

Education for democracy, dialogue and peace

Emile Rwamasirabo

UNU, Tokyo

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Introduction

In this era of globalization, higher education is under pressure to respond to market demand of the knowledge economy if it has to remain relevant. This contrasts with sustained demand for intellectual leadership in social and political challenges characterized new forms of violence that call for relevant response from the academia.

My contribution will briefly introduce the conventional wisdom in peace education and then move on to describe the context in which the education for peace in Rwanda had to be addressed after 1994. The specific example of the National University of Rwanda is here used to highlight the complexity of the challenges of peace education in the aftermath of high level conflicts.

Concepts of peace

There is a worldwide consensus on the importance of peace education across the society as a means to ensure a safer future for the generations to come. This has resulted from the 20th century world wars, the genocides, the cold war, the civil strives, currently terrorism and several other forms of social violence.

The understanding of the concept of peace leave alone the way to educate people about peace is so diverse that it is impossible to have one-fit-all model of peace education.

The most popular concept of peace remains the state of absence of violent conflict or war. With the increased number of other forms of violence in the society such as ethnic hatred, sexual abuses, political persecution, racism, etc. the concepts of peace have become much broader depending on the social and cultural environment. Scholars of peace theory define broadly peace as : (i) absence of war and

violent conflict, (ii) peace through justice with a set of laws that are universally applicable, (iii) positive peace whereby social justice and socio-economic development removes the causes of violence, (iv) inner peace by which individual get a state of the mind allowing them to leave in harmony with others and (v) ecological peace that has taken prominence with the world awareness of the threat posed by the global warming . There has been realization however across the globe that it is not realistic to compartmentalize the concept of peace in well define framework ignoring the complex nature of conflicts across the countries and cultures. This is the reason why the concept of human security has been proposed as a comprehensive framework in which all aspects of peace are included. Indeed human security as defined by the UN refers to the “freedom from fear and freedom from want”. Based on the above concepts and cultural backgrounds peace education in mainstream higher education institutions has taken various forms including (i) the study of international relations to prevent large scale interstates conflicts, (ii) the human rights education , (iii) development studies with focus on models that ensure equitable and sustainable development and thus prevent structural violence in the community, (iv) the conflict resolution education and (v) environmental education that highlights the global natural dimension as a major component of global peace. Of particular interest is democratic peace education. The democratic peace theory assumes that liberal democratic states do not fight each other and therefore the best way of ensuring global peace is to promote the spread of democracy. This is widely accepted throughout the world among not only by the academia but also by policy makers. It is against this background that in most current peace negotiations, there is always a major provision for post-conflict elections to put in place a democratic government. While this is one of the tools to obtain peace, there is huge amount of evidence to show that this mechanism is far from satisfying current intra-state conflicts.

The context of peace in Rwanda

Like many African countries, management of the Rwanda post-colonial governance has been marked by social and political turmoil

that culminated in massacres and exile for hundreds of own citizens throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1990s. It is generally agreed that the then principles of governance of the immediate post-independence regime have been the main engine to the persistent social unrest in the country. Indeed in order to assert its power base in the immediate post-independence period, the government extensively used a very divisive and exclusive ideology based on writings and beliefs of racial origins of the people of Rwanda as advanced by the so-called ethnologists of the colonial era. According to the mainstream theory on the origins of Rwandan people during the early 1920s, the Tutsi were alien to Rwanda that came in the 16th century and dominated the Hutu who had migrated to Rwanda earlier. Tutsi were depicted as a race of rulers and as such the colonial power consolidated their power to administer the country in a typical indirect rule model. In the late 1950s with the mounting pressure of independence movement throughout the continent, there was a fall-out between the Tutsi aristocracy represented by the king on one hand and Belgium and the catholic clergy on the other hand. The colonial administration found an alternative political player by supporting the much frustrated Hutu intelligentsia that had been excluded from power for long. It is this new leadership that was supported to lead the post-colonial period in the context of the cold war. Exclusion and massacres were then justified in the name of majority rule. The threat of total annihilation of Tutsi as a means to settle political challenge was publicly announced by the head of the state in a 1963 radio address to the refugees. Differences were over-emphasized in every field of the state, in elementary schools, open segregation was institutionalized in schools, jobs while several hundreds of refugees moved to temporary settlements in neighboring countries throughout the 1960s and 70s. It was against this background that refugees under the Rwanda Patriotic Front, a mostly young and educated Tutsi rebel movement forcefully re-entered by force from its Rwanda northern neighbor Uganda in 1990. A UN sponsored peace accord was signed in August 1993 in Arusha, Tanzania between three players, the government, the rebels and the opposition parties. Among all the protocols signed there was a specific emphasis of unity and reconciliation commission that will focus on peace education

throughout the country. Unfortunately the peace accord was never implemented as following the shot down of the President plane on April 6th, 1994 a systematic and well planed genocide of Tutsi and massacre of moderate Hutu was launched in the next 30 minutes that followed the crash. Intensive government media propaganda mobilized the Hutu population against their Tutsi neighbors, sometimes wives, husbands, cousins, etc. This resulted in massive popular participation in killings as this was the publicly stated aim of the planners. Genocide was to be stopped by the rebel army in July 1994 after 3 months when over one million people had lost their lives. A government of national unity formed by 7 political parties ran the country between 1994 and 2003 when a new Constitution was passed through a referendum and subsequent multiparty elections took place. The new constitution integrated the power sharing mechanism that bring the losers in elections to have a stake in the state affairs; it also affirms the principle of national unity ("you are first a Rwandan before being a Hutu or a Tutsi" as opposed to the other way round as was stated by one Presidential candidate as an election motto in August 2003 Presidential elections). In the meantime Rwanda has had to re-visit and adjust its traditional justice system ("Gacaca") in order to deal with the massive involvement in killings. It integrates the confession, the forgiveness and reduced sentence.

In the above described context peace education had to address some fundamental issues for the survival of the Rwandan society: (i) to overcome the intense post-genocide social distress; (ii) to help secure a consensus over a long-term vision for the country; (iii) to re-build a national identity by focusing on common cultural denominators; (iv) to strive to bring up a new generation of citizen free of past destructive ideologies. Given the then prevailing political, social and economic conditions in the country; it was obvious that peace education would only be relevant if the political stability sought through the power sharing in government and the civil service, the access to basic social needs such as health care and education as well as the revitalization of the economy were a reality. With the support of the International community and able leadership it was possible to re-build the social fabric, rehabilitate the economy. Permanent civic education program are provided to a variety of groups: high school

students before entering higher education, local leaders, freed prisoners, education at all levels. It is clear that peace education was much broader in its scope than the mainstream content as discussed above; its aims, content integrates the necessary elements of citizenship education in a shattered society. It was in that context that higher education institutions and in particular the National University of Rwanda had to design and implement its program of education that was called for that matter: "Ethics and Rwandan culture"

Higher education and peace education

The National University of Rwanda is a state University, which was created in November 1963. It is located in the southern town of Butare, 150 km from the capital city Kigali. It is a "traditional" comprehensive University largely subject oriented in which the 3 main areas of University education (humanities, social sciences, basic sciences and applied sciences) were unequally represented with a bias towards humanities and social sciences. With a students' population of 3200 in April 1994, it was perceived as a sanctuary for conservatism with strong ties with the forces that carried out genocide in Rwanda.

The University admission and recruitment policies had been characterized in the past by a strong ethnic connotation and great care was taken to meticulously record each and every University community member's ethnic affiliation. It is no wonder if several members of the academic staff are among the top instigators currently on trial in the International Tribunal for Rwanda at Arusha, Tanzania.

When the NUR was re-opened in 1995, it was constituted of an heterogeneous community made of students, teachers and administrative staff that had all met in the University after 1994 from all over the world and obviously with a variety of background; along with the people who had survived war and genocide in Rwanda, there was a contingent mostly of Rwandan older refugees from neighboring countries. All these returnees came in with various educational background including linguistic differences off course.

