Integration: A process, not problem

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In May 2008, townships around South Africa exploded in what has been called xenophobic violence. Barbaric images of foreigners being burned alive and assaulted by xenophobic mobs were splashed across most international newspapers and TV. Over 60 people were killed, over 350 shops belonging to foreign nationals looted and over 200 burned down. Figures vary, but at least 25,000 people fled their homes, or—put another way—are now internal refugees. The police arrested over 1,000 individuals suspected of participating in the violence.

It was sobering, leaving me feeling powerless, distraught, and deeply ashamed. I imagine most South Africans felt the same way. Xenophobic violence in South Africa is a stark reminder of how easily violence can still erupt despite all the efforts that have been put into building a new human rights culture in the country.

Everyone has a theory about the roots of the violence, which is linked to a change in migration patterns especially from the African continent to South Africa since the end of apartheid. Many say poverty is the major cause of the violence. Frustration of unmet expectations for economic change in the lives of the country's poorest have finally bubbled over. The media have also been blamed for hyping up the illegal immigrant issue over the years, opening the door for a violent response. Immigration authorities and the police have also received stick for their constant harassment of illegal immigrants which has set a poor example. Still others say the violence was an orchestrated strategy to destabilise the ANC ruling party. The government is also blamed for ratcheting up anti-immigrant discourse on the one hand, but having an ineffective immigration policy on the other. Thabo Mbeki's dilly-dallying on Zimbabwe, according to others, was the tipping point. Zimbabwe's

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implosion, in which the South African government has failed to intervene, has meant hundreds of thousands of Zimbabwean refugees flowing into the country.

There is probably truth in all of these explanations. But what was interesting reading the different theories from afar, while knowing where different South Africans stand politically, is how one-sided and hollow most of these explanations seemed.

Mbeki opponents were quick to jump on his ineptitude as the key issue. The unions and Communist Party were quick to blame global capitalism which meant, they argued, that economic progress for the poor has been stymied. Many in the ruling party are quick to roll out the counter-revolutionary discourse and proposed that there is a hidden hand behind the violence bent on trying to pull the state down. And some racists laughed the violence off as black-on-black violence, similar to the 'two tribes' discourse in Northern Ireland.

In short, I was amazed reading the editorials and commentary one step removed from the reality on the ground how self-serving and simplistic so many explanations seemed.

In fact, a lack of complexity in discussion marks most discussions about new communities in society. For example, asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants are often treated as the same category, rather than distinguishing the different backgrounds and needs of different people who might move to any given society.

So my first point with regard to the question of building diversity in society is this: we need to develop complicated and sophisticated ways of analysing the impact of diversity; and we need a political community and a civil society that supports this. Trying to score political points through simplistic discourses such as 'foreigners are stealing our jobs' is naïve and, as the South African case demonstrates, potentially dangerous. So let us begin any discussion about diversity from a point of complexity and not simplicity, recognising the diverse nature and processes concerning migration and the movement of people.

But South Africa is not the only society with problems in relation to diversity related issues. According to the recently published Human Beliefs and Values Survey Northern Ireland has the highest proportion of bigoted people in western world. The study of nearly 32,000 people across 19 European countries, as well as Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, asked if people would like to have persons from different groups as neighbours. These groups

included those of a different race, immigrants or foreign workers, Muslims, Jews and homosexuals.

In Northern Ireland 44% of the 1,000 respondents did not want at least one of the five groups as neighbours. Specifically, 35.9% of people would not like a homosexual living next door, 18.9% immigrants or foreign workers, 16% Muslims, 11.6% Jews and people of a different race 11.1%. This was significantly higher that the average percentage across the countries surveyed that were 19.6%, 10.1%, 14.5%, 9.5% and 8.5% for the same groups respectively.

The findings are startling. It is hard to imagine that nearly 20% of people across the western world would be unhappy about a homosexual living next door, or given Europe's history, that nearly 10% still would be unhappy with a Jew living in their neighbourhood.

Recent data from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (2007) made similar findings. For example, 32% of respondents claim they would not be willing to accept a Muslim as a resident in their local area. And 17% claim they would not be willing to accept people from Eastern European backgrounds living in their local area.

