

The Migration Challenges: Building Networks of Cultural Collaboration to Support Non-Violent Bottom-Up Solutions to the Conflicts Looming on the Horizon

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The paper examines the current international tensions vis-à-vis the growing migration flows and sets out some topics relating to human rights, useful for relaunching intercultural dialogue in Europe and with the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. In particular, it examines the concept of human dignity according to the Muslim philosophers 'Abid al-Jabri, Taha Abderrahmane and Hasan Hanafi, as well as the Syrian secular poet Adonis' vision of an ideal multicultural city such as Naples, which in his view offers a useful model to respond to the European migration crises.

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We live in a historical phase of change dominated by fear, “real fear” due to economic crises, nuclear nightmare and atmospheric disasters, as well as “perceived fear” due to the growing numbers of immigrants, or “created fear of the ‘Others’”. Social analysis and data show that among large part of the European population the illusion has spread that isolation from the rest of the world and separation between natives and immigrants can reduce the economic and social crises. Immigrants are considered “foreigners to beware of”, as their manners and customs are supposed to threaten European values. It is not a solely European problem in the USA the “Muslim ban (2017 has recently been issued, but restrictive laws have also been promulgated in Chechnia as well as in the Chinese region of the Xinjiang¹.

In Italy, as in France as elsewhere in Europe, right wing journals defend the need to save our “national identity” in the name of our national homeland, in a word in the name of our shared character and culture. As an example of the subtle threat of these ideas I may mention the recent book by an eminent linguist, Raffaele Simone², that affirms the real risk for our societies is due to the fact that most immigrants are young men and their uncivilized culture is a threat for our women because they may rape them. The tone of the debate is very harsh, the intellectual opponents to these ideas have published in Facebook a Letter written in the late 1940 by Don Lorenzo Milani³, where the famous Italian priest and educator addressed to the military chaplains affirming:

“I will not discuss the idea of a National Homeland, I don’t like such kind of divisions. If you have the right to divide the world between Italians and foreigners, let me tell you that in this sense I have no national homeland”⁴.

The relevance of Don Milani's words lies in the fact that he underlines the right not to separate humanity, in the letter – written shortly after the end of the fascist period in Italy - we find an alert to the risk of a misleading interpretation of nationalism.

Europe has recently been facing a growing wave of national populism in response to the emergence of migration flows. The result is that European citizens, while thinking about protecting their rights, are violating the rights of those human beings fleeing wars and famine, seeking a better life.

As president Daisaku Ikeda affirms in his last peace proposal:

every human being – immigrant or citizen – has the right to enjoy human fundamental rights. Ikeda quotes the declaration by Louise Arbour, the UN special representative for international migration, underlining the urgency of viewing the international crises from a human rights perspective⁵.

If we take into account the situation in Italy, over 30% of the population fear Muslim migration even if the data show that the majority of immigrants are not Muslims. This feeling is the result of extensive aggressive propaganda that paved the way to the rapid spread of islamophobia. Islam is seen as a violent religion due to the recent wars in Middle East, the cruelty of Isis and the spread of the “Islamic terrorism” that has killed innocent victims until recently in Europe (Strasbourg 2018)⁶.

These dramatic events, and the military strategies of terrorists in the Middle East and North Africa, have, moreover, brought the hatred of the right-wing extremists to the boil. The return of fanatical racism, looking back to Nazism, has led to further criminal bloodshed, as recently seen in New Zealand with the attack on peaceful Muslims gathered together to pray in the mosque⁷. The spiral of revenge seems to be ineluctable; suffice it to recall the sudden outbreak of Islamic fanaticism even in Sri Lanka⁸.

