3)

COUNCIL CONSEIL
OF EUROPE DE L'EUROPE

Youth Building Peace and Intercultural Dialogue **Project**

Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention **Project**

Joint Youth and Culture Initiative

Expert Group Meeting

"Intercultural Dialogue, Interreligious Dialogue: The Role of Stereotypes and Prejudices"

16 – 17 June 2003

Council of Europe, Strasbourg (France)

MEETING REPORT

Table of contents

1. Introduction

The joint Youth and Culture expert group meeting around the themes of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, more particularly the role of stereotypes and prejudices, gathered together about twenty experts in the field, representing academia, persons responsible for youth organisations and cultural actors from across Europe.

The meeting was organised by the Council of Europe, within the framework of the Action Plan for 2002-2004 of the *Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention* Project (Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage, Cultural Policy and Action Department) and the *Youth Building Peace and Intercultural Dialogue* Project (launched by the Directorate of Youth and Sport).

The object of the informal meeting, the first of its kind, was a 'brainstorming' of ideas, information and experiences to prepare for the forthcoming Intercultural Forum in December 2003 (*Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention* Project). It connected also to one of the priority fields of the *Youth Building Peace and Intercultural Dialogue* Project, with special emphasis on e.g. the prevention of conflicts and violence and the fight against everyday violence. In addition, the meeting gave representatives of various youth organisations the opportunity to meet experts and other cultural actors and to profit from a fruitful exchange.

Thanks to the combination of participants with different backgrounds and the method of working – including an intercultural simulation exercise, introductory speeches and round-table discussions – the atmosphere of the meeting was very convivial right from the beginning. Participants seemed to feel free to express themselves and the discussions were vivid; the meeting offered participants a real forum for respectful dialogue.

Participants were invited to think about a few key questions, namely: what is the role of prejudices and stereotypes in intercultural dialogue, how can stereotypes be coped with and managed, and how can they be combated? In addition to debate around these questions, the aim of the meeting was to formulate recommendations to various public actors.

In this report the main discussion points are underlined, combining the spoken and written contributions of participants.

2. Rethinking stereotypes

The starting point was the meaning of the concept of stereotype. To make the associated inequalities and often-unconscious attitudes more visible, the meeting started with a simulation exercise. The aim of this small role play in front of the European Youth Centre was to experience what it would be like to be someone else in society. Each of the participants was ascribed a 'new identity' and had to react to questions concerning their social and economic position and ethnicity/religion by stepping forwards or back, according to the resources, potentialities and self-image of the person she/he was representing. At the end some people (the most advantaged) were far ahead, while others had ended up at the opposite end of the space.

Discussion followed and the participants retailed how they had felt during the simulation and afterwards. The reactions varied: some of those who had advanced the most (such as a university professor) said they had felt guilty about being so far ahead and not being able to help others; those who had remained very far behind (refugees, a prostitute etc.) had had the feeling that after so many steps backwards they hadn't even cared when they saw others advancing. Some people from the middle range, the majority, pointed out that often they hadn't paid much attention to the position of others but had focused only on their own situation and on the people who were near to them.

Everyone agreed that the exercise had highlighted how easily one forgot the others around one and the inequalities in contemporary society. The questions to which the participants were invited to react were also criticised for measuring only economic capital and forgetting the other capitals (cultural, social) a person might have and sometimes there was a lack of information about the context of the person in question, but on the other hand these points only highlighted the complexity of identities.

After the practical exercise, Professor Rupert Brown's spoken and Marc Thomas' written contributions in particular clarified the theoretical perspective on the concept of stereotype.

2.1 Definitions: are stereotypes also needed?

According to Rubert Brown,[1] a 'stereotype' can be defined as an attitude towards an invididual defined in terms of the group to which the latter is perceived to belong, or towards such a group of persons; in other words: when thinking of *"someone as belonging to a group it is likely that we will also think of them as having certain characteristics just because of that group membership"*. Stereotypes in themselves could be positive, neutral or negative, he said.

Negative stereotypes were usually called prejudices and had negative consequences for those on the receiving end. Too often prejudices were directed at people who might belong to a minority, in the linguistic, religious or ethnic sense of the word, and for whom identity stereotypes were often harmful. Often, Michael Privot[2] suggested, the principal source of stereotypes and prejudices was simply a lack of clarity and information, as well as confusion between different things. According to him, this was the case with Islam and Muslims since social, cultural and religious levels of analysis were frequently confused, often without knowing contemporary practices and without differentiating religion and culture: "*Most people speaking about Islam, Muslims and non-Muslims, do not have the necessary background to provide fully authorised opinions. It doesn't mean that their opinions are not legitimate; it depends on the level of reality that we want to analyse…*"

Positive stereotypes are possible, for example stereotypes of women which attribute a lot of positive values to women in general. But Professor Raphaël Drai[3] pointed out that even positive stereotypes prevented a real encounter, since they formed 'glasses': when looking through them, one obtained only a partial picture of the person or group in question. Furthermore, basically positive stereotypes like 'all Japanese are hard-working' could be harmful in that an individual constantly faced with such expectations could feel frustrated if they felt they were not fulfilling them. Some participants put the notion of a 'neutral stereotype' in question and no examples of this type were offered.

The nature of a stereotype can vary from positive to negative according to its context of use: for example, Professor Brown said that patriotism – referring to the feeling of belonging to a certain group of people (common history being a basis for common identity etc.) – didn't necessarily imply being against other groups. Nationalism, on the contrary, included the idea of one's own group being better than other groups, in which case persons belonging to other groups could be seen only through 'glasses of prejudices'. Adam Mouchtar[4] explained how in contemporary Germany anti-Semitism was latent and had taken new forms: Mr Mouchtar called 'philo-Semitism' an attitude that was seemingly very complimentary – positive stereotypes about high levels of education, appreciated professional skills etc. – but implied prejudices and an exclusive attitude towards Jews. Furthermore, anti-Semitism in contemporary societies was expressed in terms of anti-Zionism.

Participants agreed with Professor Brown's remark that stereotypes were very easily acquired but difficult to change, partly since sometimes judgements or behaviours were guided unconsciously by stereotypes. And negative stereotypes often caused vicious circles: for example, if a person faced an English person with the stereotype of English people being 'reserved' in mind, she/he might unconsciously start to behave

---

[1] Professor, Centre for Study of Group Processes, University of Kent, UK.
[2] Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations, FEMYSO, Brussels, BELGIUM
[3] l'Université Aix-Marseilles III et l'Université Paris VII, FRANCE
[4] European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS/UEEJ), Bonn, GERMANY

in a reserved way towards the latter, and that behaviour would in consequence be reflected by the other – so the stereotype of the English would be 'confirmed' and kept alive.

Stereotypes have different functions. Marc Thomas[5] presented these in a table of two columns: on the one hand stereotypes were necessary, but on the other they were dangerous. According to him, stereotypes are necessary to orientate oneself (the human brain needs to classify information in order not to be at sea), to explain (to deal with uncertainty and foresee the behaviour of others, and so to organise oneself) and to know oneself (the 'difference' of others reveals to us our own identity). Understood in the widest sense of the word, stereotypes were inevitable and necessary since they helped to deal with the complexity of the world: "*faire l'économie de la pensée*", as Professor Drai put it. The simplifying function of stereotypes was noted by a few of the participants during the practical exercise: without any stereotypical knowledge of 'typical' behaviour, for example of people having a certain faith or being in a certain situation, one wouldn't have been able to react according to the person she/he was acting.

In their dangerous function, stereotypes simplify (generalise and classify according to one's own criteria), judge and underestimate (by taking one's own cultural system of explication as a universal principle) and are often ethnocentric by denouncing differences rather than valuing them. In this function, stereotypes included dynamics of regression and stigmatisation that could lead to hate, Professor Drai underlined, speaking also about his personal experiences in Algeria before, during and after the war. For fragile communities and their identities, negative stereotypes and prejudices could be critical.

2.2 How to combat negative stereotypes

Participants were without exception of the opinion that even if stereotypes were in a certain way needed (see above) and people had to live with them, it was also possible to change them. Professor Drai recalled that each stereotype had its history and that stereotypes were transferred in different ways – and so should be taken into account in such fields as music, literature, theatre and religion, with research conducted on the ways anti-Semitic and racist attitudes were expressed in them. Jean Philippe Restoueix[6] however emphasised that the fight for more open attitudes was difficult, since stereotypes often represented hierarchies and power: prejudices and stereotypes were tools of control to subordinate persons and groups.

