



TOLERANCE – FUNDAMENTAL VALUE OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: *Justice, freedom, equality and tolerance are values that axiological determine the well going of intercultural education and of any educational process, within a democratic society. The European Union's motto appeals to “unity through diversity”. This logo imposes an explicit awareness with regard to tolerance. Specifically, it implies knowledge of, acceptance and respect for cultural diversity and the infinite diversity of human beings. The philosophy of tolerance identifies and promotes the respect for human dignity, the principle of equality of people, regardless of race, religion, nationality, and its major aim is to replace power relationships with dialogue relationships. Thus, there appears a new perspective of the relationship I – the other, a relationship implying Identity versus Alterity. Based on beliefs, tolerance materializes into attitudes that permit others to behave, think and feel in a different manner. Events occurring throughout the contemporary world, together with the depreciation of human condition, make possible for tolerance to become the antidote for the humankind torn by antagonistic behaviors, tensions and excesses. Furthermore, tolerance could constitute the premise for the human condition's rehabilitation. Which is the tolerance threshold in a society where democracy is still fragile and vulnerable? To what extent does cultivation of freedoms and citizens' rights activate the paradox of tolerance, as it was stated by Herbert Marcuse? The present study aims at identifying the occurrence of tolerant attitudes, of openness toward dialogue in young people, as premise for a democratic society's consolidation, together with identifying educational contents and strategies able to contribute to the spread of tolerance.*

Keywords: *tolerance, intolerance, indifference, indulgence, totalitarianism*

1. WHAT IS TOLERANCE?

The term originates in the Latin *tolerantia*, *tolerare* and it stands for “constantly enduring something”. The original meaning of this term suggests some disapproval reasoning in front of improper or undesirable ideas and attitudes, which, for various causes, does not stand against them nor does it penalize them. This would also be the common significance of the term that sends us to the idea of bearing something (physical and moral perturbations) whereas indicating the decision of not contesting opinions and behaviors considered to be blamable. For example, tolerance of pain or noise. From here derives the pejorative meaning of tolerance, which consists of approving something we cannot avoid, due to

constraints. Still in the common use of the term, tolerance is associated with pluralism, as a right justification of a plurality of opposite stands, which transforms it in the premise of good cohabitation under the circumstances of an infinite human diversity. The word “tolerant” has been used both in the common language as well as in philosophy, as a virtue opposing fanaticism, sectarianism, authoritarianism, a “refrain from taking action against something that is disapproved or against something that is politically opposite or strange” (*Dicționar filosofic Oxford*, 1999:404), or the “tendency of admitting other modalities of thinking or acting and feelings different from ours” (Didier, 1996:345).

In politics and ethics, the principle of tolerance gets a distinct shape, based on

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equality of freedom and dignity of own convictions, and it requires of people not to condemn an opinion if it opposes their beliefs.

In European context, tolerance became manifest in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, through its religious connotations, in an environment of religious oppressions towards protestants, after the cancellation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). Meanwhile, absolute power ruling and the absence of distinct powers in a state, phenomena so specific to that time, led to claiming of political tolerance.

Although the first theoretical reflections on tolerance appeared in the European culture history with the representatives of the medieval humanism (Erasmus of Rotterdam, Thomas More, Jean Bodin etc.), the most significant works that constitute the foundation for modern doctrines are "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus" (1670), by Baruch Spinoza, "Letter concerning Toleration" (1689), by John Locke and "A Treaty on Tolerance" (1763), by Voltaire.

The political philosophy of the English thinker, John Locke (1632-1704) spins around the question: How can people live together peacefully? Animated by this interrogation, Locke achieved an initial definition for the law of tolerance: "all churches were obliged to lay down toleration as the foundation of their own liberty, and teach that liberty of conscience is every man's natural right" (Locke, 1994:214-215). The English philosopher formulates, in his paper, the most famous argumentation of the religious tolerance: should religious belief imply a conscious consent, then it cannot be externally constrained. The function of a state consists of maintaining public order and security and the only intolerance accepted is related to anything that might prevent the accomplishment of this objective. By promoting tolerance of various religious beliefs, John Locke transformed it into an antidote to the practice of persecution, specific to his time.

