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MARGALIT COHEN-EMERIQUE AND THE ZELDA TEAM



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2.2. Encounter with Margalit Cohen-Emerique and her method – told by Artemisszio Foundation

2.3. Encounter with Margalit Cohen-Emerique and her method – told by the CBAI

The meeting with Margalit Cohen-Emerique and her intercultural approach was undoubtedly a major event in the life of the Centre Bruxellois d'Action Interculturelle. And encounters are never the fruit of chance: they take place when we are searching, with our eyes wide open.

Thus, in the 1990s, CBAI was in search... In search of another way to approach the encounter between "communities", with eyes wide open on a changing context.

And this was not the first transformation of the CBAI: created in 1981 to train executives from immigrant communities (the "organic intellectuals" dear to Gramsci), this association was then called the "Socio-cultural Centre for Immigrants in Brussels". Ten years later, noting that the challenge is much broader and that the immigrants of yesterday are the Belgians of today, the association became the Centre Bruxellois d'Action Interculturelle (Brussels Centre for Intercultural Action). This change has a double symbolism: On the one hand, the Centre abandons the increasingly meaningless term "immigrants". On the other hand, it illustrates the concept of intercultural action as both a societal and pedagogical objective. The association thus marks its desire to engage with the various populations that make up the demographic profile of Brussels.

The meeting with Margalit Cohen Emerique follows this process: at the time the CBAI was looking for a methodology to work on the interaction between groups or individuals from different cultures. It was Françoise Berwart, co-director at the time, who found the treasure she was looking for in a



conference: the intercultural approach as conceived by Margalit Cohen Emerique. A turning point took place: Margalit would form the team of trainers at CBAI and many other partners.

- a. Trainers' training in the intercultural approach: trainers from CBAI (Christine Kulakowski, Javier Leunda) and Italians brought together by Caritas (Giancarlo Domenghini, Nicolas Di Pirro, Marco Muzzana) are trained by Margalit Cohen-Emerique from 1994 to 1999 in the framework of the European HORIZON programme; contact with the international ARIC network in 1999.
- b. Trainers' training of 5 trainers from CBAI and trainers from the not-for-profit organization Iteco in February 1995 on "Identity strategies of young people with an immigrant background."
- c. Trainers' training of trainers from CBAI and from partner organisations in Italy and Spain in May 1999, in the framework of the European INTEGRA programme.
- d. Trainers' training of the CBAI team in 2000 on the "Identity threat of professionals and resources to overcome them"
- e. Training of Italian and Spanish trainers in DPN and identity threat of professionals and resources. Training delivered by Cbai trainers Christine and Javier together with Margalit Cohen-Emerique punctually from 2000 to 2003, within the framework of the European programme ITACA SUD. Zelda, the initiator of our project has been present at the training in 2003.

Thus, CBAI and its Italian, Spanish and Belgian partners had been trained together. From the 2000s, the CBAI will give a large number of intercultural training courses in various sectors (socio-cultural, health, justice, etc.) ... to the great displeasure of Margalit ? Indeed, Margalit was somewhat astonished by the variety of the public that benefited from her training approach. Her approach, she reminded us, was built for social workers who had already had a training in the social field which was supposed to have already equipped them with the skills for decentering. But the CBAI, appreciated her method so much that it made the method accessible to a wide range of professionals from a variety of fields and even the ultimate target group itself: newcomers, migrants



participating in CBAI's long training courses have also be trained in the approach. Initially opposed to this choice of the CBAI, Margalit was at the same time interested in CBAI's rich field experience. Resulting in a tumultuous and exciting collaboration, Margalit remains a key figure in CBAI's life, past and present.

Aujourd'hui, le CBAI continue sa route avec au passage des nouveaux enjeux que sont la gestion des équipes multiculturelles, les demandes de réponses aux questions d'actualité (radicalisation...) ou encore la question de « comment travailler avec un public particulièrement « résistant » (racisme, xénophobie...) à la rencontre avec l'autre ? »

Today, the CBAI continues its journey facing new challenges such as the management of multicultural teams, or addressing inquiries on current issues (such as radicalization...) or focusing on methodological questions such as "how to work with a public that is particularly "resistant" (racism, xenophobia...) to meeting others? »

2.4. Encounter with Margalit Cohen-Emerique and her method – told by Cesie

2.5. Encounter with Margalit Cohen-Emerique and her method – told by Élan interculturel

Élan Interculturel is an organisation created in 2008, by psychologists, researchers, trainers - most of whom were immigrants in Paris - who were interested in exploring and developing new methods to facilitate intercultural communication, collaboration and adaptation. One of the founding members had been trainer by Margalit Cohen-Emerique (actually, in a training delivered at the CBAI in 2005), so the approach she created has been with the association since the beginning, formatting the intercultural mindset of newly arriving colleagues. Today we have a very different team, young and interdisciplinary, who did not have the pleasure to be trained directly by Margalit. However, we could



say that familiarity with the key messages of her approach became part of our institutional culture. This does not mean though that the organisation's main profile is to offer trainings following the original method. While élan maintains education and training in interculturality as its core mission, we are curious and quite passionate about putting new approaches to the service of interculturality.

