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CULTURAL ALTERITY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT A RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE PLURAL SOCIETIES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN¹

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Abstract: A complex world like ours demands for the teachers and professors to command intercultural competences in order to avoid the instrumentalization of the alterities. It is precisely the professionals of education who, given their social function, have the responsibility of forming the citizens of the future in attitudes and behaviours adjusted to plural communities. This article presents the first part of a research project carried out by researchers from Barcelona, Marseille, Rabat and Beirut on the complex world of the respect necessary to face prejudices and stereotypes.

Keywords: *interculturality, ongoing training, identity, alterity.*

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The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also (...) one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience (Edward W. Said).

The awareness of a progressive and inevitable globalization may cause paralysing fears and temptations to withdrawal, a denial of the differences that would entail the death of the coexistence between different groups. We live in multicultural and multireligious environments. In short, at stake here is the future of humanity: the defiance of cohabitation that, if one is attentive, can arise in us the desire of knowing others better, the hope of dialoguing to overcome the prejudices that oppose us, the urgency of the towings and froings so that the contact with the other different person turns out to be revealing for us.

For some, the current situation causes a feeling of dejection. Certain exhaustion is perceptible because the consolidations of the interpersonal and inter-group relationships requires time, or because the efforts to favour the meeting seem to always revolve around the same subjects (the call to the reciprocal understanding...) and the same people. In some way this is positive as it contributes to reduce tensions, although it may turn out to be exhausting. For others, on the contrary, interculturality and interreligiousness have a splendid future ahead. The multiplicity of all kinds of gatherings all over the planet would be the evidence of a well consolidated process, and in this sense, an invitation to a hopeful attitude.

Whichever way, the truth is that the 20th century meant a point of inflection regarding relationships between cultures and religions: we have gone from disdain to esteem, from indifference to dialogue... In this sense an atmosphere of mutual trust starts to arise that has no stop: the actors get familiar with the risks of the intercultural gatherings, they are acknowledged as relationship men and women located on the crossroads of belongings. Although the promises of collaboration do not proceed out of nothing. Nothing is definitely acquired. It is necessary to restart the work every day; a repeated commitment on behalf of everybody is imposed. One discovers here the value of an intercultural pedagogy: beyond a restrictive vision of pedagogy (reduced to the creation of some kind of a priori recipes, to a curriculum that would supposedly assure success) the learning of how to dialogue demands an epistemological and methodological base in order for everyone to be able to contribute the best of himself, going beyond the indifference or the refusal of the alterity.

A pedagogical perspective will help us manage the contradictions of the intercultural dialogue itself: one outlines at the same time the absence of stable points of reference but also a mobility and interest for other cultures as maybe never before; one is in danger of falling in an ideological instrumentalisation of cultural and religious alterity (applied to immigration for example) or to lead to what is *politically correct*, although at the same time it is stated that each tradition has resources to live hope if it is capable of becoming an everyday issue.

A pedagogy that considers the intercultural competences demands a testimony. Lived in depth it brings up the most authentic human part of each of us as it makes us discover new paths, it favours awareness, it enables passing from the arrogance of the monologue to the humbleness of listening attentively. That is why to talk about intercultural competences is to talk about questions, of a hermeneutical process that opens the path to unprecedented collaborations that favour coexistence. It is the learning of interculturality understood as the richness of donning and receiving, as freshness of the meeting, the search for a common source.

PLURAL WORLD AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES.

In a previous article (Marín & Navarro, 2010) we analysed how a complex world like ours demands a review of the professional profile that includes the so called intercultural competences as a structuring element, at the same time as we suggested that the intercultural competences entail a transformation of the person's identity. We stated then that, despite a progressive inclusion of the intercultural competence construct as an important part of the initial and permanent education of professionals, its flagrant absence is still noticeable in the university curriculum adapted to the process of Bologna. We also stated that the intercultural competence as well as the linguistic competence, has to do with a receptive attitude towards cooperation, with adapting to new environments, the solution of conflicts and the respect for diversity. Therefore, besides from a much more apparent presence of the intercultural approach in the contents of the university credits, it is necessary to promote the appropriate attitudes related to the intellectual opening and curiosity, the respect for the cultural differences and the enjoyment in the interaction with people belonging to other cultural contexts (Neuhauser & Smith, 1996; Saunders, 1998; Hanson, 1991).

