

The crisis of multiculturalism in Europe; what is our role as cross-cultural experts and as intercultural trainers?

A Plenary Community Session led by

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Angela Merkel, David Cameron, Nicolas Sarkozy, Mark Rutte – all of these contemporary European heads of government publicly declare that multiculturalism is dead, that the integration of immigrants from Algeria and West Africa in France, from Morocco in the Netherlands, from Turkey in Germany – has failed. All of them echo the arguments of Huntington in “Clash of Civilizations” and all of them are worried by the rise of the populist sentiment with nationalist undertones. But are they right? Is populist exclusion of the Others, especially if they are ethnically (darker skin) and religiously (Muslim) foreign legitimate and sustainable? And can we do anything to stop the populist backlash against the immigrant others, if we believe that it ruins sustainability? That it undermines the European project of Community?

*1. First, let's face it, we have always been bastards of multicultural intermarriages and smuggled intercultural influences. But we have learned that going it alone, as dominant European nation-state, as the West, is unsustainable. Individualist we may be, but investing in one's private hedonistic experience alone will not do. We should move from “**saving our souls to sustaining our planet**”.*

European societies have always been multicultural in many dimensions. Pilgrims, soldiers, monks and merchants mixed. Commerce networked, crusades organized. And yet, what changed recently is the immediate connectivity and communicative power at our disposal. “Societies” and “cultures” are in reality powerful “rivers” of multilevel processes. They are complex bunches of patterned relations - the ongoing ebbs and flows of complex interdependent interactions. Difference between the year 1000 or 1900 and 2011 is that all these processes have become much more and much more quickly visible than ever before. Not only are our words and deeds more quickly and more sharply visible – they can also be followed by many more of us at once. Complex knowledge, which enables human societies to sustain almost seven billion individuals, depends crucially on sensitive and transparent production, maintenance and application in our hyper-connected societies. Intercultural competence is an indispensable part and parcel of this knowledge contributing to diversity governance and... yes, sustainability.

In medieval universities, this knowledge was arranged around religion, and the central idea of salvation for individual souls – God made the world meaningful and theology led instrumental arts and sciences. Portuguese Jesuits, the inventors of an early version of SIETAR - in a sense - attempted a large scale translation of Bible into Hindi and mandarin Chinese, but the Pope found them too lenient for Buddha and Kong Zhe.

In universities after the industrial revolution, expanding knowledge was arranged around natural sciences. They are telling us what the world is made of, while the central idea of securing a progress of mankind from poverty and slavery to welfare, liberty and – as an afterthought – pursuit of happiness, replaced individual salvation. Heaven became a classless society, and if this was difficult, at least a less unjust, less class-differentiated one. Russian and Chinese communists attempted a large-scale translation of scientific management into simple equations of future happiness to “Soviets + electricity”, but collapsed into genocide and waste.

In universities of today, exploding growth of knowledge is being increasingly re-arranged around information technology and life sciences. The central idea is a sustainable growth of societies at peace with their environments and less violent inside human institutions (that’s why cruelty of North Korean concentration camps stands out, as does stoning of unmarried female lovers under sharia). No clear single agency emerged to claim this new historical task, though many asked for a share (ecologists, feminists, alter-globalists, etc.)

Nobody grows up prepared for the rapid and unpredictable currents of these changes. Politicians are unprepared. Parties atrophy, personalities matter more than programs - political PR spin doctors learn from showbiz and marketing gurus. Economists are unprepared. Trading financial derivatives and reassurances can blind financial experts and entire banks to the unsustainable housing subsidies to insolvent poor. Investors learn from behavioral finance researchers and ethical sustainability gurus. Legal systems are unprepared. Intellectual property laws may kill creativity and diversity, but will not protect the obsolete privilege of “the west” above “the rest”. Creative professionals are unprepared... but first and foremost we all, as informed and concerned citizens, are unprepared.

What can we do to prepare ourselves? Recognize that there are two fundamental divisions, which we can help bridge; the division between rich (the west, the north) and poor (the rest, including enclaves inside the west and the north) and the division between deeds (actions, interactions, relations, briefly “societies”) and words (communications, expressions, experiences, briefly “cultures”).

