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 my neighbour. The reverse: when I am doing something good for the Other, it is of great benefit for me as well. Everywhere, there are discussions 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, 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 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.
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’.

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’.

Rank
Rank can be defined as the sum of our inherited and acquired privileges – 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 context. 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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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’

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 racial 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.

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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

determine how to do the right thing

determined. Examine your rank in relation to a

situation in your personal relationships.

We have, to address the problems of rank in this

situation, to make the situation 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.

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:

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

Bibliography:


Mindell A (1995) Sitting in the Fire: Large Group

Transformation through Diversity and Conflict, Portland: Lao Tse Press


For more information on the European Multicultural Foundation, please visit us on the Internet at

www.em-foundation.org.uk

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