humiliated and is strong enough to practise self-defence. This is the explicit justification: the right to self-defence.

But it is precisely the core of the problem. Humility (not humiliation) is needed to find more peaceful ways. The search for the adequate reaction is a complex mix of different ingredients and this mixture is never imposing. The reaction that does not let itself be led by blind anger is a mixture of patience, of thoughtfulness, of inventiveness, of humility, of compassion for humanity in general, of trust also that the enemy may be capable to enter new ways, of hope that it can happen. These qualities are not qualities that pay for political grandeur, but they

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are certainly the main qualities that make leadership coherent and insightful. Courage and wisdom are here again the keys.

And finally it is just the courage and wisdom to do what needs to be done. Any other solution is an illusion. It can demonstrate strength and power and will, but it does not bring any solution. It is only bluff that will hurt on long term.

3) *The image of our own self and of our enemy*

As long we do not see the enemy as another human being, similar to us, who certainly fights against us, but has also his reasons to do so, we are trapped in hate.

In all this process the way we see our enemy is the most important factor. The image of the enemy is in our head; it is our own construction. We can choose to see him as a primitive actor that practices violent ways against us in order to destroy us. Maybe he does, but this is nevertheless the monolithic image I have mentioned earlier that represents the enemy as a stereotype of evil.

But the many people who constitute the mass of the adversary forces are in fact all different persons. They are all men and women who lead their daily lives and have their human experiences in so many different ways that they come to different conclusions, understandings, attitudes, behaviours, like each of us.

This image of the other is like a map. If the map you use is simplistic and erroneous, you risk to be misled in your walk through the territory. But if the map is precise and full of nuances that show well the details and the complexity of the land you intend to walk through, you are in more security and you will find your way more easily and more in conformity with your intentions and expectations. It is the same with the image of the

other. The more it is nuanced and realistic, showing the diversity of people and their humanity, not only their flaws but also their qualities and skills, the more you will be able to see them for who they are and the better you will be able to relate to them.

In reviewing the image one has of the other, one is also called to review the image one has of oneself. This means, beyond any fiction and imagination, seeing honestly where one stands, how one acts and which are the real shares of one's responsibility in the conflict.

Israelis are not all commanders in the army or right-wing settlers who want to conquer the whole of the West Bank and to establish new colonies. There are also many of them who truly care for the wellbeing of Palestinians and participate in their defence, like for instance the organisation B'Tselem I mentioned earlier.

I met in the 1970s a beautiful Jewish man. Simcha Yom-Tov (which literally means *Happy Good Day*), called also Gulli (for Gulliver, because of his size), was a tall and noble men with a white crown of hair. He had been one of the founders of the kibbutz in which he lived in Galilea. He was halftime architect, halftime shepherd. In his work from his kibbutz – it was just after the invasion of the West Bank by the Israeli army in 1967 – he was supporting Palestinians in the West Bank to consolidate their own culture. He was doing some planning for the development of Druze villages; or he was building mosques or inventing new forms of building. He was passionate about the right of Palestinians to defend their conditions of life. In 1973 (Kippour War) he wrote to me: *The good thing now is that Israel has been defeated on the Egyptian border. As Israeli nation we will be at least forced to the negotiation table. It will open a new door for peace.* What a deep insight!

In the same way people like the members of Women Wage Peace are very committed actors for peace in a context of

increasing tensions. Or people like Dan Bar-On, I already mentioned, are true artisans of peace.

One of the best examples is maybe the Divan Orchestra founded by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said which is composed of musicians from Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Egypt. They all play together in an attempt to meet each other and to understand each other. As they say, it does not generate peace. Music cannot be used for another purpose but the orchestra offers a frame and an opportunity to meet each other. They say they have vivid discussions about the situation in the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They do not need to agree but they nevertheless meet and respect each other, each one supporting the other when they play together.

We absolutely need to see this diversity in the camp of the other if we want to escape our self-destruction. This diversity is so much more adequate to describe who the others are than the preconceived and monolithic image we have formed of them in our minds.

There is a beautiful book written by the journalist and author Nir Baram⁷². He goes and interviews all kind of people, mainly in East Jerusalem and the West Bank: Palestinians, settlers, from the right and the left, ex-prisoners of the enemy, children in a kibbutz; and he asks them to describe their situation where they live and how they see the conflict. He does this in a very subtle way and with a lot of respect and listens attentively to what they express about their ways of life and their motivations. This book offers an excellent illustration of the diversity of people who are indistinctly called Israelis. This is a work of true love.

⁷² Nir Baram: A land without borders - My journey around east Jerusalem and the West Bank.

And we can say the same of Palestinians. They are not all suicide bombers or terrorist members of Hamas. These extremists are not even necessarily representative of the whole. They form only a minority, certainly more motivated and active, that is also more visible, more impactful, certainly inhabited by despair and hate and a spirit of revenge. Even Hamas itself is diversified, with many branches, and does not represent a united form of action. Many services of Hamas care for their people, for health services, for education. It is why they have been elected by their people; because they care for them.

I am always struck how the Palestinian doctors who are interviewed in circumstances of conflict in Gaza show always a lot of dedication to their task in impossible conditions without medication, electricity, or any basic means. They never express feelings of hate, but rather deep despair. What an example of courage and humanity.

Many other examples of inspiring people can be found, such as these ordinary people who try to meet in daily life with their Israeli neighbours and come together on both sides to maintain relationships of peaceful conviviality. Or the Women of the Sun who are acting for peace and equity. Or these influential members who participated in the proposal of the Geneva Accords. Humanity has such varied faces. No people can be condemned!

Of course Palestinians who live in the “open-sky prison” of Gaza all live in the same common context, which imposes common constraints and reveals common characteristics of oppression (enacted or undergone). They are exposed to the constant humiliation of a blockade that treats them as subhumans and to regular shelling.

Whether they are Israelis or Palestinians, they are inevitably subjected to their own feelings of blind anger in reaction to what happens to them or subjected to the social pressure of their own

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group to follow the common trend of hate and reprisals. But they also aspire to health, education and security for their children, to justice and peace, evidently perceived through the filters of their own eyes, subjective understandings and personal situations, but yet also impregnated with these aspirations for a good life. These different ways they have to experience their own humanity call the others to see them in a different light, other than just the stereotypical monolithic image these others have generated. This reconversion of the image of the enemy is fundamental. Without this essential reconversion of the image of the other, there will be no change and no possibility to come back to more peaceful relationships.

As explained previously the best way to discover who the others are consists in story-telling, each one telling their own story and listening to the stories of the others. In this new form of encounter the participants discover aspects of the other party they completely ignored. Especially they discover how the others and themselves have similar experiences and suffer of the courrant violence in very comparable ways. They slowly discover their similitudes and their common humanity. The monolithic image they had of these others as totally threatening dissolves and is replaced by a more nuanced image that shows not only their humanity but also their diversity and the great variety in their reactions to the conflict. A space is created where all participants can find a common ground and share their experiences and their vision for the present and the future. Many common perceptions arise that demonstrate the potential for convergence of different positions.

When we see the other as he is, we are also made free to see ourselves as we are. This is another form of freedom in which we can rectify our own image and recognise our faults and responsibilities in the conflict.

4) Our egocentric perception of the conflict

We need to rise to a higher level of understanding, from our self-interested point of view to a global hetero-centric view that allows to understand the mechanisms at game.

This need to rise to a higher level of understanding has already been mentioned shortly. It is important to have a more detailed look at this theme. To be able to sit with the enemy at the same table, as in the example of the Geneva Accords, and to envisage other ways of relating than through violence requires also that we change our own ways of looking at the conflict itself and at its causes.

As long as we look at it from an egocentric point of view we will only see how our interests are molested by the opponent. We will only perceive the ways the present situation harms us and why it does because our immediate experience makes us principally aware of where it hurts us. We need a lot of courage, of honesty and humility to go further and to become able, by a fundamental shift of our way of looking at the roots of the conflict, to better understand the position of the adverse party and to penetrate his ways of reacting.

This requires from us that we rise to a higher level of observation when we do not stand on our own level of egocentric perception. This egocentric perception is characterised by the ways we experience daily life in a subjective way through our senses and through the very selective filters of our own personal mind that has been shaped by all the personal experiences we had in the past. To rise to a higher level of more global perception we need to leave behind this basic egocentric (centred on myself) perception and replace it by an hetero-centric (centred on the others or the whole) perception.

This other understanding does not only integrate our own position and experience. It tries also to see further, beyond our own subjective traps, what the experience or the point of view of the other is or has been. It is a difficult attempt to sit in the skin, heart and mind of the interlocutor and to understand the world as she sees it.

And even, it goes further. It tries to integrate all these different and often antagonistic perceptions (depending on which side they are seen from) and to generate a new image of reality that presents a global vision, i.e. which is able not only to understand the position of the other but also to integrate, above subjective perceptions, an understanding of the mechanisms that have fostered the conflict.

These mechanisms are in this case no longer observed from the subjective (egocentric) point of view, but from above (even above an hetero-centric vision), as if by an external impartial observer who would not be involved in this conflict but would be free to understand its complexity because each aspect of it becomes than an objective fact, and not a subjective feeling or hurt. The vision is then global, like from above.

This other wider vision – which cannot appear without the precedent transformation of the image of the other and has to combine with it – is the necessary condition for being able to sit at the same table with the adversary. Once these two transformations (image and hetero-centric or global perception) have happened, new ways open. They allow the leaders, or inspiring people of the concerned party, to be stronger in their inner being to renounce violent reactions under the lead of blind anger and to resist the public pressure and expectation for a powerful and violent response. Together the adversaries of yesterday can build a different future.

5) Our narrative

We are used to tell a story that justifies our cause and presents our action under a positive light. But we have to review this narrative in the light of the present.

At this stage we come to the background of the whole story which is the narrative. The narrative underlies the profile of the monolithic image and serves as justification for the egocentric perception of the conflict. It is the corner stone that generates the whole ideology. It tells us why things are what they are and why we act the way we do. Although it has a lot of true elements in it, it is not an expression of the truth. It is a partial interpretation that serves as justification of what has happened and why it did in this way and in which ways it should continue to develop.

As it has already been mentioned and examined, the Israelis refer constantly to this narrative each time they mention the Holocaust and the devastations caused by anti-Semitism. The Holocaust is a real fact of the past and it is, among other causes, the reason why, just after WW2 in 1947, Palestine has been partitioned in two states, one for immigrating Jews (the new settlers) and one for the residing Palestinians (the autochthones). The story of the Holocaust mentions a real fact; but the main problem is that it makes it the reason to ignore the traditional rights of the Palestinians on their own land and the negation of the process of heavy eviction (750'000 people displaced by the Nakba). It is where, from an objective fact, the narrative of the Holocaust is transformed into a specious justification.

And the claim that Jews are constantly exposed to anti-Semitism is exaggerated, as we have seen and needs to undergo a deep process of national therapy. The worse acts of anti-Semitism are, in my mind, the violent acts that some Israeli leaders perpetrate, not as Jews but as Israelis, because these violent acts become then real facts and they call for a possible reaction of generalised

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hate of these leaders which may wrongly extend to the Jews in general. In this way these violent acts by Israeli leaders can be considered as anti-Semitic acts because they foster indirectly hate of the Jews which has its reasons, not against the Jews in general but against the acts in particular. This is then not the same kind of condemnation as pure anti-Semitism. The claim that these Jewish leaders are victims of anti-Semitism is in this case a fallacious claim and a treachery way to escape the condemnation of their criminal acts.

In what concerns the Palestinians, the narrative is the Nakba, the Catastrophe of 1947-48. Here again, this is a fact but it is used to deny the Jews any right to settle on the land situated between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan. Of course this story is right in what concerns the displacement of so many Palestinians who never could go back to their ancestor land. It describes the eviction which has been real. But it is also evoked as an exclusive right to the land, as a pretext to repel the Jews into the Sea. Today, facing the fact that Israelis have been living on this shore for more than seven decades, not counting the many millennia before, it seems difficult to deny them any right. The right of the Palestinians remains yet solidly anchored in this narrative in what concerns the means of their expulsion and this needs to be reconsidered as one of the main sources of the conflict.

When people sit around a table, all aspects of this past, and especially the narratives themselves, can be reconsidered. The facts remain true, but their interpretation may change radically. See the Geneva Accords; they are just the practical illustration of this possible move forwards.

It is essential to remember how these respective narratives are different from one another although they are meant to tell the same story. They do not tell the objective truth, because any narrative is subjective and represents always the most favourable

version that makes emotionally and culturally sense and suits the interests of the group. The example I mentioned earlier of the double history or narrative of Israel-Palestine published by Dan Bar-On and Sami Adwan is a good illustration of this contrast.

St Francis and the Sultan Malik Al-Kamil

At the siege of Damietta, during the 5th Crusade, St Francis crossed the frontline and went to see the Sultan of Egypt and talked with him about God and peace.

I presented earlier the positive example of peace-making of the Geneva Accords that illustrates very powerfully how it depends on us whether we follow our own anger that will drive us to destruction, destruction of the enemy but of ourselves too; or whether we dare to imagine a new path of conciliation that will allow everybody to live a peaceful life. Is there one single conflict that cannot be solved by reciprocal understanding and simple human compassion, if there is good will on both sides?

I want here to finish this chapter with another positive example of a daring initiative for peace which is much older because it happened in the 13th century at the time of the Crusades.

At the Third Crusade the three kings (Richard I the Lionheart of England, Philippe II of France, Frederik I Holy Roman Emperor) had reconquered Acre but not Jerusalem which was still in the power of the Sultan Salah ad-Din Yusuf Ibn Ayyub (better known as Saladin). From Acre the fifth Crusade deviated to make the siege of Damietta, at the North-East edge of the Delta of the Nile. This siege reminds me of the siege of Gaza today. The town was cut off from its surroundings and the inhabitants (some 80,000 people) were slowly starving and dying of many diseases. But the city remained invincible.

It happened that St Francis of Assisi had accompanied the crusaders, not so much as a support for their undertaking but rather by interest for the Islamic faith and hope to have the opportunity to meet Muslim people and evangelise them⁷³.

As the situation seemed to come to a stalemate, and the last battle had been very cruel and destructive, especially for the Crusaders, the Sultan of Egypt Malik al-Kamil, who was the nephew of Saladin, made some offers of peace but the Crusaders refused his opening and persisted to continue the siege. One day St Francis left the camp, with his brother Illuminatio, and crossed the lines to meet the Sultan. Francis had no idea whether this would be possible, and even if he would not simply be killed by the first squadron of Egyptian horsemen. It happened that not only there were both welcome but he had passionate discussions with the Sultan about faith and God. He was treated as an honoured guest and stayed there for a few days. He came back then to the camp, and it seems he was not harassed by the Leaders of the Crusade for having dared to not follow their instructions but they nevertheless continued to resist any initiative of peace.

I find this history very interesting and inspiring because it proposes, at a time where communication through the battle lines were very difficult and risky, an example of audacity and courage moved by trust and faith and hope. It demonstrates that the intelligence of the heart (circular) is much more powerful than the astuteness of the mind (linear).

One of the most interesting aspects of this exchange is that this encounter revealed a very different image of the Sultan from what the Crusaders knew about him. He seemed to be a very peaceful and cultivated man, surrounded by wise advisers, who

later demonstrated some magnanimity when the Crusaders tried to conclude peace. This is also a good example of change of image of the other that allows another dynamic based on the quality of personal human relationships.

Peace is at hand when there is a sincere wish to reach it.

⁷³ See the book by Paul Moses: *The Saint and the Sultan – The Crusades, Islam and Francis of Assisi’s mission of peace*. Doubleday Religion, 2009.

Chapter 14: Resistance and liberation

Did you say: war on terror?

After the attack on the Trade Centre on September 2001, the United States declared a “War on Terror”? Does it make sense? What is terror? And who is a terrorist? Let’s investigate this question.

Rage and hopelessness

Anger and despair are the two principal energies that foster hate and violence and the will for retaliation; they participate in the escalation of violent conflicts.

I will start this comment with an example.

The name of George Habash (1926-2008) would be known to you. He was the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), in the 1970s, which defended the Palestinian cause through acts of violence and terrorism worldwide. Habash’s opinion was that the Western powers were responsible for the creation of Israel and for providing support to it and needed therefore to be treated by Palestinians as enemies on the same level as Israel.

His most famous action was the Dawson Field’s hijacking of four Western airliners (TWA, Swissair, El Al, BOAC) which were brought to a military base in Jordan and blown up, releasing the passengers and crew or keeping part of them as hostages. But, exceptionally, this was an act of terrorism that did not cost

any life. Most of PFLP’s actions finished in undistinguished carnage and bloodbath. A bomb at El Al headquarter in Athens: one child killed. Shooting at Munich airport: one dead, many wounded. Fire set to a synagogue in Hamburg: seven dead. A Swiss plane explodes in flight: 47 dead. And many others.

At that time George Habash was the advocate of a single democratic state of Palestine, between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. He believed that only violence could bring Israel down as a Jewish state and allow peace in the Middle East. He wanted to put Israel under a constant pressure and threat of being violently annihilated. As a member of the most extremist wing of the PLO, he has remained an emblematic figure of international terrorism.

This terribly sombre image of a freedom fighter fully committed to violence contrasts sharply with the earlier figure of the same George Habash who was previously a practising Greek Orthodox Christian and a medical paediatrician who consecrated himself fully to the wellbeing of his patients, mainly children.

The Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci (1929-2006) used to interview the most famous leaders of her time, asking them the most embarrassing questions and challenging their authenticity and relation with truth⁷⁴. In her interview with Habash she described him with a puzzling feeling of irresistible sympathy, which she tries to repress with all her energy as she is humanely deeply disgusted by his criminal actions and contempt for human life. But she also tries at the same time to understand him and to discern what may move him.

⁷⁴ Oriana Fallaci: *Interview with History*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publisher, 1977. In the English edition the interview with George Habash is missing (it has probably been intentionally eliminated) but it has been published in the French edition by Flammarion 1975. Hence the extracts I quote here are my own translation from the French version.

In preamble for the reader, before she challenges Habash about his terrorist actions, she describes him as the medical practitioner he has been before he became a terrorist. In her introduction to the interview she writes:

“Before he was killing people, he was saving them. He was a medical doctor. And what a doctor! Not one of those who treat people according to accountant’s criteria, but one of those who cry if the patient dies. He owned a clinic where he worked with a group of Christian nuns, the Sisters of Nazareth. This clinic was in Amman, and mainly children were treated there because he was a paediatrician. But, on top of the children, the clinic used also to welcome poor or older people and the left-behind who could not afford to buy the simplest medication. Not only Dr Habash did not ask for payment but he was buying the necessary medication for his patients and, when time had come for them to leave the hospital, he used to slip some money in their hand and told them: ‘Go to the market and buy yourself some shoes and clothes’. Born rich he had in this way exhausted his patrimony. He never used to spend money for himself. [He lived simply.] ... He believed in the law of *Turn the other cheek*. [...] But one day, suddenly, the clinic closed and the patients were asked to find another doctor. Where is he gone? What does he do? He is gone with the Fedayeen to pursue the only undertaking he could still believe in: a pitiless vendetta”.