Students have always played a major role in the history of the university, often used by government as catalysts or igniters for national hate campaign that would prelude ethnic killings and genocide; this happened in February 1973 at the NUR when all Tutsi students were chased away at night from the campus by their fellow Hutu students as authorities, the police and the army were watching and those who failed to promptly leave the country were jailed as criminals. Students' politics at the campus after 1994 has therefore been a constant concern of the NUR administration.

A new admission policy based purely on merit was instituted and mention of ethnic identity on national ID had been abolished. The majority of students were government sponsored and accommodated in university hostels at the campus.

Besides the basic duty for the university to provide education to students, it was equally important to ensure peace at the campus; there were many avenues for confrontation that had to be dealt with such as access to university facilities including rooms, elections in students' bodies. The students had a fully registered organization that plays an intermediary role between the administration and students. The administration had decentralized some duties to the organization such as the students' canteen, the allocation of rooms in the hostels, first-level students' discipline control, etc. off course on agreed terms. They are well represented in all organs of the University including the Council, the Senate, faculty boards and departments' boards. Their organization is basically composed of a parliament, an executive and an arbitration bodies. These bodies are renewed every year through secret ballot. The philosophy of students' politics management has been of a constant dialogue at department, faculty and higher authorities' levels and at the same time to set the environment for vision sharing and relevant practices on national issues. Together with formal courses, this interaction aims at the establishment of a culture of citizenship and democracy that ensures equal rights for all students to access to the university and other university services, active participation in decision-making in university matters but at the same time requires students and staff to respect and promote the notion of a "common good". On the

particular issue of identity, students are challenged to discuss issues of ethnicity versus Rwandan identity; students of all groups share the same rooms in their hostels and the secret ballots elections results at various levels of their governance structure do not seem to be ethnically oriented. There is also awareness amongst the players that this status may be fragile as it requires time and consistency to install new values in any society; this fragility is witnessed when students have to elect the guild president; there are always those candidates who feel that their best card is their ethnic affiliation. Since, this is unacceptable neither to the university nor to students' code of discipline; the students' arbitration body normally eliminates such candidates from the race. The active staff - students interaction may not run as smoothly as the administration may wish; it is actually torn between the staff that feel the administration is giving in "too much" and students who take advantage of that opening to "claim too much". Despite all the shortcomings, this has significantly reduced the numerous teachers/students' conflicts that the senate had to settle during long sessions in the past. Besides the immediate task of managing groups' relationship at the campus, other social challenges such as the need to increase female students, HIV/AIDS management would require equally important attention. The university administration supported all sorts of students' activities through their various associations and in particular they proved to be very active in unity and reconciliation advocacy as well as fight against HIV/AIDS. Students were active not only within the campus; they developed outreach activities in secondary schools and in rural areas.

While it was clearly an imperative to initiate the reforms that would reflect the new face of the country, it was in essence a duty for the university to organize a formal peace/civic education package for all students. It was clear that the content had to address the immediate needs on top of standard human values with the aim of bringing up a new set of future leaders that would drive the country in a more positive direction.

The University Senate University then set up a foundation course for all first year students aimed at developing critical thinking in the new generation of students including among other subjects initiation to

philosophy, psychology, history of Rwanda, ethics and Rwandan culture with focus to tolerance, human rights and reconciliation. The design of the course content proved to be highly contentious: consensus had to be reached on issues such as the interpretation of specific points of the country's history; issues of justice and reconciliation. This was meant to be an interactive course in which students were to take a major role but teachers' compliance to this approach would not meet always the intended outcome. The course was formalized by the traditional course assessment as a means to obtain full participation of students. The course proved to be one of the most popular as it was an open forum for frank discussion on issues of major concern in the society. It would have been certainly difficult to capture interest of students if this process did not run within a changed campus environment in which acceptable levels of democracy and fairness are put in practice. In other words it seemed as important to provide peace education but also make peace at the campus.

The promotion of positive values in the society, critical thinking, intellectual exchange and innovative ideas remain a solid liberal component of the core functions of the university today. This role carries even more weight in post-genocide Rwanda where there is not only need to heal the society but most importantly to build a future free of new genocide. To what extent the NUR played a significant role in the public sphere in line with that objective requires a more focused analysis. However various curricula reforms with introduction of new courses and department such as conflict management, political science; involvement in national reconstruction through research on such issues as justice and constitution were seen as a necessary contribution to the national recovery. It would seem more accurate to state however that unlike students the university staff do not feel compelled to get more involved in community interaction. As this activity is not given high profile in staff promotion and recognition, the University administration has to create the necessary policies to ensure the fulfillment of its fundamental role of enlightenment of the society.

Conclusion

In this paper I tried to highlight the gap that exists between the mainstream theoretical approach to peace education in higher education and its complexity in the post-conflict situation. Peace education requires a broader agenda in its content taking into account the prevailing political, social and economic conditions. This calls therefore for more scholarship engagement from the academia as this addresses the fundamental role of the university within the society

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Promises, Fallacy and Challenges
(Workshop Session 2: Education for Democracy, Dialogue and Peace)

-----Pathways towards a Shared Future:
Changing Roles of Higher Education in a Globalized World-----

United Nations University
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Dr. Kazuo TAKAHASHI
Visiting Professor, UNU/ICU

I. Liberalist Assumptions

The promises of liberalist economic policies and the challenges that are created are relatively well known through the experiences of the past hundred years. Political struggles in a democratic system are fought by political parties related basically to this question. However, implications of democracy for peace are complex, and not understood well. Perhaps the only formula which can stand the rigorous analysis and which is relatively well understood is to say that armed conflicts between states that have deep rooted democratic systems are rare. Indeed, the relationship among these countries has developed into an international security community where most of the members are OECD countries. However, at a time when most of the armed conflicts are taking place domestically, and a large number of countries where elections take place are at best fragile democracies, relations between democracy and peace are complicated, difficult to grasp.

However, there is a strong liberalist assumption that democracy is the basis for sustainable peace, a basis which is strengthened by a dialogue. This assumption is clearly expressed in most peacebuilding efforts of the post-cold war period. Witnessing the fact that more than half of the peace accords, which were concluded upon this assumption, have been broken in five years' time, it is high time for the world community to re-examine the liberalist assumption seriously. Poor records of peacebuilding for the past two decades demand the epistemic community of active engagement with this question. Problems being taking place in developing countries (with or without the involvement of industrialized countries), it is important to consider this question in relation to development. Therefore, the linkage among democracy, dialogue and peace should be examined not only from the perspective of education, which is the overall theme of this conference, but also from a developmental viewpoint as well.

II. Historical Development of Higher Education

1. Services to God, King, State, Industry or Society

While there have been a number of patterns and models of higher education throughout history around the world, the modern institutes of higher education have been developed in Europe. Initial objectives of the universities were largely related to service to God in the Medieval times. Search of truth was pursued for this purpose and education took place around those scholars who excelled in this activity. Close linkage and occasional tensions between universities and monasteries played an important part in the academic life in the Medieval Ages.

With the emergence of the kingdoms where the kings were the sovereigns and almighty, universities began to serve the kings. Royal patronage became an important part of university lives. Truth and training were largely related to the interests and the glory of the kings. As the state

institutions began to be diversified from kingdoms to various forms, including democratic systems, the state as such became the major concern of the universities. Coinciding large with the age of enlightenment, reason and knowledge for knowledge sake became a crucially important part of academic life. Cooperation and tension between the state and universities were major institutional issues for scholars during this period. Restraint of the state in its relations with universities gradually became an important feature, while it has been a difficult principle for state to observe at critical moments.

From the middle of the 19th century, universities began to be organized for the training of a significant number of young people so that they became important human resources who support and promote the industrialization process. Practical subjects such as engineering became important components of higher education. Independence from and cooperation with private firms became major issues in the academic life.

In the course of the 20th century, universities evolved into institutes of higher education that train people to become good citizens. Initially making of good national citizens was the major objective with the ascendancy of democracy. From toward the end of the 20th century fostering of global citizens has been becoming a predominant feature in an increasing number of universities.