These new approaches include:

Non formal pedagogy: based on the observation that learning is the consequence of the activity of the learner and not the trainer, making the learning process active, personal, experiential.

Educational neuroscience, sensorial pedagogy: building on new findings from this field to foster attention and retention and invite as many senses as possible in the learning experience.

Art mediation: inviting artistic creation as both a simulation of encounter with "the unknown" and as a means to develop skills to welcome and handle this unknown: managing emotions, uncertainty, learning new languages for self-expression etc.

Cognitive psychology: acknowledging the importance of individual psychological processes in intercultural interaction - challenges such as stress reactions - and adapting techniques of Cognitive Behaviour Psychology to remedy these challenges.

These approaches are integrated into our two main axes of activities: intercultural trainings for professionals and the methodological development work carried out in pilot projects. Both activities have the same double motivation. On one hand we believe that welcoming diversity can bring more knowledge and beauty into our lives. On the other hand, we know that today dealing with interculturality is more than a luxury: cultural difference is all too often connected to inequality, and that we have a responsibility in working towards more justice.

Intercultural trainings for professionals

Nowadays we offer trainings mostly to professionals of the social field, and professionals or volunteers of language teaching for migrants. Incorporating new pedagogical principles and



methods into our educational activities has already changed substantially the style and the dynamics of the learning experience we offer, with respect to the trainings Margalit herself was dispatching. But there is another factor affecting maybe even more our trainings: changes in clients' expectations and in general in expectations towards learning experiences. Clients are more and more reluctant to accept long training programmes focusing on transmission of complex methodologies, so we face demands to touch on a variety of subjects of interculturality in a short time. As a consequence, the original 9 days training has become unimaginable. Most of the time we have three, maximum five days. In these constraints, we try to put the focus on part of the approach that we feel participants may be best able to integrate into their practice. This often results in an emphasis of decentering and negotiation, while in a lesser degree offering tools that should help them for the discovery of the frame of references of others: understanding the relevance and risk of "information about other cultures" equipping them with path to acquire and process such information mindfully.

When working on decentering, our attention is on helping people to integrate this simple but radical gesture: whenever we perceive otherness, and this perception triggers sensations of threat or stress, we take a step back and try to use this mirror of otherness to identify what is it that we hold dear and feel threatened by the difference. The awareness of this duplicity (that the other person is moved by values, and logics that are different from mine) and the willingness for self-reflection (as opposed to judgment and rationalisation) are the keys that we wish to transmit most of all to all professionals venturing into intercultural territories.

During "negotiation" we have a double focus: getting participants to understand the nature of negotiation, Second: training participants in skills necessary for negotiation such as intercultural communication (awareness of cultural diversity in communication and flexibility to adjust to it) resistance to one's need of closure in emotionally charged situations, capacity to take care of the face of the other while also taking care of one's own face.



Methodological innovation projects

Besides the trainings, we often invite the method of critical incidents into our pilot projects, to obtain a better understanding of how diversity affects a specific professional domain or thematic area. Indeed, we think that collecting critical incidents gives a particularly precise window on what dimensions of cultural difference will play out in specific settings and what will be the sensitive zones in the cooperation of people or professionals of different backgrounds. In this vein in the past we have adopted the method to explore how cultural diversity has an impact on the health sector (on users and providers) in early childhood education, in adult education and the domain of youth. We have opened up different thematic areas such as body, disability, gender and intimacy. In this we have often stretched the original scope of the method – sometimes surprising Margalit herself. Can for instance different bodily abilities give rise to “cultures” and interaction between people of “different abilities” or “orientations” be understood as intercultural contact? In our experiences we found that indeed, that would be quite appropriate. And we find that the original message that Margalit gave us still provides valuable keys to professionals and “lay persons” in these different domains, making the world a little bit more meaningful, beautiful and a little bit more just.

