

The Annual Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) Lecture 2006

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**“Mono and Multi Culture: The Role of Universities
in Learning from Each Other in Today’s World”**

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Your excellency Lord Dearing,
Your excellency Sir Graeme,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some years ago I was invited to be in Belfast, and it was a Jewish chancellor, a non-denominational university and a Muslim recipient, and after lunch we started chatting about “Islamist terror”. I asked my host whether in Northern Ireland I could talk about “Christianist terror”. He said “You have a point!”

This of course does not blinker the fact that the role of education in the context of the dangerous schisms and misconceptions that have emerged between the two great interlocking entities we call “the West” and “the Muslim world” – apples and oranges to me, because the West is geography, and the Muslim world is a part of the universal values which we share. I was just asked to comment on the conversations which have been very generously published between Maimonides and Averroes. Maimonides was 13 years younger than Averroes, and the two of them object strongly to those who have turned the holy text into a profession – I am referring to those who have turned religion into a private industry. It’s interesting that in the days of Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Maimun we were talking of the “sons of”; today we are living in the day of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Abu Ammar, any number of Abus you might like to name, of the newly privatised movements which represent in their totality a parallel political discourse, a parallel economy, a parallel society. And I find this extremely worrying, because this parallelism is between the state on the one side, and *people* on the other. One of the main schisms is the schism and the break in the social contract, the contract of trust between governments, private sector and the general public – whether non-governmental organisations, universities, academia, professional unions and the like.

I know that I am following in the footsteps of establishment figures; Lord Broers of course is a Cantabrigian so I cannot share that particular attachment and affiliation with him, although I am glad to say that our eldest daughter went to Trinity and our son went to Gonville and Caius. Many years ago my father was accepted at St John’s, Cambridge, before my grandfather, who thought that all these universities produced leftist ideas, decided to send him to Sandhurst. Robert Reich I must mention also as a predecessor. I’m not Clintonesque in my pronouncements; that is to say, I have felt the way I do for forty years – it hasn’t come as a blinding flash of the obvious after I left office.

I’d like to suggest that in light of the current scenarios in our region – and our region is described by Americans during the conversations we had last year at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as from Marrakech to Bangladesh, Casablanca to Calcutta – and I said “You do realise you’re talking about the most populous, the poorest and the most dangerous region in the world?” The eye of the storm, however, is still the current scenarios in Iraq, Iran, Israel/Palestine and at a broader cultural level, and this ominous

forecast of schisms becoming real and permanent, is a very worrying one. The forecast of which I speak is “either you are with us or you are against us”. I’d like to know, as I said to five American congressmen who visited me for the first time in many years a few days ago to ask “Middle East, quo vadis?”, I’m glad that they’re looking to the bottom of the barrel. We do have a wisdom deficit in our part of the world which is a close second to the human dignity deficit. We have bombs in our part of the world. One of them is the population bomb, the other is the environment bomb, and the third is the poverty bomb. We need 35 million job opportunities in West Asia over the next ten years, according to the United Nations, and 100 million job opportunities in the West Asia and North Africa region in the next twenty years.

H.G. Wells suggested in his *Outline of History* in 1929 that “the future of mankind becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe”; more and more a challenge of what we called in the independent commission for humanitarian issues (David Owen was the British participant) a report which languishes as wisdom languishes in the general assembly of the United Nations from 1988 to the present day calling for a law of peace posits the question “Can we win the human race?” The question becomes more and more real as we look at the schism between MAD: Mutually Assured Destruction and MAS: Mutually Assured Survival. And I feel that only by putting science and education within the logic of human solidarity – for surely it is at the very least logical to respect others in an interdependent world – can we hope to achieve the call for partnership in humanity. Lester Pearson called it partners in development; I would like to call it partners in humanity.