This complete change of heart and mind from a caring doctor to a radical pitiless terrorist is an incredible transformation, hard to believe, hard to explain. One wonders what can provoke such a deep change of mind and attitude in the way we, as ordinary people, experience and perceive and take care of our common humanity. I say *we* because I believe that this question concerns all of us, victims or perpetrators or observers, even more than these famous world leaders or activists such as Habash.

At the end of her interview Oriana Fallacy asks Habash what the cause of his complete reconversion was. This puzzlement was indeed the true reason why she wanted to see him. She wanted to understand. She asks him: “Doctor Habash, tell me please the truth. What has made you choose? What has provoked such a metamorphosis? I want to understand. Please let me understand.”

He answered: “It was... It was a feeling, yes. I was accustomed to the sight of physical pain, you see, but not to the sight of moral pain. Not the one of injustice, of shame. Until 1948, I was a boy as the others; of the style of a well-off boy, going to university, who likes to go to the swimming pool, play tennis, court the girls. What happened in 1948 debased me but hardly changed me. I was 22 years old and lived in Lydda, near Jerusalem. I did not have to share the tragedy of the refugees. When I got my diploma, I took refuge in medicine as the unique way to make myself useful to humanity. And also as a means to apply my socialism. I had joined socialism in my last years at university. But then 1967 happened. They came to Lydda... I do not know how to explain... what it means for us... to have no longer a home, no longer a nation, no longer anybody who cares for it... They forced us to flee. This is a vision that haunts me and I will never forget... Never! Thirty thousand human beings who went walking, crying, hauling out of terror... Women with their children in their arms or grabbing their skirts... While the Israeli soldiers were pushing them with their rifles. They were falling on the road... Often to not get up again... Terrible, terrible, terrible! When one sees certain things, one thinks: it is not life, it is not humanity, why heal a sick body if then such things happen? We must change the world, we must do something, kill, if necessary, kill at the risk of being inhuman and dying in turn... When one has seen this, the heart and the mind change... You don’t understand us, and maybe you despise us. But one day you will understand. And you won’t despise us anymore. You’ll be hundred percent with us”.

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This expression of pain is striking. What Habash tells us in his personal story is such a deep surprise, especially when it comes from a “terrorist”. We wonder how such a complete break with the person he was before could occur. The experience of going through such a trauma is evidently a complete transformation of the person or rather a complete breakdown of trust and hope that only violence remains as possible expression of the deep anger and despair that have invaded the mental and emotional space of this person.

A child can say: “When I’ll be grown up, I’ll be commander in the army”. The title is impregnated of official authority and of pride. Such a vocation can well take shape in a child’s dream; it is about the prestigious position in our society or, in the eyes of the child, about a form of play with big toys. It is never about killing people, even not the enemy.

It is sure that no child can say: “When I’ll be grown up, I’ll be a terrorist”. It is inconceivable. There cannot be such a vocation because this cannot be a vocation. It is rather something one becomes without wanting to be; or at least not out of one’s own will. If it happens, it does because it is an unavoidable consequence of what was before or something that happens to the person more than it is a free decision. The responsibility of the person is of course fully involved and undiminished; but this is not a responsibility that necessarily controls the ethical dimension of one’s choices; it is rather perceived as the responsibility to do what needs to be done, as an unavoidable necessity, whether one likes it or not. We can even say that it is probably the same for each soldier going to war. The decision is like imposed from outside.

It is why we have then seriously to ask the question how an ordinary person, such as a dedicated doctor, can be transformed into a terrorist. What does make the terrorist out of an ordinary person?

First, in the story of George Habash, there is the terrible excruciating hurt, the extremely deep pain of losing everything and of being degraded and humiliated, of losing one’s own humanity, of being treated like cattle chased away without respect for any basic rights, not even the right to live and remain settled where one has always been living, from numerous generations on. And, paradoxically with the new mission that takes shape for Habash as terrorist, this excruciating hurt concerns more the destiny of all these people around him, who fall under the strokes of the Israeli soldiers than it concerns himself. This is the tragedy of this common destiny with his fellow humans that destroys deeply his own sense of humanity.

But more tragically there is a kind of symmetry. When the conflict intensifies and degenerates, the same hurt develops generally also on the other side, on the side of the adversary. And this deep human hurt is of the same nature on the other side although it happens in other circumstances and in a different context. Whether our dear ones are killed by a national army or by a group of vindictive insurgents, they are no more; and we grieve. The pain is atrocious and nobody can bring them back. The worse is that these dear ones probably died for no reason, just “gratuitously” because they were the victims of “gratuitous” violence, in an act of uncontrolled revenge or reprisal.

Who is a terrorist?

Revenge motivated by resentment is the core energy that feeds violence: either into acts of terrorism by freedom fighters or into state terrorism by armies. Both are similar.

It is important here to go back to the disparity of means and power I have described that concerns the two opposed forces in game, i.e. the invading armed forces on one side and the “insurgents” on the other. I have illustrated how the conqueror

disposes on (too) powerful means and on the form of depersonalisation that an institutional army offers. The freedom fighters have on their part to hide and strike on surprise.

In the case of Palestine-Israel one can see how the Israeli army is probably one of the most powerful and well-trained in the world. It has the highest level in the world of military expenses per capita: for a total amount of military expenses of US\$23,300m in 2022 it gives an average of expenses of US\$2359 per inhabitant between 2013 and 2022 (to compare with the United States US\$2247). The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) involve 170,000 soldiers and 467,000 reservists, this means in total 637,000 combatants for a population of 9.2 million people, i.e. 1 of 14 people is a potential soldier. We can see how it is effective. Since 1947 the surface of the state Israel did not stop increasing considerably, extending first the limits of the partition of 1947, then invading in 1967 the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza – without counting the Sinai which has been later returned to Egypt – and finally intensifying progressively the occupation of the West Bank through the settlements of new Jewish colonies, one after the other. Soon there will be nothing left of what was meant to become the Palestinian State in the two-state solution.

There is also in the Israeli society a sense of entitlement to live on these ancestral lands which is also in a sort confirmed by the traditional belief in its own biblical election as a people chosen by God. This sense of entitlement is consolidated by the technological power of the nation, based also on its military supremacy on the land that was meant to welcome the two states. Most Israelis have no doubt they have all the rights and Palestinians none. There is no space for the others.

As we have seen earlier, there is in this sense of entitlement a deep historical contradiction. The Jewish narrative refers to the Holocaust when Jews were chased and executed. This was

genocide. It is consequently strange that the memory of their painful past does not impel these ex-victims of such an intense and lasting suffering to have more of a sense of compassion for other victims in similar situations. On the contrary the memory of the Holocaust seems to work in reverse. It generates in the mind and heart of these previous sufferers an imperative need to impose their own existence as the crucial issue that has to regulate all other destinies. Not only compassion is excluded; it is about survival that allows no concession. Contrarily to what could be expected, the memory of these times of human weakness and oppression has fostered radical attitudes of dominating harshness: our survival at any price. The ex-victim tends then to re-enact the events of cruelty he has undergone under the Third Reich. He reproduces the same process but this time in a reversal of the roles, when he is the perpetrator. This re-enactment is a typical psychological process for ex-victims of deep traumas.

One can understand what motivates this attitude but it is also evident that it cannot solve the trauma of the past. And it can only generate more tragedies, more oppression and violence and hate. And, especially, it can only strike back. Oppression calls for resistance that calls for retaliation. And the same cycle of violence and killing starts all over again. It is evident we have difficulty to learn from history, even when it is our own; even when we have paid such a high price for the lesson.

No about the Palestinians. By contrast and in comparison with the Israeli army, according to estimates, Hamas has some 40,000 fighters for a population of 2 million people in Gaza, i.e. roughly 1 of 50 people is a Hamas fighter (more than 3 times a lesser proportion than the IDF). How can David fight against Goliath? History is here reversed; it runs on different tracks.

As what concerns the general mental attitude, the position of the Palestinians is objectively much more fragile than the one of the

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Israelis. No official army, light weaponry (probably provided by Iran?), no economic power, no resources. In contrast to the sense of entitlement of their neighbours, they seem to experience a sort of generalised precariousness, or fragility, in their living conditions. They do not know stability. They do not know what tomorrow will bring. Especially in Gaza there is a general feeling of being disempowered and of depending on the good will of the controlling Israeli Forces that do not occupy the city but nevertheless, through the blockade, control anything that comes in or out. This precariousness generates rage and desire to break through it, violently. This rage is multiplied by the difference of standards in the means available to fight for freedom and security. Rage brings violence to explode.

Do not please misunderstand me. I do not intend to justify any type of reaction. As Fallaci when she interviews Habash, I just want to understand what triggers such a reaction of despair from the Palestinian side. There is here a very objective process to be observed. It is what I try to grasp and to describe.

In reference to the sense of entitlement on the Israeli side, there is, from the Palestinian point of view, a sharp contrast in attitudes fostered by different degrees of empowerment and this contrast shows how the colonised person is more sensitive than the coloniser and well aware of what is at stake. James Baldwin expresses it well in *The Fire Next Time (Down at the Cross)*⁷⁵:

“The American Negro has the great advantage of having never believed that collection of myths to which white Americans cling: that their ancestors were all freedom-loving heroes, that they were born in the greatest country the world has ever seen, or that Americans are invincible in battle and wise in peace, that Americans have always

dealt honourably with Mexicans and Indians and all other neighbours or inferiors, that American men are the world’s most direct and virile, that American women are pure. Negroes know far more about white Americans than that; it can almost be said, in fact, that they know about white Americans what parents – or, anyway, mothers – know about their children, and that they very often regard white Americans that way. And perhaps this attitude, held in spite of what they know and have endured, helps to explain why Negroes, on the whole, and until lately, have allowed themselves to feel so little hatred.”

I think this is, in general terms, also very true about Israelis and Palestinians, or about white Australians and Indigenous people. There is indeed a form of acceptance (or rather resignation) and patience on the side of the oppressed, not only because of disempowerment but also because of this knowledge of the other that does not get covered by false myths. But, at the same time, there is also a great charge of accumulated anger of being forced into disempowerment, of being deprived of the basic means to defend oneself and to restore equity.

The contrast between these two contrasting degrees of respective power and (lack of) empowerment represents also the typical relationship between coloniser and colonised. The situation is objectively in the hands of the coloniser, because he has the upper hand, while the colonised adapts and finds his own ways wherever there is a loophole. The deep imbalance between the two forces generates in turn two very different and contrasting ways how to confront the “enemy” as described earlier.

In this context of despair and disempowerment the personal story of George Habash seems very relevant and even to make sense, even if one totally condemns any criminal action that aims at civilians. It illustrates how the victim can feel pushed to the extreme limit, or even much beyond, by pure destruction that fosters rage and despair; so far that this reaction of despair

⁷⁵ James Baldwin: in his essay *The Fire Next Time - Down at the Cross*, published in *Collected Essays*, The Library of America, 1998.

destroys his own humanity by turning him into a sort of monster. Not because he wants to be a monster but because the despair and rage do not leave any space for other attitudes of self-defence or restoration of his dignity than to commit acts of extreme violence and retaliation. These acts “have even to be” cruel to be able to restore dignity. Of course this is an illusory process that can only lead to more destruction and humiliation. There is simply no other ways because these others ways have been annihilated, by the mere destruction of hope and trust.

The alliance of the extremes

There is a tacit alliance between the extremes on both sides. With the violence they practise they reinforce each other as enemies and make peace impossible.

I have already mentioned earlier this aspect of apparent alliance between the extremes on both sides. It is worth now coming back to this in more detail.

What is most significant in this process of rage and despair and cycles of exacerbation of violence is that the situation of the victim is very much the consequence of the attitudes and actions of the invader. It is the invader, because he has the upper hand, who has the power to regulate the degree of violence he involves in his own actions and therefore also the degree of violence of reaction of the victim. The invader is caught between, on one hand, his own will to control and dominate and achieve the goal of imposing his own will and, on the other hand, the level of woundedness or of precariousness he is ready or intending to inflict onto the victim for achieving his goal, knowing that he has to restrain the degree of harm he inflicts if he wants himself to survive. The invader knows that the more he maltreats the victim, the more he will have to pay it back later because the maltreatment will provoke a reaction of revenge which will be

destructive for the invader. This is at least the logic of war and reprisal. The reality of this logic yet does not mean that the invader will act according to it. Maybe his interest, or rather his intention, is to follow this logic of escalation, for a reason or another.

In this way there seems to be a weird alliance of the two extremes on both sides (the far-right in the Israeli government and the Hamas) to bring the conflict to its paroxysm and to the limit of collapse. Each one knows that the other will retaliate to its own actions. Each one knows, and it seems often even to be the purpose of the action, that the enemy will retaliate and demonstrate his cruelty that will justify more action against him. The two enemies seem then, in this tragic infernal spiral, to become allied forces because they aim at the same result to create a situation without return, without other way out than exacerbated violence. In this infernal cycles they need the collaboration of the other, i.e. that the other will follow and react more violently. They contribute in this way together to create the same dead-end blockage. They indeed obey each other, each one doing in retaliation what the other expects him to do. This becomes an alliance against humanity, against peace, an alliance that prevents the peace-minded people to establish more human relationships with the other party (the so-called enemy who is just another human being). This alliance prevents each party from trying to regenerate trust and hope where it can be done.

This fear of the possible peace is what motivated Yigal Amir to assassinate Rabin (1995) or Ariel Sharon to be afraid that the Geneva Accords (2003) could succeed because their success would have meant the loss of the West Bank for colonies, and the end of Israeli supremacy over the whole territory of Palestine. Both the terror practised by the army and the terror spread by the fighters aim, in their respective extremism, at the same end: killing the peace process.

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In fact there is no other solution to the enigma of the subtle balance between imposing control but avoiding inflicting harm, except the choice for conciliation which alone offers the potential for a new equilibrium that could last for a long time, instead of tolerating a temporary absence of reciprocal harm while each party heals its wounds and prepares the next stage of the fight.

In this sense the terrible destiny of George Habash is an excellent illustration of how things go wrong when violence is involved. The suffering of each party will justify any action of retaliation. This is true for what people call terrorists. But are they truly to be called terrorists if they have been cornered in such a way that they may see no other possibility left of self-defence than the possibility to retaliate? And the freedom fighter, given his disempowerment, can only practise “gratuitous” violence because direct confrontation with the occupying forces is out of question. It would defy common sense, as a small group of few fighters, to attack one of the most powerful armies in the world.

There is then no possible action left than to attack the civilians who will offer the less resistance. This is of course humanely and morally unacceptable, but it is the reality to which fighters are “condemned” by the invaders themselves. And where is space for morale in war? Fighters then attack civilians because these civilians are not so dangerous but they are equally representing the enemy. They are the enemy. At least so says the monolithic image that the fighter has forged of the oppressing people: whether the army or the civilians, they are all part of it. They are all indistinctively the same Other that oppresses the fighters and their people. In the same way the Israelis tend to consider all Palestinians as members of Hamas. This is pure non-sense.

There is also an incredible power in the freedom fighter in despair. He seems ready to do anything to promote the cause of his people. He offers even his life, as a martyr. We do not need

to approve of this choice. But it remains yet a reality for many fighters. They understand themselves as martyrs for the cause of freedom and equity. They are ready to sacrifice themselves. They will give everything they have, even their life. They are the ones who will suffer with their people until everything is consumed. And, against this disposition of the fighter to give oneself fully, the power of any army, be it the best in the world, is reduced to nothing. One thing can only be traded in this case: justice.

What is also interesting to observe in this escalation of despair and retaliation is that the armed forces of the invading army are not acting in a very different way from the fighters. Because the fighters are mingling with the crowd who are they own people, the army also strikes indistinctively. When the army goes into action it says it wants to destroy the terrorists but, by intending to do so, they destroy a large part of the villages or the towns or cities where the fighters are meant to live among their own people. And many civilians, this time on the other side, are also killed. But the big difference is that the killing machine is a national army and not a group of fighters. The crime hides behind the screen of the institutional façade of the armed forces.

Civilians killed by the army, among the people of the fighters, are then called casualties (or collateral damage) while the previous dead civilians killed by the fighters were called victims of terrorism. In most cases, after the army has stricken, the number of dead is finally much higher – some five or ten times more – on the civilian side of the colonised population than on the side of the coloniser. In fact they are all victims of terror (called war); either terror brought by fighters or terror brought by a state army. There is basically no difference, except that all suffer from the same evil: terror, either individually enacted terror or state enacted terror.

Then the term of *terrorist* is not adequate when it concerns the attempts of a people to free themselves from domination. Killing

remains in all cases a crime and nothing can justify it. Useless killing is in any case not acceptable, if the expression *useless killing* can even make sense!

This means then that George Habash is not to be called a terrorist. He is just a freedom fighter who has gone mad. He just lost the plot. It is not insignificant and it generates a lot more suffering and grieving and rage and retaliation in turn. But everybody knows why he has gone mad and why he lost the plot. So why then make him guilty more than the other actors on the same scene?

I believe the term of *terrorist* is too often used as a means for propaganda to degrade the adversary as a despicable protagonist who does not respect the laws of war (if finally there are any). And it pretends at the same time that war is a normal act that allows the official army (Israeli, US or UK, any allied invading force) to do what is denied to the so-called terrorist. Yet in any fight there is a right for each party to defend themselves and to try to reconquer what they have lost. But this is defence and not aggression or revenge.

As inhuman as it can seem, brutality and cruelty are the effective facts of war because war consists in committing them. Engaging war means accepting to use destructive and cruel means, i.e. committing crimes. And it is the responsibility of each party to choose the “adequate” means and measure, and to reject the cruel ones. In this case the problem is not terrorism; it is war. And the purpose of it. As the Haaretz correspondent in the West Bank, Amira Hass, says, she never speaks of war crimes but only of war because war is a crime. Even the right to defend oneself belongs to the acts of war. It is equally destructive when it applies “necessary” war measures. Then it is no more self-defence; it is aggression, i.e. war.

Then, if the freedom fighter is not a terrorist, who is a terrorist?

In my mind terrorism is a strategy that goes much beyond self-defence, even in the most tragic cases of despair and rage. It aims at changing the political scene by introducing pitiless violence where there are relationships of power, and even of exploitation, but not necessarily scrupleless violence. I would mention in the list of such organisations the Baader-Meinhof Bande of the 70s (Red Army Faction), Al Qaida, Islamic State, especially because they do not act locally but use the world scene to destabilise dominating powers. In the same intention of changing (or corrupting) a political process I will cite the assassination of Yizhak Rabin by Yigal Amir who acted in this way for the single purpose of destroying the initiated and successful peace process, and not for his own security or defence. This makes the whole difference.

