

Intercultural Dialogue and Literary Exchange in the Mediterranean: Pathways for Coexistence and Mutual Understanding

Omar HATEM

University of Blida2

ORCID ID 0009-0009-4294-8071

o.hatem@univ-blida2.dz

Aicha LAACHEMI

University of Medea

ORCID ID 0009-0005-1840-5991

laachemi.aicha@univ-medea.dz

Abstract:

Dialogue in an important aspect of human life. It is regarded as being the chief gateway through which a nation can prevent conflicts and struggles not only at local and national levels, but at international levels too. As a matter of fact, dialogue among civilizations can reduce misunderstandings and mistrust. Furthermore, intercultural understanding also lays the foundation for non violent resolution of controversies. It is a key element in uniting the people, and helps spreading awareness of their differences and particularities. Equally important, dialogue among civilizations has an enormous potential of solving current and future economic, social, cultural, and political problems by sharing experiences and also through joint implementation of remedies.

Keywords: *dialogue, literature, civilization, Mediterranean basin.*

Dialogue interculturel et échanges littéraires en Méditerranée : voies vers la coexistence et la compréhension mutuelle

Résumé :

Le dialogue est un aspect important de la vie humaine. Il est considéré comme le principal moyen par lequel une nation peut prévenir les conflits et les luttes, non seulement aux niveaux local et national, mais aussi au niveau international. En effet, le dialogue entre les civilisations peut réduire les malentendus et la méfiance. De plus, la compréhension interculturelle jette également les bases d'une résolution non violente des controverses. Elle est un élément clé pour unir les peuples et contribue à sensibiliser à leurs différences et à leurs particularités. Tout aussi important, le dialogue entre les civilisations recèle un énorme potentiel pour résoudre les problèmes économiques, sociaux, culturels et politiques actuels et futurs, grâce au partage d'expériences et à la mise en œuvre conjointe de solutions.

Mots clés : *dialogue, littérature, civilisation, bassin méditerranéen.*

Introduction

Throughout history, the profound impact of civilized dialogue among diverse peoples has been eloquently articulated by authors, poets, and litterateurs. These intellectual pioneers traversed vast distances, driven by a desire to bring back to their homelands the creative fruits of foreign minds. Simultaneously, they acted as conduits, transmitting their own cultures and artistic expressions to distant lands. This reciprocal exchange facilitated a fertile cross-pollination of ideas, as creative minds influenced and were influenced by one another. Consequently, ideas blossomed and matured within societies through these rich intellectual dialogues across various humanities, nurturing the evolution of civilized culture. Today, the disciplines of comparative studies and comparative literature have embraced these cross-border creative ideas – through rigorous study, review, and testing – as the foundational core of comparative scholarship in general and comparative literature in particular.

The most distinguished features of civilized dialogue among different peoples were expressed by authors, poets and litterateurs. They travelled the long distances without suffering in order to records for their countries what the foreign creative minds had produced. At the same time, these authors, poets and litterateurs in turn transfer their cultures and creativity to foreign people. This led to cross fertilization of ideas from different cultures since the creative minds affected and were being affected others at the same time. So, the ideas developed and grew up in the minds of peoples through these intellectual dialogues in varied humanities and that motivated the civilized culture. Nowadays, the comparative studies and the comparative literature have

adopted these cross-border creative ideas-by studying, reviewing and testing to be the main core of comparative studies in general and the comparative literature in particular.

Invention of new technologies has changed our lives drastically. We are living in a universe of social activities in which electronic media seem taking over from traditional social activities and have a central and constitutive role. The universe of social activities is expanding and growing in which the society is not carrying the traditional definition anymore. For instance, the virtual societies, which are web-based societies they are the harvest of modernity and invention of new media.

Throughout history, the peoples of the Mediterranean basin have played a paramount role for the promotion of dialogue, mutual understanding, and the enrichment of cultures and civilizations, indeed, the Mediterranean basin is considered as being the birth place of several great civilizations that are worldly known. The Mediterranean basin is also cradle and crossroad of civilizations. Actually, however, the accelerating pace of political, economic, and technological devices that the world is undergoing has added new challenges such as fundamentalism and racism, thus, increasing difficulties in bringing cultural differences and hence; dividing the shores of the Mediterranean.