In Europe the ever-growing atmosphere of hatred in political debate seems to have cancelled the major improvement achieved in intercultural dialogue and activities with the 1995 Barcelona declaration⁹. Since then many intellectuals, both religious and secular, have made useful contributions to the debate on promoting dialogue between the various cultures. Amongst these, the celebrated Christian philosopher Hans Kung warned that the 21st century would not be a Europe-centred century, nor American or Asian, but a world century, and therefore there was the need to strive for a universal civilization. He believes that it is possible to create a global ethic because “there will be

no new world order without a global ethic”¹⁰

As a result of these proposals on the political level, the European Community decided to establish the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) in Naples (2003)¹¹ to promote partnerships in social activities, affairs, economy and security, human rights, women, empowerment, energy and environment. To bring about interaction among civil societies on these topics, in 2005 the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (Euromed) set up the *Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures*, a network of civil society organizations dedicated to promoting intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean region¹².

Today, to stem the surge of racism dialogue must be restored amongst the intellectuals of various cultures and religions, returning to reflection on the shared values serving to construct a new humanistic approach.

Here I will recall the ideas of the Moroccan philosopher Taha Abderahman and the Egyptian Hasan Hanafi, among the most prominent Muslim intellectuals engaged in revisiting traditional thought and at the same time very active in the dialogue with western scholars. On the secular side, Adonis, the famous Syrian poet, is among the most prestigious Arab thinkers engaged in dialogue with European intellectuals.

Abderahman believes that humanity needs to go beyond the limits of western rationality and look for an answer to the present crises in a renewed ethics. Abderahmane believes that there is a bond between four major components: religion, reason, ethics, and doing/ practice, seen as inseparable entities. He seeks to re found Islamic philosophy on an ontological fact he sees as having been lost since early Islamic times. This ontological fact is the “original unity” between religion and politics, and between this-worldly affairs and other-worldly worlds, which makes religion vital to human life, for religion means ethics, and the human condition without ethics is impossible; that is, there is no man or woman without ethics, since it is the latter that distinguish human beings from other existing beings, and gives meaning to life. Abderrahmane argues at length that religion equals ethics, “religion and ethics are one”¹³.

The Egyptian philosopher Hasan Hanafy (b. 1938) affirms that the history of religion can be responsible for this mistaken perception, because Islam is a humanistic religion, as he declares:

“In Islamic revelation there are Five Universal Intentions, serving as the

positive foundation of Islamic law. They can form a core set of values for a Global Ethics, a unified collective action for Human solidarity. First the preservation of Human life is an absolute and primary value. In no way and under no circumstances can life be sacrificed. All laws have to give way if human life is in danger. Life is not only for human beings but also for nature, as plants and greenery”¹⁴.

Hanafy, who has been a mentor for many followers of the Muslim Brothers, is showing clearly that in Islam life is sacred, and therefore there should be no misunderstanding about Muslims’ attitudes in respect for the dignity of human life. Furthermore, the Egyptian philosopher affirms:

That Human compassion disconnected from a clear theoretical awareness of the state of the world and the actual distribution of wealth, is a pure human sympathy without knowledge, leaving science and knowledge in the hands of the powerful socio-political elites”.

Hanafy argues that poverty is a problem that should be faced honestly because “denouncing the devil without preventing it, or announcing the good without implementing it is empty utterance, a rhetorical global ethics for human solidarity. (...) While people need not only words but also deeds.”¹⁵

Recently, in the occasion of Pope Francis visit to Dubai an important document was signed by him and the chief of the historical Egyptian Mosque of al-Azhar. The document emphasizes the importance of the role of religions in the construction of world peace; it upholds the necessity to work on shared values as the right to enjoy freedom, and defend the right to a Justice based on mercy is the path to follow in order to achieve a dignified life to which every human being has a right.¹⁶

