

WELCOME TO THE 7TH CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR QUALITY OF LIFE STUDIES

Eden Grove Centre, Rhodes University

Monday, 17 July 2006

The president of International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS) Richard Estes, the vice-president, Don Rahtz, the conference hosts, Valerie Moller and Denis Huschka, conference participants, speakers and distinguished guests

On behalf of Rhodes University, a very, very warm welcome to Rhodes, to Rhini/Grahamstown, to the Makana District, the Eastern Cape province, and South Africa. We are honoured to host the 7th ISQOLS Conference and trust that you will find our lodgings comfortable, that our facilities will meet your needs, and that you will find us convivial and hospitable hosts.

Permit me four observations on the context in which your conference on the 'Prospects for Quality of Life in the New Millennium' occurs.

First, we live in the epoch of globalization - of the compression of time and space resulting from the huge increase in speed of communication and contact made possible by information and communication technologies and air travel; of the rapid growth in trade; of the expanded and more rapid flows of capital, of the global organisation of production through transnational corporations and the development of a global

materialistic culture symbolised by brand names like Coca Cola, Nike, Microsoft and McDonalds.

The phenomenon of globalisation is beautifully captured by the following observation, which I paraphrase:

Highly industrialised countries have through their exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. The highly industrialised countries **create a world after their own image**. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish this epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. **All that is solid melts into air. All that is holy is profaned**. (Karl Marx, quoted in Wheen, 1999:121-2; emphasis added).

Written over 150 years ago this is nonetheless a wonderful and brilliant description of globalization. Under globalisation, ‘all that is solid (indeed) melts into air’. Many also believe that ‘all that is holy is (indeed) profaned’. It is no wonder that so many people today experience profound crises of identity and being and experience a lack of stability and rootedness. It is not surprising that there has been a turn to exploring new kinds of coexistence with nature and other people, as well a turn to various kinds of fundamentalisms as part of a search for meaning in every day life and as an attempt to regain greater control over individual lives.

In the coming days, you will no doubt address what are the prospects for quality of life, for happiness, and the like in the epoch of globalization.

Second, the distance that we have to travel in many parts of the world, including in South Africa, to enhance the quality of lives of people is eloquently captured by the Chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission when he observes that:

...the reality remains that for millions of people the promise of human rights and the vision of a just and caring world remains an illusion. Intolerance, war and impunity; starvation and greed; power and powerlessness all combine in a conspiracy of the powerful against the weak that invariably deepens the faultlines that exist in the world and within nations.

(T)hese millions... see a world where disparities in wealth, resources and opportunities have grown, where human rights norms and values seem invariably to yield to the dictates of the rich and powerful; which expresses shock and outrage at arbitrary killing but at the same time is complicit in the killing of many more thorough hunger and disease – which could have been avoided (Kollapen, 2003:26).

He rightly goes on to say

We need to be creative and bold...to challenge poverty and inequality, to reshape the way society is structured and does its business and, importantly, to ensure that the concept of the

‘oneness of humanity’...comes to mean just that (NEPAD’S Human Rights Challenge, *Connecting...*, February-April 2003:26).

Again, how do these realities condition quality of life and the prospects for quality of life in the 21st century.

Third, the economic and social structure and conditions of the town, Rhini/Grahamstown in which you are meeting, have been profoundly shaped by a history of colonialism and apartheid. Twelve years into our democracy, the legacies of colonialism and apartheid remain all too evident and raise significant questions regarding the quality of life that its inhabitants can hope to experience in coming years and decades.

Related to this, successive post-1994 South African governments have campaigned on a platform of creating ‘a better life for all’ South Africans, and especially those that have been previously economically and socially disadvantaged and marginalised. We can ask:

- How is this ‘better life’ conceptualised?
- What aspects of the lives of citizens does government seek to improve or transform? Through what development path or paths?
- Through the allocation of what roles to the state, civil society, social movements and individuals?
- Through what kinds of attention to the economic and the intellectual, cultural and social, and the material and the spiritual?
- With what results?
- And what are the prospects for quality of life in a society in which millions have AIDS, in which AIDS like other diseases impacts along

the fissures of 'race', class and gender, where the public health and social infrastructure cannot cope with treatment and care, and there is a tardiness in addressing the ravages of AIDS.

It is clear that the global and local contexts provide a rich terrain for asking questions about quality of life, for research, for theorising, and methodological innovation, as well as for debate, especially if there is a social commitment to a more just, more humane, less unequal and inequitable and more environmentally sustainable world.

It should also be clear that a microcosm of the historical, economic and social conditions and challenges that face South Africa as a whole and also face many parts of the world, Rhini/Grahamstown is a perfect location for posing questions about the quality of life in the 21st century and for your conference and discussions.

I wish you a very stimulating and productive conference, an enjoyable stay at Rhodes and in Rhini/Grahamstown, and I declare the conference open.