These challenges need to be addressed by promoting mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue among the Mediterranean various civilizations and cultures. So what can be done for the promotion of dialogue among the Mediterranean civilizations? How can mutual understanding reconciliation, and tolerance be promoted within the Mediterranean basin? What new and technological devices can be used for better achieving dialogue? And which way could they promote dialogue among the Mediterranean regions?

1. The Enduring Power of Intellectual Exchange

The Mediterranean region has long stood as a dynamic epicenter of cultural intersections, where diverse civilizations have engaged in exchanges that are both enriching and contentious (Robert D. Kaplan, , 2015. P. 27). This region's unique geographical positioning—linking Europe, Asia, and Africa—has facilitated not only the circulation of goods but also the diffusion of languages, religions, and intellectual traditions. From ancient maritime trade networks to contemporary digital flows, the Mediterranean has functioned as a connective tissue binding disparate societies through sustained interactions. These exchanges have shaped the region's collective memory and identity, embedding within its literary, philosophical, and artistic productions the traces of encounter, adaptation, and resistance.

Dialogue among Mediterranean civilizations has historically operated on multiple levels: from the intimate discourses of philosophers and poets to the grand narratives of empire-building and cultural diffusion. The literary canon of the Mediterranean—from Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* to the Andalusian works of Ibn Tufayl and the philosophical writings of Averroes—testifies to a long-standing tradition of engagement with the "Other." (Catlos, B. A., & Novikoff, A. J., 2018, pp. 123-135). Routledge) These texts not only document encounters across cultures but also frame them within complex dynamics of power, identity, and aspiration. As Wellek and Warren (René Wellek & Austin Warren, 1949, pp. 117-125) argued, literature is both a mirror of its society and a vehicle for shaping it, and the Mediterranean literary tradition exemplifies this dual function by both reflecting and informing the processes of cultural negotiation.

Yet dialogue in the Mediterranean is not a static achievement but an ongoing, often precarious, negotiation. It has been shaped as much by conflict as by cooperation. The Crusades, the Reconquista, the Ottoman expansions, and colonial enterprises have all left indelible marks on the region's history, underscoring the reality that dialogue has frequently emerged not from a place of mutual respect, but as a necessity born of confrontation. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Edward Said, 1978, pp. 07-12) famously critiques these asymmetries, arguing that the construction of the "Orient" by Western powers was less a dialogue than an exercise of domination masked as understanding. Nevertheless, even within such imbalanced encounters, traces of genuine intellectual and cultural engagement have persisted (Ibid), as seen in the translation movements of medieval Spain, the shared architectural styles across the Mediterranean rim, and the hybridized musical and culinary traditions that continue to flourish.

In the contemporary era, the Mediterranean faces new challenges that test the limits and possibilities of dialogue. The rise of populist nationalisms, the refugee crisis, and environmental degradation have deepened divides, while digital technologies have both facilitated and fractured communication. The promise of dialogue is undermined by echo chambers, algorithm-driven polarization, and the commodification of cultural difference (Jerry H. Bentley, 1993, .p 80-95.). Yet, the imperative for dialogue remains urgent: without it, the Mediterranean risks fragmenting into isolated enclaves defined by suspicion and resentment rather than shared aspirations.

This paper aims to critically examine the role of dialogue in the Mediterranean, not as an abstract ideal, but as a historical and contemporary reality shaped by literature, cul-

tural practices, and technological mediations (Peregrine Horden & Nicholas Purcell, 2000. P. 178). By interrogating the narratives that have sustained and challenged dialogue, the analysis seeks to illuminate the ways in which the Mediterranean continues to serve as both a site of encounter and a crucible of contestation. In doing so, this study argues that the future of the Mediterranean—as a region of shared destinies—hinges on our ability to reimagine dialogue as a transformative practice grounded in critical awareness and ethical responsibility.

