

**REVISTA CIDOB d'AFERS
INTERNACIONALS 82-83.**

**Boundaries: Transience and
intercultural dynamics.**

Open Cultural Spaces in Search of New Frontiers.
Nada Švob-Đokic

Open Cultural Spaces in Search of New Frontiers

Nada Švob-Đokić*

ABSTRACT

Crossing cultural borders opens up a new creativity, new expectations and new emptiness that provoke fear and existential nausea. Are we lost forever, in a specific historical time, in a specific culture, or in a specific geographical location? Are we forgotten in transitions, translations and intercultural misunderstandings? Are we bound to remain foreigners forever? In order to provide some answers, we hurriedly establish new borders and define new relations between the recently-established entities, a new creativity or a new understanding and knowledge that can help us to survive the confrontation with a limitless nihilism. In the age of globalisation, an increased effort to position cultural creativity and cultural identification within the local, now multicultural and largely redefined context, is strongly felt. How does this affect people and societies? What are the limits of transgressions between cultures and different cultural values? How can the new cultural identities be redefined? The answers to these questions can turn out to be very different, but they seem to be confined to at least two already discernible directions: cultural hybridisation (García Canclini) and the emergence of virtual cultures that promote de-standardised identities.

Key words: Boundaries, communication, cosmopolitanism, cultural consumption, cultural diversity, cultural identity, multiculturalism

“Universalism”, “globalism”, “cosmopolitanism”, “modernism” have become commonly used and discussed concepts that pervade the present-day discourses on cultures and cultural creativity. These concepts offer a flexible context for interpretation of the role of cultures in wider social and political frameworks. They comply with the fact that all cultures existing on the Earth are exposed to communication and exchange, which makes cultural values, modes and results of cultural creativity, inherited cultural contents and cultures broadly expressed in different ways of life accessible to large audiences. Different cultural spaces have thus become present in our daily life. They encompass anything from food and habits to creativity and cultural production, including systems of established humanistic and social values. Being omnipresent, and subjected to different possible choices, cultures transgress their own borders and enter all fields of human work and imagination. This is the reason why it is possible and necessary to discuss cultures as interconnected spaces. Spaces may be territories, flows, hierarchies (Storper, 1997: 19-44); intellectual concepts open to creative efforts, imagined free contexts that we are filling with symbolic signs and contents. Spaces may be limited and unlimited; regulated or de-regulated. They exist only when and if specifically designated, usually through introduction of frontiers or some other signs that delimit or describe the notion of space. Yet, the notion of space is perpetually constructed as absent (Derrida, 1976: 267), perhaps as something that we are hunting for in order to domesticate the un-known, understand it, in-plant ourselves in a space, and contextualize our existence, the existence of our societies, cultures, values.

Cultural spaces tend to be defined by flexible borders (linguistic, anthropological, or creative, artistic, etc.) that provide for cultural identification and dynamic exchange of cultural values and cultural creativity. However, in most cases, cultural spaces are subjected to ethnic, national or professional delimitations. This turns them into multi-structural constructions which can only prove that cultures cannot be submitted to single sided definitions. If, however, the ideas and values, cosmology, morality and esthetics, are expressed in symbols, culture could be described as a symbolic system (Kuper, 2000: 227), or as a space providing for diverse combinations of symbols. Reading such symbols, or crossing borders that separate diverse symbolic combinations, is not easy, but it is challenging, and often a source of creative inspiration.

In most cases cultural borders do not coincide with the borders of states, be they national states or empires. They are much more flexible, although influenced by states and state politics; they reflect more the ideas and structures of culture communities than those of building up of national identities. They are more adapted to localities and thus involved with the extra-cultural surroundings, whether natural or human. In this sense they are much closer to the open global spaces, and also to the interacting global-local relations and developments. Such flexible borders contribute more to the “pluralization of borders” (Robins, 2006: 41), and consequently to the softening of cultural borders,

than to creation of “multiple identities” that reflect a certain merging and interactions among different discernible and well structured national cultural identities. Crossing cultural borders opens up new creativity, new expectations and new emptiness that may provoke uneasiness, fears or existential nausea. Are we lost forever; in a specific historical time, in a specific culture, or in a specific geographical place? Are we forgotten in transitions, translations, intercultural misunderstandings? Are we bound to remain foreigners forever?

