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## THE RESPONSE ULRICH BECK WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HEAR

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The death of Ulrich Beck leaves us bereft of that always lucid, special perspective found in each of his articles or in the new publication that arrived on just the day that, for the umpteenth time, we were doubting our own theories or missing someone to lend a hand and help us understand the world. For Beck, as a sociologist, what happened in the world was what happened between people and groups, making “globalised patchwork generations” of their hopes and dreams, their fears, disappointments and frustrations.

It took real courage to rehabilitate and reuse a concept such as cosmopolitanism that had been stigmatised as “idealistic” and for that reason fallen into disuse; for its supposed lack of connection to real problems. He never spoke of cosmopolitanism as a given, rather, he spoke of a cosmopolitan view or a cosmopolitan project, and used the term cosmopolitanism as a socio-scientific concept for a highly specific situation: to define a special form of social relations with the culturally distinct. That is to say, Beck proposed the concept of cosmopolitanism so as to distinguish it from all the forms of vertical differentiation that attempt to subsume the socially different within a hierarchical system of relations of superiority and inferiority, of universalist and nationalist uniformity and postmodern particularism. “In my interpretation of cosmopolitanism people get wings and roots at the same time”, said Beck. For him, nationalism is a way of relating to the different, unifying the differences that separate them according to local distinctions. But he considered it an error to understand the national and the cosmopolitan as two independent levels or two political principles that were exclusive of each other and place one in opposition to the other. “Cosmopolitan Europe cannot erase a national Europe, but it must “cosmopolise” itself from the inside....In other terms: cosmopolitics transforms and conserves, it opens up the history, the present and the future of individual national societies and the reciprocal relationship among national societies.” That is what Beck wrote in 2004.

In 2007 he broadened his concern with a new internationalism of political generations within a new landscape of global risk. In a seminar at CIDOB (March 2007) on *Fronteras* in which he participated, he spoke of the need for a cosmopolitan sociology to understand the circumstances, impacts, divisions, contradictions and desires of global generations. Since then, one of his phrases has particularly stayed with me and still makes me question and reconsider even obvious concepts: for the first time generations exist that have a common present but who do not share

a past, what future awaits them? In that seminar he spoke of global generations in the society of global risk. He wondered: "Can we continue to understand, as we have until now, the concept of a generation in a national frame of reference?" A present in which each nation is a neighbour of the other and the crises that occur in one place in the world are communicated to the whole population of the planet at extraordinary speed in no way guarantees a shared future. In 2007, Beck warned of the importance of traumatic events in creating generational consciousness and how the production of consciousness—post-9/11, for example—can vary according to historical context or life experience and makes some more cosmopolitan and others more anti-cosmopolitan. "In order for this consciousness to go beyond an enormous growth in mutual hatred and a more or less general reciprocal tension, it must begin a gigantic process of listening, of mutual understanding and progressive self-exploration."

Cosmopolitan sociology means considering the global generations that appear as a set of interlinked futures. Relations between those futures have greater consequences than a mere interest in globalisation, mobile capital and challenges to the sovereignty of the nation-state. And it was inevitable that Beck would refer to terrorism and the space of the 9/11 generation and how the dislocation of the exclusive claims on truth and authority by religions dissolves the apparently "natural" links between the distinct pasts lived through and suffered by peoples and lands. It is here that we find "a specific section of the global generation, a fundamentalist section: a hybrid of modern-anti-modern, post-colonialism and individualised fundamental religiosity, which gives rise to religiously-motivated terrorism. In no sense does this come from a renaissance of tradition. Better said, their demands are at once transnationalisation and individualisation and, therefore, arise out of the fusion of extremes: premodernism and anti-modernism".

In Barcelona in 2007, Ulrich Beck ended his contribution by trusting in the future: "My greatest hope is that in global risk society there is hidden a new cosmopolitan moment which can be activated by the global generations." It is a moment in which the distant "other" is becoming the inclusive "other" and in which people are obliged to give meaning to their own lives in exchange with others from all over the world. He insisted that in order to face the challenges of global risk it was necessary to shed the political quietism that is incapable of conceptualising the risks in an adequate way because "they are trapped in the concepts of the first modernity, nation-state modernity, which are inappropriate today". A step in this direction would be to ask how a non-Western risk society can be understood by a sociology that until now has taken for granted that its object—Western modernity—is at once historically unique and universally valid. How is it possible to decipher the internal link between risk and race, between risk and the image of the enemy, between risk and exclusion?

Ulrich Beck wondered how to live in times of uncontrolled risk. How do we live when the next terrorist attack is already in our heads? How much should we worry? Where is the line that separates reasonable concern from paralysing fear and plain hysteria? I believe that the demonstrations in France on January 11th against jihadism were the first response to this question and the beginning of this process of listening in order to understand intergenerational tensions, affinities and conflicts in nations in a different way. It is a pity that he couldn't have been there.