

Good morning. It is a delight to be here with you this morning and to spend some time together, but, more importantly, it is a time to celebrate the very important work that you are doing. And this work is even more important given what is happening in the world today.

I am from the University of California, Berkeley, California, United States.

I arrived late last night and, even so, I feel that it is really important to be here. I hope to establish an ongoing relationship with you because, once again, I believe that your work is very important for everyone today. So I want to recognise and celebrate you, and the work that you do.

I lead an initiative called the Othering and Belonging Institute. As this slide suggests, I argue that the problem of the 21st century is the problem of othering.

It is a curious word. What do we mean by othering?

Basically, othering means asserting that some people or some groups are not accorded the same dignity or the same respect. They are not considered important. They are not considered to have the same value as other groups.

This can be based on many different factors. We can make it up. It can be based on a person's race, their age, their abilities, their language or their religion.

And we construct stories about those people and say that, somehow, they are not deserving. That they are not really part of us. And, in the most extreme cases, we even say that they are dangerous.

Here are some of the ways in which we turn other people into "the other".

The most important thing is to realise that this is not natural. When we define someone as the other, as different, we end up thinking that this difference is natural.

That one race is different from another race.

From a biological perspective, I think most of you already know this: race does not even exist.

And yet we construct a story around it and it seems that not only does it exist, but that it is inevitable. That it has to exist.

It is a sociological construction, but once it is established it becomes a social reality.

And sometimes it is not just race; sometimes it is gender, our height, whether we are tall or short.

One of the greatest genocides of the 20th century took place in Rwanda.

And many of you know this. In Rwanda, people had the same race, the same religion, the same language and, in many cases, the same ethnicity and the same tribe.

And a story was constructed that if you did not have a certain number of cows, if you had fewer than three cows, you were "the other".

You did not belong.

And from there, after having lived together for decades, they literally began killing one another.

Who is the other? This person only has two cows. They cannot be part of our group.

When we hear this, it seems absurd.

And it is.

But this is the way we construct stories, and those stories help define who we are and who the other is.

So an important part of this is asking ourselves: can we construct different stories?

I am from the United States and I have visited many countries, including Northern Ireland.

Talking to people there, they would say to me: “Those people over there cannot be trusted. They are Catholics.”

And I would ask: “How do you know they are Catholic? How can you know?”

And they would answer: “Look at the way they walk. Look at this. It is obvious.”

It was not obvious to me. I did not have that sensitivity.

And that is why it is important to understand the different ways in which we turn people into “the other”: it is a way of deciding who belongs and who receives respect.

So this problem of othering, which also manifests itself as racism, xenophobia or religious phobia, appears in many different ways.

Why is it so prevalent in the world today? Why is othering happening not just in the United States, not just in Spain, not just in Europe, not just in Africa, not just in Latin America? It is happening everywhere.

Why do people turn against one another?

And one of the reasons is change itself.

When change happens very quickly, it creates anxiety, not only in human beings, but also in other animals.

There is research suggesting that if, over a two-year period, you change your primary relationship, the place where you live and your job, your chances of having a heart attack increase by 50%.

And that is assuming that you have found a good job and a good partner.

If you have found a bad job and a terrible partner, you are already dead.

The problem is that we can only process a small amount of change over a short period of time. If change is spread out over years or even decades, we can manage it.

We can adapt.

And this is not only true for us. It is also true for other animals.

What is happening in the world today is that the speed of change is accelerating.

Things are changing faster than we are able to process.

And with this speed, we are experiencing anxiety.

For example, we are dealing with changes related to health. We are still thinking about COVID-19 and now we are also thinking about Ebola.

We are seeing technological change.

Is artificial intelligence a good thing? Will it help us? Will it cure cancer? Or is it a bad thing? Will it destroy humanity?

Climate change. Is it normal for it to be this hot so early in the year? Should we be concerned?

Economic change. Will I have a job next week? What about next year?

There are young people here. When I graduate from university or finish high school, will I have a job? Will there be a place for me?

And, obviously, demographic change. We are seeing the world change demographically everywhere.

And here in Europe, for example, immigration is a very important issue.

Surprisingly, it is also an important issue in Africa. South Africans are concerned about people who are not South African coming into their country.

And there is also a contradiction because, once again, in the United States, our president is very hostile to the idea of immigrants.

At the same time, we say that we need immigrants to work in our hospitals and in our fields.

