

# Education in Multiculturality Education to Interculturality

In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education  
and in Formation Communities  
for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy

Edited by  
**Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi**



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Enrica Ottone, Luca Pandolfi (eds.)  
**EDUCATION IN MULTICULTURALITY  
EDUCATION TO INTERCULTURALITY**  
**In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education  
and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy**

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*Front cover*  
Pavel Égüez, *Grito de los Excluidos*, mural en cerámica.  
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“

*Diversity always proves a bit frightening, for it challenges our securities and the status quo. [...] In the face of cultural, ethnic, political and religious diversity, we can either retreat into a rigid defense of our supposed identity, or become open to encountering others and cultivating together the dream of a fraternal society.*

”

POPE FRANCIS

*Speech to the Hungarian Episcopal Conference*  
Apostolic visit to Budapest, September 12, 2021

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# Formation in Multiculturality Formation towards Interculturality

Challenges to Embrace  
and Necessary Transformations\*

❖ Luca Pandolfi



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## Abstract

The article closes the series of essays presenting the *action-research-training* on formation to interculturality in multicultural communities of ecclesiastical institutions of higher education, as well as Institutes of Consecrated Life in Italy. Through an anthropological approach and the interpretation of cultural processes, it presents a broad reflection on four years of participant observation and the analysis of results drawn from the employed qualitative and quantitative survey instruments. Although multicultural reality is often referred to as “richness”, it is still experienced and understood as a struggle for mutual linguistic understanding, and though it also appears as a possible coexistence of cultural differences, it rarely presents formative awareness and planning in view of intercultural competences and for the common construction of a plural and syncretic way. Differences emerge between the approaches of formators and the approach of candidates. The conclusions indicate possible paths to achieve formation that is adapted to the challenges of today’s plural and interconnected society.

## Keywords

Multiculturality – Interculturality – intercultural competences – participant observation – qualitative research – formation, and education

**Luca Pandolfi** holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, in Theology and a Master’s Degree in Fundamental Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University, an MA in Sociology from Sapienza University of Roma as well as a PhD in Ethno-Anthropology from the same university. He is full professor of Cultural Anthropology, and also teaches Sociology of Religion, Intercultural Communication, Communication and Pastoral, Social Doctrine of the Church at PUU. Pandolfi was also dean of the ISCSM (2019/2022) and directed the PUU Social Communications Centre (2006/ 2022). He has been visiting professor in Latin American (Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, Mexico) and Roman Universities (UPS, PFSEA). He has authored four books and several articles.

\* Translated from the original  
Italian by Roxanne Doerr

...real "interculturality" is more than just co-existing side by side with people from different nationalities or cultures. Rather, the ideal intercultural setting for interculturality provides a space or opportunity for people from different cultures to interact with each other and thereby mutually enrich and transform each other and those around them<sup>1</sup>.

1

## Not a conclusion... in narrative terms

This article, which closes the reading and interpretation of the results of our action-research-training, does not have the aim of concluding a discussion. There is still much work to be done. There is a part of the gathered data that requires further elaboration. There are various readings, with different angles and perspectives, that can offer further food for thought. The very instruments of this *Action Research* which, as has been frequently mentioned, also represented a micro experience of *formation* and auto-analysis that has been offered to the encountered contexts, may be further refined and used again, thus constituting new situations to be investigated and providing another database.

After all, the present research grew while carrying it out during our encounters with many realities that are in great transition for the most part, despite the remaining presence of much resistance and inability to perceive and experience ongoing transformations, both in academic contexts and in those of formation towards a consecrated Catholic life.

Starting from a reading that is analytical, but more so socio-anthropological and deriving from the study of cultural processes, I will attempt to share a reflection that even surpasses the results of the present research. As far as certain aspects were concerned, the entire experience was also a provocation, a posing of questions that were uncomfortable at times, a suggestion and elaboration of concepts, an initiation of processes. The idea was not – or rather, not just – to gather answers and sediment, record, and codify the contents of thoughts and social actions to be understood and commented later on. We certainly had the aim of bringing out, observing, monitoring and recording reactions, behaviours, discursive modes, and probable consolidated attitudes. However, the transversal objective of the entire investigation was also to strategically pose "some" questions, to help different realities pose them systematically and consciously (*Action Research*) by inducing the restlessness of the questions and the discursive and practical problematic nature of their possible answers...or of the absence of answers (*training*).

As a social and cultural anthropologist, one of my specific investigative activities consisted in gradually observing, monitoring and registering the reactions and processes that were generated. Through an eminently qualitative approach, I constantly took note of the collateral processes of the research while collaborating with the research *équipe* to put precise information-gathering instruments in place. Such instruments enabled the subsequent analysis of more specific data, which were somehow connected to more objective forms of elaboration of the results, and their comparison with the participant observation that I had previously carried out was also interesting.

In this paper I will therefore share both a reflection on the path of "participant observation" that I carried out<sup>2</sup> in the course of the four years of research, and my own reading, by means of the aforementioned anthropological and sociocultural approach, of the information that was provided through the use of qualitative instruments (i.e., numerous focus groups, very few interviews, and reflections on "critical incidents") and the use of one more quantitative instrument (i.e., the questionnaire which was structured in 9 languages). Here I will employ a narrative style which, fol-



lowing a dialogical and participative anthropological approach, made me into a participant of the study and an interactive interpreter, inside and beyond the work of an external researcher who reads the data as a detector and analyst of the clashes, divergences and intersections of information.

## 2

### A long participant observation

A disposition of attentive, curious and systematic observation is a substantial and transversal part of an anthropologist's entire work. It starts from the moment scientific "curiosity" emerges; then, when the research project is born, it becomes a precise ethnographic practice through the drafting of a field journal, that is a notebook with notes and annotations.

#### 2.1

#### A historical premises: the 2007 survey

Nevertheless, I feel the need to make a premise. In truth, I have already worked on matters of multiculturalism in the formation contexts of the Institutes of Consecrated Life (ICL). It was the year 2007, and the experience was centred around a one-day seminar held at the Urbaniana University by our *Istituto Superiore di Catechesi e Spiritualità Missionaria* (ISCSM) in collaboration with the *Faculty of Missiology*. At the time, upon the request of the then-head of the institute, I arranged a brief survey on the perception of the processes of contextualisation and inculturation in the novitiates of female Catholic ICL. About 100 student test subjects, who were female students and women religious attending courses at the ISCSM, were involved. In view of the one-day seminar entitled "*New sprouts, same lymph. The experience of inculturation in novitiates*", which was to take place on March 23rd, 2007, I prepared a brief semi-structured questionnaire in order to start prompting communication on the topic and gather preliminary quantitative and qualitative information. Throughout the seminar, we created and recorded some study focus groups (FG): some of the immediate reports on these FG were shared by their animators during the seminar. During the event I also shared an initial reflection on the data that emerged from the questionnaire which, as mentioned, had previously been administered. The findings of that research were never converted into a scientific article, and I never published the considerations and interpretations that emerged from that work. The sample base was too small and rather connected with the context, and the research instruments, while clearly not banal, were simple, self-produced and unvalidated.

However, regardless of the objective results that emerged from the questionnaire and the various FG, what struck me back then – as in the present research – were the communicative processes: there was a certain distance between perceived reality and narrated reality (or reality that could be narrated), between people's complex experiences, their modes of communication, and the presence of occasionally contradictory evaluations. In the questionnaires, and similarly in the FG, the overwhelming majority of the involved women religious conveyed images of local Catholic churches and related religious congregations characterised by initiated post-colonial processes and with positive contextualisation dynamics. This occurred in the various continental contexts, be them African, Asian, American or Oceanian. At the same time though, it was clearly specified that the founders of the various institutes, most of the current leadership, as well as the contents, materials, structures and personnel that were involved in the formation were of European origin and under European management. As for the question "*The formation experience you have received, in relation to attention towards the novices' cultures of origin, was a) very good, b) good, c) barely sufficient, d) entirely insufficient*", almost all of the attested answers were "a)

very good”<sup>3</sup>. The questionnaire then concluded with two open questions: 1. *Describe two experiences/situations that occurred during your novitiate demonstrating attention towards your culture of origin that you believe were very positive*, and 2. *Describe two experiences/situations that occurred during your novitiate demonstrating attention towards your culture of origin that you believe were very negative*. These two questions almost always remained unanswered. When they were resumed during the FG they were leading to the same results until some students warned me that the participants did not feel free to speak of the topic due to the presence of some FG animators who, for various reasons, were close to people who could refer what the participants said to their superiors or formators. I therefore called the animators to entrust them with another task and left the FG free to moderate themselves but with the commitment of preparing a detailed and anonymous report of what emerged. The reports presented a different reality compared to the questionnaire: there were indeed some positive practices, which were quite rare in truth; then a greater number of difficult and sometimes painful experiences were narrated, where religious formation was presented as being rather “colonial” and Eurocentric, and therefore often denying or being judgmental towards the non-European women religious’ cultures of origin and incapable of imagining forms of contextualisation and inculturation. Two different worlds and two different narrations emerged, one apparently very ideal and the other sometimes dramatically very real.

I had the distinct impression that for a pluri-continental religious institution like that of the ICL of the Catholic Church, with its widespread and capillary formative structures, the matter of cultural plurality and the diversity of languages, uses, customs and traditions were an accepted fact, yet the ethical and religious (or religious and ethical) need for their positive interaction constantly produced an idealised narration. The statement: «Finding ourselves together in diversity is a nice experience that enables encounters and the exchange of great richness» thus became (and remains to this day) a constant, nice, easily expressible topic that was part of its own habitual narration and self-representation. Multiculturality was (and is) indicated as an opportunity for great exchange in a climate of mutual respect, dialogue and mutual “enrichment”<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, institutional and idealised representation on the one hand, and cultural logics, socioeconomic dynamics, hierarchical and asymmetric relations, and the concrete life of people and institutions on the other hand, may be distant. And I am not referring to the normal gap between ideal and real, between project and concrete realisation. I am also not referring to the classic phenomenon of institutional communication (narration) that diverges from that of the more or less aligned or unsatisfied base. Although the latter is often inevitable, at the time I sensed a specific cultural process, a sort of habit of double narration and double truth: a sort of “environmental hypocrisy” due not so much to a gap between ideal and real that is incommunicable due to reasons of freedom in communication, but rather to an embraced, interiorised and widespread self-representation and consequent idealised narration that stems from the (religious and Christian) nature of the institutions. These in truth are perceived in themselves as “right”, as “good”, regardless of the human contradictions that have always, and in any case, been considered occasional, extemporaneous, and never structural. I will return to this later.

In any case, the 2007 investigation, which would have needed further investigation, remained suspended and unfinished, but various dynamics have reemerged in the present research, which started ten years later. It is as if I had resumed the weaving of the threads of a texture that I had never stopped observing or experiencing while teaching at PUJ and other universities, generally within an ecclesiastical context characterised by the significant presence of subjects from ICL and by decisive internationalism. My later activity in formation and accompaniment in ICL, especially in the missionary area, whose members are increasingly multicultural, was added to this experience.