2. Dialogue using new media:

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, dialogue and communication must embrace innovative techniques, leveraging the power of new information and communication technologies and emerging media forms. The transformative potential of digital technologies is undeniable, fundamentally shifting patterns of dialogue and human relationships¹. These technologies offer an extraordinary capacity to promote human understanding and unity. However, it is crucial to ensure that these technologies are positively harnessed to connect people, facilitating cross-border debates, fostering meaningful relationships, encouraging cooperation, and, most importantly, promoting a truly transnational civil society.

Technology is an integral part of daily life for most people. In our increasingly complex society, individuals, organizations, and other entities continuously seek new technologies to support their objectives. Since the 1990s, there has been a significant shift towards **mobile wireless technology**

¹ Yijun Zhang, dialogue among civilizations seeding peace, based handbook for national geographic news, <https://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=article&aId=166533>.

in education. Like its wired predecessors, mobile wireless technology was initially adopted in business sectors to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in production (Cliff Mimes, 2000, p54).

Various technologies of communication and information are opening up the way for dialogue between peoples from different countries, cultures and religious.. Among these tools of communication:

a-New media: Digital technologies that take advantage of computers and the Internet have led to products and services that provide information or entertainment. Social media, blogs, video games and online news outlets are typically referred to as “new media.” These channels of communication have far-reaching implications for society. However, older forms of media, such as radio, television and vinyl records, were once new. So what exactly makes “new media” new? In truth, new media is a relative term. Several practical and theoretical considerations help clarify just what new media is.

New media refers to “those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication and involve some form of computing,” Robert Logan writes in his book *Understanding New Media*. New media is “very easily processed, stored, transformed, retrieved, hyperlinked and, perhaps most radical of all, easily searched for and accessed.”¹

The media and telecommunication play an important role of interconnection between peoples, nations and civilizations. Indeed, they are regarded as being a key factor in the process of the globalization of culture and the spread of mul-

¹ Kerry Holmes, What Is New Media?, Southeastern University Online <https://online.seu.edu/articles/what-is-new-media/> 05/10/2019.

ticulturalism. In addition, the media is promoting connection among peoples and societies and is simultaneously facilitating.

b-Mobile phones and computers

From being a simple communication technology to a key social tool, the mobile phones and computers have become such an important aspect of people's everyday life. Mobile phones and computers have altered the way people live, communicate, interact, and connect with others. Mobile phones and computers are also transforming how people access and use information and media. Given the rapid pervasiveness of mobile phones and computers in society across the world, it is important to explore how mobile phones and computers have affected the way people communicate and interact with others, access the information, and use media, and their daily lifestyle. We aimed to explore the social and cultural implications that have come with the ubiquity, unprecedented connectivity, and advances of mobile phones and computers¹.

The accessibility to computers combined with internet connection opened up a range of means of communication. It has shortened the long distances and allowed people worldwide, to share knowledge and information in a more rapid and effective manner. It also opened up the way for dialogue between people from different countries, cultures, religious, and ethnicities. Indeed, the new so called cyber space is actually facilitating forms of cooperation between people from different geographical and cultural contexts that enable them to deepen their common humanity and their sense on shared responsibility for the good of all. When

¹ The contribution of dialogue in civilizations, <http://sjweb.info/documents/dialogo/contribution.doc>

effectively exploited, these technologies will help overcome the prejudices and cultural barriers, which in their turn impede the objectives of achieving a common area of peace, stability and welfare.

3. toward an intercultural dialogue between peoples

Dialogue among civilizations reflects a pressing need, dictated by the accelerating world mutations prevailing at this critical juncture of world history. It has become a strategic option, mandated by the major challenges confronting the international community, for it constitutes the noblest means of coexistence among nations and peoples, indeed the remedy to all factors of tension and conflict at the origin of international crises (Smith Ronald, 2011, p178).

