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for the RAPPROCHEMENT OF CULTURES

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# interculturalism At the crossroads

comparative perspectives on  
concepts, policies and practices

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# IV. Postscript: what future for intercultural dialogue?

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The impetus for this book emerged out of an upsurge of interest in interculturality, both as a concept and as a policy articulated in different ways as the basis for managing diversity and dealing with a broad understanding of the ‘rapprochement of cultures’. Indeed, UNESCO’s own International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (IDRC) (2013–2022) sought to reinforce ‘Member States’ commitment to furthering interreligious and intercultural dialogue (ICD) and the promotion of mutual understanding and cooperation for peace’ (UNESCO, 2016, p. 4). The need to ensure that intercultural paradigms form part of the mix for policy articulation is a consequence of emerging forms of diversity and cultural expression facilitated by globalization, human mobility and new information technologies (Mansouri, 2014). But ‘while these phenomena have brought people together across geographic spaces, [they have] concurrently exposed a widening moral gap in our societies and the extent to which our societies are ill-equipped to effectively manage and overcome the challenges that continue to arise’ (UNESCO 2016, p. 5). It is the difficulty of managing the new challenges associated with living with diversity that academic literature and its many manifestations at the policy level has tried to grapple with over the past few decades (Anna Lindh Foundation, 2015).

Yet, and as the various contributions to this volume show, academic debate in this field of research has exhibited a high level of conceptual and methodological variation reflecting epistemological traditions, theoretical frameworks, assumptions and diversity-related categories of different

disciplines, ranging from communications and cultural studies to business, urban planning, psychology and social sciences in general (including sociology, political science, anthropology, education and so on). Indeed, the individual contributions contained in this publication reflect to some extent these specificities. This is in spite of the fact that each chapter developed from similar conceptual and methodological questions.

## **Intercultural dialogue in context**

Internationally, the last two decades have witnessed an upsurge in intercultural tensions, xenophobia and social disharmony, in particular inter and intra-state conflicts driven by religious, sectarian and ethno-cultural disagreements (Berry, 2013; Kymlicka, 2015). Indeed, since 9/11, new forms of extreme ideologies, radicalization, populism and estrangement have dominated national and global agendas (Akkerman *et al.*, 2016; Cesari, 2010). Migrants, especially adherents of the Islamic faith, have become the focus of some of these debates in Western cities, in particular as they relate to global terrorism, rising insecurity, increased urban segregation and lack of social integration (Mansouri, 2015). This ubiquitous discourse has fuelled rising fear of the diversity agenda and contributed to a palpable 'sceptical turn' against multiculturalism, which has gathered international momentum (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). Informing this 'multicultural backlash' is a growing popular belief that migrant integration in diverse societies is no longer possible and that the creation of cohesive diverse societies is becoming more utopian and less realistic.

The UNESCO IDRC (UNESCO, 2016) Roadmap is in many ways an attempt to reinvigorate the diversity and ICD agenda. It explicitly reflects a 'pragmatic turn' in debates on interculturality with the aim of moving towards concrete interventions and away from more rhetorical and conceptual deliberations. It is still, however, of critical importance that some level of theoretical and conceptual clarity be provided to help understand how ICD can offer a positive and productive pathway towards human rights extension, social cohesion and peaceful co-existence. A level of inclusionary practice around ICD is of paramount importance to ensure that socio-demographic, as well as geographic representation, remain essential ingredients of a sustainable and far-reaching ICD engagement strategy within the ambitious IDRC agenda.

In a context where polarization and retrogressive political agendas are gaining saliency across the world, identity politics is emerging as a new

driver of social and intercultural relations (Yilmaz, 2012). The rise of far-right groups in Europe and elsewhere is a manifestation of such a polarization, where identity markers – particularly those based on cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds – are resulting in more differentiated societies (c.f. Vidmar-Horvat, 2012). This may have resulted in conflicts provoked by cultural, structural and institutional reasons. Yet, this situation remains in need of a clear policy strategy to counter these tensions at local, national and international levels. This is why the IDRC places a high premium on respect for human dignity, human rights for all, and fundamental freedom of belief and expression. It is within this context that new policy paradigms are being explored which may uncover innovative ways of enshrining positive and sustainable approaches to managing different expressions of diversity. Such emerging paradigms still need to be approached within an ethos that emphasizes openness and respect between different groups and, more importantly, between individuals from different cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds.

