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Migration, Media and Intercultural Dialogue

Intercultural Studies, Interculturalism and the practice of "Intercultural Dialogue"

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This research programme focuses on a range of issues, theoretical and practical, related to cultural diversity and difference. Migration and media are twin facets of globalization, the one demographic, with crucial spatio-temporal consequences, and the other cultural and technological. While migration often poses the question of cultural difference, diverse forms of media play a key role in enabling representation, thus forging modes of communication. Through a focus on the role of media, this research programme explores the extent to which the latter bridges cultural differences in contexts of migration and facilitates intercultural dialogue. Of interest too are the ways in which media can mobilize societies and cultures. Also relevant is the role of media in triggering migration, as well as in connecting migrants to their homelands.

Intercultural Studies, Interculturalism and the practice of "Intercultural Dialogue"

Summary

Following a review of the literature in the field of intercultural studies, the main objective of this report is to summarize how debates on interculturalism and the related concept of "Intercultural Dialogue" have developed recently. Different approaches to intercultural research can lead to the development of different practices towards "others" or outsider cultures. Similarly, intercultural practices take place at different political levels and as a result different interpretations can emerge, both in terms of the use of facts, and also in the pursuits of political intentions. These will depend on particular cultural backgrounds. Consequently, the discussion developed in this report aims to raise consciousness among policy-makers about the sensitive nature of discourses surrounding this topic.

Aims and Objectives

This report examines the literature on intercultural studies in the interdisciplinary area of Intercultural Relations. It considers both the scientific debates concerning the topic of intercultural relations between different groups within a society, as well as and the debates concerning issues of intercultural relations in the field of International Relations. Despite differences in levels of analysis, the two sets of debates focus on negotiations about the structure of power relations among different collectives, including communities of people and communities of states.

The main aim of this report is to contribute to the development of positive intercultural relations between different UN Member States. The analysis of the literatures intends to provide a scientific and informed foundation in order to discuss the case and the practice of "Intercultural Dialogue", as it developed within the Security Council of the United Nations. It also aims to formulate suggestions for avoiding critical mistakes which can arise in the practice of intercultural relations.

Definition of Intercultural Studies

Intercultural Studies is a branch of research that has been developing across different social, political and economic sciences, including anthropology, sociology, political sociology, sociology of organizations, business studies, communication, politics, social policy and public policy. Its emergence as a distinctive branch of research dates back to 1980, when the first issue of the *Journal of Intercultural Studies* was published. Some authors date it as far back as the late 1950s, at least in the discipline of business communication (Dahl 2004:9). As a field of study, it aims to explain intercultural negotiations, cultural formations and challenges to new and old identities. In some cases, it can overlap with immigration studies and inter-ethnic relations; when it looks at the settlement of outsiders within societies, or when it considers the coexistence of different cultural groups and its effects within a society (Meer and Modood 2012; Sze and Powell 2004; Wood et al. 2006).

This report takes into account the literature on intercultural studies, as its main objective is to summarize how debates on interculturalism and the related concept of "Intercultural Dialogue" have developed in recent years. These notions have been explored far less than other similar terms, such as multiculturalism (Meer and Modood 2012; Sze and Powell 2004; Wood et al. 2006). Meer and Modood (2012) claim that there are four domains in which interculturalism can be distinguished from other similar notions:

1) It concerns something greater than coexistence, such as dialogue and interaction;
2) "Interculturalism is conceived as something less 'groupist' or more yielding of synthesis than multiculturalism" (Meer and Modood 2012 177);
3) It is more committed to societal cohesion and nationality;
4) "It can be criticized for consisting of illiberal practices, particularly when related to the concept of intercultural dialogue" (*ibid.*).

According to the two authors, even if it is possible to understand interculturalism as a distinct concept, it remains complementary to multiculturalism. Wool et al. (2006), instead, consider that interculturalism can be differentiated from multiculturalism for the key role that communication plays. Indeed, this is mainly the case when we refer to intercultural dialogue, as every aspect of it lies firstly in the field of communication. Sze and Powell (2004) instead claim: "Multiculturalism tends to *preserve* a cultural heritage, while interculturalism acknowledges and enables cultures to have currency, to be exchanged, to circulate, to be modified and evolve" (*idem*: 8).

Interculturalism across the Social Sciences

Until now, many disciplinary debates have focused on how intercultural dialogue takes place among different groups within a society. In the field of social psychology, Henry Tajfel explains the essential role that relevant "others" play. The notion of "group" for him refers to a collective of people who perceive themselves – and are perceived by relevant outsiders - as belonging to the same ethnic, cultural or religious community (Tajfel 2010). The literature in the field of intercultural studies has also analyzed perceptions relating to the dynamics of "us and them" and their possible outcomes within societies (Gagnon and Iacovino 2004). However, political developments in the "New Millennium", as Harvey Kushner named it (Kushner 1998), have raised issues of "Intercultural Dialogue" also in the practice of high-level meetings.

