

New Perspectives for EuroMed Education: Cross-Cultural Education for Intercultural Citizenship

Nayla Tabbara. Director of Cross-Cultural Studies Department, Adyan Foundation (Lebanon)

Over the past twenty years, and since the launch of the Barcelona Process, the international community has been supporting Euro-Mediterranean initiatives in the framework of intercultural education implemented by both international non-governmental and national civil society organizations. The sum total of these initiatives and their cumulative effect has yet to be evaluated. Nonetheless, one can witness the proliferation of intercultural educational programs, courses and training on dialogue, on intercultural issues and on global challenges, aiming to build mutual understanding and a framework of shared values and principles across the Mediterranean shores and amongst youths from different cultural backgrounds. Yet the context that led to the Barcelona Process has changed. With the revolutions in Arab countries as of 2011 shifting the power dynamics in the Arab world but also creating a new wave of violence and a new refugee problem all over the Mediterranean, and with religious extremism and terrorism in the name of religion becoming a global problem, intercultural education should take on new forms.

What Is behind the New Contextual Situation

Since 2014, the international community has come into question following the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its proliferation, whether geographically, virtually or among the youths from different cultural backgrounds. The numbers of foreign fighters joining ISIS show that the phenomenon is not only a local or regional one, and not only a religious one. In other words, if increasingly

more youths are joining ISIS, it is not only due to religious beliefs but also to the fact that some youths mistakenly think that ISIS can fill an existential gap that they feel.

Although military and security action is what is required and being done today to face the ISIS phenomenon, this type of action is not enough. An upstream and long-term action needs to be designed to prevent the formation of other groups similar to ISIS, and to stop the galvanizing effect on youths of extremist movements.

I believe that this upstream action needs to be twofold: on the one hand, ISIS is a wake-up call for the Islamic community to work on its discourse and textual interpretation of topics such as Islam and State, Islam and the other, Jihad and shari'a law, in accordance with the universal principles of human rights. On the other hand, the present situation is also a call to reflect on what gaps ISIS or its consort groups are filling in order to provide youths with their counterpart.

To my mind, there are three needs that youths have in our contemporary world:

- the need for a cause, for something to believe in;
- the need for recognition of one's own worth, one's own dignity, especially in having a role and a voice
- and the need to be part of a community, for brotherhood.

The first and third needs are related to our postmodern world, where the individual is increasingly left to him/herself, where identities are going through a crisis and where idealistic causes have been replaced by the needs of the market. The second cause differs from context to context (i.e. from the different shores of the Mediterranean), yet it is related to a feeling of injustice and inequality that is shared by youths from both sides of the Mediterranean: injustice in international policies, inequality in human dignity between North and South, disparity in resources, discrimination against populations or communities or minorities...

My belief is that this feeling of injustice and of selectivity of governments in their perception of human dignity (North) and in favoritism of communities over others (South) leads to

bottled-up anger that feeds on the victimization discourse. Political violence breeds violence, and dehumanization leads to inhuman acts from the one feeling dehumanized.¹

In view of this context, intercultural education has to take account of these needs and where they stem from to provide new avenues around the Mediterranean. Besides the psychological needs of youths mentioned above, Arab countries need the introduction of citizenship embracing diversity in constitutions, laws, education and mentalities. In European countries, diversity management ought to be reviewed, because as much as there are societies where individuals coming from immigration feel they are full citizens or even global citizens, there remains the fact that some feel they are lost citizens without a connection to civil society and without recognition in the public sphere.

Besides the psychological needs of youths, Arab countries need the introduction of citizenship embracing diversity in constitutions, laws, education and mentalities

Herein lies the definition of the concept of intercultural citizenship developed by the Adyan Foundation in partnership with the Anna Lindh Foundation and promoted on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Intercultural Citizenship

The concept of intercultural citizenship was gradually developed to represent the framework for living together in peace in our current societies, taking into consideration the challenge of diversity management, and uphold-

1. Monstrosity, in most cases comes later, as shown by James Dawes, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/15/opinion/dawes-syria-video/>.



Jordanian children at school in Amman (EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre).

ing the fundamental principles of equality, human dignity and liberty. Although some still conceive of this form of citizenship as a being both “within and across nation-state boundaries”² and seeing that the intercultural citizen is the global citizen,³ others tend to focus more on the local level of intercultural citizenship, seeing it as the form of social contract that fits multicultural societies, where each is represented equally and where all different cultural backgrounds are recognized as a source

of enrichment of the national identity, instead of being in competition or a minority/majority tension⁴ – for there is a natural tendency that a majority (especially historical and cultural) becomes hegemonic by marginalizing or not “seeing” or “hearing” the claims of minorities.

