

Towards an Intercultural Mediterranean Citizenship

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In a world of increased contacts and far-reaching social networks, intercultural communication is more necessary than ever to understand one's culture as well as the culture of the 'other'. According to Katérina Stenou, the Mediterranean is a laboratory for understanding this new reality, a region which is characterised by cross-cultural circulation and in which everyone can find sources of their origins, real or symbolic. Yet this representation can neither remain unchanged nor integrally renewed, but must adapt and get richer without denying itself.

Space and time compression render today's world increasingly interconnected and interdependent in all disciplines of human activity on a global scale. The resulting new cultural geopolitics has created a new cartography in which classic 'cultural areas' and old borders – cultural, linguistic, religious and others – are muddled thereby creating an unknown landscape with shifting lines and contrasting forms. Furthermore, the cultural flow – i.e. the cohort of dematerialized works circulated in new social networks, such as YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, etc., not to mention Google, which is proportional neither to resources nor to the needs of humankind – calls for different forms of positioning of individuals and groups. This call mobilizes cognitive and emotional capacities of people and allows us to 'float' in our own cultural universe as well as that of others. It archetypically calls for intercultural communication, a communication that extracts us from our own culture to confront another, plunging us in new communities of knowledge and sensitivity. Thus, it creates new needs of fictional territorial identification. In this new global context, coexisting - i.e. reasoning and feeling in unison - does not mean living in a tight universal module, but fully sharing the infinite riches of world cultures that become genuine 'soft powers' harnessed in "getting others to wish your own wishes through symbolic icons and associated positive images and values".

This realization should induce neither cultural self-sufficiency, cultural negations nor cultural Darwinism, but rather the understanding of the mechanism of passage from difference to diversity, suggested by a profound evolution of perspectives. The concept of diversity, as opposed to that of difference, relies less on culture analysis in terms of structures, invariants and variables than on an analysis of processes, dynamics, cultural blinding and – in brief – dialogues. The difference, according to Derrida (1963), could be conceived as a 'différance' ('Différance' is a French term, invented by Derrida and homophonous with the word 'différence' It plays on the fact that the French word 'différer' means both 'to

defer' and 'to differ'. In its essay 'Différance' he indicates that 'différance' gestures at a number of heterogeneous features which govern the production of textual meaning. The first (relating to deferral) is the notion that words and signs can never fully summon forth what they mean, but can only be defined through appeal to additional words, from which they differ. Thus, meaning is forever 'deferred' or postponed through an endless chain of signifiers. The second (relating to difference, sometimes referred to as 'espacement' or 'spacing') concerns the force which differentiates elements from one another and thus engenders binary oppositions and hierarchies which underpin meaning itself.): it offers strategies of delay, deferral, elision, detour, adjournment and reserve; thus, it prevents stabilization of any system as a closed totality. It fills the gaps and aporias that form potential spaces of resistance, intervention and translation. This art of understanding and managing differences at several levels – local, national and international – is quite difficult to put into practice because cultural mutations and blinding are more than ever before ahead of the response capability of political institutions, often caught short by their speed. Such practice is not risk free: by defending distinctive cultural identities, the difference may never comply with a collective common life. Thus, one could easily end up with a fragmented world – in a permanent power play with others – where every cultural entity would claim more space, recognition or profit, under the pretext of its specificity. Consequences of this escalation are easy to predict: forgetting, by insisting in a unilateral manner on diversity, that a necessary condition for survival of humankind lies in the recognition of what makes us similar to each other, "each person bears the complete stamp of the human condition", according to Montaigne.

Some Terminological Clarifications

What is meant by memory, history and education? Memory is life, always borne by living groups. As such, it is in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembrance and amnesia, unaware of its successive deformations and

vulnerable to its utilizations and manipulations, susceptible to long latencies and sudden revitalizations. History is the constant problematic and incomplete reconstruction of what is no more. Memory is an ongoing phenomenon, a link experienced in the eternal present. "Since it is affective and magical, memory only preserves comforting details; it nurtures vague memories, overlapping, global or floating, particular or symbolic, sensible to all transfers, screens, censorships or projections. History, being an intellectual and secularizing operation, calls for critical analysis and discourse ... History binds itself to temporal continuity, evolutions and ratios of things. Memory is an absolute entity and history only recognizes what is relative ..." (Pierre Nora).