Such terrorist movements constitute often the military arm of a foreign government, such as the Hezbollah for Iran. This goes much beyond self-defence. It is puzzling and very telling to see how the so-called “War on Terror” has not inflicted defeat to them but has on contrary consolidated them. It has generated ISIS; it has reinforced the position of the Taliban.

In this perspective the PFLP could be considered as a terrorist organisation in its international actions but Hamas would not be considered as such, as violent and shocking as its military arm can be. Where can we then define the understandable limit between guerrilla (in the South America or North Vietnam ways) and terrorism? Horror is not a monopole of insurgent fighters or so-called terrorists. Armies have done “much better”. See the impact of the US army in Korea, in Vietnam, and later in Afghanistan and Iraq, or the Israelis in Palestine where their intervention triggered the death of 8 to 100 times more people than they had undergone “at home”.

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Conciliation as the only path

To avoid being caught in the infernal cycle of exacerbated violence and endless revenge, there is only one possible path: conciliation with the “enemy” and solution of the conflict.

What is central here – and that we too rarely describe as the key of all war – is the extreme anger and despair of all people at the loss of their dear ones; or their sentiment of being brutalised or evicted from one’s own land or home. Such treatment would generate in each of us, as it does in them, a terrible similar feeling of humiliation, of dehumanisation. We almost stop existing because the spark of life has been destroyed in us; and with this spark of life, our capacity to be compassionate, to relate, to listen, to forgive.

The resentment that arises from suffering is incredibly deep and powerful. It is, I believe, the deep hidden energy that leads our nations into wars and escalation. When attacked we feel we have to defend ourselves. Maybe we have a right to protect ourselves; but what does mean defence? In most cases it is merely understood as a counterattack, especially when this counterattack is loaded with the anger of having undergone terrible losses, whether of our dear ones, or of our home, or of our livelihood, or even just of the feeling of security or safety to have the right to live in peace.

This is our human fragility that dictates our reaction of rage because we feel disempowered. It is why the government of a nation that has been under attack is put under the terrible public pressure to react, to defend its people, that is to show that the nation is stronger and will not tolerate to be threatened. But all this is only theory or bluff. Such a form of self-defence that demonstrates strength and intolerance, wrapped in a deep energy of rage and will for reprisal, can only foster more damage. It

does not bring any solution. It only retaliates, i.e. bring further harm to the other, and later to oneself as a payback.

Hence the conflict escalates into passionate killing by one another. With no end, except the limit of the escalation. Each one intends to let their own anger drive them on this road of endless revenge. Each one dreams of completely and radically destroying the enemy and then having the possibility to live in peace because the conflict will have disappeared by lack of antagonistic forces.

But there is an endless number of enemies. In fact, as exposed in my thesis above, there are no enemies as such. They are only ordinary people who are perceived by us as enemies because they want to live on the same land or access the same resources as we do. Or they oppose us for any reason which is real in their eyes but senseless in ours. They are not enemies in themselves but we perceive them as enemies, not because of their innate enmity, but because they are perceived as the competitors they objectively are. And as competitors they become antagonistic to us.

As explained in the thesis above, the conflict that opposes them to us is the source of the whole process. Without the conflict that opposes us we would just be neighbours or even friends. But the conflict, which is real, has put us in antagonistic positions. To avoid us becoming eternal enemies caught in an infernal cycle, we need first to break the cycle of endless violence and second to solve the conflict. That is to sit around the same table and find a solution that could bring satisfaction to both parties. But this resolution can only be found if each party lets go of some important concessions. There is a price to pay for peace: the conflict must find a solution that does not leave rancour; and this at any price. Yes, it is a high price to pay. But peace is invaluable. No price is too high.

If we do not go on this path of compromise and true solution that would put a definitive end to the conflict, there is no other way out than slaughtering this so-called enemy until no one of them (of us) remains. And we know that this is impossible. Each time we kill ten, fifty rise again, because the seeds of hate are spread and, out of the harm that has been done and out of the rage this harm will foster, many more new fighters will rise. The cycle is endless and soon degenerates into a violent war, motivated on both sides by the same feeling of hurt and kind of energy of resentment, which never can come back to a peaceful solution. The capital of suffering and resentment that has progressively been accumulated makes it ever more difficult to paddle back and to undo the harm that has been done.

It is why, in realistic terms, conciliation is the only possible path that can lead the two adversaries to a higher level of respective understanding and will bring new solutions, at the price of strong compromises. The terrible aspect of this path is that the more one waits to walk it, the more strength, maturity, clear-sightedness and wisdom it will require from us to be able to walk with the “enemy” in a spirit of true reconciliation. Not just tricking the opponent into a false deal but truly conceding what needs to be conceded in order to find a new balance, a new equilibrium where basic needs are met for all parties.

To walk this path requires a lot of humility. Each protagonist has to go to the limits of what they can concede. There is no glory on this path because it is a path of hardship. Each one pays a high price. But the reward is also in the same proportion. Peace is then the fruit that lasts. This is priceless.

Here above, I said systematically “we” because we are all involved, whoever we are and wherever we live, small or big, rich or poor. We are of course involved in our own conflicts with our neighbours. But we are also involved in all conflicts worldwide, in the conflicts of others, in the war in Ukraine, in

the war in Gaza, in the war in Yemen, in Sudan, in Myanmar. The list is sadly endless. Our responsibility, as a person or as a nation, is to take a stand for conciliation as the only possible path. Especially if we remain exterior to the conflict, we can take the stand of encouraging the adversaries to follow the only path of for conciliation, instead of supporting one side of the belligerents. Supporting one side – as any alliance tends to do – is not only fruitless; it is destructive because it exacerbates the conflict and leads it into escalation. Hence the “we” is fundamental, because it emphasises our shared responsibility for peace, wherever conflict happens. We are all involved and all responsible to design this new path for conciliation at any price, which is the condition for the return of peace.

6 contradictions that hamper peace

The peace process is prevented by 6 (or more) contradictions that work against it: all of them concern illusory privileges the mighty has difficulty to renounce.

I described earlier the five hurdles on the path to peace. They concerned changes of mind about 1) our own rage or 2) public pressure or the transformations in the ways we perceive 3) the image of the adversary, 4) the conflict or 5) our own narrative. All these changes may well happen when the protagonists are ripe for it, that is when they see that time has come for change because change becomes more fruitful than persistence on the path of war.

But, on top of these five major changes, there are some sensitive issues that concern privileges the mighty must renounce. This is another hard step on the way to peace. Why would the mighty not only change his mind and the way he sees the best possible way out of violence but also, as a supplementary price to be paid by him alone, abandon real privileges he enjoys at that time?

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Only clear-sightedness and wisdom may allow him to perceive that only peace is fruitful and that this peace is only possible if these privileges are let go of. The mighty has then to take a step more and, not only for the benefit of the colonised but also for his own too, give up these privileges. These privileges can be described like keys to the peace process. They concern all ranges of advantages, and they appear here in disorder as a kind of melting pot; but this mixed form is intended because it demonstrates how far all these aspects are entangled with one another.

Key 1 = the initiative: The most difficult step is the first one: how to initiate the peace process? how may one of the protagonists take the initiative not to follow the spontaneous cycle of revenge, but stops and thinks and gives himself a time of reflection? This requires a powerful change of mind and a great freedom of spirit to be able not to respond to the instinctive rage and expectation of retaliation but to question the energy that is driving the conflict and to see that it is mainly blind rage that leads nowhere. In this change of mind the hardest is probably to confront the public opinion and the world observers who spontaneously expect retaliation or at least demonstration of an attitude of power that tolerates no humiliation. This is all false pride set at the wrong place. What matters most is to open a new door to escape the whirlpool of the battle and to search for stability and alternatives that truly may bring a solution to the conflict.

Concerning this initiative, there is a major fact: it has to come from the stronger party, from the mighty side, that is the invader or dominator or coloniser, for the precise reason that, as coloniser, he is in control. Yes, it is hard to give up a privileged position.

Historically decolonisation came from below because there was a strong movement of independence after WW2 among the

colonised nations. And it became evident that colonisation represented a pattern that was obsolete. It needed a remake. Many colonial countries obtained their independence in the 1950s or 60s but, rather than true independence that would provide all means of empowerment and self-management for the newly emancipated country, it resembled more a transformation of the relationships between coloniser and colonised. It happened with colonisation what had happened in a similar way with the abolition of slavery, as it has been described earlier. In both cases it came rather to a new untold setting where the poor (colonised or slave) remained the poor and the dominator remained in control. Colonisation or slavery had been abolished but they had been replaced by something pretty much equivalent.

Strangely it is what can be expected in a peace process. There is a deep transformation of relationships but, contrarily to the end of slavery or the decolonisation process, this is a transformation that has to change the relationships of power between the two parties. This is precisely what is at stake: both parties must find satisfaction.

Hence the initiative belongs to the strongest, and the process intends to set both parties on equal terms. It means the peace process should put an end to domination. This is the qualitative transformation. In other words the dominator cuts the branch on which he sits in order to sit on ground level, with his adversary, both in relationships of reciprocity. Reciprocity is the key for a solution. This is the quality that both parties need if they want to open a new future.

Hence the status of domination is the deep contradiction or the privilege to renounce.

Key 2 = resistance to counter-violence: Once the peace has found solid ground and an accord has been found between parties, then comes the most dangerous last stage. It is almost certain that the opponents to the process of peace will intervene

publicly and try to break this new unity. These opponents do not need to be many; they can constitute only a handful of persons. We saw earlier how Yitzhak Rabin has been assassinated after he concluded the Oslo Peace Agreement. This single crime by a single man was enough to block the whole process and to put an end to it. Peace needs consensus but there will always be an opponent, even a few, but never a large number if it is true that the process has come to a positive result. It is then essential that the whole community, on both sides of the agreement, shows its determination (its faith) that the process is right and needs to be protected from all possible assaults. This is evidently the most fragile step.

For instance how will Hamas react to a peace agreement that will recognise the right of Israelis to settle down in Palestine? or how will the illegal settlers of the West Bank react to a peace process that will return these lands to the Palestinians? They will, on both sides, certainly oppose it by the most violent means. It is the great challenge to which the newly reunified community of both ex-adversary parties must resist when it has to show its cohesion. It has to demonstrate a strong commitment to the new consensus that has arisen between the two parties which used previously to be adversaries. These ex-adversaries have now to stand together in strong solidarity and reciprocal support and counter the destructive actions of some of their own members, on both sides. This will very much look as a sort of treason, from the point of view of the opponents to the peace process. And this accusation of treason is not easy to resist for the community which is committed to the peace process. One seems then to ally with the enemy against one's own people (although they represent only a minority of extremists).

The new covenant of peace, if it has to last, must reveal itself to be stronger than the cohesion of the "Us-concept"; and, as well, it has to resist the previous alliance the extremists of both sides had tacitly established to prevent peace. This is a sharp U-turn

and a tough stand to adopt: to oppose some minorities who are parts of "Us" in order to remain faithfully allied to the adversary of yesterday with whom one has collaborated to establish equitable and just relationships in the form of an agreement of peace.

This move from an alliance of "Us" to an alliance with the previous adversary is the second contradiction and the previous cohesion based on the "Us-concept" is the privilege to renounce.

Key 3 = land as sovereignty: It has been often repeated that the access to the land is the expression of the necessary sovereignty. Sovereignty of the land is the key issue that provides true land rights to the original owner. And the land needs to be shared if there are many traditional owners. Sharing does not necessarily mean for the land to be divided. Access to the same land can be shared between different sovereign users as nomadic and sedentary people use to do in many countries. Or it is also possible that different populations can divide the land and live each one on their own territory. In both cases it is not easy for the mighty to let go of a portion of land he has conquered.

This restitution of the land is the contradiction and the exclusive ownership or use is the privilege to be renounced.

Key 4 = empowerment or traditional law as sovereignty: We have seen how the enforcement of a new imported law by the coloniser has condemned traditional laws to be discarded. It will be part of the new peace agreement to provide equitable means for justice that make sense for all people. The colonial law, or rather the system of decree, cannot apply any longer as an exclusive reference for justice. Traditional law has to be recognised because it is on this basis that traditional owners are truly empowered to manage their own destiny. This calls for a form of cohabitation of two or more different legal systems. This is not simple, but it is essential that the traditional law can be restored in some way. There is a lot of benefit to gain for even

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the coloniser because the traditional law is rich and adapted to the land, in many ways that offer unthinkable solutions to conflicts.

This open recognition of the limits of the colonial system is the contradiction and the negation of the absolute value of this tool of power constitutes the privilege to be renounced.

Key 5 = a voice for indigenous people: All over the world there are numerous ethnic groups of indigenous people who live as many disempowered nations, hidden in each nation-state. They are all disempowered because the nation-state has taken over and overrules their own traditional law and their sovereignty over land.

We ignore too often how many people in the world belong to these ethnic groups which have been evicted from their own land or at least have lost the control they used to have over their subsistence and own social life and organisation. According to Amnesty International there are 476 million Indigenous people around the world and spread across more than 90 countries. They belong to more than 5,000 different Indigenous peoples and speak more than 4,000 languages. Indigenous people represent about 5% of the world's population. Here is an enumeration of only a few of them: Inuit in Canada; Apache, Cheyenne, Pawnees, Sioux, Mohawk, Navajo in the United States; Maya, Zapotec, Nahuatl in Central America; Aymara, Quechua, Mapuche, in the Andes; Yanomami, Kayapo, Shuar in Amazonia; Kabyle, Tuareg in the Sahara; Fulani, Dinka, Nuer, Tigre in the Sahel; Ogoni, Efe, Bongo in Equatorial Africa; Somali, Masai, Hadz, Turkana in East Africa; Sami, Basques, Tatars, Kalmyks in Europe; Tibetan, Uygur, Hui, Zhuang in Turkestan; Chin, Kachin, Shan in South-East Asia; Buryat, Yakut, Chukchi, Koryak in Siberia; Yolngu, Arrernte, Wiradjuri in Australia; Maori in New Zealand; most people in Papua New

Guinea and the Pacific are from indigenous origin. And this is only a small sample; the list goes on for ever.

Similarly to the colonised people these indigenous nations have lost their sovereignty and empowerment. They have been swallowed by nation-states in which they form only a vulnerable minority. Most of these nations are trying to recover their empowerment and sovereignty over land and traditional law. They need a voice to express their need and to recover control of their destiny. In this they are similar to any other colonised people.

The recognition of their denied rights and the restoration of their sovereignty are the contradiction; and, for the nation-state, the rule of domination over these minorities is the privilege to be renounced.

Key 6 = wealth as way of life: One tenth of the world population lives on eighty percent of the world wealth, while the poorest half of the world population lives on only one percent of the total wealth. This creates huge disparities. But more than this, it creates violent destruction. The overconsumption by Northern nations destroys biodiversity, generates climate change, fosters huge migration flows that perturb harmony and stability for all, rich and poor. But the poor suffer the most. Tuvalu and Kiribati are two nations in the Pacific that lie on sea level. The smallest increase in sea level will overflow their habitat and main places of settlement and completely annihilate these people and their culture. How can they survive when Northern nations continue to live on such a high standard of living which is not at all sustainable?

This is only an example. What matters here most is that the overconsumption of Northern nations destroys the land of Southern countries. This is another insidious way of occupying their land.

The change of standard of living, especially of level of overconsumption, is the contradiction and comfort and indulgence are the privileges to be renounced.

In a nutshell: I have described here six contradictions that hamper peace. This is the responsibility of the mighty to engage into peace process and to create the necessary conditions for it. This means the mighty has to renounce these privileges unilaterally. This is a huge step because it requires a deep clear-sightedness into the matter of conflict. And only a few leaders are capable of such honesty. One collects the fruits one has sowed.

The path of liberation as ideology

In the context of a colonial society or between mother country and colonies, as we have described, many different tensions occur, due to objective facts of oppression and exploitation that lead to the formation of movements of resistance and liberation. These movements refer in general to some main ideas or concepts that lead their struggle. It is what forms ideology. I would like here to investigate the nature of ideology and the important role it plays in supremacy and in colonial liberation.

Let's us start here with general considerations that are not directly linked with supremacy or colonialism but refer to societies in general.

Scapegoats and sacrifices

To resolve conflicts generated by the want for the same goods (mimetism) societies tend to invent scapegoats; which are made responsible for the conflict and then sacrificed.

As we all live in more or less densely populated areas, on delimited territories, where resources are perceived as rare, competition often generates conflict between people by the want of the same resources (especially the land on which we live) or by desire for the same most celebrated goods (consumerism). For most of us, a sense of entitlement and a hope for self-centred betterment contribute to reinforce this form of intensified competition. And, on top of this, this competition is exacerbated by a plethora of commercial advertisements. The competition for the same thing creates fetishism or fashion which reduce the range of objective possibilities of choice or of goods on which we tend to focus our attention. The feeling of having our subsistence or the objects of our desires threatened by the competition or pressure of the others generates social tensions between individuals and between different groups of society, one against each other.

In order to manage eruptions of discontent, our society tends to divert the general tension of such social tensions and conflict towards selected scapegoats. It chooses them usually out of marginal or despised minorities, making them responsible for the state of conflict, turning them into victims, and denying in this way the general diversity of the major group that feels confirmed in its unity.

This process of scapegoating leads to some forms of sacrifice, whether executed plainly (as in primitive religious rituals of goat killing) or hidden behind a social dynamic that condemns and oppresses a minority (the Holocaust or any process of ethnic cleansing, such as in Bosnia or Rwanda). So many minorities have paid, and continue to pay, for the general state of fear, anger and resentment against them by dominating clans and even average social groups. This means that we urgently need to look at our common behaviours with open eyes and deep honesty. We need to become aware of these terrible hidden currents leading our destructive collective behaviours.

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This is how, in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, René Girard⁷⁶ explains these mimetic acquisitive behaviours (wants for the same things) and how they bring competition and conflict. He shows how since the early beginning of social life, societies have learned to cope with this growing tension by the institution of prohibitions and ritual sacrifice. According to old traditions and following appalling rituals such as described in the Bible (Leviticus 16), a scapegoat is chosen, symbolically loaded with the guilt of the whole community and, in a ritual of sacrifice, sent into the desert. It is meant to take away the flaws and faults (sins in biblical language) of the people. Peace returns as the community finds new unity in colluding against the victim, which becomes sacred (sacrificed) in the way it has given its own life to bring back cohesion and peace.

The same ritual is regularly repeated in order to maintain harmony. This is a cleansing ritual that is meant to bring purification of the people, although nothing has changed in themselves. Scapegoating and sacrifices create the illusion of restored harmony. But the participants do not learn more about themselves and about their flaws. They do not reconcile with each other. On the contrary this illusory ritual seems to confirm them in their illusory righteousness.