In his written contribution, Marc Thomas argued that the starting point in dealing with stereotypes and prejudices was to distinguish between the individual and the group, and to keep in mind that an individual could not be reduced to the supposed characteristic(s) of his/her group. Furthermore, one should accept the diversity of points of view and adopt constructive perspectives towards the novel and unseen, as well as enhancing the value of difference. A remark by Simone Bernhardt on the role of creativity in moving towards real dialogue (working on common memory, for example) could be seen to complement these points.

In practical terms, multicultural education and bringing different groups into contact for dialogues in 'safe places' were seen as the best ways to combat prejudices. The European Youth Centre was mentioned as an example of a neutral and functional forum for discussion. One of the starting points to deconstruct stereotypes, Professor Drai pointed out, was to make them explicit and to discuss them, and towards that end neutral spaces for dialogue were needed. Agata Dziewulska[7] suggested that religious and political leaders should be given the opportunity to take part in inter- and multicultural educational programmes, in addition to the students and cultural actors already active in the field.

Adam Mouchtar made an interesting comment in indicating the sometimes unexpected ways stereotypes might even serve as tools in fighting against prejudices: some ethnic or religious groups (Mr Mouchtar was taking Jews as an example) would tell ethnic jokes about their own group, and humour could be seen as one way of coping with the difficulties resulting from prejudices.

3. Is dialogue possible?

The other central questions of the meeting were those concerning the possibility of dialogue: even if participants acknowledged its absolute necessity, there were certain disagreements on what dialogue should be about. Some were of the opinion that in a democratic society everything could be discussed,

---

[5] Directeur pédagogique, Centre de Médiation Interculturelle, Metz, FRANCE
[6] Administrator, European Youth Centre, Council of Europe
[7] Researcher, European University Institute, San Domenico di Fiesole, ITALY

including issues of religion – that the human condition could be discussed in a universal manner – while others were very sceptical about the scope of inter-religious dialogue.

Ciad Taskin said he was very much in favour of intercultural dialogue but couldn't see suggestions about inter-religious dialogue as realistic – in his view, the two should be kept separate. Simone Bernhardt[8] was quick to point out that at the first discussions about the Draft Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conf.lict Prevention (prepared by the *Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention* Project team), the suggestion that the title should refer to 'Inter-group Dialogue' had been rejected as religion was understood as a component of culture, not totally independent of it. Michel Privot contended, however, that the combination caused problems, since everything depended on the context: sometimes there might be agreements and the possibility of dialogue at the cultural level but not at the religious one.

Professor Drai was in favor of dialogue in every field. He argued that in a democratic society religious 'dogmas' could be debated, in particular if they contained prejudices or stereotypes about the in-group or people belonging to other religious groups. He was anxious about different usages of the term 'other' (*autre*), the word being much deployed without regard to the reservations and specifications philosophers would want to identify

The Conditions of Dialogue

Robin Wilson[9] responded to the challenge of defining the conditions of dialogue and presented six, divided into two groups: those associated with the public sphere and those relating to each of us as individuals

Conditions in the public sphere were:

(1) recognition of our common humanity, as 'small differences' could otherwise be magnified into violent conflict and vast inequalities accepted without demur;
(2) an equal chance for everyone to pursue their conception of the good life, which meant human rights, democracy and the rule of law had to be guaranteed for all; and
(3) neutrality of the apparatuses of the state, including separation of church (or party) and state, so that no one conception of the good was elevated over others.

Conditions at the individual level comprised:

1. acceptance of uncertainty, as certainty meant a refusal of dialogue and in today's individualised, detraditionalised and globalised society the only certainty *was* uncertainty;
2. a 'reflexiveness' about our own conceptions of the world, characterised by an ability to stand back and look self-critically at ourselves; and
3. a recognition of the complexity of individual identity and so acceptance of the existence of multiple identities, rather than reducing individuals to a single, ascribed and stereotypical characteristic.

The conditions presented by Mr Wilson stimulated a vivid debate, engaging most of the participants. Some, like Kelig Bossert-Puyet,[10] were of the opinion that the six points represented goals to be attained rather than starting points for dialogue. State neutrality was put in question by Adam Mouchtar, who said that a totally neutral state was a utopia (Mr Wilson agreed but recalled that any religion or politically dogmatic order could only be democratic if the faith were not obligatory). According to Gesa Tessényi,[11] the most problematic point was the acceptance of uncertainty: in many religions, there was no space for doubt. Marc Thomas continued that the capacity to accept uncertainty depended also on the individual – their personal convictions, life history etc. As to a common humanity, Professor Manfred Beller[12] remarked that one had to face the fact that there were different perspectives on the human condition in general. And Ciad Taskin disagreed with Mr Wilson's 'mosaic' view of cultures and religions: if too many colours were mixed, he claimed, the result was only grey.

In light of his extensive practical experience, Michel Roekaerts[13] warned against imposing dialogue on those unwilling to enter it. He told of how, for example, an exchange of stamps had once provided a safe form of intercultural dialogue between two groups believing they had little or nothing in common, beside

---

[8] Project Manager, *Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention* Project, Council of Europe
[9] Director, *Democratic Dialogue*, Belfast, UNITED KINGDOM
[10] Youth Forum, Brussels, BELGIUM
[11] Director, Intercultural Leadership School, Strasbourg, FRANCE
[12] University of Bergamo, Bergamo, ITALY
[13] Pax Christi, Brussels, BELGIUM

the officially announced function of the meeting. Agata Dziewulska very much agreed and suggested that it would be sometimes useful to gather people to discuss themes like sustainable development, bioethics and practical questions, rather than vague topics like intercultural or inter-religious dialogue. The possibilities of dialogue depended also on the starting points – very different in democratic states and in conflict areas, Simone Bernhardt pointed out, having given the example of a situation in which dialogue was not possible because the parties to it were seen as traitors by their own communities. Alexandra Raykova,[14] continuing in practical vein, remarked also that the physical conditions for building real dialogue were necessary, not always evident in conflict areas.

The general opinion of the effects of dialogue was rather realistic: differences were not going to disappear but we should, as Marc Thomas said, ask ourselves *"How do we live together with disagreements?"* Teppo Sintonen[15] added that there were different levels of acceptance: even where there were disagreements and a will to live with these in accepting the habits and opinions of others, it was necessary to set limits to that acceptance. Dialogue shouldn't lead to an ethnic relativism, were *"everything is accepted in the name of cultural differences"*. Dilek Ayhan[16] and Simone Bernhardt both added the important point that to make dialogue possible, despite differences, we should think about the common values that we shared.

4. Small steps towards real dialogue

The common conclusion was that dialogue is necessary, dialogue needs time and to attain important goals through dialogue we must go further with small steps. As Jean Philippe Restouiex put it, small steps are the only way to individual changes and, through that, to change society. In this vein, the participants thought about concrete actions that could be taken by different social actors to promote tolerance and intercultural dialogue.

As a general preamble, participants saw the need for a dynamic effort to promote respect, mutual knowledge and understanding: 'living together' doesn't happen by arranging cultural diversities into a universal monoculture, but rather by learning, respect and teaching. In summing up their reflections, they formed the following recommendations to various individuals and organisations in the public sphere:

For politicians:

1. Politicians must engage in *continuing* dialogue with NGO practitioners and researchers; it would also be fruitful to have dialogue with those whose opinions differ vastly.
2. Politicians need to assume responsibility for addressing the implications of multi-ethnic society.
3. Particular efforts are needed in spheres such as education, labour and culture.
4. There is an argument for a single minister being responsible for intercultural issues, to ensure 'joined-up' responses and that ethnic concerns are clearly recognised.
5. Reconsider citizenship laws (e.g. the tradition, albeit recently qualified, of *uis sanguinis* in Germany).
6. Create real (face-to-face) networks for international exchange of good practice.
7. Politicians should not use the 'race card' for partisan advantage – recognise democracy can not be about subordinating minorities.
8. Intercultural dialogue is a valued process to pursue in and of itself, regardless of outcomes.
9. Legislation should outlaw incitement to ethnic hatred, or 'hate crimes'.
10. Set general limits regarding what is negotiable and what is not, the frameof reference being respect for human rights and equality of the sexes.
11. Encourage all countries to develop systems of global education, on human rights, intercultural themes and sustainable development.
12. Find and finance 'safe places' to ensure dialogue.
13. Initiate and finance projects (or promote and support existing projects) such as those of the Council of Europe, UNESCO, NGOs and smaller associations.
14. Support all efforts to promote intra-community discussions.