## 2.2 The 2017 research

As narrated in the Introduction<sup>4</sup>, about four years ago I was presented with an opportunity to carry out research on a large scale that would open a more capillary exploration of Roman pontifical universities and the numerous formation centres in ICL located in Rome or the province whose members normally attended Roman ecclesiastic academic environments. Collaboration with the “Unione Internazionale delle Superiori Generali” (UISG) and the support of the GHR Foundation made the project feasible and expandable. We could increase the personnel at our disposal by involving collaborators and researchers, and expand into the Italian territory mostly to attain comparison samples that would make what had been found in Rome, which prevailed in terms of the number of institutions that were inserted in the field of investigation, plausible.

Ten years after my first reconnaissance on the dynamics of the inculturation and contextualisation of novitiates, the world of Catholic consecrated life seemed to me to have changed only in part. In this sense, starting right from the phase of elaboration of a possible project to be shared with the UISG and submitted to the GHR Foundation, I made it my business to keep track of notes and annotations. I did it just as much during the phases that followed, and more precisely the phases of personnel selection and training, as well as those of first contact with and involvement of the institutions to be inserted in the research project. The information on the contact modes, different reactions and eventual involvement of various Roman and Italian ecclesiastical institutions of higher education, as well as the various male and female Institutes of Consecrated Life, that I gradually collected could thus be considered “ethnographic notes”. A certain participant observation was also experienced by and with the members of the extended équipe, especially during the meetings of the FG. For each meeting in fact, written notes reporting the observations of both FG facilitators, one of whom explicitly had the role of observing, were gathered. Before proceeding to the interpretation of what emerged from the research’s global data set, I therefore intend to share some considerations on these ethnographic notes.

### 2.2.1 The contact phase

As already mentioned in the introductory essay of this action-research-training, the analysis and management of multiculturalism and of communication and intercultural education had already been an object of discussion in the world of ICL<sup>5</sup> for some time and, albeit as a marginal discipline, it was already somewhat a part of the educational offer provided by ecclesiastical university institutions. Nevertheless, the first phase of the project was difficult and entailed the complex task of contacting and engaging various institutions. This phase, which was completed in collaboration with Prof. Longhitano, at that time dean of the ISCSM, and with the executive secretariat of the UISG, led us to contact the superiors of various ICL and the heads or rectors of ecclesiastical institutes of higher education, i.e. mostly universities or pontifical academic institutions. Our attention was clearly only on academic or religious, and congregational or intercongregational, formative communities with a strong degree of multiculturalism among its members. Because we had envisioned our research as an engaging and participative experience (*action-research-training*, as a matter of fact) since the very beginning, it was important for us to gather active and dynamic consensus, and not just formal permission, to meet formators and candidates, students and teachers.

We knew that the matter of multiculturalism was one of the issues that were discussed (and experienced) in such formative realities which, despite being mostly characterised by their reflection on the dimension of “coexistence”, was also increasingly revealing itself to be an “educational emergency”, or a dynamic that concerned both formation to consecrated life and the transmission and true acquisition of the offered contents in university contexts. Each head of (academic or religious

higher) institution that was contacted received a brief presentation of the research and its objectives, of the issues that it stemmed from, and of its methods of implementation and involvement of the communities.

From the onset, I noted my perception of strong resistance in my field journal. The (regional and national) locations of coordination of religious life were formally contacted by e-mail and with an in-person visit during one of their periodic meetings (at the *Unione Superiore Maggiori d'Italia* (USMI), the Lazio regional USMI, the Sicily regional USMI... to give some examples). They then generally provided a formal acceptance of the proposal, to which almost no communication of interest followed, except that expressed by a few superiors or formators (both male and female) who were particularly interested in the phenomenon. In truth, practically no real calls, requests for further information or desire to be engaged occurred. In general, the meetings were characterised by courtesy and respect, coupled with great coldness and silence. This partially explains why very few religious communities were involved in the end, despite there being many ICL and related formative structures throughout the territory, and even this was the result of extensive, patient and reiterated in-person contact. This matter, which seemed to be "so urgent", did not correspond to more than a very difficult and scarce willingness to participate. An ethnographic note is in order here: in the course of this first phase, which required the engagement of the communities in three consecutive meetings (the 3 FG), there was a greater availability of male ICL (Comboni, Consolata Missionary, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate) compared to their female counterparts, which were much more distrustful and usually available only as intercongregational formative communities. Another relevant observation lies in the fact that greater availability was found in strongly missionary congregations. Experience, a missionary perspective, and familiarity with the dimension of encountering diversity probably lowered some defences. And I believe that the fact that the research was supported by the leadership of the PUU (Pontifical University of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples), which is especially familiar with these ICL congregations, also contributed.

As far as universities were concerned, the rectors and heads of ecclesiastical institutions of higher education, including those whose members were part of the *équipe* of researchers, replied in an equally courteous and welcoming manner but generally displayed a certain degree of distrust and struggle in actually cooperating. I personally suppose that there was difficulty on their part in accepting the idea that the real intercultural dynamic present in teaching and institutional organisation could be "read and evaluated" from outside (or inside) such institutions. Perhaps there was also some concern that external or other researchers could investigate the real perception of such a dynamic among teachers and students.

The first form of involvement consisted in a phase of qualitative research by means of batteries of multi-thematic FG composed of three meetings for both students and teachers. In brief, out of the six academic institutions that were involved in the FG phase as regards the teachers, 3 accepted to carry the activity out in 2 meetings, 2 chose the option of 1 meeting and in the biggest institution, i.e. the PUU, only 3 faculties accepted the one-meeting mode, while one faculty, along with the ISCSM, opted for the 2 meetings mode<sup>6</sup>.

The main, and understandable, reason for this, which was also present in the ICL, often lied in the fear of overlapping many activities and initiatives, as well as the desire to protect formators and candidates, as well as students and teachers, from the dispersion and overload of commitments. Another reason for not participating consisted in "having already dealt with the issue", having the matter "already been the object of other meetings, formation sessions and assemblies, etc". I sometimes had the impression that "the matter" was perceived as a topic "to be dealt with, to be discussed..." rather than a process to be monitored, evaluated, promoted, produced, and transformed. It was difficult, and often fruitless, to try to share this second ap-

proach with superiors, formators and teachers in light of a different and new way of considering “the matter”, which is connected less with *coexistence* and more with *formation organisation*. Yet perhaps, in my opinion, it was the very intuition of this horizon that created difficulties for the hierarchical structures of the institutions and formation organisations. In truth, they were supposed to be the subjects who are most interested in the investigative processes and the results of the Action Research that had also been devised as an opportunity and time for self-formation. These institutions were supposed to be the first to eventually achieve a new awareness of reality, initiate transformative processes and guide them. I will return to this topic in the final paragraphs.

Another interesting dynamic consisted in the phase of recruitment and expansion of the research *équipe*, as well as the sharing of the project, its objectives, its possible instruments and the attempt to create a common “language” concerning used terms and their profound understanding. Most of the *équipe* was made up of students and teachers from the same academic institutions that were involved in the action-research-training, and a part belonged to the world of ICL. It was necessary, but also interesting, to work on sharing the project and its “language”, both as a *pre-test* of some instruments and as the beginning of a reflection on the semantic and practical perception of terms such as “multiculturality”, “interculturality”, and “intercultural competences”. There were divergences and different experiences, approaches and ways of thinking within the *équipe* itself that required personal and group discussion and elaboration. It was just as interesting, both during and after the various formation sessions with the *équipe* members, to reflect on the ongoing dynamics and processes related to these dimensions within the realities they were meeting during the research. The presence of researchers from “more secular” contexts also made the confrontation useful both on a comparative level and in relation to the greater awareness of various surrounding contexts.

In brief, if I were to describe what emerged from my field diaries in relation to the first phase of the research with few and significant words, I would say that, both during the qualitative and quantitative phases, the experience of contacting and engaging various realities was characterised by:

#### For the RESEARCH ÉQUIPE

- *Enthusiasm and sharing of the project and its objectives, but lack of initial clarity regarding the difference between multicultural and intercultural dynamics.* It was important to focus with them on the differences that are present in many multicultural formation contexts in case they presented projects in or attention towards an open and dialogue-based *multicultural*, or paths in view of an *intercultural* dynamic. In other words, the *équipe* also had to reflect on and mature in the (planning, practical and dynamic) differences between the horizon of a welcoming multicultural and that of an interculturality capable of producing mutual transformations. It was just as important for the *équipe* to better understand the existence of specific intercultural competences and of the pondered processes that promote them.
- *Great attention towards the engagement, training in and sharing of the use of participative methods* and of the activation of mutual support towards awareness within an *équipe* that was plural in terms of generations, countries of origin, studied disciplines, academic roles and ecclesiastical contexts.
- *Perception of the experience’s value in terms of self-formation and “multicultural” dialogue* in academic or ICL formative contexts featuring strong cultural plurality.

#### For the UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

- *Widespread surprise and lack of preparation, as a team of researchers, in elaborating matters concerning the relation between multicultural, interculturality and their own educational offer.* In the course of our first contact with these in-

stitutions and, as we will see later on, in the FG phase, there was a certain degree of unease and lack of preparation in connecting their own disciplinary matters with those of *multi-* and *interculturality*. There was a tendency to see multiculturalism as a dimension (difficulty, disturbance) of didactic transmission, an issue related to addressees and students, and interculturality as a specific matter of certain disciplines.

- *Substantial resistance towards outside observation*<sup>7</sup>. Sometimes the evaluation/self-evaluation was perceived as a time of analysis, collaboration and improvement. Much of the time however, it was perceived as a moment of judgment, and in some cases, of interference in their work. After all, our action-research-training provided *not* for the production of an evaluation report of universities or congregations *but rather* a participative process whose results would have been freely received and employed for further internal processes aiming at the qualification of the experience. This dimension was little grasped and implemented. Furthermore, there was a certain amount of struggle due to the research's being perceived as an experience coming from the bottom and not proceeding in a hierarchical line. It was carried out by a group of university researchers – initially from the PUU, the PFSEA and an international institution (UISG) – and it was open access and therefore not “commanded from above”. The encountered environment seemed to be more accustomed to asymmetrical dynamics.
- *Partial disengagement in taking advantage of the time for collaborative formation*. As mentioned, in the universities and academic institutions that embraced the research/action path it was very difficult to engage teachers in the formation-self-formation activity that had been planned and devised as 3 consecutive meetings in the form of FG. The main reason that was given was the overload of meetings and commitments (as well as lessons), and the perception of this activity as free and not mandatory, i.e. not formally requested by academic authorities. As a result, in the various academic institutions that were involved, the number of teacher FG had to be reduced to two, or even only one, as a minimal condition to maintain at least some participants. Within these “abbreviated solutions” we attempted to summarise the type and content of the investigation without making any substantial changes. Moreover, in the various academic institutions many, and sometimes even most, of the participants who were truly interested in the issue or desirous to demonstrate their presence at these academic initiatives were either not permanent (in the case of invited professors or lecturers) or had only recently been instated. This occurred, with varying numbers, at the PUU, the ITVCC, the IUS, the STI–PIME and the FaTeSi. The contrary occurred in the PFSEA, where the participants had been formally invited: here in fact, there was a majority of permanent teaching staff and less availability on the part of the invited professors (who were not as present at the university). In general, during the teacher FG there was a certain struggle in carrying out the *peer-to-peer* self-formation experience, and at times the questions of the FG seemed to be aimed more at “judging” (evaluating) the work of the teachers rather than analysing the situation together; at other times, there were questions as to whether a superior institute was organising the research.