In the field of International Relations, a number of scholars in the 1970s considered the implications of cultures on international events and dynamics (Heald and Kaplan 1977; Iriye 1979; Wallerstein 1990). However, before the emergence of constructivism, which can be dated back to the publication of "Anarchy is What States Make of It" (Wendt 1992), studies taking into account cultural elements and factors were infrequent in International Relations. Even though cultural approaches to the analysis of international affairs are quite widespread now, very few studies on the topic of intercultural dialogue in the international arena exist (Aggestam and Hill 2008; Hafez 2000; Silvestri 2007). As yet, to our knowledge, no studies have taken into account its developments within the Security Council of the United Nations.

When taking into account this higher level of analysis, "Intercultural Dialogue" takes place between "civilizations", "cultures" in a wider sense, groups of nations or states which share wide cultural, ethnic or religious frameworks (Hafez 2000; Silvestri 2007). Each of these expressions brings with it a particular interpretation of both who the subjects of this dialogue are and which parties and levels should be involved in its implementation. It is even hard to agree on the final aim of intercultural dialogue itself (Bello 2013). What has been found, within both scientific debates and its very practice, is that intercultural dialogue is always related to both the structure and evolving dynamics of power relations (Kim 2009; Wallerstein 1990).

Defining the Self's and the Other's Relevant Cultures

Kim (2012) claims that it is possible to identify five different research trends in intercultural research; each of these trends is based on a binary relation of the Self with the "Other", the Self in the end aiming at ingesting outsider groups. He argues that all these different approaches "can no longer deal with the complexities of a multicultural/globalizing society" (Kim 2012: 11; Yep 1998).

Indeed, in the early 1980s, collectivism did not take into account possible combinations of individualism and collectivism and consequently reduced outsiders to stereotyped individuals or groups of individuals, considered to be in opposition to the interests of the endogenous group. Even when the debate left the irreducible opposition of collectivism versus individualism, still, within the debate, the perceived necessity of reducing the other to another part of the self remained (Kim 2012). In fact, assimilationist theories claimed that acculturating outsiders was of benefit for both dominant and marginal groups. As Yep (1998) notes, assimilation of outsiders to dominant groups had never been questioned before then. In the structure of power relations, there was an implicit opposition between "us and them".

Reynolds demonstrates how "diplomatic history can learn from historians and sociologists of culture" (Reynolds 2009:127). He uses three historical examples of summitry to explain how simultaneous translations affect negotiations positively. They allow counterparts to associate discourses, sentences and phrases with the tone of voice and corporal expressions of the speaker, both of which help facilitate interaction. However, what really made a difference to the outcomes of negotiations were the cultural backgrounds of political leaders.

As Alexander Wendt shows in the field of International Relations, cultures and ideas are as real as material resources for international actors playing in the international arena (Wendt 1999). Definitions, negotiations and struggles around cultures all contribute to structuring power relations

in ways which are similar - in their outcomes - to those produced by the means of arms, capitals, lands, or partnerships. Consequently, those who can establish both the content of "Intercultural Dialogue", as well as its main players, will be able to structure the consequent power relations. They will be those speaking of, and owning, "intercultural dialogue". They will choose the relevant platform upon which it takes place. This very definition will impact upon what is allowed and desired in UN members' relations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Intercultural research should try not to base studies of intercultural interaction on the binary relations between "us and them", insiders and outsiders or within any other hierarchy that considers one part as inferior or marginal or less successful than the other. By transposing the debate developed within intercultural studies into the field of International Relations, the following suggestions arise:

1) Groups cannot be reduced to an assemblage of stereotypes; there are always possible interactions between collectivism and individualism, which can concern both whole groups and individuals, including political elites and leaders.

2) Attempts to assimilate or requests to develop some competences to the detriment of its own cultural patterns always engender stressful situations for outsiders. This will preclude the success of any negotiation.

3) Definitions of competent cultures shape the structure of power relations.

Applying this to the examination of "Intercultural Dialogue" as it developed within the UN Security Council entails considering the way in which each of the international actors involved in the discussion think "Intercultural Dialogue" should be implemented. This will structure both the meaning of "Intercultural Dialogue" itself and the way relations between UN members will develop. Ensuring that this process of definition is important to all concerned parties, and that there is no preferred version of "Intercultural Dialogue" or a hierarchy or main versus marginal players within it, will help to secure peace and good relations. After all, nothing prevents multiple "Intercultural Dialogues" from taking place. This has not been considered in UN Security Council speeches until now. And yet, this is what is happening in practice (see Bello 2013). Relevant points to underline are: if multiple "Intercultural Dialogues" are institutionalized, will all actors understand the importance of being involved in several or all of them? In fact, UN Member States can prevent these "Intercultural Dialogues" from becoming intercultural soliloquies only if they ensure that they become interconnected.

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