From a more secular point of view the famous Syrian poet Adonis (b. 1930), in a poem dedicated to the city of Naples and Mediterranean culture, writes on the hardships of the immigrants, victims of the oppositions between the radical fundamentalism of the East and the rigid efficiency of the West – a tragic conflict that also involves a generation gap within and outside the Arab world. The poet believes in the revival of a new humanism, and recalled the example of multicultural cities of the past, like Granada under Muslim rule in the Middle Ages and modern Naples. The Italian city, as many other Italian cities, is hosting a growing number of immigrants coming

from different cultural areas¹⁷; but in this city, both in the centre and in the periphery, a multi-ethnic community is working and organizing their lives side-by-side with the local population. As a matter of fact, the rhetoric of political campaign is creating distrust and suffering. Education and positive communication can promote a recognition of the past that can open the way to mutual cooperation in the present and sharing a common future. Adonis believes that human civilizations, and particularly Mediterranean history, offer many examples of cooperation and trade throughout the centuries that, in spite of wars and antagonisms, can give practical answers, useful today to address the complex challenges of globalization.

On a theoretical basis, it is possible to break down the wall of cultural separation between North and South if attention is focused on human dignity, but actually the wall of evil propaganda is separating and dividing people and has produced mistrust and conflicts among the citizens; the result is that this wall has been transformed into laws that make the European borders impassable for people coming from south of the Mediterranean shores.

Adonis writes against the hostile ideologies, inviting the intellectuals to give new life to humanism, promoting exchange of knowledge and mutual understanding that can produce a better, peaceful coexistence. The roads are paths leading to freedom, away from violence and blood:

Maybe the roads fly in Naples between the wings of blackbirds working to free a poet in my country from a prison of a cage, or perhaps they fly in the face of Arab immigrants spitting blood and running away or fearing this other blood bleeding in their land. "I work here, I doubt I will return", a doctor sighs "I write poems in the language of this host country" said a young man looking old¹⁸.

In Adonis' vision these roads are symbols of the vital impulse that binds different places as in an embrace capable of welcoming those fleeing from dictatorships and wars.

A cultural border should not be an obstacle to knowledge, but should rather become an opportunity to create a new frontier where dialogue builds a broader concept of culture. This transformation is possible, but it requires effort on the part of civil society to promote mutual understanding. Women are naturally gifted with capabilities to embrace and bridge the gap between generations; they can make the difference; there can be no change without

their engagement in favour of the new generations. As Daisaku Ikeda pointed out in his 2018 peace proposal, women empowerment is urgent also because they constitute almost half the human population¹⁹. Intellectual speculation alone is not enough, social harmony begins from the smallest community, the family; an important role of mediation in families is played by women. This role is void of significance if there is no respect for women. The problem is evident if we take as an example the numerous debates that emerged after the recent terroristic attack in Brussels: much analysis but scant solutions to help immigrants to cope with growing racism and marginalization. We often stop to analyze the reasons for the desperation in which the new generations live in the slums, but they do not move in a coordinated way and with clear objectives in the planning of solutions. The problem is complex and the state alone cannot solve it, for the cooperation of civil society and especially of educational institutions, religious leaders and intellectuals is necessary.

Involving women is fundamental for transmitting the healthy values of their traditions of origin while at the same time helping to harmonize also with the rules of the host countries. Women empowerment advances through the possibility of overcoming the misunderstanding between the different cultures that meet on the same territory. It is true that many of the immigrant women do not participate in social life but through their children they are an important support in the transmission of knowledge and in harmonization with the rules of the culture in which they live. The patriarchal culture of origin is a clear obstacle to this process of empowerment, which is why civil organizations and schools should support women in this fundamental role of linkage²⁰.

In Europe today, the Arab intellectual lives in a 'frontier zone', because his/her condition means that he/she finds him/herself in an oscillating space, they live like the Europeans, with all the consequences of the social and economic crisis, and at the same time they virtually live in their country of origin because the media have reduced the distance from the place they come from, almost to the point of annihilating it.

This special condition makes them sensitive to the needs of those who are outside the "fortress Europe" as well as of those inside, and therefore this special condition means that they can be excellent mediators. In particular, in their separation from social life women are in contact through their children with the system of values that these should acquire in schools. At the same

time the Media allow you to remain mentally “inside” the country you left behind.

