

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



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## Empathy – A Necessity for Social Wellbeing

One of the basic reasons for chaos, instability and war in the world is the incapacity of human beings to see the world in its totality. Human beings are not able to consider themselves as a part of the whole. They divide themselves into nations, casts and sects and do not relate themselves to a single community of humanity. This is also because of the fact that they live in different parts of the world with different socio-political circumstance, therefore, it is very much possible and practical that they see the world from different points of view and, on certain occasions, consider others as different and even enemies.

However, it is not a valid argument to justify conflicts, wars and chaos. Definitely, there are differences among human beings and among different groups or communities of them, but it is not impossible to accept these differences, embrace them and let them embellish the world with variety instead of fighting over them and killing others for them.

Today's globalized world has brought human beings closer in so many aspects and it has given rise to the challenges of confrontations among different people with different backgrounds; however, it has also provided the opportunities to understand one another and appreciate others or learn from them. It has also disclosed for the human beings that there are so many aspects among them which unite them and bring them closer as a single community. However, it is important to see the factors that are common instead of discovering differences for political and other purposes. They have to see the world and its habitants with the feeling of empathy instead of hatred. Hatred would definitely see the differences and give rise to further hatred, while empathy would enable them to see above all the differences and rise in stature as a human being.

From a practical point of view, it is really vital to understand that the systems in the world are designed or formed in such a way that they make people and things connect to and depend on one another. No human being can live alone in the world. Those who think that they can isolate themselves as individuals from their societies and their fellow beings are basically living in a fool's paradise. They need to wake up, and realize the true world and their true selves. Accepting others, supporting and assisting them are the only way to live in today's world that is turning to be more and more mechanical with each passing day. Human beings require adopting empathy as their top priority behavioral trait, if they want to guarantee their existence in the world. So much hatred, bloodshed and differences have been promulgated just because human beings have forgotten the habit of Empathy.

Hating others just because they belong to different cultures, religions, sects and ideologies is, in fact, a weird behavioral trait. If others are different for a person, it is also true that he is different for them as well. If he thinks others as detestable; others may also think so. However, it is important to see others in perspective of their environment and their socio-political context. Looking at others with one's own biases is a silly mistake and may lead to abhorrence and hatred.

Empathy, in fact, has the capacity to turn enemies into friends. The policy of hatred can only generate further hatred; it creates a never-ending chain. If you hate others; others will hate you as well and process will continue. In order to break the chain of hatred and enmity, it is important to adopt empathy from the very beginning.

An imperative point to understand is that every person must start empathy from his own self. He must understand himself and his true nature first and then he can understand the worth and reality of others. Loving himself and developing his own personality will really help him in being kind to others. And, it must be realized as well that being compassionate to others does not mean that a person is superior to others; that he is on the giving end and others are on receiving end. It is mutual – empathy for others is vital for one's own self and personality as well.

It is crucial to comprehend that the current policy of animosity and envy will lead human beings towards extinction. It is not wise to continue the same policy of hatred. Human beings require changing themselves. Realizing this fact is of utmost importance. Having realized it, we can further debate the viability of the policy of empathy in today's world.

Today our country is also suffering from the repercussions of hatred and war. Our people, therefore, require adopting empathy as their basic code of conduct. It will surely change our society and our people and we would be in a better position to fight hatred, violence, terrorism and wars.



## Kankor and the Challenges of Afghanistan's Higher Education

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

University entry exam (Kankor) and its administration have evolved into symbolizing higher education in Afghanistan and the challenges involved with a major part of it. The Ministry of Higher Education announced on Sunday April 03, 2016 Kankor examination results. According to the officials, over 58 thousand students have qualified for entry to state universities; more than 46 thousand people have passed the exams to enroll to semi-government higher education and 40,000 others will be introduced to private higher educational institutes. Each year, administration and management of the university entrance examination are involved with a number of challenges. In many areas across the country, the examination is marred by fraud and forgery or the students go to the exams amidst severe cold weather and security threats.

However, the Ministry of Higher Education had introduced many new measures this year to conduct the nation-wide examination and reduce the challenges involved with it. Some of the measures are believed to be effective in dealing with the challenges related to the on-scene conduct of the examination, scoring and announcement of the examination. However, as it is obvious the ministry of higher education should be able to rapidly improve administration of Kankor and resolve the relevant technical issues that create many problems and mar transparency of Kankor exam. The exam used to become a major controversy at some points as the ministry was unable to efficiently conduct the examination across the country and maintain order and transparency. However, there have been progresses in terms of technical issues and the overall administration of the examination. But the real challenge for the Afghan government is to deal with greater challenges involved with Afghanistan's higher education and development of the country's human resources. Each year a large number of people seeking to get into state universities get failed and those who pass the exam have a long way to get higher education and find jobs after graduation. The post-Kankor is becoming a new experience whether good or worse for many of the aspiring students. The post-Kankor era matters for either those who have succeeded or the ones who have failed. The post-Kankor problems are important and deserve reflection.

Students who manage to succeed and get to the universities will face many difficulties. The system of Afghanistan's higher education is largely outdated and perhaps unhelpful to prepare the students for a career to enter the market when they graduate. The content of the university education is old and ineffective and the instructors do not have the ability to research and empower the students with crucial skills. Afghanistan's universities have not been able to renovate and follow the paths of other world higher education institutions. As result, what are taught at the universities in Afghanistan will not be helpful in meeting the needs of the society and the students will not be able to easily get to the labor market after graduation.

Most of instructors serving at state universities are elderly pro-

fessors whose barely have master's degree. These long-serving instructors have long been resisting any changes that see employment of new young professors as they clearly will lose out to newcomers who have better educational credentials. Many of the university students get along with unbearable behaviors of their instructors and graduate with memories of harsh treatments of the lecturers. These are only few of the challenges that the students at the state universities experience.