According to Dewey, the definition of education corresponds more to the intercultural character of education, under constant redefinition, provided it is centered on the learner: "Education is that reconstruction or reorganisation of experience which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience". Thus, the concept of development in educational terms means "that the educational process has no end beyond itself. It is its own end; and that the educational process is one continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming". 'Educare': nourishing and raising, and 'Educere': drag out of ..., lead to ... Two concepts, which should be complementary, but are in fact contradictory. (Who knows and where from ...? What and how does one know ...? What do we know about and what for ...?).

From the above, one can retain the symbolic dimension since it characterizes, through an event or an experience lived by a small number, a larger majority that has not participated, leading to a reasoning of identification encompassing the collective and the individual. Our approach retains these circulation phenomena, which reflect the courses and wanderings, the complexity of to-and-fros and the complicity of looks. Built on the positive effects of encounters between peoples and cultures, the circulation concept highlights exchanges at the level of knowledge and know-how, ideas, beliefs and live performances. This is achieved by integrating the fundamental data of natural, cultural, material and immaterial heritages.

These circulatory phenomena reflect dynamics which, whether in times of prosperity and crisis, have led to such interactions in the past. The phenomena have helped, after a diachronic analysis, to better evaluate changes and modalities of a genuine intercultural dialogue in pluralistic contemporary societies – while avoiding reconsidering and getting lost in past debates. In other words, 'Roads' offer not only a geography and history of intercultural dialogue over the centuries, but also contribute to a prospective reflection: meetings and interactions which, today, have been somewhat forgotten, illustrating the precedence of intercultural processes over its currently assigned discourse. We now come to the heart of the matter: the Mediterranean as a metaphor for this idea, as laboratory, as a pool of plural and dynamic cultural identities, a palimpsest, an open historical environment, welcoming and evolving, where everyone would find sources of his/her real or symbolic origins.

What Mediterranean Space are we Talking about?

The Mediterranean is no more an inner sea, limited by a fringe shore. It deeply immerses three continents, if not the whole planet. I shall limit myself to recall some facts well engraved in everyone's memory: the recent excavations carried out in Bourges France, which revealed Greek ceramics from the 5th century BC, mixed with local pottery from the site of Ai-Khanoun, in Afghanistan, where dolphin-shaped fountains were discovered in the Central Asian steppes, far from any sea. Similarly, Carrara marble was exported to Marrakech in the 16th century and Maghrebi and Machreki leather and fabrics entered the Baltic world alongside Syrian crockery that were recently discovered in Lübeck.

In an expanded world where population movements have reached planetary dimensions, the Mediterranean space has considerably expanded and diversified. Escaping the confinements of geography, it links Colombia with Cartagena, the latter as the avatar of Cartagena. This constant migration of knowledge, myths and artistic forms, whether a consequence of conquest or trade, is nothing more than the ostensible aspect of an intense and incessant intercultural

Austria - Intercultural School Forum

With a focus on educational exchange, the 'Euro-Mediterranean School Forum for Intercultural Dialogue' set out to develop the skills and competences of students and teachers for cross-cultural communication. Through the project, a network of seventeen secondary schools has been established including educational institutions based in Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, The Netherlands and Turkey. In addition to its focus on skills development, the Network has dedicated attention to the exchange of educational approaches and practices regarding cultural and political education. An initiative of 'Interkulturelles Zentrum', the project has a range of partners, including the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and the Arts and the National Commission for UNESCO. The Forum has also led to discussion taking place with students from different backgrounds on topics including identity and cultural diversity, and the Anna Lindh National Network in Austria has been a resource to broaden and promote the debate at the national level.

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circulation, which has multiplied cross-fertilizations, paving the way to hybridization.