Whichever way, the complexity of the intercultural competence construct is structured around a cognitive dimension (the knowledge of the importance of the own culture in the construction of reality) and an emotional one (sensitivity towards other cultures, which translates into the refusal of ethnocentrism and the adoption of respect, empathy and value), and another behavioural one (the capacity to interact with members of other cultures and manage possible conflicts due to the diverse world-views). That is, the intercultural competence is, in essence, fruit of a learning of the mechanisms of construction of the identity and difference (Echeverría, 2001 & 2002). Or, if we prefer, it is a transversal element that affects both the capacity to learn how to acknowledge in a critical manner, and how to face complex situations in order to learn how to coexist. In this sense, the intercultural competence has to do with knowing how to be, how to behave and know how to interact which facilitates creativity and the adaptability to new contexts.² That is, every time more the professional needs to be aware of the nuclear elements of the different cultures in order to favour communication from the management of uncertainty that supposes having to face different ways of understanding space and time, masculinity and femininity, universalism and particularism, individualism and collectivism, as well as the value given to the language as a whole (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998 & 2000; Hall, 1998 & 2001).

According to this criteria one can get an idea of how the cultural factors (often assumed unconsciously) condition our sense of belonging to groups, the management of anxiety before what is unknown, the creation of expectations, the confrontation with the own prejudices and stereotypes, the interaction between endogroups and exogroups and in all, the values that underline our identity. Because behind the characteristic actions of the professional life there is a whole system that has to do with the concept of the human being, his place in the reality, the hierarchy of the relations and the moral valuations of the attitudes and behaviours.³

² Here we talk about the intercultural competence from a cognitive (cultural understanding), affective (cultural sensitivity) and behavioral (cultural interaction) perspective. See the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) by -Ming Chen or the International Competence Intention Index - English.

³ Finally, at the same time as it configures the identity, it expresses exteriorly in the different professional strategies: How team-work is understood, the leadership, the management of the schedules, the individual's autonomy, the establishment of

In short, it is from the assumption of the intercultural competences how the possibilities of interaction are faced and diagnosed, one is prepared for the critical revision of our own points of view and how team-work is understood.

We live surrounded by plurality, whether we are aware of it or not. And this obliges to reconsider the matter regarding how it affects us to belong to a certain culture and the fact of coexisting with people coming from other cultural contexts. After all it is an eminently ethical challenge as it has to do with the identity and alterity, the respect and acknowledgement of the differences. And maybe this challenge is alive with more intensity in schools than anywhere else: a modification in a few years of the pupils' profile, a relative slowness of the Administration that tends to react instead of planning, a certain disorientation of the faculty which is perceived as not very trained to manage diversity in a classroom, not to talk about the stereotypes and the prejudices (and some xenophobic outbreaks) that understand that diversity in the educational centres jeopardises the teaching-learning processes. Therefore, in one way or another, all the educational institutions (schools, high schools, universities...) have become a border area, an area of convergence of plural identities and alterities, a challenge for coexistence and to citizens' training. The school becomes therefore the privileged field where to work all what the society needs to channel and cushion the tension that the fact of coexisting in cultural plurality environments may generate.

THE PERCEPTION OF ALTERITY IN THE FUTURE EDUCATORS: A RESEARCH PROJECT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT

In 2007, the Intercultural Dialogue and Identity research group of the Universitat Ramon Llull of Barcelona proposed to the Research Coordination Centre of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (CCR-FIUC) to organize a work group on intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Therefore, from the collaboration between different universities and research centres the Pol Euromediterrani per al Diàleg Interreligiós (Euro-Mediterranean pole for Interreligious dialogue) was built (Universitat Ramon Llull of Barcelona, Institut Catholique de la Méditerranée of Marsella and the Universities Saint-Joseph and Antonine Hadath-Baabda of

objectives and resources, the making of decisions and the evaluation of the processes.

Beirut, as well as a team from the Groupe de Recherche Islamo-Chrétien of Morocco). The main idea was to establish an interdisciplinary team that would enable putting in common the visions on the cultural diversity from the 4 different points of the Mediterranean: a country constituted since its foundation over the management of ancestral religious diversity (Lebanon) and three cities that are at the same time receivers-exporters of immigration and immerse in a public intense debate regarding cultural diversity (Barcelona, Marseille, Rabat).