Against the background of this history of higher education it is clear that the involvement of universities in democracy is relatively new and issues involved have not been clarified yet. This relationship has been preceded by universities complicated relations and tensions with monasteries, kings, state and industry. Why have tensions between democracies and universities disappeared, or seemed disappeared? Tension and complicated relations between the objectives of higher education of the time and the socio-political structures being constant factors throughout the history of universities, it is only natural that one should assume complicated relations and tensions between democracy and universities. These issues are in fact related to a number of factors, including

- limits of democracy related to the pursuit of truth,
- cultural context of truth and its social implications and
- need of a basis for constructive dialogue.

These are some of the points which emerge by reflecting on the history of higher education, and will be analysed later in Section V.

2. From International Understanding to National Integration and Development

The traditional liberalist perspective on positive linkage among education, democracy, dialogue and peace has been concerned with the promotion of international understanding, with the expectation that it will strengthen peace. Even this perspective requires close examination because most of international armed conflicts have taken place between ascending powers and the status quo

powers regardless of the types of governments. With most of the violent conflicts being domestic, involving developing countries, it is now even more important to scrutinize liberalist assumptions. The background against which democracy and peace need to be considered is not a pursuit of stability. It is related to the dynamic processes of development and national integration. And the reality of a political regime is at best a fragile democracy. The present historical context against which inter-linkages among higher education, democracy, dialogue and peace need to be examined is the situation where majority of developing countries are characterized by such countries as fragile states, failing states or failed states. If one abandons any feasibility of “education for democracy, dialogue and peace” in these countries, the most important part of this theme is lost. It is essential that potential relevance of this proposition to these countries need to be kept as its central concern. This perspective makes liberalist assumptions more difficult than in industrialized countries, more challenging to make it real as will be seen in Section V.

III. Japan’s Experiences: from national glory to individualism

It should be useful to look briefly at some of the concrete cases of the roles of higher education before dealing with these difficult issues. Two cases are dealt with for this purpose: Japan and the private volunteer agency, Rotary.

1. Precursor

In the course of the Edo period(1603—1867), a large number of educational institutions flourished. For the common people (merchants, artisans and peasants) the major objectives of learning were to acquire skills for livelihood and for social relations. They were carried out by temples and private institutions. For the ruling class (bushi, warriors), the objectives of education were to acquire self-discipline, to learn about moral and social leadership, and to know man, society and nature in general. Most of the fiefdoms (there were about 300) had their own schools for the ruling class.

2. Pursuit of National Glory

Based on this situation which produced the highest level of literacy in the world in the first half of the 19th century, a modern educational system was developed from the second half of the 19th century. Modernizing elite of Japan focused national efforts on two objectives: economic growth and strengthening military might. Practically all policy instruments were mobilized for these objectives. Achieving these objectives was considered as the national glory. A high esteem that had been accorded to education during the Edo period was now geared toward the pursuit of national glory.

A top priority of higher education was placed on glooming elite bureaucrats. Managing the state institutions was the major objective of training. Based on pre-university college education which was largely based on liberal arts, the university education had potentials in two directions. One was to train competent agents of statism, and another was to educate promoters of democracy.

For a short-interlude of the period in the first half of the 1920s, budding democracy spread over Japan, promoted by those who were educated in liberal arts, and who pursued studies of law, politics, economics and humanities as an extension of liberal arts. However, most of the people who had the privilege of entering into universities took liberal arts education as an ideal, and studied law as a realistic means of governance. They were the ones who became bureaucrats and controlled Japan before the end of World War II, together with the military establishments since the beginning of the 1930s. From among a number of options, the German model influenced most during this period of Japan. Their pursuit of national glory ended with a complete defeat in World War II.

3. Individualism and Higher Education

The national purpose of the pursuit of glory based on economic and military powers was replaced with individualism after the defeat in World War II in Japan. Individualism in the context of the devastation of the national economy was basically interpreted as the freedom of each person to exploit economic opportunities. The educational system of the post-World War II period, which was influenced significantly by the United States, was organized based on this assumption. Institutes of higher education have been expanded rapidly with the objective of responding to the requirements of individualism. It has largely been taking a pyramid system, with the University of Tokyo at the top, a system which is basically the same as the pre-World War II period, with a few exceptions.

While the new system has liberalized the educational content substantially, it has not developed a system where discussions are encouraged and difference of views is respected. Because the system has been organized as an educational mechanism not necessarily as a learning institution.

Therefore, higher education of Japan in the post World War II period has been characterized by massive number of graduates who are trained to pursue their economic gains, but who are not well-equipped with discussion and dialogue, and with high sensitivity to and with tolerance of different ideas and perceptions. Japan has succeeded in reviving its economy after the devastation at the end of World War II which was promoted by these people, but has not been successful in reconciliation with neighboring countries.

Japan's experiences in higher education provide a number of lessons for the world community. Throughout the modern history, universities have been successful in being instruments for economic

development, either based on collectivism as before World War II or on individualism as after World War II. However, the universities' roles in pursuit of national glory led to the self-destruction of the nation as well as to invasion of a number of neighboring countries and territories. Enhancing individualism based on education rather than learning have been efficient for economic purposes but not successful for reconciliation with neighbours.

IV. Rotary Centers for Peace and Conflict Resolution

Another set of lessons may be able to be learned from the new project of 21st century. It is the initiative taken by the Rotary Club which has established Rotary Centers for Peace and Conflict Resolution in some universities around the world. It is a master's course in peace studies at UC Berkeley, the joint center between Duke and the University of North Carolina (UNC), University of Salvador (Argentina), University of Queensland (Australia), Bradford University, Science Po in Paris (until 2007), and International Christian University (Japan). It has also established a center for shorter training courses at Chulalongkong University. After considering and examining various options for a number of years, the establishment of the system of centers was decided upon by the Rotary at the beginning of the century. With the membership of 1.3 million globally, the impacts of this project go beyond the immediate beneficiaries.

Every year 60-70 applicants to this project are selected from among those who have been screened by local Rotary clubs around the world, resulting in hundreds of candidates. They are distributed to the Rotary Centers for Peace and Conflict Resolution for the academic training at the master's level. Each candidate should have at least three years' experiences in the real world. It is for each of the universities that decides whether or not to accept a candidate based on its own judgmental criteria.

Each center has its own unique characteristics, geographically or discipline wise. For example, Bradford puts emphasis on Africa, ICU on Asia, and USAL on Latin America. Duke-UNC is strong in those aspects that are related to development studies.

The first conference of all of these Centers took place at UNU in March 2006. This conference focused on peacebuilding. The second conference took place at Salt Lake City in June 2007 where more than 200 fellows and former fellows got together in conjunction with the global Rotary convention. Through these joint activities comparative strength of individual centers on geographical and disciplinary lines is increasingly becoming clear and mutually complementary efforts have begun.

There are a number of common themes of these centers. They include the recognition of the uniqueness of each violent conflict, importance of dialogue for social and individual healing, socio-cultural relevance, historical treatment of issues and cases involved and emphasis on long-term

perspectives including development efforts. Relevance and various roles of democracy and human rights are also dealt with, with varying degrees of emphasis.

Graduates of these centers have begun to work in such places as the UN system, governments, aid agencies, NGOs and journalism. Some have gone into Ph.D. programmes. It is still too early to make a definitive judgment about this project. However, it is certainly an interesting new attempt at the global level with emphasis on decentralization for higher education.

V. Challenges Ahead

Briefly reviewing historical development of higher education, and some concrete cases (Japan and Rotary), it is now possible to examine challenges ahead for higher education related to democracy, dialogue and peace.

1. Conceptual Challenges

1) Truth and Democracy

Pursuit of truth and to learn truth are the main institutional objectives of academic institutions. Interventions from religious authorities, kings, states or industries (including labour) have been fought back by universities through centuries to protect these objectives. Universities have learnt ways to minimize pressure from these sources through their experiences.