So there is both a need and a fear at the same time.

When we experience this rapid change—and this change will accelerate, it will not stop—the world will demand more from us.

How do we make sense of it?

We know that the world is changing, but we do not necessarily know what it means.

We make sense of these changes by telling stories, and there are two structures that I want to focus on in terms of how we tell those stories.

One structure is called the breaking structure.

In a breaking structure, we say: yes, things are changing, it is frightening, and it is their fault.

It is the immigrants' fault. It is older people's fault. It is gay people's fault.

We blame the other for our anxiety and say: if we could deal with the other, if we could keep the other away from us, if we could send them back to their country, we would be better off.

This is what is called a breaking story, in which we are not just talking about difference.

We are saying that the other is a threat to our way of life.

It is a threat to our civilisation. It is a threat to our jobs.

It is a threat to our well-being.

Most of the stories we see on social media and in newspapers are breaking stories.

They are stories about some other.

The other way of explaining it is to say: yes, things are changing. We are changing too.

We are becoming more diverse societies.

But we can talk to one another. We can listen to one another. We can learn from one another.

We can educate one another.

We can build a larger “we”.

And, in order to do that, we have to engage with one another.

This is called a bridging story.

So these are two types of stories.

One is a breaking story and the other is a bridging story.

And I would say that the work you are doing is about building bridges.

You are trying to help people understand themselves and help them understand the other.

So part of the message of my talk today is: can we build bridging stories?

And when, for whatever reason, we cannot do that, can we at least avoid breaking stories?

Let me explain a little more about breaking stories.

When you see another human being, there is a part of your brain that becomes active.

This does not mean that you like that person. It does not mean that you want to buy them a coffee.

It does not mean that you want to take them home.

Nature considered it useful for us to recognise our fellow human beings.

That is why this part of the brain becomes active.

Recognition.

When you deeply turn someone into “the other”, when you construct stories about a person in such a way that they are really not considered part of your group, this part of the brain does not become active.

That is, at an unconscious level, when we deeply turn someone into “the other”, we stop seeing them as a human being.

In the United States, they conducted a test.

In the United States, one of the groups that we deeply turn into “the other” is people experiencing homelessness.

They had members of the public look at people experiencing homelessness and connected them to equipment so that they could observe their brain waves.

And that part of the brain that recognises another human being was completely silent. There was no activity.

And then they asked a question:

“What kind of vegetables do you think these homeless people like?”

And suddenly, that part of the brain that recognises another human being became highly active.

What is happening? What is happening is that when we are curious about other people, we see their humanity.

When we are not curious, that person is a homeless person and we have stereotypes.

We think: they are probably a drug addict. They probably do not have a job. They are a failure. There is something wrong with that person.

We do not imagine that they might like vegetables. We do not imagine that they have children. We do not imagine that they feel pain and sadness. We do not imagine that they are like us.

So an important part of building bridges and seeing the humanity of others is curiosity. It is asking curious questions about other people.

So what we work on at the Institute is a sense of belonging without creating othering.

Belonging without othering.

On this slide you can see three images.

The first is a circle in which there are people who remain outside the circle. This is exclusion.

We recognise it in many of our immigration policies. We recognise it in things such as segregation or apartheid.

We say: these people cannot be in our neighbourhoods. They cannot be in our church, synagogue or mosque. They cannot be in our country.

They are the other. We keep them away from us.

The second image is what we call inclusion.

Inclusion is: okay, you can come to my school.

Sometimes I tell a story: I am going to have a party and I hope most of you will come.

I grew up in Detroit. Some of you know that yesterday was my birthday, so every day I get a little bit older.

But when I have my party, there will be a lot of Motown music.

I am also a vegetarian, which means that when you come to the party, there will be no meat.

So: lots of Motown music and no meat.

And, since I am now over 70 years old, the party will end at eight o'clock in the evening.

Now some of you might say that this is not a very attractive party. Why should I make the effort to go to a party like that?

Well, you are welcome at my party, but it is my party.

I make the rules. I choose the music. I choose the food. I choose the time. I choose the guests.

And you can come, but you have to follow all my rules.

This is inclusion. You are included.

But what if we said: "I do not want to go to your party. Can we have a party? Can we have a party together? Can we participate in choosing the food?"

Maybe we can have vegetarian food, but we could also have non-vegetarian food.

Maybe we could have Motown music, but also some reggae. Maybe we could have classical music.