The question therefore remains: what future awaits ICD? What role does national and supra-national governance play in shaping this future? Are all stakeholders (policy-makers, inter-governmental agencies, researchers and practitioners) actually asking the right questions and invoking the right theoretical frameworks, approaches and arguments in our push for an 'intercultural turn' (Zapata-Barrero, 2015)? The remainder of this concluding chapter presents three inter-connected arguments exploring the promise of ICD from conceptual, policy and ethical perspectives, respectively.

## **Conceptual argument**

One of the unfortunate developments regarding ICD is that many intellectual, philosophical and policy debates tend to unhelpfully juxtapose interculturalism with multiculturalism. While the argument against this juxtaposition has been taken up elsewhere (Meer, Modood and Zapata-Barrero, 2016), the position in this book is that these two policy paradigms are not and should not be discussed in oppositional terms. Equally, these two concepts cannot be analysed in ontological isolation from public discourses and policies that are shaped and have themselves shaped distinct temporal and spatial contexts (Meer and Modood, 2012).

There is no doubt that the post-9/11 context has given rise to a backlash against multiculturalism in Europe, in particular, but also elsewhere across

the Western world, in particular in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom among other countries (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). This increasing criticism of multiculturalism revolves around: (i) a perceived communitarianism that leads to lack of social integration, (ii) a cultural relativism that encourages illiberal practices, and (iii) a lack of attachment to a common political culture. This latter problem, in particular, has been equated with perceived cultural groupism that may lead to divided loyalties and even domestic security risks, as has been the case with so-called 'home-grown terrorists' (Mansouri, 2015). These difficulties have been amplified in the European context, where real social problems and security incidents (e.g. the terrorist attacks in Brussels, Paris, London and Nice) have added to public fears of and skepticism towards cultural and religious difference. But in this context, and as Taylor (2012, p. 414) argues:

too much positive recognition of cultural differences will encourage a retreat into ghettos, and a refusal to accept the political ethic of liberal democracy itself.

Those arguing against 'too much positive recognition' are essentially suggesting that it is the 'protective' rights-based agenda implied by multiculturalism that has sown the seeds of social segregation and, consequently, intercultural tensions. These problems are further compounded by contemporary political challenges arising from international conflicts and national economic difficulties, which often add credibility to those views by advocating for less recognition and support for cultural and religious diversity. Despite this, the multicultural policy frameworks in culturally plural societies, such as Australia and Canada, were designed and articulated to deal with rising levels of migration and consequent socio-cultural diversity (Mansouri, 2015). But acceptance of diversity and coexistence within multicultural paradigms is now being challenged by new types of social fissures fuelled by international conflict, right-wing extremism and radical violent ideologies. It is within this context that the intercultural turn has been advanced as a new paradigm offering possibly remedial but complementary ingredients to current international variations of the multicultural policy paradigm, in particular in its Australian and Canadian versions. And although there is no unified approach to nor application of multiculturalism worldwide, the unifying assumption behind all variations of multicultural policies is a rights-based approach that offers support for and recognition of collective cultural claims.

Against these fluctuating contexts across regions and policy articulations, the UNESCO IDRC Roadmap (UNESCO, 2016) clearly attempts to



synthesize diverse orientations from both frameworks, as it seeks to locate ICD both at the collective communal level and at the individual subjective level, aiming for:

societies and communities where the richness and potential of cultural diversity is better understood and recognized for its vital contribution to improving and shaping development outcomes [and] Individuals who are equipped with the competences and tools to operate in a diverse and rapidly changing world, and who are driven by shared human values in living and working together as custodians of the same planet (UNESCO, 2016, p. 10).

