

A global citizenship for a multicultural environment¹

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Abstract

Considering the increasing number of people who will be moving across borders seeking a better life chance, it is expected that most countries of the industrialized world in particular will have a multicultural and multiethnic composition . The number of cultures that will have to coexist in the same social environment will increase enormously to the extent that it won't be easy if not impossible, as a result of the many conflicting aspects within the intercultural relations , to give each culture the full chance to be apparent and with a certain impact on the general social life . These countries will be facing unprecedented challenges and problems sometimes affecting their very existence. In order to maintain their social cohesion and their political unity, they will have to work out practical solutions with unfortunately very few alternatives and through many compromises and certainly with more sacrifices . And among questions that might be raised:

1- How should social life be reinforced in such a dynamic multicultural environment?

2- What type of citizenship would be needed ?

3- If a more global citizenship can give better chance to social stability and social harmony how are individuals and communities going to manifest their proper identity without being absorbed by this global society ?

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4- How will individuals be prepared to live and work in this fast changing global society ? What sort of education is needed for that purpose ?

5- How is society going to maintain its historical identity to which people in the past , present and future would relate ? What will happen to religions, family life, traditions, values?

The attempt to give answers to these and other related questions will necessarily engage the discussion into a predictive framework and put it sometimes within a more fictive view. This, of course , will not eliminate the possibility to evaluate the human and social experiences and particularly the way cultural compromise is worked out .

Key words: global citizenship, social identity, multicultural environment.

المخلص

مواطنة شاملة لمجتمع متعدد الثقافات

بالنظر إلى تزايد عدد الأشخاص الذين سيتحركون عبر الحدود سعياً إلى إيجاد فرصة أفضل للحياة، من المتوقع أن تتشكل المواطنة في معظم بلدان العالم الصناعي على وجه الخصوص من تركيبة بشرية متعددة الثقافات والأعراق. و نظراً للعدد المتزايد من الثقافات التي ستتعايش في نفس البيئة الاجتماعية فسوف يكون من الصعب إن لم يكن مستحيلاً، نتيجة حضور الجوانب المتضاربة الكثيرة داخل العلاقات بين الثقافات، إعطاء كل ثقافة كامل فرصها للظهور و تنوياً مكانتها والسماح لها بإحداث التأثير الذي يتناسب مع حجمها على الحياة الاجتماعية العامة. و من المتوقع أن تواجه هذه البلدان تحديات و مشاكل لم يسبق لها مثيل تؤثر أحياناً على وجودها ذاته. و من أجل الحفاظ على التماسك الاجتماعي والوحدة السياسية، سيتعين على الجميع إيجاد حلول عملية مع الأسف من بين عدد قليل جداً من البدائل المتاحة و مع تقديم تنازلات و مزيد من التضحيات. و من بين الأسئلة التي يمكن طرحها:

1- كيف ينبغي تعزيز الحياة الاجتماعية في بيئة دينامية متعددة الثقافات؟

2- ما نوع المواطنة المطلوبة؟

Introduction

Considering the increasing number of people who will be moving across borders seeking a better life chance, it is expected that most countries of the industrialized world in particular will have a multicultural and multiethnic composition . The number of cultures that will have to coexist in the same social environment will increase enormously . Asking people to give up their original identities and to adapt themselves to the society's historical predominant culture is no more that practical solution viewed in the past as the " best possible compromise" . But on the other hand , it won't be easy if not impossible to give each culture the full chance to be apparent and with a certain impact on the general social life . It becomes necessary then to extend citizenship so that it includes more and more important aspects of individuals' and groups' life such as languages , religions and traditions and customs .

These multicultural countries will certainly be facing unprecedented challenges and serious problems sometimes affecting their very existence but the cultural diversity so present now is also expected to bring new opportunities to many citizens and may on the long term become one of the main aspects of development .

In order to maintain social cohesion and political unity, such countries will have to work out practical solutions with unfortunately very few alternatives and through many compromises and certainly with more sacrifices . And among questions that might be raised :

1- How should social life be reinforced in such a dynamic multicultural environment?

2- Since citizenship traditionally linked to humans rights can only be viewed as a partial citizenship which cannot offer to individuals more than a partial social integration , what type of citizenship would therefore be needed ?

3- If a more global citizenship can give better chance to social stability and social harmony how are individuals and communities going to manifest their proper identity or are they going to be totally absorbed by this global society ?

4- How will individuals be prepared to confidently live and work in this fast changing global society ? What sort of education is needed for that purpose ?

5- How is society going to maintain its historical identity to which every individual in the past , present and future would psychologically and socially be attached ? What will happen to religion , family institution , traditions , morals.. and all the other individuals' and communities' valued aspects of life ?