The major new challenge to the universities comes from the civil society which is organized by liberal values including democracy. Decision-making can take a number of different forms in a civil society. However, majority rule is accepted at least as the last resort as a democratic approach. However, majority rule can not be applied to truth, moral or religious convictions or aesthetics. Thus, academic institutions that are the promoters of truth have basic contradictions with democracy where majority rule is an integral part of the values that support it. It is important to recognize that there is a tension between universities and civil society related to the relationship between truth and democracy.

2) Cultural Context of Truth

It is also important to recognize the fact that truth in such a situation as a post-conflict society is highly characterized by contextual judgment, such as power, economy, history and culture. Ethnicity and religion as well as language constitute predominant factors of the cultural context in post-conflict societies. Higher education in this situation is bound to sharpen differences of interpretation of such factors as national history and social justice. The more education, the more seeds of conflicts. Dialogue may not be carried out in a positive manner in this situation between educated people who belong to different ethnic groups.

It is essential that universities recognize the potential damages they can bring about to the society

due the cultural context nature of truth particularly in a polarized society.

3) Basis for a Constructive Dialogue

Dialogue is not just communication. Participants to a dialogue have views, wills and perceptions on problem which requires a solution. A constructive dialogue should assume that participants may change their views, wills and perceptions on the problem so that participants move closer to a solution. A meaningful dialogue requires a certain number of pre-conditions which include:

- common rules of a dialogue,
- a possibility of mutual understanding, and
- a possibility that a potential agreement will be implemented.

In a fragile state, a failing state, or a failed state, where a constructive dialogue is strongly needed these conditioned do not seem to exist. The best higher education can try is to increase the possibility of mutual understanding if the problems of the cultural context of truth are resolved. The other two conditions do not exist in the problem countries. Dialogue and these two conditions are in chicken-and-egg relations.

Liberalist assumptions of positive relationship among higher education, democracy, dialogue and peace contain these rather basic problems. Grossing them over implies the repetition of “Iraq” and “Afghanistan”. It is essential that the difficulty of the relationship among them is recognized. Any attempt at strengthening roles of higher education in establishing durable peace has to be based on this recognition.

2. International Cooperation

It is, thus, inherently difficult to realize liberalist assumptions of linking higher education, democracy, dialogue and peace in a positive manner. One way to alleviate this difficulty is to insert international cooperation into this equation, whereas it will not resolve all the problems. The starting point of incorporation of international cooperation into these efforts is to make it clear about two premises. One is to recognize the fact that the levels of our understanding of the subject are still relatively low. It is important to restrain ourselves from over confidence, and therefore to keep humility at the back of our mind always in approaching these problems. Second is, however, to make it sure that we do not avoid the most difficult context where application of these liberalist assumptions are most difficult. Namely, the question should be examined in the context of fragile states, failing states or failed states.

International cooperation can be useful with varying degrees in a number of areas. Following are of particular importance in overcoming inherent difficulties.

- insertion of global perspectives,

--- making ethnic and cultural differences as relative as possible, and
---joint research on the issues involved.

1) Global Perspectives

It should be useful to treat various issues of the country at universities not only from national perspectives which have inherent difficulty in this type of countries, but also from a global perspective as well. There are many similar issues in various parts of the world at various points in history. It is useful to learn how others have been dealing with these issues. It will be for scholars from abroad who will be able to do it effectively. It should be preferable that several professors from abroad to do it so that it becomes clear that they also have different global perspectives among themselves.

2) Relative Difference in Cultural and Ethnic Perspectives

Another useful approach is to send students abroad for the purpose of learning how cultural and ethnic differences are dealt with in a foreign country. It should be important that these students are treated equally with other students of the country, while studying abroad. Difficulties encountered abroad often result in enhancing group identity such as ethnic identity for the sake of psychological security.

3) Joint Study

Issues encountered by these countries require deep studies. It is useful to organize a joint research team consisting of stake-holder ethnic group scholars and international experts. The research outputs will be presented not only to national audience but also to the international community so that the principle of transparency should be clearly registered.

VI. New Tasks of UNU

UNU has been evolving over time from essentially a research grant agency to, on the one hand, a decentralized system of research activities globally, and on the other hand, an increasing set of capacity building activities. While a number of new tasks of UNU can be conceptualized related to the question of education for democracy, dialogue and peace, following will contribute to the world community significantly in a relatively short time.

---an intermediary role for universities in developing countries, and

---a role model for democracy, dialogue and peace.

1. Intermediary Roles

The above analysis suggests that it is important to globalize universities in developing countries in a number of ways. In fact, individual universities are doing their own efforts for this purpose. UNU may be able to support these efforts.

1) a Roster of Specialists

UNU may start a project of creating a global roster of scholars who will contribute to the efforts of developing countries for globalizing their universities. It will include specialists in the following areas:

- humanities,
- sociology and anthropology
- development studies,
- peacebuilding
- economics, and
- engineering.

UNU may seek the cooperation of UNESCO in establishing guidelines of cooperation for this purpose with relevant academic associations that are affiliated with UNESCO. The roster being useful for international grant making foundations and some think-tanks, UNU may develop cooperation with them over time.

2) Information Center for Studies Abroad for Students in Developing Countries

There are a large number of projects, programs and institutions which make it possible for students in developing countries to study abroad. However, relevant information is difficult to tap. UNU may take an initiative to centralize as much relevant information as possible. It should be possible for UNDP to cooperate with UNU for this purpose.

2. A Role Model

UNU might try at creating a model program at the graduate levels related to the human resources needs in fragile, failing or failed states. It may be a programme of a modest size, consisting, however, of masters, doctorates and post-doctorals. By organizing teaching capacities at the UNU Center which has already been conducting some activities of capacity building at the graduate levels, and research and training centers around the world along the lines of clear objectives, the existing capacity can provide a large part of the requirements for this programme. It will consist of the following components.

- individual courses offered mainly at the UNU Center,
- internship activities in relevant UN agencies,
- research activities mainly for doctoral candidates and post-doctoral fellows at relevant research and training centers of UNU,
- and a few joint research activities related to needs and requirements in fragile, failing or failed states by developing country specialists, Ph.D. candidates and post-doctoral fellows, UNU academic

staff and outside specialists.

An international advisory committee for this model programme will be a useful instrument which can be consulted on various problems that may emerge as this project is organized and then, implemented. Specialists from developing countries as well other internationally recognized experts should be represented in this committee. A third party review of this programme should be built into the programme itself from the outset, an exercise which might be carried out every five years. Consideration should be given to feasibility of this model to be disseminated to the developing world.

UNU/UNESCO International Conference

PATHWAYS TOWARDS A SHARED FUTURE

CHANGING ROLES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

UN House, Tokyo, 29-30 August, 2007

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY, DIALOGUE AND PEACE

LESSONS FROM THE SRI LANKAN EXPERIENCE

Dr. Nelum Deepika Udagama

I am deeply honored by the invitation extended to me by the UN University and UNESCO to present my thoughts and views on an extremely important dimension of education at this international conference. I was reluctant at the beginning to present a paper at this conference as I cannot claim to be an educationist who is fully versed in theories and methodologies of education. However, I accepted the invitation when I was assured that what was expected of me were my thoughts and ideas as an academic involved in higher education in Sri Lanka and as one who has engaged in human rights education for over one and a half decades. Therefore, I urge you to receive my remarks in that spirit, recognizing that I make them in my capacity as an educator and not as an educationist.

This conference comes at an opportune moment when many countries are agonizing over the goals of their respective education systems in an ever changing world. Diverse ideas have been entertained and articulated on the future directions of education among educationists, policy-makers and relevant inter-governmental institutions. There appears to be an air of uncertainty and indecision in many quarters as to what is the best approach. There is also the phenomenon of international funding agencies attempting to advocate and impose on countries what is touted as a universally acceptable approach to education including higher education.

