

As I started my studies in International Relations, I came to the conclusion that the world is a terrible place. Not worse than it was yesterday and seemingly not worse than it will be tomorrow. At that moment, I lost my conviction to make this world ‘better’; there was too much to do to fix it. There was too much to be **changed**.

Change.

The world has changed; but only on the surface. Technological advancement is undeniable, physical distances are constantly reduced by faster planes and better roads, medical research is saving lives that would have been lost ten years ago and societies are noticeably formed around greater international melting pots. Yet, while societies are brought together throughout those transformations, “the other” seems to still be a source of fear, hate and prejudice. The current migrants crisis or terrorism attacks around the world have contributed to solidify xenophobia for many but also demonstrated how a lack of knowledge is a great source of fear.

Fear.

Our generation has been raised in a world in which it has never been so easy to virtually connect with others but learning about other cultures only through medias can be dramatic. Some will call it ‘misinformation’, others will call it ‘lies’ but many also accept it as ‘facts’. Prodigious facilitation or pure laziness, there is not so much to do nowadays to get information about anything. In turn, becoming aware of the existence of vast global dimensions surrounding us is ‘one click’ away using technology but so is misinterpretation and miscomprehension. In that sense, fear could be overcome by greater comprehension about “the other”. Let me demonstrate this idea using my personal experience.

Comprehend.

Where are you from? Answering that question was probably my biggest challenge while growing up. While I was born from a Rwandese-Yemenite mother and a Franco-Austrian father, I have lived pretty much everywhere but in any of those countries. My multiracial background was such a heavy cultural heritage to carry; I did not feel like I belonged to any of it. For the past ten years, I have been trying to research and understand each of my origins but no matter how much I would explore and learn about my cultural heritage, I realized I will probably never feel completely like any of my passports states I am from.

Learn.

Deciding to learn a new language is a substantially similar quest to gain knowledge on the world surrounding us because it is a personal, intimate step towards “the other”. Learning Spanish or English was similar to my origins’ investigation; it allowed me to step into another culture and offered me opportunities to enlarge my horizons. In other words, learning languages is a way to acquire knowledge and can lead to comprehension. While language is allowing that communication, it is also crucial to share our own cultures too. In that sense, cultivating our own diversity and sharing it with the world is important in so many ways. In this globalized world, preserving what makes us different is essential. Languages are the transmitters of traditions, customs but also stories. Nevertheless, I do not think the sole demarche of learning other languages is enough in itself to become a global citizen. Indeed, it is a resonant, precious tool to communicate across boundaries but it is only a tool.

Knowledge.

Knowledge is infinite. I will never know everything about my own cultural background. Yet, I think being a global citizen is not about knowing everything, speaking all languages and comprehending each traditions; it is about perceiving the unknown without prejudices and grasping all those differences as precious treasures they are. This observation actually led me to a crucial conclusion: my origins are an invaluable wealth because it makes it impossible for me to perceive the world from a single point of view.

Listen.

Moreover, I believe it is important to acknowledge that one's culture is a heavy burden to carry but at the end of the day, each of us is also carrying our own story. I will always carry small pieces from my cultural heritage but my identity is mainly about what I have experienced, whom I met, and what I am feeling as a person. Where I am from is part of me but it is not making decisions for me. While I do think cultural heritage is valuable, it is not meant to define what we choose to be as individual. As I travelled the world, I became increasingly interested in what "the other" had to say; what was their story and message. Acknowledging "the other" as their own person and not their cultural origins is something I have learned by listening to what is a person's story instead of limiting myself to what I know about their culture. Knowing a person is critically different from knowing their culture. Cultural or origins labels just disappear as you get to know someone's story and message.

Realize.

Beyond understanding that languages are transporting entire cultures, different customs and traditions, being a global citizen is about realizing we do not know everything and never will. It is about opening our conscience and comprehend that there are other ways to live. It is about accepting that no single way to live is to be judged for its distinctions to our own. I am aware I have myself prejudices on other culture. The important part is to be able to let go of those preconditioned ideas when learning about the unknown. But it is also about listening and sharing stories to others. Foremost, this demarche should convey a human-to-human connection. Researching and investigating my own origins pushed me to appreciate that while cultures and traditions are wonderfully miscellaneous; human expressions such as smiling and crying, human emotions such as love and fear are universal. In that sense, beyond reminding us how different we are, languages are treasurable instruments especially to realize how similar needs we have, as humans; no matter how differently we express them.

Hope.

So I suppose there is hope. Hope that todays and future generations will not repeat history by using the 20th century's great resources such learning languages and travelling to gain knowledge on the marvellous diversity that our world has to give. Changing the world is not a one (wo)man's job. I now know that I am not alone. Our generation is already full of global citizens unafraid to spread their stories and collect others. "Be the change you want to see in the world" has never been so important right now. Learning languages can give the courage to step out of our bubble, what we do with it is only up to us. No matter how much more the world will continue to change, it is up to us to **change the story** and finally celebrate differences in this multicultural world.

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