Voltaire was attributed the statement that is considered a motto of tolerance: "Je n'aime pas vos idées, mais je me batterai jusqu'à la mort pour que vous puissiez les exprimer". He

wondered "What is tolerance? it is the consequence of humanity. We are all formed of frailty and error; let us pardon reciprocally each other's folly; that is the first law of nature". (Sponville, 1998:184). Consequently, tolerance of self and of others is part of the behavioral repertoire of the human species, as a premise of its living together and surviving.

The Liberal Revolution of the nineteenth century has determined an extension of the significance of tolerance. While for a long time the issue of tolerance used to be of religious nature only, nowadays it tends to invade almost all aspects of social life. The term begins to be used in reference to political, ideological, cultural or social differences. Sectarianism, which, initially, was only religious, has been omnipresent and multiform under the dominance of politics, much more than it used to be under religion, which makes political tolerance gain priority. It condemns the use of violence and political offenses (imprisonment for political beliefs). In accordance with the political credo, the practical political life shows us that tolerance manifests various justifications. For example, based on liberal thinking, tolerance is perceived as a moral ideal. The work of the English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty" was considered the most eloquent pleading for tolerance of the nineteenth century. Advocate of liberalism, the author claims that the intervention of the state, which holds legitimacy in defending individual rights, needs to subordinate to the individual's liberties, at all times: "To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him must be calculated to produce evil to someone else. The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign" (Mill, 2001:101). Thus, tolerance turns into an essential condition for social progress, for moral and spiritual development of an individual. Moreover, tolerance becomes the source of maximizing happiness and wellbeing for a great number of people, which

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utilitarianism claims as its own goal, and the author himself belongs to this movement. The historical events of the twentieth century, together with the new geopolitical configuration, globalization, the profound unprecedented mutations, affecting the human condition, bring about new aspects of tolerance. Tolerance covers more and more extended areas: sexual practices, gender equality, political opposition, religious beliefs and last but not least, interculturalism. This is how more and more species (types) of tolerance appear, and they do nothing else but to prove the vulnerability of the term. Within the contemporary world, axiological decentered, we witness an expansion of the idea of tolerance, under the pressure of all sorts of controversies: from economic to political, social, moral or religious ones.

2. TOLERANCE NOWADAYS

At first sight, the issues of tolerance simplified. In democratic states, rights and liberties, judicially recognized and guaranteed, replace tolerance. In the last decades of the twentieth century, undeniable principles of the civilized world became distinct: respect for alterity, right to be different, tolerance of others' opinions etc. Nevertheless, the interest for this topic is nothing else but the symptoms of the crisis humanity lives, symptoms of the intensification of tensions and imperfections of the world that humans have created and in which they must learn again to live together.

The excessive formalization of inter-human relationships, due to the manifestation of the axiological vacuum, and the atrophying of reason lead to a conversion of tolerance into amiability and a distortion of its true meaning

“reciprocal tolerance ends up in a universal, smiling and peaceful silence, the kind of silence for which dialogue is nothing but an undesired jamming (...), it amputates the appetite of knowledge, of real understanding of alterity and it destroys the necessity of debate”. (Ple□u, 2005:4).

This distortion of tolerance and the pseudo-tolerance it generates reveals the

modified condition of our inner, psychic world, “a kind of logical and axiological anesthesia, a symptom of a merry interior paralysis” (Ple□u, 2005:5).

The German philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), representative of the Frankfurt School, has tried to discover the reasons for “oppressing” the modern man and found out that the conflicting subjective dynamics is intensified and reiterated by social oppression. The risk that threatens the developed capitalist society consists of replacing tolerance with tolerance of oppression, which gives way to a generalized indifference, meant to reject any opposing attitude and allows for the mechanism of privilege and discrimination: “What is proclaimed and practiced as tolerance today, is in many of its most effective manifestations serving the cause of oppression” (Marcuse, 1977:286).

