

Political consciousness

Date 20.9.20, 16-20h cameroonian time; Tool: online

report

The aim of this workshop was to understand that we need political consciousness to be able to analyze ourselves, our own acting/ attitude and to be able to act sensfully. Political consciousness protects against radical in the sens of fanatic groups (so protects of manipulation) and/ or follow ideologies and black-and-white-schemas of thinking, or to become completley passive and to leave self-responsability. Political consciousness allows us the awareness of our responsability in the society and independent critical thinking.

Political consciousness can be defined as:

1. Critical consciousness as self reflection,
2. Critical consciousness as mode of aperception/ analysis or critics and
3. Critical consciousness as action, as practising and as resistance.

For this knowledge and education are important , as well as partners of interaction and exchange, and the believe in being able to change societal circomstances.

As exemple: If we see that societal influences have a negative impact on our own life, we need to search for the reasons/ roots (so e.g. if we cant go to a higher school, because our parents decide so or if economical tendences dont permit the visit of a higher school (if e.g. school is to be payed privately). On the other way round we can tend to always critizise because this is our self image and thus we don ´t see see circomstances really as objectively as possible (2). Both attitudes tend to „individualize“, where a context knowledge would be important to really analyze and thus act in the sens of political (and thus automatically not only self-centered or self-related) consciousness (3).

The workshop started with a round on: How are you personally? And: What are your expectations for the workshop?

Participants said that they hope to become intersted in politics and to know more about politics, also in both countries.

1. Association to politics:

After a short attentiveness exercise to be present especially in online-workshops participants were asked to draw a picture or write a poem on their associations to politics. Most poems were about lies and manipulation and abuse of power on behalf of the population – so there is not at all a positive relation to politics.

Some poems:

Politics

Women with skirts and men with ties.

Speeches read from a paper.

People listening are doing a favour.
The rest of the parliament is occupied with other labour.
I'm counting at the television who sighs...

Politics

Hungry children and desperate parents.
Forgotten have been the human rights.
Too economically convincing had been the fights.
Anyway, helping packages are at sight...
Where is coherence if complexity is taking away the light?

Politics

People are shouting on the streets.
Left or right? Who will win?
Who is fighting till the end, showing he is really in?
Did nobody see the line of differences is so thin?
Aren't we all human?

Politics

A game of power.
A story of abuse.
A war of interests.
A searching for proof.

No party will save us if we don't learn to listen to each other.
No president will rise our community if we don't work together.
So lets learn to listen and lets learn to speak.
Lets ask and lets seek
For a better future for all.

So what do I think about politics? It's complex. There exist so many good things: human rights, structures to prevent power abuse, etc. but we have to fill them with life and keep up straight with them. No written word is valid without being taken seriously and lived. There are so many dependencies and influences (manipulations?). It's confusing, it's a maze, where it's easy to loose direction. Answers are not always clear. So we need to start reflecting, asking questions, analysing, but also dreaming to find the roots of the problems and their solutions towards politics that are really about letting everyone participate and coming to solutions that are wide, thought ahead and have in focus the well being of all life on earth.

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Manipulation,

The truth is becoming false,
The falsehood real,
The population blinded until they got what they want,
Then the misery, the suffering, the tears.
Be careful people, politicians are hunters and you are their preys.

Picture showing a yellow and a black face. It was said they symbolize people wearing masks of happiness / of everything is fine while it isn't.

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Politics, what is politics?

It's too high for me.

Maybe people who understand you are not from the same world from me.

I tried to interest myself in you.

But it is too much lies.

I don't want fake in my life.

When I hear politics I hear lie.

Why???????????

Politicis, manipulation, dark sidey shadow.

We need light in the world.

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Manipulation (politician using happenings in their interests)

Power

Division (of the people)

Hypocrisy

Lies (promises of beautiful things)

This shows that politics is considered as far away from population and finally power game and abuse.

It shows as well that politics is understood as „something done by politicians“, not understood as something of daily life where all play a role in and not conceived as context (also historical) knowledge of everyone as condition for being able to think critical. This might have a relation to the political system in Cameroon which is more or less a dictatorship and far away from democracy, even if told so. If we live a situation where others have a say, and me (e.g. youths) not, politics as “dealing with differences and similarities in a society” (following Hannah Arendt) is difficult to be understood as inner attitude of everyone, as the whole education, in family, school, society and also in the past (colonialism e.g.) tends to obedience or, in Cameroon, “attentisme”.

