

Creativity: An Interactive Factor of Interculturality

With the aim of promoting intercultural dialogue between Europe and southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, as in other dossiers of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània* since we embarked on this course more than a decade ago, in this issue we wish to emphasise the importance of interculturality. In this case, from the perspective of migrations and creativity. Far from the simple vision of a Europe withdrawn in itself or a creator of ghettos, we want to show how, despite the ethnocentric visions, Europe is also becoming a society in which interculturality is gradually finding its path. A path constructed, in particular, by the actors of immigration. The panorama of our cities, especially the most cosmopolitan, is a reflection of this, if we disregard the case of the ghettos marked by marginalisation. And it is difficult not to appropriate the host culture when we live in societies where school attendance is obligatory, and the media and consumer products constantly bombard us with messages that form part of the host culture. Moreover, democracy and freedom of expression, including religious expression, in an open society allow individuals who have come from other cultures to adapt to the host culture and make it their own. Where is the heart and thought of the migrants, whether first generation or those born in Europe, who can maintain some of the cultural features brought by their parents? Is preserving certain specificities compatible with human rights a problem or can it become a creative factor, not only given its cultural aspect but also its economic and social features? These are some of the questions answered through the contributions that appear in the dossier “Migrations and Creativity”. Most of the contributors in this issue were born in a country and culture different to the place where currently their works are disseminated and their successes are recognised. This issue does not seek to be exhaustive, but to offer some of the visions of those who, in their dual cultural status, have reflected on this reality.

We begin the dossier with an article about current European migration policies by the political expert and specialist on migrations Catherine Wihtol de Wenden. She argues that, despite the coercive policies focused on security, Europe has become a continent of immigration. Thus, despite the manifest restrictions, the initiatives of first and second generation immigrants contribute to constructing transnational spaces between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, both for the remittances of immigrants from Europe and the associations between both sides, which usually make up networks for joint development and the establishment of cultural links while also being forms of civic mobilisation. For the political expert, it is necessary to highlight the function of the group of people with dual nationality, whose élites are courted by the country of

origin as possible investors and entrepreneurs or brains to be recovered, and by European countries as representatives of “diversity” or as politicians (as in the case of Cem Özdemir, of the German Green Party, or Ahmed Aboutaleb, Mayor of Rotterdam). This posture coincides with the vision of the French-Algerian economist Khélifa Messamah, who particularly focuses on the Maghrebian emigrants and notes how there is an interest by the European states in attracting the brains of the south, who offer great potential, especially to multinationals. Wihtol de Wenden also notes how in the world of music, theatre, dance and sport numerous mixed cultural initiatives emerge, which now form part of European popular culture.

Following the thread of creativity as an interactive factor, the journalist Marta Ramón uses the sociologist Felice Dassetto as a theoretical framework: “In multiculturalism, the parts in question are juxtaposed in space and time without really meeting”; and the anthropologist Néstor García Canclini: “Interculturalism requires a policy with fixed conditions for dialogue.” Marta Ramón, aware of the importance of the participation of immigrants in the economic development of the city, offers the practical example of Barcelona. In this case, the Intercultural Cities Plan and Interculturality Plan 2009 are an optimum example of the use of culture, soft power, as an element that can influence the social and economic sphere to promote, in the urban environment, integration of immigrants by valuing cultural diversity. Without seeking to resolve the problem of social marginalisation, above all in the political field, these cultural strategies represent, according to Ramón’s perspective, an alternative to the failure of the previous classical models. The main objective is to encourage social dynamism in cities with a high level of immigration and to establish a starting point for new research. Corroborating this vision, journalist and art critic María Elena Morató believes that, in the study of the effects of the different waves of contemporary migration, we should deeply explore the creative phenomenon and its consequences as, above all, art poses a future challenge to us. Deciding how to manage the visibility of emigration and how culture channels this visibility are themes that are, or should be, on the agendas of those who manage citizen life. Morató points out that if culture is a key element for achieving social cohesion, policies that provide for cultural development should be priorities. This, in the current state of crisis and growing lack of resources, puts those responsible in the councils (the most directly related to the groups of migrants) in a dilemma which is difficult but must necessarily be resolved.

Above all, we feel it appropriate to present in our dossier elements provided by the protagonists themselves of the two cultures, North and South. Is culture a static factor? Are we talking about identity or identities? We will see that the views that appear in this issue are personal; it could be no other way as the authors are creators, such as the writers of Moroccan origin Najat El Hachmi and Esther Bendahan. Both came to Spain, the first to Catalonia and the second to Madrid, as girls, and both have contributed with their works to enriching the panorama of Catalan and Spanish literature. Najat El Hachmi’s reflection explores the conflict between tradition and modernity. For this writer, born

in the Rif, coexistence between codes of distinct cultures is the ideal place for artistic creation and the construction of our own identity. In her case, reading has embodied a refuge-space for observing reality, and writing has enabled her to take advantage of the intercultural experience. But the author warns us that writers at this intersection between two cultures (emigrants or children of emigrants) run several risks related precisely to their status. On the one hand, there is the risk of self-exoticisation; on the other, the risk of misunderstandings in how works are received. In any case, what defines literature, independently of its geographical origin, is its reflection on universal themes with the aim of understanding the common background inherent in the human condition.