The attempt to give answers to these and other related questions will necessarily engage the discussion into a predictive framework and put it sometimes within a more fictive view. This, of course ,will not eliminate the possibility to evaluate the human and social experiences and particularly the way cultural compromise is worked out .

I- Social life reinforcement

The necessity to reinforce social life is practically linked with the very existence of the society and without doing so this latter will weaken and won't be able to efficiently face internal and external challenges and cannot therefore compete to achieve at different levels the many objectives by which it may confirm its national identity and its strength and worth between communities and nations.

There are of course many ways to reinforce social life and encourage citizens to engage more and more in social activities and to entertain better relations and solid ties with one another, chief among them :

1- Fostering respect to diversity in all its aspects (Niето ,S ,2000) . This diversity should be regarded as a source of wealth and richness that can be fully invested and not

necessarily as a threat to the social security and stability which we have to face.

2- Facilitating cross-cultural understanding among all members of society by eliminating all sorts of handicaps that may interfere with the smooth interaction between people of different religions and of different cultures (Pattnaik j ,2003). They will therefore have all the chance to learn from each other and to be in a direct contact with other religious and cultural aspects which will undoubtedly help people to accept each other . It would be expected that the more cultural barriers are eliminated and the more people become accustomed to live together with all their differences (Pattnaik, J. 2003) .In this way ,by considering, of course , the necessary time that will take, we may succeed to build societies of what some of them call “ the open cultures” (Vermes G.,Labat Cl.,1994) where everyone would feel unconditionally free to interact with the other members of the society .

3- Building an effective multicultural education system that may help children in particular to naturally bring to the school environment their unique experiences ,expectations , skills , interests and dreams (Koppleman and Goodhart ,2010) ,so that every person will have the possibility to self-actualize and work out his views and convictions and realize his projects and objectives without being frustrated or forced to act or react unintentionally . By giving more chance to students from different cultures to verbalize their wishes , present their opinions , we are, on the one hand , helping each one of them to construct his confident identity and thus live in harmony with his proper culture , and preparing them , as well , to build their life vision , show to the other individual or groups of citizens their way of life within a healthy democratic atmosphere and work out therefore each one’s social inclusion with a high positive self-esteem .These students , as expected , may become closer to each other and will , as a practical and profitable choice , entertain positively more open and friendly relationships (Vandenbroeck M., 2005).

4- Developing awareness among members of the community of the danger that may come from segregation and discriminative positions in societies which have become increasingly diverse . People from all cultural backgrounds should always react negatively to such behaviours and contribute effectively to the elimination of all possible internal conflicts between the citizens which may arise in the future .This awareness is the fruit of the educational effort invested within the family institution as well as schools , and through the different medias contribution .The Citizen, by the time ,develops sensitivity to racism and will spontaneously reject all its forms and feel disgusted to see it exhibited in some people's behaviour. This type of response once generalized could become an efficient means to protect national unity and safeguard social cohesion .

5- Spreading a culture of cooperation and coexistence between individuals and groups would hopefully contribute to make an end to all forms of aggressive conflicts and why not lead to peace inside and outside society .People are generally willing to make sacrifices and postpone some of their rights' demands in order to achieve balance within the community and help reach the general consensus among citizens . Intercultural dialogue , if widened , can also contribute a lot in dealing constructively with these different identities and in sustaining social cohesion through appreciating diversity but at the same time preventing cultural divides .

II- The Citizenship needed

The needed citizenship in these multicultural environments should necessarily be more global so that it may be able to include every member of the society without any exclusion , and certainly cannot be based on particularities or on specific aspects relevant to certain cultures or beliefs or customs and not to others .This will be naturally seen as discriminative positions and will probably reinforce hatred between the citizens and will not , in any way, help them to entertain healthy relations so necessary

for social stability. This is why global and multicultural citizenship is necessary and may be easily adapted to support social unity since every individual within the large society would feel that he is at home . Of course when it comes to practically define such a citizenship it would not be that easy and including a component or excluding another will not be as direct and logical as one may think (Berry, J. W., 1991) . This is why sacrifices are required of all influential actors in the community with the keenness of all these parties to reach common denominators that unite and not divide. For these people it represents the best adapted means to maintain order benefiting of course from the constructive engagement of all members of the society without any marginalization .

We will probably tend to discuss citizenship in terms of rights and duties rather than qualities and characters so that all members of the society will feel the presence of their citizenship and be proud of it through what they benefit of rights and what they engage as contributions and duty fulfillment . But this social strategy , I suppose , will have to change as people become more assured and confident and more indulged in their role performance . They would be willing to cooperate with others and make more sacrifices for the welfare of all citizens and the stability and security of the homeland .

