6ème séance
Volonté générale et pluralisme collectif
Mobilisation, consensus et rationalité

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Mobilization, Consensus, and Rationality
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The themes discussed in this Conference are of great importance and relevance because a significant part of cultural and social tensions which manifest our time is derived from the clash between, an increasingly global society on the one hand, and, local resistance which is created by such society, on the other.

In my part of the world, I must admit the tension is a historical one.

Some countries have intercultural policies to encourage socialization of citizens. These policies may be used to fight racism.

Interculturalism however, requires open minded culture to others, away from dogmatism. Once a person is exposed to others, a dialogue is initiated to understand the other's culture and respect differences. This interculturalism breeds dialogue to look for the commons and enhances fusion and merger of cultures. The differences which remain make up the subcultures of humanity.

One would say that culture of any nation will evolve as information flow heightens and interconnectivity of vast network of communication reduces distances and cultural barriers of the world's separate or isolated societies. However, deep rooted culture will resist change, particularly that of ideological or a value-system character. So we must not conclude that cultural differences could diminish easily by spontaneous convergence and who want the world to become a mono-cultured society.

Globality to us is the interconnectivity and interaction of diversity of cultures for a better understanding of the world societies.

Although, there are criticisms against globalization particularly in relation to mono cultural domination and loss of cultural diversity and identity of social groups. However, it imposes a threat to dogmatism, fundamentalism whether connected to religious, ethnic, nationalistic or ideological nature.
We must realize that as human beings, we live on the same planet and we are actors of the same history and share the quality of life.

Cultural pluralism is central to democracy which accommodates diverse cultural groups. This involves fighting against marginalization and includes the excluded. It means redistributing of resources and opportunities to victims of past and present injustices with affirmative action, and ethnic and race-conscious. Democracies should address disagreements stemming from divergent cultural values and should block discrimination.

Critical intercultural dialogue (James 1999) provided a basis for mutual understanding of group values and valid intercultural criticism. Such critical intercultural dialogues are based on three criteria:

1- Priority of understanding of other's values of criticism of them.
2- Achievement of fair conditions for discussion.
3- Fostering mutual openness and truth.

Cross Cultural Communication:

Cultural Communication was developed as an application of the cross-cultural paradigm, in response to the challenges of globalization which demanded cross-cultural awareness, for the global marketplace.

Cross-culturalism could be attributed to a convergence of multiculturalism and the pedagogy of multidisciplinarity across the curriculum in the academia. Here, we use the educational approach to problem-solving by addressing it from scientific and social concerns, with more than one discipline, or for that matter, more than one culture (Badran 1980).

Like multi-culturalism, cross-culturalism is viewed by some as advocating ideology in terms of value-system as those associated with trans-culturalism, trans-nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalism.
Nevertheless, cross-culturalism is neutral and it portrays other cultures for better understanding and peace building. Multiculturalism deals with cultural diversity within a social group, while cross-culturalism deals with exchange beyond boundaries.

A cross-cultural communication study is gaining ground in language, and cultural training for business abroad in expanding the marketplace. It's core to understand how people from different cultures better communicate. It includes anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, and communication.

Although attempts were made to keep the purity of cultural identity, but realities of social changes dictate the cultures not to remain "pure" but are destined to change.

Through reproduction and regeneration cultures are integrated. Children reflect upon nature in a globalized world particularly those living in the diaspora.

Nevertheless, obstacles to ethno-convergence can be overcome within a single generation; ethnocentrism is the obstacle to ethno-convergence. Religion is the prime ethno-centric divider, language belongs to this category. Second is tradition and custom, but learning a foreign language does not constitute forfeiting one's cultural heritage, it enriches and strengthens indigenous intangible heritage.

In order to be able to live TOGETHER, we need to know and respect each others starting with our neighbors, to make the distance between “us” and “the others” shorter, to get involved, through education, in promoting common values such as democratic citizenship, physical and social welfare, cooperation, tolerance, security, intercultural communication etc.
Mobilization

Understanding divergences and convergences, one must systematically organize a mobilization process. To strengthen the commons, manage resources, particularly human resources, by alleviating differences for achieving the objectivity of solidarity behind commonality.

This may involve:

1- Mass media for social and popular mobilization.
2- Education of early childhood and throughout schooling.
3- Civil groupings and NGOs and public meetings.
4- Local communities.
5- Info- networks.

How to avoid conflicts?