The national unity government has taken relatively bold measures to bring reforms to the country's higher education system. The plan, however, has met fierce opposition of the existing cadres. The government needs to remain steadfast in tackling the low quality higher education and in particular bring reforms to the government universities.

The challenges with the state universities and Afghanistan's higher education is much more and complicated. Thousands of the applicants have failed to get to university. Leaving aside how much they suffer psychologically, it is an urgent matter that those who have failed to enter to universities should be absorbed in the labor market. The situation for employment is even somber. In addition to those who are not successful in entering universities, thousands of university graduates graduating each year fail to get employment despite having higher education and academic degrees. On one hand, there are growing numbers of people who seek job and employment while, on the other hand, Afghanistan's labor market do not have the capacity to provide jobs to those seeking employment. Worse than all, even many of those who are employed lose their jobs due to the fall of the international aid and the decline of the economy.

Government should start making reforms in both secondary and higher education institutions. While more investments are needed for the education sector, the educational agencies of the government can embark on reform plans by current means that they have.

The focus of the reform efforts must be on renovating the largely monologue lecture system currently applied in schools and higher educational institutes and upgrading it to more diverse and engaging methods.

Development of the educational system would be an integral part of the overall development objective. The ministry of higher education should not only focus on how to administer the Kankor exam. The educational agencies including the ministries of education and higher education need to develop more extensive and broader vocational training for those who fail to get university education.

Vocational training is an alternative for formal higher education all over the world. Besides the higher education, Afghanistan needs to have a well-developed vocational institutions aimed at providing job trainings for those who are not willing to go further for higher education or fail to get university education.

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## Europe's Generational War

By Harold James

Throughout the industrialized world, governments are rushing to hand out money to the elderly. Germany's government has not only reversed an increase in the retirement age intended to make pensions more affordable; it has recently announced a 5% increase in benefits, the largest such rise since 1993 (when, unlike today, Germany was actually experiencing inflation). Poland's Law and Justice government, in one of its first moves after taking power last year, decreased the pension age and increased payments.

At a time when public budgets are strained, this trend may seem counter-intuitive. And, in fact, the United Kingdom's government has moved in the opposite direction, cutting disability benefits (though a cabinet minister resigned in protest). But the overarching trend toward increased benefits for the elderly has a simple explanation: politics.

As populations in Europe and Japan age, the demographic pyramid is rapidly inverting – and a war of generations, rather than of classes, is emerging. The war is fought primarily at the ballot box – old people win elections, while young people stay home – and the spoils lie in the national budget, in the balance among education, pension, health-care, and tax regimes. With this clash, the intergenerational pact that long underpinned social and political stability has been broken.

The conservative philosopher Edmund Burke famously saw society as a contract not just among “those who are living,” but also with “those who are dead” and “those who are to be born.” Burke was suspicious of popular politics that would favor the current generation over future cohorts. The father of welfare economics, Arthur Pigou, thought that the state would somehow protect the social contract's absent partners, but that view was hopelessly idealistic. What motive would the government have to be a trustee for unknown people at the expense of real and present voters? The focus on the present has far-reaching consequences. The impact is particularly severe in a context of labor mobility, where the losers at the ballot box – the young – wield another weapon: their feet. In countries dominated by gerontocratic politics, young people typically try to leave as quickly as possible. And because young people receive extensive subsidies in the form of education, when they leave, they take with them resources that could otherwise have been used to pay for other people's retirement. Put another way, they leave behind a debt burden that will be much more difficult to reduce without them. This trend is fueled by inadequate economic opportunities at home. In the mid-twentieth century, rapid economic growth implied that each generation would have a better future than the last. Today, by contrast, widespread malaise and forecasts of secular stagnation make promises about a better

future appear fraudulent.

In many countries – particularly in the Mediterranean, but also elsewhere in Europe, as well as in North Africa – youth unemployment has reached record levels, owing to a combination of problematic macroeconomic policies and bad labor-market policies. With the young seemingly bound to leave, spending on education increasingly appears to be a waste. As education diminishes, the amount of investment in human capital that the migrants take with them declines – but so does the amount of human capital that stays behind.

A better approach would be to reverse the exodus of the young through better policies, as Ireland did in the late twentieth century, with rapid economic growth leading many of the skilled workers who had left in the 1980s to return – and spur even faster growth. In order for such a reversal to take place, however, young people's countries of origin must become more open and more innovative – no small feat, especially when the elderly are in political control. In short, there are many feedback loops that make the gerontocracy self-reinforcing.

The damage wrought by the preference for the old over the young extends beyond national economies. Environmental damage on a global scale provides perhaps the starkest illustration of how today's middle-aged population is making decisions without regard for the younger generation – and those that will follow. Indeed, global warming, for example, is often viewed as imposing a heavy burden on future generations. While the scale of this burden has not been unambiguously calculated, it is clear that it could be reduced substantially by investing relatively small amounts today on a global basis. Yet countries continue to fail to make such investments. By the time the needed adjustments are implemented, they will be the next generation's problem – and they will cost much more. In this sense, current generations are imposing a kind of tax on their successors, who are already being starved of life opportunities. Some commentators describe the burden in even more brutal terms, saying that the current generation is essentially colonizing the future, as they, like many European colonizers in the past, strip the world of its riches and leave a wasteland for those they colonized.

It might be said that it is hopelessly naive to expect altruism of the present generation. And, indeed, in today's self-centered culture, it is difficult to expect people to put the interests of future generations first. For now, the safety valve provided by labor mobility may rule out a youth revolt against the selfishness and complacency of the elderly. The question is what will happen when opportunities abroad are no better than those at home. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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