So, what perspectives can I, as an NGO, a “non-governmental organism”, offer to you today? First of all, having been involved in intercultural and intracultural dialogue, and dialogue between the adherents of the faith – I have never touched on metaphysics or the core of faith for obvious reasons, but tried to get on with values – having been involved for such a long time, long before it became fashionable, I studied Hebrew at Oxford, I’m the only Muslim member of the Centre for Hebrew Studies at Oxford University, I was in Auschwitz a few days before Pope Benedict is going to make his historic visit, and it was a few years ago that I tapped the mezuzah in the synagogue in Auschwitz. The Catholics thanked me for triangulating a relationship and the Jews thanked me because we were at that time, Jews and Arabs, extending assistance to the Muslims of Bosnia. If you recall, for those of you who know the history of the Middle East and the Mediterranean region it was Chaim Weizmann who said we should not do injustice to the Muslims, after all they took in Jews and Arabs after the holy inquisition in Spain. Today of course we are talking about Sephard, about Andalus, about the past, about reconciliation, about forgiveness, but we also I think need to talk about the future. And now more than ever I think we need to look at good education as an inspiring and human-centric bulwark against ideologies of certitude that reduce others to mere objects of hatred and derision. Dogmas leave us all the more impoverished, as they encourage the moderate majority – the silenced majority, not the silent majority – I hate to say the moderate majority because to the man in the street and the poor majority in the street today, if you say “moderate” or “centrist” then you’ve basically sold out to Mammon or to the material order. And unfortunately I feel this is borne out by the fact that you can call a technological order or a security order or an internet order, but please don’t talk about human, humanitarian or humanist. But the silenced majority, I feel today, is retreating into its own exclusionist identities at the expense of the empathy and mutual respect so sorely needed at this time. In fact I feel that the clash of cultures is about inclusion and exclusion, it’s hardly about culture at all.

The question facing us today then becomes: these dogmas, these fundamentalisms of all the different kinds – from the so-called Islamic and Christian brands to the secular varieties – are they organic developments in their own right, or are they the product of strained social and political circumstances? Do people fear and resent the other out of natural inclination, or because they have been intimidated, traumatized, or victimized into doing so?

The answer is most certainly in my humble opinion the latter, and I think it is one of the great responsibilities – but also the great opportunity – of education, particularly higher education, to try to repair the damage done by reckless and short-sighted actions, from military invasions to desecration of religious symbols. The “cartoon wars” are an instructive example: it was above all the sheer *ignorance* of how offensive such images are to Muslims, rather than any deliberate attempt to insult, that set off such a terrible and chaotic sequence of events. I have always said that freedom of speech comes from the top of the mountain, but I believe the age of prophets is over. All the rest is editing. And I feel that from September to January the cartoon war lay dormant. In January, suddenly it became public and it was exploited by Islamists who carried worse caricatures than the ones actually published in the Danish newspaper. And the result was the killing of people in the streets from Nigeria to Bangladesh.

As my colleague in the World Conference on Religions for Peace, the Reverend Hans Küng, has pointed out: “freedom of expression may not be abused in such a way that it deliberately violates central religious feelings and produces stereotypical hostile images - formerly of Jews, now of Muslims. Press freedom entails being responsible.”

Bertrand Russell – I wish that Bertrand Russell could join us at the World Conference (for Religions for Peace, with particular emphasis on peace) – and I quote, said: “The problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.” This seems to me to sum up our present difficulties: you get far more attention by shouting simplistic slogans with a long beard and a Kalashnikov in your hand than you do by promoting reasoned dialogue. Of course, I have a basic handicap, I am a prince. You’ll forgive me for that, but I have to say that I’m going to speak at Brandeis University in Boston, and it’s a tremendous conundrum in the making, on the one side there was an exhibit of Palestinian children suffering in the intifada, this was torn down by a right wing Israeli who said that it should be a balanced exhibit, so the university promised a balanced exhibit, and then I was attacked by one of them for coming from a country with a dismal human rights record and Amnesty International was quoted. Now of course you must hold me singly responsible for all the sins of humanity, not least of all those of Jordan, and I can’t say that my country has been any more or less forthcoming in the field than many other countries in the world. But I was rather saddened to find that on the other side of the equation there’s a Mr Kushner who is also a recipient of an award, and Mr Kushner produced a film on Munich. He said that the perpetrators of the Munich massacre were as bad as those who went to hunt them down. Now between one and the other I don’t know – I violated human rights in the views of those who oppose the death sentence by signing a death sentence for those who actually carried out the Munich massacre. It was never implemented because they were never caught.

It’s a very difficult world in which we live. It’s the credentials you bring to the table rather than what you have to say, and in Arabic it is the knowledge of rhetoric, the

knowledge of meaning, the knowledge of innovation, all of these components and many others, that form the essence, the kernel of communication. And we need a communication strategy. There are 250 satellite stations in the Arab world which spout “info-tainment” and “info-terror” so our airwaves show little sign of developing “info-wisdom”. Although we should hardly begrudge the vast amount of knowledge at our fingertips today, a true education goes beyond mere knowledge and opens the mind to the *wisdom* of our shared human heritage. I think, ladies and gentlemen, that with virtual reality we need a little bit more virtuous reality. And in that context I would like to say that particularly with reference to humanities subjects like history, we have been lagging behind. I am delighted to see that excelling universities in the Mediterranean region – excelling in science, that is – are now interested in developing humanities. The initiative taken by the Spanish and the Turkish governments to establish a centre for Mediterranean humanities in Turkey, I hope will see the light of day. But in many countries the way history is taught continues to convey national prejudices that hinder the construction of shared supranational identities. I studied French history from a British perspective, which you can all appreciate was entirely objective!