1- No Generalization

We must not stereotype. We must not ignore any group or nation in this global world. Every group regardless of race, colour, ethnicity or tradition, has certain qualities that are unique and valuable. The world is interconnected, but some people still resist learning to live with others as equals, and accommodate the other value-system. They view themselves as the centre, and have a shallow perception of others.

Biased perception based on acts of a limited number of people from a particular social group, or sometimes based on second-hand information from media. This may lead to an inaccurate understanding of a particular group. Stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and racism are all obstacles to creating a harmonious society.
2- Promoting Cosmopolitan Culture

A cosmopolitan culture is a culture tolerant to the expression of diversity, open to discussion, and positive intercultural dialogue.

This dialogue must be supported, locally, regionally and internationally.

On the local front, authorities concerned, at all levels are to consider that by allowing the free comparison among cultures and dissemination of experiences between different people and civilizations, cosmopolitan culture encourages the critical spirit of expression, values which are at the core of the democratic and liberal political culture.

3- Promoting Interlingua Communication

Linguistic differences may also cause misunderstandings between people from different cultures, especially as there is no exact correspondence between one language and another. The study of words, of their origins and shifting meanings, can tell us a great deal about human life and thoughts. If we compare English words with words in Arabic for example, we will be faced with untranslatability issue. We can not translate the English word pub, for example, into Arabic, the word pub does not mean a restaurant, café', bar, coffee shop etc.

An Arab person must visit a pub to know what a pub is. Can you find an exact English equivalent for sauna (Finnish) وضوء (Arabic), or, safari (Swahili)? These are words for notions that existed only in a specific culture and which were not shared between cultures. However, language universals suggest that beneath the surface all natural languages do share certain features, which make interlingua communication possible.
4- Promoting Intercultural Communication:

We are living in a turbulent world: there are disputes over territory and resources, conflicts over the terms of trade, and conflicts between nations or groups that began centuries ago. However, cultural conflict is the most widespread. Cultural conflict is a clash between two or more cultures or sub-cultures. The world today is characterized by an ever-growing number of contacts, which leads to communication between people from different cultural backgrounds.

Misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication often occur between two parties because of linguistic and cultural differences. During the process of communication we often turn consciously or unconsciously to ethnocentric behaviour, stereotyping and biases, which may result in cultural friction. As people of the 21st century, we no longer have a choice about whether or not to live in a multicultural world.

Everybody needs to know how to get along with people from different cultures and how to solve the problems that arise, and many people need to know how to survive in a culture that is not identical to their own.

Misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication often occur when we interact with people from different cultures. Therefore, it is essential for us to interact with other cultures.

5- Role of Higher Education Institutes:

Universities all over the world are now hosting international students.

It is the task of higher education to train both staff and students, so that cross-cultural awareness spreads across society. Universities can do a great deal to promote intercultural learning and dialogue. Some of the surveys reveal, however, that not all universities have put the issue of intercultural learning and dialogue on their agenda.
Observations tell us that this is a neglected area. Intercultural learning and dialogue do not really figure on the agenda of university leadership.

Many steps could be taken to remedy this. Firstly, training the leaders of universities or have them attend international conferences would be a good way to alert them to the issue under discussion.

Universities play a crucial role in establishing a flexible intercultural environment on campus, by organizing lectures on intercultural learning and dialogue, arranging short training courses for instructors and encouraging them to conduct research in this area, and recruiting more international students and students from different ethnic groups to study in mixed classes.

Mixed classes in the form of exchange programs, for example, provide a chance for undergraduates to understand each other, to explore each other's culture, to learn from each other.

Education should include not only knowledge of the mainstream culture, but also of the minorities' cultures. Furthermore, it should be stimulated to appreciate diversity and differences.

6- What Teachers Can Do:

Teachers can achieve a great deal by using a few minutes of class time to challenge the students to reflect on how to live and work in a multicultural society. Students should be encouraged to read literature from other cultures in order to open their minds, although this cannot replace direct experience. Through reading, they will acquire an indirect but nonetheless stimulating experience, which may give them some idea of the culture with which they will later have direct contact. It will also train them to observe more carefully and reflect on the problems they face.
In a multicultural university, teachers should be trained to respect the customs and religious belief of the others, be sensitive to their feelings, and try to promote positive interaction between students from minority ethnic groups and the mainstream students. It is the teacher's and the international office's responsibility to help students to learn the social conditions, the customs and convictions, and the history and geography of the unfamiliar culture. Those students who prepare themselves well before coming to a new place by taking time to learn about the new culture will adapt more quickly than those who do not have any information about it. Statistically, it has been proven that students who are offered scholarships abroad and undergo a pre-departure briefing on the culture of the country they are traveling to, score higher marks than those students who have no idea about that country. The latter are subject to a cultural shock.