In his study “One Dimensional Man” (1964), Marcuse analyzes the industrial civilization, which he considers to be a form of well-disguised totalitarianism. Even though, apparently, everything is possible, and everybody has maximum of freedom, in this type of society there functions a refined system of persuasion and manipulation that continuously nurtures the societal needs and people's illusions. On the other side, constitutions of all modern democratic states guarantee various types of individual and group freedoms (freedom of opinion, religious freedom etc.). Tolerance is included in the United Nations Organization's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, from 1948. Under the circumstances in which pluralism represents one of the characteristics of modern society, it is necessary that a promotion of permanent dialogue exist between the bearers of various spiritual, moral and religious beliefs, as well as an accomplishment of community and communion in diversity. This constraint determined the contemporary thinkers (Marcel, Buber, Levinas) to promote a philosophy of dialogue to bring about the necessity for the practice of tolerance to be present within a culture capable of accepting and fully recognize difference and equally to respect and value it.

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On the background of the same blockage of dialogue, the year of 1995 was declared the United Nation's Year for Tolerance, Peace and Good Cohabitation between Peoples and States. This decision of great responsibility was made under the pressure of numerous conflicts, tensions and divergences between different human groups, a pressure that spread over the world just like a giant and devastating historical fire: "In the eve of the third millennium, tens and hundreds of human beings die or get mutilated in absurd and inhumane confrontations. This is an authentic proliferation of barbarianism" (*Curier UNICEF*, 1994). In this context, learning to live together has turned into the very condition for humanity's survival, in this new planetary Babel Tower. The axiological education, intercultural education, fostering of tolerance are the means of this lesson on survivability through learning how to live together: "We are condemned to tolerance" (Pleřu, 2005:15).

Alternatively, maybe we should give a thought to Emile Boutroux's words, in order to overcome weaknesses: "I do not like the word 'tolerance'; let us rather call it respect, mutual understanding, love. Until the day of grace when tolerance will become love, we cannot say that tolerance, the prosaic tolerance is all we can do. Tolerance – as little attractive as the word may sound, remains an acceptable solution while waiting for something better. People should be happy that they started to bear one another, until they are able to love one another, or simply, to get to know one another! Tolerance is just a provisory stage" (Sponville, 1998:190).

In a desecrated World, tolerance becomes the profane expression of ascetic virtues, through which the man imitates God's sovereign 'kindness', His patience, understanding and love, thus trying to save himself. While talmudically rereading the bible, Emmanuel Levinas states that human side of man, authentically manifested as care for the close ones, can prevent or generate violence. Everything depends on the real proximity consciousness of "Absolute Alterity" (God) and the manner in which this is reflected by every man's fragile face.

3. BETWEEN INTOLERANCE AND INDIFFERENCE

Opposing tolerance, intolerance can result in the extreme facet of fanaticism. The fanatic is the one who blindly believe in something or someone and manifests his or her absolute devotion through his or her behavior. Such traits make the individual unable to foresee or tolerate any other opinions but his own. His blindness, toward others' opinions, becomes dangerous whenever he tries to impose 'his' truth on others. Intolerance now shapes as "a deliberate attempt at eliminating any disapproved conduct, by means of coercive methods, usually in a very energetic manner, close to brutality (persecution)" (Miller, 2006:747).

From a philosophical perspective, intolerance is a reaction attitude toward everything that is different or opposite to one's own beliefs and way of self-being, both at individual or group's level. Most of the massacres in history were nourished by intolerance. This is how the phrase "There is one thing that cannot be tolerated and that is intolerance" was coined. Imposing one's point of view and making it legitimate by means of force is the mechanism that constitutes the foundation for the manifestation of totalitarianism. Any type of intolerance aspires to become totalitarianism, characterizing itself through a settlement of the tyranny of one single truth, considered as absolute truth. Concerning the amenity that ideology and totalitarian movements practiced against democracy, Karl Popper stated the paradox of tolerance: "Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them" (Popper, 1993:230).

The danger of tolerating intolerance is thus highlighted as well as the fact that the type of tolerance that ignores anything is destined to becoming obsolete. Therefore, the issue of a 'tolerance area' appears, next to the objective limits of tolerance and the identification of the

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intolerable. The difficulty of this endeavor consists of the fact that tolerance is not a value in itself, yet it is intimately connected with the social context, whose coordinates represent its experimentation or testing. Humanity is conflicting, passionate and torn in its nature, and that is why tolerance is needed. A society, in which universal tolerance would be possible, would be much more humane. In a humane society, there will always be something intolerable, even for the most tolerable human being on earth.