---

[14] Foundation for Promotion of Roma Youth, Sofia, BULGARIA
[15] Senior lecturer, University of Jyväskylä, FINLAND
[16] Landsradet för Norske Ungdomsorganisjoner, Oslo, NORWAY

For civil society:

1. Civil society organisations have similar overall responsibilities in promoting intercultural dialogue to those of other public actors.
2. Such organisations should connect issues of intercultural dialogue – e.g. via placements, attendance at seminars, circulation of ideas inside organisations – to their existing work.
3. Senior NGO figures should give a lead to set a tone for other staff in their organisations – 'mainstreaming'.
4. NGOs can co-operate with each other, including via common actions, and profit from synergies with intellectuals, fieldworkers, intergovernmental organisations, representants of small associations and minorities to take on initiatives of a more general character, eg. to produce interactive pedagogical materials (conceptual, role-plays etc.).
5. Organisations can provide entrées for participation in society by ethnic-minority individuals.
6. Organisations should promote youth exchanges between totally different contexts.

For intellectuals (in the widest sense of the word) and media:

1. Intellectuals should be careful not to see ethnic minorities as a research 'problem'.
2. Research should treat those they research as subjects, not objects.
3. Encourage research by individuals from ethnic minorities themselves – giving a 'voice'.
4. Encourage dissemination of research beyond the academic world via diverse forums.
5. Academics need to contribute to developing 'objective' understandings of the past, as against culturally partisan positions.
6. In education, favour openness to diversity at the same time as critical thinking by teaching critical regard towards the media, working on stereotypes and prejudices (for example, stimulate the use of university research and the knowledge of those working in the field of stereotyping and intercultural issues during the training of teachers and journalists).
7. The media need to have diverse staffs – and not to 'pigeon-hole' minority journalists in minority stories
8. It is difficult to bring the media to account, so they have a big responsibility for reproducing stereotypes – too often extreme groups are more visible than people presenting average opinions.
9. The media should project a *range* of images of ethnic minority persons – not just negative ones.
10. There is a need for the visual media to ensure minorities are *rendered* visible.

Council of Europe:

1. The Council of Europe can create fora which can bring NGOs in contact with politicians, to give the latter a 'wake-up call'.
2. It can interrogate ministers (e.g. of culture, youth) in member states as to how they are developing intercultural dialogue.
3. Politicians could be 'trained' by the Council of Europe in what intercultural dialogue entails.
4. The Council of Europe could assist self-organised events bringing young people together (including language-learning).
5. It can promote good practice in youth education in this domain (including teaching materials).
6. It can develop more internal co-ordination across directorates to exploit more effectively its repertoire of knowledge (e.g. its related work vis-à-vis the Framework Convention on the Rights of National Minorities).
7. It could send educators into primary and secondary schools, as well as to universities, to promote intercultural activities.

Evaluation of the meeting by the participants

Without exception, the participants found the meeting and discussions around the table, as well as outside the seminar room, fruitful. The extraordinary 'mixture' of actors was regarded as a success. Many said that the personal contacts and forthcoming co-operation they had planned with each other were the greatest advantages of such an informal meeting. Ciad Taskin, who said that there had been a lot of *"idealistic and romantic thinking, which was of course positive"*, described the general atmosphere nicely!

On the other hand, there were also critical voices: a few thought that a lot of potential to contribute had been left untouched, and many questions left unanswered. In future, Aste Dokka[17] suggested, it would be good to have some more academic perspectives on the topic at the beginning and to work in a more 'structured' way: sometimes the point was a little bit lost when discussing a very general theme. To avoid that, it might be good to have working sessions on more specific topics and the goals and objectives of the meeting made clear in detail at the beginning. On the other hand, the openness of the forum was seen positively. In any case, *"There is still a lot of work to do in this field"*, said Jean François Delage,[18] summing up the thoughts of participants.

As to working methods, the participants had found particularly the work in small groups effective and interesting, and Teppo Sintonen suggested that in future more of this style should be adopted. Also the exercise at the European Youth Centre was seen as having made a good and unusual start to the meeting. All the participants expressed gratitude for having been invited and a willingness to continue the work started. The meeting was a successful brainstorming and no doubt each of the participants returned home with new ideas – even with a "*new way of thinking"*, as Agata Dziewulska suggested.

---

[17] World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), Oslo, NORWAY
[18] Editeur de la collection « Idées reçues », Paris, FRANCE

<u>Appendix 1 : PROGRAMME</u>

Monday, 16 June 2003 (Room 14)

9.30 – 11.00   Opening of the meeting:

        a. Presentation of the Youth and Culture Sectors
        b. Presentation of the aims of the meeting

Presentation of the participants and their work or organisations

11.00 – 11.30   Coffee Break at the **European Youth Centre**

11.30 – 12.30   European Youth Centre: Do you know who I am?
        a. Simulation exercise
        b. Debriefing

12.30 – 14.30   Lunch break at the **European Youth Centre**

***
(back to Room 14)

14.30 – 18.00   Stereotypes and prejudices: from your experience and your field of work, how do you perceive these notions and their impact? What difficulties did you encounter?
        a. Round table
        b. Discussion

Tuesday, 17 June 2003 (Room 8)

9.30 – 12.30   Under what conditions is intercultural/interreligious dialogue possible?
        a. Intervention of Mr Robin WILSON
        b. Questions, discussion and debate

12.30 – 14.30   Lunch break

14.30 – 15.30   Recommendations to:
        a. Politicians
        b. Civil society
        c. Academic world
        d. Council of Europe

Discussion in working groups

15.30 – 16.00   Coffee Break

16.00 – 17.30   Reports from the working groups and Conclusions
Evaluation of the Meeting

Appendix 2 : LIST of PARTICIPANTS

Ms. Dilek AYHAN (E)
Landsrådet for Norske Ungdomsorganisasjoner (LNU - Norwegian Youth Council)
Nedre Volgate 5, N - 0158 OSLO
☏　　+47 23 31 05 90　　　　　　　　　Fax: +47 23 31 06 01
E-mail: Dilek.ayhan@lnu.no

Professor Manfred BELLER (E)
University of Bergamo, Dipartimento di Linguistica e Letterature comparate
Piazza Vecchia, 8, IT-24129 BERGAMO BG
☏　　+39 03 52052405　　　　　　Fax　　+39 03 52052439
E-mail: manfred.beller@unibg.it

Ms. Kelig BOSSERT-PUYET (E)
Youth Forum
Rue Joseph II, 120, B- 1000 BRUXELLES
☏　　+ 32 2 230 64 90　　　　　　　Fax:　　+32 2 230 21 23
E-mail: youthforum@youthforum.org
　　　　kelig.puyet@youthforum.org

Professor Rupert BROWN (E)
Centre for the Study of Group Processes, Department of Psychology, University of Kent, Canterbury,
UK - KENT CT2 7NP
☏　　+ 44 1227 827468　　　　　　　Fax: + 44 1227 827030
E-mail: r.j.brown@kent.ac.uk

Ms. Marthese CASSAR (E)
Oeucumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE)
5, rue du Champ de Mars, B – 1050 BRUXELLES
☏　　+32 2 510 61 87/ 510 61 92　　　　Fax: +32 2 510 61 72
E-mail: general.secretary@eyce.org;
　　　　marthese.a.cassar@gov.mt

Professor Nadya DANOVA (E) *(to be confirmed)*
The International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations,
45, Moskovska str., BU - 1000 SOFIA
☏　　+359 2 980 62 97　　　　　　　Fax +359 2 980 62 97
E-mail: cibal@balconia.org

M. Jean François DELAGE (F)
Editeur de la collection "Idées reçues"
Maison d'Edition le Cavalier Bleu, 23 rue Truffaut, F - 75017 PARIS
☏　　+33 1 44 69 15 15　　　　　　　Fax : + 33 1 44 69 15 10
E-mail : jean-francoisd@prat.com