At the same time it became clear **that all wish a society where everybody has a voice**, where the population speaks out and is heard and where politicians act for the best of the people. Also this situation is for Cameroon (and not only there) very known: the wish to be heard, and the wish to have an influence in society on political level.

To be sure, the wish onto politicians to act for the best of the people is difficult as the opinions of people are divers, so politicians need also to stand for something, for specific values shown in a specific party program (that's what voting is for), and it requires that people have the chance to speak out – and use this chance as well - or find ways to democratise themselves. If people don't start to speak out, the system of politics won't change – there is no need to.

Another point was the constant and growing influence by the surrounding i.e. social media, fake news etc. that influence the opinion of people. It was said that this requires a personal effort of everyone to distinguish fake from real messages, which means as well seeking for divers information and not only from one source – and at the same time political consciousness (where comes what source from, with what interest, where do I just follow the mainstream because i was educated like this etc.).

Same was constated for the power of your own voice and the importance of debate as a real talk listening and understanding each other, not only convincing the other person – this also requires a daily effort of everyone and conscious training. Political consciousness comes not from alone, but must be trained – and educated for.

2. After this first round the questions were asked: **What is political consciousness? What do we need political consciousness for? How do you recognize that somebody has no political consciousness?**

The discussion brought out several and diverse point of views, again split up into the role and tasks of politicians and the “population”:

a)

- interest in what is happening in politics and around you.
- critical thinking and awareness of what is going on.
- Seeing ourselves as part of sth and have the desire to participate
- You need to be educated to develop political consciousness (abilities mentioned above)

b)

- Politicians working in the interest of the population
- it needs self-responsibility and good listening to what people need and what is happening
- you need to be open to people
- it's hard work

c)

more or less bringing politicians and people together:

- awareness of being part of something bigger
- being educated for critical thinking
- being aware of the power of your voice
- being open to debate and knowing that every part is influencing the other one. So talk with each other and learn from each other not only one side convincing the other.
- needed to change the world.

The discussion brought out that political consciousness means **in general** “being aware of people impact on you and your impact on people“.

A discussion on „impacting“ followed – here the **difference between manipulation and influence** in politics. Participants agreed on the fact that influence can be positive or negative and manipulation is only negative. It was as the well discussed if manipulation is always intentionally (and power abuse for the own interest) and influence is not intentionally.

Later on it was clarified:

Influence can be done by intention or not (as we all influence the other, if we want or not). Consciously done influence is a mean to „affect“ the others, to have an impact. But it is not about using unfair means. It is about making your voice heard with an impact.

Manipulation means to bring someone there where I want, without the free will of the other, by using unfair means. It is always done with intention, even if unconsciously. It is always bound to power (abuse).

If people/ population want to make their voice heard, if one acts politically (in the sense of using the own influence to deal with similarities and differences, also to go on for a constructive change) they/ ones use the own capacity of **influence by INTENTION**. All political action also of NGOs or groups is about influence and by intention. If one tries to change politics in the sense of politically taken decisions, laws, political culture/ mentality, if one tries to make his/ her voice heard, also if one uses lobbying or demonstrations or what ever, one tries consciously to influence: to have an impact! So YOW for example is about influence!

Even if one person talks with someone about something where she/he is standing for, to make at least reflect on his/ her mind, it is about influence. Even if we are only there and don't say anything we influence the others. Our being has an influence, a reaction of others.

One tries to influence another person consciously (e.g. to change her/his position), or one influences the other because the other is open-minded and ready to reflect the own opinion. This is dialogue. But always the basis is: the reflecting capacity of oneself and the other, you don't use unfair or hidden means, but argumentation and open communication.

The influence of all means as well democracy – to bring in your voices to be considered in a successful way in society. But to be heard you first need to speak out and you need to try to influence, you need to use your influence („power of your voice“)! This can be voting, but it can be far more than that.

Democracy means to bring the different opinions together by exchange. To go for something, to step back, to make compromises, finally a lasting dialogue. And this means always to question: Where do I stand? What makes the other opinion in me, is he/ she maybe right?