III- The proper identity within the global citizenship

As we explained above social stability is at risk when the citizenship is built on discriminative aspects and that people should be prepared to a wider life where they are expected to appreciate the values and beliefs of others as they expect to have their own values and beliefs respected from others. This as I said gives better chance to social harmony . The problem which we will face is how individuals and communities are going to manifest their proper identity if they are going to be totally absorbed by this global society ? Do people have to forget about their original identity and live as citizens without identity and without history ? or do they have to live

with a certain number of identities adapted to the different contexts and stick to the global identity when it comes to nationwide matters ? (Cummins, Jim.2001) . It is a fact that when an individual feels he is fully and unconditionally accepted in his society , he will increase his enthusiasm and willingness to cooperate with his own people and build effective humanitarian bridges and responsible relations with them. But if you ask him to give up elements of his identity that are so important for him , you are as a matter of act asking him to live in his society without his proper personality and therefore without identity . Such a practical problem needs a practical solution because people from many cultures are living together in the same environment and have to find out a way to organize their sharing life . It seems difficult , however , to do the compromise between accepting the uniqueness of each individual in all its dimensions with all its rights and the uniqueness which accommodates to the sharing aspects of social life on which citizenship is supposed to be constructed (Banks , J. A., et al. ,2001).

The equilibrium would never be reached in life reality and within the dynamic relations between people and communities . Some authors generally affirm the dissimilarities in the way people interpret or accept knowledge sharing due to their cultural background . Others viewed it as the fruit of educational systems and consider for example that western cultures do not encourage a social exemplar of knowledge sharing and that these latter are more likely to embrace values of self-determination, independence and the attainment of personal interest whereas Asian cultures ,as explain Yang , nurture a sharing and teamwork environment (Nadene King, et al , 2007).

IV- Preparing the individual to live in the global society

The global society is built as such that each individual human being living in that society will feel his profound integration and consequently would be freed from any

strangeness feeling or of being threatened since all races , colors , languages, traditions , and religions are integrated parts within the national identity .To make life easy in a global society individuals need to be prepared to live with all these multicultural aspects and respect each others' convictions and affiliations in a spontaneous manner without feeling being forced to do it . This will not happen without the serious contribution of education , particularly in facilitating the acquisition of the knowledge , attitudes , skills and behaviours necessary for the adaptation to the social realities (Banks , J.A, 1997) .

Educational curriculums should be presented as globally as possible in order to avoid internal conflicts between individuals and groups with different cultural and religious backgrounds .This of course will not help the individual to reinforce his proper identity and to acquire the necessary knowledge related to his proper convictions and proper traditions . As if we are attempting to prepare people to adapt to a strange context with no color and no smell and to forget about themselves about their history.

Some propositions with regard to goals that multicultural education would take into consideration such as:

- Developing multiple historical perspectives .
- Strengthening cultural consciousness and intercultural competence .
- Learning to accept and appreciate cultural diversity .
- Learning to respect human dignity .

One should remark that in the absence of a deep change in the individuals' philosophy of life, views, attitudes , reactions , and in their disposition to share with others the maximum and restrain from doing the minimum that may hurt and put social stability at risk :

- These goals could only partly be reached and conflicts within this diversified life are expected to rise.

- The cumulative unsolved problems faced by individuals and communities will push to more open conflicts inside the society .

In this essential preparation of the citizen who will be able to successfully live a multicultural environment , we certainly need the engaging contribution of many parts mainly teachers spend who through a direct contact several hours with their students (Zeichner K., Hoeft K., 1996; Akkari, A., 2006) , school counselors who usually entertain specific relations with some of these students and where their awareness of school realities may help them provide effective multicultural guidance (Victoria Merrill-Washington, 2007 ; Constantine, M. G., & Gainor, K. A. , 2001) , and principally parents and other important family figures (Trumbull, Elise et al ., 2001; Vandebroek M., 2005) .

V- The social historical Identity and the global society

As it has been asked before how will society maintain its historical identity to which all individuals relate in the space and time ? If we admit that the limits of each society are defined by what really exist within as cultures , religions , traditions , customs, languages ... , in this case we may have generations of people different from each others in these cultural , religious and traditional ingredients , which means that people of the past cannot through what they had in common relate to what makes the social reality now and that people today will not in their turn relate to the social realities in the future since we are living in a constant changing world characterized by the international migration and mobility . Does this mean that the national identity will have to change as well . If this is the case we will theoretically have less intergenerational conflicts since all generations are accepted and their values are integrated but on the other hand we will have no continuity of the society during the time .

Conclusion

It is a fact that diversity within societies has become a reality that cannot be underestimated and life has to be organized in a certain way that help objectively use and take the best of it . The simple strategy that may engage people in a harmonious life is to learn to accept one another without preconditions and entertain the relation through a more global citizenship that integrate all members of society and exclude no one on any basis .

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