All Blacks of Davos vs All Greens of Porto Alegre

reframing global strategic discord through polyphony?

Reflection inspired by the Maori *haka* and the choral possibilities of an encounter between the *All Blacks of Davos* and the *All Greens of Porto Alegre* -- on the occasion of the simultaneous annual meetings of the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum

Introduction

Both the *World Economic Forum* (of Davos) and the *World Social Forum* (of Porto Alegre) continue to meet annually to the great satisfaction of their participants and their constituencies. Both gather in other regions of the world throughout the year. Each is understood to provide a major opportunity for strategic articulation and networking for their participants. Their views are of course intrinsically opposed. To the extent that there is any coherence to their respective views, each is perceived by the other as totally misguided. Each may be understood as the shadow of the other, holding to values that the other denies or abhors.

The possibility, briefly explored here, is whether such a discordant relationship in a world in turmoil could be reframed within a different context, specifically one that benefits from the universal appeal of harmony and the potential of polyphony. Might musical values offer a means of interweaving such otherwise discordant insights?

This builds on the substantiating arguments and precedents presented in greater detail in an earlier exploration (*A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic?* 2006).

For...umms?

A "forum" is a well-explored space for the presentation of concerns, ideas, and projects, however they may be brought to a focus -- if at all.

It might be said of both the World Economic Forum and of the World Social Forum that, although they meet many of the needs of their participants and constituencies, it is far from clear to the outsiders (on whose behalf they may claim to be acting), that significant progress is being made. What is "significant progress" at this time? Given the rate at which the world situation is worsening, are these environments contributing what is required -- given the resources and/or expertise they represent?

In what sense can they be challenged as underperforming and regrettably not "fit for purpose"? Each would of course argue this of the other. Their quarrel may appear to be more of a noisy indulgence to others. The discord arising from their problematic arm's length interaction is unfortunate.

In the larger sense what are such forums actually for? Given the incoherence associated with any forum as an environment dedicated to networking, is such a question appropriate? Should what they are "for" lend itself to meaningful articulation beyond statements crafted for the media?

Is there merit to a high degree of understatement with regard to the purpose of a forum -- a necessary constructive ambiguity -- for it to serve the purposes of its participants and those that consider it a point of reference? Or is this used, consciously or unconsciously, as a means of disguising a failure to achieve a higher degree of coherence that might be more responsive to the acknowledged challenges?

In this sense is the play on words justified -- namely that the degree of uncertainty regarding the purpose of a "forum" may well be more appropriately described by referring to it as a "for...umm"? Or perhaps, for those who place great emphasis on their potential significance in spiritual terms, might the pronunciation be altered to "for...omm"?

If the For...umms of the world cannot unite, Why be astonished if its peoples fight?

Polyphony and harmony

In metaphoric terms it is fairly obvious that the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum may be understood as distinct
"voices" that are far from singing in harmony -- and necessarily not from the same "hymn sheet". Although at first sight far-fetched, media information about both events readily obscures the fact that both are the occasion for music and song -- whether to enhance the occasion through classical music or better to articulate and focus protest and concern about issues. Unfortunately such inherently memorable contributions are disregarded as vehicles for the substantive issues in preference to speech -- typically of unmemorable length.

A challenge for the World Social Forum, as articulated by Naomi Klein (Cut the Strings, Guardian, 1 February 2003), is the lengthy speechifying by "big men", as exemplifying what the movement was seeking to move beyond. Is it any different in the World Economic Forum?

In the earlier study (A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic? 2006) the possibility of interweaving two or more disparate voices was considered. Indeed how many such collective voices could be appropriately represented? What other "for...umms" could fruitfully contribute voices to the rich polyphony required to address the strategic challenges of the times? Should each "stakeholder" be reframed as a "voice"?

From a technical perspective, music offers a wide range of tools through which to handle a variety of voices. These have not been explored with a view, firstly, to reconciling the discordant voices of the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum, or, secondarily, to ensure that the voices play off each other to give expression to resonant effects that may offer templates for another order of strategic focus. An order that might prove to be far more appropriate, comprehensible and appealing than the separate messages of either at this time.

