

SESSION 15:

OPEN HOUSE II - CONCLUDING SESSION

SOCIOLOGY

Anu Kapur: There were two of us in the group. Clemens was chosen as the coordinator. We have listed out a few activities which we want to do. We will take the syllabi of 2 universities in our individual disciplines – Geography and Sociology. We will highlight the relevant and the non-relevant aspects at 3 different levels: language, theme and references. We will list components within the curricula which could be increased, extended or strengthened. Each of us will try to enroll 3 more individuals into our groups who would be keen to assist in this endeavour. We have listed some details of the syllabus that we will look at, including aspects like ‘systems of healing’; outcome, support and strengthening; the silent, the silenced and the marginalized groups; people, places, skills. Clemens will send this material out to people we think are interested and we will coordinate and put things in place by the end of 6 months.

HISTORY

Gloria: We talked about having various levels of discussion in the text. We paid a lot of attention to local history and the methodologies associated with it. We felt that no matter what the capabilities of the students are, if they want to do research in their own area, it should be encouraged. We suggest that the assessment and evaluation should also reflect that and perhaps 40% or 50% could be awarded to that aspect. We paid some attention to possible regional groupings although we recognize that with time that would work itself out. We had South Asia, South East Asia, West Asia in mind. Some people wondered whether this was the old Eurocentric classification scheme and whether we had to change that but we finally decided to retain that for the present. We believe that methodology is at the core of the matter. We would want to work with a one-year period.

Claude: I would like to add something on the spirit of the discussion. We felt that an introductory course for an 18-year old who is coming into college for the first time is essential. How do we explain to such a person what is happening in the discipline of history and how do we give him/her a sense of the variety of ways that exist of knowing about the past.

Second, the emphasis in Eurocentric history has always been in the sphere of kings and emperors. The result is that local histories are wiped out. Local events that are in the memory of people do not figure at all in history as it is taught at present. That sort of historiography should be done. We should begin with local history and then move in concentric circles to regional history, national history and world history, To give a sense of history to anybody at the fundamental stage, local history is important national or global history is really not necessary.

In terms of methodology, we felt that at least 50% of the time students should be involved in the reconstruction of history, the location of history and the creation of history. This can be done by talking to people, visiting sites and so on. Some amount of de-eurofication of Malaysian history for example has been done in Malaysia – so we should use that to show people that this is already happening. The introductory course should thus be a tangible way for students getting into history to actually relate to peoples' history, historical artifacts and so on. That would be the best way to begin a course that would avoid all the pitfalls of the Eurocentric models to which we are accustomed.

EDUCATION

Radha: Among the representatives in our group some were teaching post-graduate courses, graduate courses, undergraduate courses, some at school level, others were teaching outside the formal education system and there were also some who were not teaching anywhere but were interested in the subject.

First, we tried to identify which level of education we were talking about. We then discussed various methodologies of teaching and we concluded that there were diverse methodologies and their need to be documented and made available in terms of websites, names of authors, resource persons etc. We also felt that one needed to examine the kind of resources that are required and search for where they exist or create them if necessary.

We did not discuss a time frame. But I think that if everyone cooperates, we ought be able to work this out within a year.

Vimbai: Some of us were concerned about our approach i.e. the foundations of education. Then we realized that there are worlds of education. Education for a Moslem may be different from education for an African or for a Hindu. So we need to formulate syllabi that take into consideration those worlds of education. This must be our guiding principle.

We also need to consider the medium of instruction. Some people may want to make it a principle to start teaching students right from kindergarten in the language of their mother-tongue so that they know how to name their world before they can name it in other people's world. So there will arise the need for each one of us to start writing about education in the language of their world to enable them to intervene if they like.