The initial preoccupation of this Euro-Mediterranean pole was structured around the integration of people who profess Islam in the heart of the European societies. Therefore, in a first meeting between the teams of researchers, it was proposed to take as a starting point the documents of the European Commission published in the 2008 dedicated to intercultural dialogue.⁴ Nevertheless, it was decided to consider this material as a secondary source as it took no interest for the different cultural and religious alterities present throughout Europe but was based on a methodology centered in the Islamophobia and the discriminations arising from such for those who practice Islam. Despite the fact that the presence (and increase) of Islamophobia in the West is an undeniable fact, the work team did not want to initially rule out a more global study that would enable integrating the forms of discrimination that take place also in the South and East of the Mediterranean. This first stage of common reflection enabled the researchers to become aware of the importance of the different sensibilities, fruit of the differentiated socio-cultural and historic-political contexts that cause for the *new alterities* to be lived in a substantially plural framework as we analyse the context of Barcelona, Rabat, Marseille and Beirut: Post-colonial cities, developed or developing societies, that are secularized or with a strong public presence of the religious identities.

In this way, it was agreed that the research would centre on the diversities and the perceptions of the alterities in the framework of the four cardinal points of the Mediterranean (Catalonia, France, Morocco,

⁴ Muslims in the European Union, discrimination and islamophobia, Rapport 2006, European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC 2006). http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/material/pub/muslim/Manifestations_EN.pdf Report on Racism and Xenophobia in the Member States of the EU, FRA 2007, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2007), 163 p. http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/racism/report_racism_0807_en.pdf

Lebanon) in the heart of which the difficult integration of the groups and people coming from cultures different to the (pre)dominant model takes place, behind the intercultural and interreligious fact. In fact, the different origins of the researchers (and not only their methodological interests) already opened an area of intercultural dialogue that had to serve to deconstruct a possible partial approach on alterities. Likewise, it was agreed that the population concerned for the research would be that of future teachers and professors who tomorrow will be the actors that, dedicated to educating the citizens, will be able to influence in raising awareness in the meaning of living in plural societies.

This was the challenge: The way we position before (against) alterities is determined by the particular contexts where our differentiated cultural references reside. The different languages (French, Catalan and Arab) of the researchers and of the students understood as a symbol that not having a common language also means not starting from a shared epistemology. This epistemological and methodological difficulty therefore became the core of our study: These are geographically close societies although often perceived as culturally distant. This is why, in this initial part of the research, the project worked on a wide framework proportioned by the network “Understanding and training on intercultural and interreligious dialogue” coordinated by the Institut Catholique de la Méditerranée de Marseille. For the past 10 years this network has gathered researchers from different universities in Europe, Maghreb and the Near East to reflect on the identity, alterity, the difference, the dialogue and the acknowledgement, and has therefore become the optimum area of interactivity where the progresses of the research have been presented.⁵

The plurality of perspectives of the researchers of the four countries involved in the research right from the beginning of the project has especially been noticed once the specific objectives and the most appropriate methodology were established. Throughout this long process the team from Lebanon worked especially on the methodological section and the group from Marseille on the theoretical framework, finally establishing

⁵ “Identité et dialogue en contexte de mondialisation”, 8-10 juillet 2007 (Barcelona); “Sur l’altérité, approche philosophique et approche sociologique”, 29 juin-2 juillet 2008 (Marsella); Colloque international “Fragilité et durabilité du dialogue des civilisations : responsabilité des instances religieuses et politiques”, 27-29 octobre 2009 (Beirut). Different work meetings have also taken place in Barcelona and Paris, restricted to the researchers of this project, in conjunction with these meetings with researchers of the Mediterranean Pole.

that the field work would be established through a comparison between the perceptions of the teacher-training students of Barcelona and Rabat.