The dynamic of hierarchical processes seems to be strongly perceived in Catholic ecclesiastical contexts, but the situation differs in universities and formation communities of consecrated life. The former initially embraced the chance to host the research but presented difficulties when it came to really engaging students and teachers. The latter generally ignored the invitation to participate and closed themselves to a prospect of reading that was animated from outside; however, the few who accepted the proposal were seriously and more collaboratively engaged.

## STUDENTS

- *More extensive but problematic involvement of students.* It was also difficult to involve students, despite their participation being volunteer and sample-based, in the attempt to form only a few FG for each academic institution, each composed of 14 members<sup>8</sup>. For the most part, these meetings were seen as an extra hourly commitment in addition to the students' various university commitments, and in some cases an investigation that could highlight something – i.e. multiculturalism – that was evident in the composition of the student body but not to the same extent in that of the academic organisation, languages, dominant cultures and course programmes, was viewed with suspicion. Like in the brief 2007 survey, I sensed the perplexity of many students concerning the researchers' real desire to listen to the truth and the students' practical possibility to express opinions, including critical ones, as well as little belief that anything could really change. *There was more participation in institutions where the researchers made a greater effort to explain the aims, contents and procedures of the research*, as well as where there were teachers who were "more sensitive" towards the research and acted as mediators. In these cases, it was easier to illustrate an activity that would enable the lights and shadows of the ongoing experience to be narrated and lead to reflections on desirable future transformations. In cases where the university population was mixed in terms of gender, the female component was more participative. Those who participated in the FG generally expressed their satisfaction upon having the opportunity to speak more extensively about certain topics. Despite the diversity in experience and competences (with very different languages) students faithfully partook in the proposals that were presented at the 3 meetings.

## For the ICL FORMATION COMMUNITY FORMATORS

- *Difficulties in self-analysis on the part of formators.* The formators to consecrated life who were called on to carry out interviews and not to form FG, somehow manifested dynamics that were similar to those of the university teaching staff. Not many interviews were carried out because only a few formation communities accepted to be involved in the end. Yet this was not the only reason. While courtesy, collaboration and the willingness to meet characterised our contact with such formators, much less willingness to undergo an in-depth interview was displayed. Where this did occur, multiculturalism was perceived as a dimension "of others", i.e. of the candidates, and as dealing more with "their" dynamics of coexistence and community. In few cases did the discussion manage to mostly approach their way of being and acting as formators, the dynamic of the formative proposal, or matters related to the charisma and forms of religious life (which are mostly centred, on a categorical and substantial level, in cultures with a European matrix). In fact, it was difficult to explore how the entire formative framework is rooted in anthropological, social and religious categories with a "Western" matrix on a psycho-pedagogical and spiritual theological level.

It is possible to notice how this dimension somehow emerges in contrast with the extensive documentation that has been gathered on ICL and their reflection on *multi-* and *interculturality* compared to the reiterated claims of the importance and current relevance of the issue, as well as with the "culture" of attention towards multiculturalism that has been expressed based on the recent past of the various congregations (especially missionary ones) that joined the research<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, the somewhat defensive statements "we have already dealt with these things", or "we have already held meetings on this topic", often recurred.

## CANDIDATES

- *Serious and continuous involvement of ICL candidates.* The participation of consecrated men and women in the various formation houses (first by means of the sample FG, and then in an extensive manner with the questionnaire) was generally very consistent. In their case as well, their adherence to the FG was on a voluntary basis. The decisional process of these smaller realities with closer relationships resulted in more consistent and dynamic participation compared to that of the academic institutions. Such meetings were, for the most part, considered an extra – albeit interesting – hourly commitment by the consecrated men and women and allowed them to escape their routine of community commitments.

### 2.2.2 A further statistical annotation

It must be pointed out that the few formative ICL communities that signed up for the qualitative phase and were mostly from missionary congregations, were backed by formators, formation programmes, but especially by candidates that were rather open and favourable towards the contents of the research and the group dialogue approach. A further reflection is in order here: as previously mentioned, in the *qualitative phase* of the research, there was greater availability within the male communities, while more closure emerged in the female communities. However, it is necessary to point out that it was the heads and formators of the “female communities”, and not the communities themselves, that expressed greater closure and acted as filters of the experience. In contrast, during the *quantitative phase*, there was less involvement on the part of the male participants and greater availability within the female part, since the Questionnaire was open access and *online*.

Considering that the quantitative phase of the research (the administration of the online Questionnaire) mostly took place within the academic institutions, the following brief reflections may be useful: 81.9% of those who completed the Questionnaire were diocesan priests, seminarians or consecrated men and women. The latter, i.e. the consecrated men and women, made up 68.4% of the compilers. It is interesting to see how 71.6% of the number of people who filled in the Questionnaire were female. Considering that 13.4% of the total were diocesan priests and seminarians, and that 18.1% were male and female laypersons, it is easy to infer that most of the consecrated men and women who filled in the Questionnaire were “consecrated women”<sup>10</sup>. This data assumes even more value upon observing – even merely as an example – the related numbers (Table 1) and absolute numbers (Table 2) of the students of 4<sup>11</sup> of the universities or higher education institutes where the Questionnaire was distributed in 2021 (corresponding to 75.8% of the institutions that answered the Questionnaire<sup>12</sup>).

**Tab. 1** – Percentage of distribution of the Q participants among the academic ecclesiastical institutions\*

Participating academic institutions	Percentage
Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome)	38.4%
Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome)	25.6%
Istituto Universitario Sophia (Florence)	6.0%
Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome)	5.8%
Pontificia Università Salesiana (Rome)	5.1%
Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan)	3.4%
Other university institutions	15.7%
Total	100.0%

\* Only institutions with a % above 3% were listed.



**Tab. 2** – Absolute number of teachers and students present in the academic ecclesiastical institutions in the three academic years in which the action-research-training took place\*

Academic Year		Italian teachers	European teachers (non-Italian)	Non-European teachers	Students	Males	Females
	PUU						
2018/2019		83	19	23	1396	1094	302
2019/2020		76	12	21	1240	929	311
2020/2021	<i>Covid19 Pandemic</i>	72	12	21	1286	1046	240
	PFSEA						
2018/2019		41	2	8	356	37	319
2019/2020		42	3	9	346	32	314
2020/2021	<i>Covid19 Pandemic</i>	47	3	13	459	54	405
	ITVCC						
2018/2019		28	8	7	173	18	155
2019/2020		29	10	8	167	11	156
2020/2021	<i>Covid19 Pandemic</i>	30	8	7	151	12	139
	IUS						
2018/2019		32	10	4	123	58	65
2019/2020		28	8	5	128	67	61
2020/2021	<i>Covid19 Pandemic</i>	34	7	8	164	81	83
	STI-PIME <sup>13</sup>						
2018/2019		27	–	–	41	35	6
2019/2020		27	–	–	54	48	6
2020/2021	<i>Covid19 Pandemic</i>	29	–	–	74	53	21

\* **Source:** the didactic secretariats of the academic institutions. The FaTeSi in Palermo is absent, as it did not send the data, but its percentage of compiled Questionnaires was not significant.

It is interesting to see, upon observing only A.Y. 2020/2021 in Table 2, how the significant number of women that filled in the Questionnaire (71.6%) cannot be accounted for based on the majority of female students in the PFSEA and ITVCC (which combined still make up 31.4% of the total number of compilers), since the vast majority of participants in the PUU and the STI-PIME are male. At the IUS, the number of male and female students is even. The interweaving of this data leads to the conclusion that the Questionnaire has mostly been the object of interest of women and not men (why? I will advance a hypothesis later), and that most of them are probably consecrated women that attended the PUU and PFSEA institutions.

3

### A comparative analysis of the framework presented by the Focus groups and Questionnaire

I do not wish to repeat what has already been illustrated in the preceding contributions<sup>14</sup>, yet it is important for me to have them in mind, read them and go through

them from a comparative perspective. Therefore, I will add my analysis of the gathered data and information to what has already been detailed and share a series of conclusive reflections. I will try to do so in a schematic manner by indicating the “thought-provoking” critical points and aspects that emerged during our four years of listening, working, reflecting and comparing.

### 3.1 The main subject of our research: female, member of an ICL, who crosses different worlds

In the working hypothesis of our research, we started from the perception that, in these worlds so marked by multiculturalism (pontifical and ecclesiastical university institutions and ICL formative communities) there were different levels of awareness in relation to the terms and dynamics at play: everyone perceives multiculturalism, but what value do they give it? Do they know the specific meaning of the intercultural dynamic? Do they confuse it with the former? Do they know what an “intercultural competence” is? Do the people who experience this immersion in cultural plurality perceive the competences that they already possess and exercise as well as those they should develop? Do the (academic or of formation to consecrated life) formative institutions promote and form them in a conscious and systematic manner? The (provisional) answers to these questions stemmed from research in the field and the rereading of textual data and of that deriving from the completion of the questionnaires. The units of analysis were different, the sample mostly came from the complex and multifaceted reality in Rome, and the information received from the various control units (formative faculties, communities and locations that differed from the Roman institutions) substantially confirmed a perceptive and practical dynamic that is similar in the analysed samples. However, there is a “key subject” that emerged throughout the entire process and constituted about 70% of the studied sample base: consecrated women between 25 and 55 years of age, mostly from Africa and Asia but with relevant percentages of European (especially Italian) and Latin American members. This is the “woman belonging to an ICL” who crosses different cultural worlds for the mission and her formation, and who constitutes almost 50% of the participants of the FG and more than 70% of those who completed the Questionnaire or were involved in the completion of other provided instruments of investigation (intercultural survey form and analysis of critical incidents)<sup>15</sup>.

