EUROPEAN MULTICULTURAL FOUNDATION
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3rd Way Communique

"Thought for the Middle Brows"

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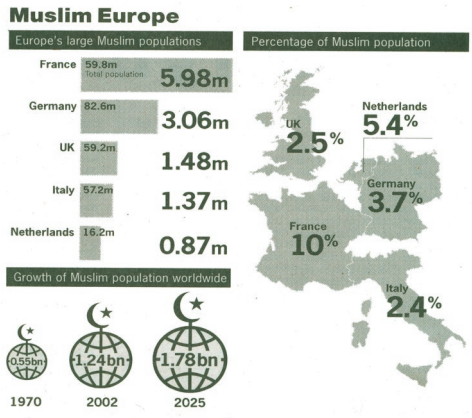

From Diversity to Cohesion

By Dr. Marie-José Minassian- Deputy Chairman EUropean Multicultural Foundation

Three years ago, "Third Way" magazine would insist on "Strength in Diversity". In February 2005, Tara Mukherjee, our President, was insisting on "Cohesion". It is indeed high time that we insist on cohesion, rather than on diversity. Diversity is a concept that emerged just before 68, when it was necessary to think in terms of difference, as Herbert Marcuse was suggesting. Of course, diversity does not exclude cohesion: in ecosystems, diversity is even a key factor for harmony. But when men emphasize diversity, they tend to forget the cohesion factor.

Thirty-five years after Marcuse, we have had plenty of time to show our differences. It is high time, now, that we affirm cohesion. Cohesion within our own respective States, so that no one is left behind in this fierce and competitive world, cohesion within Europe: not for the promotion of a few enterprises that will be able to compete at a world level, but cohesion for the civil societies and enterprises together to share the same project of an integrated European society.

An integrated society is one where values of solidarity, respect, tolerance and interest for the Other are shared by everyone. Interest for the Other is not a matter connected with catastrophes happening now and then, today more "now" than "then". It is a style of life, where everybody shares the same goal, that of a good life together. What is a good life together? In Spinozist terms, it is to consider that when I am doing something **good for me**, I am doing something **good for the Other**, and the same is true of the reverse: **when I am doing something good for the Other, it is of great benefit for me as well**. Everywhere, there are discussions of about individualism and egoism. We hear discourses about our society being composed of selfish people. Media are greatly responsible: we conform ourselves to the picture they give of us as a selfish society.

But the real egoism, the one which we must defend, is the egoism whereby, doing something good for me, I am doing something good for my neighbour. It is not bad to be selfish, provided that we know exactly where our own good resides. And our own good resides always in the good that will not harm my neighbour, that will be good to him.

This is a long introduction to explain what is now going on in France, regarding discrimination. The consciousness that there is a discriminatory problem arose with the arrival on the labour market of the second generation of people originating from migrant families. Recently for instance, sociologists have examined the situation in a very concrete way. They have sent people with fake curricula to answer enterprises' work offers. They have even engaged professional actors to do so, to see the reality of enterprises reactions. A girl with a North African looks, and very high diplomas will have less opportunities to find a job than her French counterpart. Discussions with the recruiters will always reveal that they do not take an opened way to refuse their profile. They will for instance say: "you are living too far". The same happens for women, who may be disqualified because they are

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assumed to get pregnant one day or the other. Not all enterprises react in this way. Intellectual professions like publishers, for the most part, will not consider origin or matrimonial status.

This may explain why, in France, public service meets such a success with populations who are not of a French background, or who are coloured. The system of anonymous competitions allow these people to pass such competitions. When they succeed, they are accepted, without any consideration as to their origin.

France had also to nominate an independent administrative body, to fight against discrimination: sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and discrimination against handicap. This independent authority – Haute Autorité de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l'Égalité (HALDE) - has been appointed as a guarantee of impartiality, and speed of action. News ways to regulate social relationships are being thought of, like mediations which have however been used for a long time among social workers.

This high authority is expected to see what sort of discriminations exist actually, those which are enforced in the Administration as well as in the private sector.

The first mission of this High Authority is to care for individual complaints and help them to go through juridical process. The Authority will be helping individuals to prove the substance of their complaints in order to influence the jurisdiction. Information about such jurisdiction will be publicised.