Right from the beginning it was clear that to go beyond configuring the prejudices and identifying the factors capable of facing them it was necessary to know the genesis, and therefore discover the alterity image of the social groups present in our societies. That is, to find out how the people who live among us are perceived and are considered as outsiders to our culture. This consideration addressed to the Other is undoubtedly in the roots of the cultural stereotypes and of the majority of difficulties that appear throughout the dialogue process. It was therefore a matter of analysing the formation of the alterity in the conscience of the different individuals and groups. The first stage of the research was therefore to discern the most significant alterities of our respective areas, both the alterities shared around the Mediterranean as well as other alterities particular of the national and regional areas. The alterities to be specified both affected the religious order as well as the social, ethic, linguistic, and ideological area. They could be local (national) alterities, external (foreign) alterities, multiple (mixed) alterities... That is how, through different work meetings and exchanges of points of view, the main interest of each group of researchers was set:

For the group from Lebanon the research did not have to be limited only to the general denominational markers but it had to go further than that to introduce nuances: Belonging to Shia Islam or Sunni Islam, to the Catholic church, to Orthodox or Maronite Christianity, possessing double nationality or the connection of each community to one or either side in the Lebanese civil war and in the subsequent period.

For the team from Barcelona it was inevitable to reflect on the alterity of a context marked by immigration: 1 million immigrants over a total of 7 million inhabitants, with 280 nationalities and 200 languages present in Catalonia. The significant presence of people from Morocco and Latin-America as well as the political context of the past years makes the theme of alterity affect both immigration and the religious creed, but also the debate over the Catalan identity with regard to the State of Spain.

The team from Marseille underlined the complexity of the local context where the ancestral mixture present in the city often makes forget the weight of the socio-cultural alterities. Years of work by all the institutions have made the alterities essentially communitarian, therefore proposing to always consider the weight of the socioeconomic realities when perceiving the cultural differences.

Finally, the Moroccan team considered the integration strategies of the minority national groups in the nation as a whole (Berbers, Jewish, etc.) it was necessary to also consider the alterities of the foreigners and of those that are perceived as *not totally from here or totally from abroad* (mixed marriages, etc.). Moreover, as in all Islamic societies, some specific identities (religious and of gender) reside within the framework of a law (the Sharif legal code) that perceives them as differentiated alterities.

These specific interests of each team within the general project outlined the importance of the involuntary and unconscious elements, and not only of the historic contexts, in the perception of the alterities. It was therefore imposed to adopt a methodology centred in qualitative projection methods. Because the projection, as psychological mechanism, preserves the unconscious feeling displacing its purpose to an exterior reality. Unlike the surveys, the projective tests are addressed to the unconscious; they disregard the goodness/evilness of the answers, their sincerity/simulation. Here the essential element is the ambiguity of the material presented so that the individual does not exert a control over the profound personal representations.

In this way the objectives and the methodology of the research had to help answer questions such as: Who are the Others? What traits are they attributed? What feelings do they provoke? What attitude do the people that interact with them adopt? How do they justify themselves for this behaviour? Or to formulate it another way, it was a question of identifying the view of the Others and find out how the identities form opposite the differences.

The preparation of a pre-survey was imposed as a preparatory stage in order to work this compulsory distance between the purpose of the research and the researchers, in order to avoid possible biases. It was a matter of selecting a group of students as *external group* to the researchers to build a part of the material for the survey from the identity that this group perceived as the most significant in the respective social environments. This pre-survey established the social groups perceived as Others, its degree of strangeness with regard to the student's culture was quantified, and a list of positive and negative adjectives that define it was established. This process enabled reducing a possible dispersion in the list of alterities which would finally be considered and at the same time it stimulated the analysis in order to establish a common background for the different teams participating in the project. In fact, it was from this pre-survey when the category of the *between two* appeared strongly, of

those who are not perceived as from here or from abroad, the *culturally mixed*, as well as the importance of the legal status and of the nationality when perceiving a collective as more or less different.

Therefore, with regard to the work carried out in Barcelona, the pre-survey was given to 27 students from the Blanquerna Faculty of Psychology, Education Science and Sport of the Universitat Ramon Llull. They were 5 men and 22 women, of ages ranging between 19 and 39 years, being more numerous the group of students between 20-21 years (12 students). To the question of which social groups did they identify when they heard the expression *cultural alterity* the answers were very dispersed and mixed different criteria: Gipsies, Latin-American, Chinese, Hindus, Immigrants from the Third World, without legal documents, Moroccan, Africans, sub-Saharan, foreigners from the European Union, Germans, Russians, Peruvians, Romanian, Spanish people from outside Catalonia, Pakistanis, North-Americans, Arabs, Andalusian emigrants...