Why is there such an imbalance towards women? The population, both female and male, that was contacted and involved throughout the various stages of the research had been carefully selected. We could actually say that the majority of the population that received the invitation to participate in the research was sometimes mostly constituted by a male point of contact (e.g. in the PUU). Nevertheless, men, be them already priests or on the path of formation towards diocesan or religious Catholic priesthood, more frequently withdrew from the research. In academic institutions or formative events featuring a mixed participation (male and female), even when the male component represented the absolute and abundant majority of the population, it composed the relative and scarce majority of those who joined the FG, and a clear minority of those who compiled the Questionnaire. Among the ICL communities in Italy that were called to fill in the Questionnaire, only the female congregations responded sporadically<sup>16</sup>. Is reflection on the practices of multiculturalism and interculturalism only a female matter? Is the “potentiation of” and “formation towards” intercultural competences only a path for women? Is welcoming others in their cultural diversity and caring for relations a “feminine thing” while men do not cede, defend their identity and culture<sup>17</sup>, and avoid entering problematising discussions? Or are we in the presence of a more complex attitude which, beyond these hypothetical simplifications and generalisations, is connected to the phenomenon of “clericalism”<sup>18</sup> in the Catholic Church, meant as a form of separation, authority, lack of dia-

logue, and disdain towards investigations from below? The doubt that the priest or he who studies as such (in Rome, in particular), could aim at reaching a status (and socioeconomic position) of authority rather than dedicate himself (with passion and effort) to meeting and confronting the world and its complexity, emerges. It is easy to think that he may – not only but mostly – be destined to future teaching or governing<sup>19</sup> roles (especially if involved in higher education abroad) rather than those based on animation, dialogue, understanding and the participative construction of basic realities. In contrast, female candidates seem to be better suited for dialogue from below and for the horizon of missionary activity, pastoral animation and service in the territory that are characterised by cultural, religious and socioeconomic pluralism, especially in missionary contexts. Only a partial divergence compared to these very general hypotheses emerged from the male religious missionary world: however, as we already know, it mainly participated in the qualitative part of the research. In any case, these are open reflections. There is still much to investigate in further depth.

### 3.2 Disturbances in the perception of key terms: multiculturalism, interculturality, intercultural competences

In the various units of analysis, different ways to perceive, interpret, and therefore manage cultural plurality and its consequences appear. Here as well, the matter of the perception/interpretation of cultural diversity leads to the emergence of other problematic points. These also concern the difference between *leadership* and the base, among formators and candidates.

As in the reflection that was shared in the preceding paragraph regarding the numerical differences between male and female participants in the research that opened a possible window onto the matter of clericalism in the Catholic Church, now, upon discussing multiculturalism, another window opens on the way university education and, to the same extent, “educational and formative processes” in general, should be understood. I will therefore proceed by unit of analysis and briefly share what, in my opinion, emerged from the observation and analysis of the data.

#### ECCLESIASTICAL UNIVERSITIES AND ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

##### *Teachers/Students*

In the context of academic education, upon listening to the *teachers*, the perception of university education as an event of unidirectional communication that is characterised more by the transmission and consequent possible acquisition of content than by the qualification and learning of competences (including cognitive ones) and critical abilities prevails. The matter of multiculturalism is thus mostly seen as a typological *context* of the base of recipients of the transmission/transfer operation of content. In cases where the origin of the candidates is plural, the main problem (for the transmission of content) is, in fact, a linguistic one (in the dimension of code more than of semantics): technically, it is “a disturbance” of efficient transmission. Space is little or rarely given to the conscious and critical perception of the multiculturalism of the teachers themselves, who self-perceive themselves (or perhaps only narrate themselves as such in public) as having transited with sufficient “integration” to “Western” culture and the Italian language. Even less space is dedicated to the matter of the mono, multi and/or intercultural dimension of disciplinary contents. Therefore, while multiculturalism is mostly a problematic fact characterising students (and mainly a linguistic problem), the multiculturalism/interculturality dynamic as disciplinary content is generally perceived as a “topic” to be treated in certain specific subjects, and not a transversal, and thus transdisciplinary, element. It is transversal in the background of the formators, as of the candidates, but also of the educational offer (contents and programmes). In any case, interculturality, as Deriu<sup>20</sup> rightfully points out, is not perceived as the responsibility of the teacher,

who is called upon to transmit his or her specific discipline (of which, I repeat, the mainly Western contextual and cultural aspect is rarely seen). Even the comparison with other teachers from other continental contexts is only a vague hypothesis that is indicated theoretically: we are in Italy, in Europe, with an age-old Christian tradition, and this indicates the main cultural horizon of reference without it needing to be reiterated. The “others”, or the other teachers with different cultural backgrounds are basically called upon – albeit with mutual respect – to approach and integrate within a formal, thus enriching confrontation and tolerant dialogue. Those who belong to this “other” origin tend to (finally) be able to speak about it but do so with great humility and without great demands.

During the teacher FG, the sincerity of some – although few – teachers in sustaining that they had never considered “the matter”, and that these are questions they had never asked themselves, is striking. Others, on the contrary, assume the topic as being inside their way of acting and thinking as a teacher in a multicultural context of teachers and students, but then only give examples about the adaptation or the possible and difficult “translation” of content for “the others”, the recipients, and narrate teaching as unidirectional transmission. It is usually the non-Italian or non-European teachers who present competent reflections on the matters at play in terms of the meanings and forms of thoughts in disciplinary content, but they do so in a marginal and discreet manner.

In these stories, Europe often appears as an academic and scientific world that, being unique, developed or was the main motor of the human or religious sciences<sup>21</sup>. The existence of other continental contexts with a cultural and disciplinary heritage that is just as historical, be it similar or different, is not, little, or not relevantly perceived. For some teachers, this self-referential “ethno(Euro)-centric position” seems to have been enacted and experienced but not conscious. For others, this position is conscious and experienced with a certain degree of discomfort but betrays a lot of circumspection, introjection, or something that it is not really the case to talk about. It is worth noting that the Italian teachers mostly favoured narrations where it is the *other* (new teacher and especially student) who encounters difficulties with what he or she finds and receives during the didactic event (language, lessons, theoretical frameworks, exams). It is “they” who do not understand and need to be helped or guided to understand. Multicultural attention consists in taking on the task of helping them to adapt and integrate.

It is the teachers of foreign origin who most often report their own acculturative difficulties, as well as the awareness that the *other* (teacher and especially student) may experience the same. It is underlined that such difficulties do not derive from “not understanding”, but rather from the cultural inconvenience of “difference”, or in other words from seeing something that has been understood in a different manner. However, these considerations are narrated in a discreet manner, so as to not really “touch” upon the sensitivity of the dominant cultural horizon.

All this leads to the emergence, along with the rarity and vagueness of seriously focused reflection on postcolonial and intercultural processes, of the prevalent educational model. Although an extensive bibliography on learning processes and didactic methodology has been built over the decades, and although we may speak today of many innovative matters and modes<sup>22</sup>, a mostly deductive model and a form of teaching that is mostly based on frontal and unidirectional dynamics still prevail. They are based on contents presented as discursive/rational elements that the candidate must listen to/understand, comprehend/interiorise and, if and when possible or required, choose and translate into behavioural practices. For this reason, the main problem lies in “the language”, i.e. the code chosen for the data transmission. The imagined sequence that learning must undergo follows this path: ear / eye → brain → “heart” (in a metaphorical sense: appreciation / desire / choice / willingness) action / body → world.

Therefore, without entering the psycho-pedagogical and neuropsychological matters underlying the plausibility or bias of this imagined process, in our case “multi-

culturality” is mostly transformed into a matter of linguistic diversity and “interculturality and the related socio-relational competences” become a “topic” (content/discourse) to be made into the subject of lessons or conferences, as well as workshops to explore a “topic”. It is not a matter (it is almost never understood as being the matter) of complete educational objectives, actions of collaborative learning, theoretical/practical and relational competences, alternative semantic approaches to content and teaching methods, etc. From a unidirectional perspective with resulting in-person teaching, the only problem (when present) lies in the inconvenience that arises when the used linguistic code is not “understood” (correctly decoded and memorised). Furthermore, if it is understood, the cultural (non-linguistic) mediations are generally the responsibility of the candidate or may be facilitated by means of a comparative path that is provided by the teacher or created by the student. The problem, therefore, is not only the matter of understanding multiculturalism, interculturality and intercultural competences, but also the awareness of and real willingness to transform the formative model. However, the topic is wider than what our research sought to study, and further in-depth analyses of the second meeting of the focus groups could lead to the emergence of other aspects.

The male and female *students* enacted an approach that was partly similar to and partly different from the topic. When inserted into a frontal formative system having the aim of acquiring content (by means of discursive activities), the linguistic matter remains the main means of detecting diversity with teachers and students; after all, it is also the normal first communicative link and gate among people of different origins. Nevertheless, in comparison to the teachers’ discussions, which mostly make the problem of misunderstanding and distance emerge, male and female students are more creative and positive: they highlight the value of even sporadic attempts of teachers’ and students’ *cross-cultural* action. They are *cross-cultural* because it is important to underline the intermediate steps going from multiculturalism towards interculturality, which are attempts to go across and to overcome one’s own position, and in some way tip the balance towards the other. Such a (more or less themed and more or less aware) maturation of one’s intercultural competences, as well as those of others’, may be seen in students (upon going through the FG’ materials and the results of the Questionnaire<sup>23</sup>) as something that grows with time: the time spent in Italy, the years of living in multicultural religious congregations, the years of pastoral mission in different geographical contexts, and finally the years spent attending universities, faculties or academic institutions. One’s own discomfort towards language (and/or the culture of the other) and the perception of the discomfort of others towards one’s own language and culture decrease – as it is feasible, but not obvious, to think – in function of one’s own experience of diversity. Cultural shock may in fact sediment and exacerbate the discomfort of people and their communities, yet a trend of adaptation and gradual solution emerges in general. The educational and formative institutions that consciously detect the resources and problematic areas of a multicultural context should therefore facilitate processes or prevent inconveniences within an experiential and qualifying, and not discursive, logic. One of the questions that animated the second meeting of the FG was devised in this sense: “2.2. Thinking of your formation in the context in which you were inserted, *what type of proposals* are made by those who animate and direct such an environment in order to promote *multicultural attention and interactions*? Briefly describe them”. The students indicated some efforts that were made by the academic institutions, but not great commitment. I will only report three statements that briefly describe what emerged in many FG:

«A specific proposal no, maybe promoting a nice environment, some time to work together, this could already be a way...but something specific to know, to share, to accept the culture of others, that...no...» (A, FG 2, 26/11/2018)

«...there are professors who give tasks according to research, according to one's own country, and sometimes there are those who even give the opportunity to share one's own experience, but it is not aimed at promoting interculturality, but rather to make people's culture known...» (A, FG 2, 26/11/2018)

«...we are all foreigners because there are almost no Italians. For this reason, there is a certain degree of sensibility, and then also some professors, but this depends on the professor, who sometimes give us the chance to exchange thoughts "speak for 5 minutes in small groups, say what you think, how this works in your country, in your congregation, in your country". Perhaps some professors are more sensitive...also the fact that the professors themselves are from different cultures... This also helps in this sensibility, (...) then yes, there are courses. Last year there was a course just on interculturality held by professor \*\*\*. He is Congolese and a specialist. So yes, I have the impression that this is important for the institute, not everything works well but in any case there is awareness and also an effort to help the academic community» (C, FG 2, 04/12/2018).

The analysis of this second FG was carried out by Fiorenza Deriu<sup>24</sup> using the *IramuteQ software* but not by the other researchers, who used MAXQDA 2020. It could therefore be further investigated in depth. In general, even the simple reading and discursive analysis of the recordings highlight the episodic dimension of the formation proposal, which is connected to the teacher's personality and mostly in the linguistic or merely occasional and representative/folkloristic horizon of cultural diversity. They usually consist in irregular and not planned "facilitating" activities for students rather than the assumption of cultural plurality (on a disciplinary and interdisciplinary level) with regard to the formation proposal, with the exception of some specific courses (cultural anthropology, intercultural communication, intercultural pedagogy, interreligious dialogue). In any case, the horizon is that of multiculturalism and never appears, on a substantial level, as interculturality.