After this rapid overview, we could conclude that the dynamics of travel are the key trait of a Mediterranean identity. Without stopping at this obvious fact, I would like to underline, on the contrary, that movement, in the first and physical meaning of the term, is not indispensable for identity dynamics. Much as we encounter bas-reliefs borrowed from antique monuments in Christian basilicas in Rome, Corinthian pillar capitals from pagan or Christian constructions in the Grand Mosque of Kairouan, we can also admire the Blue Mosque of Istanbul, freely inspired by architecture of its Byzantine counterpart, Hagia Sophia of Constantinople. These examples among others show the astonishing building capability of diverse cultures without wiping out the common heritage and while avoiding atherosclerotic amnesia. This heterogeneous inventory compels us to a humble practice of intercultural relations, a search for empathy and hospitality, and even knowing and welcoming otherness and accepting to be under its surveillance. The image that springs to mind to illustrate this internal dynamic - a dynamic compatible with a maximal degree of a sedentary nature - is that of a Greek myth: the myth of the Argonauts and the Argo. During its endless journey in its quest for the Golden Fleece, the ship encountered countless breakdowns; piece by piece, its hull, rail and rigging had been repaired by carpenters until none of the original parts survived. Yet, these modifications which may affect the Argo's physical nature - and possibly its shape - posed no threat to its identity: the crew of Jason never felt like they were navigating another ship.

Therefore, I would like to make a symbolic representation of cultural identity of this myth, following comments of Toshiaki Kozakai, the Japanese researcher and Zvetan Todorov. This representation cannot perennially remain unchanged, as wished by fundamentalist policies, nor entirely renewed with each generation. It must adapt without losing itself and get richer without denying itself. Despite their simultaneous great diversity and extreme similarity, interactive and evolutionary Mediterranean identities may achieve the mythic ideal of the Argo: perpetual youth that repudiates no memories. However, this optimistic conclusion quickly leads to another question: How could we all, regardless of where we come from, create our new cultural universe, decipher its messages and adhere to it? Learning, according to Gilles Deleuze, is first and foremost about considering any matter, object or being as if emitting signals to decipher, to interpret.

This philosophy has emerged in UNESCO programmes: though faithful to 'Education for All', acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, availability of various cultural resources and access to new means of communication and information, the Organisation is aware of the urgent need to develop "intercultural competences". The objective of sharing remains unchanged, but the ultimate aim is to

get each emancipated individual to fully participate in the new symbolic global environment; in other words, give each person the means to acquire one or several cultural or intercultural citizenships (this term can be defined as the ability and capacity of people to participate actively and responsibly in the world; it is dynamic and transformative, requiring the competence to learn and re-learn, based on notions of recognition and respect of diversity). This concept of cultural citizenship presupposes specific abilities for new trainings - major stakes for UNESCO today - to block mixtures of ignorance, prejudices, humiliations, frustrations, resentments, fears and exclusions, which yield a spiral of tensions, insecurity, violence and conflicts at the local, regional and international levels. Intercultural dialogue could be considered as a means to acquire an 'intercultural competence'. However, the success of such an acquisition depends on the aptitude of different partners to rediscover the past and the present, starting from a different cultural perspective than ours..

It also results from the ability to critically analyze in order to 'decolonize' the mind, values and knowledge systems perpetuating grounds for superiority. Intercultural competence aims at freeing us our own logic and cultural systems in order to engage with others and listen to their ideas, which may involve belonging to one or more social groups, particularly if they are not valued or recognized in a given cultural context. The ability to express our aspirations for a better future for humanity and the planet is all the more important in so far as it aims at promoting permanence of all forms of life. Intercultural competences are therefore linked to two major dimensions: memory and creativity. Acquiring intercultural competence is a thrilling challenge since we are not, naturally, called upon to understand the values of others as we do our values encountered in the family context, circle of friends, school, religion or in society at large. This challenge is a unique opportunity in the history of the Mediterranean and humankind. It invites us to avoid all phenomena of confinement or ghettoization by offering new groups opportunities of multiple readings and unexpected discoveries. These opportunities sometimes lead the groups to rediscover their own identity under the deciphered forms of the 'other', rendering this 'other' sometimes an ally and a cultural contradictor at other times.

One last word: Heraclitus said that the oracle "... neither says, nor hides, but (it) signifies (gives off signs)". This expression could be transposed to apply to culture since it "... neither says, nor hides, but (it) signifies (gives off signs)". Our task is to nurture intercultural skills required to acquire one or several cultural citizenships, particularly 'the Mediterranean intercultural citizenship'.

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