

## Education to Intercultural Dialogue

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«The policy of an intercultural dialogue by the European Union should focus on youth, education and communication. The education of young people in the spirit of tolerance, comprehension and respect of the other is a priority field of action» – this is a quote from the Declaration written by the Scientific Committee at the end of the Symposium Intercultural Dialogue organised by the European Commission in March 2002<sup>1</sup>. This paper follows the recommendation and tries to deepen in the topic of the education to intercultural dialogue<sup>2</sup>. Two questions arise:

Why education to intercultural dialogue?

How to educate to intercultural dialogue?

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<sup>1</sup> H. Kaelble, B. Strath, R. Mehdi, A. Papisca, L. Bekemans, E. Banús, *Declaration*, see [http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/jm/more/confdialo2/declaration\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/jm/more/confdialo2/declaration_en.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> In certain points, the paper presupposes the ideas on education expressed in E. Banús, *Educate European Identity?*, in C. Naval, C. Ugarte (eds), *Europe as an Educational Framework: Cultures, Values and Dialogues*, «Journal of Social Science Education (JSSE)», vol. 6-1 (2007), pp. 57-67.

<sup>3</sup> Created by the French authors René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo. The first volume was published in 1959. It has been interpreted as expression of the French mentality under de Gaulle (see, for example, A. Stoll, *Asterix, das Trivialepos Frankreichs: die Bild- und Sprachartistik eines Bestseller-Comics*, Köln, M. DuMont Schauberg, 1974).

### 1. Why Education to Intercultural Dialogue?

Literature can give a first approach to this topic; so, I want to introduce a relevant character of the European literature: Asterix<sup>3</sup>. In his village, which is surrounded by the Roman conquerors, there are regularly quarrelling about the freshness – or even not – of the fish sold by the fishmonger Unhygienix. The quarrels end when someone announces that the Romans are coming. In that moment, all the inhabitants have a common goal: to fight against the Romans. So, the «Asterix phenomenon» could symbolise how the arrival of the Romans agglutinates and sets up a goal for a whole population that, otherwise, is constantly fighting among themselves. The «Asterix phenomenon» shows how a people's unity that may be immersed in internal squabbles can achieve cohesion by rallying against the common enemy.

Intercultural dialogue means a change of paradigm in relation to the common way of approaching «the other», as it has been

realised – and transmitted – in modern Europe. «Otherness» has often been felt as a threat. In fact: the creation of the modern state<sup>4</sup> has been accompanied by homogenisation tendencies, as if diversity would be a problem for the new political body; only in recent times efforts are being made for harmonising unity and diversity. In the internal dimension «the other» was considered as a complication; in the external dimension, «the other» was seen often as the common enemy whose evocation can be used for creating internal cohesion.

Europe's history is plenty of examples on how «otherness» is seen as a problem. In St Antonio's city other saints may be evoked. Maximilian Kolbe, for example, died for someone who would have to die because he was one of «the others». But not only for the state «otherness» can be seen as something dangerous; St John of the Cross was imprisoned by the Carmelites<sup>5</sup>, although being he himself a Carmelite; but the idea he has to reform the Order coming back to the original strength was seen as a danger for the identity of the Carmelites that have adapted themselves to a more suitable way of life.

The change of paradigm included in intercultural dialogue has to be not only *accepted* but *done* by the society. If not, intercultural dialogue will be nothing else than a machinery producing activities by people and for people who already have entered this train, if you want to use this metaphor<sup>6</sup>.

But intercultural dialogue is a plural phenomenon (although we tend to use the expression as a singular), and most of the intercultural dialogues are done on the street, beyond the governance, beyond the so-called civil society, which so often is confounded with the society as a whole, given however the fact that most people (members of the society) are not organised in the structures we commonly call civil society<sup>7</sup>.

Being «on the street» it has to be taken into account that «the other» is no more far away or on the other side of the frontier. In the first case, it provokes maybe admiration (see the vogues of «exoticism» in Europe's cultural history<sup>8</sup>), in the second the fear of an invasion or a silent contamination, a fear that – as expressed above- can be exploited by the political powers. «The other» is now part of the daily «landscape». The encounter with this «otherness» provokes different reactions. Of course, not all of them can be qualified as desirable<sup>9</sup>. Therefore,

<sup>4</sup> For the nation as a modern «product» see F.-X. Guerra, *La invención de la nación y el problema de las comunidades*, in E. Banús, A. Llano (ed.), *Razón práctica y multiculturalismo*, Pamplona, Newbook Ediciones, 1999, pp. 239-258.