#### ICL FORMATIVE COMMUNITIES: *Formators/Candidates*

In the context of ICL formative communities, a certain vagueness on the topic is striking upon analysing mainly the material of the few interviews to *formators* (7) but also the contact, observation, and formal and informal dialogue with other formators that had not been interviewed formally but met during the creation of the FG. Clearly, the database for such an analysis is small and reflects the specific and personal experience and competence of few people. Nevertheless, some things recur and are mirrored in what has been said and indicated by the candidates.

During the interviews with some of the *ICL formators* (one Brazilian, one Eritrean, four Italians, and one Spanish whose congregations or missionary institutes are generally mostly composed of African or Asian members) various moments were dedicated to the matter of interculturality. When asked about the differences between multiculturalism and interculturality, some of them answered as follows:

«I am a bit embarrassed. It (*our institute – Note by editors*) is definitely multicultural. I believe that interculturalism is when there is an exchange among cultures, in other words one takes advantage of the other's culture. This is what I understood, but honestly I must say that you caught me off guard. It's not...I have never thought of it, I have to be honest. But I think a bit of interculturality as the advantage that one takes of the culture of another, or of the enrichment that one gains from the culture of another. That's what I think, I may be wrong» (V., 24.11.2018).

«...I would not know how to define them, I would not be able to exactly tell you the difference now because even now, when they ask us.... so what are you.... we are, we speak of internationality and interculturality and our congregation is formed by interculturality and multiculturality» (T., 29.03.2019).

«...we reflected as an institute, and this is the booklet that was published after the meeting that they had and... but... we are lacking in continuity, so we have this meeting and then it seems that the topic is done, although important things were underlined in that meeting, but it is a reflection that it is not finished at all, it is a reflection that it should be carried forth, and instead once this meeting is done it is forgotten» (J., 24.11.2018).

«Multiculturalism, I imagine some monolithic students from Africa or Chile, for example, that bring their nation like a...how do you call it, container. So when they later go on a mission everyone wants to be Chilean in Peru, Colombian in Peru and so naturally where does the encounter take place? We go down parallel roads. And interculturality instead? Instead interculturality, I see that everyone comes with their own, their baggage, but the baggage is open, so they pull out their own best, but also their own worst sometimes, and share it with the others so there is a comparison. From this comparison something new, something that is not really local could be born but it is, well...not placed among the clouds, but it is human...in other words, it is different, richer» (C., 29.03.2019).

«I believe that multiculturalism is... I don't know... as if the other cultures were... one in front of the other, they can be juxtaposed, I'm not really sure, like an archipelago, or in search of an exchange, each is not an unconnected island, but by speaking, communicating, like with bridges, it remains a nucleus... but various influences then pass» (A., 06.04.2019).

The way in which the formator is called to transmit the values of the “charisma” of his or her ICL and the solidity of religious life to educate in the “*character*” and human dimension of behaviours and attitudes, to help each on the path towards common life (all perceived as if it were a value in itself, with its own strength, a-cultural) thus emerges. He or she feels called to this. Cultural plurality, instead, is a background variable that is added as a “specific mode”, on the candidates’ part, of being, perceiving oneself, perceiving others and behaving. It may be richness, in the sense of appreciation of pluralism, or, and more simply, a “disturbance” with regard to communication and socialising. However, the centre is generally occupied by the person (interpreted according to European categories...), not the matter of cultural difference.

As far as multiculturalism and interculturality are concerned, there are vague ideas and only sometimes is the reflection more profound; “common”, simplified perceptions prevail. Multiculturalism is perceived in a “divisionist” sense, and where there are cultural diversities, each normally seeks to live or survive according to one’s own mentality and one’s own uses and customs without wanting to impose them on others and without wanting to be transformed by those of others. Interculturality is “when there is exchange”, “mutual enrichment” (the topic of culture diversity as a set of “things” that one is and has and “exchanges”). The two concepts, while somewhat plausible, are however perceived in their extreme and simplified form. The problem for formators – due to their action and the communitarian life of the candidates – emerges when one passes from reflections that are a bit theoretical to the planning and managing of community life as well as that of religious and missionary formation: what does this “exchange” mean? How does it occur? Based on what does it take place? Based on what can exchange and negotiation not take place? Who decides it? By means of which cultural categories is the exchange managed?

Who animates or promotes it? What does enriching oneself of the “values” or the traditions of another culture exactly mean? How are they stably inserted into the “culture” of the recipient? How do they transform it? Into what? Generally, there is silence in the face of these questions. What has been shared by the formators seems more to be a way of “organising” community life in a non-conflictual and tolerant manner than dealing with the matters of learning and understanding charisma and the human person within a plural, hybrid and intercultural perspective. Such an interpretative and practical “perspective” of plurality, hybridisation and intercultural contamination and transformation is a distant topic (while it is what actually happens daily and slowly). The consideration of diversity as plurality and of interculturality as, at the most, mutual enrichment, prevail. Then, as we mentioned, the way in which the exchange occurs and what it changes within a person is not really clear. It is preferred to “believe” and not explore the image of a sedimentation of experiences that accumulate and “enrich”. The rest of the work focuses, on one hand, on the inclusive respect of cultural plurality in communities (food, some marginal habits, songs, certain liturgical aspects, the language at times), and on the other hand, on the possibility of occasionally expressing and representing diversity within a mainly folkloristic horizon.

«...we have a day... then there are also others, throughout the year...for example, if there is the Independence Day of Congo, we have a small party. Then they speak about their country, they explain what they do in their country to the others. There is a Kenyan national holiday, they prepare a little something and talk a bit to the others about the country, about Kenya, about the challenges they face there. No, in that they are fairly open, they also know a bit about the things they also have in other countries, especially the Africans...» (J., 24.11.2018)

By the way, this entirely European attitude of repeatedly giving a specific name to those who come from different countries (they are referred to as Chileans, Indians, Chinese, Poles, Italians, Americans – referring improperly only to US citizens) is surprising, as is that of speaking about “Africans” indiscriminately to refer to those (for the most part with black skin) coming from the different and numerous countries and cultural contexts of Africa. Moreover, within the perspective of inclusive cultural plurality, a problem is sometimes reported when one ethnic or national or cultural group prevails on the others. Usually, phenomena that have already been seen (but are still widespread) of Eurocentrism in language, lifestyle and ways of religious experience are repeated, but this time from an African or Asian perspective. In an interview, an example of a community that is unbalanced towards Africa is narrated, along with the resulting Africanisation of its uses and customs (schedules, food, “exaggerated” sense of privacy), that creates problems even if it does not seem to be “an enormous difficulty” for those who are in a minority position (Italians, Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians). Interestingly, the phenomenon of the current prevalence of “vocations” from continents other than the traditional European or Western ones has been solved, for instance, not by implementing a now-necessary formation of all subjects – formators and candidates – towards intercultural competences for the management of multicultural communities, but rather through facilitating strategies to shorten distances by choosing formators who are capable of adaptation or mediation.

«In choosing the formators, due to the irreparably African imprint that our seminary has taken on, people from Africa or with experience of positive encounters with Africa who are capable of “adapting” here... mmmm adapting perhaps... is really the wrong word.» (V., 24.11.2018)



«...as regards the matter of intercultural formation, I would not make a new proposal. It's enough to...listen to, look, appreciate one another. I would not do anything new compared to what has been attempted... Each person has a culture, a way of living, thinking, acting, relating inside that are fundamental values and when one can.... listen to, feel, appreciate what is in the other person, that is good for me... I don't know, I don't have anything else to add.» (V., 24.11.2018).

Without commenting the reference to the “*irreparably African*” imprint of the seminary at hand, it truly seems that the topic of *intercultural competences* is the great absentee. For the formators that we encountered, multiculturalism is a “fact” that they perceive and seek to face: they have experienced it and developed a certain competence in the course of their personal story (as missionaries from one part of the world who are sent to another part) and in their current formation service. The understanding of interculturality usually does not go beyond the promotion of a mutually welcoming environment and of occasional exchange, and it struggles to go beyond conflict management. However, the specific competences and related qualifying paths aimed at living in cultural plurality and managing intercultural transitions are not part of the formative horizon. Neither the formators nor the candidates are generally accompanied in perceiving and managing their own cultural transformation and contamination: they are an absent topic or the product of a personal path. The formative horizon is mostly based on the reinforcement of relational and communicative human qualities to be enhanced through choice, exercise, patience and the support of a religious and spiritual ideal horizon.

A *gap* emerges between formators and *candidates*. With the appropriate exceptions, the various phases of the research and the results that emerged from the analysis of the texts and the data of the questionnaire present a certain distance that is not only generational, between the formators (even when they are teachers) and the candidates, in relation to the perception of multiculturalism, personal experiences of crossing into and settling in different geographic and cultural contexts, and the possibility of elaborating and promoting intercultural experiences.

Upon rereading the discussions that emerged within the various FG and the data of the Questionnaire, and comparing them with the reflections of Deriu, Deliu and Di Censi, I can hereby sustain that the unit of analysis that was grasped by the candidates seemed to be open to the dynamics of interculturality, even if it is still not well prepared.

While for the former (formators and teachers), as well as for the latter (students and candidates) multiculturalism is a fact pertaining to the reality in which the formative experience takes place, for the candidates it is so with greater awareness also in the reality they came from or in which they carried out their ecclesiastical service. Upon analysing the texts of the FG and many answers of the questionnaire, we can claim that the candidates *make memories out of “their” experience of multiculturalism*, as opposed to many formators who speak of the experience of “others”. Clearly, the data on teachers and formators is smaller: it was limited to few interviews (and the teacher FG) where the role of formators and formation was dealt with more directly. Nevertheless, the overall perception is that of a greater presence, in candidates, of reading multiculturalism and “intercultural competences” that have been experimented and/or acquired in the field. Clearly, there is no lack of lights and shadows: students and members of ICL often analyse their own cultural *background* and that of others, as well as the encounter that can take place with poor, simplistic and inadequate instruments<sup>25</sup>. Other times, also due to the lack of other formation proposals, the multicultural exchange is limited to matters of language, diversity of food, some social behaviours and ways of organising festivities and “ethnic” self-representations. However, there is no lack of reflections and sharing which, on the contrary, are carried out

with human and cultural competence and require training the formators to face the challenge of interculturality, of the *inter*-culturation of the disciplines and charisms of ICL, of teaching and formation methods, etc. As Di Censi<sup>26</sup> well underlines, the increase in formation entails an increase in the ability to analyse and understand other cultures and one's own culture as a dynamic process by trying to sense paths that favour the encounter and relationship of mutual transformation. It is only by being accompanied<sup>27</sup>, and in a climate of dialogue and comparison with planned and solid formation experiences, that one senses in which way it is possible to go beyond the horizon of mere "enrichment" by sedimentation/juxtaposition. It is only thanks to a conscious and intentional formation that one competently faces the fear that the other (or the plural or global context) can transform us. Only good personal and group formation may help each member and the formative institutions participate as a protagonist and be aware of (inter)cultural transition. The horizon of formation seems to be the way to go.