The second mission is to promote equality. The main aim is to look into indirect discriminations, such as the difficulties for women to obtain positions of responsibility in Universities as compared with men. Companies and administrations will be encouraged to volunteer in this direction and be an example for the future.

The third mission is to act as consultant, propose laws and decrees, and make proposals for the future.

The fourth mission is one of observation, study and research. A better understanding of the mechanisms of discrimination will be expected from such research. And as a result, a better fight against them.

I know that the Commission for Racial Equality in Britain has been efficient, to promote anti-discrimination and equality among enterprises. Has it promoted the notion of equality among individuals? Has it modified racist attitudes among the majority of the population? George Steiner, professor in Cambridge, recently said that his grand-daughters, with a part of British blood and a part of Indian one, were not regarded as equal to the other children in the streets of Cambridge. Cambridge is a place where consciousness about human values is supposed to be at its utmost. There, the level of understanding and tolerance is supposed to be great. However, it is not so, if young girls feel threatened or discriminated.

It may be that asserting diversity has brought a threat to social cohesion. I guess it is now high time to think again in terms of common welfare and common goals for the whole of European society.

THE RANK "BUSINESS"

DYNAMICS OF PRIVILEGE IN MAJORITY – MINORITY POSITIONS

'If you want to understand how conflict happens and its prevention, it is essential to understand dynamics of rank'

Building multi-cultural communities needs legislation but cannot happen with legislation alone. It is a practice that involves each of us. Building multi-cultural communities means recognizing how our diversity enriches us, along with our underlying shared humanity – It also means recognizing what dominates and what gets marginalized, historically and now. This brings us to the 'rank business'[1]

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The title for this article was inspired by a participant in the first seminar of the project 'Social Inclusion in Action'. (www.cfor.info, www.annwin.sk, www.em-foundation.org.uk) As the participants spoke about their experiences and what they'd learned, someone who has been a longtime leader in community building remarked that what was new for him and very important was this 'rank business'.

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Rank
Rank can be defined as the sum of our inherited and acquired privileges [1] – it simultaneously refers to our relative privileges, and the sense of inclusion or exclusion we feel as a result of this dynamic.

- ***Social rank***
  Social rank refers to how our privileges in society vary according to things like gender, ethnic background, class, color, religion, sexual orientation, religion, age, health, physical ability, education and more
- ***Position or Hierarchical rank***
  Rank dynamics also revolve around our job, profession or position within a community or society
- ***Psychological spiritual rank.***
  Psychological rank refers to how you feel supported or not internally. If you know yourself well, having learned a lot from life experience, you could say this is a high psychological rank. Spiritual rank is independent of culture, family and the world. It rises from a connection with something divine and transcendent that keeps you centered even in a storm and often frees you from the worries that plague others.

Context and Complexity of Rank
Rank is also dependent on contex**t**. For example, when you are in a group that you know well, you might have rank that a newcomer doesn't have or that you don't have in another group. At the same time, rank dynamics are complex. It is rarely a simple matter of one person having more 'rank' than another. Imagine that you have a new boss, who has hierarchical rank over you in the organization. At the same time, you may be aware that you have been with the company a long time, and know the ropes. Or you may be aware of your social rank in relation to your boss based on how people perceive you due to gender, ethnic or cultural background, age, class, etc. Awareness of relative privileges in all of the different areas can greatly influence our relationships.

Rank, Tension and Conflict
Rank itself is not the central problem. The problem is that we are usually unconscious of rank, and this creates hurt and conflict, inclusion and exclusion. Additionally, you'll find you can more easily spot where you have lower rank,

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because you feel put down, frustrated and treated unjustly. It is harder to notice where you have privileges and therefore higher rank. You tend to think it's just normal. If the color of your skin is not an issue for you when looking for a job, that is great, and it shouldn't be, but it may make you unaware that it is still very much an issue for many.
Lots of difficulties and conflicts we have in our personal relationships have to do with insufficient awareness of rank dynamics between us. In society, insufficient rank awareness creates and perpetuates serious tensions and conflict.

Prejudice and Power
Rank has to do with the power to enforce your prejudices. We all have prejudices. We judge each other according to pre-conceived ideas, based on insufficient information and experience. We get attached to our fantasies, myths or outright lies. But, sometimes we have the power to assume that our prejudice is true, and to enforce it. This may be a result of political, financial or social power. Or we use the unspoken power of the majority to assume our prejudice is a fact, 'just so'. Racism is often defined as prejudice plus the power to enforce it. Institutionalized oppression of all kinds results from this combination of prejudice plus power and is self-perpetuating.

