

## Reviews

### Jean Ziegler, *La haine de l'Occident*

By Edmundo Murray



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I find the genre of denunciation rather hard to read. Many books and articles include lengthy and detailed narratives of varied horrors. War, abuse, torture, corruption, human rights violations and destruction of natural resources are some of the condemned calamities, often in connection with conspiracy theories. Frequently, interpretation is silenced by wordy descriptions, and the analysis of the information comes in short supply. Referencing is often shockingly poor and the sources are not clearly stated. Some authors - with a predominance of journalists among them - feel that publishing less than 500-page books would not be considered serious. To complete the inventory of the genre, irony in this type of books is a rare jewel.

Jean Ziegler's new book is a refreshing exception to the rule. The latest addition to his long series of titles, chiefly in the domain of social sciences, *La haine de l'Occident* (1) is a welcome contribution to help to understand reactions against the colonial and post-colonial policies of certain governments to acquire dependent territories or to extend their foreign influence through trade, diplomacy or other means (2).

At 75, the author is flourishing in intellectual production, articles, books, and various polemics. Born in the Swiss canton of Berne,

Ziegler is Emeritus of the University of Geneva, where he taught at the Sociology Department and was the director of the Sociology Laboratory of the Third World. He also taught at the University of Grenoble and the University of Paris IV (La Sorbonne). He studied at the universities of Berne, Geneva, Paris and Columbia University in New York, and has a PhD in law and in sociology. Since the early 1960s, the political career of Jean Ziegler in Switzerland included elected posts at municipal and federal levels, and he was a Member of the Parliament up to 1999. He was United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food in 2000-2008. Among other recognitions, Jean Ziegler was awarded Honoris Causa degrees by the University of Mons-Hainaut (Belgium) and the University of Paris VIII (Vincennes-St. Denis). He was appointed *Chevalier des arts et des lettres* by the French government, and received the Gold Medal from the President of Italy and the Amílcar Cabral National Order from Cape Verde.

A controversial figure in national politics and international relations, Jean Ziegler has gained as many friends as he has collected foes. Rocky declarations like 'Switzerland is a republic of merchants who are not able to argue with ideas' (3) are not received warmly by all. This attitude of almost constant hullabalooing for fifty years may be perceived by his rivals as a posture to

grab the media's attention. But it may also be seen as a sincere and well thought out reaction against the oppressive practices of powerful groups. In 1964, when he was training as a young lawyer and willing to follow social movements in the most needy places of the world, Ziegler met Ernesto "Che" Guevara during a six-day visit of the Latin American leader to Geneva. Guevara told him that it was the brain of the monster that he had to attack, thus Ziegler stayed in Geneva to develop a fruitful, and rather controversial, political and intellectual career (RSR.ch, 29 October 2007).

From the opening paragraphs of *La haine de l'Occident*, Irish links to the subject of the book are manifest. A gathering of diplomats is described at the residence of the Irish ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva. Paul Kavanagh, a seasoned representative with vast experience in international organisations, organised this meeting to prepare the text of a negotiated resolution to the Darfur conflict. This is an example of Ireland's contribution to supporting human rights through diplomatic means. Some see the lessons learned from the conflict in Northern Ireland as a credential to pass on experiences to other struggling societies.

In pages 67-78 a discussion is developed about Mary Robinson's role as High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997-2002). Former President of Ireland in 1990-1997, Mary Robinson was appointed to the UN post by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in order to change the top post in human rights from that of the traditional bureaucratic consensus-builder to a public advocate and setter of principles. Her tenure was full of brave acts and declarations against human rights abuse by powerful governments. However, her job ended in disaster when she led the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa. The conference was 'a total failure [and] from the first day, hate for the West burst out' (70) (4).

Some readers may find the words in the title problematic - 'hate' and 'West'. The latter is frequently used by the European media - though its use is being gradually abandoned -

and in diplomatic circles. Sometimes ambiguously, Ziegler uses 'West' in opposition to 'South', i.e., wealthy as opposed to poor countries. Apart from the geographic problems of such taxonomy - Australia, Brazil, Argentina and other countries of the 'South' could not accurately be described as poor nations - its use is heavily loaded with Cold War dynamics. However the author is clear about the weakness of the West-South opposition. He thoroughly analyses the situation in Nigeria and Bolivia, where he illustrates the outrageous social divide between the powerful economic elites and an appallingly destitute population. Further examples of conflicts in which 'hate' is described as not exactly between West and South may be found in *la Terreur* during the French Revolution, the current so-called *Campo vs. Ciudad* conflict in Argentina, and the bloodshed on the Gaza Strip. The West-South opposition may be perceived therefore as analogous to the conventional oversimplification of bad and good people, groups or governments, instead of recognising the inherent human quality of being bad AND good (though not at the same time or in the same circumstances).

The use of 'hate' represents a challenging rhetorical strategy. On the one hand, there is a grammatical ambiguity in the original title in French, which can be rendered in English as either *Hate for the West* or *Hate of the West*. The West - namely, the US and Europe - is both the object and subject of hatred by and for the poorer countries. It is the context provided by the book's chapters that clarify the ambiguity of the concept in the title, which clearly refers to the sentiment experienced by the developing countries towards the richest societies in the world. On the other hand, 'hate' may be seen as rather hyperbolic. Even if radical groups in many regions of the world (not to speak of terrorist governments and their followers) are inclined to use disproportionate force in their abhorrence of the most powerful nations, this attitude may not be extended to entire populations. That the whole 'South' hates the entire 'West' may be a gross generalisation, and indeed the author does not fall in the trap; Ziegler's analysis is rich in nuances. It

acknowledges the effects of slave trade, racism, colonialism, territorial and economic imperialism, xenophobia, immigrant and sexual discrimination, and at the same time considers the social spaces in which these behaviours operate.