Universities offer the individual the opportunity to indulge in learning and discover the world for the sake of personal development, and through that to come to terms with different worldviews. As you may know, the first word of the Holy Qur’an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was “Iqra!”, “Read!” – a seminal exhortation to learn if ever there was one – and a famous saying of the Prophet instructs his followers to “seek knowledge, even unto China”. In this “knowledge century”, when knowledge is at such a premium, it is nevertheless clear that misunderstandings and distrust are primarily due to a knowledge deficit. It was in 1970-something that we met under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme in Buenos Aires to develop a database, as it was then called, it’s now become an informatics base and then a knowledge base, to support a conversation between Latin America and the Mediterranean world. These initiatives are well-inspired, but as with the three baskets of the Helsinki process, which start with security first, then economy and then culture, culture remains an afterthought.

And as for knowledge, I would like to suggest that despite, or perhaps because of, the plethora of resources suddenly available to us, we suffer from “infotigue” and remain poorly informed about each other’s cultures and societies. Peoples have been brought face to face without always having a firm grip of their identities, leading to some unfortunate frictions. If we care to look beneath the surface, however, what we find is emphatically not a clash over values, - and you don’t need to take my word for it, there are numerous independent surveys (the Pew poll, Telhami / Zogby International, University of Michigan World Values Survey, and the Arab Human Development Report) – we see some startling facts. The Arab Human Development Report refers to the Arab country - any Arab country - as a “black hole” into which nothing enters, and from which nothing emerges. And this is an overall commentary on scholarship, on the production of ideas, and so forth.

The clash that we see today has everything to do with the selectivity and double standards with which these values are applied – and I won’t exhaust you here with the usual catalogue of examples from West Asia. All I can say is that our West Asian region is unfortunately influenced by unilateral impulses – and I’ll give you an example, despite myself. We can meet in a room – Karl Popper said that any meeting that goes beyond eighteen is not a meeting – and we can agree on anything. The Quakers organised meetings on chemical weapons years ago, long before the peace treaties with Israel;

Iranians, Israelis, you name it, everyone attended. I've had Indians and Pakistanis in one room. They walk out with an agreed code of conduct. Will it ever see the light of day? No. If I were to call for a regional conference in the Middle East today, would it see the light of day? No, because ultimately it's what the hyperpower feels about the issue, and if the hyperpower is yawning, then it's not topical and not acceptable. As for Europe today, well, I leave you to comment on focus and willpower in Europe in helping to bring about – before it is too late, and we're talking about between here and November I think, and the American elections, the possibilities of war breaking out in our benighted region. So, we work under huge difficulties, it is very difficult to talk about multilateralism when unilateralism is the order of the day.

As we've seen, the hypermodern meeting of multiple cultures has its inevitable flashpoints, but it also contains the potential for great self-knowledge, at an individual and a cultural level. And if this seems a bit fanciful or optimistic, then it is up to us to devise strategies to institutionalize such a process. One of the most obvious approaches is that of educational exchange programs, and I hope you will agree that far deeper interaction between universities in the West and in the Arab and Muslim worlds on this score is an absolute must.

Educational exchange is all about understanding the world from another point of view, relativizing your perspective by putting yourself in the shoes of the other. When I used to speak to the Israeli attorney general during the Israeli-Jordanian peace talks I would say to him "Where there's a will, there's a way!" and he'd say "No, where there's a will, there are relatives!" So can we relatives relativize? I don't know. Only by doing this we can begin to reach a reasonable consensus and a civilized framework for difference – or a framework for civilized difference. I saw some graffiti on a wall the other day that said: "Before you criticize someone, walk a mile in their shoes. Then when you criticize them... you'll be a mile away wearing their shoes!"

But seriously, this is another instance where the tragic reality of post-9/11 life hinders us, as security-conscious countries understandably tighten immigration controls and the number of students from Muslim countries wanting to study in the West – also understandably – decreases. While I never underplay the importance of security – I've lost dear friends and colleagues along the way – we do have to show the necessary resolve and imagination to work round such obstacles before they become insurmountable. After all, educational exchange and learning by analogy fall under the rubric of "soft power" – the combination of "soft power" and "hard power", we are told, becomes "smart power", and is I believe the coinage of Joseph Nye at Harvard who calls it: "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion."