In a general sense, the objective of intercultural dialogue is to learn to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world and to develop a sense of community and belonging. Intercultural dialogue can also be a tool for the prevention and resolution of conflicts by enhancing the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. More specifically, the following goals have been outlined¹:

- To share visions of the world, to understand and learn from those that do not see the world with the same perspective we do;
- To identify similarities and differences between different cultural traditions and perceptions;
- To achieve a consensus that disputes should not be resolved by violence;

¹ The concept of intercultural dialogue, council of Europe, https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept_EN.asp

- To help manage cultural diversity in a democratic manner, by making the necessary adjustments to all types of existing social and political arrangements;
- To bridge the divide between those who perceive diversity as a threat and those who view it as an enrichment;
- To share best practices particularly in the areas of intercultural dialogue, the democratic management of social diversity and the promotion of social cohesion;
- To develop jointly new projects.

4. The relationship between dialogue and civilization

The dialogic communication is characterized by a relationship in which both parties genuinely care about each other rather than merely seek to fulfill their own needs. This kind of relationship is embodied in the symmetrical model of public relations, in which organizations try to adapt and harmonize with their publics. It elevates public relations, in which organization itself, allowing either party in the interchange to take the initiative.

An example of dialogic communication would be an equal relationship between corporate management and either an external public such as an activist group or an internal public such as an employee union, in which either side could call meetings, propose agenda topics, conduct research, launch a dialogue program and so on. Advances in communication technology have made it easier for organizations to engage with their publics in a two-way dialogue. Certainly advances in internet-based technology are breaking down old hierarchical structures in communication (Ibid, p179).

In the practice of strategic dialogue, there is a role for each type of dialogue model: information, persuasion and dia-

logue. Information approaches to communication often focus on the message sender and receiver, while persuasive dialogue deals with the content of the message.

Dialogue in turn, emphasize the relationship between the parties in the communication process, each of these elements is important to public relations, which necessarily deals with the actors in the communication process (Smith Ronald, p. 179), the messages shared between them, and the relationship they share.

5. Toward Effective Intercultural Dialogue: Foundations for Peace and Pluralism

Intercultural dialogue is fundamentally about building bridges that enable coexistence within pluralistic societies marked by diverse histories, beliefs, and social structures. Its practice requires a deliberate effort to foster empathy and mutual recognition, moving beyond tolerance towards genuine respect for cultural differences. This process is not merely idealistic; it is grounded in the pragmatic need to address and mitigate social fragmentation and polarization caused by globalization, migration flows, and political upheavals (Huntington, Samuel P., 1996, p. 215).

A central challenge in promoting intercultural dialogue lies in overcoming entrenched stereotypes and prejudices that hinder open communication. Dialogue demands that interlocutors not only express their cultural narratives but also engage in critical self-reflection and a willingness to revise one's own worldview. This reflexivity is essential to avoid the trap of cultural relativism or absolutism (Kymlicka, Will. 1995, pp 67-68), allowing instead a balanced approach where diversity is both acknowledged and constructively negotiated.

Moreover, institutional frameworks play a critical role in facilitating dialogue. Effective governance models must accommodate cultural diversity by ensuring equitable participation in decision-making processes and protecting minority rights (Taylor, Charles, 1994, pp 34-36). Democratic governance and the rule of law are thus indispensable for sustaining dialogue and preventing the escalation of conflicts rooted in cultural misunderstandings. Practical implementations of intercultural dialogue encompass educational programs, cultural exchanges, and joint community initiatives that promote social cohesion (UNDP, 2019, p 47). For example, in the Mediterranean context, projects that bring together young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds have shown promising results in fostering trust and collaborative problem-solving skills, thus contributing to regional stability.