At a local level, formal education is increasingly being demanded by the public, not only as social service, but as an inherent human right. This is to be expected in a fast changing world where knowledge is seen as a commodity. It has also become one of the main means, if not the main means, of social mobility for disadvantaged sections of communities.

In this paper, I will attempt to present the achievements and the trials and tribulations of the Sri Lankan education system, with special emphasis on higher education. In keeping with the theme of this session, my analysis will be based on the question whether the education system in Sri Lanka has contributed to the conflictual situation in the country, or whether it has been

a vehicle for advancing democracy, dialogue and peace. I will then attempt to elicit lessons that could be learnt from the Sri Lankan experience.

Sri Lanka:Paradise or Paradox?

Sri Lanka, formerly Ceylon, has a long legacy of ethnic and religious diversity. This diversity existed even before the onset of over 450 years of colonial rule successively under the Portugues, Dutch and the British. The current ethnic and religious break down of the population is as follows¹:

Ethnicity	Religion
Sinhalese 74%	Buddhists 69.3%
Sri Lanka Tamils 12.6%	Hindus 15.5%
Indian Tamils 5.5%	Muslims 7.5%
Moors 7.1%	Christians 7.6%
Others 0.8%	Others 0.1%

Universal adult franchise was granted in the then Ceylon in 1931 when it was still a British colony. The post-independence period saw the promulgation of three successive constitutions, all embracing democratic forms of governmental structures. Periodic elections have been held since independence in 1948, with elections keenly contested in a multi-party setting. However, as we shall see later, the political system has seen erosion over the years with State violence and authoritarianism becoming a fact of political life in the country. Similarly, democratic institutions have also gradually lost their independence due to politicization, resulting in them losing their efficacy in sustaining democracy. Violent political uprisings by militant groups both in the North and the South of the country have given rise to armed conflict claiming many lives and creating an environment of insecurity and instability.

In spite of the many political upheavals, Sri Lanka has always been seen as a success story in the realm of achieving high social indicators. This is especially so with regard to achieving high levels of literacy. For a country that only recently achieved the status of a middle-income country, it has, for several decades boasted of high levels of literacy that are comparable to those in more developed countries.

As at 2004 the level of literacy was as follows²:

¹ Central Bank fo Sri Lanka, **Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka (2006) at 1.**

² *Id. at 127.*

Overall literacy – 92.5% (82.2% in 1963)

Male literacy -- 94.5% (87.1% in 1963)

Female literacy -- 90.6% (71.4% in 1963)

It is remarkable that even variations of literacy levels at a provincial level do not reveal huge disparities, including in the war-torn areas.³ Sector wise disparities are more pronounced, with the lowest level of literacy in the country being among women in the plantation sector with the level standing at 74.7%.⁴

The key reason for this success has been the introduction of free public education (translating into tuition-free education) in the formal education system in 1945 by the visionary Dr. CWW Kannangara. Free education is provided up to the first degree. Prior to this, for millennia, rich traditional systems of education had existed in the island nation that provided education as a social service and not as profitable enterprises. At a social level too, many communities have invested, and continue to invest heavily, in education. Significantly, today this investment is with regard to both boys and girls. In 2005 enrolment at primary level stood at 161,793 for boys and 156,296 for girls.⁵

Thus, the overall picture in the field of education does appear to be a rosy one. Similarly, health indicators have shown healthy progress over the years, again mainly due to free or low cost health services provided by the State. In fact, Sri Lanka is well on its way to achieving most MDGs.⁶

Given this background, the violence and conflicts that have engulfed the country for a good part of its post-independence history does baffle many. Of the nearly 60 years since independence from the British in 1948, Sri Lanka has been governed under emergency rule for over three decades and has experienced sustained armed conflict since 1983. Violent conflict has raged not only in the North and East of the country which is predominantly inhabited by the minority Tamil community, but also in the South dominated by the majority, where two bloody uprisings by the majority Sinhala youth took place in 1971 and also in the late 1980s. In fact, an often asked question is what went wrong with this success story?

³ *Id. at 129.*

⁴ World Bank, *Sri Lanka: Poverty Assessment* (2007) at 84, quoting Consumer Finances and Socio Economic Survey Report (2003-2004).

⁵ Central Bank of Sri Lanka, *Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka (2006)* at 141.

⁶ World Bank, *Sri Lanka: Poverty Assessment (2007)*, Annex I, Table A-1.1.

Higher Education and Youth Militancy

It is of interest that, in spite of the political and social commitment to education, and the resulting expansion of educational opportunities for many, militant activity challenging the State has emanated from the youth, both from the majority and minority communities. One explanation for that phenomenon may be that educated youth with high expectations of gaining job opportunities and social mobility found their expectations frustrated due to many factors. One other factor that is widely thought to be a source of great frustration for youth is the very limited opportunities in gaining access to higher education.

University education has been a State monopoly for a long period of time with the students fortunate enough to gain admission receiving a tuition -free education. In comparison to the number of students facing the extremely competitive public examination to gain eligibility for university admission, only a miniscule proportion actually gain admission to the 15 State universities in the country each year. For example, in the 2005/06 academic year, of the 118,770 candidates who gained eligibility to gain admission to the university system, only 17,287 (14.6%) were selected for admission⁷. **Of the age cohort, only 3% or so eventually gain admission to the university.**⁸ For this reason, the intensely competitive nature of the examination has become a testament to the artificiality of the goals of education in Sri Lanka. The intensely exam orientation of the education system has stunted the love of learning, intellectual curiosity, sensitivity and innovative thinking. We, as teachers in the university system have to spend a considerable amount of energy and effort in helping the students unlearn a lot of the warped features of secondary education when we receive them into the university system.

It may not be a surprise then that university students have not displayed a high degree of concern for public issues, in spite of living in a country wracked by political upheaval, armed conflict and ever widening economic disparities. Student politics is mostly centered around the immediate concerns of students such as bursaries and hostel facilities. Student unions have consistently opposed moves to expand opportunities through private institutions of higher learning. I have been asked constantly about positions taken by students with regard to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, especially with regard to constitutional and law reform. Even though we do have brilliant students, sadly, the type of interventions one would expect of

⁷ University Grants Commission statistics reproduced in *Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka*, *supra* at note 1, 143.

⁸ Jayaweera, Swarna & Gunawrdena, Chandra “*Access, Equity and Efficiency of Education in Sri Lanka*” (unpublished) at p.9 (on file with author).

university students on such burning public issues have not materialized. So, also with many academics. In fairness, it has to be mentioned that civil society, in general, has become very detached from public issues. However, there are different expectations placed on universities, as centers of learning that generate new thinking and ideas capable of catalyzing social and political reform. Even with a heavy heart, I have to admit, that we have not played that role. I do believe that the public feels let down by the university system on this score.

In my opinion, this passivity or detachment is attributable in large measure to the type of education the students are exposed to. It is clear that the majority of students have lost the capacity to feel for social issues and to respond. These capacities are not encouraged by the larger education system; in fact, I would maintain that even nascent skills and sensitivities are severely stunted by the formal education system. This exemplifies the problems in the entire education system. Problems or prospects in higher education cannot be discussed in isolation of primary and secondary education. The next segment of this paper attempts to assess the nature of those levels of education.

A Critique of the Larger Education System in Sri Lanka

As pointed out above, the public education system in Sri Lanka has provided expanded opportunities for children from all types of socio-economic backgrounds to receive a school education through free education. Enrolment levels are very high and a large proportion of children move on to secondary education as well. It has been observed that 95% enrolment takes place in the lowest income quintile and 97% in the highest income quintile.⁹ This level of egalitarianism in education has served the country well in terms of literacy. However, when the system is viewed from the perspective of contributing to promoting democracy, dialogue and peace there are serious shortcomings and failures. In my view these weaknesses are due to the orientation of education and its content and structure.

i) Orientation

I would like to first remind ourselves of the noble words contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) about education:

Article 26

⁹ *Id.* at 7.