Ms. Äste DOKKA (E)
World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)
Skogholtvn 27, N – 1178 OSLO
☏　　+47 22 28 83 12 / 47 93 23 51 70
E-mail: wscf-europe@xs4all.nl
　　　　ophiese@hotmail.com

M. le Professeur Raphäel DRAİ (F) *(lundi le 16 juin)*
Professeur d'université à la l'Université Aix-Marseilles III (droit et science politique) et de l'Université
Paris VII, 11, rue Lamblardie, F - 75015 PARIS
☎   +33 1 43 07 10 94   Fax : +33 1 43439768
E-mail : draid@libertysurf.fr

Ms. Agata DZIEWULSKA (E)
Researcher, Department of Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute,
Via Deli Roccettini 9, I – 50016 SAN DOMENICO DI FIESOLE
☎   +39 055 4685 1
E-mail : agata.dziewulska@iue.it

M. Jean HURSTEL (F) *(mardi le 17 juin)*
Ms Sarah LEVIN (E/F) *(lundi le 16 juin)*
Coordinateurs, *Banlieues d'Europe*
BP 101-67069 STRASBOURG Cedex
☎   +33 388 22 2443   Fax: +33 388 75 58 78
E-mail: banlieues.deurope@wanadoo.fr

M. le Professeur Jacques-Philippe LEYENS (F)
Université Catholique de Louvain, 10, Place du Cardinal Mercier, B-1348 LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE
☎   +32 10 47 43 77   Fax: +32 10 47 37 74
E-mail: Jacques-Philippe.Leyens@psp.ucl.ac.be

Mr. Adam MOUCHTAR (E)
European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS/UEEJ), Kolfhasstr. 9, D – 53173 BONN
☎   + 49 177 4230790
E-mail: info@eujs.org

Mr. Michael PRIVOT (E)
Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO), Rue Archimède 50, B –
1000 Brussels
☎   + 32 2 280 69 22   Fax: + 32 2 280 69 23
E-mail: info@femyso.com

Mr. Michael ROEKAERTS (E)
Pax Christi, 21 rue du Vieux Marché aux Grains, B – 1000 BRUXELLES
☎   +32 2 513 81 69   Fax: + 32 2 502 46 26
E-mail: youth@paxchristi.net

Ms Alexandra RAYKOVA (E)
Foundation for Promotion of Roma Youth, 99 Suhodolska Str, 1373 SOFIA , Bulgaria
☎   +359 2 23 27 44 (office)   Fax: + 359 2 988 53 49
E-mail: alexraykova@hotmail.com
        alex_raykova@yahoo.co.uk

Professor Teppo SINTONEN (E) *(Tuesday 17th June)*
Senior Lecturer, Jyväskylä University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Philosophy, PO. BOX 35, FI -
40014 JYVÄSKYLÄ
☎   +358 14 260 29 26   Mobile: +358-50-3380 705
E-mail : temisi@yfi.jyu.fi

Mr. Ciad TASKIN (E)
Lahnstr. 32, D – 60326 FRANKFURT AM MAIN
☎ +49 69 75009561 Fax : +49 69 75009561
E-mail : cihattas@yahoo.de

Mr Géza TĒSSENYI (E)
Director of the Intercultural Leadership School, 44, rue de Chambord, F – 67000 STRASBOURG
☎ +33 (0)388 457 203 Fax: +33 (0)388 418 993
E-mail: geza@intercivilization.net

M. Marc THOMAS (F)
Directeur pédagogique du Centre de Médiation Interculturelle, 15, rue du Ruisseau, F - 57070 METZ
☎ +33 387 74 46 52 Fax. +33 387 74 46 52
E-mail : cmi@mediation-interculturelle.com Web : http://www.mediation-interculturelle.com

Mr Robin WILSON (E)
Director, *Democratic Dialogue,* 23 University Street, BELFAST BT7 1FY, United Kingdom
☎ +44 28 9022 0052 Fax: +44 28 9022 0051
E-mail: robin@democraticdialogue.org
mailto:cmi@mediation-interculturelle@com

M. le Professeur Vincent Y. YZERBYT (F) *(excusé)*
Université catholique de Louvain, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l'Education
Unité de Psychologie Sociale et des Organisations, Place du Cardinal Mercier, 10
B-1348 LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE
☎ +32 10 47 43 76 Fax: +32 10 47 37 74
E-mail: vincent.yzerbyt@psp.ucl.ac.be

COUNCIL OF EUROPE SECRETARIAT

DGIV - DIRECTORATE OF YOUTH AND SPORT
European Youth Centre
30, rue Pierre de Coubertin
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
http://www.coe.fr/youth

Youth Building Peace and Intercultural Dialogue **Project**

Mr Jean Philippe **RESTOUEIX**
Administrator in charge of the Assistance Programme
Tel: +33 3 88 41 32 17 Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 27 78
E-mail : jean-philippe.restoueix@coe.int

Mrs Nelly **CIRÉ-ISNARD**
Assistant
Tel: +33 3 88 41 32 26 Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 27 78
E-mail : nelly.cire-isnard@coe.int

***

DGIV - DIRECTORATE OF CULTURE AND HERITAGE
Palais de l'Europe
F- 67075 Strasbourg Cedex
http://www.coe.int/InterculturalDialogue

***Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention* Project**

Mrs Simone **BERNHARDT**
Project Manager
Tel: + 33 388 41 2604   Fax: + 33 388 41 3782
E-mail: simone.bernhardt@coe.int

Ms Sandra **FERREIRA**
Project Assistant
Tel: + 33 388 41 3421   Fax: + 33 388 41 3782
E-mail: sandra.ferreira@coe.int

Project Trainees

Ms Henna **MIKKOLA**

M. Guillaume **HERVIEUX**

Appendix 3: Written Contributions

Stereotypes:
where they come from, what roles they play, and how we deal with them

By Robin WILSON, *Democratic Dialogue*

> O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
> To see oursels as others see us
>
> ('Oh, that God would give us the very smallest of gifts
> To be able to see ourselves as others see us')
>
> from Robbie Burns, *To a Louse*

The vulnerability of modernity

When I was growing up in the north-east corner of Ireland, my (late) mother frequently recited the above extract from the work of the man often deemed to be the Scots national poet. My mother was of a humane cast of mind. And Burns' invocation in the late 18th century of the need to be able to reflect upon how others reflect upon us is the *sine qua non* of tolerance in the early 21st.

Indeed, it is even more so in our time, as sociologists have characterised 'reflexiveness' as a defining feature of 'late modernity' (Giddens, 1994: 80-87). It is characteristic of this 'reflexive modernisation' that individuals are required to be increasingly autonomous and self-determining at the same time as the conventional social roles they might have occupied are less clear and more volatile. Each of us is now presumed to be '*actor*, *designer*, *juggler* and *stage director*' of our 'biography, identity, social networks, commitments and convictions' (Beck, 1997 : 95). And the trouble is, there is now no God—or, at best, there are a range of competing Gods—to tell us what to do.

For instance, until little over a generation ago it was clear, across most civilisations, what it meant to be a 'woman': it was to be confined to the domestic sphere, under the control of the male 'head of household', and to be responsible for childbearing and childrearing. It was a predictable life of drudgery. None of that, at least in advanced capitalist societies since the late 60s, is quite so clear any more. And, at one level, good riddance. But, at another, to be a 'woman' today may mean pursuing a profession through a succession of career moves, while coping with the emotional demands of an evolving range of significant others—perhaps including a second or third partner and/or step-children—and trying to accommodate to this complex adult life-cycle having a child or children of one's own (if one can do so at all). 'Emancipation' may not always be what this feels like.

This is also a world (Held *et al*, 1999: 424-431) of ever-deepening global flows—of communications, commodities and people—careering at ever-faster speed without pre-determined direction. And the nearest thing to a pilot is an increasingly unilateralist United States, driving forward internationally the neo-liberal world view that has come to dominate its politics over the last two decades (Hutton, 2002).

It is a world where the post-war international institutions—the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—established after the last war to prevent another lurch towards economic desperation and totalitarianism have increasingly been bypassed or suborned to that predominant American agenda (Stiglitz, 2003). And it is a world of rampant inequality: according to the UN Human Development Index, the income gap between the richest and poorest quintiles of the world's population, which stood at 3:1 in 1820, had by 1970 reached 30:1 and by the end of the century 86:1 (Halliday, 2001: 66).