Ultimately, intercultural dialogue should be seen as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. It requires continuous commitment and adaptation to changing social realities, particularly in regions like the Mediterranean (Apiyah, Kwame Anthony, 2006, pp 112-113), where historical legacies of conflict coexist with profound opportunities for cooperation and cultural enrichment.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of intercultural dialogue should not be misconstrued as a demand for individuals or entire communities to completely assimilate into or fully internalize the entirety of another culture—or, indeed, all the diverse cultures that exist globally. Such an expectation is neither realis-

tic nor desirable in the context of pluralistic societies. Rather, the core purpose of intercultural engagement lies in facilitating meaningful encounters and experiences that cultivate a genuine appreciation, understanding, and respect for cultural differences. Through these interactions, individuals come to recognize other cultures not as exotic or alien abstractions but as intrinsically human constructs—each embodying unique values, practices, and worldviews that contribute collectively to the tapestry of human civilization. This recognition serves as a foundation for self-enrichment, whereby exposure to diverse cultural traditions enhances one’s own perspectives, knowledge, and creativity without necessitating cultural abandonment or homogenization.

Furthermore, acknowledging the legitimate right of all cultures to exist, develop, and flourish is a fundamental principle underpinning ethical intercultural dialogue. This respect for cultural plurality reinforces democratic values, human rights, and the preservation of cultural identities in a globalized world often marked by hegemonic tendencies and cultural domination. The dialogical process thus becomes a site of negotiation, mutual learning, and co-creation, which, if sustained, can mitigate ethnocentrism, reduce conflict, and promote social cohesion within multicultural context.

In the contemporary era, the rapid proliferation of new technologies—particularly those related to digital media and communication—has irreversibly transformed the landscape of intercultural dialogue. These technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for cross-cultural interaction, enabling individuals and communities separated by geographical and political boundaries to engage in continuous and instantaneous exchanges. Social media platforms, online forums, and virtual communities have emerged as potent spaces

where cultural narratives can be shared, contested, and co-developed, thereby expanding the reach and depth of intercultural communication.

However, these technological advancements are double-edged. While they facilitate greater connectivity and democratize access to information, they also introduce complex challenges. The digital environment can exacerbate cultural misunderstandings, amplify stereotypes, and create echo chambers that reinforce divisive ideologies rather than foster dialogue. Moreover, unequal access to technology – the so-called digital divide – poses significant barriers to inclusive participation in intercultural exchanges, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups and regions. Thus, a critical and reflective approach to leveraging new media is essential to harness their potential for genuine intercultural understanding and avoid pitfalls that may deepen existing social and cultural fractures.

In sum, intercultural dialogue is a dynamic, ongoing process that necessitates respect for cultural diversity, openness to learning, and a conscious engagement with the tools that mediate human interaction today. It is through such informed and deliberate engagement – both offline and online – that societies can aspire to build more peaceful, equitable, and culturally enriched futures in an increasingly interconnected world.

Recommendations:

Effective intercultural dialogue demands more than goodwill; it requires concrete actions grounded in education, policy support, responsible media use, community engagement, and ongoing research. Education must foster genuine cultural understanding, while policies should institutional-

ize dialogue as a tool for social cohesion. Media and digital platforms need to promote accurate, respectful exchanges rather than division. Equally important is creating inclusive spaces where diverse communities actively collaborate. Continuous study and adaptation of dialogue practices are essential to respond to changing realities and ensure marginalized voices are heard. Without such a comprehensive and pragmatic approach, dialogue remains superficial and fails to address the root causes of cultural misunderstanding and conflict. Here are some Expanded and Analytical Recommendations for Fostering Intercultural Dialogue

- **Institutionalize Experiential Intercultural Education Programs**

Effective intercultural dialogue transcends theoretical knowledge; it requires lived experience. Educational systems and cultural institutions must embed experiential learning as a core pedagogical approach. This includes intercultural exchange programs, collaborative projects across cultural boundaries, and immersive workshops that facilitate direct interpersonal contact. Such experiences are vital because they confront individuals with cultural realities that challenge stereotypes and simplistic assumptions. By promoting sustained engagement rather than one-off encounters, these programs foster empathy and critical self-reflection, allowing participants to see others as complex human beings rather than cultural abstractions. From a civilizational perspective, these programs also provide a platform to explore historical entanglements and shared heritage, which are essential for a grounded appreciation of cultural interdependence.

