



2nd Higher Education Conference – 2021

THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITIES AND DEMOCRACY

Session Keynote

**WHEN DEMOCRACY IS NOT ENOUGH: TOWARDS
UNIVERSITIES EDUCATING FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE**

Professor Catherine A. Odora Hoppers, Gulu University

Professor Extraordinarius, University of South Africa

Part I:

DEMOCRACY and its GHOSTS

To quote Vaknin

- In his article “The Complexity of Simplicity”, it is simple procedures (codes, programs),
- **that often yield the most complex results.**
- **In other words, complexity resides precisely in the simple program that created it.**

- **Complexities draw attention to ambiguities in the existing application of the concepts and indeterminacy of those applications,**
- **and enables us to acknowledge the existence of competing, distinct, but equally valid meanings**
- **inherent in the constellation of concepts**
- **that surround the democratic projects of our societies.**

Democracy can be thought of as a **system of government with four key elements:**

- A political system for choosing and replacing governments through **free and fair elections,**
- **the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life;**
- **protection of the human rights of all citizens;**
and
- a rule of law, in which **the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.**

- **Democracy is a key means by which people choose their leaders**
- **and to hold them accountable for both their policies and their conduct while in office.**
- **It enables citizens to choose between competing parties in regular, free and fair elections.**

- Central to the idea of democracy is the aspiration that **government is based on the consent of those who are governed.**
- **Sovereignty of the people is a precondition,** in that the real power flows from the people
- to the leaders who hold power **only temporarily.**

- **the registers that show up would consist of concepts like: citizen, participation, choice, government, party or parties, rule of law, accountability, governance, majority, votes, right to vote, power, free and fair elections, consent, power etc.**

- It is clear that the pillar in the thinking about democracy is **the citizen**, with the process being played out in **a nation state**.
- The **non-citizen's presence is not a factor**, neither is democracy clear about events **outside of the nation-state** i.e. beyond the **“familiar”**, the **“community”**.

- It does not have propositions as to how citizens should **relate to one another outside of electoral processes,**
- or in the **private spheres of lived world.**

- As Sartwell has so well put, communities as a form of group identity,
- are not made from the abstractions of shared beliefs,
- but on something more difficult to articulate... a deep level of communication
- which Sartwell calls “emitting noise in the right shape”.

- **To the extent that conceptions of community miss the crucial formative role of exclusion,**
- **they misconstrue how and why the exclusions form and perpetuate themselves,**
- **while remaining quite unequipped to deal with this darker shadow...**
- **the inbuilt exclusion inherent in the DNA.**

- Communities are formed by **exclusions and by violence**, and what constitutes 'normal' is articulated by a process of scapegoating
- – i.e. creating and internalizing **hallucinatory images that degrade the 'other'**
- as excuses to **dominate, abuse, murder, or exploit people**
- while exalting the **'we'** group.

- Thus, **exclusion** is key in defining **an identity in a community** (Sartwell, 2002:47-49).
- In other words, **democracy does not equip the citizen with tools to reconstruct itself from an exclusion based identity to one that is embracing.**

Democratic deficits

- **Democratic deficits** can occur when democracy is:
- is **narrowed down to elections** as the arbiter of political succession,
- when **formal equality does** not say much about the social, cultural or economic structure within which this **equality is embedded,**

- when running for office at any level of government becomes **a very expensive affair**, which ends up leaving the masses with **a narrow pool of people (elite of means) to choose from – legitimating perfectly the social and economic status quo**, and
- When popular sector challenge is **repressed**, and redistributive policies are **blocked** (Bello 2005).

PART 2:

HUMAN RIGHTS

- In the attempt to find tools to help us **manage diversity,**
- the human rights framework has emerged as **an overarching instrument of choice**
- in international and national discourse **across the world.**

- This implies that there is a **collective commitment based on the vision of humanity, and the solidarity** required in order to fulfil the vision of **a better life for all.**
- The value addition element in the HRA is the introduction of **the moral dimension, urgency, responsibility and *accountability*** to the implementation of development objectives (SIDA 2000).