By contrast the death of Jesus on the cross is not a sacrifice as it is too often described. It is a murder, the murder of an innocent. This is precisely the deep message of the cross. Evil is not vanquished by force or power or violence. It can only be vanquished by love. In renouncing self-defence, vengeance or retaliation Jesus gives himself as a sign of reconciliation, of unlimited forgiveness, of absolute love. He accepts to be on the

side of the sufferer to show unlimited compassion and to reject violence and hate. Love is the path of the complete self-giving. In this way Jesus the Son is not sacrificed by God the Father – which would reflect an image of a cruel god – but he is one with the Father. They both give themselves, both as expressions of God, as witnesses to what love truly is: making oneself small so that the other may grow. This is of course an image of God we have difficulty to understand. It is why Jesus was murdered because this image seemed unacceptable for the people of that time. Yet it has now become the core of Christianity and of what absolute love means. It is how such a practice of love fosters unlimited forgiveness.

Given that this image of self-giving has not been assimilated, it is frightening to notice how many processes of scapegoating, similar to what I described earlier, are active in our modern world, in a less formal way. Minorities, refugees, strangers and indigenous people are oppressed; marginal peoples are excluded; religious identities are rejected; ethnicities are “cleansed”. The society as a whole seems to protect itself against the Others. But this act of self-defence consists rather in creating a new narrative that shifts the faults of the community onto some marginal members who become the scapegoats. It seems that our world constantly needs victims in order to disperse the violence generated by greed and the lust for power.

But our own flaws and aggressive behaviours cannot be redeemed through the false sacrifice of a fabricated scapegoat to a false god. But yet pure liberation remains on offer; because human compassion can be limitless. It does not impose its power as domination; it may by contrast offer its creative power as a free gift to the Other. Offering one’s own force of life in powerlessness expresses the true nature of life and our own true nature as human beings. This offering makes of life a true experience of compassion and care and sharing. Because of this gift of what flows through us, we are accepted as we are, with all

⁷⁶ René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Stanford University Press, 1987.

our twists and flaws. Our misdeeds of yesterday and our constant detours, away from true consciousness, do not matter any longer. We just need to be who we are, here and now. Each day is a new start. This is true liberation, called salvation in theological language.

There is in this personal giving of one own skills and gifts a great transformation. We see better what life is all about. It is true liberation from our false beliefs and from our own limitations when we see them clearly and recognise them for what they are. It is a deep change of mind, a change in our way of thinking and deep understanding. This is called *metanoia* in Greek: a turnaround of the mind. This is the true path of inner liberation (search for truth and the mystery of life) that will bring us on the path of outer liberation (the struggle for humanity, equity, justice and peace).

This last description of the turnaround reminds us of the change of mind necessitated by the interruption of the cycle of retaliation and increasing violence in war. I have described earlier how this change of mind is necessary to put an end to the alliance between the extremists of both sides (the hawks), which needs to be replaced by a new alliance, this time between the moderate actors (the doves) on both sides, against these same extremists (the hawks).

Here compassion, or at least detachment from narrow self-interest, appears as the fundamental energy that fosters this change. And, most important, it is not by chance that these are generally the women, and more particularly the mothers, who initiate this kind of radical change. I have earlier mentioned the Women Wage Peace and Women of the Sun movements that are clear expression of this turnaround.

Love then opens new doors, doors for conciliation. It is a very demanding path that requires great sacrifices, but, this time, these sacrifices consists in concessions, in detachment, in

renouncement that transform the persons, by contrast with the type of ritual sacrifice and scapegoating.

Resistance based on opposed values

To resist the invaders, colonised people need alternative values that contrast (oppose) the dominant discourse of white supremacy.

I have mentioned how any society or community tends to create a narrative that justifies its past history and proposes a leading thread for the reaction in the present to the inherited situation from the past. The purpose of the narrative is not to explain reality as it is. It consists in proposing an interpretation that justifies the present behaviour of the community and offers a guide for action. Narratives develop especially strongly in cases of conflict. The sharpness of the conflict increases usually the radicalism of the narrative. Acute conflicts generate stereotypical narratives.

Among many possible examples Christianity has fed and justified the project of the crusades. Jewishness is the justification of the present Israeli state. Jihad is the justification for the liberation of Muslim people. From the point of view of external people who are not involved in these “tales”, these three narratives are considered as harmful radical (fundamentalist) forces that drive the participants to commit incredible crimes in the name of God, Yahweh or Allah.

What creates problem is not the faith at the origin of these religions but rather the interpretation that is made of these religions and the twist that brings them to become the supports of destructive conquests, instead of being the expression of the practice of compassion each of these religions wants to promote, as the fundamental core of their teaching. To become positive and creative energies each of these narratives has to dis-escalate

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the talk. It has to force the narrative out of its monolithic narrow interpretation. It has to open it to more complexity and nuances as described earlier.

This shift in perception changes fundamentally the role of the narrative. The narrative is no longer the tale of justification. It becomes the tale of inclusiveness of the other, as path of common liberation, in a common move and cooperation. It intends no longer to justify but to open new ways. The liberation is no longer perceived as the negation or destruction of the Other. It tends rather to include this other by approaching him and trying to make contact and understand him.

This new ways consist in an acceptance of the other and in a will to solve the points of conflict. The focus is on the conflict, no longer on enmity.

This means that the new way or new narrative needs to be completely rebuilt. It does not need to negate what it was. It rather needs to evolve towards a more complex vision in reinterpreting the material of its origin. On the base of what it was, it needs to generate a new alternative, to imagine and practise a new supporting culture. And, very important, this new culture must contrast with the one of the past, even if the bricks remain roughly the same. This is a new construction. The completely new setting and narrative is the necessary condition for the maturity of this culture if it has to become a path of liberation.

What is ideology?

Ideology is the guide (the manual) how to implement the right choices and how to translate them into reality. Ideology can both liberate and oppress.

Let's first define the concepts we will use. It is important to distinguish between narrative, anthropology and ideology which seem to me to be here the main components of our reflexion.

- 1) **Anthropology:** Anthropology proposes a description of the world and how it functions and of the role of humankind in it. It defines what matters most and how to protect it. This is the world view that also explains where life comes from, in what it consists and why it evolves as it does. Out of what has been formulated and accepted as the truth of reference, it proposes guidelines of behaviour.
- 2) **Ideology:** Ideology is the instruction manual. It is the practical guide that formulates the terms of choice and the main concepts that have to apply and how these concepts are organised. It prescribes purposes and means to achieve them. It is built on the anthropology, the creed of how one should act in this world. It tells us the priorities and what it is worth fighting for.
- 3) **Narrative:** The narrative is the discourse that makes the ideology explicit. It runs like a myth that refers to the past and exalts the destiny of the nation. It is the discourse that justifies the acts of the nation in its perspective of the future.

As we can see, the anthropology is the source of the whole construction. The ideology proposes the adequate means how to act. The narrative is the tale that glorifies this path.

As we know out of personal experience or observation of the world, each ideology can have aspects that liberate and aspects that oppress. It usually combines both ways because it is at the same time a guide that has to inspire the participants but it is also a tool for governance, that is for leading the population of a nation where the forces in game (whether dominant or recessive) intend to lead them. It can even be coercive. Ideology in this way is a subtle balance between inspiration and constraint.

This cohabitation of two contrary tendencies in the same package that guides the nation is a very important aspect that often prevents us from understanding what is really at stake in its game. I want here to illustrate this cohabitation of the contraries by four examples that will make this tension more understandable.

I am aware that the contrast between these examples will remain very much a caricature. The purpose is not to represent reality in all its details and nuances, but to emphasise the dynamic of the main processes in game. Therefore the caricature, because it is a bit simplistic, will better convey the core of the message. This will not be a representation of reality but a description of the main trends that oppose different models (ideologies).

This four examples are: the free market model, the role of the ex-USSR as alternative model of development, Christianity as personal liberation and Islam as a struggle for freedom.

The model of the free market

Our Western world tends to limit its objectives to being led by market and technology. Development happens in a mechanical way that does not involve anthropology.

The forces of free market and intensifying technology dominate our Western world. Decisions are taken according to the trends of the market (the price) in order to generate economic growth, increase of profit, accumulation of wealth, improvement of comfort, without yet menacing the stability of finance and employment or generating too much social tension. Or they follow more technical considerations according to the trends of technology that aims at more performance, less effort, more comfort, more data and less meaning. The trends of this double model encourage materialism, individualism, competition,

domination by the rich and the powerful, corruption, laziness, subservience. This is the caricature.

The law of free market can be resumed to “the privatisation of the benefits and the socialisation of the losses”. In order to avoid that this model centred on private wealth accumulation develops to the breaking point – such as ecological collapse, social unrest, unemployment, homelessness, migration from poor to rich countries, international tensions, violence, destruction, war – some social measures are taken by the nation-state to compensate the injustices that such a system naturally produces.

These measures are sorts of brakes, or corrections and compensations, to the natural tendencies of the system. They aim at maintaining an indispensable minimum of balance and equity. This translates into social services of support for marginalised people, as well as into public services such as education or health. These basic services of community life are established by necessity because the market does not care for these qualities, although they are a necessity and even a condition for its survival.

The economy is certainly an important aspect of our common together-living; but it is only one among many aspects. It represents rather, by essence, a minimum constraint of subsistence than a general guideline for life. Once subsistence is ensured for all, the purpose of life reveals itself to be much broader and deeper than materialist accumulation.

This is a tragedy that the Western world has lost the perspective of developing human values and priorities and that these qualities are relegated to being marginal and reduced to the initiative of personal choices inside the family, the neighbourhood or in relationships of friendship. They rarely become determinant in the general choices we make as a society. Even truth is ever more subjected to profit and power.

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From the point of view of a more human anthropology, it is indeed a necessity that the market be tamed, under the control of the social network. This would then no longer be the market that rules but it would be the social network that controls the market and what role it has to play for the better enhancement of social life. The market becomes in this way subservient. But there is a serious condition for this to happen. The ideology that has to master the market must become prevalent; and before this, it needs to take shape and become consistent and consensual. It cannot be alive before it is born.

The role of USSR as alternative

During the 20th century the USSR has played a major role of alternative model for the colonised countries. Far from being ideal it yet represented the path of liberation.

In our Western society we tend to describe the USSR as the great (satanic) opponent to the power of capitalism. It was mainly described as a totalitarian power that threatened us. But the situation is much more complex.

It is possible to compare the role of the Russian Revolution of 1917 to the role of the French Revolution of 1789. As a counter-model to the monarchies that existed at that time, the French Revolution appeared as a threat to the established order. The ideas of the revolution have been generally welcomed by the populations of the different neighbour countries, especially in what would be later Germany, as a sign of hope of liberation from oppression of autocratic powers. But the monarchs of that time, who were all more or less autocratic leaders, formed a reactive and defensive coalition to prevent French ideas of liberty-equality-fraternity from spreading freely and intoxicating other nations. This was principally the reason for the alliance

between Britain, Prussia and the Austrian Hungarian Empire against France.

This was also probably the main cause of origin of the Napoleonic wars. These wars started as a defensive struggle of French ideas against the reacting offensive of the neighbouring monarchies against France in order to repress the nascent revolution. But the further these wars went into territorial expansion, the less they had to do with the defence of its leading revolutionary ideas and the promotion of liberty.

What matters here is that the revolution was the expression of a new spirit and new social order and it was threatened to be annihilated by the autocratic powers which did not want their stability to be challenged by these new ideas. There is in this reactive fear of new emerging ideas a strong similarity with the Russian Revolution.

- The French Revolution presented an alternative to autocratic power through an empowerment of the bourgeoisie, which became the leading force for the development of industry and trade in the next centuries. The revolution failed to empower all people as the Jacobins hoped to. It is why the bourgeoisie remained the great winner.
- In a symmetrical way, the Russian Revolution presented, through the empowerment of the proletariat, an alternative not to autocratic powers but to this power of bourgeoisie, born roughly one century earlier, and ever extending power of capital. But, if the revolution succeeded in replacing the imperial power of the tsar, it failed also to empower the workers and all people. It was in this way, through its failure to realise its aspiration, more similar to the Revolutions of 1930 and 1948 in Western Europe.

Yet the Russian Revolution, despite its totalitarian drift, has remained in principle a true model of aspiration for the

empowerment of all people. As such it proposed a serious alternative to the model of free market as we just described it earlier.

The leading idea of this alternative model was the following. A collective form of development that aims at equality and support for the poorest allows the social network to keep control over the forces of the market and to prioritise human dimensions of life such as education, health, housing, and even of the consciousness of what it means to be human. Despite all the distortions of the Russian project when it was translated into the Soviet system, there remained, at the core, the proven reality that a society can manage its economic development in other terms than mere profit. A mature and conscious society may propose an effective service for all and a realistic translation of human values into social forms.

Even if this did not happen, it remained true that the Russian model continued to be challenging, especially for the free market model. This is the challenging aspect of the role that the USSR was called to play in the world, especially after WW2.

At the same time as it was offering an alternative social and economic model for developing countries, it was also constituting an effective strategic counter-power, which was even able to seriously challenge the domination of the international scene by the USA and their allies. And it was proposing to the poor countries, which were emerging from colonisation after WW2, a counter-alliance in their struggle for independence against the forces of colonialism which were mainly West European and of capitalist nature.

The support of the USSR to developing countries translated directly by non-negligible pragmatic contributions, such as weapon deliveries to encourage freedom fighter movements or as financial means to enable alternatives of economic development. Beyond the efficiency of these practical contributions, the role of

ideological support became very significant because it was opening a completely new way of looking at the potential and ways of development and independence.

These new ways were understood in terms of long term collective forms of development that aimed at national independence and stability (e.g. for the agrarian revolution in Algeria or the Ujamaa cooperatives in Tanzania), rather than in terms of immediate profit. It is in this spirit of solidarity and alliance that Cuba became a solid agent of direct contribution in guerrilla strategies worldwide and in medical aid in developing countries.

This model of solidarity with developing countries sharply contrasted with the way the USA were engaged, on the opposite, to reinforce totalitarian regimes in Africa, Asia and South America; or even to intervene directly in putsches that allowed them to install, like in Guatemala or Chile, more repressive regimes and leaders more cooperative to their own colonial strategies, focused on resource extraction and economic domination (the free market model).

There is another important dimension of the Russian Revolution. This is the important role that ideology plays to shape the mind of people and orient the common effort of a society. The concept of ideology has been since that time impregnated by the consciousness that the role of the narrative is important because it shapes the awareness of the participants. It has even to shape it through education.

I believe that our present understanding, in Western culture, of the role of ideology has been dominantly marked, because of the threat it represented for capitalist interests, by the negative image of the totalitarian approach. The rejection of the potential role of ideology was also a form of self-defence. The West did not want to recognise that the role of ideology could be a creative force

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and train people to be more aware of what is at stake and of how to proceed on the path of liberation; as we will soon see later.

What matters most here is the fact that the USSR became rapidly a model of emancipation for the poor countries. This status of counter-model to colonialism and leading ideology of liberation was still reinforced by the historical fact that Russia, in the past, had not been involved in colonial projects as Britain or France had been. At least the domination of other countries by Russia had rather concerned its direct neighbours and was rather motivated by the will of Russia to control or extend state power in the hands of the tsar, than to provide an economic power to the bourgeoisie, which was still very undeveloped at this time in Russia, by contrast with the aristocracy, which was very powerful, especially as land owner.

Following the precedent remarks we can summarise that the USSR became then, in principle, a quadruple model:

- a model how to get rid of totalitarian domination,
- a model how to implement more collective forms of development based on rather human values of solidarity and equity,
- a model where ideology represents the creative force of awareness of all participants and enables the realisation of their empowerment to create more equitable relationships between people,
- and a model how to counter-balance the influence of the USA and other capitalist powers in the world, especially in colonised or dominated countries.

As we can see, the power of the counter-model is impressive, and this despite the fact the situation in the USSR was not so thriving and convincing as a counter-model. Yet it played a considerable role in the movement of independence from

colonialism until the collapse of the USSR in 1989. And paradoxically today Russia seems to consolidate this old heritage and use it at its best advantage in Africa, as an alternative to Western powers.

As I explained earlier, a movement of liberation needs to formulate its own ideology in order to make it a guide in its struggle against the oppressor. For this purpose the narrative that expresses this ideology must rely on very different premises that will clearly distinguish the freedom fighters from the dominator or invader. The more contrasting the difference in the narratives will be, the more the reasons for the struggle will be made evident. The freedom fighters do not combat an enemy; they combat a process of oppression. It happened that the USSR was offering the adequate ideological tools to do this. It became then a leading figure for the so-called Third World.

Christianity as a path of liberation

In Latin America the Theology of Liberation has traced a path of emancipation that concerns the essence of life but also proposes social and political ways of empowerment.

Before we talk about the role of religion as a liberation movement, I would like to make an important distinction. For each religion I believe there are two forms of expressions, two paths, two types.

- The first type is the authentic search for truth in a personal experience of the mystery of life. This is what I call the authentic path, religion of type 1.
- Then there is the derivative type when religion becomes a tool of power. There is basically a need for each religion to transmit the wisdom it has acquired and to formulate the teaching that ensues out of past experience. Religion attempts

then to propose a formal and structured expression of dogmas and rites. There is nothing wrong in this, as long as one does not confuse this teaching with the reality of the mystery. The teaching is only the finger that shows the moon, not the moon itself that it cannot reach. But, most importantly, it happens very often that the teaching becomes a tool of domination, in a hierarchy top-down. It becomes an instrument for power when it imposes some formal conformism in beliefs and behaviour or even some formal adhesion to the faith. It then does not foster growth; it rather represses the person and its freedom of conscience. This is the repressive form, religion of type 2.

Now about the role of Christianity as a path of liberation.

At the beginning, Christianity took shape as a kind of distinct path diverging from Judaism or rather as its further development of the original message of the prophets. Soon the Christians were persecuted, by the Jews as heretics, and by the Roman power as a subversive force because of its belief or practice. The Christians were sacrificed in the circus arena, feeding the lions. Remaining independent and free in spirit and faithful to their faith, the original Christian communities were constituted of people who lived very simply, sharing everything they possessed in a genuine commitment to a way of life that brought joy and peace despite its extreme sparsity. This was truly a path of liberation from old rules and heavy institutional structure, a path of personal and communitarian liberation.

But soon the Roman Emperor Constantine understood the potential of this new faith. The Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 led directly to his conversion. Prior to the battle, he prayed to the

Christian God and saw a Chi Rho⁷⁷ (sign that represents Christ according to the tradition) and the words "in hoc signo vinces," or "by this sign, conquer." He credited his victory to the Christian God.