We come together and decide together.

This is the final image on the slide.

This is belonging.

Belonging is when we co-create what we belong to.

You are not a guest in someone else's story. You are not a guest in someone else's home or in someone else's neighbourhood.

It is your neighbourhood too. And you have to come together to make it work for everyone.

So belonging is different from inclusion.

Inclusion is when you show up as a guest and, as a guest, you can be asked to leave.

Belonging is when you co-create the very thing you belong to.

And belonging requires inclusion. It requires agency. It requires you to have a voice.

It requires you to be recognised and it requires connection. You have to be connected to the place and to the people around you.

So here we have two of the big ideas that we have already mentioned.

One is called breaking, which we have already discussed. The other is called building bridges.

Now, there are short bridges and long bridges.

What is a short bridge?

A short bridge would be a bridge that connects you with someone you do not get along with very well.

Maybe it is your cousin. Maybe it is your sister or your brother. It is someone with whom you share many things.

But you can still argue with your brother or sister. And when you argue, maybe you stop talking to each other.

Maybe they did not pay you back the 10 dollars you lent them last year, or they did not come to your daughter's graduation, and you are angry.

But you have the whole family to help you come back together.

Now, short bridges does not mean they are easy.

Think about civil wars. In many cases, the worst wars people experience are those in which brothers and sisters turn against one another.

Also, with short bridges you know how to hurt the other person.

I know how to make my brother angry. I know things about him that a stranger would not know.

But you have many resources to come back together as a family.

Then there are long bridges.

Long bridges are those people with whom, you know, I do not know the language, I do not understand their language. I do not eat the same food. I do not come from the same place. I do not believe in God in the same way they do.

Last night, one of my closest friends called me to wish me a happy birthday.

He said: "How are you, John?"

And I said: "I am fine."

He said: "They are making me work too hard in Barcelona."

I was there. Barcelona, as you know, is one of the cities of peace, perhaps the most important city of peace in the world.

And I was there to take part in several activities. It was wonderful.

But it was not a birthday celebration.

And my friend said to me: "It is very good that you are doing this work. But you have to take care of yourself, because we only go through life once."

And I said to him: "What if you were Hindu?"

He replied: "We are not Hindu."

What I mean is that even our idea of death is different from that of other people.

So when people do not share the same food, the same language, the same belief in God or the same idea about death, it is as if we could never imagine having a relationship with that person.

These are long bridges.

An example of a long bridge: I have a friend who is a Christian minister.

And I told him that we have to be open to others. We have to be willing to relate to people and see the humanity of people who are different from us.

And sometimes that difference is very great.

And he said to me:

"John, are you suggesting that I build a bridge with the devil?"

And I replied:

"As a Christian minister, building a bridge with the devil would indeed be a very long bridge. So do not start there."

But also be careful about whom you call the devil.

The point is that when we start building bridges, it is like exercise.

And when we exercise, we do not start by trying to run a marathon tomorrow.

We start by walking around our block. We start by running perhaps half a kilometre.

And as we get used to it, we can increase the distance to one kilometre, perhaps two kilometres.

And perhaps, eventually, we will reach 42 kilometres.

So do not start with the most difficult bridge. Do not start with the most complicated relationship.
Start with something a little easier.

And as we improve, we will be able to build longer bridges.

So, again: breaking stories say: “There is no place for you in my world. You are a threat to my world.”

Bridge-building stories say: “We are in this together. We are connected to one another. We share things. And I am curious about you.”

Now, everyone believes in belonging.

Maybe you are not used to using this word, but everyone believes in belonging.

You are a family. You belong to that family.

When we think about any great religion, it is always organised around the idea of belonging.

Whether it is Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism or Christianity, all the great religions say that the people who belong to them are a family.

We belong to one another.

So belonging has existed for as long as human activity has existed.

But usually, in many religions, they create a group that belongs and, at the same time, create a group that does not belong.

So if you are Christian, great. But if you are not Christian, you are a sinner.

If you are Muslim, great. But if you are not Muslim, you are an infidel.

If you are not Jewish, you are not part of the chosen people.

So the idea is that every nation, every religion, has organised itself around belonging, but also around creating othering.

That is: “Our group belongs; they do not belong.”

And that is why the challenge we have today, the challenge you have today, is to create belonging without creating othering.

Can we create a world where everyone belongs? Where everyone belongs?