## 4

### Challenges to embrace and necessary transformations

As a matter of fact, in light of what has been experienced, understood and shared throughout these four years, I can say that the horizon of a formation that helps the comprehension and management of multiculturalism is no longer deferrable or relegated to occasional "thematic" exploration, unless it is done by means of occasional workshops based on sharing and animation. I believe that such formation must take on three important challenges:

- a. to be included in higher university formation and entrance in ICL as one of the curricular contents and a mandatory qualification along with others and within fertile and critical interaction with other contents, abilities and competences; curricular contents and qualifications, devised in terms of educational objectives, from the perspective of the candidate's level and degree of learning, and not of the "topics" faced (or, in other words, transmitted) by formators.
- b. to be devised, planned and experienced in a participative manner, thus engaging formators and candidates as interlocutors and bearers of experience and competence and not, especially in the case of the latter, only as the recipients of the formative event;
- c. to be founded on the critical and conscious assumption of the desire to overcome some conceptual and experiential "knots" that impede progress in the formation towards intercultural competences. Such knots are indicated below and have been a motif underlying the main cognitive concerns of our research: 1. culture as a "thing" and not a process, 2. dialogue-based and inclusive multiculturalism as a dangerous synonym of interculturality and 3. the discursive, didactic, occasional approach in formation towards interculturality in multicultural contexts.

#### 4.1 Culture, multiculturalism, interculturality, cultural...

A conceptual knot and a substantial and "objectified" idea of culture persists in the minds of many teachers and formators<sup>28</sup>: it lies between static, monolithic and stereotyped perceptions ("us/them", "my culture is...", "those who come from... are like this", etc.) and more dynamic positions that still make culture into a sort of "innatism", "imprinting" or profound attitude, something that is in fact acquired but learnt once and for all and determines a person. As a result, *multiculturalism* is thought to be an experience of juxtaposition of differences that is changeable for the most part, and *interculturality* the context where some are more capable of transporting "pieces" of

their own or others' "culture" in themselves and others. "Cultural" coincides with "typical", determining, connotative of a geographic area, a human group (at times defined as an "ethnicity"), a religious group or, in general, a part of the population that is connoted at a linguistic and/or sociocultural level. Therefore, each communicative and cognitive operation occurs through narration, representation and, if necessary, the "cognitive" learning of differences, with the resulting control and psychosocial management of the behaviours and feelings that are triggered by the relation, especially if the latter is characterised by proximity. Candidates are also somewhat bearers of this mentality, either due to the "mirror" effect with formative communities and adults of reference, or because it is also widespread in their contexts of origin. After all, they do not want to lose a concept that is self-referential, stable and reassuring in terms of identity and cultural identity.

We may think of "cultural identity" as a reality, as something that really exists inside and outside of us, in others... or we can think of it as "a speech", i.e. an ideological, cognitive and interpretative process that is useful for the management of the self with others while remaining a provisional, procedural, relational element. Psychologists, social psychologists, sociologists, and especially cultural anthropologists<sup>29</sup> have been defining it so for decades with multi and interdisciplinary attention.

Everything that nourishes and builds the perception and the sense of self of the answer to the question "*who am I*" on a psychological and sociocultural level inevitably emerges when we find ourselves before an "*other*", and it never says what we are... but what we are with others and also thanks to others. Identity, which is literally something that remains stable and similar to itself at least for a certain amount of time, is the mental category, the framework that men use to define (and try to at least psychologically control) that which in truth is plural, changes, and updates and modifies itself continuously (and thus remains alive). On a phenomenological level, it is the most absurd and contradictory category that the human sciences could use. Nevertheless, it exists (and therefore is studied); it is part of everyday and scientific-disciplinary language but must be understood in a critical and complex manner and in its "instrumental" use or in its "ideological/interpretative" or "discursive" non-ontological dimension.

Therefore, if we learn to overcome this knot, and in other words to understand, slowly loosen and abandon the "objectifying" meanings of these four key words of ours (*culture, multiculturalism, interculturalism, cultural*), we can open ourselves to a more dynamic, procedural and interpretative understanding. By doing so, it would no longer be a matter of defending, preserving, comparing or exchanging "things"; instead, we would be occupied in a manner that however must be more competent in perceiving, inhabiting and learning how to experience complex, interpretative and relational processes in which we are immersed and of which we are the co-protagonists. It is necessary to understand the dynamics and consequences that produce our identity "perception" and that of who is with us, thus attempting to internalise the result of humanity of each person without "objectifying" it, or in other words freezing it in a stereotyped and static vision of us and the other. Even if we disguise ourselves or tell ourselves or imagine our "cultural identity" or that of others as something that is "rather stable", this corresponds *in reality* to an interactive layering and a continuous, plural and dynamic contamination of different interpretations and actions, both on a generational and a sociocultural, value-based, economic, interpretative and performative level. It is a matter of understanding, experimenting, rereading and reflecting on these dynamics that have always inhabited man and constitute his "nature"... in terms of culture.

Not surprisingly, as I have been experimenting with students in my courses on *Intercultural communication* for years, to journey towards interculturalism, we could start precisely from the multiculturalism that is already inside of us and that, in a plural manner and with various roots and traditions, intertwines *in* and constitutes *our* personal

intercultural story<sup>30</sup>; something, in other words, that becomes *interculturality* inside of us, just as much as it does outside of us. More than “individuals”, we are “multividu-als”<sup>31</sup> who are plural, complex, porous people in relations that sediment and elaborate experiences while sometimes keeping different identities, dimensions and modes together, speaking different languages, acting in more “ubiquitous”<sup>32</sup> ways every day in different in-person or online worlds.

## 4.2 Multiculturalism/interculturality and formation

Another “knot” that must necessarily be overcome is the overlapping between (tolerant, welcoming and dialogue-based) multiculturalism and interculturality (which involves experiences of fusion, contamination, mutual hybridisation and the shared building of new, inclusive and inedited cultural processes): they are not the same thing. It is important for both the formative institution and the candidates to be capable of focusing on the various dynamics that present themselves or can be promoted when one wants to build a generally divisionist, and at the most tolerant multiculturalism; or a welcoming and dialogue-based multiculturalism or, instead...an interculturality, which we know to be something else with different objectives. It is important, along with the dimension of awareness, to proceed then to the qualification of related and more complex competences. Formative institutions are especially called on to operate in terms of planning as regards these different scenarios, and should make a clear choice and consequently build their educational offer. Formation in multiculturalism and formation towards interculturality are two different things. At the most, the former, if aware in terms of planning, could be a prior and intermediate step of the latter. Understanding the difference means overcoming the previous knot that made culture into a “thing” (that one has and one is) and enables the imagining of experiential paths of awareness, qualification and maturation. While tolerant and dialogue-based multiculturalism requires cognitive, relational and communicative abilities with regard to the knowledge, comprehension and non-judgment of *diversity*, thus attempting to build and manage common spaces and times and to share inclusive and non-conflictual practices, interculturality requires even more of these, which surpass the already valid and important ability to decentre oneself, which is mostly based on today and the management of the present. Interculturality asks to positively surpass, elaborate and manage the fear of mutual contamination and transformation, deems it necessary to comprehend cultural processes in a complex, dynamic and profound manner, requires cooperative collaboration and learning skills and, most of all, requires passion, desire and competence in building a future that no one possesses and that is not conceivable as being marked by the projection of the prevailing continuity/innovation of one of the involved parties. An intercultural future, as a conviviality of differences, is not “our” reality in the more open and inclusive future. It is a different reality that is built together and remains to be invented.

## 4.3 Formative projects and practices more than speeches

To accomplish this, it is necessary to overcome the ecclesiastical habit and that of traditional formation teaching, which employs the “discursive” remedy to support the promotion and change of reality. This is truly a “knot” that was often encountered during the research and that must be overcome. Multiculturalism and Interculturality are not “topics” to be spoken about. Choosing something regarding these inescapable dimensions of contemporary life and of formation does not mean inserting the topic into a text, a programme of resolutions that are written and documented for the future in a formative curriculum. It is not limited to organising meetings, conferences, seminars, in-person conventions or formative events or impromptu psychosocial workshops that “talk about it” or “help to talk more about it”. And the principle of those who sustain “that this could at least be an initial way to face the issue and start cir-

culating ideas” is not valid, for it is not so. Instead, it is a widespread way to make those who view dynamics connected with pluralism with distance or discomfort say that “the topic has already been dealt with, much space and time has already been dedicated to the topic and...it is necessary to *speak* about something else...”. Those, on the contrary, who are sensitive towards the matter delude themselves that “having spoken about it” surely triggered some reflection, activated some competence, or initiated some decisional dynamic; however, that usually does not happen or does not go far. We saw this in almost all of the environments that we encountered in the course of our action-research-training. People change, contexts are modified, gradually acquired competences require periodic assessments, enforcement and further formation and....many made decisions or matured competences are dispersed.

The accompaniment, promotion and transformation of cultural processes are dynamic, and complex competences that are not acquired in a deductive manner “by talking and reflecting” on what has not been experienced, or on what one has no authority over, and the possibility of changing and translating into action: in this sense, only frustrating intellectual, moral, or uselessly discursive vicious cycles are generated. The discursive and reflective activity of those who come *from* and work *on* an experience, and especially those who have the authority to and responsibility of making new experiences grow and ripen, is different. In such a case, hermeneutic and projectural circles are activated for the transformation of social action and are extremely fertile and capable of enabling change.

Briefly returning to what had been noticed during the brief 2007 survey on the relevance of the inculturation of novitiates in ICL with a high degree of multiculturalism, I would like to briefly touch upon a matter that has spread in ecclesiastical environments and Christian religious contexts in general: the matter of “word” and “discourse” as forms that are sufficient to trigger transformations. To “talk about”, “talk together about”, “listen to someone who talks about something” seem too often to be actions that are sufficient to promote choices, attitudes and cognitive, emotive and socio-relational competences. In brief, without entering a discipline that is not my own, we may say that in the “great code of the West” and the “grammar of existence”<sup>33</sup> of the Christian world, i.e. the Biblical, Semitic and Hellenistic text and context, God’s “saying” is creative (He says and things are) and “speaking with us” is pro-vocating, interlocutory (He calls man, acknowledging him as an interlocutor and man speaks, assumes a position and, at times, decides to...). However, God, and not immediately man, possesses this characteristic of often being able to speak<sup>34</sup> without “saying” (doing) anything creative for Himself, for others, or for reality. The “word” probably has a creative and poietic effect (that makes, produces, realises), creates and builds mental images and promotes interpretative forms that are then transformed into actions: yet all this only occurs (and can only occur) within a complex multifactorial, social, structural and experiential game.