Even if this conversion seems to have been genuine, he saw also how this could help him consolidate his power in reference to the spreading of what was considered as a new religion, not based on rules and rituals but on a living practice of compassion. Constantine, although emperor, was even very much involved in theological debates, like for instance in Nicea (325 AD), which had also their own political significance and allowed him to set clearer borders to the Empire, between the ones who belonged to it (adherents of the creed) and the ones who did not (the Others). Formally Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire when Emperor Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica in 380. From this day there was confusion between Christianity as a path of liberation (religion of type 1) and Christianity as an allied to power (religion of type 2).

Along the centuries, there were many attempts to bring Christianity back to its original message and practice as a humble path of compassion, non-violence and service (type 1). For instance St Francis of Assisi tried to bring it back to a path of poverty. Luther, in the Reformation, tried to detach it from power, especially from clerical power, but the German Princes grasped pretty quickly how Protestantism could serve their ambitious interests.

Later the Jesuits in the colonies tried to support indigenous people and defend their culture, against the colonisers, to enable them to live an empowered life. The Jesuits were the promoters

⁷⁷ Chi (CH) and Rho (R) are two letters of the Greek alphabet that symbolise the name of (Jesus) Christ. Assembled in a single diagram they look like a P in an X one sees in many paintings or symbols of early Christianity.

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of an encultured way of practising Christianity as a form of synthesis between traditional local cultures and the essence of the Christian message. One famous illustration of this theological and social understanding and translation is the famous film *The Mission* by Roland Joffé, with music from Ennio Morricone. This example nevertheless illustrates also a very paternalistic attitude towards indigenous people, which is yet more understandable in its context of the 18th century; when the awareness of the damages of colonialism were still not so developed as it is today.

More recently Liberation Theology arose in South America in the 1960s. As an emanation of a new perception of the meaning of faith in the decolonising world, led by theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff, Liberation Theology was a Christian theological approach calling for the liberation of the oppressed. It intended to be the social translation of the Christian message. It proposed explicit socio-economic interpretations, with social concern for the poor. It offered a path of political liberation for oppressed peoples. It dared also to address many other forms of inequality, such as race or caste. This movement became very powerful in Latin America where it took politically side for the majority of the exploited population, adopting very often some of the revolutionary values of the liberation movements. See the examples mentioned earlier of Don Helder Câmara et Oscar Romero.

The evolution of the past 2000 years has demonstrated how it is a great challenge for a religion such as Christianity, or for all religions, to remain without ambiguity on the side of the poor and the oppressed. By its nature and its role, religion cannot remain a pure path of liberation in mere search for bliss; because it has inevitably needs for expression in practical forms – teaching is part of its mission – that soon imply structure; structure of the doctrine, structure of the concepts, structure of the discourse, structure of the institution. Religion, by essence,

cannot remain pure because it has inevitably to be involved in the world, precisely as a path of liberation that concerns not only the spirit but the whole being, which includes the body and the social conditions in which we all live.

There has been also for Christianity some ambiguous ways to practise apparent solidarity with the poor. These ways were ambiguous because they looked like the path of liberation but they were not. We saw clear examples of this in the missions in Australia that took “care” of Aboriginal people and especially of children who were taken away from their families to be Christianised. This is a form of so-called assistance to development – that looks like the path of liberation – that is indeed a hidden way to impose more coercion and control over these children, preventing them from being whom they were meant to be. This is indeed a racist path of contempt that imposes white supremacy.

Christianity against Islam or empire clashes

Since Islam rose, there has been a strong antagonism between European nations and the Sarasin or Ottoman Empires. Wrongly it has been interpreted as a clash of religions.

Since the rise of Islam in the 7th century there has been a constant antagonism and even enmity between Christianity and Islam. The potential conflict has focussed on faith (the religious background) but it has rather concerned in fact the competition for power between two antagonistic conquering forces and centres of power. Maybe the motivation of this competition was to be found unconsciously in the fear of this religious difference, but it translated soon into military conquest.

Since the rise of Islam the Muslims have been expanding their zone of influence, especially through the conquest of large portions of land that led them from Arabia to North Africa and

even Spain, to the West, and to Iran and India, to the East, without mentioning later expansions into Central Africa or Indonesia. The Saracens and the Ottomans became an important strategic and economic threat to European powers.

But, among many reciprocal moves in response to the expansion of one another, one can also observe some equivalent moves of European forces into The Middle East, like for instance at the time of the Crusades. The Crusades had the purpose of reconquering the Holy Land from the Muslims, to save it from “heretic” influences and set it under Christian protection. But these Crusades often lost their ways and religious motivation to turn into mere conquest. The 4th Crusade in 1204 finished in Constantinople under the influence of the Venetians who were chasing their own strategic and trade interests. Or the 5th Crusade in 1218-19 finished at Damietta in Egypt in the purpose of weakening the power of the Sultan of Egypt, the nephew of Saladin, at that time the most powerful force in the Middle East. See the description I made earlier of the meeting between St Francis of Assisi and this powerful Sultan.

A wide competition between the European powers and the Saracens or the Turks was engaged around the Mediterranean Sea. The battle of Poitiers (732) marked a turn in the expansion of the Arab conquest. What was called the Reconquista started around this period and reached its highest point when Queen Isabel of Castile and King Ferdinand of Aragon acted together to chase the Arabs out of Spain. That was the time of the Inquisition which was persecuting everybody who did not seem strictly Catholic (according to a very narrow and strict definition of this term). In a first stage Jews and Muslims were forced to convert to Christianity. But then it became impossible to distinguish who had converted sincerely and who had done so by convenience to better dissimulate their real Jewish or Muslim faith. In order to clear this confusion an edict was produced in 1492 to expel Jews and Arabs out of Spain. Spain was “purified” of their presence.

But a powerful Muslim presence nevertheless remained on the other side of the Gibraltar Channel, in North Africa. And Andalusia remained for ever deeply marked and enriched by this presence of Islam and Arabic culture.

Soon after this process of expulsion out of Spain Christendom (and not Christianity) extended its vindictive force at the battle of Lepanto (Gulf of Patrai, 1571) that marked another turning point when the fleet of the Holy League, a coalition of Catholic states arranged by Pope Pius V, inflicted a major defeat on the fleet of the Ottoman Empire. This battle re-established the domination of European powers over the Mediterranean Sea. That had nothing to do with Christianity as a path of liberation.

Later the Ottomans penetrated into Europe as far as Vienna where they were beaten in 1683 by King of Poland Jan III Sobieski who was hailed by the Pope the “Saviour of Western Christendom”. Here again the religious distinction is explained as the cause of the conflict when it is mainly about the rivalry of empires and armies.

Since then there has been a constant rivalry between Western and Arab-Turk forces, which has been reinforced by colonialism in the Middle East, India, in the Far East or in Africa for more than three or almost four centuries.

Still recently President George W. Bush waged a war in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was called *War on Terror*, and terror seemed, in this discourse, to be directly related with Islam, quasi as synonym. What a distortion.

There is here a deep, intentional and dangerous confusion of the difference between two cultures and the true antagonism why these two cultures are at war. The discernment that undoes the confusion is especially necessary when, in an asymmetrical relation, we have to ask why one of these two cultures has to become the victim of the ambition of the other. In these

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conditions of oppression, the difference of faith between the two cultures can truly adopt a new significance and propose a true path of liberation, in a struggle against the oppressor. Then the religious factor becomes more significant and overrules even the causes of the conflict. It becomes a real energy to change the state of oppression. This intentional distortion and confusion between difference of religion and real cause of conflict is in my mind one of the main causes of Islam phobia today.

This antagonism between North and South, or West and East, is a good illustration of the principle that a major cultural or ideological difference is generally needed to define the enemy and to combat him. Between Western and Middle Eastern powers the reason has been found in religion, in the contrast between Christianity and Islam, although the respective messages of these two religions are very similar in their deepest content – they both have common ancestors in Abraham – but varying in the forms of expression, their mentalities and dogmas and rites.

In these few examples above of the historical clashes I mentioned, out of the long time span between the arising of Islam and its vilification in the eyes of Northern powers, we can observe how Christianity and Islam have been equally invoked to be the call for resisting the other.

Since then Islam has remained a powerful ideology of reference for all liberation movements from decolonisation to Islamism to even terrorism. It is important to well discern the deep motivations of these movements and why they invoke Islam as their root. Some of these ideological motivations can be very deep and sincere and inspire true paths of liberation. By contrast, some others seem just to nourish political discourses and ambitious strategies that serve projects of mere power which have nothing to do with the content of the faith. Fundamentalism comes on top of these distinctions to add some more confusion.

Specialisation according to gender

The specialisation of tasks following the gender line does not mean oppression but specialisation, or even empowerment; and also protection of certain feminine qualities of care.

Before we look at the role of Islam as a possible path of liberation – or at least invoked as such – we need to make a few comments on the way our Northern culture looks at Islam and what it tends to project onto it, especially in negative terms. There is indeed, in our Western look at the East, a deep misunderstanding of what Islam truly means, much beyond the inevitable distortions of Islam by its own clerical Muslim institutions (type 2).

The principal flaw in the look of the North onto Islam is that it judges Islam in reference to what the North has established as its principal priorities, such as individualism (called freedom) and materialism (called progress). This means it consists in measuring the other, who has other criteria and priorities, with one's own measures. In a sarcastic way one could say that it is like evaluating the capacities of the fish in reference to the skills of the bird, or reciprocally. Both would fail the examination.

Let's start here with an example. I worked for a short while in Ghardaia (Algeria), which is an oasis in the Northern part of the Sahara. The oasis embraces five small cities dating from the 11th century. At this time, the sect of Ibadism decided to find refuge out of the way of "civilisation", far from the usual routes of trade caravans across the Sahara, in order to live a purer life of radical simplicity, more conform to the spirit of Islam. In the valley of the Wadi M'zab, they established five beautiful towns, which are nowadays classified as historical monuments by the UNESCO. The design of introverted houses, agglomerated together in the meshes of a network of narrow streets and small public squares, is based on the division of roles between men and women in the

traditional or in the Islamic society. Men, in general, cannot access the inner private space of the houses that are not the homes of their own family. When they visit friends – which never ceases to happen as this society is very drawn to practise intense hospitality and conviviality – the men friends have unimpeded access from the street, by direct stairs to the first floor of the house, to the guest room which is completely separated from the rest of the house. In addition to a remote door from the house used for the service of the guests, the guest room is also doted of many small holes that allow the women who remain in the house to have a glimpse and to hear, and participate indirectly to, what happens in the guest room. The rest of the house remains the strict domain of the women where they reign over the household economy and the children.

The realm of the men is clearly the street, the public square and the gardens in the palm grove where the vegetables are growing. These respective domains of man and woman are very clearly delimited and each gender acts in its own field of influence. There is no special hierarchy between both because each one is equally necessary. Specialisation of roles goes according to gender, as it is generally the case in all societies in which people produce everything they needed. Beyond a given complexity of tasks, specialisation becomes a necessity because of the wide range of activities. Nobody is capable to practise all skills and trades; hence roles specialise. Women give birth to children and bring them up; they feed them as well as they feed their husband. They are almost all-powerful in the home. Men are in charge of external relationships.

This seems to us, Westerners, like a form of repression or exploitation of the women by the men. Or at least it is the way we look at this form of specialisation by gender. But, when I go to a barbecue in Australia, I can observe the same pattern: all the men collect in one corner and talk principally to other same-gendered people; and the women in another corner do the same.

There is also in our Western society a straight division according to gender. Nothing is forced upon; it is freely practised. Search please here for the 10 differences between these two situations.

In the Middle East women are often the leader force of the home. They control often the whole or most of the economy of the household, including even a form of economic production. African women, even in Muslim countries, are often the ones on the market, selling fruits and vegetables of their own production. I remembered bargaining directly with women in South Saharan oasis. It means they are in charge (and control) of the main income of the household.

In the Bible (Book of Proverbs chap. 31) there is a description of the ideal woman in terms that can resemble a form of exploitation because of her dedication. But on the other hand, with deeper understanding, one sees that she is very industrious and creative and holds all the strings of the household in her hands. She has even control on the finances and on contracts. Is this not an illustration of full activity and initiative in a context where subsistence is evidently the dominating constraint of life? Note that this is not an example out of the Islam but out of Judaism, which would not have been so different from other Middle-Eastern models.

The time of colonisation has brought our Northern cultures in narrow contact with many different Muslim societies, from Africa to the Middle East or the Far East. As said before we have then judged them according to our own measures but we did not understand them, because we contacted them in a spirit of domination and with contempt.

Certainly it can seem narrow, at first glance, that women are mainly active in the house, the market and the fields, or in circles among women. If we look more carefully at what is at stake, we can notice that our Northern approach has confused the principle of protection of the qualities of womanhood with the principle of

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patriarchal oppression of the workforce and status of women – which is a very different process.

The protection of womanhood – when it is not recuperated by fundamentalist interpretation – is rather based on the preservation of human qualities which need protection to be able to find expression: compassion, care, listening, helping. It is true – and our Western society has forgotten this point – that these too rare qualities cannot extend and be practised when they have to compete with the egocentric rights of the person, which seem to correspond to rather masculine trends. This is a subtle balance in which, as Northerners, we are certainly not experts.

Eastern women in the eyes of the West

Colonisation has impacted femininity, here and there, in a negative way. On both sides patriarchy has prevented democratic freedom from being expressed.

There is also a major factor in the way we look at the East. The colonial experience has forged a false image of the Muslim woman. Let's be clear. In all civilisations there are some forms of patriarchal domination, of extremism, of use of tradition, and especially religious tradition, in purpose of exploitation, and finally of fundamentalism. This form of radicalism can either offer a path for increasing power of the dominator – which is the degraded form of religion – or it can propose also a form of self-defence against colonialism. When it becomes a self-defence it tends to harden and it fosters a counter-reaction of increasing extremism. See the three levels of violence according to Don Helder Câmara as described earlier (chapter 11). The counter-model falls consequently into fundamentalism, not by itself, but by reaction to the excess of Western constraint. This is evidently what colonialism has produced.

The Talibans or ISIS are in this way explicit radical products of themselves but also, in their hard version, of the Western intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. Of course they existed before then, but they have been considerably reinforced as a form of self-defence, and even counter-model of national resistance, that has later (nowadays) justified an intensified form of internal oppression.

In an article in the *Monde Diplomatique* (July 2023)⁷⁸ Hicham Alaoui, author of many books about the Middle East, describes very well this distortion generated by colonialism. First he insists that the patriarchal model is so ingrained in both societies (the Northern and the Middle-Eastern) that it is improbable that one be able to criticise the other in balanced terms. Each one tends to project its own dysfunctions onto the other. It is clear that the types of masculine privileges in the Middle East were of very different nature from what they were in Europe.

One of the major differences between the Middle-Eastern and the Northern systems concerns the distinction between informal norms and legal codes. Alaoui describes how Sharia laws were, before colonisation, much more flexible and served as guidelines more than as strict rules. They left a wide margin of interpretation that allowed to adapt their principles to a wide range of different situations, combining at the same time religious concepts and pragmatic needs of society.

The colonial European system transformed this system in two ways.

- It replaced first a flexible interpretation inspired Sharia laws and traditional customs, which varied from one society to the next, by a set of uniformed rigid rules ensued out European

⁷⁸ Hicham Alaoui is a member of Human Rights Watch, researcher at the Institute for International Studies (Stanford University). See *Le Monde Diplomatique*, English Edition: <https://mondediplo.com/archives>

jurisdiction and ways of thinking. Rigidity replaced flexibility.

- And, second, it engraved these new rigid rules into civil and penal codes, imposed against the usual laws and practices, and these new laws were then applied by juridical courts, by Western military decrees or by public authorities. It happened, in reaction, that the local practices of the dominated indigenous society were, in a move of self-defence, hardened into a rigid system that would accept no exception.

The European will to “civilise” translated into an oppressive power system and an exploitative practice that harmed the women more than the men. Rather than they were made free, women were absorbed into a legal system that expressed the European perception of the hierarchy of genders. This reduced also considerably their economic role as described above and the relative freedom they enjoyed in the flexibility of interpretation of the Sharia laws.

Many strategies are at work in present day modern Muslim societies (Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia) to combine autocratic power with apparent measures of liberation of the status of women. I will not detail them here as Alaoui does in his article. But we can say that they all tend to avoid the question of democratisation of which they are indeed inseparable. The issue is then rather the question of autocratic domination than of femininity. See Iran which is a very refined and evolved society but under terrible repressive power.

Seen in this wider perspective that tries to look beyond general patriarchal tendencies common to most civilisations, we may reconsider in a more positive way the relative original economic independence of women that has been restricted by colonisation. We may appreciate the conscious intention to protect their intimacy and to defend them against the utilisation of their

gender as sex symbol. We may also be aware of the validity of the flexibility of Sharia law when it is not the rigid tool it has become under autocratic influence.

We have to accept that it can be the inspiring guideline that helps the translation of subtle and fragile religious or even gender priorities which have to be not only preserved but also expressed for the wellbeing of all. I believe this form of religious or ethical model of behaviour is also very present in Christianity. Why then not in Islam? These different aspects demonstrate in my mind that our perception of the role of the hijab is not what we think it is. Our vision is much too narrow and primitive.

Of course each custom can also be used in the reversed way. This is what fundamentalism does. But fundamentalism exists not only in Islam, but also in many forms in our Northern countries, especially in the way white supremacy believes to be the only right system that is called to dominate the world and teach other civilisations what life is meant to be. Is this not also another more surreptitious form of fundamentalism, which also represses women?

The Hijab

There is a deep misunderstanding concerning the hijab, symbol of the dissent between Christianity and Islam concerning the rights of women or other human rights.

The hijab has become in the eyes of the West the symbol of Muslim feminine oppression, because Iranian or Taliban fundamentalism has made of it a sign of repression – which it is in these two cases. But the hijab means much more. I met many Muslim women who find it very comfortable as a protection not only against heat but also against intrusion. It protects their own privacy and they love to be able to be as hidden as they wish to

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be. I know also many Australian men who feel their hat is a similar protection they almost never let down.

By contrast one says that Western women are free. But, a few decades ago, they would not have been able to subsist by themselves. This contrasts with some aspects (not all) of the empowering Middle East model of their counter-parts who were in many cases masters in the way they managed the household, and the home production, core activity of subsistence.

This is in fact the reason why feminism has been so strong to develop in the West, because women were so disempowered that they needed to find their own ways. It was still recently (less than a century ago) about defining the rights of women to be active in the economic field with a clear income that was worth their contributions. The question yet still remains today of knowing how to do this in remaining faithful to their feminine entity which is very much repressed in an economic system that has adopted masculine priorities (power, success, profit). It seems women in traditional societies had long partially (or comparatively) acquired this fundamental right as I just described it. Probably not in the usual terms that we call freedom, in our Western culture.