Esther Bendahan's reflection assumes the condition of her identity linked to the identity of the Jewish people, which, for the writer, is formed by elements that involve migration and exile. Indeed, from their common origin, both Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews have had peculiarities derived from the history of their respective exiles. In the case of the Sephardic Jews, the will over the centuries to preserve a language, Judaeo-Spanish, characteristic of the land which expelled them in the 15th century, is significant. Language acts, therefore, as a native land, as a host place. However, Bendahan argues that writing is also linked to this identity process, so that writers are always foreigners who find their identity through the construction of the story. In her case, faced with migration and exile, the function of literature is to preserve memory and prevent oblivion.

Another vision contained in the dossier is that of the historian of Turkish origin and living in Israel, Nathalie Aylon, who through a narration that starts with the visit to an exhibition of Constantin Brancusi in New York, traces the formation of her own identity. Thus, she explains how she grew up in Istanbul, a city she recalls through the Ladino language and her dual Turkish and Jewish identity. However, it was in the United States where the author discovered the complexity of the religion that determines her identity, a religion which she had never believed in or practised. Later, she reached Jerusalem, where over the years she has made contact with Palestinians born in Israel who do not speak Hebrew. The article ends with the conclusion that, as in the sculptures of Brancusi, the identity of the people lies in the simplicity of their forms, in the essence of their movements, in their reality.

For her part, the writer and chef of Iraqi origin Pius Alibek recognises that all cultures are formed from elements with a travelling soul; that is, they have been migrating from one people to another so that each one adapts them according to their environment and their own characteristics. Food, music and words or art in the broadest sense cross borders without a visa and provide solid ground for bringing peoples and cultures together. Similarly, the migrant who travels following the natural tendency of man to move must not be seen as a threat but rather as a person who can enrich our own identity in a very valuable way. For this author, the creative potential of migrants who adapt to a host land contributing elements from their land of origin is endless. Because, just as reading and travel make us discover new worlds different to ours, which we consider unique and irreplaceable, is this not exactly what immigration teaches us?

Gastronomy is perhaps one of the most intercultural elements, although it is often believed to be a mere example of our cultural heritage. Food is an act expressed every day, but also forms part of the most representative moments of each culture. The specialist Sylvia Oussedik reminds us, in this respect, how the products that today are considered essential in Mediterranean cuisine are, in fact, borrowings from other lands that have been assimilated with the passage of time. This process, always inevitable and enriching, continues today thanks to the migration movements between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Immigrants travel with their culinary practices and habits, while acquiring new food customs that they adapt naturally to their new life and, on occasions, import to their countries of origin. This mixing takes place, therefore, in both directions, as a reflection of human beings' need to share and dialogue, expressed through food.

We close the dossier with an interview by the documentary film producer Sergi Doladé with the Turkish-German filmmaker Yasemin Samderelli, director of the film *Almanya: Welcome to Germany*. The work features a story that connects the Turkish and German cultures showing the problems in their dual complexity. The filmmaker affirms that her roots are an important part of her identity but honestly believes that the focus of her life, where her family lives, is Germany. However, she regrets that the German government forces emigrants to choose between two passports as if asking a child to choose between mother and father. Samderelli argues that it is possible to have both cultures without this creating a conflict of identity.

The dossier of this issue is complemented by the regular sections. In the "Overview of Recent Events", Gianluca Solera offers us a vision of Libya today, highlighting the efforts to reconstruct the country and the difficulty of creating institutions, as well as the emergence of civil society. For his part, the doyenne of correspondents in the Middle East, Tomás Alcoverro, narrates the misfortunes of Syria, a country known as the "heart of the Middle East" because of its rich complex history, which has become a battlefield of disagreements and interests increasingly more difficult to resolve. In the section "Cultural Overview", the writer Juan Goytisolo argues the need to recognise the languages of the Maghreb, and Edlira Osmani introduces us to the Bektashis of Albania, an open and conciliatory Sufi brotherhood. The multimedia artist Rogelio López Cuenca completes the section by examining the stereotypes that represent a serious obstacle to interculturality and, finally, Patricia Almarcegui comments on a selection of important exhibitions in different European cities to revisit Orientalism. We close this issue with the review by Alessandra Fani of three key books for analysing the Arab revolutions and a website selection that complement the dossier compiled by Alessandra Fani and Elisenda Macià. In short, the Europe of cultural diversity can no longer ignore the component of its plurality.

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