In our case, something of the sort occurs: on the one hand, there is the horizon of the supposed sufficiency of “speaking” about multiculturalism and interculturality that is understandable within the schemes of cultural transmission based on deductive and asymmetrical teaching methodologies → teacher/formator who speaks → pupil who listens (obeys)/(and therefore) learns. On the other hand, I believe that there is a more or less innocent, (feigned) vice of omnipotence; that which is the action of God and that we think could work with the help of God, “speaking” of human processes, situations or dynamics, is borrowed while paying attention not to concretely affect their structure and institutional organisation. In other words, one avoids intervening in that which would really promote and really transform the same processes and the same situations or dynamics in a vital way. In my opinion, it is necessary to move on to more experiential and participative learning dynamics and to a tighter connection between action, word, interpretation and a concrete and structural transformation of reality. If this is really what is wanted.

## Possible formative and educational paths

The experience that was gained during the research, observation, dialogue and reflection on what emerged from the FG, interviews, analysis of critical incidents and the Questionnaire, leads me to suggest possible formative paths to overcome the above mentioned “knots”. If desired in fact, it is possible to initiate itineraries for the maturation, efficient learning, realisation of concrete planning and a transformation (also of a structural nature) of the formative communities and their members. Having specified the difference between a) inclusive multiculturalism and b) creative, practical and projectual<sup>35</sup> interculturality, we can imagine the former as a preparatory stage of the latter. However, it is a matter, for the institutions, of having and implementing a real formation project towards interculturality and the promotion of intercultural competences.

Upon decisively leaving the episodic logic, or that of “content to be treated”, it will be important to imagine a specific commission/workgroup for communities or academic institutions with a high degree of multiculturalism that will elaborate and propose a participative construction of a project. We know in fact that someone can make a project on formation towards the management of multiculturalism for someone else. As regards interculturality instead, it is necessary to move in a participative and dialogical sense<sup>36</sup>, considering reality a strategic, rich and dialogical ally for maturation and change rather than a recipient to be sensitised or transformed according to a project that is not (or little) shared. In this sense, it is interesting, for the definition of the project, to involve the entire institution and/or community within a participative process of self-analysis, definition of objectives and action towards change<sup>37</sup>.

The project will have to imagine not the realisation of an occasional event, but rather something that establishes a fixed, annual or semestral appointment of analysis, reflection, planning and assessment. It will have to devise systematic activities that will gradually transform and enrich the contents, methods, programmes, formation offer and updating of formators. It will have to imagine interculturality as a transversal and transdisciplinary element.

Such a dynamic requires a dedicated workgroup, with an established working time to promote the collective comprehension of the intercultural horizon of the experience and of the formative structure. We may thus summarise the fundamental elements of this dynamic:

- a. a dedicated workgroup;
- b. an established and specific working time for the construction of the project;
- c. a participative, engaging and transparent methodology both for the building of the project and the implementation phases;
- d. that both the formators and the candidates are involved in the experience of planning and formation;
- e. a comparison *with* and the periodical presence of formators or resources outside of the institution;
- f. the activation of formal and non-formal experiences;
- g. the presence of institutionally established moments to assess the project in relation to expected results<sup>38</sup> and last, but very importantly,
- h. a patient and gradual pedagogy aimed at achieving goals that create a dialogue with periodic assessments of the workgroup and the involved basic reality.

Along with these elements, which apply to both of the units of analysis that were involved in our action-research-training, it is possible to single out specific elements and those of contextualisation:

## HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- the connection between the topics of interdisciplinarity and those of cultural plurality with regards to the contents and methodologies of the formation proposal;
- the planning and realisation of participative Action Research that engages teachers and students in a multi and interdisciplinary manner<sup>39</sup>;
- the elaboration of a “*Self-assessment form*” for the teacher/formator for the annual assessment of *attention towards plurilingualism and multiculturalism* in his or her courses in relation to disciplinary contents, methodologies of animation and student engagement, attention towards other contextual approaches, proposals of further bibliography and webgraphy, etc...;
- periodic *open workshops* available to students and teachers for analysis, assessment, creativity and *concrete planning* with regards to international, plurilinguistic and multicultural attention towards communication, management of spaces, common initiatives and the offer of formation proposals.

## ICL FORMATIVE COMMUNITIES

- It is important to have *stable, and not occasional, congregational and intercongregational workshops* on the international, plurilinguistic and multicultural dimension not only of communitarian socialisation, but also of communitarian organisation (roles, decisional processes, planning and animation of pastoral and missionary work<sup>40</sup>).
- Another element consists in opening a more systematic reflection on the perception and possible *multicultural, intercultural, and transcultural elaboration of the “charisma”* of ICL foundation<sup>41</sup>. Being inhabited today by plural men and women who are all undergoing an anthropological, social, cultural, and hyper/multimodal transition, how may it be devised, interpreted and experienced through modes and categories that are still ethnocentric, increasingly less attentive and increasingly less contextually comprehensible<sup>42</sup>?
- Finally, it is important for each ICL, alone or in collaboration with others, to equip itself with a reflection and concrete guidelines to imagine annual or adequately frequent *formation itineraries* (also with an *external formator*) for formators and candidates on the dynamics of “formation” within a multicultural context in relation to the qualification and assessment of all subjects with regards to *intercultural competences*.

## 6

## Conclusions

Interculturality is an inevitable process. It happens inside of and around us due to the complexity, communication and continuous intersection of different cultural processes and to the encounter and interaction of the human subjects who are involved in and bear it. Such bearers are biased and specific, simultaneously produced by and continuously builders of plural and inedited forms of these same processes. Interculturality may be experienced in an unconscious, conscious, or conscious and competent manner.

Culture and cultural identity are “categories” that try to define, in a mostly static way, that which is in continuous movement and too plural and complex to be appropriately defined. They are fragile, biased, temporary tools and they may be transformed into stereotyped ideas and ideologies, biased and provisory maps that expect to be the territory. Multiculturalism, as an interpretative *framework* and social dynamic is, on the one hand, the perception of the constitutive pluralism of the only humanity and, on the other hand, the attempt that is always a bit precarious to categorise, de-fine, con-fine, identify ourselves and the different other<sup>43</sup> and make the various differences interact in the most manageable way.

The subjects that are involved in the game of multiculturalism, understood as bearers of “specific and different identities” may not recognise themselves in such identities, or they may accept the “label received” from the understanding of others, welcome being stereotyped and trivialised by others, and somehow thus identify themselves. Later though, the process tends to “go mad” and proceed towards mutual ideological, biased and rather precarious identity definitions, until it gradually expires towards the “us”/“them” logic.

The understanding of cultural diversity and pluralism is an important cognitive and formative step, but it cannot always be the horizon of identity and relational awareness and maturity simply because it does not coincide with reality in its fullness and complexity. The various forms of multiculturalism or multiculturalism usually lead to forced divisions, precarious balances and recurring conflicts. Almost never does cultural diversity correspond to a social, economic and communicative symmetry. And usually the “multicultural” management of plural and multicultural reality (I apologise for the play on words) has asymmetric subjects and is brought forth by dominant actors against subaltern actors that tend to put in place, for the most part, marginal alternatives of resilience or (blatant or hidden) conflictual strategies of resistance. In the meantime, all “learn” a communicative and managerial mode: that in which the model of multiculturalism is determined by those who detain power and whose turn it is to do so. In such a sense, it is also<sup>44</sup> possible to explain the postcolonial realities where there has been a passage from one social or “ethnic” group’s processes of social, cultural and political transformation to the marginality and exclusion experienced by another social or “ethnic” group by means of simple substitution or turnover. And the same process may happen (is it already happening?) in some ICL where most of the members no longer belong to the European-Western area of foundation.

It is necessary to experiment, learn, and spread other ways of planning and acting within plural diversity. Conscious and competent interculturality chooses participative and dialogical modes of *coworking* and *cooperative learning*. It is therefore not a matter of doing something for the respectful and partially inclusive welcoming of “others, those who are different”, but also of trying to build an approaching world together where everyone, albeit being (and precisely because they are) different brothers and sisters<sup>45</sup>, can provide their own contribution. This action-research-training has attempted to set some processes in motion in order to analyse what exists more clearly and make it the object of a shared reflection. It also attempted to open a path to catch a glimpse of some alternatives capable of valuing the intercultural competences that are present, and to imagine the promotion and formation of those who expect more attention. The Italian ecclesiastical world of academic education and of the (extremely multicultural) formative ICL communities has been the field of exploration and perhaps the true and familiar context in which researchers have been moving for a long time and for which they believe that some attention and transformations are urgent and necessary. Nevertheless, these transformations may only occur in a conscious and participated manner by deciding in favour of serious, competent and gradual work. The path is open, and perhaps has been so for quite some time...





## Endnotes

1. T. VÃN NGUYEN, *From Multiculturalism to Interculturalism: the Aim of Theological Education in Today's Global Context*, "CrossCurrents" 69, 1 (2019) 24-28. (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/782685/summary>; <https://archive.is/Hta7Z>).
2. This was also accomplished by means of comparisons with the observational notes that were required of the various members of the research *équipe*, especially during the compilation of the reports by the focus groups (FG), and with the comments and reflections that were shared during the field work or briefings.
3. This word "enrichment", or "richness", which is connected to cultural plurality, struck me then, as also in the findings of the present research, as recurrent. However, it was intended in the (convenient) sense of an accumulation, an addition to something that is "known" or "had", but not something that one "is". It therefore is a sort of internal collection that does not become (for there is fear that it could become) syncretism, fusion, and the construction of a richer identity, as it is different and transformed in an inedited in a way that is plural and complex, diverse and transformed.
4. Cf. E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Interculturalism in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*, in *Id.* (eds.), *Education in Multiculturalism, Education to Interculturalism in Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 33-38.
5. Cf. *ibid.*, 35-37.
6. It was difficult to get the teachers to participate in the FG, and this is an "ethnographic" fact that is worth reflecting on. For example, in one academic institution that had been a co-partner of the research project since the beginning, and was therefore engaged and informed by means of numerous initiatives and meetings, we managed to create only two teacher FG, which is still more compared to the institutions that only accepted one. Nevertheless, the participation of the teachers was affected by systematic withdrawals. Starting with 43 teachers, of which 11 were permanent (including emeritus, full and extraordinary professors), we found ourselves at the first meeting with one permanent professor, who was the head, one lecturer and five invited professors, one of whom dropped out before the end. At the second meeting, the one and same permanent professor, i.e. the head, one lecturer and four invited professors, one of which arrived after the meeting started, were present. In the case of the other institutions, where only one or two meeting(s) were arranged, the participants were not numerous but were relevant in comparison with situations like the reported example.
7. Such resistance should be considered somewhat normal, as there has been an Agency of the Holy See for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties that periodically organises "procedures for individual academic institutions" by arranging visits *in loco* by experts since 2007. Cf. [http://www.avepro.glauco.it/avepro/english/00000282\\_Who\\_we\\_are.html](http://www.avepro.glauco.it/avepro/english/00000282_Who_we_are.html); <https://archive.is/mKqHK>.
8. The number of FG that were formed within the various pontifical and ecclesiastical university institutions was based on a proportional sampling base, and the number of FG was greater in institutions with more students. A similar procedure was employed for the ICL formation communities by creating one FG (for each of three meetings) in small communities, and two or more in larger ones.
9. Once again, cf. PANDOLFI – OTTONE, *Interculturalism*, § 3.
10. Cf. L. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural Challenge in Multicultural Education Communities: Results of the Quantitative Survey*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, Tab. 3 and Tab. 5, 163.164.