There is also in the hijab a very important will of womanhood not to be treated as a sex object. By contrast our Northern society has transformed women as sale argument. Even the advertisement for a chainsaw can include the image of a woman, although they are not meant to use it, but only to seduce the bloke who is called to buy it. Is it not primitive and regressive for feminine dignity?

Beyond its use in advertisement, the many aspects of fashion, make-up and body language have also transformed the feminine body into a call for seduction that has transformed the relationships between genders. Ideologically this extreme simplification tends to reduce relationships between genders to

sex. Relationships are volatile. But they are much more complex and deep than that. Of course sex is a pleasant part of it, but it is not all of it, and, as such, it requires respect and delicacy. One understands that the hijab may be a protection for the woman against this form of aggression.

I am aware that I'll be criticised for writing this and that it will not be well accepted because it looks like a very conservative and reactive position to what is considered as a normal evolution towards individual freedom. But we have also to consider that the domination of sexuality in our Western society has deeply transformed the quality of relationships we may develop between genders. In my mind the multiplication of same sex relationships is not only due to its liberalisation (which rejoices me) but is also the consequence of a deterioration of our inter-gender relationships; and this is worrying. See the example of the barbecue here above.

On the other hand excessive sexualisation impends on children life. It is a major cause of child abuse, and of abuse in general. It is why a "second skin" of protection (e.g. the hijab) is not necessarily something repressive. It can also be protective. Of course its use must remain free, and not be imposed under the threat of death penalty. And, especially, it must be free of any doctrinal interpretation.

The role of Islam as path of liberation

Islam has always been one of the main streams of thought, beliefs and values that have inspired resistance against Northern domination.

As we have seen, in the form of antagonism between Islam and Christianity, both religions, treated as ideologies, have served as motivation or justification to oppose one another, although the issue was rather about a strategy of secular domination than

about the right way of living according to religious value. But since the further extension of colonialism in the 19th century, Islam became a main ideological source of inspiration in the colonial movement of independence that nourished sincere spiritual liberation or political movements of emancipation or, also sadly, strategies of violence and terrorism. It is important to try to establish a few basic distinctions between these different trends.

Islamism has developed in the past centuries but also especially in the 20th century; in Egypt of the 1930s with Hassan al-Banna as the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood; or later in the 1970s with Ayatollah Khomeini as the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the fall of the Shah; or in the Algerian Civil War (1991–2002) in its attempt to overthrow the government. These were endeavours to install a political system in reference to Islam. Islam played the role of a religious, cultural, social and political alternative to the Western form of nation-state, rather than as a movement of liberation against a colonial power; although both aspects cannot be completely detached from one another.

It is important to notice that many of these movements attempted at the same time to organise civil services of cheap and accessible health and education, which constitute an important dimension of liberation.

There was an important turning point in the development of Islam based liberation movements. This was the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, after the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 1989). We saw earlier in this chapter the important role that the model of the USSR and its practical strategic support played in the movements of liberation against the colonial rule. When the USSR disappeared there was a void of counter-power to the domination of the Western countries over the South. There remained only in place the capitalist model that

was unable to nourish the ideology of liberation as it was precisely the source of the energy of domination. This was the so-called *end of history*.

It is interesting to observe that very naturally Islam took over, from the USSR, this role of leader of liberation. Since the 1980s-90s it played a major role in the struggle of decolonisation. But it was perceived in a much more negative way than the USSR by the Northern culture. The antagonism was not only of ideological and political nature, as it had been the case in opposing the influence of the USSR. It was also reinforced by a cultural aspect, nourished by different paths of religion, and especially by racist attitudes against people of the South. Islam was typically a force that had developed in the South, as a circular culture, and in this way always antagonist to Northern powers (linear cultures) that tried to colonise this same South. Islam is feared because it belongs to these Southern circular ways of thinking that usually tend to frighten Northerners.

It is also fascinating to see in this colonial movement of emancipation an evident parallel with what has characterised the struggle of Black movements in the USA that nourished itself in taking pride in its Muslim roots, which provided the necessary difference of ideology that was necessary in a liberation movement, as it has been demonstrated earlier.

For instance Malcolm X, who was one of the main leaders of the Black movement, was a declared Muslim. His faith was important to him and was one essential component of his identity and inspiration for his fight against injustice and white racism and supremacy. When Malcolm Little was growing up in Michigan, he developed a mistrust for white Americans. Ku Klux Klan terrorists burned his house, and his father was later murdered. After moving to Harlem, Malcolm turned to crime. Soon he was arrested and sent to jail. The prison experience was an eye-opening radical change for the young man, and he soon

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made some decisions that altered the course of his life. He began to read and educate himself. Influenced by other inmates, he converted to Islam. Upon his release, he was a changed man with a new identity. Believing his true lineage to be lost when his ancestors were forced into slavery, he took the last name of a variable: X.

The Nation of Islam, to which he adhered, was founded in the 1930s. In contrast with Christianity, which was the white man's religion forced upon African Americans during the slavery, the members of the Nation of Islam read the Koran, worshiped Allah as their God, and accepted Mohammed as their chief prophet. Mixed with the religious tenets of Islam were black pride and black nationalism. The Nation of Islam preached adherence to a strict moral code and reliance on other African Americans. Integration into the white society was not a goal. Rather, the Nation of Islam wanted Blacks to set up their own schools, mosques, and support networks.

The celebration of the roots of Islam in the Black movement was playing a double role.

- On one hand it offered an alternative ideology opposed to the white identity of white supremacy that referred to a white form of Christianity of the degraded type (religion as power) and it made out of its own religious motivation a tool of personal experience and liberation (of the authentic type 1).
- On the other hand it was a way to reconnect with the African roots and its Muslim origins and to establish a form of solidarity with the liberation movement in the colonies of Africa. It created in this way a double narrative of liberation.

Of course all the Black movement was not exclusively nourished by Muslim incentives. Martin Luther King represented another approach, explicitly based on nonviolence, which was equally important and had also reinterpreted its spiritual source in

Christianity in terms of struggle for liberation from oppressive models. It is fascinating to see that these differences of faith, and even of strategies (violence vs nonviolence), did not seem to have generated clashes in the Black movement, although they generated numerous debates. They were indeed rather unifying forces because they were equally based on similar ethics of solidarity and justice that the two religions had very strongly in common, at the core of their own teaching, especially as they were both of the first type of religion (path of liberation) and not of the second (instrument of power).

This substitution, in developing countries, of the ideological role of the USSR, as a leader in the liberation fight, by an equivalent role of inspiration through an explicit reference and identification with the culture of Islam can well explain the major development of the importance of Islamic belonging and Islamist tendencies, in developing countries in the recent years, especially stronger since the fall of the Wall: Palestine, South Sahara, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Indonesia, and many others.

The gap left by the collapse of the USSR as a counter-model was calling for an alternative model that could support the struggle of liberation for most developing countries; especially after their formal political independence did not propose real forms of empowerment and self-management but rather reinforced Western domination, through globalisation.

The Islamic ideology has then replaced the communist model. The enemy to combat (i.e. domination and exploitation) remained the same. The new freedom fighters inspired by the values of Islam had then still to find the ways how to expel the dominators.

Indifference and the power of evil

The deeper motivation for liberation is to be found in the first type of religion (path of inner liberation) but its expression is too often and dominantly of the second type (power).

I find it fruitful to investigate the role of liberation movements, whether rooted or not in Islam, under the perspective of the two types of religion; search for truth and contemplation or tool of power and control.

It seems to me that the first type of Islam is the true motivation that, in the case of Malcolm X, awakes in him human dignity and solidarity for his people. It is the path that liberates all of us, even independently of religion.

In another context, it is extremely challenging and deeply inspiring how indigenous people such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or Amerindians are able to offer a peaceful path of (re)conciliation after so many long decades if not centuries of rejection, ill-treatment and belittling. There is a deep mystery in this offer of peace to White people that contrasts so sharply with the degrading treatment that has been imposed onto them. How can they keep in their inner core so much strength and rootedness in truth and compassion? This is visibly the work of a long inner search beyond appearances, a path of inner liberation (first type) that they have gone all the way. The generosity and maturity of the Uluru Statement from the Heart – the title says it all – is a pure expression of this unfathomable wisdom. Gratitude to them for opening such a path of salvation, i.e. that not only will save us from destroying one another and ourselves; but that will also reinvent the new ways of the future which seems so far from today practice.

We can affirm in general about Islamist groups what we have said about terrorism. Only the extreme conditions of oppression

can motivate such a usage of violence. It does not mean this justifies it but, in this case, violence is not the aim but it is the expression of the past suffering and it becomes the means for the struggle of liberation. It is then not different from the use of violence by a national army. Terror remains terror, whether committed by a few freedom fighters or by a whole nation. Violence as such is not linked with Islam.

Beyond the necessity to solve our conflicts and to generate harmony, there is another aspect which remains for me very enigmatic. What is the nature of destructive regimes that rely on systematic oppression or totalitarianism? There is in these regimes like a force of destruction that goes much beyond what ordinary human beings can be individually capable of, even in their worse traits of cruelty, of greed, of self-centredness, of anger and hate. It is like a force (acting from outside?) penetrating the society that turns into nightmare. This is probably what we call evil, as a destructive spiritual power that overwhelms us, and the whole nation. It is very enigmatic to know what this power exactly is by nature. But there have been so many occurrences in our human history. It starts at a small scale with the massacre of the Innocents by Herod and continues into the Inquisition, the Terror under the French Revolution, slavery in the British Empire, White supremacy, the Holocaust, the Gulag, The Apartheid, the crushing of Indigenous cultures, Pol Pot, the Ayatollahs, ISIS, the Talibans. And the list continues for ever. This is the dark side of history we hardly can grasp its horror and monstrosity.

Hannah Arendt has proposed an interesting approach of this evil action, in her book *Eichman in Jerusalem*⁷⁹. If I well understand her or rather as I reinterpret what she says in my own way, the

⁷⁹ Hannah Arendt: *Eichman in Jerusalem, a Report on the Banality of Evil*. Many Publishers in different languages.

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fact that evil seems “banal” is only a mask, a cover-up that hides its terrible dealings. Behind the apparent insignificance of its bureaucracy hides the unfathomable horror of the Holocaust. The so-called banality of evil is only a cover that allows evil to act at full scale. It is the screen that hides the abyss of its monstrosity, of its ineffable absence of any self-limitation. Evil is the black hole of the absence of godliness, the negation of the presence and being of God. It is the absolute void of life.

But, in parallel to this acting form of evil, there is also in our Western attitudes, as a non-activated counter-model, our total absence of awareness, our entanglement in rationality, our narrow belief in science and our fascination for technology and market as the three forces that animate the world. We can wonder which the relation is between evil and, on the other hand, our incapacity to react to climate change, to starvation for so many people and children, to injustice, to violence, to depression, to hate, to the escalation of war and weaponry.

Yet, deep in us, in each of us, there is also a powerful and hopeful spirit that leads us to the truth, an inspiration that reveals to us the true nature of our world as a complex living whole of interrelated components, of a deep creative energy that aims at harmony. This wonder is so powerful that all our egocentric small concerns may dissolve as meaningless in regard of a powerful image of who we may become, all together as humanity.

The true role of ideology as creation

The ideal power of ideology consists in a guide that reflects the maturity and consensus of the community and traces the way of the future by encompassing all dimensions.

In contrast with what I have sketched here above in terms of source of motivations that call for a deep inner and exterior

liberation, ideology is generally understood, in our Western interpretation, as a totalitarian tool used for imposing a false representation of reality and forcing people to obey a power that works against them. But this is a very twisted interpretation, which is partly justified by the vicious use it has been made of ideology in totalitarian regimes (Nazism, Stalinism, Apartheid).

This negative understanding is yet incomplete because it totally excludes the possibility that ideology may have a positive role that has to stimulate creativity and encourage people to express their best potentials. I intend here to demonstrate this creative potential. And I will start paradoxically with an example that will first appear to be negative. But I will also demonstrate how it can be turned into a positive tool. I want to take the example of China, which is perceived as a totalitarian regime.

Instead of conquering the world through military force, China has designed a wider project of influence on – or rather of penetration and domination of – other countries. This project is called *One Belt and One Road Initiative (OBOR)*. This is a wide strategy that aims at ensuring access to the most necessary natural resources as well as offering good means of control on the networks of transport and communication that make this access possible. Through very large investments in faraway countries, and in many “nerve centres” along a network of paths of communication, it ensures a higher grade of influence or control on the entities that manage these far neuralgic points of the world. It is fascinating to observe the width of this strategy that tends to encompass all aspects of life and all tools at disposition in one and single all-encompassing coordinated perspective and intention.

This translates concretely into roads and railways building and investments through Asia, Oceania and Africa, in acquisition or leasing of neuralgic points of circulation such as well-situated harbours in foreign countries, or railways that allow the transport

of essential mineral resources from their continental source to the next harbour, of main roads for transport from one ocean to the other, avoiding bottlenecks that could be used as points of blockade by antagonistic interests. Or it consists also in acquisition of large surfaces of land under favourable climate that will be protected from rising waters and will help to provide the necessary quantities of food that will be needed by the increasing Chinese population. It concerns also more qualitative equipment such as participation in, or access to, scientific knowledge in foreign research institutes or universities, or access to people in the circles of the political power, government or parliament.

In this form of discrete, rampant and progressive conquest of the economic and vital space of other nations, even of parts of their own heart and brain, it is fascinating to observe how all means are applied in parallel and coordinated for one common goal. The technology, the infrastructures, the finances, the defence forces, the industry, trade, the cultural influence, the diplomatic links, even aid to development for poor countries, or mingling into internal affairs of other countries, or using means of education and health systems, are all involved methods and ways to support this wide strategy. In comparison with this wide all-encompassing strategy we can only be appalled by the poverty of our Western motivations which rely mainly on individual profit and the reference to prices as the main criteria of our main choices.

Our first instinctual reaction to these considerations about the maturity and the high level of awareness of such a strategy consists in reaffirming the totalitarian character of the Chinese power. It is true that the fact the state has control on all these means and tools provides the best opportunity for the control and coordination of their implementation. But this emotional reaction on our side about the clarity of Chinese enterprises seems to impose a screen of blindness on the functioning of this regime.

This is a very dangerous reaction which is again a proof of our illusory belief in white supremacy. It says that there is nothing to learn from China because it is totalitarian. But this is a stupid way to ignore what happens there. There is in China a very vivid cultural and social life, despite a form of state control over what is said and expressed. There is a huge creativity and high intellectual activity, discoveries, inventions, initiatives, imagination. And we should better learn from it, in anyway when there is something to learn. If we adopt a more positive attitude, we will notice how this way to build a wide strategy, which involves all possible tools and means and abilities, is certainly one of the main teachings of China to our intellectually impoverished West.

Let's now consider the problem from another side. Let's imagine that, instead of a totalitarian state power, it is our own choice and ability, as a national community, to reach a level of awareness and consensus concerning the priorities we choose for our nation and our together-living and the means we want to apply in order to reach our common aims. We become then able, because of this higher level of awareness and consensus, to implement new strategies. We could face the challenges of the growing gap between rich and poor, of climate change as a call for radical change in the way we live, of inequality in chances of education, health, imprisonment, domestic violence, relationships between genders, white supremacy, and many other issues.

What matters here is not so much the diversity of these issues. It is the fact that we could, if we wish to, link them all together as one single strategy of bringing more justice and compassion in our own world, that is justice and compassion for ourselves as a nation that includes us all; creating better conditions of life for all. This is precisely the vision that is missing which would in turn imply the implementation of all the possible means in all possible fields of thought and action, as the Chinese example illustrates it so well. This means we need more ideas, more

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visions, and less profit and fewer references to prices. We need a strategy based on a positive ideology inspired by the warmth of lived human values.

This new ideology, understood here as a wide and deep vision of the path in front of us and of all these available means to make it real, becomes then a fascinating and attractive way to look at the world, at ourselves and at our future.

For Australia to adopt this form of perspective, there is a first condition. We all need to go first on the path of inner liberation (type 1). This means to investigate who we are as a nation. Fear is an important aspect of the national psyche. As Australians we have fear to look at our past, fear of our colonial history, fear of our colonial way of functioning, fear of the first inhabitants, fear of refugees, fear of China, fear of abandoning white supremacy politics, fear of ideas. The path of inner liberation will precisely consist in getting rid of all these fears and in daring to look at ourselves as we are, without false pretence.

And before we try to translate this new awareness into a new narrative, we will have to learn the art of inclusive dialogue, as described earlier. Then, and then only, we will be able to invent a common future and write a new narrative that will describe our new ideology as a guide into the future. An all-encompassing creative ideology for justice and peace.

This new ideology does not need to be exclusively oriented towards the defence of our own interests, as the OBOR initiative does for the interests of China. It can be inclusive. It can aim at equity among all Australians, at sharing the common wealth, at changing our ways of living in order to integrate all our activities into the rigor of natural cycles, at being inspired by the wisdom of first nations. It can also weave new relationships with other nations in the spirit of the network of cross-relationships I described earlier where the network is so dense in all directions

that there is no longer antagonistic alliances by blocks but true and lively exchanges in all possible combinations.

Imagination has no limits. If courage follows, we can invent anything that promotes peace, justice and equity. Let's try.

Chapter 15: The Uluru Statement from the Heart

I would like to finish this book by quoting the text of the Uluru Statement from the Heart because it seems, as related to the Australian context, to say everything this book has tried to convey. I wish you will see the generosity and the deep awareness and wide perspective for the future that this proposal expresses. Here is the text, less than a page, that says it all:

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a *spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.* It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia’s nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is *the torment of our powerlessness.*

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take *a rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle.* It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

Circular and linear

Through referendum, that invited us to accept this initiative and translate it into a new way of relating between Indigenous people and white Australians and into a new vision of our common future, this proposal of a new path has been rejected. This is a tragedy, not only for the proposal itself that cannot be implemented in the way it was meant to be, but especially for the whole nation that has sunk to an incredible low. We deprived ourselves of an incredible wealth of knowledge and wisdom, of an incredible opportunity to reconcile one with another and shape a new future together.

But, despite this cataclysm, the future still depends on us. Everyday is a new start that depends just on us. We can still listen to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; and to the Kogi People. This potential is in our heart-mind, in the hidden sphere, in our hands and in our ears. We remain free to do what we want if we dare to be honest and look clearly at whom we are and how we function and who we aspire to be, as persons and as a nation. This is in my mind a very exciting prospect, which requires courage and determination, and which will bring harmony, peace and joy to all.

This is, I believe, the true path of liberation, liberation from supremacy.

List of options (titles and short wordings)

This complementary table of contents is different from the one at the beginning of the book; it presents a detailed list of all the options proposed in this manifesto.

Remember what has been explained in the introduction: this book has proposed a range of successive key statements that represent proposed patterns for a change of behaviours. These patterns are the expressions of an alternative understanding of our society and, as such, provide powerful incentives for change. As they open to new choices, they represent many options that consist in a personal or collective choice (or commitment) that depends on us alone and the way we want to interact with the world.