<sup>5</sup> He was apprehended on 3 December 1577 and retained in cell of the Toledo convent. After eight months, in May 1578, he fled. A summary of the history of the controversy within the Carmelites can be found, for example in A.F. Imízcoz, *Historia de España en la Edad Moderna*, Barcelona, Ariel, 2004, p. 355.

<sup>6</sup> The Budapest Observatory used once the expression: «The Intercultural Dialogue Machinery Has Been Set in Motion» (*Memo July 2006*, <http://www.budobs.org/news/memo/memo-july-2006.html>, consulted 27 June 2010).

<sup>7</sup> According to Wikipedia, «Civil Society Is Composed of the Totality of Voluntary Civic and Social Organizations and Institutions» ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil\\_society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society), consulted 17 July 2010).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.pangloss.de/cms/index.php?page=exotismus>, consulted 1 July 2010.

<sup>9</sup> According to the Spanish Observatory against Racism, in 2006 around 4,000 immigrants have been attacked (see M.Á. Cea D'Ancona, M.S. Valles Martínez, *Evolución del racismo y la xenofobia en España [Informe 2009]*, Madrid, Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, 2009, p. 332).

<sup>10</sup> This idea, in a certain sense, is coincident with the survey conducted in the years 1999-2001 by the UNESCO asking who should be in charge of intercultural dialogue education. An overwhelming majority of respondents (80%) place the responsibility with the family. But more respondents (82%) see the responsibility of the educational system to provide this education. All the other factors are far away: the representatives of the different religious traditions with 78%, the actors of the different cultures (74%) and the civil society (69%). The last rank is for the public authorities, with 64% (Division of Intercultural Dialogue of UNESCO, *An International Survey on Education and Teaching of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue (1999-2001)*, published in <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127158e.pdf>, consulted 23 March 2010).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, C.L. Harper, *Exploring Social Change*, Engelwood Cliffs (NJ), Prentice Hall, 1993 and S.N. Eisenstadt, *Tradition, Change, and Modernity*, New York, Krieger Publishing Company, 1973.

<sup>12</sup> See one example: «The gradualist approach of European construction, devised by Monnet, was possibly the only one feasible and the one that has allowed progress in the integration process. However, that way of building up Europe has been based on bureaucratic institutions negotiated by official élites that produce essentially decisions of economic sort» (J.C. Ocaña, *The History of the European Integration. The European Citizenship*, Chapter *Citizenship and Identity*, in [Historiasiglo20.org](http://www.historiasiglo20.org), 2003 (<http://www.historiasiglo20.org/urope/ciudadident.htm>, consulted 18 July 2010).

<sup>13</sup> The literature in many countries provides examples of this attitude. Here only the German author Wolfgang Borchert with his drama *Draußen vor der Tür* and his anti-war manifesto *Dann gibt es nur eins! Sagt Nein!* shall be mentioned.

education for daily life has to include education to intercultural dialogue<sup>10</sup>.

There are many theories on social changes – and this is not the space for discussing such a complex issue<sup>11</sup>. One of these theories underlines the role of elites in the changes – and the European integration seems to confirm this theory insofar as it has been launched and developed by a hand full of politicians (the «fathers of Europe») with no relevant participation by the civil society, the parliamentary structures or the public opinion. This can be criticised – and it has been criticised<sup>12</sup>, probably with an anachronistic approach that does not take into account that in post-war Europe there is an implicit support to this project by almost the whole society. The project is promising «no more war», «no more destruction»<sup>13</sup>, and a population living in ruins is probably not interested in knowing the details, but in the goal that is guaranteed.

Peace was in the immediate post-war years a social claim. Intercultural dialogue must become a social claim like – let us become poetic – the rain that is going down and into the earth.

Here, in this idea of guaranteeing an education for everyday life and for the street, the square, the supermarket, the city bus, is place for local authorities, for organisations – and for individuals' initiative.