Norma: One of the reasons why we took so long to come to any kind of agreement on how to deal with education was because education was not discussed at all at this conference – it was not on the agenda. Another reason was that it took us much time to figure out at what level we would want to intervene. Would it be at the level of teacher training colleges and institutions or schools? Finally we came to the conclusion that teacher training institutions would be a good place where we would like to intervene in terms of curriculum. We felt that the teachers that graduate from these teacher training

institutes must recognize that it is not their job to dispense knowledge or transfer to others the things they have learnt but rather they should see themselves as facilitators who will help students to acquire knowledge by their own efforts.

We agreed that one of the ways of learning was to give students freedom to decide the pace of learning and the subject of study. The facilitator must explain to parents that it is good for the child to be left free to figure out what he /she wants to learn because otherwise there is a continuous feeding of knowledge and no time where the child can think for him/herself.

We also discussed different ways of evaluation. We felt that however creative the learning system may be, if the method of evaluation is not creative, then a lot of the goals we are talking about are lost. Some persons may be able to write well, others speak well, still others may be able to interact excellently with the community, some may be able to dramatize, and so on. So we need to look at the various ways in which the educational institute can evaluate a student's learning in order to best appreciate how well the student has learnt the subject.

Wasif: Within the formal discourse of understanding the discipline of education, what is missing is factual epistemology or history of where this entire enterprise comes from. This, perhaps more than any other discipline, needs debunking because education, unlike sociology, history or economics, as a societal enterprise, is considered to be noble. Opening a school, is seen as a noble task. So, to unmask its actual basis should be at least at the core of the new curriculum. Second, in order to show how impoverished and bankrupt this system of education is, we need to have an entire range, an entire database of alternative possibilities of learning.

ECONOMICS

Shau Lung: We had a very competitive discussion about what exactly to put into a foundational course. If we put all the things we talked about, the foundational course would take about 5 years. But perhaps within the next year, we can pare it down to something manageable as a single course, hopefully something which would provide the basic critical, analytical foundations with which students can engage in deeper exploration of the subject. A lot of focus went into how to teach economics.

We are particularly focused on the competence to critique economic theory. There was a debate between Chiu and Tariq about whether to focus attention on the radical students and release more radicals into this world or to focus on the hard core conservatives and try to liberate them. May be it is upto personal preference. It also depends on how the syllabus is structured, which can be customized according to individual persons. Beyond these foundational considerations we did not really get beyond the broadly western tradition as we know it today because we were talking about the economics of capitalism only so far.

We also talked about studying the mechanisms of primitive accumulation, field study within economics as well as seeing real, live, moving economics in action. We also talked of appropriating a bit from economic anthropology to study other multi-productional and multi-economic lives, particularly reflecting the diversity of economic livelihoods in developing countries.

We vowed to continue this discussion on email and hopefully we will come up with some interesting results. Time frame: One year. Principal agent: Robi.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Edgu: To begin with, anthropology is a vast subject. Everything is there in anthropology: Economic structures, historical structures, political structures, etc.

We felt that we have one advantage over Europeans which that while they cannot speak our language, we can speak their language. So we can go to their schools and come to know what is their purpose. Then we can come back and sit with our people and try to find a way to critique our own system and to know where to go. First we have to return to traditional structures and study them.

Anthropology has to consider firstly local literature, local life, economics, politics, social relations, education, where people are the subject and not our object. We have to find local material for this purpose. We have to critique the anthropology we learn and we have also to critique our own systems. We have to use anthropology to understand ourselves and educate people to use anthropology to understand themselves.

Claude: I must thank you for being such wonderful participants. We are happy you have taken this exercise seriously. Now Mr. Idris will make his concluding remarks.

Mohd. Idris

It gives me great joy in congratulating all of you for spending your energy in exhaustive discussion on social sciences. You have discussed on teaching of economics, sociology, anthropology, history, politics and agriculture. You have examined these various disciplines, especially from the viewpoint of Asia, Africa and S. America. I don't know how you left out law, which governs our lives in many forms. I think you should have discussed that subject too.