Think for a moment: who, in your view, does not belong? Which group? Which child does not count? Which family does not deserve to have food?

Can we create a world where everyone belongs?

And we have already made some progress in this direction.

Think about the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which begins with the idea that everyone, everyone, matters.

And when it was adopted in 1948, again, the world was not like this.

We had just come out of a war. Six million Jews had been murdered.

In fact, there was a debate between Eleanor Roosevelt, who was one of the principal architects of the declaration, and W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the most important American sociologists who ever lived.

Du Bois was really angry about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Why was he angry?

He said: "This is only symbolic."

He said: "Africa is still colonised, women cannot vote in almost any place in the world, Black people are segregated in the United States. We have just seen six million Jews murdered. We are altering the land of Palestine."

He said: "What do you mean by this?"

He said: "This is only symbolic."

And I usually say that he was right and wrong.

He was right that it was symbolic.

He was wrong to say that it was only symbolic.

Symbolism matters when it is done correctly.

So Eleanor Roosevelt was not describing the world.

She was creating an aspiration.

She was creating an aspiration.

If I can open this... My father was a Christian minister. He died a few years ago.

He and my mother were wonderful people.

What does it mean to be Christian?

Christian means "Christ-like".

So I imagine that some of you are Christians. How many of you are really Christ-like?

Islam means submitting to Allah.

How many of you have surrendered yourselves to God?

So we establish these aspirations, we establish these principles to guide the way we move forward, and we believe that it is now important to move towards belonging without othering.

In the United States, J. D. Vance and other people want to create othering, they want belonging.

But they want it for a small group of people.

Some people now argue that the only people who truly belong in the United States are Christians, and not just Christians, but Protestants.

So Catholics do not really belong.

Some people say that only white people belong.

We used to have this debate in the United States: who is the real American?

And at one point, in the United States, we argued that there were only two types of people who were true Americans.

Two types of people.

Who were they?

Anglos and Saxons. Anglos and Saxons.

Not Germans, not French, not Italians.

Everyone else was a guest.

So now we are trying to move beyond this and say no, this is not an appropriate way to decide who belongs.

So I want to give you 90 seconds to think about a time when you felt a sense of belonging.

Have you ever felt that you belonged to your city?

What were the circumstances that created that sense of belonging?

And could you think about belonging, about the way that you belong to your city or to the place where you live?

Can you extend that sense of belonging to people who do not always have that feeling?

I want to give you 90 seconds to reflect on that.

Okay.

I just want you to keep that in mind as we continue, because the idea is that I think the work you are already doing is really the same work that we do.

You use different words, but it is the same idea.

How do we make cities, how do we make the places where we live spaces where everyone can belong?

And belonging with othering does not work; this is negative. It is already happening.

It is what really divides and polarises us.

When you create the other—because the other is largely a construction, it is a story—the question is: how do we build bridges? How do we get to know the other?

We have talked a little about building bridges and breaking.

Building bridges means turning towards the other.

Breaking means turning against the other.

And breaking creates the other.

It is based on fear, whereas building bridges is based on empathy.

So I have suggested that, if these things are not simply out there, we organise them through stories.

We organise them through narratives.

How do we know which is a narrative about building bridges? Which is a narrative about creating bonds?

There is another concept: creating bonds. It is another concept that I just want to spend a few seconds on.

So building bridges is when you reach out to someone; breaking is when you turn against someone.

Bonding is when you say: "I care about my family, but I do not denigrate your family."

So bonding means recognising a relationship without putting other relationships down, and we will return to this a little later.

Okay.

One of the things you focus on is critical thinking, and I will also return to that later.

But I want to add to critical thinking the idea of intentional engagement and empathic listening.

What is empathic listening?

It is different from critical listening.

You can listen to someone in order to find a mistake, you can listen to someone in order to expose them, or you can genuinely listen in order to try to experience what the other person is experiencing.

This is not what building bridges is.

Many times, when people hear about building bridges, they think it is too soft, especially in this very harsh world.

And why should we make concessions to the other side?

Building bridges is not about making concessions. Building bridges does not mean agreeing, nor does it mean abandoning your values.

You can build bridges at the interpersonal, institutional or systemic level.

And, again, there are short bridges and long bridges, weak bridges and transactional bridges. And for each of them, the method for building them is slightly different.

And then there is the idea of strong ties and weak ties in cities.

What is the difference between a strong tie and a weak tie?