Each option is made of a title and a short summary in two or three lines. They are organised here by chapters and sub-chapters, in the same order they have been presented; with the page number as reference.

CHAPTER 1: MANY CONTRASTING CULTURES **16**

Common humanity – diversity of cultures **16**

North – South contrast **16**

The contrast between rich and poor (in material terms) is rather between North and South, according to latitude, but principally in cultural terms. **16**

Different relationships with the land **17**

Peoples in the South have developed a different relation with the land to which they belong more than they own it. Territories are more inclusive of diversity. **17**

Different ways of thinking and being **18**

Different living conditions have fostered different behaviours and ways of thinking that are the result of experience and interpretation. **18**

Races, languages, meaning **19**

How race takes form **19**

Race develops in the interactions inside a smaller pool of genetic characters. Not clearly delimited as such, race varies under external influences. **19**

Racism as a social construct **21**

The social interpretation of racial differences in terms of hierarchy creates a fiction that soon reinforces existing forms of oppression. **21**

Diversity of languages **23**

In their diversity languages express the differences of perception by diverse cultures, showing different ways of thinking and behaving. **23**

Different understandings of life **24**

Different cultures handle life in contrasting ways, although life is common to all; shall we favour pragmatism or intellectualism or a spiritual approach? **24**

Religions as worldviews **25**

Religions as differences of perception **25**

Reality is complex; our perception depends on our diverse (physical) points of observation which become points of view; the diversity of religions expresses these differences. **25**

Non-dualist religions **28**

They focus on the path of personal experience as a means for transformation (breakthrough) that brings us beyond appearances. **28**

Prophetic religions **29**

They teach us about the essence of the Ground of Being and His/Her will. They intend to enhance our personal relationship with the divine as Source of all that is. **29**

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Composed differences 31

The cumulative effect of differences 31

Contextual, physical, cultural and spiritual differences cumulate and accelerate the process of differentiation that increases contrasts between cultures. 31

CHAPTER 2: CULTURE AND THE POWER OF CHOICE 34

Culture and civilisation 34

Culture and civilisation 34

Culture represents the content of what matters most in terms of values and priorities; civilisation is the social construct of these main preferences into concrete and institutional forms. 34

The traps of civilisation 37

“Civilisation” is caught in two false premises: 1) an inexorable linear development towards complexity, 2) a trend towards social stratification and a quest for power (the empire). 37

The trend to materialism 39

As a materialisation of culture, civilisation tends to become ever more materialistic unless culture, which inspires it, retrains it in this trend and keeps it focused on values. 39

The glory of civilisation 41

Civilisations have contributed to major discoveries concerning social harmony, science, art, knowledge and even wisdom. How far is this also a contribution to culture? 41

Culture as the search for truth 42

Culture as the power of choice 42

Culture is built on choices. It remains alive when it is animated by our freedom of spirit and our freedom to remain coherent to what matters most for us. 42

The right to remain simple 43

The model of linear evolution, towards stratification and “civilisation”, denies hunters-gatherers a basic right to remain simple and be yet wise and evolved. Who is truly the “savage”? 43

The indigenous critic of Western ways of living 45

When the Indigenous people met the European conquerors of their land, they were shocked by the values that were leading their behaviours: especially money and domination. 45

The search for truth 47

Culture is a living process that transmits to us the teaching resulting out the experience of our ancestors; it sustains our search for truth and feeds our life choices. 47

CHAPTER 3: LIVING WITHIN THE TRUTH 50

The hidden sphere 50

The home as the cradle of our social behaviours 50

We first experience life in our “original home” and learn what is possible: e.g. that male dominance and violence, at the expense of recessive feminine values, inhibit life. 50

Living within the truth and the hidden sphere 53

Culture is not given by the community; it arises in the hidden sphere which is the field of our search and attempt how to live within the truth. 53

The hidden sphere and our capacity for choice 55

It is in the hidden sphere (our personal culture) that we find the resources to make fundamental choices concerning the values we want to prioritise. 55

Freedom and search for identity 58

The 5 forms of freedom 58

The five basic forms of freedom are: freedom to move, to disobey, to create new social settings, to be enriched in our hidden sphere by wisdom teaching, to care and be cared for. 58

List of options (titles and short wordings)

Freedom to be rooted in the hidden sphere	60	The essence of Life	72
It is our choice to follow the old patterns (generally egocentric patterns of domination) or to develop our own path, rooted in our natural human predisposition to truth.	60	If Life is the leading energy of the Universe, it is fundamental; and we have to adapt to its coherence and its laws as a permanent creation process.	72
Reactive struggle against or progressive hope for gain	61	At the beginning was the Word	74
When we struggle to implement essential changes in our society (social justice, climate change, democracy), we have to fight against the status quo; yet we need to foster unity.	61	In the Bible Life is described as the Word, an energy that is the active Principle that leads the evolution of the world. The Verb is the principle that overrules all processes.	74
Two opposed strategies of communication	62		
Dialogue can be linear and dialectical or circular and dialogical. The first increases division and is selective while the second generates union and is inclusive.	62		
Dialogue as inclusiveness	64		
When a community debates about change, transformation should not be perceived in terms of polarisation (for/against) but in terms of inclusiveness of all contributions.	64		
The search for identity	66		
Identity is not composed of individual characteristics that distinguish us from others; but it takes shape through the ways we have to belong and the art we have to relate to many others.	66		
The energy of Life	68		
Our common humanity	68		
Our mind has difficulties grasping the general picture; it gets hooked on small disturbances and misses the opportunity to perceive what links us: our common humanity.	68		
The smooth all-encompassing and the smooth hard recalcitrant	70		
The smooth of natural harmony (metaphor: the pond) is very different from the smooth of harsh artificial pretence (metaphor: the office building in the CBD).	70		
Life as a process	71		
Materialism and domination call for a manipulation of the world. Yet the world is driven by the energy of Life which has its own dynamic and laws.	71		
		CHAPTER 4: THE POWER OF WHITE SUPREMACY	76
		The Northern obsession with supremacy	76
		1) The discovery of agriculture	76
		When humankind learned to cultivate the soil, it abandoned nomadism and started to control nature and accumulate some wealth. This is at least what we usually are told.	76
		2) Greek philosophy as world view	78
		The 5 th century BC was a rich time that saw a deep change of mind take place that, with Plato, Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, considered the world as an external phenomenon.	78
		3) Christianity as state religion	79
		From an inner intimate experience that favoured an egalitarian way of life based on sharing, Christianity turned into a top-down structure based on authority.	79
		4) Gothic, Scholastic and early technology	80
		The rediscovery of Aristotle (rather than Plato) nourished analytical or rational thinking at the root of the Gothic and Scholastic era.	80
		5) Renaissance and the Demiurge	81
		Science, as a new way of observing the world, allowed new knowledge to arise such as astronomy, anatomy, perspective, technology. The observer became the demiurge.	81

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6) Perspective as self-centred perception 82

The discovery of perspective shifts human perception from a global symbolic overview to a self-centred but efficient point of view, i.e. from a hetero-centric to an egocentric perception. 82

7) Reformation and free conscience 82

The new human-centred perception allows to challenge religion as imposed from above; it revives the personal free conscience as a central faculty for choice and responsibility. 82

8) Colonisation 83

Geography and better ships and better weapons allowed the development of navigation that led to the discovery, conquest, exploitation of unknown lands. 83

9) Banknotes 85

The frequent use of banknotes partly disconnects money from gold; it relies on trust that the banknote has value despite it is only paper. 85

10) Industrial Revolution 86

New sources of energy (steam, electricity) and the invention of new machines allowed to (over-)produce more than needed, for profit. Accumulation fostered social stratification. 86

11) French Revolution 87

At the French Revolution the bourgeoisie becomes the new elite; it forms on the base of wealth (not nobility), at the expenses of the empowerment of people. 87

12) The nation-state 88

The function of the nation-state is to administrate the society of a population living on a given territory where all citizens are considered equal. 88

13) Imperialism 89

The exploitation of the colonies provided an extreme wealth which fed a further growth and increase in might for the mother country as well as a shift in ways of domination. 89

14) Marxism and the October Revolution 90

A strict critic of capitalism combined with an ideological interpretation of history proposed a strategy for the dictatorship of the proletariat translated later into the Russian Revolution. 90

15) Decolonisation and Bandung 92

The decolonisation brought hope that the Southern countries may follow their own path of emancipation, conceived in terms of innovation of many new ways of development. 92

16) International trade and neo-liberalism 93

Trade and interventions in Southern countries have shaped a relationship of domination, North over South, based on power. Globalisation is the expression of economic neo-liberalism. 93

The loss of the essential 93

Supremacy as destruction of life 93

Supremacy (exploitation of nature, repression of femininity, exploitation of the weaker) tends to destroy life and relationships. 93

The loss of wisdom 94

Each stage of evolution has proved incapable to generate a new synthesis of past heritage into the new paradigm of progress, by lack of ability to integrate one with another. 94

The cumulative effect of wealth and power 96

Initial extraction and exploitation of the poor by the rich have generated an ever growing gap that never stopped reinforcing the trend of domination. 96

The essential issue of choice 97

At each stage of this evolution, and for all the dichotomies it created between the new gains and the lost values, resides a deep and existential challenge: the urgency for choice. 97

CHAPTER 5: OPPOSED WAYS OF PERCEPTION 100

Whiteness, Blackness and Otherness 100

The essence of whiteness 100

This long evolution that consolidated the dominating power of whiteness asks the question of what whiteness consists in. What does it mean to be white? 100

List of options (titles and short wordings)

Identification with whiteness	102	Linear thinking: the takers - exhaustion and destruction	118
The violence and lies of white supremacy challenge white people to search for a white identity that does not necessarily identify with whiteness.	102	The linear approach is based on the exploitation of the context (resources, people); we behave as takers; we do not return to the context what we owe to it, in a cycle that would nourish it.	118
The privilege of whiteness	104	Linear thinking: the betrayal of the mind	119
I am free to choose how I relate to my own white culture; but, even if I prefer the wisdom of perennial philosophy, I cannot abolish my real privileges.	104	When we let our mind produce ideas that direct our life, we get into conflict with reality; we suffer. Let's learn to love what is, as it is.	119
And what about blackness?	106	Linear thinking: ideas and judgement	121
If whiteness is a fiction, blackness is a fiction too. How can a fiction become so powerfully destructive? Why does it have the power to humiliate if it is based not on reality but on a lie?	106	Ideas may arise 1) from our intentions, or 2) from observation or 3) from our ethical stand. They have then different qualities or potentials of impacts.	121
Why is racism so powerful?	108	B) Circular thinking: dialogical process	123
Although racism is a fiction, it is very destructive. As victims we are shaken in our deeper being. As complacent spectators we are too unaware, lazy or timid to challenge it. We doubt.	108	Southern cultures have developed a dialogical process to interact with complexity; all different forces compose in dynamic dialogue.	123
Otherness: Us and them	110	Circular thinking: cycles and circles	125
When there is oppression, the dominator is distinct from the victim. This essential distinction is necessary to allow the victim to resist, but it generates the false concept of "Us and Them".	110	The circular approach is based on an imitation of natural cycles, including all the parts; it does not exclude circling nor repetitions.	125
The experience of Otherness	111	Circular thinking: the vernacular model	126
Our feeling of being frightened by otherness generates a feeling of being threatened. This is often more in our head, because of objective deep differences, than in reality.	111	The vernacular world proceeds in a circular way: fragility, dependence on nature, interdependency, reciprocity, relationships.	126
The monolithic Other or Self	113	C) The balance: linear and circular	127
In conflict we tend to build a monolithic image of the Other; but this image has to evolve towards a more complex image that differentiates these others from one another.	113	Although both ways are antagonistic and incompatible, linear (rational) and circular (symbolic) thinking both have to cohabit.	127
Linear or circular - rational or vernacular	115	CHAPTER 6: THE MEETING OF TWO WORLDS	129
A) Linear thinking: the entrepreneurial project	116	Mobility: the road to elsewhere	129
The Northern culture thinks in linear and rational ways, from A to B to C, from premises to conclusion. It adopts the same for its grasp of time and space.	116	The practice of mobility	129
		Mobility has been constant in history, from migrations to travel, trade, pilgrimage. Nothing prevented people from moving far.	129
		Nomadism and migrations	129
		The mobility of whole ethnic groups has allowed important migrations as seeds of the present different races or cultures.	129

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Pilgrimages	131
Spiritual travels have been an early practice that moved important crowds at certain season to places of high energies.	131
The shore	131
The sea shore is often perceived as a limit to mobility but it opens to vast horizons, as a call for trade and travel.	131
The shore and the continent	132
1) Sea shore cultures turn to the sea, trade, exchanges, negotiation; 2) Continental centralised cultures turn to the land.	132
What is mobility?	134
Mobility seems to be the fluidity that brings me to the resources or the resources to me, in order to have my needs satisfied, whether these needs are material or immaterial.	134
The game of mobility and sedentariness	136
A hypothesis for an interpretation of history	136
More than the evolution from mobile hunter-gatherers to complex sedentary states, it is rather an alternation between trends of mobility or sedentariness that leads history.	136
Different forms of mobility	137
Mobility can take many forms: nomadism, discovery, trade, conquest, exploitation, travel; or social change, revolution, war, migration, mental mobility.	137
Alternation of stability and mobility	139
All empires, as powerful they have been, have collapsed and left behind them an empty space that has soon been occupied by newcomers (mobile people).	139
Cohabitation of mobility and sedentariness	140
Traditionally mobile and sedentary societies have cohabited, or alternate, on the same land; often the sedentary body has tried to stabilise the other because nomadism escapes control.	140
The key factor: our relationship to the land	141
Mobility is narrowly linked with the notion of land. Does the land where we live or the land we “discover” become a place we belong to or a place we conquer and try to possess?	141

The great contradictions of colonisation	144
“Discovery”	144
“Newfoundland” was the apparition of the unknown, to be conquered, settled, exploited, as if it were Europe’s back garden.	144
Terra nullius	145
When Northern invaders conquered “new lands” they denied indigenous people any right to be recognised or defend their lands.	145
Military occupation or/and trade	145
Continental societies have occupied “new” lands; sea shore societies rather practised trade, even on the lands they did not occupy.	145
Charles 5th Habsburg: the continent against the shore	146
In the 16 th Cent., Spain was at war with Muslims, Jews and Christians to preserve feudal power against arising capitalism.	146
Sovereignty	147
The British invaders imposed their law on a territory that was declared under the authority of the British Crown. The settler law was meant to replace the traditional indigenous law.	147
The British Museum: where is culture?	149
In the name of civilisation the invaders looted cultural goods they stored in national museums: culture had travelled north, not south.	149
Missionaries	150
The participation of missionaries to colonisation is shocking; it helped establish domination in the name of “righteousness”.	150
And the railways?	151
The question is often asked in an attempt to show that colonisation also brought positive lasting contributions to Southern countries.	151
1) The great contradiction: war is peace	152
Under the cover of “terra nullius” the invaders hoped to implement their entrepreneurial project in peace; if indigenous people submit.	152
2) The great inversion: resistance is guilt	153
Because they prevent the colonists from implementing their projects, indigenous people are made guilty of resisting, of fighting.	153

3) The great provocation: the so-called light is the great Satan	154	2) Linear time	170
The great contradiction destroys the lives of all: colonised people are deprived of their identity; colonists humiliated as perpetrators.	154	There is only one path of materialist development. It is linear in time; you are either behind or in front. Other cultures are generally behind us.	170
<i>CHAPTER 7: NORTH - SOUTH CLASHING MODELS</i>	<i>157</i>	Many other twists of perception	171
26 forms of de-structuration of local cultures	158	There are many more factors that falsify the way we look at Southern cultures: aspect, customs, history, writing, technology.	171
De-structuration of local cultures	158	Monopoly of humanity / humanism	172
De-structuration, acculturation, extraction, externalisation, monetisation, segregation, oppression, monopoly, fashions, elites... Colonisation takes many shapes.	158	Northern nations have taken control of what it means to be human by defining an ethical order that fits European culture.	172
Clashing models	164	The pretence to universality	173
Nations and corporation against culture	164	Universality of human values	173
The colonists introduce in the South the specific forms of state and corporation, with their own logic, which are unknown in the South.	164	Northern nations have established a program of civilisation based on human values they pretended to be universal. But they are not!	173
1) The nation-state as main vector	164	Counter-example 1: Growth and supremacy	175
Northern nation-states were the first protagonists and supports for colonisation in a form that was unknown in the Southern countries.	164	The obsession with growth generates inequality and supremacy that are then justified by a discriminatory and racist discourse.	175
Top-down or bottom-up	166	Counter-example 2: Conformism and marginality	176
The form of the nation-state allows to better impose the authority of the King because the form of expression is monolithic, through its institutions (Governor, army).	166	The clear definition of Northern values (humanism) fosters conformism and therefore also marginality by a process of hierarchy and exclusion.	176
2) Corporations and traders as exploiters	167	Counter-example 3: Institutions aid or social solidarity	176
Colonists were motivated by the will to exploit natural resources and local workforce, not for subsistence, but for private profit.	167	Northern institutions are in charge of “social cases” whose identity is defined by their “fault”; instead of social solidarity as a network.	176
A conflict of interpretation	168	Counter-example 4: Decision by numbers or consensus	177
Northern cultures judge Southern cultures according to two main criteria: 1) material growth and 2) linear progress in time.	168	Northerners practise a form of democracy based on numbers (majority). Elders discuss issues and ethics and come to consensus.	177
1) Material growth	168	Counter-example 5: Non-violence	178
Our Northern yardstick principally measures development according to material components; growth is thought as necessary.	168	Colonisation has been based on violence. The best form of resistance was generally to practise non-violence and civil disobedience, as Gandhi did in India.	178
		Counter-example 6: Retributive or restorative justice	178
		Northern justice is repressive (retributive) while other forms of justice are restorative, restoring trust and freedom for the culprit.	178