This flexibility in the vision of the present leads the consciousness of the intellectual immigrant to become flexible, necessarily provisional, forced as it is to change continuously. The Arab feels European and then again Arab, according to the changing conditions of the immediate circumstances, of historical time and of the geographical place where he/she lives.

This oscillation is well described by Adonis, especially in the works of the early European phase, when his imagination was constantly on the border between East and West; he lives among the icons of a world that fascinates him, but which at the same time worries him, because of the continuous attacks of racist violence that he is facing. Arab intellectuals like the Syrian poet have never ceased to participate in dialogue and cultural exchange with Western poets and critics over the years in an attempt to release Arab culture from the periphery to which it has been relegated because of the colonial heritage. Europe still occupies a central place in Western culture today, but for Adonis it is in a phase of crisis confronted with the strength of new emerging cultures.

Rediscovering its Islamic roots could also encourage a rebirth that allows Arabic culture to facilitate the coexistence of peoples of different cultures in its territory. The Islamic world has been able to demonstrate over the centuries that it can manage coexistence in respect and tolerance of the other²¹. Adonis recognized a similar provision of openness and tolerance in Naples.

The city appeared to him open to the Mediterranean and at the same time receptive of cultural instances from the rest of the world.

Adonis believes that the woman is the symbol of rebirth; by nature she knows how to settle differences and generate harmony from diversity. The poet promises rebirth, but starts from the contingent reality where he alludes to the difficult condition of departure for Arab women because of patriarchy:

*“I will not return to my country ...” a young man whispered that he was about to cry seriously Today I would not like you to be Arab!*²²

The words of Adonis expose the harsh realities of immigrants to urge greater compassion towards those who live and produce by our side. This is why he encourages intellectuals to promote the exchange of knowledge, starting with translation and diffusion of ideas through cooperation, in

particular with women civil and religious associations.

In some countries in the world of Islam there is a growing awareness of the need to promote the empowerment of women, and indeed this aspect also came to the fore in the joint declaration of Shaykh di al-Azhar and Pope Francis²³. Some concrete examples of this approach are offered by the agreement drawn up between the Italian government and the Council of Muslim civil associations in Italy, which includes religious and secular associations, while the other major example of the women empowerment approach is to be seen in the committee created by the Tunisian government to fight against violence towards women. This committee represents a significant step forward in the fight against femicide – a crime of worldwide occurrence that does not stop at ethnic or religious borders, and stands in the way of the development of women’s full economic and intellectual autonomy. Again in Tunisia, associations of professionals have been at work for decades, assisting women in the rural areas or outskirts of the big cities to develop productive capacities they can apply at home, helping them to sell their products²⁴. These are simple examples of collaboration that catalyses even on such a small scale; it takes many small and relatively modest actions to create a network of collaboration indispensable to support non-violent bottom-up solution to the conflicts looming on the horizon. It is indispensable for all to take action to mobilise a mechanism for collaboration that leaves nobody behind.

notes

- 1 United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Russia*, 19 September 2018, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcf1f86c.html> [accessed 20 July 2019]; <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/Anti-terror-drive.html>; **The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang**, in http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/18/c_137904167.htm
- 2 Simone R., *L'ospite e il nemico* (the Guest and the Enemy), Garzanti 2018.
- 3 Don Milani created a school in a peasant area for poor children in order to provide them with adequate education, see Don Milani, *I Care*, Roma, Libreria Internazionale Paesi Nuovi, 1965. [it includes: *I cappellani militari e l'obiezione di coscienza e Autodifesa di Don Lorenzo Milani*. Grech, M. and Mayo, P. “What Catholic educators can learn from the radical Christianity and critical pedagogy of Don Lorenzo Milani,” *International Studies in Catholic Education*, Vol. 6 No.1, 2014, pp. 33–45; Mayo, P. “Critical approaches to education in the work of Lorenzo Milani and Paulo Freire”, *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, Vol. 26, No. 6, 2007, pp. 525–544. Reproduced in Mayo, P., *Echoes from Freire for a Critically Engaged Pedagogy*, New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013;