What we also know in Northern Ireland is that at a bare minimum reporting in racial prejudice, hate crimes and attacks against foreigners has been increasing since more migrants have moved into the society. The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey also shows that self-reporting about holding prejudiced views has increased. Chris Gilligan and Katrina Lloyd note that in:

> In 1994, around one in ten respondents (11%) described themselves as very prejudiced or a little prejudiced against 'people of other races'. By 2005 one in four respondents (25%) said they were either very prejudiced or a little prejudiced against 'people of minority ethnic communities.[2]

The recent Life and Times Survey (2007) reported that 35% of respondents described themselves as a little (32%) or very prejudiced (3%).

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[2] Gilligan, C., & Lloyd, K. (2006). Racial prejudice in Northern Ireland. *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: Research Update, 44* (June).

Of course, the increase in reporting of prejudice could be because prejudice has increased but could also be that people are now more willing or in touch with their own prejudices. Arguably holding a prejudiced view may also not be a problem if you keep it to yourself and do not harm others. That said, I doubt we would be gathering here today if we felt there was not some sort of problem in Northern Ireland. Hate crimes have been increasing in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as the number of immigrants has grown. Racist attacks in Northern Ireland have surged by 60% in the last year, while assaults on gays and lesbians have doubled.

On the positive side, if we return to the Human Beliefs and Values Survey, 11% of people would not like someone of different race living next door to them, or 19% would not like an immigrant living next door to them. One could see the glass half full. After all 90% of people have no problems with someone of a different race living next door, 80% of people are content with immigrants living next door to them.[3] According to Life and Times Survey 68% of people agree or strongly agree that migrant workers make Northern Ireland open to new ideas and cultures.

And returning to South Africa, after the xenophobic violence I mentioned many ordinary South Africans responded positively to the crisis. There were rallies to call for an end to the violence, many donated money for the people forced out of their homes, and public condemnations were extensive. When it comes to inter-racial relationships this is, despite ongoing racism, improving in South Africa. From survey data by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town published in 2007 we know that more than half of all South Africans have sensed an improvement in race relations since 1994. Most surveyed, however, remain cautious in their assessment, but the majority of respondents share a positive outlook about continuing improvements in race relations.

So this is my second point. If we are to deal with diversity questions we have to acknowledge two things at the same time. Firstly, I believe we have to acknowledge where there are real problems. We cannot pretend that race is not an issue in Northern Ireland or South Africa. It is a problem and grounds for division. Secondly, however, the majority of people are not

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[3] The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey results are slightly different. Thirty-seven percent of people said they were "a bit uncomfortable" and 4% were "very uncomfortable" with a neighbour from a minority ethnic group.

wholly negative about such issues. So one task is to find ways to build on this, to empower people to take action, for ordinary citizens to become the best defence against those who continue to sow hate between communities or remain ignorant about their own prejudice.

Earlier I highlighted some of the findings of the Human Beliefs and Values Survey Northern Ireland. I am saddened to report that despite some of the progress in South Africa I mentioned above, the recent release of the South African edition of the World Values Survey indicates that South Africans are as bad as their northern counterparts.

On the positive side, the survey found that over 95% of South Africans of all races are now proud of their country. But the survey also found high levels of intolerance. Although racism, which remains a problem, could be expected to be high given the history of South Africa, the findings about other groups such as homosexuals and those who are HIV positive were alarming.

Gay neighbours were seen as unacceptable by 48% of black South Africans respondents, 39% of Indian respondents, 37% of so-called coloured respondents and 26% of white respondents. Having a neighbour suffering from AIDS was considered problematic by 21% of Indians, 13% of whites, 9% of so-called coloureds and 6% of blacks.

So it would appear that South Africans, certainly when it comes to the minority groups mentioned above, are equally, if not slightly more, intolerant than the people of Northern Ireland. Clearly therefore the people of Northern Ireland and South Africa share some problems. At the risk of conflating the experiences of two very different societies, this leaves one asking: is a consequence of political conflict a legacy of intolerance and a lack of respect for other people's human rights? And does this generally extend beyond groups to which you differ politically to other groups?

Both societies for example seem to be suffering from fairly high levels of xenophobia against new immigrants. This could be a result of an increase in the number of people coming into the societies after peace. However the rise in violence against foreigners in both societies generally outstrips the proportional increase in new arrivals suggesting a more sinister conclusion. It would seem logical, if not disturbing, that if a society has for several decades

used violence and exclusion as a way of dealing with problems some residue of this after peace remains.