## 2. How to Educate for Intercultural Dialogue?

By doing. We are indeed fascinated by practice.

But maybe practice has to be complemented by, more: based on reflection. And here also the specific role for the universities can be found. In the website of the International Association of Universities it is said about intercultural dialogue: «Higher education institutions have an important role to play. Disciplines, teaching methods, student skills, and knowledge itself can be deepened and strengthened through an intercultural dialogue approach».

This indeed is an integral, transversal, all-embracing approach (with all the risks such approaches have). It would presuppose a reflection procedure which impossibly can be done at the beginning of this project. So will the paper focus on one

methodological element how to transmit intercultural dialogue.

Via stories – as usual. Stories are one of the oldest pedagogical instruments, now rediscovered under the concept of «good practices» or «success stories» – which sounds incredibly modern, but signifies by no means a change of paradigm or a discovery. In old stories, taken from the founding sources of European culture, different aspects and attitudes towards dialogue can be found.

Here only one attitude shall be analysed that is intrinsically related with intercultural dialogue: the hospitality.

If we look to the Greek literature, there we find hospitality not only as an attitude but also as a narrative element with a relevant function in the development of the story. In Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, the same narrative scheme can be found several times for two characters: for Telemach, who starts travelling for finding his father and for Ulysses himself travelling back from Troy under countless adversities. Both arrive during their wanderings at places where they are accepted, invited, treated as guests – and, then, invited to tell their story. The questions: Who are you? On which way have you arrived to us? What are you looking for? – all these questions are put after the acceptance of «the other» and after the treatment that is considered «normal» towards foreigners.

And then the guest tells his story (which is the «pre-story» to the events with which the narration started). On that way, hospitality (the acceptance of «the other») becomes the guiding, the moving narrative resource for the book.

But the Greek world also knows the punishment for the negation of the hospitality. There is for example the story from the Greek mythology (transmitted by the great «loudspeaker» Ovid and his *Metamorphoses*) in which Philemo and Baucis, the old married couple are the only ones in their town to welcome disguised gods Zeus and Hermes. As a penalisation to all the other inhabitants, the village is destroyed by a flood and only Baucis and Philemo survive.

At the other main stream of the European culture, the Judeo-Christian tradition knows both the relevant positive consequences of hospitality and the punishment for the non existing hospitality. A very eloquent example from the Old Testament can be found in Abraham's history<sup>14</sup>, when the Lord

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 18 of the *Genesis*.

appeared to Abraham when he was sitting in the entrance of his tent, «while the day was growing hot». Abraham offers his hospitality<sup>15</sup>, and on that occasion the Lord will transmit his promise to Abraham: «I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son. [...] Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, now that he is to become a great and populous nation, and all the nations of the earth are to find blessing in him?».

In the New Testament, Jesus blames a Pharisee who has invited him and takes no care about the commandments of the hospitality<sup>16</sup>.

The lack of hospitality is considered as a sign of little appreciation of «the other». The exclusion from hospitality can be also a punishment for the crime: so, Cain – after having murdered his brother – is excluded for being accepted by «the others»<sup>17</sup>, although also his life is protected by God<sup>18</sup>. The others' mistreatment is also punished, as it is shown when the people's claim in Egypt is the explanation why God will call Moses for conducting the people back to the Promised Land<sup>19</sup>.

The summit of the acceptance of «the other» in the Bible's perspective can be seen in Jesus' genealogy as presented by Matthew (1, 2-16) with the mention of four women belonging to Jesus' ancestors and coming from abroad: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathseba.

On this way, showing how the acceptance of «the other» is included into the cultural mainstreams that have formed the «common narrative heritage», the education to intercultural dialogue can be combined with the so needed transmission of the knowledge of this common cultural heritage.

Of course, this is a selection from both sources, in which we also find many examples for non acceptance, for exclusion, for rejection or consideration of «the other» as an enemy. When presenting these models you are transmitting a certain story, a narrative; but this is not uncommon: national narratives – based also on selection – have been common (and still are, sometimes with new definitions of «nation»<sup>20</sup>); also the «European identity» is a narrative and the values mentioned in the Lisbon Treaty as European characteristics are a selection that not necessarily reflects the whole of the history of Europe; Europe's history has been a bloody one, the respect for the European values has not been the predominating element in

<sup>15</sup> «Sir, if I may ask you this favor, please do not go on past your servant. Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest yourselves under the tree. Now that you have come this close to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way».