Lessons from the Haka

The haka is a Maori posture dance accompanied by chanted vocals. Commentators have noted the degree of posturing at both the World Economic Forum and at the World Social Forum. Could this be more fruitfully ritualised in some form of dance? Whilst neither is characterized by using the same "hymn sheet", could their ritual arguments be more effectively expressed as chanted vocals -- as with any corporate or protest song?

The haka has been publicised worldwide as the prelude to any rugby match by the All Blacks of New Zealand. It has been further publicised, as a parody, through a video advertisement for William Lawson's blended scotch whisky (undoubtedly to be consumed in quantity in Davos).

As noted on the All Blacks website however:

More than any aspect of Maori culture, this complex dance is an expression of the passion, vigour and identity of the race. Haka is not merely a pastime of the Maori but was also a custom of high social importance in the welcoming and entertainment of visitors. Tribal reputation rose and fell on their ability to perform the haka. Haka reflected the concerns and issues of the time, of defiance and protest, of factual occurrences and events at any given time.

There are many forms of haka in addition to that which has been publicised by the All Blacks. Haka constitute an integral part of formal or official welcome ceremonies for distinguished visitors or foreign dignitaries, serving to impart a sense of the importance of the occasion. Many are performed exclusively by men, with or without female backing. Some are performed predominantly by women. Women were however strongly involved in the traditional origin of haka.

It could be argued that the views of the World Economic Forum and of the World Social Forum merit an articulation reflecting the "passion, vigour and identity" of their respective insights. It is worth reflecting on whether their respective reputations should be linked to their ability to embed their messages in a performance like the haka.

Conclusion

The challenge is how to shift beyond the possible use of the haka in articulating the identity of the All Blacks of Davos in confrontation with the All Greens of Porto Alegre -- perhaps as prelude to a debate.

There is a psychodramatic appropriateness to such "team" names given that those of the World Social Forum readily frame those of Davos as representatives of the "dark force" -- exploitative corporate raiders with values akin to the serried hordes in the cult apocalyptic movie Mad Max. Or perhaps Hell's Angels in suits and limos after a cosmetic makeover -- even Demons And Vampires On Spin? On the other hand those of the World Economic Forum consider the Porto Alegre participants as dangerously "green" in the naivety of their understanding of how a sustainable global economy needs to be run -- as well as lacking any demonstrable collective competence in how to do so.

The "All Greens" would of course respond that -- if the "All Blacks" are as effective in their role as they pride themselves to be -- they either have a strong commitment to exacerbating the crises of the world, or are themselves a continuing demonstration of a high order of global strategic incompetence. Such contrasting views are typical themes explored in opera.

Both could benefit by honouring their understandings in appropriate lyrics and song for wider comprehension -- readily communicable through the media. But the All Greens need to be more creative in expressing their "passion, vigour and identity", in response to any haka of the All Blacks of Davos, than reactively following the inspiration of the William Lawson's ad, as some might be tempted to do.

How can these distinct voices then be interwoven in a vocalised dance that could give expression to their complementary role in a larger strategic understanding? Note that in polyphony the voices may indeed "confront" each other -- in an interplay of contrapuntal challenge
and competition. Of greater significance is the fact that it is only through the emergent resonance of their encounter that a more integrative framework becomes apparent. It is from this framework that appropriate global strategies could emerge.

As noted in the earlier study *A Singable Earth Charter. EU Constitution or Global Ethic?* 2006), this possibility is an aesthetic challenge to musicians and choreographers -- but especially to those capable of embodying substantive insights, concerns and strategic possibilities into such a medium for wider comprehension.

Prior to the industrial revolution, the organ was considered one of the most complex man-made creations. Such a musical instrument ranges in size from a single short keyboard to huge instruments with over 10,000 pipes. A large modern organ typically has three or four manuals with five octaves (61 notes) each, with a two-and-a-half octave (32-note) pedalboard. Perhaps this is no different in complexity from intergovernmental secretariats -- whose component units "pipe up" in response to particular stimuli with a range of "notes". But what do the amazing possibilities of harmony with an organ imply for modelling future possibilities between contrasting organizational voices?

How inappropriate is it to imagine that the institutional challenge of the times calls for a form of organization that might best be understood in musical terms as "organ-ization", namely the development of an institutional instrument of complexity analogous to that of an organ? How might such an institutional organ be designed and what thematic patterns of harmony and discord might it explore?

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