Recent history of humankind displays an eloquent case of tolerance: the city of tolerance, namely Sarajevo. Its abandonment to its own fate of a besieged, famine, blood-washed city (in December 1993) meant cowardice and lack of tolerance from Europe. Passivity in front of horror and the very acceptance of evil has transformed people in accomplices to this event. Accordingly, we are confronted with indifference at the opposite pole of tolerance, which is the most dangerous form that the western culture of individualist type may manifest.

Another term, which in common acceptance is confused for tolerance, is indulgence. Indulgence is regarded, through daily experience, as an excess of tolerance manifested toward less essential aspects. By correlating these three terms, we can conclude that tolerance represents an mean value between intolerance, the refuse to tolerate what should be tolerated and indulgence, that is tolerance of what should not be tolerated, yet not considered indifference, which stands for a denial to consider what deserves being considered (Miller, 2006:748).

4. THE ISSUE OF TOLERANCE

The issue of tolerance it has generated long debates within the American territory, which, in its nature and configuration, as a mixture of ethnicities, religions, cultures etc. – is predisposed to and vulnerable in front of such social behaviors. Influenced by these social realities, Emory S. Bogardus wrote “Social Distance Scale” (1993) to measure the degree of understanding and affection manifested in

relationships between people, thus highlighting the attitude of acceptance or isolation of different ethnic groups by the population that held majority.

In Romania, the first psycho-sociologic study based on the social distance scale, adjusted to the Romanian environment, was accomplished in 1993, by the sociologist Septimiu Chelcea. Applied to a representative sample, the survey supplied relevant data about the social contact index and the quality of social contacts index. The survey revealed that Romanians manifest powerfully positive attitudes toward the ethnic minorities.

The changes to which the military institution was subjected, next to the experience of volunteering-based army and of international operation theaters extended the study of tolerance to the military organization as well. Of great interest is the identification of tolerant/intolerant behaviors from the military environment, the limits of tolerance and the presence of this attitude with the military personnel, an attitude reflected by tolerance toward the human being’s diversity.

The problem under investigation aims at analyzing the contents of military regulations, which, by their stipulations contribute to the instauration of a tolerant setting or fails to do so. The content analysis of the Regulation for Military Discipline has led to the following conclusions:

- norms and rules stipulated by this military directive are norms of social cohabitation, fact that implies the cultivation and promotion of civic spirit and behavior (Art. 3, clause c);

- internalization of these norms carrying values (dignity, honor, comradery etc.) is pursued, together with forming of convictions so as to guarantee discipline and authentic military conduct;

- rules involving military order and discipline converge to the necessity of consolidating the military groups’ cohesion and functionality, which implicitly appeal to cultivation of tolerance toward human diversity and capitalization of such diversity;

- the commanding officer is the person who, by personal positive example (Art.4, clause f; Art. 19, clause h; Art. 22, clause f)

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provides a behavioral model, both related to professional relations and societal ones. A tolerant commanding officer will have tolerant subordinates and the other way round: intolerance will always generate intolerance. Correctitude and impartiality are indispensable qualities of a good leader;

- art. 5, clause c explicitly mentions among the factors that diminish military discipline “tolerance of behaviors and denigrating or discriminatory actions from the military personnel”;

- the most elaborate and explicit support of tolerance is found in art. 19, clause e that stipulates the commanding officer’s obligations regarding the military discipline: “to respect the rights and fundamental freedoms of his subordinates, as well as their personality and dignity;

- relevant for the issue under debate is art. 42, clause i: “volunteer participation at some religious communities’ gatherings or organizations through which the soldier’s, state’s or nation’s dignity is affected and emission of discriminatory opinions in relation with groups of people or social entities” are deeds that compromise military honor and dignity. Manifestation of such behaviors is followed by disciplinary reprimands.

In conclusion, although explicit statements are not numerous, all stipulations included in this military regulation promote tolerance directly or indirectly. The military organization is guided by rules involving mutual respect, cohesion, comradery,

harmonious cohabitation. All of these guarantee the well-functioning of military structures and the efficiency in accomplishing military missions. The International Human Rights extend these values, norms and behaviors toward the relationships with the enemy as well, which strengthens the idea that promotion of tolerance among the military personnel is an exigency of modern and postmodern armies.

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