2. Having read the above summary of the “humanist diagnosis of a cultural situation of our times” (culture being understood as communication filtered through values and beliefs) we would like to invite you to a teamwork on tackling the problems of future dialogue and collaboration of civilizations (following Emmanuel Todd rather than Samuel Huntington). Proposed team assignments six teams coupled with one another (A+B, C+D, E+F); NB: Each team will be split into 5 or 6 subgroups.

- A. West/Deeds – How to shift to a sustainable life-style giving up our monopoly of world resources so that the citizens of BRIC, CIVETS and other inhabitants of “the rest” can be accommodated? What values have to be compared and what cross-cultural trade-offs are necessary?
- B. Rest/Deeds – How to initiate a virtuous circle of political, economic, cultural development without getting high-jacked by authoritarian temptations and give voice to the underdogs, even those blinded by ignorance and extremism? What values have to be prioritized and what cross-cultural trade-offs should be facilitated?

(team A and B work separately for the first hour, then together for another hour to prepare a joint statement on **“What Should be Done”**)

- C. West/Words – How to overcome the populist ideological threat (Ms le Pen Junior in France, Wilders in The Netherlands) and to stimulate solidarity with and support for voluntary increases of tax, higher retirement age and lower bonuses? How to make an ecological footprint and Fair Trade more attractive in view of values and beliefs than unsustainable, but not yet untenable privilege of conspicuous consumption?
- D. East/Words – How to remedy the monopolistic position of the Thompson-Reuters’ and Bloomberg’s of the news world, so that a more balanced world report and less biased point of view can be included in daily multimedia diet? How can the social media and alternative networks be employed in order to complement and correct one-sided mainstream news?

(team D and C work separately for one hour and then together for another one in order to prepare a joint statement on **“What Should be Said”**)

- E. Is there really a crisis of a multiculturalism in Europe? In the rest of the world? In equally complex societies of Brazil, India, or Canada? Do we really want to deport the Muslim North Africans back to their lands of origin and refuse to save the Greek banks? Or is it just another manifestation of profound political disarray given the new complexity of EU societies? Are new social realities threatening national cultural identities? Or is it a matter of perception in mass media and in political PR preying upon the supposed rise of populism?
- F. SIETAR is one of the emergent networks of professionals, who made it their business to facilitate dialogue, communication and mutual respect for inter-culturally troubled groups, organizations and individuals. What are the best practices that cross-cultural experts and intercultural trainers might promote in Europe? White paper or flash mob, op-ed article or a Facebook, petition or a blog, demonstration or a twitter?

(team E and F work separately for one hour and then together for another one in order to prepare a joint statement on **“How can SIETAR help actors in complex and divided populations and defuse xenophobic populism?”**)

1. Magala: pre-readings for a reflexive practitioner

Therborn, Goran, "Why We Are Who We Are: a Sociocultural Geology of Today's World", in: Therborn, 2011, *The World. A Beginner's Guide*, Cambridge and Malden, MA, Polity (pp.5-83) [***a crash course in global inequalities and their economic comparison***]

Runciman, W.G., "Winning Orthodoxies and Losing Heresies", in: Runciman, 2009, *The Theory of Cultural and Social Selection*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press (pp. 128-139)[***a brief intro into the comparative analysis of long-term consequences of cultural dynamics***]

Jackson, Terence, "The Visibility of religion in ethical management: Islam and the Middle East", in Jackson, 2011, *International Management Ethics. A Critical, Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, (pp. 172-202)[***an empirical study of the dynamics of postcolonial societies with an analysis of power relations shaping the rules and values which guide intercontinental, international, interorganizational and interindividual choices***"]

4. Pelletier readings:

D'Iribarne, Philippe, "The Logic of Honor", 2003, Welcome Rain Publishers [***about French cultural contradictions***]

D'Iribarne, Philippe , "Penser la diversité du monde", 2008, Seuil [***intercultural audit of a French international company - French only***]

Lagrange, Hugues, "Le déni des cultures", 2010, Seuil [***an overview of immigration and cultural factors impacting French society - French only***]

Todd, Emmanuel & Courbage, Youssef, "A Convergence of Civilizations: The Transformation of Muslim Societies Around the World", Columbia University Press, 2011 [***a demographical survey of Muslim societies reversing the "clash of civilizations"***]