All the elements have been here for some time for a relapse from the 'golden age' of post-war, democratic European prosperity into a rage of movements of 'counter-modernity' and 'constructed certitude' (Beck, 1997: 62). And this, indeed, is the world in which we have increasingly found ourselves—a world characterised by inchoate ethnic nationalisms, such as erupted in ex-Yugoslavia in

the early 90s, and by the religious fundamentalisms at the root of September 11th. And, particularly in western Europe, it is a world where the asylum-seeker and the immigrant have become the new Barbarian, in which 'post-fascist' parties have thrived and mainstream politicians have looked anxiously over their shoulders at them (Roxburgh, 2002).

Fundamentalism can be defined as the refusal of dialogue (Giddens, 1994: 85). Why listen to anyone else when one already knows the answer? Why open oneself to doubt and uncertainty? As such, fundamentalism is not the monopoly of any one religion and nor does the private pratice of any religion necessarily imply a fundamentalist commitment to impose it on other- or non-believers via dominance of the public sphere. Fundamentalism can be associated with the sanctification by the state of secular political dogmas (as in North Korea) as much as religion (as in Iran). Indeed, part of the fear inspired around the world by the current US administration lies in the potent mix of Judaeo-Christian fundamentalism and secular neo-liberal dogma at its heart.

Liberal democracy (which has outlasted all other pretenders) is characterised at its best by a genuine confrontation between adversaries, rather than limitless and potentially violent antagonism. This is what has been described as 'agonistic pluralism', marked by competing, and never finally resolved, arguments between contrasting versions of the 'common good', ultimately derived from left- and right-wing value systems. In the absence of agonistic pluralism, politics all too easily becomes a conflict between ethnic 'collective identities' conceived in an essentialist fashion (Mouffe, 2000: 101-104), as in most of sub-Saharan Africa, for example. Indeed, it is a salutary reminder of the global challenge democracy still faces to recognise that while the number of certifiably democratic states around the world increased from 56 in 1990 to 86 in 2000 that still left a clear majority of the nearly 200 states in the world outside the democratic camp (Halliday, 2001: 75).

Democracies are 'dogged permanently by public disagreements', and are thus always vulnerable to 'morbid attempts to simplify matters' by movements, for example those inspired by nationalism, which would replace pluralism by their version of Order (Keane, 1998: 93-94). Patriotism, again, does not necessarily have a fundamentalist flavour, as 'civic republicans' can recognise each other the world over. But ethnic nationalism shares with religious fundamentalism a sense of a particularist 'chosen people'—by definition morally superior to all others, committed to a radical reversal of perceived lowly status in the world, strictly separated from those who are not part of this sacred mission and mobilising in populist fashion in pursuit of this taken-for-granted global destiny (Smith, 1999: 334-339).

Such movements thrive on a partisan reading of history. They identify a 'chosen trauma', such as the Battle of Kosovo Polje of 1389, which becomes an *idée fixe* capable of blotting out any sense of the elect as other than history's victims. And with the 'time collapse' characteristic of individuals who have not successfully negotiated the 'work of mourning' following a bereavement—continuing to speak of the dead relative in the present tense—they represent this chosen trauma (and this is the sense in which it is chosen) as an ever-present contemporary reality (Volkan, 1997: 30-49). On this basis, they are capable of visiting great inhumanity on dehaumanised others—for example, the victims of Slobodan Milosevic's neurotic nationalist aggression. And they can cast out 'traitors' from their own ranks with equal ferocity—as, in the middle east, the respective assassinations from their 'own side' of Anwar Sadat and Yizhak Rabin were to prove.

The role of stereotypes

This is where stereotypes come in. For a stereotype is 'a highly simplified representation of social realities' and stereotypes create 'a black and white design' that leaves no room for diversity (Bauman, 2002: 115). This can be an apparently positive assertion, though it will then verge on the patronising ('Italian mothers are wonderful') or the jealous ('Jewish businessmen are so successful') and so will, as with all stereotypes, say more about the disposition of the speaker than the supposed object of the speech.

But enemy stereotypes are the really dangerous ones (Beck, 1997: 82): 'They stage and give institutional form with existential force to the great certitude of counter-modernity, the Either-or, that mutes all questions.' They turn genuine, and inherently pluralist, diversity into a bifurcated difference, invested with huge emotional charge. Identities become 'digital' rather than 'analogue' (Ericksen, 1993: 67): the pluralist can feel a bit X (say Catalan), a bit Y (say Spanish), etc (say Barcelona supporter) but for the fundamentalist one is only either X (say Basque) or not X (Castilian)—indeed, what 'X' comes to mean will then be defined negatively by what it, supposedly, is not. The step from such antagonism to polarisation and violence is a short one.

This identity politics thus operates on what Freud called the 'narcissism of minor differences'. For instance, both Turkish and Greek Cypriots promenading in 60s Nicosia (Volkan, 1997: 109) and a Serbian paramilitary interviewed in a Krajina bunker in the early 90s (Ignatieff, 1999: 36) could only distinguish themselves from their 'enemies' by the different cigarettes they smoked!

Stereotyping denies the inherent complexity of every individual's identity, a product as that is of many determinations (every Muslim is not *just* a Muslim). It projects on to the stigmatised 'other' unintegrated aspects of our identity (Volkan, 1997: 89) with which we find it difficult to cope (the 'Irishness' of Ulster Protestants, for example). In so doing, it turns into irreconcilable difference matters (such as an individual's private spirituality) to which we should be publicly *in*different (Ignatieff, 1999: 34-71).

And it reduces every individual to a mere cypher for the group, to the extent that such '*imagined* communities' become treated as if they were ontologically real. There are, for example, individual Serbs, there are associations of Serbs and there are Serbian institutions (such as the Orthodox Church). But to speak of 'the Serbs', as if they comprised a homogeneous, timeless, single corporate actor is to commit the epistemological fallacy of 'groupism' (Brubaker, 2002). From here the only way to 'explain' the eruption of war in ex-Yugoslavia is to conjure up an underground reservoir of 'ancient hatreds', just as '9/11' can only be made sense of, within this perspective, in terms of a 'clash of civilisations'.

Stereotypes, in this sense, are *mutually* recognised by the antagonistic ethnopolitical entrepreneurs who deploy them to advantage. Slobodan Milosevic was as obsessed by the Battle of Kosovo Plain— he chose its 600th anniversary to make his first foray into Kosovo to inflame nationalist feeling there— as western commentators have been prone to identify the wars of the Yugoslav succession as genetically programmed by history (Glenny, 1999: xxiv). And there are many within the Arab world as wedded to the idea of the incompatibility of Islam and 'western' democracy as is the US thinker Samuel Huntingdon (Halliday, 1995).

Indeed, it is in and through 'degenerate spirals of communication' (Giddens, 1994: 245) between opposing ethnic protagonists—critically mediated *by* the media—that intercommunal violence escalates. How can it be, asked so many impotent spectators of war-ravaged ex-Yugoslavia, that those who had lived as neighbours could resort to 'ethnic cleansing'? And the answer, of course, was not an accumulation of individual evil but a process which can be readily charted by which stereotyped conceptions of the 'other' became increasingly prevalent and increasingly 'plausible' at one and the same time. On the one hand, one's 'own side' could thus be recruited to the role of passive and blameless victim; on the other, to the 'other side' could be attributed all responsibility for each twist in the violent spiral (Beck, 1997: 83-84). In Northern Ireland it has even been given a name: the 'blame game'.

And yet here is another twist to the role stereotypes play. For not only can sworn enemies unwittingly collude on the terms of their engagement, but also stereotypes are as much about ensuring loyalty *within the ranks* as prosecuting antagonism against the 'other'. Indeed, for ethnopolitical entrepreneurs, the latter can be a means to the former. In Kosovo, for instance, the violence of the KLA against Serbian forces was initially geared to the polarisation of the society and the strengthening of the paramilitary group's hitherto minoritarian position among ethnic Albanians.

A superficial 'groupism' can prove very damaging to genuine diversity in this regard. A collection of male elders, for example, may present themselves to the local authority as the single voice of 'Muslims' in that area. They may not, however, articulate the views of all female or young Muslims in so doing (Halliday, 2001: 152): 'The right of individuals to question their tradition, and community, must be recognized and must be linked, as it too rarely is, to a recognition that what are presented as homogeneous or consensual communities rarely are.'