In order to provide for some answers, we hastily try to establish new borders, to define new relations among the newly established entities, new creativity or new understanding and knowledge that would all help us survive the confrontation with unlimited nihilism. In the era of globalization, an increased effort to position cultural creativity and cultural identification within the local, now multicultural and largely redefined, contexts is strongly felt. How does it affect individuals and societies; what are the limits of transgressions between cultures and different cultural values? What will the redefined cultural identities be? Answers to such questions may be very different indeed, but they seem to be confined to at least two already discernible directions: cultural hybridization and the emergence of virtual cultures promoting destandardized identities.

CULTURAL HYBRIDIZATION

Cultural hybridization appears to be best elaborated and summarized by Nestor García Canclini as a type of societal restructuring and as a kind of transitory social movement (García Canclini, 2005: 23-46). García Canclini interprets cultural hybridization as “a useful interpretation of relations of meaning that are reconstructed through mixing”. Hybridization needs to be understood in the “context of ambivalences of the globalized mass diffusion and industrialization of symbolic processes, and of the power conflicts these provoke” (Idem: 29), and, further: “(...) cross-cultural thinking and practices are resources for acknowledging difference and elaborating on the tensions that arise there” (Idem: 31). Cultural hybridization therefore transcends processes of *mestizaje*, *creolization* and the like, and re-opens the problems of “how to design forms of modern multicultural association” (Idem: 33).

In practical terms, and having in mind elaborations of possible cultural policies, such issues could be approached through the contexts of pre-national and post-national transitorities. Pre-national transitorities would imply cultural assimilations that have already led to the formation of nations and national cultures by standardizing certain cultural values and by providing cultural integration and assimilation through the acceptance of

such standardized values. The problem arises when such national cultures get in contact with minority groups that they cannot integrate and assimilate for different reasons. This would be the phase of multiculturalism and necessity to acknowledge the others and tolerate the others. Globalization and re-definition of economic, financial, communication and all other previously established areas and borders coincides with multicultural settings. National cultures are reduced to only one of the possible choices, while minority cultures emancipate and reject the assimilation.

With modernity, post-modernity and “the end of globalization” (Harold, 2002) the national cultures are ever more subjected to deconstruction, and the post-national transitorities are increasingly confined to subaltern social groups. Such groups may be cultural minorities, but also “urban tribes”, the young, the old, women, various professionally associated groups, etc.

Modern cross-cultural contacts are created by globalizing processes: world markets, migrations, communication and flow of messages; by policies of educational integration; by culture industries, and many more processes that are usually very fast and not lasting long enough to provide for cultural hybridization. Garcia Canclini nevertheless mentions a possibility of multiple hybridizations; some authors discuss multiple identities (Musek, 1995: 9-28). The point is that assimilation and hybridization which function in the context of the homogenizing logics of globalization are hardly needed in the context of globalization understood as a process that has abolished the borders among (national) cultures and thus opened up a cultural space that contains and hosts cultural diversities of all kinds. Cultures floating in this virtual global space are no longer forced to communicate. They may get together or not; they are individualized, and their communication and relationships have much diversified.

The historical perspective of the contemporary cultures may be exemplified by Chris Anderson's thesis that the endless choice is creating unlimited demand (Anderson, 2006). Generation and offer of cultural products supported by new technologies provides a possibility to choose from different cultures and various cultural values, and the choice is extremely individualized. This post-globalization cultural context gets us back to local cultural production and creation of local cultural contexts that are becoming ever more structured sources of cultural creativity. This context is also the context in which borderless cultures appear, mainly confined to cultural creativity that develops in the virtual spaces.

The existence of national and ethnic cultures is a reality; hybridization processes are also a reality. This reality reflects the “(...) need to construct theoretical principles and methodological procedures that can help us make the world more translatable... more cohabitable in the midst of differences” (García Canclini, 2005: 44). However, cultural differences are all subjected to and defined by a certain type of borders, and also by a certain consciousness and convictions that such borders should be overcome.

The concept that might be able to express “the need to construct theoretical principles and methodological procedures” may be the concept of “new cosmopolitanism” (Beck, 2004: 45-67) that stands for an overall cultural diversification and tolerance within the global neo-liberal cultural space.

