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Key Note Address

By

Professor Renate Holub
Director, Interdisciplinary Studies
University of California, Berkeley, USA

Europe’s Identity and Islams

Abstract

Until the break-up of the Soviet Union, dominant intellectual and educational cultures in Europe worked primarily with national concepts. In the curriculum of grammar schools and high schools, national literary and philosophical traditions received special status. Curricular recourse to national traditions has its roots in the cultural policies of the education ministers of the nascent modern nation states all over Europe. Calls for a national organization of traditions in the curriculum reflect the self-assertion of the expanding bourgeois strata over aristocratic and ecclesiastical power, but they also reflect the self-consciousness of national elites in competition with other national elites. In the twentieth century, nationalist ideologies have, of course, lost some of their glamour due to the impact of two disastrous world wars. But while leading European intellectuals over the past 50 years developed a research program that transcended the national spirit, they nonetheless remained bound by the concept of “modernity,” which comprises the concept of the modern nation state and the modern nation state system. Hence they remained also bound by the territory of Europe and Northamerica. Alain Touraine, Juergen Habermas, and Anthony Giddens are all cases in point. The historical connectedness of Europe to the rest of global regions – be it culturally, politically, financially, or economically – remained outside the purview of Europe’s leading social and political thinkers. Hence the geopolitical facts of Europe’s development, including its national developments, escaped the central debates. The formation of the European Union on one hand, and Europe’s enmeshment with forces of globalization on the other, have begun to impact the consciousness of cultural and educational elites. While the European Union has set up educational initiatives intent on de-nationalizing or Europeanizing the education of Europe’s young, globalization has presented European intellectuals with both an opportunity and a challenge that transcends this process of Europeanization. First, globalization accelerates a process of conscious multiculturization of the European public spheres, a process which is already widespread.
in the educational systems and public spheres of the immigration societies of North America and elsewhere, such as in South East Asia. Secondly, since migration into Europe occurs primarily from the East and the South, it largely equals migration from Muslim majority countries. The integration of Muslim immigrants in Europe and the fact of the presence of Muslim Europeans in Eastern Europe, brought to heightened consciousness by the Kosovo wars, has opened up debate about the “nature of Islam.” Muslim intellectuals in Europe have made a substantive contribution to these debates—among them Mohammed Arkoun, Aziz al-Asmeh, Krishan Kumar, Tariq Madood, Mohammed Sabour, Bassam Tibi, Pnina Werbner, and others. What I propose in this paper is that dialogues on the “nature of Islams” present an opportunity to rethink the “nature of Europe.” Steeped as the cultural unconscious of Europe has been in the concept of “modernity,” the “modern nation state” and “the modern nation state system,” it has neglected the systematic study of alternative modernities and alternative systems of governmentality, including systems of democratic governmentality in the internet age. Islamic political systems tend to link the elements of the holy book of the Koran, the legal knowledge of the Schari’a, and the jurisprudential traditions of the fiqh to political institutions. The current European systems tend to delink religious knowledge and institutions from legal and political power, though they retain ideological and educational power to some degree by way of constitutional legitimacy. Dialogues with Muslim scholars inside and outside Europe can remind us to reflect on the evolution of rights traditions and constitutional traditions, the ideological and material conditions of which in early modern Europe were wrested by the leading intellectuals from the principles of ecclesiastical and absolutistic power. Yet the further evolution of these rights traditions and the potentials they hold for a global network of peace, equality, and justice was not impeded by ecclesiastical and absolutistic power, but by the “myth” of competition to which the national economic elites and intellectual cultures clung. Built into the European tradition of rights is the so-called international law which from its inception in the seventeenth century promotes, however camouflaged by the concept of “balance of power,” the right of the stronger over the weaker. (Grotius, De iure belli et pacis, and De mare liberum). This includes the right to war. Yet right to war, which brings destruction to people, cannot be a human right, because to live unharmed, physically, psychologically, and spiritually, is a human right. Dialogues with Muslim intellectuals, for many of whom the connection between politics and religion remains a material, legal, and constitutional fact, offer an extraordinary opportunity to rethink the “religious” principles that govern the rights traditions in Europe, however secular they appear to be, particularly in the area of international law. And these dialogues may direct us into a renewed study of the many philosophical traditions in Europe which legitimate moral principles of violence on one hand, or reject moral principles of violence on the other. Above all, these dialogues can assist in resurrecting the most important project philosophical Europe began to set up at the beginning of modernity, when its intellectuals promoted natural rights, the universality of the human right to justice, equality, liberty and peace. Fundamental in this promotion was the recognition of the right of human beings to be the authors or the makers of their rights, a practice which Giambattista Vico called, in his New Science on the common nature of nations, poein, creating and making. The comprehensive logic of this promotion of human rights was aborted and turned upside down when these human rights to justice, equality, peace, and liberty were
territorialized in the modern nation state, thereby creating an “insider citizen” and an outsider non-citizen other – not included in the national territory, an other who could be colonized, subjugated, exploited, and even destroyed. The presence of many different forms of Islams in Europe, the participation of Muslim immigrant intellectuals in the European debates, and the networks with Muslims outside Europe procured by these immigrant intellectuals offer an extraordinary opportunity to learn about the range of rights traditions in Muslim majority countries, and to substantively rethink the many legal roots of European identity. In Europe, these roots include enlightenment proposals for the institutional implementation of moral principles of global justice and peace.

Key Conceptual Relations

modernity and violence; intellectuals north and south; ontology of peace and ontology of violence; modern modes of knowledge organization and alternative modes of knowledge organization; history of jurisprudence 1500-1700 and inversion of rights; principle of rights and principle of the mind/soul; anthropological principal of human capacity for justice and theological principle of justice; ontology of violence and modern philosophy; ontology of violence and modern social sciences; right to the right to knowledge on global peace and disciplinary censorship.