Well, a strong tie is when you have a very close relationship with someone. It is almost like a family or romantic relationship.

It is someone you see and perhaps love, someone you interact with every day.

A weak tie is, in part, what Robert Putnam, author of the book *Bowling Alone*, studied.

He talked about generalised reciprocity and specific reciprocity.

A weak tie is when you do not have a close relationship with people, but nevertheless you have a relationship with them. You recognise and value them.

It is like simply being kind to someone on the street or leaving a tip for someone in the United States.

So Putnam argues that a weak tie is what holds a society together.

Not everyone becomes your brother or sister, but they can be people who matter to you.

If you see someone trying to lift something heavy, perhaps you go over and help them.

If you see someone who is in a hurry, perhaps you lend them a hand in some way.

It is a general positive feeling towards your community and a willingness to help it.

Again, it is not a close relationship.

And he says that, in fact, a weak tie is more important for creating cohesion in a society than a strong tie.

So, according to Putnam, you cannot consider everyone your brother or sister, but they can still be people who matter to you.

Reflection: how is your educating city a container that facilitates change and encourages bridge-building? What circumstances make this possible?

Is there a culture of weak ties in your city? Is there a culture of caring about strangers in your city?

Again, I want you to reflect on this, but this time we will do something a little different.

I want you to think about it, but I will give you two minutes, and I want you to turn to the person next to you.

Each of you will have a little more than a minute to explain how you are doing this work in your own city.

What is your educating city like? Is it a container? Is it a place where people can feel that they belong?

Are the practices in your city creating belonging, especially with strangers?

I will give you two minutes. Turn to the person next to you and reflect on this question.

Okay, you have 30 seconds.

Okay, let us all come back together.

When we think about bridge-building and a sense of belonging, one of the things we need to consider is how structures can create a space of belonging and connection, or they can generate exclusion and become mechanisms of othering.

Now there are some very obvious examples.

For example, if there are stairs and a person uses a wheelchair, and there is no ramp, we are basically creating a structure in which that person is not welcome.

I travel too much by plane and sometimes I use the example of overhead luggage compartments.

There is a part of the population that tends to be shorter and that, as a group, tends to have less upper-body strength.

What part of the population am I describing?

They tend to be shorter and have less upper-body strength.

Does anything come to mind?

Can you say it out loud?

Children, okay. Children, this is true.

But who else has less upper-body strength and tends to be shorter?

Are there people in this room who fit this description?

Women, right?

Okay. Women are the majority of the world's population and, as a group, have less upper-body strength and are shorter in height.

So what happens with women as a group—and this is a slightly controversial issue—is that they are also more likely to carry more luggage.

As a group, women check luggage more often than men, even when they have the same amount of luggage.

This means that they have to arrive at the airport between half an hour and 45 minutes earlier than their male counterparts, and they leave the airport between half an hour and 45 minutes later, sometimes even without their luggage.

So this is a structure that, again, ends up disadvantaging women.

And what we need to do is pay attention to what structures do.

Structures have effects: they make some things more difficult for some people and easier for others.

So how can we create structures and stories that say to people, to everyone: “You belong here”?

And different groups will need different things, different structures, in order to experience a full sense of belonging.

And that is why cities are containers that have helped shape the design of cities.

Think, for example, that in the United States, the porches of houses used to be located at the front.

This meant that, when you walked down the street, you saw your neighbours.

You could talk to your neighbours.

In the 1950s and 1960s we thought: “Let's put the porches at the back.”

And this meant that now you can live in a neighbourhood for years and never see your neighbours.

They arrive by car, park inside the garage and enter through the back.

This is a structure: a structure that makes it more difficult for people to meet and interact.

So when you look at structures, ask yourself: what effect do these structures have in telling us “you belong here” or “you do not belong here”?

And what we are experiencing now, not only in the United States, is that we are seeing cracks in many of the structures that used to hold us together.

Public schools, we know, are now the subject of debate and protests. There are people trying to destroy public schools.

But public schools are one of the places where we used to meet and be together.

Public libraries.

Public libraries are another space where perhaps we can meet.

In Berkeley, for example, they worked very intentionally to make libraries open to everyone.

But this also created a problem.

Many people experiencing homelessness went to the library and used the bathrooms as if they were their home, not just to use the toilet, but also to shower or bathe.

And then people who were not experiencing homelessness stopped going to the library.