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Counter-example 7: Truth and Reconciliation	178	The racial theory	188
Northern nations solve conflict through domination and repression.		The social construct developed even into racial theories that were some	
Truth and Reconciliation offers true solutions that bring peace.	178	kinds of composite constructions that justified supremacy.	188
Counter-example 8: Nationalism or international solidarity	179	Orientalism	189
Resistance to supremacy goes beyond borders through international		Northerners (Europeans) have created a romantic and exotic image of	
solidarity: workers, feminism, decolonisation, racism, multiculturalism.	179	Oriental people: a “science” called Orientalism and fitting their idea of	
		supremacy.	189
Beyond the “limes”	180	The myth of white supremacy	190
No man’s land	180	White supremacy is also based on know-how and power, and has	
The world of the other is often perceived as a desert, an empty land; we		nothing real in itself; except its will for domination and hindrance of	
cannot imagine how we would survive in such harsh conditions.	180	lower castes to reach empowerment and wealth.	190
The “limes”	181	The end of slavery as a conversion of mode of production	192
In Roman times the “limes” was the border of the empire. What was		Rather than to end exploitation for ethical reasons, slavery was	
beyond was unknown and considered as the threat or enemy.	181	abolished to allow more stable forms of cheap production (indentured	
Us and Them – beyond the “limes”	181	work for small wages).	192
Each social group tends to think in terms of “Us and Them”, defining			
its superiority according to a monolithic identity.	181		
CHAPTER 8: THE SELF-HARM OF COLONISATION	184	The boomerang effect	194
The constructs of slavery and racism	184	The boomerang effect	195
The reign of fear	184	Colonisation is not only a process of external exploitation of Southern	
When newcomers discovered Africa, a continent inhabited by black		countries. It impacts also powerfully the spirit and culture of Northern	
people, they were first frightened; and so were also the inhabitants by		countries, in a detrimental way.	195
the newcomers.	184	The impact on home culture	198
Racism as a construct	185	As we all are whole human beings, who cannot ignore one part of our	
Races exist as genetic poles of formation of physical differences; but		own being, similarly the profits in term of wealth cannot be separated	
the interpretation of what they mean in terms of identity and		from the feelings how they have been acquired.	198
comparison is a social construct.	185	The loss of self-esteem	199
The scientific construct	187	Once the dominant discourse has lost its power, simple humanity	
Natural sciences are artificially used as “rational support” to the social		remains; through the lie the White has lost his identity and self-esteem.	199
construct, establishing racial biological differences to be observable and		The unknown knowledge	202
measurable, they say.	187	If Whites recognise their loss of identity and self-esteem and if Blacks	
		are given true opportunities to live fully, a new future opens.	202
		The great inversion revisited: mere being is guilt	203
		The White wishes that the Black would disappear; because his presence	
		makes him feel guilty; the Black stands between him and his life.	203

List of options (titles and short wordings)

Racism as a habit and contempt	204	An international open debate about truth	221
The tragedy is that we are accustomed to racism: it seems normal that a White oppresses a Black; more normal than the contrary, although this exists too.	204	The international community must be the guarantor of the truth. This process consists principally in a common search for justice and peace as a ruling principle.	221
The psychotherapy of white supremacy	205	Re-writing history	223
The solution for racism is not to be found in better conditions for the victim (filling the gap), but in a psychotherapy of the oppressor.	205	White myths for an old continent	223
A new awareness	206	The conqueror has re-written the history of Australia in celebrating his own people (the invaders) “forgetting” to mention the Indigenous people who lived here for 60000 years.	223
The awakening of conscience	207	Courage and determination in resistance	225
From the end of slavery to Nazism to decolonisation to Apartheid (South-Africa), the colour line has fostered a deep awakening.	207	We know the names of the white conquerors but none of the indigenous resistance fighters. White twist of history, as it is sadly still taught today despite a rising awareness.	225
CHAPTER 9: THE TOOLS	210	Many versions of history	226
The use of weapons	210	History has many faces because it is lived differently by the diverse actors or witnesses. Let’s tell it as it has been experienced, in its many versions.	226
The fleet in being	210	Truth-telling in 4 stages	229
The power of the fleet relies more on its potential ubiquity than on its factual domination, more on the way its presence or absence is managed than on the losses it inflicts.	210	These would be: 1) story-telling, 2) identifying / understanding processes, 3) identifying perpetrators, applying retribution or forgiveness, 4) inventing a better future.	229
Weapons for power	211	Forgiveness	231
The most important weapon producers and exporters are the five permanent members of the Security Council. Weapons are by nature offensive tools of power.	211	The victim may forgive her perpetrator or not. It can be done unilaterally, without the perpetrator being sorry or asking for forgiveness. But reconciliation needs contrition.	231
The contradictions of weapons	214	Cartography	234
Weapons generate conflict and destroy what has value. They are ill-adapted to what they are meant to do. Most powerful armies are held in check by a few freedom fighters.	214	Geography	234
The alternative to armament	217	Geography, this is used for waging war. Cartography is the technic that allows to plan domination over other nations and exploitation of resources.	234
We live in a dangerous world because there are always mad leaders or ideologies that lead whole populations to go to war... and to regret it later. How to resist?	217		

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Projection of our greed	235	The bancor for balanced exchanges	246
When the Earth is perceived as a heap of resources, maps become the tool for accessing these resources, which means also how to go there where they are.	235	A self-regulating system, proposed by Keynes, to maintain the best possible equilibrium in international exchanges intended to avoid wealth to accumulate on one side.	246
Mercator and Peters	235	Statistics	248
The Mercator projection of the sphere onto the plan deforms the proportions between South and North countries; the Northern countries look much bigger than they are.	235	Statistics as ideology	248
Other scales, other proportions	238	Statistics seem to be an objective science of collecting data but they are loaded by a way of looking at the world (an ideology) that defines how they will be used	248
Cartography can also represent countries, not as surfaces of land, but as surfaces proportional to other data, such as population, or wealth.	238	Deficit data	249
Ecological footprint	239	Deficit data are the data that try to demonstrate that the colonised is the problem; they refuse to recognise that the white settler society is indeed the real cause.	249
Our footprint on the Earth	239	CHAPTER 10: BY LAW OR BY DECREE	251
The footprint represents the surface of the Earth each of us is using for providing the necessary resources for their consumption.	239	An “ethical” conquest	251
The footprint understood as mode of colonisation	240	Conquest under “ethical” conditions	251
As an expression of the level of consumption and the surface of Earth needed for it, the footprint can be understood as a form of colonisation of the resources of the Earth.	240	The international law used to define under which conditions a newfound land could be taken possession of. The practice remained yet in deep contradictions with the rules..	251
Debt and exchanges	240	Settlers vs the Crown	252
Debt as artificial creation	241	Instructions from the mother country always stipulated that Indigenous people should give their consent. Yet the mere nature of the project of settlement made this impossible.	252
The poor countries have an enormous financial debt to the rich countries. But it is an artificial consequence of (creation by) the dominance of colonisers and market forces.	241	3 antagonistic ways of thinking	253
Inversion: the real debt	243	Indigenous people, the local Governor and the settlers have three very different sets of laws they refer to, which are conflicting: the land, the Crown, the conquest.	253
The countries which are truly indebted are in fact the Northern countries which extracted their wealth from Southern nations without repaying it at its just value, or even not at all.	243	The law of the sword	254
The 9 dimensions of the hidden debt	245	The mighty has always tried to justify or consolidate his power with the help of the law that tried to demonstrate his domination was legal. Law is power.	254
The debt of rich countries to ex-colonised nations consists in the many diverse dimensions of the relationships we establish with the land, the resources, the inhabitants, etc.	245		

List of options (titles and short wordings)

The idea of nation-state	256	Two councils for being rooted in truth	274
Taking possession of these faraway lands would mean to integrate them into the vast Empire and to force their traditional structure into the pattern of a nation.	256	The institution is not sufficient to maintain the right spirit. Democracy is a dynamic that is fed by the maturity and awareness of its citizens.	274
By decree or by law	258	The Uluru Statement from the Heart	275
In the mother country decisions are taken by law; in the colonies by decree. Many aspects of democracy in ex-colonies are still impregnated by this dissonance.	258	Australian Indigenous People have designed a generous path how to come together and rebuild our nation in cooperation: a Voice to Parliament, truth-telling, Treaty.	275
A democratic system	261	Rejection of reconciliation	276
Bipolarity of the Westminster model	261	This inspiring call for inclusiveness was rejected by the Australian people. The teaching of this result reveals a country still deeply marked by the ideology of colonisation.	276
Colonisation imposed on the colonies a parliamentary system that triggers black and white polarisation. It prevents true dialogue and reaching of consensus.	261	CHAPTER 11: THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE	280
The winner takes all	262	Decolonisation as rebirth	280
The electoral system in Australia is falsified by the fact only one candidate by electorate can be elected, collecting 50% of the vote using preferences = votes given to other candidates.	262	The Bandung Conference (1955)	280
The three independent powers	266	The Bandung Conference attempted colonial countries to unite and design a new strategy of empowerment that would remain non-aligned, i.e. independent of the USA and USSR.	280
As the Government is composed by members of Parliament, there is not sharp separation between executive and legislative powers. These are the same people (for almost one half).	266	Decolonisation as rebirth	281
A counter-example of grassroot democracy	267	Decolonisation is mainly a deep transformation (liberation) in ways of feeling-thinking-living which restore the potentials of original cultures to design new ways of life.	281
Although I do not believe the Swiss model is perfect, I think it will be helpful to describe it here as counter-example and feed in this way our reflection about democracy.	267	Indigenous vocation	283
An alternative model to the Empire	270	Indigenous cultures are the guardians of a tradition that understands the universe as a whole led by an Intelligence whose general laws we have to adapt to.	283
Democracy is nowadays in a sharp crisis triggered by polarisation, individualism and loss of the sense of truth. We need urgently to develop new forms of together-living.	270	Decolonisation in the mother country	285
Another practice of democracy	271	The decolonisation process returns to the mother country (boomerang effect) and challenges the institutions or domination processes that have fostered colonisation.	285
As an independent nation we are able to design our democratic system as we feel adequate. To create something new we need to be free from past patterns.	271		

Circular and linear

Alternative forms of power	287
Decolonisation invented new creative paths of development and together-living that could open new perspectives of equality but were sadly repressed by Northern powers.	287
Neo-colonialism as repression	291
The attempts of rebellion	291
Structural injustice generates escalating rebellion. This can take many forms, from coalition of developing nations on world level to local guerrilla or nonviolent resistance.	291
The attempts of reactive repression	292
The colonial powers never accepted that power and wealth could be redistributed; although this could have provided general conditions for all to thrive. They opted for repression.	292
The Shock doctrine	293
Neoliberalism became the main tool of repression to impose a new economic order based on free-market ideology. It dismantled/privatised social services. The price became king.	293
Structure, hierarchy and domination	295
Life generates diversity and complementarity of the parts that relate to one another according to a given hierarchy; which soon translates into relationships of domination.	295
Neo-colonialism and hegemony	297
Decolonisation did not bring about liberation for all but rather a transfer of power from the public sphere to the private one, with an attempt to conserve the previous areas of influence.	297
The power of choice	298
As workers-citizens-consumers we are the main actors because the choices we make in our lives are the tiny forces in great number that define what happens.	298
Competition for private hunting grounds	299
As inheritance from the colonial time the main powers have kept their own zone of influence where they feel entitled to intervene when “necessary”.	299

CHAPTER 12: THE SECOND INVASION **301**

“Development” aid as imposed pattern	301
“Development” aid as preconceived idea	301
The concept of development aid says it all: it is about helping poor countries to follow the Northern pattern of development. This concept can yet have other more subtle translations.	301
An Indian example	302
Although thoroughly planned as an economic process of development, this building strategy based on production of simple elements does not provide the expected results.	302
An Egyptian example	303
A research for traditional techniques using natural materials allows the architect Hassan Fathy to create a harmonious setting in tune with climate, culture and economy.	303
10 principles against failure	305
Aid is very insidious and propagates the same diseases it wants to cure. The qualities that are most missing are reciprocity and a sense of complementarity between different cultures.	305
Tourism as supremacy	306
Mobility as the flattening of distances and differences	306
Easy accessibility (speed) destroys differences. Tourism transports its own comfort bubble and destroys the host country. It exploits its inhabitants as slaves.	306
Consuming the left-over	308
The traditional tools or features of the host country are re-interpreted as decorations, devoid of content, to artificially create an exotic setting that can be sold to the tourist.	308
Living like an Inuit	311
True visit to one another is possible as a form of friendship. This is then no tourism but only a form of visiting each other and participating in one another’s life.	311

The example of the Kogi People	313	1) Dehumanisation through the institution (armed forces)	333
The Kogi People teach us how to relate to the universe that is a whole where every part is related to and in interaction with one another. Life is nothing but adaptation to these cycles.	313	The invading forces use a form of dehumanisation of the act of war which is very different from the dehumanisation practised by the resistance fighters.	333
CHAPTER 13: THE “DUTY” OF INTERVENTION	318	2) Dehumanisation through the image (fighters)	335
The dehumanisation process	318	As the struggle of the freedom fighters involves them in a more direct and personal way, they “need” a very stereotypical (monolithic) image of the enemy to combat him.	335
Palestine-Israel	318	The core: conflict or enemies	336
A story of dispossession and partition of an existing land into two entities that are both entitled to this land but have conflicting narratives that tell true yet incompatible stories.	318	Two mentalities opposed in a colonial pattern	336
An exacerbated conflict	321	When a Northern power intervenes in, or invades, a Southern country, the same patterns as in colonisation characterise this intervention and the situation that ensues out of it.	336
The two protagonists are inflexible to defend their own rights, without any tolerance for the rights of the other party, although the attitudes are very different from one another.	321	Two opposed camps at war	339
Anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism or ethnic therapy	323	On each side of the mentality gap, two camps engage in war without envisaging other options or other ways of relating with one another.	339
When Israel is criticised for war crimes, they call for anti-Semitism; it is rather about anti-Zionism or simply anti-crime. A deep therapy is needed in Israel concerning the Holocaust.	323	Enmity vs conflict	341
The chains of injustice	326	The challenge is not how to beat the enemy but how to solve the conflict that opposes people of diverging groups of interests. Enemies exist in our minds; only the conflict is real.	341
The narratives that justify oppression, slavery or colonisation are based on faulty links that transform a chain of deductions into a chain of genocide, exploitation or denial.	326	A need for an alternative to war	344
No more a clear front	328	Weaponry, armies and armed resistance to invasion are based on an illusory logic that cannot bring positive fruits. It provides destruction and escalation of enmity.	344
In modern wars there is no longer a clear front that separates the two enemies. Modern weapons can strike anywhere and the enemy can be in the crowd.	328	The road of nonviolence	345
Two incompatible forms of fighting	330	Nonviolence is the only possible path to re-establish peace. This means renouncing armed conflicts. Resistance to the occupier consists in systematic opposition to its authority.	345
The armed forces form a rigid anonymous machine that uses too powerful weapons to adapt to guerrilla strategies. Soldiers are left to their own destiny facing invisible mobile fighters.	330	The Easter model	347
		The Christian belief in the life of Jesus Christ offers a strong example of how to fight evil. To renounce violence is the most powerful way of resistance that liberates creative life energies.	347

Circular and linear

Land and faith as calls for unity

The land and the sacred places of three main religions are the objects of the conflict about Palestine. But they are precisely the forces that may bring us back together.

349

A change of mind

To enter a process of peace-making, a deep conversion of mind is necessary: i.e. a change of orientation and of way of functioning. I see 5 main hurdles on our way.

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1) Our own rage

Our rage to be hurt is the main motor that leads us to commit more violence as blind revenge. But the cycle never ends. The only way to break it is to search for conciliation.

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2) Public expectation of strong revenge

Public pressure to retaliate and to demonstrate strength and power, in response to harm, constitutes a difficult pressure to resist. It pressures the leaders to do the wrong thing.

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3) The image of our own self and of our enemy

As long we do not see the enemy as another human being, similar to us, who certainly fights against us, but has also his reasons to do so, we are trapped in hate.

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4) Our egocentric perception of the conflict

We need to rise to a higher level of understanding, from our self-interested point of view to a global hetero-centric view that allows to understand the mechanisms at game.

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5) Our narrative

We are used to tell a story that justifies our cause and presents our action under a positive light. But we have to review this narrative in the light of the present.

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St Francis and the Sultan Malik Al-Kamil

At the siege of Damietta, during the 5th Crusade, St Francis crossed the frontline and went to see the Sultan of Egypt and talked with him about God and peace.

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CHAPTER 14: RESISTANCE AND LIBERATION

358

Did you say: war on terror?

358

Rage and hopelessness

Anger and despair are the two principal energies that foster hate and violence and the will for retaliation; they participate in the escalation of violent conflicts.

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Who is a terrorist?

Revenge motivated by resentment is the core energy that feeds violence: either into acts of terrorism by freedom fighters or into state terrorism by armies. Both are similar.

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The alliance of the extremes

There is a tacit alliance between the extremes on both sides. With the violence they practise they reinforce each other as enemies and make peace impossible.

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Conciliation as the only path

To avoid being caught in the infernal cycle of exacerbated violence and endless revenge, there is only one possible path: conciliation with the "enemy" and solution of the conflict.

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6 contradictions that hamper peace

The peace process is prevented by 6 (or more) contradictions that work against it: all of them concern illusory privileges the mighty has difficulty to renounce.

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The path of liberation as ideology

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Scapegoats and sacrifices

To resolve conflicts generated by the want for the same goods (mimetism) societies tend to invent scapegoats; which are made responsible for the conflict and then sacrificed.

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Resistance based on opposed values

To resist the invaders, colonised people need alternative values that contrast (oppose) the dominant discourse of white supremacy.

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List of options (titles and short wordings)

What is ideology?	374
Ideology is the guide (the manual) how to implement the right choices and how to translate them into reality. Ideology can both liberate and oppress.	374
The model of the free market	375
Our Western world tends to limit its objectives to being led by market and technology. Development happens in a mechanical way that does not involve anthropology.	375
The role of USSR as alternative	376
During the 20 th century the USSR has played a major role of alternative model for the colonised countries. Far from being ideal it yet represented the path of liberation.	376
Christianity as a path of liberation	378
In Latin America the Theology of Liberation has traced a path of emancipation that concerns the essence of life but also proposes social and political ways of empowerment.	378
Christianity against Islam or empire clashes	380
Since Islam rose, there has been a strong antagonism between European nations and the Sarasin or Ottoman Empires. Wrongly it has been interpreted as a clash of religions.	380
Specialisation according to gender	382
The specialisation of tasks following the gender line does not mean oppression but specialisation, or even empowerment; and also protection of certain feminine qualities of care.	382
Eastern women in the eyes of the West	384
Colonisation has impacted femininity, here and there, in a negative way. On both sides patriarchy has prevented democratic freedom from being expressed.	384
The Hijab	385
There is a deep misunderstanding concerning the hijab, symbol of the dissent between Christianity and Islam concerning the rights of women or other human rights.	385
The role of Islam as path of liberation	386
Islam has always been one of the main streams of thought, beliefs and values that have inspired resistance against Northern domination.	386

Indifference and the power of evil	389
The deeper motivation for liberation is to be found in the first type of religion (path of inner liberation) but its expression is too often and dominantly of the second type (power).	389
The true role of ideology as creation	390
The ideal power of ideology consists in a guide that reflects the maturity and consensus of the community and traces the way of the future by encompassing all dimensions.	390

CHAPTER 15: ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART **393**