- (1) Everyone has the right to education...
- (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Contrary to the expectations of those words, today, education has become the main, or sole, means of social mobility. The humanizing component of education has been forgotten or has taken a back seat. It is this disorientation or distortion of objectives of education that has created the above mentioned moral *lacunae* in the education system of Sri Lanka. Policy makers and funding agencies which fund the education system too constantly point out that the main objective of the education system should be to cater to the job market in a globalized economy. The creation of good citizens who are socially sensitive and possess requisite skills of upholding democracy and pluralism is almost thought of as a post-script. Most parents too appear to advocate the former position and relentlessly drive their children toward “high achievement” and “excellence” in education (translated into exams). Education today is about achieving middle/upper-class dreams devoid of a strong moral content. It is about social status and economic returns. One wonders whether in the future we will have enough writers, poets, philosophers and thinkers who are capable of firing imaginations and reforming societies.

In this backdrop, it was refreshing to hear a mother exclaim on a recently aired television program “our children will pass exams, but they will be without a heart!”. Her enlightened lament vividly captured the dilemma facing the education system. Unfortunately, her views do not seem to represent common sentiments among parents or policy makers.

ii. Content

The drive towards creating future employees who can fit into the needs of the emerging job market in a globalized economy has seen the content of education giving priority to “hard subjects”, viz., mathematics, natural sciences, English and information technology. Education reforms in the past decade or so have been mainly about introducing new emphases on these subjects. Similarly so in higher education. More funding is available to advance the teaching of those subjects. One cannot deny the importance of those subjects. However, the issue is whether or not students require a more balanced education which exposes them equally strongly to a value-based view of life. Value education and social sciences etc. are generally thought of as necessary but “soft subjects”. This was my experience too when attempting to introduce human rights education at various levels. Much to my horror and that of my senior professor in the Faculty of Law, we found out that students had started to refer to human

rights law and environmental law courses as “NGO subjects”! The “hard options” of course are commercial law based subjects.

Equally problematic is the paucity of opportunities of students to obtain an inter-disciplinary education especially at senior secondary and tertiary levels of education. I do believe that a good liberal education is a very humanizing one. Such an education will lay the foundation to create the type of person that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights envisages. The exposure to values and ideas will remain throughout one’s life, whichever path one eventually wishes to take.

While it is absolutely crucial to examine the curricula, it is equally crucial to examine teaching methodologies employed in the class room. I trust that many of us believe that the classroom should be a very democratic space where ideas and skills on fostering democracy, respect for pluralism and different views and ideas should be imparted. In fact, as a human rights educator, I strongly believe that the introduction of courses on human rights or value education alone will not do the needful. The entire educational experience should integrate those values and ideas, i.e., in the course content as well as in teaching methodologies.

In Sri Lanka, we do have a great deal of work to do when it comes to promoting student-centered learning and in democratizing the classroom/lecture theatre. The authority of the teacher is feared. Teaching methodologies employed do not, on the most part, encourage free thinking and active participation/articulation by the student. Even though teacher training may emphasise those dimensions, it seems to be very difficult to change the culture of top-down, teacher-centred and authoritarian education.

In this background, it is futile to expect students to be repositories of democratic values.

iii) Structure

The manner in which the education system is structured in relation to language media is very problematic and is at the very core of Sri Lanka’s failure to be a truly multi-cultural, pluralistic society. Schools are divided into Sinhala language and Tamil language schools. A few schools have English medium classes. Most schools are unilingual. Ethnicity is also emphasized in the educational structures with the recognition of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim schools (even though most Muslims speak Tamil). So also with regard to religious identity. Schools are referred to as Sinhala/Buddhist, Tamil/Hindu, Christian and Islamic Schools. Unfortunately, these categorizations have now assumed a formal status with school

admissions taking into consideration ethnicity and religion. One of the most contentious aspects on which official policy relating to school admission is questioned by parents and teachers is whether the policy will adversely affect the ethnic/religious “identity” of schools.

In fact, several years ago a draft Bill on Equal Opportunity was withdrawn after alumni associations of schools protested against provisions in the Bill that required non-discriminatory access to, *inter alia*, educational institutions. We are currently in the throes of another controversy relating to new guidelines on school admissions. Alumni Associations have challenged the guidelines before the Supreme Court. One of the main grounds of the challenge is that the new guidelines will affect the preservation of religious “identities” of schools.

As schools have assumed “identities” and are so compartmentalized, communities too are divided from childhood. This cynical structure of education has denied the opportunity for children from various ethnic and religious backgrounds to interact and develop a healthy pluralistic ethos. Most Sri Lankans, especially those belonging to the majority community, do not speak the language of the “other” community. This deep cultural and spatial divide perpetuates mutual suspicions and stereotypes. The education system, which should be a bridge-builder, promoting mutual understanding and respect has, on the contrary, become a dividing factor.

The university system, especially metropolitan universities, do provide opportunities to students to study together when courses are offered in English. This is the case with several professional courses of study such as medicine and engineering. Law is taught in three language media, viz., Sinhala, Tamil and English. While the decision to do so was taken in the 1970s in the hope of expanding opportunities for non-English speaking students to gain access to legal education, the limitations are glaringly obvious. There is now a move to popularize bi-lingualism in the hope that eventually the program could be offered in English. However, admittedly the cultural divide that already exists among students from various communities and also socio-economic strata is hard to erase.

Lessons from Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka’s education system offers object lessons with regard to how a well-meaning system, bent on expanding access to schooling and literacy levels, has failed in many

important spheres, especially in fostering a democratic and pluralistic ethos among the recipients of education. This failure obtains with regard to both values and concomitant skills. The system, therefore, has failed to produce a citizenry that could contribute to the resolution of serious political and socio-economic problems. The lack of a holistic and balanced approach to education on the part of policy-makers and other stake holders have brought about these serious deficiencies in the system. It is clear, therefore, that while every effort must be taken to expand educational opportunities for all, the orientation, structure and the content of the education system are pivotal factors to focus on. Quantity alone will not provide a country with the answers. The quality of education and a balanced approach is of the essence in order to create democratic, ethical and pluralistic citizens who also have the knowledge and skills to fit into an ever changing world.

**PEACE, DEMOCRACY, AND DIALOGUE:
THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**
A LATIN AMERICAN (MEXICAN) PERSPECTIVE¹

Gabriela Warkentin²

*“We must learn the narrative of the other.”
Daniel Barenboim*

Somehow we have to start considering the possibility that we are telling each other a story that is, at least, misleading. We want to talk about peace, dialogue, and democracy. But maybe, just maybe, we got either the characters wrong, or the storyline wrong, or both.

Peace, dialogue, and democracy imply the existence and the recognition of those who are different, who think different and who want different things. Differences located in the midst of a common project that reaches well beyond those issues. Therefore, more than the differences themselves, the relevant issue --if we want to talk about peace, dialogue and democracy-- is the prospect of bridging the gaps among those who share the same space and/or time, but not the same worldviews.

Recognition of otherness, acknowledgment of communication gaps and the common lack of a contextual setting: some of the main traits that should inform all attempts to foster a culture of peace, dialogue, and democracy.

But then, are we actually inserting those traits in the story we are telling each other? Aren't we reducing our story solely to a very simplistic and causal line of events? In recent discussions on the possibility of better and stronger social cohesion in different regions of the world, some have stated that we are

¹ Presented at the international conference entitled “Pathways Towards a Shared Future: Changing Roles in Higher Education in a Globalized World”, on 30th August 2007, in Tokyo, Japan

² Head of the Communications Department, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City

producing and consuming stories that lead us more and more towards a society of contempt and of indifference. If so, why is this happening?

The stories we tell each other, both as individuals and as societies, certainly help us organize and make meaning of the surrounding world (including the surrounding world of events). But, if we want to develop a comprehensive appraisal of all the implications derived from a thoughtful peace framework, we need to be sure that our story telling reflects a more complex and multidimensional narrative. And we sure have to reconsider the characters we are putting into play, the sometimes-ambiguous goals they want to achieve, and the irregular ways in which these goals are pursued. Otherness, communication fractures and contextual framing, are difficult to process as appealing, easy-to-digest stories, but they encompass the narrative challenges I want to address today.