2.6. Encounter with Margalit Cohen-Emerique and her method – told by Cooperativa RUAH

For some of us, involved since 1996 in a training course for trainers in the intercultural field, the meeting with Cohen-Emerique dates back to 23rd March 1997 during a week-long workshop entitled “Margalit Cohen-Emerique, initiator of the culture shock and critical incident method”, held in Brussels at the CBAI.

From here a path of growth and experimentation started, which allowed us to introduce in Italy this theoretical approach and this methodology through training seminars. In fact, we became the



"Italian" voice of Margalit Cohen-Emerique, with whom we met on several occasions to receive supervision on our training approach and finally also support for the Italian translation of her book.

For some of us more recently the learning experience has evolved into deeper studies leading to doctoral thesis at the end of our studies in specific domains in the social field.

For some of us, professionally involved in the field of reception and integration of immigrants and asylum seekers, it was an opportunity to understand that there was a lot to work on the front of support for the processes of social integration and cultural promotion.

For Zelda Amidoni (who inspired the present project) the meeting with Cohen-Emerique's method was an opportunity to continue her professional path within the services for interculturalism and linguistic-cultural mediation. Zelda understood that this method had the potential to offer to social workers and political leaders of any territory skills and inspiration. Zelda believed in it to the point of supporting and leading the translation into Italian of the book written by Margalit Cohen-Emerique.

All these personal itineraries have found, at different times and in different ways, possibilities of crossing and amalgamation within the Ruah Cooperative. The cooperative has taken on the task of extending this heritage and transforming it into a common language for all its 200 members and collaborators active on various operational fronts (reception, teaching the Italian language, cultural mediation, socio-cultural integration, etc.).

This enthusiasm for the method and the person of Cohen-Emerique led the Cooperative to support and lead the project proposal Zelda Erasmus+ with the aim of further progress in what for those who care about the processes of intercultural integration has manifested itself as a keystone and for those involved in training was the backbone on which to graft other methodologies and strategies functional to produce change.

2.7. Encounter with Margalit Cohen-Emerique and her method – told by Ariella Rothberg

I could begin this text by paraphrasing the presentation of Margalit Cohen-Emerique: It is not by chance that I have arrived to the intercultural field. I was born in Israel in 1953, but I spent my early childhood in French-speaking Switzerland and moved to France at the age of five. If you ask me what my mother tongue was, I can't answer. When I left Israel, I spoke, I'm told, a mixture of Hebrew and French. At my great-aunt's house in Switzerland, we spoke German, Hungarian, Swiss-German and sometimes Italian and English. In any case, when I returned to France at the age of 5, I spoke French. And if I had quickly adapted to French life (I have no memory of my life "before" - Israel, Switzerland), I never really felt like a French person like my other classmates. There was this Jewish identity "not like the others".

It is probably thanks to these questions of identity that I turned to psychology and anthropology. At the beginning of my career in the field of intercultural training, I was asked to train professionals from the social field, to shed light on the populations of the Maghreb. At the time, this was one of the main populations that challenged social workers, for whom the encounter with diversity and difference was still very difficult to manage. These were interventions on targeted subjects, although sometimes still too general: women, the family, the relationship to the body (subjects that were relevant to my thesis), etc.

Although I was delighted to share my experiences and knowledge with professionals directly involved with migrant populations, I gradually realised that this knowledge, even if it came from the field, from the populations themselves, was not perceived by the social workers as data to be integrated into their daily practice, but rather as highlights of an exoticism of the far-away, exciting, but not very useful in their professionality. I then began to look into questions of pedagogy, in connection with the social professions, always with the question of training methodology in the



background. How to articulate theoretical knowledge and practical application? How to overcome the barrier of prejudices and representations of the other, to lighten and improve communication? How to articulate this very rich professionalism of social workers with the understanding of these different "others"?

Questions such as these found their answer in an article signed by Margalit Cohen-Emerique. I was not familiar with the work of this author, but I really felt an "enlightenment" when I read this article, which detailed her training method and her journey. At that moment, everything that was described in this article corresponded word by word to my questions of the moment and to the conclusions I had reached. But it was another 5 years before I met her and asked her to become her student. And it took at least another 9 or 10 years of supervised work with her, before we had a real relationship as "colleagues", culminating in the writing of our common book published 7 years later... I gradually stopped my research activity to devote myself to training, based on her method.

In this long journey, I worked a lot to be in adequacy with the method such as she developed it, first of all because in practice, it corresponded completely to my priorities, and also because the easy and fluid mastery did not come immediately, far from it. It took all these years of close and severe supervision by Margalit Cohen-Emerique for her to be satisfied with the way I implemented her method, with the way I managed to "assimilate" it. After a good number of years of practice with professionals from very diverse backgrounds, I thought at length about the question of the background of the target groups trained, since Margalit Cohen-Emerique had built her method essentially for social workers (in the broadest sense). I gradually became aware that this method could not be adapted to all types of professionals and contexts, and I then readjusted my methods of intervention, according to the audiences received, but without fundamentally modifying the method.