Intercultural citizenship thus comes to answer these challenges, complementing both global citizenship and democratic citizenship and presenting essential nuances to the multicultural citizenship concept. In fact, the

2. M. Byram, “Intercultural citizenship from an internationalist perspective”, <http://www.nus.edu.sg/teachingacademy/article/intercultural-citizenship-from-an-internationalist-perspective/>.

3. See UNESCO, *Intercultural Competences. Conceptual and Operational Framework*, 2013, (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002197/219768e.pdf>): “Intercultural citizenship refers to a new type of citizen, the one required for the new global village”, p. 16.

4. See T. Cantle, *Interculturalism: the new era of cohesion and diversity*, 2012.

multicultural citizenship model goes further than the democratic model by acknowledging the cultural dimension of the citizen and the right to express cultural specificities of private groups, taking into consideration all different components of a society and thus preventing marginalization of groups or discrimination against them. Yet this model's challenge is that, while trying to ensure that all cultural components of a society are respected and have their place in the public sphere, it risks a fragmentation of society⁵ through the development of communal identities and communitarian causes at the expense of national unity, of a unifying identity and of shared trans-communal causes.

The global citizenship model transcends local societies and responds to the need to go beyond the scope of the national loyalty logic that can have a nationalistic or segmented dimension, in order to align one's loyalty to humanity and its common causes, based on the advancement in world communication and evolution of the feeling of affiliation to the single human family and of solidarity at the global level. Yet this global citizenship model cannot replace the need for a local citizenship model. Moreover, it is restricted to a part of the world population, those who can adopt it in practice through education and mobility. Thus this model is, at this stage, self-contradicting for if it is rooted in the principles of justice and equality among all humans, it remains by itself an example of unequal opportunities, being out of reach of the poor and the marginalized that are still seeking to attain their most basic rights at the local level.

Intercultural citizenship as a model builds on democratic citizenship's equal rights, obligations and freedoms for all, and on the multicultural model's acknowledgment of diversity,

recognizing all different cultural groups within a society, and preventing the dominance of one group over the other(s) or the imposition of a monolithic culture. Yet it views diversity as a source of mutual and shared enrichment. In the intercultural citizenship model, diversity is correlated with the interaction process between groups, instead of with the distance separating groups. This interaction is directed towards forming together, through communication and partnership, an encompassing national culture, identifying the landmarks of the shared national identity.

In the intercultural citizenship model, diversity is correlated with the interaction process between groups, instead of with the distance separating groups

In the framework of intercultural citizenship, dialogue is not a commodity; it is the essential ingredient of this model. Dialogue is actually the legitimate way for citizens with different cultural backgrounds to organize their lives communally and to decide what common rules they want to live by through public deliberation processes. It constitutes in the public sphere an open space for interaction among citizens and a place to reflect innovation resulting from free and creative interaction. This dynamic also pushes cultural communities (especially religious ones) to explain and (re)interpret their values in order to promote shared values but also to know and accept the non-shared values, i.e. values specific to one community.

Dialogue in this context becomes a path for mutual learning and common growth, helping society's focus to move from diversity management to creative cultural interaction. It becomes part of the knowledge, skills and

5. See G. Bouchard, "What is Interculturalism?", *McGill Law Journal*, 56 (2), 2011, pp. 435-468.



Arab educators on a training on intercultural citizenship (Adyan Foundation).

attitudes of each person living in our diverse society and in our globalized world.

Intercultural citizenship is hence the result of, first, accepting diversity within the same society and, second, promoting dialogue and interaction among its constituents based on the conviction that such diversity is a source of collective enrichment and that partnership with other citizens despite their cultural differences is part of the process of building oneself and society. In this model, the other citizen becomes with his/her cultural difference part of the process of building the social identity as well as of the other individual's identity,

instead of a competitor on acquisitions or only an equal in terms of rights and obligations. This openness to the other within the same society is complemented with openness to the rest of humanity and to solidarity with others throughout the world.⁶

Cross-Cultural Education on Intercultural Citizenship

This model of intercultural citizenship thus represents a vision or a cause that citizens from either shore of the Mediterranean and

6. For a more complete definition of intercultural citizenship and other models of citizenship, cf. *The Arab Toolkit for Education on Intercultural Citizenship*, ALF/Adyan, 2014, <http://www.adyanonline.net/course/view.php?id=67>.

from any cultural or religious community can adhere to, for it represents the guarantee of their rights as well as presenting a model of positive enrichment from diversity. Through education on intercultural citizenship and training of trainers, we can present a role to youths and a community of people carrying the same vision.