- Mayo, P., “Lorenzo Milani in Our Times” *Policy Futures in Education* Vol. 11 No. 5, 2013, pp. 515–522; Mayo, P., “Italian signposts for a sociologically and critically engaged pedagogy. Don Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967) and the schools of San Donato and Barbiana revisited”, in *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 36, No. 6, 2015, pp. 853–870.
- 4 Don Milani, “Lettera aperta ai cappellani militari” (Open letter to the army chaplains), for this letter he was tried and condemned, Tunstead Burtchaell J., *A just War no Longer Exists: The Teaching and Trial of Don Lorenzo Milani*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.
 - 5 Ikeda D., *2018 Peace Proposal, A movement of common persons toward the age of human rights*, in <https://www.sgi.org/about-us/president-ikedas-proposals/peace-proposal-2018/index.html>. The special position for immigrants has recently been created by the UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres, Louise Arbour, Highlighting “Positive Impact” of Migration Key to Changing Policies, Public Opinion, interview with Louise Arbour, 28 aprile 2017, <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/feature-highlighting-‘positive-impact’-migration-key-changing-policies-public-opinion—un-envoy>.
 - 6 Terrorism in the EU: terror attacks, deaths and arrests, see Eruoparl.Europa.EU <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=2ahUKewiO9Pq4o8PjAhUE26QKHxJ3BocQFjACegQIAhAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.europarl.europa.eu%2Fnews%2Fen%2Fheadlines%2Fsecurity%2F20180703STO07125%2FTerrorism-in-the-eu-terror-attacks-deaths-and-arrests&usq=AOvVaw0Cx1WFYgD3Mud83PXdsPeu>
 - 7 Here is the news as it was presented in the Arabic net *al-Jazeera* <https://www.aljazeera.com/topics/events/zealand-attack.html>. The same news presented in the British Journal *The Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/new-zealand-attack>.
 - 8 Sri Lanka bombings 2 may 2019, in *al-Jazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/sri-lanka-bombings-latest-updates-190421092621543.html>
 - 9 https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/barcelona_declaration.pdf
 - 10 Kung H., *Global Responsibility. In Search of a New Global Ethic*, SCM Press, London/Continuum, New York 1991.
 - 11 <https://www.pam.int>
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 - 15 Id.
 - 16 The event was in the 3-5 february 2019, see http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html.
 - 17 Adonis, “Concerto per il Cristo velato”, Arabic text and Italian translation F.M. Corrao, *Adonis. Ecco il mio nome*, Donzelli Roma 2019, pp. 154-179.
 - 18 Adonis, “Concerto per il Cristo velato”, quoted, p. 172-173.
 - 19 Ikeda D., *Peace proposal 2018*, quoted.
 - 20 Pepicelli R., “The changing role of women in society” (with M.C. Paciello) in C. Merlini and O. Roy (eds.), *Arab Society in Revolt: The West's Mediterranean Challenge*, Brookings

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- 22 Adonis, “Concerto per il Cristo velato”, quoted.
- 23 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html
- 24 Pepicelli, Renata, *Rethinking Gender in Arab nationalism: women and the politics of modernity in the making of nation-states. Cases from Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria* in “Orientale Moderno”, sècial essay on “Arab nationalism(s) in the Twentieth Century” ed. Massimo Campanini, Vol. 97, Issue 1, 2017, pp. 201-219; Sophie Bessis, *Femmes du Maghreb: l'enjeu*, Paris, J C Lattès, 1983; Id., *La Double impasse : l'universel à l'épreuve des fondamentalismes religieux et marchand*, Paris, La Découverte, coll. « Cahiers libres », 2014 ; Sana Ben Achour, *Violences à l'égard des femmes: les lois du genre*, Réseau euro-méditerranéen des droits de l'homme, Tunis, 2016; Bochra Belhaj Hamida, *Guide des droits des femmes: Le divorce*, Tunis, 1999.