Consensus

1- As Collective thought:

A close equivalent phrase might be the "collective disagreement" of a group, keeping in mind that a high degree of variation is still possible among individuals, and certainly if there must be individual commitment to follow up the decision with action, this variation remains important. There is considerable debate and research into both collective intelligence and consensus decision-making.

Consensus usually involves collaboration, rather than compromise. Instead of one opinion being adopted by a plurality, stakeholders are brought together (often with facilitation) until a convergent decision is developed. If this is done in a purely mechanical way it can result in simple trading—we'll sacrifice this if you'll sacrifice that. Genuine consensus typically requires more focus on developing the relationships among stakeholders, so that they work together to the achieve agreements based on willing consent.
2- In Democracy

As this example suggests, the concept of consensus is a particularly important one in the context of society and government, and forms a cornerstone of the concept of democracy. Democracy, in its rawest form, direct democracy, has been criticized by a significant number of scholars since the time of Plato as well as adherents to strict republican principles, and is sometimes referred to as the "tyranny of the majority", with the implication that one faction of the society is dominating other factions, possibly repressively.

Others, however, argue that if the democracy adheres to principles of consensus, becoming a deliberative democracy, then party or factional dominance can be minimized and decisions will be more representative of the entire society.

A major cornerstone of the Westminster System is Cabinet Government. All Cabinet decisions are consensual collective and inclusive, a vote is never taken in a Cabinet meeting. All ministers, whether senior and in the Cabinet, or junior ministers, must support the policy of the government publicly regardless of any private reservations. If a minister does not agree with a decision, he or she may resign from the government; as did several British ministers over the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. This means that in the Westminster system of government the cabinet always collectively decides all decisions and all ministers are responsible for arguing in favor of any decision made by the cabinet.
Rationality

Max Weber, a sociologist, proposed an interpretation of social action that distinguished between four different types of rationality.

1) Instrumental rationality, as related to the expectations about the behavior of other human beings or objects in the environment. These expectations serve as means for a particular actor to attain ends; ends which Weber noted were "rationally pursued and calculated."

2) Belief-oriented. Here the action is undertaken for what one might call reasons intrinsic to the actor: some ethical, aesthetic, religious or other motive, independent of whether it will lead to success.

3) Effectual, determined by an actor's specific affect, feeling, or emotion - this was a kind of rationality that was on the borderline of what is considered "meaningfully oriented."

4) The fourth was traditional, determined by ingrained habituation. It is difficult to find only one orientation: combinations were the norm.

The advantage in this interpretation is that it avoids a value-laden assessment, say, that certain kinds of beliefs are irrational. Instead, Weber suggests that a ground or motive can be given – for religious or affect reasons, for example.
Things Are Moving

I remember, the days when we were kids, we used to follow foreign tourists visiting the Roman archeology of my city Jarash located on the kings road of the famous Decapolis cities of ancient world, we used to look at them, watch their customs and habits and culture, listen to their language as if they are coming from another planet. Now they come and go unnoticed.

People used to describe America as a melting pot, but now the term mosaic seems more appropriate. Cultural adaptation has become an important part of everyday life.

In my university, Petra, for example which is rather small and hosts about 6000 students, we have more than 30 nationalities, interchanging ideas and thoughts in harmony, each learning about the others' culture.

What can we do?

Education is the starting point. But what type of education we should look for not educating xenophobia but educating for living with other cultures in a global world.

Universities are an obvious important point in dealing with many social problems. They should also be a model of intercultural learning and dialogue, training the teaching staff to accept and appreciate other cultures and to show tolerance towards people of different backgrounds. All of us in this global world must seek to learn as much as possible from dialogue systems we are not familiar with. We, university instructors and leaders, should respond to individuals as individuals, not on the basis of stereotyping and second-hand information.

To communicate effectively, one must be humble enough to recognize one's limitation, and study cultural and linguistic differences between national and ethnic groups.

However, in the end, these differences should not constitute grounds for separation, negligence, prejudice and bias, but rather for respect, understanding and cooperation.