The data indicated that the students who answered the pre-survey worked the answers combining alterities based on the profession (businessmen from multinational companies, artists, workers, doctors, journalists, students, retired people...), on the political ideology (right or left wingers, conservative, pro-independence, socialists, liberals, nationalists...), on the degree of studies (graduated, illiterates...), on the religious beliefs (Muslims, Christians, Jewish, Buddhists, Jehovah witnesses, practicing or non-practicing...), on their financial status (bourgeois, middle-class, working class, homeless...), on their sexual orientation (homosexuals...). They were also asked which cultural groups lived in an easy/difficult social situation with regard to legal rights, economical rights, social acceptance and political acknowledgement. Finally, they were also asked with which groups considered as culturally Others did they have or would like to have relations with.

The pre-survey work was presented in an International seminar in Beirut in October 2009 and at the Coordination and research Centre of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (Paris) in March 2010. This point was the start of a period of harmonization of the work instruments that collected the results of the pre-surveys given in Barcelona, Rabat and Marseille: list of adjectives, placing of images, scenarios that describe daily life situations and socio-diagrams to detect coexistence possibilities and/or difficulties between social groups, as well as scales of attitudes to measure the level of acceptance/ refusal of the Other and of the distance perceived between the groups.

The final survey was delivered in the month of December 2010 to 100 Teacher-training students from the Blanquerna Faculty of Psychology, Education Science and Sport of the Universitat Ramon Llull, taking a group of Psychology students of that Faculty as a group of control. With regard to the social groups identified as Others it was agreed among the researchers to only include those that had appeared as most stated in the pre-survey. These groups were the following: Latin-Americans, sub-Saharan, people from Maghreb, Chinese, Pakistanis, Gypsies, Muslims, newcomers, people without legal documents, Europeans, from the rest of Spain and homosexuals. As can be seen, it was chosen to maintain these 12 alterities that combine the different criteria of selection that appeared in the pre-survey. The students were asked to chose 4 adjectives for each of these groups (positive and/or negative), recalling that it was not about what they thought but rather what they heard people say in their environment about every collective.

The list of adjectives, jointly agreed between the teams of Barcelona and Rabat, is the following:

| Positive adjective | Negative adjectives |
|---|---|
| 1. Hard working | 2. Lazy, idle |
| 3. Gifted, skilled | 4. Clumsy, does not contribute anything |
| 5. Victim, exploited | 6. Exploiter, dominant |
| 7. Loyal, faithful, patriot, nationalist | 8. Traitor |
| 9. Respectable | 10. Despicable |
| 11. Believer | 12. Unfaithful |
| 13. Clean, tidy | 14. Dirty, negligent |
| 15. Generous | 16. Miserly, materialist |
| 17. Responsible | 18. Irresponsible |
| 19. Flexible | 20. Intolerant |
| 21. Progressive | 22. Conservative |
| 23. Sociable | 24. Unsociable |
| 25. Democrat | 26. Non-democrat |
| 27. Supportive | 28. Non-supportive |
| 29. Reliable, sincere | 30. Liar |
| 31. Civilised | 32. Uncivilised |
| 33. Integrated | 34. Not integrated |
| 35. Ally, friend | 36. Adversary, enemy |
| 37. Any OTHER adjectives you would like to add: | 38. Any OTHER adjectives you would like to add: |

Subsequently the students were presented with a projection of images that reflected different situations which enabled working with socio-diagrams. Choosing these images turned out to be a delicate operation. In the first meetings an over-representation of the religious alterity was soon detected over the other forms of identity. Specifically outstanding was the Islamic alterity in its most traditional dimension (the veil, the gender segregation...). A long discussion took place regarding the possibility of objectifying an alterity into an image from the external signs as when the alterities are manifested through external signs (religious symbols, places of worship) or through ethnic elements (colour of the skin) it is necessary to be very cautious when qualifying the social groups: is a colour person always a foreigner?, is a Jewish Moroccan person also a foreigner in the case of Maghreb? Also worth pointing out is that many images were ruled out as it was considered that the ignorance of the students would not enable analysing the meaning; this was the case for example of photographs provided by the team from Marseille showing the football players praying before starting a match, or the photographs of mixed marriages provided by the team from Rabat. Finally 16 images were chosen that reflected the identities identified in the pre-survey; images that corresponded to coexistence situations between different groups, as it is precisely this situation of interaction between alterities that provokes emotions that are often disguised. In any case, it seemed clear that it was necessary to combine two core matters with regard to the alterities: in relation to the place of origin and the migratory movements (being from here, or from abroad) and with regard to the cultural movements (to be perceived as a member of a more or less similar culture to that of the receiving society). It was obviously necessary to also take into consideration the religious movements (the case of the converted and of the different currents inside every religion and every faith), as well as the different socio-economic and ideological belongings; thereby respecting the singularities of each of the fields where the survey will be applied:

In Catalonia the religious (Islamic) alterity appears as a strong source for being considered a foreigner, although the fact of belonging to the national or linguistic element is also present: the Spanish people who emigrated in the 30's and in the 60's can still be perceived in some sectors as foreigners. Also to be considered is the case of who were originally immigrants and have now achieved the nationality and continue to be considered as foreigners. Likewise, the immigrants coming from Latin-America can be perceived as *less foreign* than the people from Maghreb

or the Pakistanis due to the language and shared religions.

In Morocco also present is a difficulty regarding the national belonging (Berber and Jewish) opposite other nationalities (sub-Saharan, from countries in the Persian Gulf and Chinese people) as well as the religious alterity (Christians, although also Shias Muslims). It is also necessary to consider the types of movements, such is the case of the Moroccan resident abroad that have returned, as well as the children from mixed marriages or Moroccan people converted to Christianity.

Images were therefore chosen which reflected the following situations:

- A ceremony of a mixed marriage in Morocco between a Christian woman and a Muslim man.
- A *patera* boat with immigrants near the coast of Andalusia guided by a Guardia Civil speed boat.
- The boarding in the port of Algeciras of the Moroccan people who have come from different European countries where they live and are going to spend their holidays in Morocco.
- Representatives of different religions praying for peace in Assisi.
- A Sub-Saharan person selling objects on a street stall.
- A sub-Saharan woman with two children in her home dinning-room.
- Two Chinese people eating a typical Moroccan dish in a restaurant in Morocco.
- Two students (one original from sub-Sahara and the other European) in a passageway of their high school.
- A physiotherapist wearing hijab attending a European young woman.
- Two young women walking in the street, one of them with a hijab.
- Two adolescents (one Moroccan and the other European) in front of the mosque in Casablanca.
- A nun wearing her habit voting in an elections table presided by a young woman wearing a hijab.
- The face of a person from Maghreb full of stickers where one can read qualifications such as *fundamentalist*, *extremist*, *Muslim*, *al-Qaeda*, *fanatic* or *11 September*.
- A group of Muslims praying in the middle of the street in a peripheral neighbourhood of Marseille.
- A European woman participating in a demonstration carrying a banner that says: "Sons of damn immigrants out".
- An immigrated person coming out of a police station escorted by two police men.

For each of these 16 images the students were asked to fill-out a table with three questions:

| What do you see? | What do you feel? | What does the society think? |
|---|---|---|
| Who are they? | What does the situation on the photograph make you feel? | What are the common social perceptions (positive or negative) around you with regard to this situation? |
| Where do you think they live? | How do you personally position with regard to this situation? | |
| What do they do? | | |
| What do you think they are like? | | |
| What type of relationship do they have? | | |
| Does this happen in Catalonia? | | |

Subsequently, for each of the 12 groups identified the students were asked, according to the common opinions around them, to point out the facility/difficulty for the social groups to work in public tasks, in the private sector, to acquire Spanish nationality, vote in the municipal elections, rent or purchase an apartment or to be the couple of a Catalan person.

The information obtained from the survey is still in the process of being analysed although one of the purposes of the Project is to know better the prejudices and stereotypes in order to be able to interfere in changing the mentalities, one could ask if the results will question the different education systems in order to integrate pedagogical tools linked to the intercultural competences that will alter the view of the alterities.

CONCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVES

The starting point of the project that we have summarized herein is the verification that globalisation is each time more, to a certain extent around the world although at a different pace depending on the contexts, pushing us to have to manage ways of thinking, acting and feeling that

are culturally different to ours. Inevitably we become aware of the great diversity of languages, religions, life expectations and projects that are present in our society. Slowly, and many times imperceptibly, we make ours values that come from other cultures or that on the contrary we refuse as strange. Whichever way, the absurdity of those who try to isolate themselves is every day more evident in a world where borders have become liquid and where everything contributes to the permanent influence of exterior elements that leave in us (both on an individual and collective level) a cultural print.