<sup>16</sup> The Pharisee has criticised internally Jesus for accepting the care of a sinful wife. Jesus reacts with the allegation: «I entered into thine house: Thou gavest Me no water for My feet [...]. Thou gavest Me no kiss [...]. My head with oil thou didst not anoint» (Luke 7:44-46).

<sup>17</sup> See *Genesis* 4,12: «A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be on the earth».

<sup>18</sup> *Genesis* 4,15: «And the LORD said unto him, "Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold". And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him».

<sup>19</sup> *Exodus* 3, 7-8: «And the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters [...]. And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians"».

<sup>20</sup> The very controversial Catalan Statute from 2006 uses in the Preamble the word «nation» as link to Catalonia, which – among other points – has provoked a legal action in front of the Constitutional Court.

Europe's history. Their inclusion into the Lisbon Treaty witnesses from the result of a long history and is at the same time a desire and a guideline. They are at the same time the recognition that narratives are able to change reality.

What are the effects of stories, of narratives? To «take out». That means: if you enter the subject on a frontal way, maybe there will be resistance by many people<sup>21</sup>. And it should not be forgotten what in fact is one of the challenges for intercultural dialogue: how to attract to it people not willing to be introduced into this dynamics, not open for the possibility of a shift of paradigm. But if you look for alternative ways then acceptance can be increased. Only one example shall be mentioned: the common theatre project in a third country for all participants, as organised by EMUNI.

This is practice, this is «doing», but behind there is a theoretical concept that does not simplify, that does not believe that each contact is *per se* creating nearness and dialogue (it can also create hate, the confirmation of prejudices, etc.). The coexistence of unity in diversity is a challenging aim, a not easy task.

It includes also some intellectual challenges. For example this one: «Fortis est veritas» – this sentence can be seen at the street lamps in Oxford. It is the city's device. It is not by chance that a city with such a strong university tradition believes in the power of truth. How to combine intercultural dialogue with the truth? How to combine it with the European values and the conviction that they have to be guidelines for social life in Europe and maybe also in other continents? The UNESCO affirms that «dialogue among civilisations, cultures and peoples, based on mutual understanding and respect and the equal dignity of all cultures» is considered as «the essential prerequisite» for achieving the intercultural dialogue's goal<sup>22</sup>. But the analysis of the cultures shows that in within all the cultures there are elements that manifested dignity and others that are far away from the basic categories of human dignity. Here challenges are hidden that have to be solved on an intellectually coherent way.

At the end, intercultural dialogue probably is a question of personality. See, for example, the «founding fathers» of the European Communities. See, for example, so many people doing intercultural dialogue day by day, accepting the other

<sup>21</sup> To the different attitudes (also inside relatively homogeneous groups) in front of intercultural dialogue see for example L. Yang, A.S. Rancer, *Ethnocentrism, Intercultural Communication Apprehension, Intercultural Willingness-to-Communicate, and Intentions to Participate in an Intercultural Dialogue Program: Testing a Proposed Model*, in «Communication Research Reports», no. 20.1 (2003), pp. 62-72.

<sup>22</sup> See UNESCO's website on intercultural dialogue ([http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php?p-URL\\_ID=35020&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php?p-URL_ID=35020&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html), consulted 18 July 2010).

whilst maintaining their values. Or, coming back to John of the Cross, remembering the prophet Jonas he has considered the time in the prison as the time he has passed in the whale's stomach, a time of darkness and of proof; it was the time in which he has conceived a good part of his most impressive literary work. In a letter he wrote: «At the end of your life you will be examined for your love». With this attitude, intercultural dialogue will never be a problem.

At the end, the key could be to educate the personality, to be a personality that represents values and attitudes. In that sense, education needs models.

In front of technocratic, bureaucratic and other «critic» visions of the university, this «*veritas est fortis*» could be a guideline for this education to a personality that is able to realise intercultural dialogue.