So what can we do, from within cities, to make them spaces where everyone feels that they belong?

My partner is in Berlin—not now, but I am in Berlin this summer—and they comment that everyone uses public services here.

Everyone in Berlin uses public space.

They use the bus. They use the tram.

This does not happen in the United States.

To a large extent, public space in the United States is associated with people experiencing homelessness and poor people.

Middle-class people do not usually use public services or public parks, with some exceptions.

So how do we build a city that says: “This city belongs to everyone”?

This is Bob Marley, and he has a line in one of his songs that says—paraphrasing it—that each person thinks their burden is the heaviest.

So we tell stories, and I know my burden. I do not know your burden.

I think my burden is more important than yours.

I think the burden of my group is more important than the burden of your group.

And in this way, we diminish other people’s stories.

In doing so, we diminish them.

In doing so, we are telling them: “Your story really does not matter. My story is the one that matters.”

So part of how we create spaces of belonging is by telling everyone that all stories matter.

All stories matter.

And how can we really bring those stories to the surface?

When we think about stories—and stories are really important—we have to think:

Who is telling the story?

Who is the hero or protagonist of the story?

Who is the villain?

Who is the audience?

Who is excluded?

So when you think about a story, simply think:

Who is telling it?

Who is the villain?

Who is the protagonist?

And who is left out?

There are different ways of listening.

We can listen with our minds and we can listen with our hearts.

And what we want is to listen with our hearts.

I want to know how you feel.

Not just what you think.

Tell me how you feel.

Tell me what is important to you.

Tell me whom you love.

Tell me whom you have lost.

So one way of connecting or building bridges is to listen with the heart. That is, to practise empathic listening.

When we speak, the question is: who are we talking to? Who is the audience?

I would like to suggest that we should all speak lizard language.

It is a kind of trick question, but raise your hand: how many of you already speak lizard language?

Raise your hand.

No one speaks lizard language?

Okay, then you will leave here today having learned a new language.

And it will be neither Spanish nor French. It will be lizard language.

So what is this language?

The brain is a very complex organ. In fact, it is even more complicated than this.

If we compressed the entire evolutionary history of human beings into a 24-hour day, during the first hour a part of the brain called the amygdala would develop.

The amygdala regulates things such as fear, anxiety—which we have already talked about—and intense emotions.

It is the part of the brain that we share with lizards; that is why we call it the “lizard brain”.

According to some scholars, fear is one of the oldest human emotions, and also one of the emotions we share with the rest of the animal world.

This part of the brain developed during the first hour of those hypothetical 24 hours of existence.

The newest part of the brain is what is called the prefrontal cortex.

The amygdala is at the back of the brain, and the brain develops from back to front.

The prefrontal cortex, the most recent part, would only be five minutes old.

It arrived just five minutes ago. It still does not know anything.

It is the part of the brain responsible for logic and facts.

So when we are afraid or distressed, the amygdala takes control, and you cannot speak to the amygdala through facts, studies or logical arguments.

The amygdala speaks the language of emotions.

Think about your son or daughter, or about yourself when you were a child, convinced that there was a monster under the bed.

You are very afraid, you leave the light on and the door open, and your parents come into the room and say:

“Turn off the light.”

And you reply:

“I cannot, there is a monster under the bed.”

The parents, who do not speak lizard language, answer:

“That is silly. Let’s look under the bed.”

There is no monster.

And, of course, every child knows that the monster disappears as soon as the light is turned on, but comes back when it is turned off.

And the child thinks: “How did I end up with such stupid parents, who do not understand anything about monsters?”

And the parents insist:

“Turn off the light and close the door.”

But the child is still afraid.

You have not calmed their fear. You have dismissed it.

You have made them understand that they are stupid.

Instead, we could say:

“Wow, it must be very difficult to sleep alone in a room if there is a monster. Maybe I will lie down beside you for a while.”

This is what we are seeing in the world today: the world is distressed. The lizard is running wild across the planet.

And most people, including many politicians, do not speak lizard language.

Trump does.

Trump speaks lizard language.

He appeals to our fears and our anxiety.

And he builds stories around those fears.

We know that some of those stories are absurd, such as the idea that there are reptilian-skinned extraterrestrials who abduct our children.

This is part of the QAnon conspiracy theory.

And we say: "This is crazy."

The prefrontal cortex analyses it and concludes that it is completely illogical.

Or when it is claimed that Haitians are stealing our cats and eating them for breakfast.