We are aware that all of this is lived in a complex way as the ideological reasons are at the base of the geo-strategy of the prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination, a fact that makes us have to combine the global and local perspectives. And this is where the interest lies for this project that we have presented as it includes the perspectives of Beirut, Marseille, Rabat and Barcelona, each of them with a singular and particular approach on identity and alterity. That is why the team from Barcelona suggested for all the groups involved to work from equivalent parameters:

The purpose of this research would not be in any way the desire to categorize the diversity present in our societies but to understand how this plurality of world-views is perceived by the future teachers and educators.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the differences constitute us, although the inequalities are imposed on us. The research should first detect if the population object of the study perceives these situations and then, to analyse if it is aware that the demand for equality is directly linked to respect, that is, to the challenge of receiving and including alterity. In effect our societies are confronted with a series of situations of confrontation for which it seems they are not very well prepared and that make especially urgent the work regarding intercultural competences with the future teachers and educators.

It is therefore especially urgent to reflect on all what the society needs to channel and mitigate the tension that living in environments of cultural plurality can generate. Opposite the views based on deterrence policies or assimilation, it is a matter of educating in a citizenship of heterogeneous cultural identities although with common values that favour social cohesion. The intercultural task must be capable of protecting the cultural identity of every citizen without this hindering his social integration, on a local or global level.

The methodological and strategic application in view of the research starts from the fact that precisely because the inequality derived from

the stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination is socially constituted, it becomes unavoidable to become aware of the obstacles and the limitations to leave way for meeting and dialoguing that, far from any desire of homogenization, favours everyone's integration and participation. This is why the analysis of the results of the survey must be worked from 3 coordinates that must be adapted to the context of each of the teams that collaborate in the project:

1. In the debate about the identity (re)construction processes, both on an individual and collective level, the perception we have of the identity and of the difference intervenes powerfully, as well as the cultural values that help or hinder the appropriate installation in reality. It is therefore important to fine-tune in the projective methodological form to illustrate the determinant importance of the view of the World when becoming aware of the reality. It will be useful to resort to the metaphor of the sight (invasive or attentive, of rejection or welcoming) to help verifying that the mental maps on alterity and identity enable taking charge of reality proposing comments and itineraries. As a form of coded writing, cartography often makes us forget the implicit choices of its construction and becomes a subliminal resource of imposition of representations that are essentially ideological (centre/periphery, developed/under development, civilized/savage, us/them, close/distant, proper/improper, familiar/strange, friend/enemy...). To work the intercultural competences will mean that seeing (think, say) the world in a different way demands an effort to show that any world-view is, by definition, a permanent recycle of cultural inheritances. The ethnocentrism Intends to legitimate a specific order imposed to the World that is characteristic for its refusal to recognise diversity. The field work would have to help us to see that the world's limits are not so much geographical but mental: It is only our view that over dimensions diversity.

2. We must therefore pay attention to the biases introduced by the ethnocentric viewpoint and that are reflected in a singular relation between the notions of knowledge and power. The stated tendency to outline other cultures as groups that are lacking, secondary and incapable of guiding their members accordingly generates apart from deep ethical reservations, many difficulties from a point of view of the social sciences, In this sense it will be appropriate for the research performed by the different teams to show the connections between the *power of the discourse* and the *discourse of power*. The future teacher or educator is not either innocent or neutral as all the information received always includes a judgement,

an interpretative act that tends to reproduce the social system. Finally it is convenient not to forget that to design a social group as problematic is a form of exercising power from the capacity of granting or refusing the acknowledgement of alterity.

The essential nature of the culture establishes the differentiation between us and others, demanding them assimilation if they wish to be accepted according to what has been named *cultural fundamentalism*. Therefore by emphasising what is different in the identities and cultural traditions new borders of exclusion are created and one is invited to consider the Others as a potential threat for the identity. As there is the tendency to *naturalize* the socially built situations, it must be clear that it is not the cultural diversity that is problematic but the socio-political, meaning that it is assigned and the framework of the relations established between the groups in situation of conflict and domination.