I was invited here, to this workshop, to share with you some thoughts on the role that Higher Education can play to foster a culture of peace, dialogue, and democracy, from a Latin American perspective. But before we go into details I feel obliged to say that it is very difficult to talk about a “Latin American perspective”: Latin America is a huge area with many countries and different people. It is true, there are some cultural traits that that are shared throughout the subcontinent: a common sense of the past (although with a lot of actual differences), one language (Spanish) that is spoken in the majority of our countries (which gives us the feeling of a certain homogeneity), an elusive but common enemy (for some, incarnated in the omnipresent United States), a shared narrative about our uniqueness, among others.

But our realities differ greatly from each other. Particularly, when talking about peace, dialogue, and democracy, we have to draw some lines in order to better understand the complexity of the region and, of course, of the problems faced.

Most Latin American countries are, as of today, democracies. To a larger or smaller extent, with better or worse experiences, in the last years the region has committed itself to a more democratic way of being. But here is where the

similitude ends: what is happening today in Chile, Venezuela, Brazil, Mexico or Colombia, to state a few examples, is not the same. The challenges being faced, the problems that arise, the solutions implemented... it must be recognized that, though there is a sense of shared reality, there are peculiarities among countries and societies that confer Latin America its actual and growing complexity.

If we focus only on the issue of peace, and peace education, we have to draw an even bigger line: some countries in Latin America have experienced open wars (like in the Central American region) and are still coping with the aftermaths of that violence; some have faced dictatorships of different kinds (from Chile to Argentina) and are still struggling to come to terms with the past; some have open conflicts that are political with tones of organized crime (like Colombia); some are experiencing a ravaging insecurity that encompasses street and organized crime (like Mexico and others); many of our countries are immersed in a highly polarized political situation which has exacerbated both rhetoric and action; and some countries share more than one of these scenarios.

Peace, as opposed to violence, is therefore not easily defined in such an environment: historical circumstances have to be considered; ideological frameworks have to be reviewed; social horizons have to be outlined. The idea of a common Latin American background may work more as a simplistic parameter than as an explanatory factor.

Not all Latin American countries, for example, have openly acknowledged the need for peace education or peace communication, because not all of them have recognized that violence is a problem that goes well beyond the implementation of some sort of institutionalized coercion. While places like Colombia, for example, have been actively implementing programs to strengthen the quest for a more peaceful society (peace education, peace communication, civic engagement groups for participatory budgets, etc.); others still consider that the persisting violence should be addressed basically by counter fighting it, with no specific need to include social and educational

programs to actually change the social environment that produces it. Mexico, to some extent, fits into the latter. Therefore there is an even more urgent need to start talking about peace, dialogue, and democracy from a more holistic point of view – which includes, of course, education as a prominent link in this network of complexities.

So, more than assuming a Latin American perspective, I want to assume the Latin American imaginary from the Mexican stand point. And let me do this not only because I am Mexican, but also because what is happening to us might help understand a bit more the challenges our societies are facing while trying to retell their stories to match them with the needs and goals of a very hectic and accelerated 21st century.

Today, Mexico is a country immersed in an array of violent situations and environments, difficult to grasp precisely, or mainly, because they have been addressed as fragmented and disconnected issues.

Street violence as a result of common or organized crime, has become a characteristic of many Mexican cities (and not only in cities located in regions traditionally disputed by organized crime); migration to and from Mexico is growing at an accelerated pace, which brings with it the “uncomfortableness and unwillingness of having to deal with those-who-are-different”; expressions of political violence have made themselves present (not to the extend of some guerrillas in other Latin American countries, but still); polarization, due among others to highly contested political situations, has deeply damaged social cohesion; inflammatory rhetoric, fueled also by the oversized presence of media in all aspects of national life, has deepened the distance among opposing worldviews; etc. It is true: Mexico is not facing an open war situation, like in many other countries in the region or the world; but blatant violence is coloring everyday life like never before. Today, the stories we are telling each other do not help us overcome the prevailing and aforementioned gaps.

Having before us this intricate social mesh, it is important to define what role each actor should play in order to turn the mesh into a network: nobody

pretends to turn a highly complex society into a simple and tranquil environment. But we need to find better ways to address these issues in order to find more creative means of coping with the, sometimes, inherent violence of complex societies.

So, let's talk about the role Higher Education can play in this arena, assuming that universities have still a distinct place in most social environments (although there are significant differences amongst private and public universities).

As I said before, otherness, communication, and context, are the three issues I want to highlight in this discussion. And here, I have to state maybe the obvious, but then again the indispensable: if we talk about the role of higher education in the construction of a culture of peace, dialogue, and democracy, we have to acknowledge that this is not about a subject within a curriculum, not even a group of subjects. Some universities, in Mexico and in other places, have tried to address these issues simply by designing new subject areas within established curricula. Peace, dialogue and democracy go well beyond any particular subject: what we are talking about is not a content someone can learn; it is a way a living, of understanding society, in brief, it is an experience. How do we teach experiences?

Let me first focus on the issue of "otherness". As I said from the beginning, knowing that there are others around me, who think differently, live differently and hold different perspectives in life, and being able not just to cohabit with them but actually live with them, is a condition *sine qua non* for talking about peace, dialogue and democracy.

The results of a recent study conducted by the United Nations Development Program show that the way Latin Americans conceive their identity is by differentiating themselves from others (what is sometimes called a "negative identification process"). Latin Americans find it hard to express what identifies them (the common traits that conform their identity) and easily put themselves against others in order to define some sort of identity. This narrative (using others to build my character) only opposes worldviews, and doesn't do anything

to smooth the differences or to foster a dialogue. Only if I am able to define myself and to recognize what constitutes me, will I be able to reach out to others in a forthcoming and more open way. Otherwise the other will be he who sets the limit to who I am.

In this sense, Higher Education can play a much more significant role in helping me experience otherness, than just by adding some subject area to the existing curriculum: let's consider, for example, student mobility.

Today, because of the dynamics of globalization, it is becoming part of student's life to experience, at some point of their lives, a stay abroad either to do research or attend classes. According to data from a study conducted by the University of Princeton, in the 1960s there were about 350 thousand people studying abroad; by 2004 that number had increased to more than 2 million people, and counting. Student mobility, in this sense, contributes at least to the minimum experience of having to live in a different place, with different people: this trend, along with the expansion of transnational civil society, communication and business, is a good element for the empowerment of the so called global citizen with a true international dimension. But still, even though the increase in people traveling to and living in different places for awhile is good news for the purpose of building a more global and "otherness conscious" society, we need to look closer at the facts that underlie this assumption.

The truth is that the flow of students only replicates the more general flow of people (particularly of migration) in the world: students from less privileged places (and universities) travel to more developed countries (and to more "prestigious" universities). If we dig out the old conception of periphery and center, we can easily highlight the way students from whatever periphery travel to and stay at (sometimes forever) the centers of the world – Latin American students tend to travel mostly to the US, Spain, France and the UK. Only occasionally do students from the so called centers consider the periphery (and its universities) as an option for a serious and lasting personal and professional project (that goes beyond the intent to live in a more folkloric environment for awhile, to learn a language, to gain experience, or even, from a more cynical

perspective, to accumulate the points needed to qualify as a concerned and informed citizen of the world).

In Mexico, and in Latin America in general, there have been a lot of efforts to increase student mobility. Universities, governments, even the private sector: everybody is concerned with the fostering of student mobility as an indispensable element for having better trained professionals and better shaped citizens. But something is still missing: Latin American universities (as the universities in other parts of the world, too) need to build on the development of self consciousness, on a reassuring project that offers a unique way of understanding the world, that can attract students from different areas of the world and so reverse the prevailing patterns of mobility. In a network society, like the one we are supposed to be living in, the peripheries should be considered centers or nodes that are linked to other centers or nodes. Increasing student mobility, as the universities in Latin America are doing, is in itself a good way of promoting a more tolerant citizen, open to the views of others. But the quantitative increase in itself is not good enough. The reversal of established mobility patterns, the possibility of increasing regional (and sub regional) integration, the flexibility of educational systems, are much more important than just augmenting the number of student that follow pre-established paths of mobilization.