11. No general data on the others were received.
12. Cf. L. Di Censi, *The Intercultural Challenge*, Tab 3, and Tab. 5, 163. 164.
13. The STI-PIME of Monza (male institution) hosts the Missionary Theological Study, which includes students from a dozen nations: it is now affiliated with the PUU and is also open to male and female laypersons, even only as an “audience”. This explains the female presence (theological study) that has been increasing in a male context (seminary) since 2018. Cf. <https://www.pimeseminariomonza.com>; <https://archive.is/VLldl>.
14. This is not a rhetorical reference: to understand this last contribution, which is part of an extensive and polyphonic *report*, it is necessary to have at least read those preceding it and the Introduction to our action-research-training, written in collaboration with Prof. Ottone, with a certain degree of attention.
15. Cf. OTTONE – PANDOLFI, *Interculturality*, 47.
16. I reiterate that in the course of the *quantitative phase* (March – June 2021) during the online administration of the Questionnaire, the supervisors and heads of the formation of 615 ICL located within the Italian territory were contacted. 409 female religious institutes were contacted through the secretariat of the national USMI, and 206 male institutes through the secretariat of the Italian Conference of Major Superiors (in Italian Conferenza Italiana dei Superiori Maggiori or CISM). Every institute received an e-mail with a brief presentation of the project, the request to notify the research équipe of the presence of formation communities featuring a certain degree of national plurality among its members, and the willingness to spread the Questionnaires among its members and invite them to anonymously complete it online. The invitation was sent twice to each ICL in the months of March and April 2021. None of the 206 male ICL ever answered.
17. Cf. M. CAMPS ET AL., *Ante una iglesia machista, ¿qué hacer?*, “El Ciervo” 43 (1994) 520/521, 5-13 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/permanent/40820374>) and especially the study by Zaíra Ary of the Universidade Federal do Ceará, Z. ARY, *Masculino y femenino no imaginário católico. Da Ação Católica à Teologia da Libertação*, Annablume Ed., Sao Paulo 2000.
18. This expansion has been stigmatised by Pope Francis in many of his interventions. The report that he gave in an interview some years ago, where he analysed the phenomenon of clericalism in the context of consecrated life, is interesting. Cf. FRANCESCO, *La forza della vocazione. La vita consacrata oggi*, (conversazioni con Fernando Prado), EDB, Bologna 2008.
19. The phenomenon of Christian and Christian Catholic “clericalism”, as a masculine form of authority and attitude pertaining to a separate religious cast, typical of European or Western tradition, is then united in the Catholic clergy of other origin with diverse local traditions where the difference and superiority of man over woman is marked. This leads to the overlapping and fusion of social and culture modes that are increasingly in tension and contrast with a globalised world that demands greater equality and emancipation for its female components.
20. In the teacher FG “the topic of multiculturalism underpins all discussions, while interculturality is barely touched upon. [...] Multiculturalism is not managed with an intercultural objective, especially in academic communities where teachers do not perceive this commitment as part of their mission”. F. DERIU, *Intercultural Competences in Teacher Training Communities: Key Concepts Identified by the Text Analyses of Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 95, 110.
21. Cf. within the boundless literature on post-colonial studies, the interesting work of S. BOAVENTURA DE SOUSA, *Epistemologies of the South. Justice against Epistemicide*, Routledge, London & New York, NY 2016.
22. And the recent global lockdown due to the Covid19 pandemic, along with the related spread of remote teaching at all levels of education and formation, has enforced such reflections.
23. This was accomplished both by directly analysing the data and reading the analyses of Deriu, Deliu, Di Censi and Ottone that precede the present contribution.
24. Cf. DERIU, *Intercultural*, 93-102.

25. However, such expressive poverty may be ascribed in part to the fact that this exchange occurred in Italian and not their mother tongue.
26. Cf. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural*, § 4.3., 175-178.
27. Cf. E. OTTONE, *Intercultural Competences under Construction: Qualitative Analysis of Narration of Critical Incidents by a Group of University Students*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 182-234.
28. We are referring to people with an extensive disciplinary background who are mostly dedicated to philosophy, theology and some human sciences that are imagined as universal but rooted in European thought.
29. For more on this, cf. F. REMOTTI, *L'ossessione identitaria*, "Rivista Italiana di Gruppoanalisi" 25 (2011) 1, 9-29 (<http://www.parcobarro.it/meab/ossessione.pdf>), known for the two books *Contro l'identità*, Laterza, Bari 2006<sup>2</sup> and *L'ossessione identitaria*, Laterza, Bari 2017, as well as for the latest, *Somiglianze. Una via per la convivenza*, Laterza, Bari 2019. As far as the Italian context is concerned, the works of the anthropologist M. AIME, *Identità*, Mondadori, Milano 2014 and *Classificare, separare, escludere. Razzismi e identità*, Einaudi Torino 2020, and that of the psychologist A. O. FERRARIS, *La costruzione dell'identità*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2022 are also interesting. For more within the Anglophone context, L. McDOWELL (ed.), *Undoing Place? A Geographical Reader*, Routledge, London 2020 contains the contribution S. HALL, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, 222-237, written in 1997 and still very relevant (see <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/asiandiaspora/hallculturalidentityanddiaspora.pdf>).
30. Each of us almost always bears the fact of having inhabited and having learned "the language" and the way of thinking and acting of many worlds and many "cultures": the generations we have encountered, encounter, and that we have crossed, the ages of life that have followed one another and that we are living today, the urban or rural contexts that we have experienced and internalised, the socio-economic statuses in which we were born, that we have crossed, and that constitute part of our *forma mentis* and of our ways of reading the world, lived or encountered religious experiences, etc. Each of us is a unique, syncretic, and conscious – to a greater or lesser degree – synthesis of all of this.
31. Or «*condividuals*», as anthropologist Marco Aime suggests when commenting and citing the latest publication by F. REMOTTI, *Somiglianze. Una via per la convivenza*, Laterza, Bari 2019 (<https://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/somiglianze-una-la-convivenza>; <https://archive.is/IEjWj>).
32. Cf. M. CANEVACCI, *Il Simultaneo e l'Ubiquo*, "Rivista di Scienze Sociali" 11 (2014) in <https://www.rivistadiscienze sociali.it/digitale-simultaneo-ubiquo/>; <https://archive.is/3z1Ms>.
33. As indicated in the interesting, rich and complex introduction to Biblical texts by P. STEFANI, *Il grande racconto della Bibbia*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2017.
34. Cf. *Gospel according to Matthew 7*, 21-29: «Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven».
35. Cf. also L. PANDOLFI, *Palabras ambiguas y caminos posibles. La Vida Consagrada en la Iglesia Católica en la multiculturalidad contemporánea porosa e interconectada*, "Revista CLAR" LIX (2021) 2, 58-71.
36. Cf. ID., *Animazione interculturale cooperativa*, in ID. (ed.), *Interculturalidad cooperativa. Il Progetto /1*, Aracne, Roma 2010, 107-132.
37. I refer here to two authors who were very active at the end of the XX century in Latin America but are still extremely relevant for their realisation of experiences of this sort. I am referring to O. FALS BORDA – C. RODRÍGUEZ BRANDÃO, *Investigación Participativa*, De la Banda Oriental, Montevideo 1987 and E. ANDER-EGG, *Repensando la Investigación Acción Participativa*, Lumen Humanitas, Buenos Aires 2003.
38. They are not identified, as usually happens with a series of infinitive "verbs" which, being verbs, are non-objective "actions", do not possess a subject and, by definition (known as infinitive), do not possess a clear concluded time of realisation. The expected result is described by a defined subject (in our case, the candidate who finished or is undergoing formation, the

teacher or the student, the entire institution), a concluded action (i.e. an acquired competence, a developed attitude, achieved learning, a transformed situation, an occurred change) and a precise timeframe in which such an action is completed.

39. Cf. D. ZOLETTO – F. ZANON, *La ricerca-azione come “risposta” alle sfide emergenti nei contesti educativi eterogenei. Responsabilità sociale dell’università e formazione in servizio degli insegnanti*, “Lifelong Lifewide Learning” 15 (2019) 33, 13-25 (<https://doi.org/10.19241/lll.v15i33.169>; <https://archive.is/DSdKP>).
40. It is necessary to pay attention when one wants to work on institutions by exclusively changing the shared “contents” by imagining that this will then change relations, practices, ways of thinking and decisional dynamics. It is also necessary to work simultaneously and in a systematic and correlated manner on structures and organisations. Cultural diversity often suffers from structural diversity and asymmetries; therefore, instating dialogue on interculturality without changing organisations, structures and roles may become inconclusive or illusory. Cf. D.A. HARRISON – K.J. KLEIN, *What’s the Difference? Diversity Constructs as Separation, Variety, or Disparity in Organizations*, “Academy of Management Review” 32 (2007) 4, 1199-1228.
41. Cf. R. TOMICHÁ CHARUPÁ, *Lo trans-cultural: símbolo que trans-figura la consagración a la vida*, “Revista CLAR” 59 (2021) 2, 72-81 and L. PANDOLFI, *Cultura e transculture. Tra comunità di vita e comunità di pratica nella Vita Consacrata*, in *Insieme senza esitare. La Vita Consacrata fra diversità generazionali e culturali*, Quaderni CISM, Edizioni Ancora, Milano 2020, 80-92.
42. See the two contributions from the Jesuit priest Sosa and the Verbite Weber at the 2017 semestral Congress of the Union of Superiors General (in Italian Unione Superiori Generali, or USG) entitled “Il discernimento vocazionale in un mondo interculturale; A. Sosa, *Interculturalidad, Catolicidad y Vida Consagrada* in <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZQr4wYn-mrk6OtnKx1JnKpxnwNibTJHtT/edit> and M. WEBER, *Vocational Discernment in an Intercultural World*, in <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zcGXXks2srOq1Nae6xPwbZFw-UlINvzz/edit>.
43. Cf. M. AUGÉ, *Qui donc est l’autre?*, Odile Jacob, Paris 2017 (trad. it., *Chi è dunque l’altro?*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2019, 38).
44. Also, but not only... clearly. In fact, all of the processes of (apparent) decolonialisation and autonomy of countries or territories that have experienced the military, political, economic and cultural domination of a European country or another powerful country at a geopolitical level, may be only partially explained through the substitution of violent and exclusionary colonial power with an internal (ethnic, religious, political) faction that is just as violent and exclusionary. We realise that it is impossible to comprehend these dynamics without recognising the influence and continuous interference of ongoing external factors (actors) that determine them, thus characterising them in terms of their contradictions and complexity.
45. Cf. R. LÓPEZ VILLASEÑOR – J. ANDRADE, *Fratelli tutti: los caminos de la interculturalidad en la vida religiosa*, “Revista CLAR” 59 (2021) 2, 122-128.