In this way, there is no clear division between 'West' and 'South', but rather a description of opposing forces in various societies of the world. In the first part, for example, the fundamental reasons for hate towards the most powerful countries are discussed. A thorough chapter is dedicated to the meanderings of memory, (5) i.e., the peculiar way in which human collective memory works regarding terrible and damaging episodes of our life. The relationship between memory and hate is explored in different cases, including the Holocaust and its dreadful aftermath, and the consequences of French colonialism in Africa, among many others. The second part explores the slave trade and the damage it did to relations between the countries where the slaves were hunted and those where they were exploited. Furthermore, this part includes a study of India and China as societies with a severe split between governing elites and working classes. Part Three chronicles two of the most important human achievements, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Millennium Goals, and places them in counterpoint to the hypocrisy and arrogance of certain governments. The last two sections are dedicated to two interesting and frequently neglected case studies, Nigeria and Bolivia, their particular domestic contexts, their relationships with global economic powers, and their different opportunities to break the vicious circle of oppression and poverty.

Ziegler's examination of the process initiated by Evo Morales Ayma in Bolivia is worth mentioning. This is a country divided by almost five centuries of injustice and violence towards the vast majority of the indigenous population - without forgetting a subjugated Afro-Bolivian group - that has not yet found a satisfactory political solution to their demands and those of a powerful landowning bourgeoisie and the international companies extracting the

resources of Bolivian soil. The country has the lowest GDP per capita in South America, notwithstanding the fact that it is home to the second largest natural gas reserves in the region and huge mining industries. Morales wishes to transform the country and eliminate the legacies of colonialism and the colonial state. His party has the support of the majority of the population, but finds strong resistance from the dominant economic elite. There are also radical indigenous leaders like Felipe Quispe Huanca of the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) who consider Morales's policy of negotiating with foreign and domestic powers as conceding compromises to the West (252-255).

I was startled by two conceptual inconsistencies in this book. The first one relates to international finance and trade. The author seems to follow the mainstream ideology that guides the critique against universal trade and financial rules and organisations with a global reach like the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The IMF is 'the merciless guardian of the interests of large banks and Western multinational corporations' (286). The World Bank and the WTO are considered as puppets of the US and European governments and large businesses. Nevertheless, there is in Ziegler's work a certain recognition of the validity of global trade rules and their enforcement, like the intergovernmental efforts against the negative effects of agricultural subsidies and the establishment of a dispute settlement system (99). The second inconsistency relates to religion. For societies undergoing stressful situations of poverty, famine and violence, religion may be a motivation to find new solutions (233). But it can also be a force negatively influencing the social structure (200, 258, and 279 note 2). Decidedly unpopular government leaders like George W. Bush of the US and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria are ironically portrayed as 'born-again Christians'. It seems that for the author, religion is ancillary to class struggle, representing a hierarchy reliant on economic elites and a majority of the people following their faith in an individual and beneficial manner.

What is hate? Is it the opposite of love? How does it relate to memory and fear? These questions can be further elaborated upon based on the information and ideas presented in this book. A Freudian perspective of hatred depicts it as a virtual state of ego wishing to annihilate the source of unhappiness. It is an organisation of the psyche that structures the ego in a destructive way. Hatred is built on a lie, 'that hatred can connect us with others as love does [...]. Hatred is not the opposite of love because hatred is the simulacrum of love, love in the realm of malevolence' (Elliott 1999: 72). Hate can be seen as the effect of want for something that is not possessed. Paradoxically, Plato has written in *The Symposium* about love in the same way - whether it is desire for the loved object, or the fear of losing it. In a society, hatred is strongly connected with collective memory - or with the absence of it. As Charles Dickens masterfully expressed in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the 'leprosy of unreality' that infected the aristocracy up to the French Revolution created a bloodthirsty need for 'extermination' on the

part of the populace. Hate, fear and memory are different aspects of social behaviours that may encourage or pollute the internal and international relations of a society, especially when they are manipulated by governments able to do so. Ziegler's book makes a very good start in illustrating these relationships.

The excellent editing of *La haine de l'Occident*, including its colloquial yet logical style, the practical format, and the large typeset size, are only bonus elements that accompany a breathtaking addition to the prolific genre of denunciation (6). English-language publishers are encouraged to launch a translation of this book as a companion to their series on international relations and globalisation. Jean Ziegler is to be congratulated for his new book and, in particular, for his courageous discussion of matters that are highly sensitive in the world of international relations.

Edmundo Murray

### **Notes**

1 Hate for the West (all translations are mine).

2 Some may recognise in this definition the content of the entry 'Imperialism' in the Oxford Dictionary.

3 Lausanne cités (February 2007).

4 Durban fut un échec total. Dès le premier jour, la haine d'Occident éclata.

5 Les méandres de la mémoire.

6 I would only suggest that Spanish- and English-speaking reviewers of the French text could have contributed to improving the spelling of citations and proper names in those languages. But this is a minor detail that does not undermine the excellent editing values of this book.

### **References**

- Elliott, Anthony. Freud 2000 (New York: Routledge, 1999).

- Radio Suisse Romande, available online (<http://www.rsr.ch/>), En savoir plus sur Jean Ziegler (29 October 2007), accessed 28 January 2009.

### **Author's Reply**

I thank the reviewer for his lucid and very intelligent appraisal of my book.

Jean Ziegler