Going Global opening session, 20 November 2023, Edinburgh

The Right honourable Gillian Keegan, Professor Dame Sally Mapstone, Sir Steve Smith, Scott McDonald, Maddalaine Ansell, distinguished guests, colleagues and friends. I am deeply honoured by the invitation to speak at Going Global 2023. I am honoured to share this opening plenary with Olanike Adeyemo. I want to thank Jane Lowther for her assistance with my participation.

**The world is always emerging, changing**

We meet at a time in which people, nation-states and educators face many problems. Consider the climate-nature emergency. Lost habitat and species extinction. Desertification, crises of food and water, ever larger populations on the move. Rising sea levels. The latest report says that the melting of the West Antarctic ice sheet is now locked in, regardless of what happens with greenhouse gas emissions. That is, the melting cannot be stopped. It may be complete by 2100. It will raise global sea levels by 5 metres. This will take out large parts of Cairo, Lagos, Maputo, Bangkok, Dhaka, Jakarta, Mumbai, Shanghai, Copenhagen, London, Buenos Aires, Los Angeles and New York. The climate-nature emergency is an immense challenge for nations and for education. It impells us to do all that we can to further effective global partnerships, in general and in education.

As Heraclitus said 2500 years ago, we live in a world of ceaseless change, a world not of being but of becoming, in which we cannot know or control the future. We make international cooperation in education on a ground that is always shifting, with events and issues constantly coming at us. Not all of the global changes we are currently experiencing are bad ones though. There are positives as well as negatives. Let me expand.

**Geo-political tensions, unilateral nationalism**

The geo-political negatives are all too clear. A century of failure to create a unified state of Israel-Palestine, in which the rights of all persons, communities and faiths would be respected within a democratic order, has led to the dreadful and hopeless conflict in Gaza and the West Bank. A rogue Russian state continues to devastate Ukraine, despite the equally devastating loss of Russian life. Then there is the United States and China. The US is determined to manage the global order. Rising China demands respect for its civilisation and world role. It wants unchallengeable regional sovereignty and to shred the century of humiliation. This is incompatible with US hegemony in East Asia. Other nations everywhere are being pulled and pressured to take sides.

Global tension and conflict have many downsides for international education. Russian universities have lost all autonomy. Ukrainian schools and universities have been severely damaged and some no longer exist. There are many disruptions of global mobility and visa rights. The politics of security overrule academic freedom and scientific cooperation. Governments expand their spending on armaments and reduce their commitments to education, research and scholarships.

**A plural world with many centres of power**

But there are positives as well as negatives. The geopolitics are also opening up. In 1914 more than 90 per cent of the earth’s surface was occupied, controlled or shaped by Euro-American powers and Imperial Japan. This has patterned post-school education everywhere along Western lines. This in turn has created immense and continuing difficulties in the non-Western world, not just brain drain but the suppression of national-cultural language and knowledge. But the world of Euro-American domination is now giving way to something else.

Economic and political power are now pluralising. We will not return to the Anglophone hegemony of 1945, or 1995. In education and science, large and middle-sized non-Western countries are gathering strength – not only China and India but Iran, South Korea, Brazil, Indonesia and others. We now know that there are many paths to modernisation. More than 60 countries enrol at least half their young people in tertiary education and the same number of countries have self-reproducing science systems. Educational participation and science are growing rapidly in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, South East Asia and Central Asia.

The graph shows the rapid growth of science in China, India and in the rest of the world category. And non-Western science and scholarship is greater than the graph suggests, because of the volume of work in languages other than English. It is a matter of time before this finds itself in a reorganised and linguistically plural system of global publishing and bibliometrics. The pluralisation of capacity will be followed by the pluralisation of knowledge. And in institutions there will be new fusions of Euro-American models and endogenous elements. We are seeing a worldwide uplift in educational agency.

**Dreams of Western superiority are at the roots of colonialism and neo-colonialism**

I said earlier that we cannot control the future. But we can control the way we practice the future. A more plural global setting has profound implications for the kind of global partnerships that we need. And it poses different challenges in the formerly colonised countries, compared to the former colonisers. In the once-were colonies, the challenge is to make stable and effective states, and build education systems meeting national needs and embodying national identities. The challenge before the former colonisers is less well understood but is equally important. It is an ethical challenge.

The foundation of the colonial mindset was and is not bad intentions, violence or unequal economic transfers. These are symptoms, not causes. The root cause was and is the bottomless belief in Western racial and cultural superiority. We could call this geo-political narcissism. From this comes the divine right to intervene anywhere in the world, and the ‘othering’ of the colonised, the mindset that makes it thinkable to talk about ‘human animals’, as Israel’s Defence Minister recently said. From this brutal self-superiority comes everything else – the belief there is one path to modernisation that all must follow, the Western or American path; the belief Western countries and their education has nothing to learn from non Western culture and education; the belief Western universities are always wiser and their science is more creative; the belief non-Western populations can and must be managed, manipulated, exploited and coerced for their own good. And this is no basis for the global partnerships that we need, going forward.

In English-speaking nations and other Western countries, *it is so difficult and so vital that we finally break with this inherited belief in our own superiority*. This means directly focusing on racism and White supremacy, and the remedies, which are mutual decolonialisation, global equity and reparative justice. In education, it means genuinely engaging other cultures and knowledges on the basis of equal respect. In means partnerships in which everyone learns from everyone else.

What we lack as yet in international higher education is a shared moral order and a consensus about the global common good, based in equality of respect and cultural and epistemic diversity, that can unite us across the deep colonial divide between the West and the rest. The essential starting point is the conscious and active rejection of Western superiority and coloniality, in the old imperial nations as well as in those nations that they long sought to dominate and control.

Thank you warmly for your attention. I look forward to Olanike and discussion.

Simon Marginson