Going back to the three needs mentioned in the first section, this model can represent a cause for youths, giving them a role and a responsibility in building awareness and bridges, and creating a community of experience around it, interreligious and intercultural.

Through education on intercultural citizenship and training of trainers, we can present a role to youths and a community of people carrying the same vision

Throughout its experience, the Adyan Foundation has implemented three types of cross-cultural education on intercultural citizenship, each having its own specificity and each creating a community of experience and a reference for intercultural citizenship. Their key word for these experiences is “cognitive mobility”, a concept developed in the framework of a program in collaboration with the Anna Lindh Foundation called the Adyan Understanding Program (2009-2011). Cognitive mobility means the ability to move from our own way of thinking to try to understand the other’s way of thinking. “This cognitive mobility, combined with cultural literacy, leads to the understanding of the other as well as the deeper understanding of oneself, for it takes into consideration the

learning not only of ‘how’ each one thinks and perceives things but also ‘why’ each one, the other and the self, thinks and perceives the way they do.”⁷ This thus leads to taking in the multiple facets of what affects the other, whether they be historical, sociological, religious, cultural or other dimensions, while also being aware of where we come from and why we think the way we do. Of course, this cognitive mobility is built throughout the education process.

The first type is *intercultural education on intercultural citizenship within the same country*, i.e. joining different components of one society to think together, learn together and become a local community of educators/trainers on intercultural citizenship. This allows the creation of a structure within the same country of youths from different cultural and religious backgrounds promoting the concept of intercultural citizenship as a shared vision for their country, where all communities are represented equally, where all participate in public life and where this participation is built on constant communication and on building together the cement of national unity enriched by inner diversity.⁸

The second type is *interreligious education on intercultural citizenship*. This type of education focuses on religious leaders in charge of religious education, and affects a shift from being wholly communal and in some cases exclusivist vis-a-vis others, to being carriers of the same message and concept. This leads religious authorities to build coherence between their internal teaching and the public values shared by their society, and to contribute to spreading these public values of citizenship

7. F. Daou and N. Tabbara, “Roadmap for a Euro-Mediterranean Cross-Cultural Education: the Experience of Adyan Understanding Program”, in *Intercultural Dialogue and Multi-level Governance in Europe*, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2012, pp. 381-396.

8. See, for example, the film on the project “Many Communities One Nationality”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mW5FVAUInUM&index=24&list=PLkmV4L4fkj476mkiT3Lfak75Naf7y-AbB> and, the film on Citizens for Unity and Peace project, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sE-Y3xaEMvM>.

and coexistence from faith-based and interfaith perspectives.⁹

The third one is *cross-cultural education on intercultural citizenship*, i.e. joining persons from different countries, cultures and backgrounds to learn and reflect together and also form a community of experience together. In the past couple of years, Adyan has been working with the Anna Lindh Foundation on that level, whether on the EuroMed dimension or the inter-Arab dimension, in the Dawrak/Citizens for Dialogue program.¹⁰ This experience allows mutual enrichment not only from different communities within the same country but from more global diversity, and from the specific examples in each country and the challenges faced by each country concerning the basic values of intercultural citizenship; namely, human dignity, equality and justice, cultural freedom, empathy and solidarity and participation in public life.

Conclusion

Civil society, international NGOs and educational institutions have been doing tre-

mendous work on the level of education for citizenship, and on the level of diversity management in education, transforming mentalities and creating a worldwide culture of dialogue and openness and culture of human rights. Yet for all this work to have a sustainable effect, it needs to be accompanied by a shift in international politics. Civil society is doing its part. It is the responsibility of political bodies to do theirs and uphold the values of transparency, equality, dignity and humanism in international politics through more balanced policies.

Political bodies and civil society together need to think of ways to establish intercultural structures for youths where they can find a sense of brotherhood and a worthy cause

Finally, I believe that political bodies and civil society together need to think of ways to establish intercultural structures for youths where they can find a sense of brotherhood and a worthy cause, to work together for human dignity, for solidarity and for the safeguarding of each other.

9. See the film on Interfaith Education for Intercultural Citizenship in Lebanon, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz4y8uH23xo>.

10. See the film on the project, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAELPUuiZdU>, and the film on the concept, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4y1oxAICMQ>.