Today we have done some brainstorming. We have also taken up some commitments at the individual level. For the first time, a group of scholars from Asia, Africa and South America has come together to discuss, and work out, a practical programme to tackle the ghost of Eurocentricism haunting social science teaching in our universities.

Our ship, "the Ghost Buster", is now due to set sail from Penang.

Every time we have a conference like this, we make new and lasting friends. We find that all over the world, there are people like us who are troubled by the crippling phenomenon of intellectual dependence. We find scholars yearning to be free. We discover kindred spirits waiting to join battle, but are unable to do so, because they lack an army or the company of other soldiers.

These meetings enable us to size our strengths. Weaknesses we know about, but we need to know our strengths. In the past three days, I have been witness to some scintillating discourses from scholars who can hold their own anywhere. There are also several scholars who are solidly part of this group but who could not attend due to prior commitments.

The Multiversity working group on busting the ghost of Eurocentricism in the social sciences may be small in numbers, but I feel it contains the best and the brightest people on the planet. It is a happy achievement that we have been able to get together such a group over the past couple of years, and come to agree on a common minimum programme.

In the months to come, we hope that position papers, drafts, outlines and model curricula for some of these social sciences will emerge from the concerns and work of this group (and others it is able to recruit). Multiversity will provide all the logistics for such work to be done speedily and will circulate the output as well in appropriate quarters.

No group can survive without continuous interaction and affection. I therefore request you to ensure that Multiversity is safely packed in your baggage as you depart from Penang, so that when you open your baggage at home, it tumbles out with all the other memories and mementoes you are taking back from this island city. We crave for your affection, so once in a while, send us a love note.

Multiversity is everybody's baby. As individuals, we may (and we should) have our own ideological positions on different issues. But we are all in agreement on casting aside the ghost of Eurocentricism and determined that a major start will come from here, from us, from this group and from others we can recruit to this cause.

From its inception, in fact, we have kept Multiversity as an open source and as an open platform for persons exclusively from the developing societies. We welcome you to make the ideas your own and to initiate activities in your own domains when you return. As Ashis said, all of us are already doing some Multiversity work in our own countries back home in any case.

But we also need to make the objectives and activities of Multiversity better known everywhere and for this we seek your collaboration and help. When we send you brochures, please have these circulated among your colleagues. Write about this meeting or the issues raised here. Please do spread information about our website (www.multiworld.org). Or, like Vinay and Progler, set up your own Multiversity website

on these issues. You are welcome to link up your site with ours and we shall reciprocate as well.

But above all, as far as this meeting is concerned, we seek your earnest assistance and collaboration in the practical task of thinking about ways and means to redesign our curricula, so that, when we teach our younger generations, we endow them with the capacity to respond in a creative way to the problems of their societies.

I thank each and every one of you for taking the trouble to come to Penang. International travel is not exactly pleasant all the time. It can be quite tiring and exhausting, especially for those who have come from places as far away as Zimbabwe, Peru, the USA. We appreciate the efforts you have put in for this meeting as well. Some of you have come with written presentations. We will ensure that your contributions to this meeting are circulated on the Net and in various fora, and to those who could not attend.

I think Multiversity should also get interested in other areas. We can think of planning development economic conferences, or organise conferences on indigenous knowledge, wealth distribution and poverty alleviation. Therefore I would request you to formulate some ideas to how we can popularize such information. Often, all this knowledge, these systems of thinking, are only confined to conference rooms and published works. I feel that to make it popular, at mass level, is the need of the hour. Mass consciousness, mass education and mass information is urgently required. Otherwise all these discussions remain very elite. That is why I agree with Wasif that we need to dismantle all existing institutions and to create people-oriented institutions like Lok Vidya. We must progress towards that goal. So this is my appeal to all of you: think of transforming the existing system, changing it completely, turning it upside down. We have borne this Eurocentric burden for a long while. This enslavement must now go. 500 years is too long a time.

Once again, a pleasant journey back home. This island and its concerns will keep beckoning you from time to time. And we hope you will come back for more Multiversity meetings in future.