Of course student mobility is not the only way to increase the experience of otherness; but it is a good start. Other interesting ways of doing this are recent exercises of building international student communities that have to work on possible solutions to commonly recognized world problems. During this summer, the Salzburg Summer Academy³, for example, brought together a group of 60 students and 8 professors from all over the world (including some from Mexico, Chile and Argentina). During three weeks of intensive coursework and discussions, the 60 students had to agree on different ways of dealing with terrorism, climate change and media literacy (all from a communicative perspective, as this was a program on “Media and Global Change”). The result

³ <http://www.icmpa.umd.edu/salzburg/> (on line 28th August 2007)

has still to be evaluated, as this is a very recent experience; but for everyone involved, the sole discussions and debates that came with the need to address the same problem from different perspectives is, in itself, a good outcome (in this sense, and very much related to the aforementioned point of student mobility, it is important that these exercises of putting together students from different countries, do consider a broad spectrum of origins, and not only the usual configuration of nationalities and worldviews).

Otherness, then, or the experience of the other is something that higher education can foster in order to enhance the dimensions of life, self and the social. When reality makes itself present and challenges our previously assumed reality, we have to reconsider norms and attitudes, frameworks and approaches. There are some people who consider that the experience of otherness helps individuals act in a critical way *vis à vis* tradition, without nostalgia for lost social harmonies. The truth is that the experience of otherness leads us to reconsider the stories we have been telling each other, to review stereotypes and to understand the complexity of the individual and the social behavior. But, as said before, otherness is not a subject or a content to be learned while sitting in a classroom; it is a life experience that has to be put in a broader context of socialization, communication and worldview, developing a life experience that has to strengthen empathy.

While talking about otherness, we just glimpsed into one of the areas in which Higher Education can contribute to the developing of a culture of peace, dialogue, and democracy. But, as said before, just the recognition of the other (which in itself is a huge step forward) is not good enough: we need to find ways of mediating between conflicting worldviews. We need to find ways of establishing better means of communicating the difference whilst pointing out the possibility of coexisting with the difference. We need to find ways of challenging the established communication patterns that have so much hurt our societies.

In the last decade, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), at least in Mexico and in many Latin American countries, have missed many opportunities for

establishing themselves as reliable and critically challenging social actors that openly interact with other social actors. There are of course some, and very valuable, exceptions. But in general, many universities in our region have committed a grave sin with which they now have to deal with: endogamy has been the name of the game.

Several institutions of higher education have been locked up in themselves, discussing with themselves and, in many cases, unable to cope with an outside reality that has become ever more complex and, as such, more elusive if tried to be addressed with preexisting frameworks. Only in recent years have some of these institutions reacted; but there is still a long way to go.

In a conference in Spain, in 2000, Xabier Gorostiaga, S.J., then Executive Secretary of the Association of Jesuit Universities in Latin America, asked for the refoundation of the Latin American university and insisted that the universities of the region should find better and more effective ways to address the perceived crisis in human development: “universities in Latin America need to find the missing link between them and the rest of society with all its problems and challenges.”

Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) are part of the competing forces in a society. But instead of standing aside or looking within, universities should play a better role in actively and effectively questioning the status quo, while providing useful and applicable answers to the challenges posed. We cannot go back to the times when IHE were pontificating from the Ivory Tower; and we cannot pretend that IHE turn themselves only into very active political actors (as has happened in our region in the past). We need to refund the IHE’s discourse in order to legitimize it in front of some actors in society so that knowledge can be applied to a better redesign of the prevailing social structures.

At the beginning of my presentation I insisted on three main futures that IHE can foster in order to develop a better culture of peace, dialogue, and democracy: otherness, communication, and context. I already talked about otherness; now I turn to communication.

Johan Galtung, while talking about the way media cover conflicts, argued in favor of a more *health journalism* type of coverage, than the prevailing *sports journalism* type of coverage. Among other differences, Galtung pointed out that in health journalism “the plight of a patient with an illness would be described, but so too would the possible contributing causes as well as the range of possible remedies and future preventative measures”. Sports journalism, on the other hand, sees its object in terms of a zero-sum game where winning is all. In this sense, a discourse (be it journalistic or not) more oriented towards peace, tends to explore conflict formation, gives voice to all parties, makes conflict transparent, focuses on the invisible effects of violence, exposes untruths on all sides, highlights the aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation. In sum: presents a more holistic and complex narrative, devoid of the sheer antagonism of those in direct confrontation.

Institutions of Higher Education have here different roles to play. On the one side, they must find ways of making this more complex storytelling part of the education they are providing; and again, this is not a matter of a new subject area in the curricula. They must provide students with the ability of recognizing and transforming contexts that allow different stories to emerge. And more so, they must provide students with clues to interpret the world around them, including –and this I want to emphasize– to understand and decode the media environment.

As I said before, IHE are nodes within the broader social network. In Latin America (as in some other places in the world), media have come to play such a big role in shaping the stories that try to make the surrounding world meaningful, that IHE must start to have a more proactive stance in questioning these narratives and exposing the dangers of the inflammatory rhetoric often used by some oversized and almost omnipresent media. Today, and again following Galtung, we consume narratives that focus on conflict arena, enhances the “us-them” approach, highlights only the visible (and spectacular) effects of violence, understands peace as a combination of victory and

ceasefire. As the Media Literacy⁴ group of the recent Salzburg Summer Institute on Media and Global Change stated: “there is no global issue, no political arena, no academic discipline in which the statement of problems and the framing of possible solutions are not influenced by media coverage.” Therefore, IHE cannot deny their responsibility not only in providing students with better clues to understand their surrounding context, but also in dealing with media on different levels. IHE need to acknowledge the communicative complexities of today’s media environment, and work from within to provide better narrative strategies, reconfigure the prevailing genres, and “repopulate it with different voices, views and that can have a direct meaning in the life of the students. Again, the experience of otherness as an appealing element and not just as another subject of study.

Conclusions

As I said from the beginning, it is difficult, if not almost impossible, to talk about the role of IHE in developing a culture of peace, dialogue, and democracy from a Latin American perspective, if we do not consider the concrete differences themselves. Mainly, because Latin America is facing very different challenges, and has had many different answers to the questions poised. In the case of Mexico, we still need to acknowledge, as a society, that the violent environment we are living in demands, as of today, a recognition of the situation, and a more holistic and comprehensive response to it.

I talked about otherness and communication. And I insisted that IHE can respond to these challenges only if they don’t address them by simply including new subject matters in the existing curriculum: what we are talking about here is not about content, it is about context; it’s not about learning data, it’s about developing criteria based on direct experiences and appraisal of differences. We can’t simplify the analysis to a notion of “best practices” that can be “transferred” to a different context.

⁴ <http://www.salzburg.umd.edu/globalmedia/> (on line 28th August, 2007)

Universities have been trapped in an unfruitful debate with themselves: market oriented, as they sometimes have to be (the growing number of universities and institutions of higher education in our region makes it every day more difficult to consider other issues beyond tuition, for example), they tend to leave aside many of the issues described above. But now might be the time to recognize that we are telling each other the wrong story, that the characters are somewhat not appropriate, that the storyline is faulty.

If we can find better ways of experiencing otherness and communicating differences, if we can provide the world with better contexts to cope with ever more complex situations, then maybe Institutions of Higher Education will have an increasing role to play in the development of a sounder culture of peace, dialogue, and democracy. We cannot afford to let the following statement, issued earlier this year by scholars addressing similar issues than the ones we are talking about today, become an undisputed truth: “In a world of creativity, we are running out of creativity.”

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