The importance of these potential exchanges to the Muslim world cannot be underestimated, and the problem as I see it is that we are approaching a period of demographic crisis which could have major knock-on effects, particularly here in neighbouring Europe. The moral direction that is ideally part of a rounded education is particularly vital in terms of changing attitudes among the young. I worked with Cardinal Arenz of San Paolo in the 1970s before the Cancun conference. At that time we were talking about Catholic militancy, today we are talking about Muslim militancy, and I see many of the seeds of the same malaise of exclusion. Street children was what we were talking about, and you see more street children today in Muslim capitals than ever before. In many West Asian countries, nearly half the population is under the age of 20. What are their intellectual inputs and who are their role models? For a significant

minority, it is “Info-terror Incorporated” – better known as al-Qaida. Well-intentioned civil movements must contend not only with the authoritarian state structures, but also with the other, darker side to global civil society: the parallel system that relies on a grey economy of arms and drugs.

So, ladies and gentlemen, cultural and value-based differences are not the fundamental issue facing us. What really threatens the long-term peace, security and stability of our world is its increasing division. We see this divide around us every day. It can be measured in terms of knowledge, opportunity, mobility, communications and resources – but fundamentally it is a divide in *human dignity*. This is what pushes people to do things that are not just anathema to their own culture and heritage but against all ethical standards. I’m not proposing that terrorism is fuelled purely by poverty, but I am saying that this human dignity divide threatens the security of all. The rich are becoming super-rich; the Gulf I think earns one billion dollars a day. The middle class, which at least in my country used to be a backbone, is now on the way down, and poverty, unfortunately, continues to grow. This is not something that you can address with massive investment projects; projects have to come within the context of a vision. We have lost that vision. When we put together qualifying industrialised zones, as a fruit of peace with Israel, we insisted on the employment of over fifty per cent nationals, Jordanians. Free zones now are a way around this particular conditionality; we employ Asians, and the other day there was a 161-page report to the Secretary of Labor in the United States saying how we abuse Asians. But if you go and see the film *Syriana*, you will recognise that the abuse of Asians is not limited to Jordan. Anyone, it seems to me, who is a little well off, is racist to those who are not well off.

The scale of the divide can be understood in terms of digital illiteracy as well: high income countries account for 60% of global internet users, as opposed to low income countries which possess a mere 2%. The digital divide and consequent disparity in information access is making it ever harder for those who need it most to break out of the cycle of poverty, unemployment, inadequate healthcare and so on. I am talking of my limited experience with women’s organisations in Bangladesh – empowering the poor means legal empowerment. My late sister-in-law worked for twenty years with a helpline and a group of lawyers to attend to the immediate crisis before the rights of those who have very little are taken away. I went into a mosque the other day – it was after her funeral, and one of these characters with a hennaed beard, a graduate of a Saudi university, asked if I would say a few words in Arabic, and I said “well, yes, and my Arabic happens to be a little bit better than yours, so you might be able to pull it over the eyes of these people but not over mine. You are doing a great injustice here.” “What is it?” he said. I said “You have hundreds of women outside the locked door of this mosque. This is the house of God, it is not the house of man or the house of woman. So either you let them in or I am going to scream from the rooftops!” He let them in, and it got into the press. In Bangladesh because women are empowered, when ten thousand bearded wonders demonstrate in the street, ten thousand women demonstrate in front of them. Not because it’s men or women, but because they’re citizens and they feel empowered and they feel that they are stakeholders. This is what needs to be understood in the alternative development programmes in India, in Pakistan – good work is being done, but soft security is not yet regarded as important. How do we deal with these divides which concern us all? We can continue with the adhocery, the unilateral militarism, the disregard for legal restrictions, and the bias towards hard security measures that only exacerbate existing tensions.

There is of course another way. It involves investment in the long-term future and a greater awareness not only of the complexity of human relations but also of man's relationship with nature. For we are confronted not only with "man against man" but also "man against nature", and the two cannot be seen in isolation. All of our countries are urbanising at a rate we cannot afford. Were we to raise the consumption levels of developing countries to those of richer countries, all our efforts would be wasted. This does not mean that they deserve any less. It means that in a world with 75m more people (the population of Turkey) every year, reconciling social and economic development with the wellbeing of our natural environment is the fundamental challenge facing humanity in this century. We desperately need a new approach that integrates consumption of natural resources, protection of the environment, and economic growth.