VIRTUAL CULTURES

Virtual cultures are not confined to any kind of symbolic markets and repertoires yet. The virtual space of creativity has not been limited enough, and it is hardly structured. Therefore it is possible to refer to virtual cultural creativity as to the borderless cultures that appear within information societies. Such cultures are supported by new communication technologies. They are largely de-territorialized. The values created are mediated through networks. This promotes utterly individualistic approaches, values and choices, as well as a kind of solidarity in sharing information, knowledge and creativity.

A new dynamism based on an increased individualization of values and cultures that include acceptance of cultural de-homogenization and cultural differences reflects the appearance of such globalized, borderless cultures. One of such cultures is hackers' culture. According to Castells and Himanen (2002), being the key actors in innovation system and innovation culture, hackers promote a balance between social solidarity and new information economy, flexible work and open communication. Hackers' culture produces virtual works of art, open to interventions of “consumers”, submitted to communication and an open choice. There are no regulatory limits in perceiving or co-authoring such works. Although Wark McKenzie (2006) states that “hacking reaches virtual and transforms the reality”, and although such transformation may be based on the hackers' ethos and reflected in hackers' culture, it would be difficult to say whether these stand for an open and liberated creativity, or just for a new alternative of exclusive choice in cultural creation. Such choice depends on the access to new information and communication technologies, and it is not very abstract in the world divided into the “connected” and “unconnected”, which represents indeed different realities.

This statement brings us back to the issue of borders. The borderless, virtual cultures still reside in specific cultural contexts of ethnic, national or global cultures. This is why they cannot avoid producing new borders, best reflected in digital divide, in sub-urban pop cultures and in hackers' cultures. These are clearly perceived in the cities that have become their residence. The technological modernization is concentrated in city areas; new city tribes find their cultural expression in the sub-urban pop cultures mainly confined to music, dance and drawing arts, and hackers' cultures are developed

by the new technology specialists working and living in cities that provide the best connections. Paradoxically, in spite of highly individualistic approaches to creativity, these developments make cultures more similar than diverse, more exposed to communication and interaction than to solitary isolation.

THE NEW COSMOPOLITANISM

The new cosmopolitanism represents a reaction to the reality in which the reference to cultures and cultural identities as trans-national or trans-ethnic reflects the already gained experience of being de-limited. The newly established cultural differences may appear again as either *national*, *ethnic* or *global*, but their content and values already reflect the experience of being exposed to global interactions. The new cosmopolitanism, as interpreted by Ulrich Beck, reflects this fact. Cultural national or ethnic borders are no longer clearly discernible in the global virtual space, and the cultural creativity is now being reconstructed as either global or local. However, the systemic borders reflecting the globality of neo-liberalism still clearly divide the “connected” from “unconnected”, which is very visible. This is why the borderless cultures do not and cannot avoid producing borders, which are different from the traditional ones, but which nevertheless indicate that the globally opened space for cultural creation is being structured, or re-structured in a new way now. The key value of such new restructuring (de-construction or re-construction) is the formation of cultural identities that in virtual cultures appear to be a-national and ultimately individualized. Are they also cosmopolitan? And how can the new cosmopolitanism link up with cultures and cultural values that are not *connected*?

The use of new generic information technologies provides for a temporary liberation of cultural creativity on one side, and for expansion of cultural values, symbols and meanings on the other side. In e-communication, everything is culture (culture of peace, culture of war, management culture, culture of innovation, culture of communication...), and in this respect cosmopolitanism offers a useful framework of tolerance, exchange of cultural values, understanding of differences, interest in the other, willingness to learn about others. Cosmopolitanism stands for the concept of open cultural spaces and borderless cultures, and the problem is how it could be in-built into the global re-structuring of cultural processes, based clearly on cultural communication and cultural exchange. The question is whether the new cosmopolitanism can de-construct cultural divisions; avoid extreme cultural autonomies that lead to cultural exclusions, and whether it can thus provide for more balanced, new types of cultural exchange and communication. As

a sheer concept, not extrapolated into cultural policies, cosmopolitanism remains abstract and easy to accept. As a functional incentive it cannot avoid to be implicated in efforts to overcome cultural divisions, which in practical terms mean that it should be involved in elimination of the digital global divide, and thus accept the connectedness among and with all existing cultures in the globe. Whether such eventual interconnectedness may produce new borders and what would they look like, is an additional issue to be discussed in future.