- **Prioritize Digital Literacy and Critical Media Competence**

The ubiquity of digital media has transformed intercultural dialogue but also introduced new vulnerabilities – fake news, echo chambers, and cultural misrepresentations proliferate online. Developing digital literacy is thus not optional but essential. Beyond basic technical skills, this includes training users to critically assess sources, understand the political economy of digital platforms, and engage respectfully in online discussions. This is crucial to prevent the digital space from becoming a battleground of cultural clashes and to instead turn it into a fertile ground for genuine dialogue.

A critical approach helps mitigate the risks of cultural essentialism and polarization exacerbated by algorithm-driven content, fostering more nuanced intercultural understanding in virtual environments.

- **Bridge the Digital Divide to Democratize Dialogue**

Access to digital technologies remains highly uneven, both within and between countries. This digital divide undermines the potential for inclusive intercultural dialogue by excluding marginalized groups from participating fully in global conversations. Bridging this divide requires coordinated policy efforts focusing on infrastructure development, affordable access, and digital skills training targeted at disadvantaged communities.

From a civilizational standpoint, excluding voices due to technological barriers perpetuates asymmetric power relations and cultural marginalization, which fuels resentment and conflict rather than resolution. Thus, digital equity is a prerequisite for a truly pluralistic and democratic dialogue .

- **Encourage the Creation and Support of Inclusive and Diverse Media Platforms**

Media shape perceptions of ‘the Other’ profoundly. Supporting media platforms that actively promote intercultural respect, amplify minority voices, and produce content fostering mutual understanding is critical. These platforms should be regulated to combat hate speech, misinformation, and cultural stereotypes while safeguarding freedom of expression.

Such media become cultural mediators, translating complex realities into accessible narratives that challenge ethnocentrism and promote empathy. From the perspective of dialogue among civilizations, media platforms can facilitate the construction of a shared narrative that respects difference yet highlights common human values.

- **Institutionalize Dialogue within Governance and Conflict Resolution Frameworks**

Intercultural dialogue must be embedded within formal governance structures to move beyond rhetoric into actionable policies. This involves incorporating cultural rights, diversity management, and dialogue mechanisms into national and international institutions. It also requires training diplomats, policymakers, and conflict mediators in intercultural competencies to address cultural dimensions of disputes effectively.

Civilizational dialogue at this level reduces the likelihood of violent conflicts by providing institutional channels for negotiation and mutual understanding, recognizing cultural identities as legitimate political actors rather than obstacles.

6. **Promote Joint Cultural and Artistic Initiatives**

Culture and art are powerful conduits for dialogue that transcend linguistic and ideological barriers. Joint cultural

projects – such as exhibitions, performances, literary collaborations, and digital storytelling – offer experiential engagement that fosters shared creativity and reconciliation. These initiatives should emphasize co-creation rather than cultural appropriation, ensuring equitable participation and respect for cultural sovereignty.

In the Mediterranean context, for example, such initiatives can reclaim and celebrate the region's layered histories of coexistence and exchange, countering dominant narratives of conflict with those of connection and hybridity.

Critical Reflection on Recommendations

The above recommendations are interdependent and require a coordinated, multi-level approach. For instance, without bridging the digital divide, enhanced digital literacy remains accessible only to privileged groups, undermining the democratizing potential of digital dialogue. Similarly, institutionalizing intercultural dialogue within governance frameworks demands political will and societal consensus, which can be nurtured through educational and media initiatives.

Furthermore, while technologies offer unprecedented opportunities, they are not panaceas. Dialogue requires sustained commitment, willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, and an openness to change entrenched worldviews. Intercultural dialogue is as much a political project as a cultural one – it must address structural inequalities that perpetuate cultural hierarchies and asymmetries of power.

Finally, these recommendations underscore that intercultural dialogue is a dynamic, ongoing process. It is not about reaching static agreements but about maintaining continuous, reflexive engagement. This process nurtures resilience

in pluralistic societies, enabling them to navigate diversity with creativity rather than conflict.

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