We also say: "This is ridiculous."

Or when it is said that Muslims are taking control of India.

We say: "It makes no sense. It is factually false."

But we are trying to respond with objective data to the lizard brain.

And this is not the way to speak to it.

First, you have to recognise that the lizard is afraid.

Fear exists for a reason. It is an important emotion for human survival.

The question is: how can we, again, without agreeing with the other person, recognise that they are afraid?

Recognise that they are distressed.

And show empathy, not agreement. Empathy.

That is why we all need to learn to speak the language of the lizard better.

And what scares the lizard most is not feeling that it belongs somewhere.

When you think about an authoritarian leader, you will see that they almost always start with the same script.

The story is:

"We will make America great again."

This implies that there was a time when America was great.

In India, people say:

"We will make India great again."

Then I ask:

“Remind me: when was India great?”

And some people—and I am not exaggerating—say that a very long time ago India already had cosmonauts.

That they travelled through the universe in aeroplanes or spacecraft capable of travelling almost at the speed of light.

And you say:

“This is ridiculous. This never happened.”

And it is true.

It is ridiculous.

But the lizard brain likes this story.

It is like saying:

“Do you remember when I was a cosmonaut?”

So there are two key ideas in slogans such as “We will make America great again”.

The first is looking towards the past, because the future is too frightening.

I do not want the future.

The future means change.

Stop the future.

I want to go back to the past.

And the other part of the authoritarian story is this:

If you have problems, if you could not get out of bed this morning because you are going through a difficult situation, it is the immigrants’ fault.

If your tooth hurts, it is Black people’s fault.

If you do not get the job you wanted, it is someone else’s fault.

In other words, it is the other’s fault.

The other becomes the scapegoat for everything negative.

And the final element is:

“You belong here.”

You belong here, and the reason you do not feel that you belong is because of those other people.

So the authoritarian story speaks directly to the lizard brain and creates a false sense of belonging based on othering, on turning other people into enemies.

And part of critical thinking is precisely engaging with this.

But there is an important question here:

Critical thinking understood as analysis—which is probably what many of you know—is fundamental.

But it is not enough.

Because critical thinking on its own does not necessarily involve empathic listening.

It does not necessarily mean connecting with the lizard brain.

It does not necessarily mean working with systems or with dialogue.

Right?

Dialogue means listening, not to prove that the other person is wrong, but to discover how the other person feels.

It requires co-creation.

And the critical question we are trying to reach is not to determine who is right or who is wrong, but to build a relationship.

When we combine critical thinking and empathic listening, what we seek is to establish a human relationship.

So think about it.

What kind of critical thinking are you developing in your city?

It does not only take analysis into account, but also thinks about relationships.

How do I really see you?

How do I really listen to you with my heart?

How do we build a larger “we”?

And how do we build a more diverse city?

I have about three more slides and then I will be finished.

Hope for the future has to do with one idea: belonging without othering.

And one of the ways we talk about achieving this is through a concept called targeted universalism.

What it means is:

Universal goals, specific strategies.

Universal goals and specific strategies.

What are universal goals?

For example:

“No child should go to bed hungry.”

This is a universal goal.

We can all agree.

How do we achieve it?

With different strategies for different populations, because people find themselves in different situations.

But we are connected to one another.

People often ask:

“How can we actually make belonging exist?”

And I answer:

“It is already there.”

COVID-19 simply showed us how deeply interconnected we were.

We are.

We resist it, we oppose it, we fight against this idea, but it is a reality.

So what we need is a new story.

A story that recognises our reciprocal relationship with others.

A story that is not:

“My story” and “your story”.

But:

“Our story”.

This comes from Harari’s book *Sapiens*.

He argues that, in a sense, the human superpower is our ability to collaborate, our ability to tell stories, and we do not know how far we can go.

We have not yet reached the end of our potential.

So I will simply finish by saying this:

We are trying to create a pluralistic world.

We are trying to create a world where everyone feels that they belong.

And we are doing it through cities, we are doing it through education.

I have just received the “T” signal, which I think means it is time to finish.

What difference makes a difference?

In other words: meaning.

It depends... It is not the difference itself that matters, but what we do with that difference, what stories we tell about that difference.

And if you want to explore this subject further, I have written two books on this issue that are available.

One is called *Belonging without Othering*, and the other is *The Power of Bridging*.

Thank you.