Indeed, as some of the contributors in this book illustrate, ICD offers moments of encounter, understanding and hope for individuals sharing local spaces and engaging in genuine attempts to understanding 'the other' as co-citizens and fellow human beings. To this end, Hassan Nadhem's chapter on the role of literature and transnational literary figures as intercultural conduits for bridging social-cultural divides in present day Iraq is a case in point. The literary legacy of Muhammad Fuḏūlī – the subject of Nadhem's chapter – is now seen as offering real opportunities for bridging intercultural divides within a region that is witnessing unprecedented political and social tensions. Similarly, Amineh Hoti's grassroots interfaith interventions in Pakistan examine the challenges and possibilities offered by innovative ICD interventions designed to change students' perspectives and mindsets on intercultural and interreligious relations.

These chapters and others included in this book highlight the approach that we sought to develop for ICD, which is grounded in a belief that knowledge alone is insufficient for developing critical intercultural capabilities (Abdallah-Preteceille, 2006). Instead, ICD is premised among other things on developing skills, behaviours and dispositions that enable individuals to make connections between their own views and those of others, to build on shared interests and commonalities, and to negotiate or mediate difference. In this instance, ICD involves and projects a kind of 'toolbox' that encompasses everyday pedagogical strategies for dealing with intercultural manifestations of super diversity for the mutual benefit and advantage of all concerned. As such, ICD offers the potential to engage positively with diversity as we 'change our concepts of personal and collective identity, and [develop] common bonds, on the basis of a more universal conception of humankind' (Cantle, 2012, p. 143). It is with such aims in mind that European policy-makers have adopted ICD as part of a

paradigm driven by the desire to foster community cohesion and engender common public culture (Zapata-Barrero, 2015).

## **Policy argument**

As a policy paradigm, interculturalism arises within cities and functions as an urban policy strategy. It can even be interpreted as a kind of a 'policy rebellion of cities' vis-à-vis state-centred policy domination in diversity policies for the last few decades. This 'local turn' in migration policy and research (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten, 2017), whereby cities are increasingly recognized not only as implementers of policies, but also as new players in diversity management, can offer a new area of focus for the current UNESCO ICD framework.

Taken globally, the promotion of interculturalism can also be applied to foster inner-city (intra-city) as well as inter-city relations on common diversity-related concerns related to how to live in diverse societies (e.g. religious and linguistic concerns, cultural and national traditions). The 'local turn' has, in fact, constituted the central point of the Intercultural Cities Programme of the Council of Europe since 2008, which now has more than 100 cities working together to reduce all forms of prejudice and increase knowledge formation through intercultural lenses. The premise is that integration in diverse societies can only be possible through interpersonal contact (Guidikova, 2016) and by targeting many social and public areas in cities where these encounters can take place (Wood, 2016) and where most diversity-related conflicts could arise. This is viewed as part of a socialization process to foster intercultural citizens (Zapata-Barrero, 2016). As the Council of Europe writes in its founding document:

One of the defining factors that will determine, over coming years, which cities flourish and which decline will be the extent to which they allow their diversity to be their asset, or their handicap. Whilst national and supra-national bodies will continue to wield an influence it will increasingly be the choices that cities themselves make which will seal their future (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 22).

This is in accordance with European Union initiatives that present empirical evidence for the relationship between cities and diversity policies. For instance, the report from the Zaragoza Summit of the Fourth European Ministerial Conference on Integration of Immigrants highlights 'integration as an engine for development and social cohesion' (EU, 2010). More recently, in January 2015, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of

Europe adopted a recommendation on the Intercultural Cities (ICC) approach, recognizing it as a way forward and recommending it to cities and governments (Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)1 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States). This is one of the first policy initiatives to clearly emphasize the need for local governments to develop and build capacities to better manage diversity and to combat racism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination. This represents a major turning point, highlighting the critical role of local initiatives as new/additional policy levers for managing these new social fissures. The national models of integration were first criticized by transnational literature (Thränhardt and Bommes, 2010; Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002) and by some preliminary multi-level and local analyses of immigration (Hepburn and Zapata-Barrero, 2014). The multicultural paradigm has been conceived of and implemented from the state level and has not often considered multi-level perspectives in implementing diversity policies. We are now in an historical period in which the UNESCO framework of ICD has the opportunity to emphasize this general 'local turn' dynamics within migration-related diversity studies.