There are many different theories as to why minority groups are targeted in this situation. One argument is that aggression is a common feature of social and political conflict, a survival mechanism and a means to achieving power. In post conflict societies, when power relations are rewritten, a displacement of aggression takes place because old channels are no longer there. New avenues for reasserting power are found. The victims of this violence are those with seemingly less power in the new dispensation such as foreigners and members of the gay community, not to mention women.

This compels society to protect the rights of minority groups vigorously. Minority groups not only have to have equal rights, which they largely do in South Africa and Northern Ireland at least on paper, but they also have to have access to social, political and economic power. To put this simply, minority groups are bullied because they can be. They are the weak kid on the playground, which is generally exacerbated by their social and economic position.

So this is my third point—unpopular one in some circle and contrary to anti-foreigner sentiment—minority groups essentially need a bigger share of the economic pie. In other words, they should be fully integrated into the society and economy commensurate with their skills and relative to their numbers. If we truly believe in equality and a free and fair society, then access to jobs and opportunities should not be constrained by borders, nationality, gender or sexual orientation. This is of course a core message across the European Union although many countries do not fully practice this. We also need to recognise that different societies will have different dynamics with regard to how they deal with new populations. To this end, we need to think about how, in Northern Ireland, a history of political conflict shapes reactions to changes in demographics. Such understandings should not be used to condone prejudice, but we need to think about this as a way of trying to uncover unique and contextually-appropriate ways of promoting diversity.

One answer given in relation to how societies can deal with the question of diversity is that societies need to move towards multiculturalism. Multiculturalism implies a world where we respect and accept differences, and allow different cultures to flourish on their own terms.

Proponents of multiculturalism argue that this is the best option in a world where it is difficult to reconcile different values and beliefs.

But is multiculturalism enough given the astonishing statistics quoted above? And why is the term barely used in South Africa?

Given South Africa's history of segregation and ongoing problems with racism, it seems one knows intuitively that more needs to be done. If one wanted to be crude, multiculturalism that does not seek to bring people together in some way, or if socio-economic inequality exists between groups, could end up akin to the perverse apartheid delusion of separate development.

Some proponents of multiculturalism argue that groups will learn to coexist over time if they have equal power and status. But this seldom happens. Immigrant communities generally remain socially excluded and the result is, in the words of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, ghetto communities.

Perhaps what is needed is interculturalism where we move towards learning about different cultures and views, and engage with these in robust dialogue which can result in changes in the respective cultures. This requires a recognition of interdependency that is neither assimilation nor simply co-existence.

I think this is summed up by the words of Malcolm Forbes, who said "Diversity is the art of thinking independently together".

That said, and in line with the title of this conference, getting to such a point is a process. For example simply focusing on co-existence might be the first step along the way to interculturalism. But I firmly believe this should be a first step. Multiculturalism rather than intercultural seems limiting to me.

That said, an intercultural approach can be threatening to those who see themselves as belonging to a specific community or ethnic group. But as Bauman points out, the need for community, no matter how understandable in a world where society is so fractured, creates a double bind. As much as it provides the security of being with your own kind, the more you

immerse yourself in your so-called community the more you feel threatened by the other. Security and insecurity become intertwined feeding "mutual derision, contempt and hatred" making multiculturalism impossible.

This is my final point: we need to interrogate the concept of community. The idea of community can result in us being exclusionary to those not in our community, but active and positive participation of communities in diversity-orientated activities is also one of the best ways to promote diversity. This has to be based on a continuous searching for our common humanity and celebrating interdependence, while vigorously dialoguing about our differences. Community groups are essential to this.

To conclude:

It is an old cliché that diversity is an asset. But I firmly believe it is true. In this talk I have pointed to some of the challenges facing everyone in the room today concerning the issue of diversity. But there is also a lot that is changing evidenced by this very gathering. A positive process has begun.

The question of diversity in terms of new populations is relatively new in the Northern Ireland context. This has presented challenges as I have noted, however, it also presents opportunities. The process is young enough for lessons to be learned from elsewhere. It also opens the door for Northern Ireland to develop new and positive ways of addressing the question of diversity making the region a global leader in terms of best practice.

I congratulate the organisers and all of you for the important work in this area. I will end with a quote from anthropologist Margaret Mead who captures the value of promoting diversity:

> If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.

Thank you.