Today, I deliver trainings to professionals from different backgrounds and fields, but who have all dealt with otherness, in one way or another, in their professional practices. I can work with small



groups of up to 15 people, a classic format in adult education, up to groups of 100 people. I can meet people who are confronted with cultural diversity on a daily basis and who are aware of their shortcomings, as well as individuals or groups of professionals who have only a very vague idea of what interculturality is, even if they also encounter it in their daily professional life.

As far as the professional fields are concerned, I will talk about the training practice for professionals of the social field accompanying families in the process of integration in French society, my practice and observations being in no way different from those of Margalit Cohen-Emerique. I would just add that what is unique to these professional cultures is the notion of self-reflexivity, the imperative of non-judgment, listening, but also questioning, sometimes even doubting, throughout their practice. All this facilitates the integration the method into the professional practice.

However, this is not the case for many other professionals that I meet in training situations. If there is reflexivity, it is often centred on the profession itself, the technicality, and not on the target groups they work with. This is the case for several professional fields:

Du secteur médical : je travaille dans tous types d'hôpitaux, hôpitaux généraux, hôpitaux psychiatriques, hôpitaux militaires, avec essentiellement des personnels soignants (infirmiers, aides-soignants, personnels de ménage et quelquefois, mais c'est rare, de personnels d'accueil et administratifs), mais très peu de cadres infirmiers, de médecins ou de psychologues.

Health sector: I work in all types of hospitals, general hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, military hospitals, with mainly nursing staff (nurses, medical assistants, cleaning staff and sometimes, but rarely, reception and administrative staff), but very few lead nurses, doctors or psychologists.

Social housing sector: I work with people in charge of daily management involved with the families in the cites (large apartment blocks much talked about on television), which in France are called "gardiens d'immeubles" (guardians of the block of flats) and who are in direct contact with the



families and individuals living in these housing estates. Sometimes – less frequently - I also train those who work in offices, but who are also in contact with families, at all levels of the hierarchy.

The socio-cultural animation sector, i.e. the associative or municipal organisations that manage the leisure time of the inhabitants, whose team members are professionals or volunteers (very frequent in this sector).

Du secteur de l'animation socioculturelle, c'est-à-dire les structures associatives ou municipales qui gèrent les temps de loisirs des habitants, que ce soient des professionnels ou des bénévoles qui sont très nombreux dans ce secteur.

The various professions involved in services offered to the wide public, whether in state structures (such as employment offices), social services, foster homes (young people, unaccompanied minors), administrations (town halls, departmental councils, early childhood services), libraries, institutions (childcare), associations (social or integration centers), to name but a few.

Finally, there are the NGOs, which send their staff abroad on humanitarian missions.

I do not apply Margalit Cohen-Emerique's training method unilaterally, but in line with the requests made to me by the organizers of these training courses and on what I know about the specificities of the professions represented. A lot depends also on the objective I give myself, beyond the objective that is given to me. By this I mean that even today only a very small minority of the clients I meet (at any level of hierarchy) who order intercultural training from me, have a real knowledge of the intercultural domain, whether it be in terms of the content to be given, the method to be used, or the objectives to be achieved. I must therefore carry out a real needs analysis which sometimes turns into a pitched battle, so as not to respond to the eternal demand for miracle recipes for better understanding and working with the different cultures of migrants.



After all these years of training practice with these different audiences, I would say that I have progressively modified my objectives as a trainer, and that I adapt them to professionals present in the training. I can classify my method in several levels:

J'ai construit une méthodologie d'approche de la question, sous une forme participative, qui constitue pour moi un fonds commun, c'est-à-dire que je la mets en œuvre quasiment systématiquement avec tous les professionnels. Ce qui est essentiel, dans ce travail, est la prise de conscience par les professionnels de la diversité, non comme une vue de l'esprit, mais comme une réalité qui n'implique pas nécessairement une "tolérance" très idyllique, comme ils en sont souvent convaincus, mais peu mise en pratique dans leur professionnalité, car détachée du réel. Et je mets ceci en articulation avec tous nos processus interprétatifs de la réalité de l'autre, vus au travers de nos stéréotypes, préjugés, normes, bref, de nos cadres de références. Mme Emerique dit souvent, que "c'est notre propre cadre de référence qui est l'obstacle le plus important à la rencontre avec l'autre" et c'est ce que j'essaie de leur transmettre.