Beyond either-or

There is no one 'magic bullet' for destroying stereotypes. We all operate with conceptions of the world that are inherently partial and limited, and we fill in the 'gaps' with assumptions, estimates and guesses which may or may not relate to any empirical evidence and may or may not cohere with anything else we profess to believe. So, there can only be solvents, not antidotes. Yet, paradoxically, this provides the first answer to dealing with stereotypes.

For, if stereotypes are associated with the narcissism of minor differences, then a modesty of self-regard must represent one such solvent (Ignatieff, 1999: 62): 'We are likely to be more tolerant toward other identities only if we learn to like our own a little less.' By the same token, the more we can not only know of others but also the more empathy we can feel with them, the less likely are we to be dependent on stereotyped representations in intercultural encounters. The implications for citizenship education in the school and in situations of adult and informal learning, attuned to an appreciation of cultural diversity, are obvious.

But there are more general lessons for policy-makers here. The politics of 'multiculturalism' (Barry, 2001) has emerged in recent decades as an understandable response to the subordination of ethnic (including religious) minorities in multi-ethnic states. But it has had the unintended effect of hardening communal divisions, particularly in the US—where it has been described as leading to the 'Ottomanization' of society (Hirst, 1994: 66)—and in the UK, where the recent riots in northern English mill towns have led to official anxiety about white and Asian citizens occupying 'parallel lives' (Cantle, 2001).

As Jeff Spinner-Halev (cited in Amin, 2002: 17-18) has put it more generally, 'A multiculturalism that tries to create a society with several distinctive cultures deeply threatens citizenship. In this kind of multicultural society, people are not interested in citizenship; they are not interested in making the state a better place for all; they care little about how public policies affect most people or about their fellow citizens. Even the term "fellow citizen" might strike them as strange. What they have are fellow Jews, or fellow blacks, or fellow Muslims, or fellow Sikhs. Citizens, however, are not their fellows.'

If multiculturalism has been associated with a competitive 'politics of recognition', focusing on minority communal assertion *vis-à-vis* the state, an *inter*cultural perspective focuses rather on the relationships between diverse citizens, and so places a premium on dialogue, with a view to reducing communal tensions.

And if the proliferation of identity politics has coincided with the widening of social inequalities (Barry, 2001: 325), underlying an intercultural perspective must be an egalitarian conception of citizenship—otherwise, self-regard will always take priority over regard for the other and dialogue will never succeed, as one side (the more powerful) will not be listening. And that, in turn, implies that the public sphere should not privilege one identity—in particular an identity associated with a traditionally dominant ethnicity or religion—over others.

Against the more immediate backdrop of two devastating global wars in Europe in the last century, it is easy to forget an older lesson Europe has learned. That is, the post-Reformation lesson that the principle *cuius regio, eius religio*—to each realm its own religion—was a recipe, applied to societies with citizens of more than one faith, for civil war. The only basis for tolerance was for the state to be neutral—publicly indifferent to the private faiths of its citizens (Barry, 2001: 25). This conclusion brought an end to the wars of religion and it is no less applicable today.

The same principle applies to ethnicity more generally. Basing citizenship on ethnicity, the principle of *ius sanguinis* of which Germany is the historical model, is inappropriate (as the 'red-green' governments of recent years have recognised) to more egalitarian times. At worst, it can only lead to such nationalistic intolerance as when Bismarck urged Germans: 'think with your blood'. In a Germany of *Gastarbeiter* and other *Ausländer*, it can never be the basis for civic co-existence.

The neutral state must also be a limited liberal state in this perspective. For it is also characteristic of states that are not neutral, that represent a theo- or party-ocracy, that they are overweening and oppressive too. In such states, eternal vigilance is required, including via a huge apparatus of 'intelligence' and 'security' organisations, to ensure the authority of the official dogma goes unchallenged. By the same token, it is only if the state is balanced by a vibrant civil society—including, for example, independent media offering a range of voices—that particular ethnic associations can thrive and 'safe spaces' for intercommunal dialogue can be established.

In situations of conflict along cultural fault-lines those who would broker reconciliation can only do so to the extent that they are morally indifferent to particular identity choices: the 'honest broker' must always be a neutral one to acquire the (grudging) respect of the protagonists (Gilliatt, 2002). This rule applies as much to non-governmental peace activists as to international statespersons.

It in turn implies that above-mentioned reflexive distancing, that lack of self-regard. Yet what is to fill the identity 'gap'? There is only one answer to this question: it is a commitment to a common humanity, within which all diverse individuals are considered as equal and in which no particular conception of the good is privileged. Individuals who embody such qualities—one thinks of Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel and Mary Robinson—are not thus sanitised nor dessicated.

On the contrary, they are the very role models for 21st-century politics. All have in common—think of Mandela's donning of the Springbok shirt, Havel's lack of vengefulness towards his Stalinist oppressors or Robinson's global outreach at the UN to the poor and the wretched—a civic cosmopolitanism that is the only alternative to the conservative communalism of our time.

And that has a particular European dimension. Those most externalised in Europe—migrants and asylum-seekers—currently only enjoy European citizenship in so far as they can acquire the citizenship of an EU member state. A Europe committed to universal equal citizenship—including entitlements for *all* those who can satisfy residency requirements—could recognise that 'we are mutually and dialogically constituted'. In so doing, and at a time of considerable uncertainty as to what Europe means, it could 'make cosmopolitanism its new ideal of integration and inclusion' (Amin, 2002: 21, 10).

Bibliography

Amin, Ash (2002), 'Multiethnicity and the idea of Europe', unpublished paper courtesy of the author

Barry, Brian (2001), *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Bauman, Zygmunt (2002), *Society under Siege*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Beck, Ulrich (1997), *The Reinvention of Politics: Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Brubaker, Rogers (2002), 'Ethnicity without groups', *Archive Européene Sociologique* 43, 2: 163-189

Cantle, Ted (2001), *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, London: Home Office

Eriksen, Thomas H (1993), *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, London: Pluto Press

Giddens, Anthony (1994), *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Gilliatt, Stephen (2002), 'No surrender? The attachment to identity and contemporary political thought', *Contemporary Politics* 8, 1: 23-35

Glenny, Misha (1999), *The Balkans 1804-1999: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*, London: Granta Publications

Halliday, Fred (1995), *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, London: I B Tauris

———(2001), *The World at 2000: Perils and Promises*, Basingstoke: Palgrave

Held, David, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton (1999), *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Hirst, Paul (1994), *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Hutton, Will (2002), *The World We're In*, London: Little Brown

Ignatieff, Michael (1999), *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, London: Vintage

Keane, John (1998), *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Mouffe, Chantal (2000), *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso

Roxburgh, Angus (2002), *Preachers of Hate: The Rise of the Far Right*, London: Gibson Square Books

Smith, Anthony D (1999), 'Ethnic election and national destiny: some religious origins of nationalist ideals', *Nations and Nationalism* 5, 3: 331-355

Stiglitz, Joseph (2002), *Globalization and its Discontents*, London: Penguin

Volkan, Vamik (1997), *Blood Lines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*, Boulder CO: Westview Press

**Intercultural Dialogue, Interreligious Dialogue:
The Role of Stereotypes and Prejudices**

Council of Europe, Strasbourg (France), 16 – 17 June 2003

Some notes on social psychology and stereotypes

**Rupert Brown
University of Kent**

1. **What are stereotypes?**
   - Whenever we think of someone as belonging to a group it is likely that we will also think of them as having certain characteristics *just because* of that group membership.
   - They can be positive, neutral or negative. The negative kind is usually associated with prejudice.

2. **How do they operate?**
   - Easily acquired/formed
   - Easily activated, sometimes unconsciously
   - Often guide our judgements/behaviour
   - Can be self-fulfilling
   - Not so easily changed

3. **Origins and functions**
   - Individual: simplifies and makes sense of the world
   - Social: justifies the intergroup situation; identity functions

4. **How can they be changed?**
   - New information (education)
   - Contact with other groups (under the right conditions)

5. **Useful references**

Brown, R. (1995) *Prejudice: its social psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell

Biographical information

Rupert Brown is Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Kent (University of Sussex from January 1, 2004). He works in the general area of intergroup relations and prejudice, especially in the field of host-society and immigrant relations.