Rank awareness and preventing conflict
Just as conflict is often created and perpetuated through insufficient awareness of the rank dynamics between people, it is this awareness of rank dynamics that is needed to facilitate dialogue and prevent or resolve conflict. For example, lack of accountability for past and present injustice perpetuates conflict. Rank plays into this. It takes maturity or ability to acknowledge one's own rank, and hence one's own accountability. Without it, we easily place the blame on others, without recognizing how our unconscious use of rank is feeding the conflict.

How you notice rank
Although rank dynamics are always complex, here are some simple guidelines for recognizing rank dynamics. You will probably recognize these, and it will get you thinking of others. Rank signals come up in almost all situations of daily lie and across cultures. Because communication styles are culturally bound, specific signals will of course vary between cultures:

1. The person with lower social rank says 'I have a problem with you – Take it seriously'. The one with the higher social rank says 'It's not my problem.' The one with lower rank tries to say it again, in a different way. The one with higher rank says 'What's the fuss you are making?'
2. The one with lower social rank says "A change is needed." The one with higher social rank says 'You have to fit in".
3. The one with lower social rank is upset and emotional and may feel as if she or he is going crazy, and the one with higher social rank is unconcerned, cool and collected.
4. The one with lower rank will have lots of self-doubt, and the one with higher rank will assume that she or he is right and never question her/his actions. (Over time, the one with lower rank becomes righteous, too)
5. The one with higher social rank is usually not aware of dynamics of rank - but thinks his or her attitude is just the 'norm'. Those in the minority position or lower rank feel hurt, irritated, humiliated, frustrated, enraged or patient as a result.
6. The one with higher social rank will often say there is no issue here, while the one with lower social rank may be constantly thinking about the issue.
7. In the minority position with lower social rank, you may be afraid to speak, because it could threaten you – you may lose your job, be arrested, shut out of a situation you need in order to survive, or be killed. The one with higher rank feels free and assumes the right to speak, and nothing will threaten or touch his or her position.
8. With higher rank, you may unconsciously determine the style, rhythm and what you deem as appropriate communication. You determine how available you are to relate, and the time and place. While in the lower rank, you feel you have to adapt to the dominant communication style.
9. Where you have unconscious higher rank you use physical space in a way that assumes it is yours. A sense of lack of freedom to take space is a signal of lower rank.
10. Leaning back and acting disinterested or superior is a signal of unconscious high rank, and being concerned for doing the right thing can be a signal of lower rank.

What next: The Rank of Eldership:
It can be useful to just notice signals of rank in the different places you work and live. Name them at least to yourself. Just becoming aware of rank can already be relieving for individuals, relationships, organizations and communities that are suffering from tension and conflict.
A further useful step is for each of us to get to know the rank we have, to celebrate it and to use it to make a situation or our communities more inclusive for everyone. For example:

Try this short exercises if you'd like:
- Examine your rank in relation to a situation in your home, work or community – think of the ways in which you have lower rank in this situation, and the ways you have higher rank.
- Ask yourself how you might use the higher rank you have, to address the problems of rank in this situation, and to make the situation more inclusive for everyone.

Include the "outsider" in the next meeting by not expecting her or him to have to address you or the main community body; Address the newcomer personally, make him or her feel welcome and at ease. Think that you are welcoming the part of you that might be a stranger in another place and time. It is an act of eldership.
To elder a community is to care for its wholeness. Eldership is not necessarily age related. The elder is someone who can stand the creative heat of both what divides us and what unites us. Rather than expect people to adapt to dominance or succumb to revenge, he or she welcomes the interaction at its limits and embraces the woes of growth. Nelson Mandela is the example for this attitude; after 27 years of prison, he stood up for his realization that the task was/is not only freeing the oppressed, but also the oppressor from their own oppression. That's eldership and it also is rank; it emerges from spiritual as well as political awareness and a deep confrontation with one's emotions.

London, November 14th 2005

[1] Mindell A (1992) The Leader as Martial Artist: An Introduction to Deep Democracy – Techniques and Strategies for Resolving Conflict and Creating Community. San Francisco: HarperCollins

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