All living cultures straddle borders and produce local, regional, individual and professional specificities that hallmark their social roots and characterize their identity. Globalization has given a strong impetus to such processes and made them faster and less manageable. However, it did not yet provide for completely open cultural spaces that would be eventually restructured locally, or that would be further developed into unlimited virtual cultural spaces, backed by new technologies and information societies.

In the context of open cultural spaces, the technologically mediated cultures have started to produce new cultural values. They have started to organize value exchange and to communicate in new ways based on interactivity, direct individual interventions into creative processes and on consumption of cultural products. This global picture of contemporary cultural developments has already produced a certain “swarm” structure (Cf. Katunarić, 2004: 19-42): everything exists and may be accessible at the same time. The “swarm structure” is organized by global trends that do orientate cultural development, but are not persistent and long enough to restructure internal cultural changes and most of the rooted cultural values. Each element within such swarm structure has a relatively autonomous position as long as it is connected to all other elements forming the structure. But, the elements that are not connected remain left out of the system of creativity, interactivity, exchange, sharing of values, development of new cultural products and participation in the new global cultural trends.

Could it be that the new cosmopolitanism refers to the global cultural swarm? Can it overcome cultural hierarchization, exclusivity or cultural disconnectedness? Is this picturesque swarm structure compatible with the reality of globalism? May it express, at least to a certain degree, the type of relationships that are being established among different cultures and various cultural identities in the global setting?

At the moment, new cosmopolitanism itself appears to be limited by the systemic character of the contemporary liberal globalism. It tolerates the unprivileged position and practical exclusion of many cultures from the globalizing cultural development trends. The unconnected cultures, separated from the connected ones, live in some different age, create under different conditions and are left to cherish some past values. The tolerance of everything, including cultural separation, makes new cosmopolitanism acceptable, but hardly viable way to cultural and general social reconstruction of the ever more globalized cultures and societies.

In the Beck's ingeniously outlined "risk society" context new cosmopolitanism represents just another risk, the one that many individuals and collectivities are now taking daily when they communicate, trade values and goods, or just make an effort to represent their identities or views. Such risks increase chances to overcome divisions traced by multiculturalism and intercultural communication. They help engender and eventually create new cultural contexts in which both (anthropologically based) cultural nationalisms and (systemically based) cultural globalisms may become less relevant and give way to cultures functioning as humane symbolic systems, diversified by creativity and not by inherited racial or national diversity. This might open the way to open cultural spaces and eventual de-hierarchized communication within and among them.

Bibliographical References

- ANDERSON, Chris. *The long Tail. How Endless choice is Creating Unlimited Demand*. RH Business Books, 2006.
- BECK, Ulrich. *Moć protiv moći u doba globalizacije. Nova svjetskopolitička ekonomija* Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2004.
- CASTELLS, Manuel y HIMANEN, Peka. *The Information Society and the Welfare State: The finish model*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1976.
- GARCÍA CANCLINI, Néstor. *Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis/London: The University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- HAROLD, James. *The End of Globalization. Lessons from the Great Depression*. Cambridge, Mass/London: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- KATUNARIĆ, Vjeran. "Toward a New Public Culture". In: ŠVOB-ĐOKIĆ, Nada (ed.) *Cultural Transitions in Southeastern Europe*. Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, 2004.
- KUPER, Adam. *Culture. The Anthropologists' Account*. Cambridge, Mass/London: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- MC KENZIE, Wark. *A Hacker Manifesto*. Zagreb: Multimedijalni Institut, 2006. (Published by arrangement with Harvard University Press, 2004).
- MUSEK, Janek. "The psychological basis of multiple identity". In: NOVAK LUKANOVIČ, Sonja (ed.) *Overlapping Cultures and Plural Identities*. Ljubliana: Slovenian Nacional Comisión for UNESCO and Institute for Ethnic Studies, 1995.
- ROBINS, Kevin. *The Challenge of Transcultural Diversities. Cultural Policy and Cultural Diversity*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2006.
- STORPER, Michael. "Territories, Flows and Hierarchies in the Global Economy". In: COX, Kevin Robins. *Spaces of Globalization. Reasserting the Power of the Local*. New York, London: The Guilford Press, 1997.