For more information see: http://www.kent.ac.uk/psychology/people/brownrj/index.htm.

Intercultural Dynamics and Stereotypes

by Marc THOMAS, *Centre de Médiation Interculturelle, Metz*

1. Fostering intercultural dynamics

This text was drafted during an intercultural training course for cross-border holiday camp leaders, following a discussion with the participants (their words are reproduced below in italics).

What emerges from this document is that you first have to experiment with intercultural dynamics before you can begin to analyse them. While it may be necessary to have a few intellectual categories in order to decode what is happening, that decoding is not possible unless the dynamics have been set in motion and the participants agree to be part of them.

Intercultural competence is like walking: you learn to walk by walking!

How then can we overcome stereotypes and prejudices and succeed in understanding each other and co-operating without erasing our differences?

A. ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

a. Starting a personal process

The creation of intercultural dynamics between different individuals calls for the setting in motion, on a voluntary basis, of a personal process comprising the following stages:

- The ability to talk about oneself (and be listened to)
- Expressing feelings (and not only ideas)
- Accepting the way others look at me
- Wondering how I am perceived
- Talking to others
- Coping with the frustration of being misunderstood or confronted with one's own image

b. Identifying the obstacles

- *Being on the defensive*

  "*that's what people think about us, but I'm not sure*"

  → create the right conditions for talking things over, being heard and being understood

- *Comparing*

  Comparisons lead to lower self-esteem and lower esteem for others:
  "you have a lot of bikes whereas we cause pollution with our cars…"
  "French people love their children and families more than us"
  "we have an anthem like other, larger countries"

  → recognise differences without making value judgments
  → look for areas of complementarity with an eye to co-operation

- *Generalising*

  "Germans are like that…"
  "It's hardly surprising, he's Belgian!"

  → identify an individual's distinctive features in relation to his or her group
  "The more we are part of Europe the more we are aware of our Luxembourg identity and the more we emphasise our language and our specific characteristics"

- *Being indifferent*

"I can't believe it: you French people live so close to us Luxemburgers and you don't know us! What about those who live far away!"

→ find opportunities for meeting and getting to know one another
→ give priority to minorities

B. ORAL EXPRESSION

a. Daring to speak up

"Us, stubborn?… I don't know!" (silence - the instructor: "You really don't know?"… He starts talking about himself…)

→ allow people to express themselves, without making value judgments

b. Distinguishing between facts and interpretations

We only have access to reality (the world, things, other people) via our own perceptions (what we see of them, what we can understand, what they remind us of or suggest to us, etc). Another individual in the same situation at the same time will see things differently…

"They're Americanised… Maybe it's because they're not sufficiently proud of their culture…"

→ learn to go beyond personal interpretations and see the facts
→ listen to other people's interpretations as another point of view
→ clarify different points of view and misunderstandings
→ accept diversity of viewpoints and "plural" truth

c. Distinguishing between understanding and agreeing

Something is not justified simply because it is understood.
Do not confuse questions (understanding) and reaction (feeling)

d. Recognising the cultural connotations of vocabulary

The same words in the same language do not mean the same thing in different countries.

- *"Are you talking about patriotism again? In France that's old-fashioned!"*
- *"In our country, Luxembourg, it's a very positive word!"*

C. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

a. Different "codes"

"Codes" are the meaning attributed, often unconsciously, to a gesture or certain words (eg the way people greet each other).
These codes differ from one culture to another and are not necessarily immediately understood by foreigners. This failure to understand causes a loss of bearings and generates feelings of insecurity.

"The encounter with the Malekulas was possible only because an attempt was made to decipher unknown behavioural codes".

→ enter the experience of "losing one's bearings"
→ clarify misunderstandings and even the fears they arouse

b. All kinds of differences

The differences are not only national.
There are regional, social, professional, generational and other differences.

"I'm French, and yet, culturally, I feel closer to the Luxemburgers than I do to the Bretons and the Basques".
"My grandfather always says he's a patriot. But that means nothing to me".

→ recognise that each of us is "multicultural" or "intercultural"

Everyone forms their identity from several cultural sources: family culture, youth culture, student or worker culture etc and from the cultural spheres in which they like to move (music, the arts, sport, leisure activities etc).
With all these different and sometimes conflicting cultural sources, everyone "cobbles together" an identity and tries to find an often unstable balance (who is never "torn"?).
It is within each of us that intercultural dynamics begin.

→ encourage "cross-categorisation"

"categorisation": classification of persons or things according to their similarities and affinities
"cross" the same person is not confined to a single "category" and may, according to the time or the circumstances, have affinities or be in conflict with the same person.

Example:
"I don't feel German at all"
      = I belong to the "French" category
"yet we like the same music"
      = we both belong to the rap music "category"

→ negotiate on a basis of respect and empathy
      discover and understand each individual's identity
      take account of people's different interests

→ foster co-operation, relying on:
      similarities to facilitate understanding
      differences to develop complementarity
      "The engineers' technique was improved by contact with the Malekulas".

Stereotypes are necessary…	Stereotypes are dangerous…	To deal with stereotypes and prejudges
…to orient	**…they simplify**	**To distinguish between the individual and the group**
The human brain needs to classify information it gets in order not to be lost	They generalise	- To differentiate, to pick up diversities: the group is not homogenous to learn to acknowledge differences
Almost without being conscious of it, we classify different food to fruits, vegetables, meat, fish…Peaches, pears and raisins are fruits; a black person surely comes from Africa, another with slanted eyes comes from Asia etc.	*But are avocados fruits or vegetables? Are moorhens meat or fish? And there are a lot of black people who are not from Africa but from the West Indies, America or from other parts of the world!*	- To individualise, to acknowledge the persons An individual can't be reduced to the characteristics of his/her group. To spot the specificities.
This classifying is a first rough analysis that strips away the differences between the members of one group and underlines the differences between the groups	They classify according to my own criteria and my own representations (I see reality only through my own glasses)	**To accept the diversity of points of view**
"All the black men look alike"… *"People from Marseille have nothing to do with people from Lorraine!"*	*But it is white people that say that!* *Seen from Moscow or Peking, is there any difference?*	- Other criteria of evaluation - Other visions of the world
… to explain	**… they judge and underestimate**	**To look for other explanations**
When someone behaves in an unknown or unusual way, I'm surprised and I quickly feel insecure and I need explications to reassure myself	They take my cultural system of explication as an universal principle	- The behaviour of the other can be explained by his/her cultural references and by his/her own criteria - To enrich my explanations with alternative solutions
When a foreigner behaves in strange way; "It doesn't surprise me; they're all like big kids!"	*My conceptions of a child and an adult can't be used to interpret strange behaviour*	**To acknowledge interaction as a source of conflicts and as a "place" to "work".**
To deal with uncertainty and to reassure oneself by saying that I am/we are right and that the others are wrong.	They reassure me and help me to deal with my uncertainty by increasing my self-esteem and underestimating the other	- Everyone has his/her limits and responsibilities - The meeting of others can cause tensions in itself
"Violence and insecurity are Arabs' or Skinheads' faults!" *"It's their fault if we lost!"*	*I accuse, I defend myself… And I cause a conflict*	**To have constructive perspectives**
To foresee the behaviour of others in order to organise oneself	The judgement restricts the person to one category	- To have perspectives - To allow space for the unforeseen and novelty - To trust people and their resources
"Germans like order so there will be no problem with him." *"He comes from good family, so we can trust him."*	*But there are untidy Germans and very tidy French! Even in certain good families there are people who do silly things!*	**To enhance the value of difference**
… to know oneself	**… they are ethnocentric**	- To make comparisons without evaluating - To enrich ourselves with alternative solutions - To value the specific contribution of each group - To tolerate ambiguity: to recognize different points of view without letting them to be obstacles to cooperation
The differences of others show us our own identity	They denounce differences rather than to value them.	**To look for the complementarities**
"He's like that… I wouldn't like to be like him"	*And why should one resemble? Do all the pieces of a stained-glass window have the same colour?*	- The diversity of the points of view = complementarities - To exploit complementarities in order to define common objectives and to find innovative solutions
Other visions of the world help us to define our own	They deny the value of otherness	**To construct a common identity**
"The Africans are never on time! I can't stand it! Can they be effective?"	*Is efficiency only attached to time management? What kind of efficiency do we talk about? The efficiency of production or the efficiency of relation?…*	- Similarities + complementarities + will to cooperate
We compare ourselves with others, it is most often in our favour and in underestimating the other.		