Manipulation means to bring someone to a point where he/she does what the manipulator wants for his/ her own interest - without that the other recognises it, or against his/her free will. If one manipulates, it is not in her/ his interest that the other one thinks, feels, reflects freely, it is not about dialogue and mutual reflection of the own position. It is about power (abuse).

Manipulation can be done by lies, by charming, by promises, but also by games like culpabilising, playing the victim, and it can be done very obvious and very hidden. The thing is: the basis of dialogue is NOT considered as equal. ...manipulation can be very transparent (as for example Trump) and also very intransparent. The sense is always to bring someone to your position – and even if one remarked manipulation, one needs to step out of this „magic“ consciously. Manipulation means trying to use the weak points of the other for the own interest. Manipulation can be also done by „playing“ the victim, spreading specific messages zealing on our emotions and weak points (without taking them serious) – see for example the corona „opponents“ or many others examples in daily life.

So we can only distinguish manipulation and influence by strict self-reflection. Is the other one listen to me? What maybe hidden desire appeals the other one in me?

Manipulation is always about power. And thus, yes, negative. Influence is open to real dialogue, on the basis of every voice is heard and you „handle it thus out“.

After this very important discussion on ongoing and growing tendencies (manipulation via social media (included fake news), by politicians, government etc.) and **political consciousness as mean to see through manipulation** (for an own interest)

3. the topic of political consciousness was referred on the own project and group: Are we political conscious through our mails? How would mail exchanges look to be political conscious?

On the one hand it was constated that talking about this topic was already politically conscious and training it. On the other hand it became clear that for exemple the ongoing topic of racism and cultural appropriation via mail exchange was not yet finished and didn't come to a common conclusion, even not answered to some questions. So it was stuck somehow on the surface and thus NOT politically conscious as far as some spoke out on defintions or lived experiences and that was it. So there was no deeper looking into the topic, everyone stayed in his/ her point of view. Sharing and colleting opinions are fine, but they need to come to a propper conclusion in a group and look deeply (re-ask your own opinion) or – if not – called like that (as still open) and taking into account later on. Otherwise it is no dialogue but just a collection of opinions – what everyone makes out of it is not clear. But this is the most important point. And needs to be spoken out. It is not about a „common reult“ but it is about knowing what who thinks about it and where who stands and what historical and current conditions are going on with that theme. Different definitions are not enough to make a common way to act out o fit. And if the opinionjs are diffeent, we need to talk about it.

So finally the particjpants came oout with the decision that the debates via mail must come to a conclusion. For that, we will have to communicate more on them and find all together our conclusion. And we need to look deeper, really ask questions. Being critical also to ourselves and asnweer to others. Don't thnikm that „my point of view ist he right one“ and point.

4. In the conclusion round it was said :

The most recurrent answers on things learned were influence and being influenced, so OUR self-influence on others. It was recognized that politics is not only for politicians concerning politics. And for the group work it was said that “coming to a conclusion” about our discussions via mails is important in the sens of looking deeper (doesn't mean to have the same point of view necessarily), but to gather every point of EVERYONE and not just some, and to speak it out and to continue dialogue instead of just pointing out former opinions - what did change, what do we think now? What do we answer (!!!) to the other one?. So we for ourselves didn't answer – this is somehow typical for the society we live in and what we complain about: to make a change we need to answer and to reflect and not just „gather“ other opinions and point.

We defined: Political consciousness is the awareness of being part of something and feeling the desire to influence/ exchange/ participate. A political conscious person is therefore aware of what is happening around him/her and about that having an influence on him/her but also him/her having influence on it.

Putting this into practise means having an open attitude and ability of critical thinking and reflection with the aim to find out what things are really about. This we must do e.g. in our Email exchange. This

means, really reading emails closely, ask if things are not understood, questioning, research about things not known and bring a topic in that sense to an end, that we all learned about it and can conclude sth.

In the final round everyone draw a picture as feedback on learned things about politics and where you stand in it.

Plus a feedback on moderation as done.

The topic will be present all the time, as YOW is focusing on a constructive change - in ourselves and outside (as without inner change and acting in daily life no outer change is possible, plus we need as group common actions to be heard)