- But like democracy, tolerance and globalization, **the human rights discourse needs some critical attention as well.**
- the limitations of the Human Rights discourse have been most patently captured in Howard Richard's (2004) analyses.

- To begin with, he acknowledges that “rights” is **an especially valuable concept**
- because it is a concept that **almost everybody respects as having moral authority.**

- It makes an **inward appeal to conscience** especially in the respect that most people
- **develop inwardly to guide their own conduct**
- **and avoid infringing on other people's rights.**

- It has **moral authority** in the sense that one is considered justified while acting within one's rights,
- and also in the sense that one is considered to be justified in **becoming indignant**
- when one's rights are violated.

- **But according to Richards, what we need is something more than respect for the rights of others for three reasons.**

- **FIRSTLY**, citing Hegel, Richards argues that **there are too many rights.**
- And where there is **a surplus** of rights, **force decides.**
- Commonly in a war, or in a bar room brawl, both sides **can paint with the language of rights to give their cause the colour of moral superiority,**
- and to give themselves the colour of ‘knights errant’ **fighting for a righteous cause.**

- And where culturally recognized precepts of right gives **both sides good moral arguments**, there is **a moral stalemate**
- in which both sides are rhetorically armed with good reasons for **declaring the other evil.**
- It is at this point that **force becomes the final arbiter.**

- The **SECOND** argument he makes drawing from Karl Marx, is that **the stubborn persistence of poverty,**
- the instability of capitalist systems,
- and the **exploitation of labour** are all
- consistent with recognizing the rights of humanity
- **embodied in the laws of commerce.**

- **Where everything is sold at its market price, in a free market, with property rights respected,**
- **it is often the case that labour is sold for little or nothing.**
- **This is a NORM which is also endorsed by the very same societies**
- **that harp on human rights.**

- The third argument drawn from Solzhenitsyn and Mahatma Gandhi, is that in principle, **rights without duties are unworkable.**
- Like liberty, **rights-talk can easily lend itself to an irresponsible ethic.**
- It authorizes everyone to say what they are supposed to be **ALLOWED TO DO**, and **ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE** and **SUPPOSED TO GET.**

- But it does not make **anyone responsible for contributing to the welfare of others,**
- or to **the common good** (Richards 2004)
- It is at this point that he points us to the need to go an extra step,
- and take seriously the need to work **towards a culture of peace.**

PART 3:

UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE

According to Galtung...

- **DIRECT VIOLENCE** kills quickly or maims. Its victims are numbered through body counts.
- Violence is **STRUCTURAL** when force is not exerted wilfully by a person but by a structure created and perpetuated by a custom or law. It kills slowly.
- **CULTURAL VIOLENCE** highlights the way in which the *act of direct violence* and the *fact of structural violence* are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society.

Universities are complicit in sustaining cultural violence

- One way in which cultural violence works is by **changing the moral colour of an act** from **wrong to right** or to some other intermediate meaning palatable to the status quo.
- Another way it works is by **making reality opaque**, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or that when we see it, **we see it not as violent** (Galtung 1996).

- By making **reality opaque**, cultural violence prevents **consciousness formation** (conscientization).

Conclusions

- It is performing **peaceful acts**, which when repeated become **peaceful practices**, and give rise to **peaceful traditions**.

- **TO WORK FOR PEACE** therefore is to work **against violence.**
- The universities should analyze the oncoming of the 3 forms of violence
- and causes, and help the nation in predicting
- in order to prevent, and if it is done properly, **we act preventively and curatively** (Galtung 2002).

- Peace, like war, **is a disposition**, or a set of dispositions and acts of human will – i.e. **conscious activity**.
- Education for a culture of peace would **infuse the living and coming generations with a profound aversion against violence**.
- It also means understanding **conflict as part of human existence**, and learning the skills for transformation of those conflicts **without resorting to violence**.

THANKYOU