Stereotypes in Ethnic Disagreements

by Agata DZIEWULSKA, *European University Institute*

My thinking about stereotypes starts with the observation of the new wave of immigration to the place where I live, to Prato which is an Italian provincial town on the outskirts of Florence. Since the place is famous for the production of cloth (they produce it in fact ever since medieval times) there is a really huge immigration tempted by the vision of a fast income. So that for last two years since I arrived here the very few Chinese people on the streets turned into a visible percentage of the population of Prato, joined by Albanians, Moroccans, Pakistanis, and the whole variety of people from Africa. They represent various attitudes towards almost everything starting from the way they are dressed to the use of alcohol and the liberty Italy offers. Their religions vary as well which in the pure catholic, well structured society of a provincial town introduces an element of confusion.

Yet despite all the good will of basically "kind and generous" people, the great number of foreigners (legal and illegal immigrants) trying to settle here forces the authorities to face grave difficulties with finding solutions for accommodating the immigrants. The problem appears when entire families try to amalgamate with the locals, while still holding on to their customs. Prato has always been wealthy, voting for communists and going to the church on Sunday. The breakfast was at 8, lunch between 13 and 14, dinner at 20 so that you could see not a single body on these times at the streets. Shops were open on weekdays and on Saturday, closed on Wednesday afternoon and in August when every soul goes to the seaside where many of them have their second house. Today the Muslims want to open a mosque in the historic centre of Prato claiming that the current post does not fit the needs of five thousand (which they are apparently over) souls of the community (the place they use was given by the authorities in order for the Muslim community to make a cultural centre).

The authorities try to do their best but all the measures they take are temporary and without long-term vision. They are not equipped and not prepared to deal with the massive influx of immigrants of different origins, cultures, religions, attitudes. They lack a vision and a policy and all that these two should result in, that is schooling system and vocational training. Thus step by step some tensions appear between the native population and the incomers as well as between various groups of incomers themselves.

The idea of building a mosque is at the moment one of the biggest trouble spots. It is hard to imagine for the deeply catholic, well structured, always monolithic society to have something like that in their town. It is one thing to employ immigrants, having a brand-new mosque is another. The people of Prato do not really want any problems and hope they will go away, presumably together with the incomers. But this attitude of "let's hope for the best" does not seem to be functioning any more.

Now I would like to shift to theory of ethnic conflict and see what the situation in Prato can result in.

I shall use Stuart Kaufman's hypothesis of ethnic conflict development since it seems to be viable and was largely confirmed in my studies on Bosnia. On the basis of the study of the existing literature in the field, Kaufman comes up with five preconditions for ethnic conflict:

1. External affinity problem;
2. Historical domination of one group by another;
3. The presence of negative ethnic stereotypes;
4. A conflict over the symbols;
5. Economic hardship.[19]

With regard to the first point, the ethnic minority is a majority in a broader region, like for instance the Serbs in Bosnia are only the second biggest group but within broader ex-Yugoslavia they are the majority. The history of domination is present, which is that under the auspices of a foreign power one of the groups dominates or used to dominate over another one. The groups often take turns in the domination. Over the years and ages of co-existence the groups developed stereotypes about each other. The symbols play a great role and are usually a litmus paper of the intensity of the conflict – the more discussion about the symbolic issues the hotter the conflict becomes. The last issue is facultative

---

[19] Stuart J. Kaufman (1996), "An 'international' theory of inter-ethnic war", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 22, pp. 149-171.

– it may be that the general decline in the living conditions means that the other grievances become less bearable and the ethnic issues come up.

These components can be activated in two ways: a conflict can be mass-stimulated or elite-led. In the first case, the hostility erupts spontaneously between groups and later on is taken up onto the agenda of political representations. Step by step the extremist political movements get stronger in the manipulation of the group feelings and eliminate the opposition from the scene of action. With the use of mass media they create an atmosphere of intimidation explaining that the other group endangers "our" interests and the only way is to arm ourselves. Simultaneously, the opposite group seeing the growth of antagonistic emotions on the opposite side, start to prepare themselves for the defence, giving at the same time the other side a "real" reason for armament ("they are arming themselves" – the other group says). This situation of groups' mutual perception of the other as a threat is called a "security dilemma" and develops in spiral, each of the ethnic constituencies arming themselves because the others are doing the same. On the hay day of the preparations one of the groups attacks.

A elite-led conflict has a similar course only it is started by political leaders rather than by masses. Political movements take over mass media and use them in order to create an atmosphere of intimidation and with the use of increased stereotypes, the feeling that the other group is a danger. They set up semi-official paramilitary groups and provoke incidents. They eliminate the opposition from political life and they block the possibility of negotiations with another group. When the spiral of security dilemma is initiated the military conflict is only matter of days.

A certain lesson from the study of a violent conflict is that once initiated it gets out of control, so that nobody is in a position to stop it. The possibility of negotiations is blocked, the extremist political elite is in power on all the sides, illegal and violent paramilitaries plunder the country, the war lords expand their empires and the situation is basically out of anybody's control. So that when the time comes to make peace, there is really nowhere to start.

Now let us come back to the preconditions of a violent conflict. It would be far too much to say that a violent conflict is at the moment endangering Prato but as we know conflicts have different faces, the violent, military one being an extreme. External affinity problem is not formed, at least at present, since the pattern of immigration includes various different groups, none of which is immigration from neighbouring countries. There is no historical domination of one of the groups since the influx is a relatively new phenomenon. Instead, there is the presence of one well established group and the arrival of new ones. There are, however, negative ethnic stereotypes being created and they start to turn strong. Associated with the stereotypes comes the issue of symbols like in the presented case of the Muslim community wanting to build a mosque in the town. Somewhat naturally, Italian citizens do not want any unknown places to appear in Prato and so it happens that a place of a prayer is for the growing number of Muslims the most relevant attribute of their presence and recognition. Economic hardship is also an issue since Prato has always been wealthy because people were making money in Prato and were spending it in Prato. The immigrants, especially the Chinese, take over the entire businesses by creating illegal companies making cloth, and thanks to the fact of not paying taxes, offer cheap material. Not only do they open "secret" companies but also the Prato stereotype of them is that they do not spend any money in the numerous Prato shops. Although the incomers cannot complain about the bad living conditions and the locals' economic situation does not decrease rapidly, the bone of discontent is unfair competition, the avoidance of paying taxes and the fact that they do not "give back" the money they make in shopping. Therefore a certain shape of the economic hardship or dissatisfaction also influences the situation.

It is hard to believe that an ethnic conflict can appear in Prato over the next ten or twenty years but one should not forget that it was equally difficult to imagine Notting Hill Riots of 1958, when the white mob ran over London's district in search for any "coloured" immigrant they could make justice on their own on. The events in Notting Hill make the authorities learn their lesson and already a year later a tradition of spectacular and multiethnic carnivals was initiated as recognition of cultures fleeing into Great Britain – as one of a set of multiethnic education undertakings.

This is not to threaten all of us here with a wave of ethnic violence crossing over Europe – nothing like that is likely especially if we manage to find ways of facilitating dialogue between the "old" communities and the incomers. But what is an advisable conflict prevention activity now is the facilitation of mutual understanding of ethnic groups so that the stereotypes – which probably cannot be dismantled completely – are loosened and the new ones prevented from formation. In Prato, it is still a long way from the present situation to a conflict in a full swing but the initial conditions are already present. If there is something one really should be aware of, it is a duty of learning from history and trying not to

make the same mistakes twice. Therefore, it seems to be the time now to learn how to manage dialogue between ethnic groups in order to prevent misunderstanding from spreading around.

This task of facilitation of dialogue could be done in the simplest way that we already know very well, that is by:

- doing a research on what the situation is and whether there were similar situations in the past and the ways they were dealt with;
- delivering training in facilitation for those who deal with ethnic strivings (e.g. local authorities and leaders of ethnic immigrants);
- preparing teaching materials on performing in multiculturality.

Thank you very much for your attention.