This brings us back to why we are here: education. Not just as a fundamental human right and the basis of individual and social development, but with a view to advancing a more sophisticated grasp of what has become the watchword of our age: security. This concept of security incorporates the active stakeholding of the disempowered. Mrs Karen Hughes, the other day in yet another conference on "the West and the Rest" – the West and Islam – was talking about the four Es, Education, Empowerment, Exchange, Engagement. I said to her, dear lady, how can you talk about engagement without a partner? Who doesn't believe in education? Why don't we emphasise in the Gulf here and now, the importance of building a cohesion fund, like the European Cohesion Fund that tried to develop and improve standards for your new European partners, the Eastern European countries? Is this a monologue about the need for dialogue? That's what it boiled down to, and sadly that's what I feel. I'd like to speak of education in an anthropocentric framework, - as Shirley Williams used to say, putting people at the centre of everything – putting people first, whereby science and technology are at the service of humanity rather than vice versa. Learning not just for work, but for life, so people can solve problems on their own terms.

And I didn't intend to come here today to preach or exchange platitudes. We are all aware of the unprecedented importance of education as a creator of open, democratic societies; of its powerful synergistic effects on other development objectives such as empowerment of women, protection of the environment, better health and so forth. In the eight Millennium Development Goals I think it is perfectly obvious that two of those goals ("universal primary completion" and "gender parity in primary and secondary schooling") are still issues that need to be attended to, along with innovation, flexibility and productivity in the labour force; of its inverse relation to infant and child mortality rates; of its role in making countries competitive in world markets characterized by rapidly evolving technologies. How can we make these components of the state feel that they belong? How can we give them ownership?

The predicament of education in the Arab world is that with globalization, Arab countries are increasingly integrated in world markets, and therefore require an ever higher quality of human capital to compete. A 21st century education involves focus not just on particular subject content, but on learning how to learn in a changing environment. Arab countries are struggling to keep up alongside high-performing economies like South Korea and Finland, where we see education, skills and technology interacting to create a virtuous cycle of productivity. Ensuring basic literacy and numeracy, as well as problem-solving and world-class professional skills, will require new curricula and improved teacher training programs. I was delighted to be able to bring from Vietnam and Poland, with Japanese support, in 1995, the days of my late

brother King Hussein, the “happy programme” which basically speaks of a generational contract. To be able to take the Deputy Head of the IMF into poor areas, where he asked about room density, take-home pay, severance pay, social conditions – this is policy, not politics. But unfortunately, as with many other things, education has become a case of politics. I invite you all to come and participate in the Second World Congress for Middle East Studies (WOCMES2) in Amman next month. I hope that we can focus on alliances – an alliance between the voracious media and academia. Let us see a few more embedded scholars, rather than only hearing about embedded journalists.

One of the basic problems we face is the absence of a tradition of dialogue. I have, through education in this country and more formal Islamic education, learnt the hard way. I love the English expression “I believe in a meeting of minds – if you have a mind, I would like to meet it”. When I went back to the Arab world and tried to put forward an argument, or to correct the views of someone else which I disagreed with, I didn’t realise how many enemies I was making. One of the problems of “brain drain” (an Indian friend once said “Better “brain drain” than “brain in the drain””) is that we look at it as a *scourge* of Arab and developing countries. I do not think that necessarily has to be the case. I think that if we are changing attitudes in those who have travelled to other communities, interacted on a competitive level and benefited from the experience of dialogue with others, then that in the long term surely must be “brain gain”. We’re faced with a daunting array of urgent social and political issues. Developing education and a young population capable of addressing these issues is absolutely essential. It’s worth remembering that it was a former president of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, who in 1998 proposed to the UN General Assembly that the year 2001 should be a year of dialogue – dialogue of civilisations. When Khatami’s government was subsequently dismissed as part of the “axis of evil”, one might well have asked: does the West want a serious discussion with Islam? We missed that opportunity, and today we are confronted with a polarity of populism, which I find extremely difficult to see our way through.

I think the perceived Islamic threat to Europe to which Dominic Moisi refers can best be summed up in questions of monoculture versus multiculturalism and democracy versus autocracy. Given that so many Muslim countries have missed out on the so-called “3rd wave” of democracy, many have drawn the conclusion that the supposed unity of religion and state in Islam presents an insuperable cultural barrier to the spread of democracy. I would like to express the view that, sadly, there is much more truth to this statement than meets the eye, and I am a strong advocate of the creation of a Vatican-type system in Jerusalem, Mecca, Najaf – where moral authority stands apart from the state, whichever state that may be, and discussion based on respect for the other is encouraged. And what’s more, altruism, based on the reactivation of institutions that focus on broadly defined alms – we have enough arms, but we need more philanthropy and more caring – can be the focus.

I think I have taken enough of your time; I would just like to close with a rabbinical saying that goes: “don’t limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time.” Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.