The focus is not only the promotion of 'contact zones' in different spheres, but also the resulting disproval of stereotypes and reduction in prejudice towards 'others'. In this sense, this ongoing process is a means to an end, intended to develop and maintain relational competences. In other words, the premise tries to ensure that the contact zones between people are areas of interaction rather than areas of conflict, which reject racism, poverty and social exclusion. Intercultural policies are thus seen as an anti-racist tool. This promotion of anti-discrimination is a fundamental element of the policy argument for interculturalism, since it focuses on the factors that can hinder positive intercultural relations. There are contextual, legal, institutional and structural factors that reduce the motivation of people to interact and even build walls of separation between people based on misinterpretations of differences. Here, we take into account legal frameworks concerning voting rights for foreigners and naturalization policies, as well as socio-economic opportunity gaps among citizens, when differences become the explanatory factor in reducing contact. The promotion of anti-discrimination also means tackling disadvantage, as interculturalism is unlikely to continue over time if one or more segments of society remain so unequal that people are led to believe they have no real stake in society. It is here that many programmes aimed at debunking rumours, disrupting 'fake news', resisting prejudices and negative perceptions of diversity are expanding in Europe. See, for example, the

Antirumours Networks for Diversity promoted by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, n.d.).

## **Ethical argument**

The IDRC is very much premised on the broad aspirational goals of Sustainable Development Goal 16, which centres 'on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies [and] provides for specific targets to reduce violence, strengthen institutions and improve decision-making processes' (UNESCO, 2016, p. 8). Reducing violence and working towards inclusive and peaceful societies is not merely a matter of public policy or legal obligation, but also an ethical orientation and a societal condition for ensuring dignity for all. ICD demands that peaceful coexistence among diverse groups and communities, indeed between societies, be taken to a higher and more ethical level whereby individuals not only accept diversity, but also commit to developing the critical tools necessary to engage with it more positively and productively. This is a priority for all members of societies, including first peoples, white settlers, majority groups and migrants.

While strong political leadership will always play a positive role in strengthening the momentum behind the intercultural turn, what is required even more urgently is a grassroots uptake driven locally through cities and local councils, where everyday intercultural encounters take place. What ICD promises are genuine moments of hope and care where individuals within local social milieus not only accept diversity, but are also proactively engaged in acquiring the reflexive and pedagogical tools needed for successful intercultural interactions and exchanges. Social divisiveness grows when difficult cultural, social and political matters are left to fester uncontested and undisrupted by critical deliberative modes of engagement. It is these critical, deliberative modes of engagements that ICD aims to nurture as a mechanism for preventing ignorance of 'others', prejudice and cultural bias.

The ethical dimension of ICD orientation is captured through an emphasis on a human-centric interest in the 'other' as a co-citizen, but also as a fellow human being. The fact that we all belong to a 'common humanity' must prevail over other political and social considerations. This humanitarian dimension of ICD is one of the main drivers of this ethical argument. For this to happen, ICD needs to focus not only on present conflict and difficulties, but also, more importantly, on future challenges that will continue to rise as globalization accelerates further, at least at the

level of socio-economic interdependence, human mobility and information technologies. It is, therefore, at the level of pedagogical interventions among youth that much of the promise of ICD is located and where real investment is needed from policy-makers, inter-governmental agencies, NGOs and educators. Indeed, authentic and agentic ICD practice premised on a critical reflexive pedagogy holds the key for resolving conflicts at the inter-personal, inter-group, intra-national and international levels (Noble and Watkins, 2014). More importantly, this approach to ICD holds the key for ensuring social peace and intercultural understanding at a time when many societies are undergoing deep and unsettling social transformations on many fronts that raise questions about national identities and cultural differences. Within many diverse societies such challenges have often led to the rise of xenophobic ideologies targeting migrants and minority groups, in particular adherents of the Muslim faith (Mansouri, Lobo and Johns, 2015; Mikola and Mansouri, 2014; Modood, Triandafyllidou and Zapata-Barrero, 2006).