I have constructed a methodology for approaching the subject matter in a participative way, which for me constitutes a common ground and I apply this almost systematically with all the professionals. What is essential in this work is to create an awareness of diversity, not as a theoretical construct, but as a reality that does not necessarily imply a very idyllic "tolerance", which they often refer to, but rarely put into practice in their day-to-day work, as it is detached from reality. And I put this in articulation with all our interpretative processes cast on the reality of the other, such as our stereotypes, prejudices, norms, in short, our frames of reference. Ms. Cohen-Emerique often says that "it is our own frame of references that is the most important obstacle to encountering the other" and that is what I try to convey to them.

C'est dans un deuxième temps, que je modifie la suite de mon approche. Je peux entrer directement dans la méthode, si je perçois que le groupe est en mesure d'effectuer ce travail. En revanche, si je perçois des résistances trop fortes, trop profondes, je ne mets pas en pratique la méthode d'analyse de



Margalit Cohen-Emerique de façon académique, mais je peux utiliser tout un panel d'exercices pratiques et de mises en situations, leurs permettant d'appivoiser cette notion et de surmonter leurs peurs. Cela peut prendre tout le temps et l'espace imparti à la formation. Un exemple de résultat est cette phrase écrite en bilan après une formation : "Après ces 3 jours de formation, je me suis aperçue que la différence n'était pas dangereuse". J'estime, à ce moment, que mon objectif est atteint. Parfois, pour certains groupes, il faudrait une formation graduelle, en deux temps : un temps pour surmonter les résistances, et un second temps pour entrer véritablement dans la méthode. Mais il est rare que je puisse répondre à cet objectif, car le temps formatif aujourd'hui doit tout autant être rentable que le reste du fonctionnement de la société.

It is in a second step that I chose the next step of my approach. I can enter directly into the method, if I perceive that the group is able to do this work. On the other hand, if I perceive too strong, too deep resistances, I do not put Margalit Cohen-Emerique's method of analysis into practice in an academic way, but I can use a whole range of practical exercises and situations, allowing them to tame the key notions and overcome their fears. This can take all the time and space allotted to the training. An example of a result is this sentence written as an assessment after a training: "After these 3 days of training, I realised that difference is not dangerous". At that moment, I feel that my objective has been achieved. For some groups, a gradual, two-step process would be more adapted, starting with a first part to overcome resistance, and a second part to really enter into the method. But it is rare that I can opt for such an arrangement, because training today must respond to the same criteria of "efficiency" as all the other of domains of life.

Je rajouterais à cela qu'il n'y a pas de spécificité de métiers dans les choix méthodologiques que je peux opérer : je peux tout à fait mettre complètement en œuvre la méthodologie des chocs culturels avec des professionnels d'un secteur et le groupe suivant du même type de professionnel, ne pas pouvoir le faire de cette manière-là.



I would add that my methodologic choices are not necessarily specific to the professional domain: it can happen that I can apply perfectly the method of critical incidents with a group of professionals and it would be impossible with the next group of the same specialization.

En conclusion, je dirais que je n'arrive pas très loin de ma fin de carrière et je ne ressens pas de nécessité forte à adapter plus encore la méthode, par des innovations plus ou moins importantes, qui pourraient s'effectuer sans toutefois modifier le fondement de la méthode. Je suis toujours persuadée de bien fondé de cette méthode, de l'extraordinaire apport qu'elle peut donner aux personnes qui arrivent à l'intégrer et qui en font un outil dans leur pratique, en particulier pour tous les professionnels qui sont en relation au quotidien avec les différentes formes d'altérité que nous connaissons dans ce pays. Je suis aussi conscience de la difficulté qu'elle peut représenter dans sa mise en œuvre, car elle demande beaucoup au formateur qui a la volonté d'utiliser cette méthode. Mais la contrepartie est aussi importante que la difficulté est grande, dans l'immense richesse que cette méthode peut apporter à celui qui s'y investit pleinement.

To conclude, I would say that I am not very far from the end of my career and I do not feel a strong need to adapt the method further. I am still convinced of the validity of this method, of the extraordinary contribution that it can give to people who are able to integrate it and adopt it as a tool in their practice, especially for all professionals who are in daily contact with the different forms of otherness that we know in our countries. I am also aware of the difficulty that it can represent in its implementation, because it demands a lot from the trainer who has the will to use it. But the counterpart is as important as the difficulty is great, in the immense richness that this method can bring to the one who fully invests in it.

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