This is where the critic thinking and ethic sense meet. In this sense the background of the problematic must state that we are studying a situation of lack of communication between groups. Every culture is an open system that interacts with its environment; a potential of interaction or of establishment of relations is therefore required to face the tendency to a definite separation and to inbreeding. If otherwise, the interest to maintain the hope for a cultural homogeneity leads to an attribution of difference and an active exclusion on behalf of the most powerful culture. Therefore, the exclusion of the others who are different serves to build and assert our own identity.

The internal cohesion implies the satisfaction of knowing one belongs to a superior group with the complementary contempt towards the other groups that are denied the acknowledgement. It is what Psychology names the mechanisms of the *figures of exclusion*, alterophobia, the *fear of contamination* and the *anomic infection*, the internalization of the stigma or the selfish use of the identity.

3. The analysis of the internal frictions and of the interdependencies of the society itself is essential to understand the conditions of the coexistence/ conflict with other cultures. It is these elements that build this universe of mutual ignorance and acknowledgement, with its categories and institutional classifications, with its practices that defines *us* and the *others*. Without analysing the discursive configurations of the alterity (that is, the way of looking at it, thinking it and treating it) we completely lose sight of the fact that the alterity is a social figure through which (in comparison with which) the figure of *us* is also constructed. It will therefore be necessary

to work jointly those strategies known as *Exclusion Technologies*.

It will be asking ourselves about the processes through which the *fear of the Other* is built that we will understand that each society creates a new line of social demarcation, a new symbolic boarder that constitutes new *imagined communities*. In this sense, the rhetoric and the practices of exclusion do not appear spontaneously in the social margins, but in the majority they are pre-formulated and spread by a kind of progressive trivialisation of the forgetfulness-exclusion of the other, and that legitimize the prejudices (re)production processes.

In this context we relieve that the most interesting to study is not as much the extreme stances (acceptance or refuse, integration or racism, heterophobia and heterophilia) but the continuous culturalist interpretations of plurality, that is, the convincement that the cultural differences would supposedly threaten social cohesion, economic safety, cultural homogeneity and the political stability. Therefore, the increase of the social rejection of the Other is the symptom of the uncritical perception of the differences. To summarize, the apocalyptic representation of the others, demonised as enemies, assimilates them as a global and fatal threat against which the society can only defend itself. In the end, this discourse spreads a view of the social and cultural heterogeneity that, characterizing it as an anomalous situation coming exclusively from the exterior and that is always disturbing and dissolving, describes the social relations as a *clash of civilizations*. Therefore, the culture as a social segmentation factor is presented as a single explanatory dimension of the social interactions that reasserts the symbolic borders between a supposedly homogeneous society and the others defined as culturally different and socially exteriors. This generates very specific attitudes: it inoculates fear, the feeling of insecurity, the tension and violence, at the same time as it favours the ideal conditions to increase the reactions of reclusion in the ghetto or of fundamentalist re-arming.

Supposedly the peaceful and harmonious coexistence must necessarily go through a *social contract* where every individual-group-culture finds its place and acknowledgement. Likewise, we must not lose sight on the fact that the ethical imperative demands moral awareness. Consequently, the fight against the magnification for the differences supposes promoting the demand of concepts such as equity (emphasising the diversity of human possibilities), justice (in order to answer everyone's aspirations) and equality (insisting in the possibilities of access and opportunities). When the difference is not considered as a value the exclusion processes appear

automatically. As ethical communities, our societies can not obviate the fundamental equality of all human beings, the imperative of the welcoming, coexistence and participation. It is obvious that to choose models favourable to pluralism and work for the coexistence in culturally differentiated societies entails creating societies that acknowledge and acknowledge themselves in the exchange of opinions, beliefs, values and social practices with the aim of achieving a communication that contributes capacity of understanding on what happens in our environment to transform it. In all, to accept living in intercultural societies.

To summarize, to work intercultural competences implies going into depth in the problems of the interaction and asymmetry between cultures, the vastness of the cultures, the understanding and respect for the others, the explanation of the values and rules at stake when the cultures enter into contact, and it is when the image that one makes of oneself is directly linked to the esteem-rejection that his ethnocultural group is worthy of. Therefore, if a culture does not enjoy the general on behalf of the society, then the dignity of its members feels deeply threatened. It is necessary therefore for the future teachers and educators, having assimilated the intercultural competences, to help their fellow men teaching them how to build a healthy capacity and a salutary interaction capacity, that is, that they are capable of acknowledging the cultural difference.

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