In most European Union and Council of Europe documents, interculturalism is linked to European values, such as human rights, democracy and a culture of peace and dialogue, and European identity (Council of Europe, 2008; European Commission, 2008a, 2008b). This view of diversity as constitutive of the new European identity underlines the fact that the latter is neither a pre-existing quality nor a historical given, but rather a process in the making – an identity to be achieved (Bauman, 2004).

### **Conclusion: interculturalism as an alternative to the extremist narrative**

These three arguments (conceptual, policy and ethical) relating to the present context for ICD assume that interculturalism is a mechanism to generate trust and mutual understanding, and to break down prejudices, stereotypes and the misconceptions of others that constrain interaction and contact between individuals living within culturally diverse cities. ICD is akin to a pedagogical technique for bridging differences between individuals and, consequently, bonding groups together as per the social capital agenda. That is, it promotes relations between people who share certain characteristics (bonds), as well as relations between individuals from different backgrounds (e.g. promoting interactions among people across different religions, languages and other characteristics of cultural diversity) that have the predisposition to respect the differences of others (Gruescu and Menne, 2010, p. 10). It is a way, then, to avoid the confinement

and segregation of people, which has become an explanatory variable of social exclusion and social inequality. To this end, social cohesion is now widely promoted as an ICD conduit for encouraging interaction, in order to overcome social and cultural barriers among people, especially at the level of local neighbourhoods and cities (Cantle, 2016). Xenophobia, racism, and intolerant discourses and practices are increasing their presence in all spheres of European (indeed global) society from political parties, to social discourses and among citizens. This is why the incorporation of migrants into the main institutions of democratic societies (e.g. into political parties, see Zapata-Barrero *et al.*, 2017) is urgent for a future ICD agenda. Migrants are currently gaining primacy in several national governments and constitute an emerging challenge for institutional policies and practices. In the context of Europe, for example, the current process of re-nationalization of policies, xenophobia, racism and intolerance are becoming a new 'political ideology' framing political opinion and legitimizing politics and policies of exclusion. Scholarly work highlights the fact that while this originates in cultural anxiety, it also emerges from approaches to welfare, entrenched inequalities and emerging insecurity, all of which are also nurtured by the inconsistencies arising from the management of complex issues such as access to European territory and diversity.

Populism and neo-conservatism are the main forms this new ideology takes (Rubio-Carbonero and Zapata-Barrero, 2017). Most of the public debate around migration and diversity is focused more at the explanatory level and seeks to identify the main factors provoking the emergence of far-right groups. Such public debates and associated research aim to identify intervention strategies that seek to invade political power and governments, and focus less on the required political and policy instruments to prevent and reduce the conditions that make it possible. ICD can play a central role here.

The last European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) report highlights growing anti-immigration sentiment and cites Islamophobia as being among the key trends in 2015 (ECRI, 2016). The recent terrorist attacks in Berlin, Copenhagen, Nice and Paris further add to the Islamophobic sentiment being misused by populist political parties to stir up prejudice and hatred against Muslims in general. Likewise, the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union in June 2016 (commonly known as 'Brexit') is also connected to anti-immigrant sentiments. New key questions emerge: Is the policy narrative of multiculturalism, in its current formulation, sufficient to counter the rising extremist narratives

which are often dressed in nationalist terms? Can multiculturalism be a marker of multicultural identity without creating more political cleavages at the national level? These questions cannot be answered with state-centric policy paradigms alone, no matter how well-intentioned. Rather, they require more nimble, locally driven initiatives, such as those articulated within ICD where the agency of the individual, the authenticity of local context, and the heuristic premise of contact and interaction are all given primacy over top-down narratives that no longer reflect the complexity of the world within which we all live.

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