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Boundaries: Transience and intercultural dynamics.

The Challenge of Transcultural Diversities.
Kevin Robins

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ABSTRACT

The economic and social dynamics of globalisation have brought with them a new kind of migration movement that can no longer be approached within the traditional framework of the Nation-State and its limits. Starting from the idea of the importance of transcultural diversity as a democratic social resource that should be emphasised and preserved through cultural political intervention, the author of the article stresses the need for a change of paradigm in drafting cultural policies. The case of Europe is a clear example of the process of complexisation and diversification of this transnational space and of the need for the continuation of the process of Europeisation for some kind of accommodation between national and cosmopolitan principles. In this way, the author –basing his argument on reports from the Council of Europe– calls for a transnational cultural policy to defend transcultural diversity; a policy in which the Council will have to play a key role.

Key words: Boundaries, cultural identity, cultural pluralism, cultural policy, cultural relations, migration flows, transnational actors

GLOBALISATION AND TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

There have been two major phases of migration into the European continent. The first took off in the 1950s, and was generally characterised by migrations of colonial and post-colonial populations to the imperial "mother countries" (for example, migrations from West Africa and the Maghreb into France, from Indonesia into the Nether-

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lands, or from the Caribbean and South Asia into Britain). Migration was to particular and limited destinations, determined for the most part by shared historical, cultural and linguistic links. In recent years, this pattern of post-colonial migration has been of diminishing significance, and we may now say that it has given way to migrations of a different kind.

At the outset of the twenty-first century, something significantly new is happening in the European continent. What we are seeing is the proliferation of a new phase of migration, associated with new kinds of transnational movements, flows and connections of people into and across the European space. These are developments associated with the economic and social dynamics of globalisation. And they raise issues of an unprecedented kind. We may say that the migrations of the recent period have dramatically changed the social and cultural composition of European societies, and that that it is these movements, crucially, that are now compelling us to rethink the meaning and value of cultural identity and cultural diversity in the European space.

The new global migrations present a fundamental challenge to European social and cultural policy. There are clearly possibilities that these proliferating transnational migrations will bring with them new dangers of social tension, antagonism and conflict. But perhaps there might also be new possibilities for confronting these threats, and at the same time working to "modernise" the European social model? Indeed, we might suggest that that there is now no alternative –that the new complexities of the European social space now make it imperative that we take up this latter challenge.

TRANSCULTURAL DIVERSITY

The new transnational migrations that have been occurring through the 1990s are changing the European social and cultural order in quite dramatic and significant ways. They have given rise to innovative kinds of lifeworlds operating across transnational spaces. Chinese populations in Hungary do business in Budapest but may educate their children in the United States. A Turkish man living in London may be doing business in Hamburg and educating his children in Istanbul. Transnational migrants are commonly organising their everyday lives in more complex ways, across extended spaces, and in ways that increasingly challenge the containing powers of nation states and national societies.

The formation of new transnational spaces has brought to light a new pattern of cultural diversity that can usefully be named "transcultural" diversity. The concept of

"transcultural diversity" points to the creation of a European space conceived in terms of a different kind of cultural configuration. It may be characterised in terms of cultural porosity and fluidity operating *across* space, rather than in terms of a landscape of boundaries containing relatively sedentary communities living *inside* national jurisdictions. It arises out of the ongoing cross-frontier movements of people that continually renew the landscape of cultural diversity in national jurisdictions. It creates culturally diverse groups and networks linked to a number of different national jurisdictions, through a variety of coexisting vital interests (birth, work, marriage, family, etc.). And it favours the sustaining of plural cultural identities and different loyalties over the desire to identify and achieve specific equality status as a fixed minority in any particular state. As such, transcultural diversity presents new and significant challenges both for national cultural agendas and for those concerned with cultural policy and politics in a new Europe.

The crucial point is that transcultural diversity has by now become an integral aspect of the social landscape of Europe. Transnational and transcultural flows and connections are no longer exceptional –indeed, one might even say that they are now the norm, or at least they are rapidly becoming so. They constitute the material out of which European culture and identity must now be elaborated. Transcultural diversity must therefore be at the heart of European cultural policy concerns. Many aspects of democracy, cohesion and inclusion now have to be addressed at this transcultural level. Of course, this will mean acknowledging and dealing with the disturbing and problematical aspects in the new transcultural dynamics (it is clear that the dynamics behind some forms of mobility –in the irregular economy, for example, and in various forms of criminal activity associated with trafficking– are deeply problematical and promote what might be called negative diversity). But what we focus on here are some of the positive aspects of transcultural diversity, the ways in which it may come to be seen as a social and democratic resource to be sustained and enhanced through cultural policy intervention. We might say that there is no Europeanness without transculturalism: it is now the *sine qua non* in thinking about the meaning of Europe. Transcultural diversity and diversity policy actually take the European agenda to a new level, accepting complexity as a given and also as an asset for Europe. Jacques Attali, French economist and scholar, has invoked the idea of Europe –an enlarged Europe– as "a space without borders, from Ireland to Turkey, from Portugal to Russia, from Albania to Sweden". Such a Europe should, he argues, "privilege the nomad over the sedentary dweller; generosity of spirit over solipsism; tolerance over identity; in short, multiple belongings over exclusion". It is to this radical and conception of a European public space –one that seeks to move beyond old certainties– that the principle of transcultural diversity also connects.

BEYOND THE NATIONAL FRAME

These developments represent a fundamental challenge to the way in which European researchers and policymakers have addressed issues of migration. Research and policy have until now been mainly concerned with processes of immigrant settlement and community formation, and with the impacts of immigration on the majority populations in host societies. Migration has been pre-eminently considered within the national frame; we may say that the national frame has simply been taken as self-evident. The core agenda has been to do with the management and containment of ethnic minority populations. And this objective is now proving more and more difficult to achieve. Consequently, there have been anxious and defensive reactions to the challenges of the new transnational migrations. The fundamental problem is seen to reside in the challenge to the coherence and integrity of the nation state. Such defensive responses are frequently associated with the creation of the so-called "Fortress Europe" mentality.

Such an approach is no longer a viable response to migration in Europe. A defensive and protectionist stance cannot be a reasonable way forward. Transnational migrants are an absolutely integral aspect of the space of flows generated through the creation of transnational economic structures; in a global economy, we can hardly expect the workforce to remain rooted and contained in their national societies of origin. The question of migration needs therefore to be radically rethought in the context of globalisation and the transnational nature of the new migrant cultures. If the dynamics of social relations transcend borders, then so must the methods used to address them. Global change and the increasing importance of transnational processes require new approaches from the sociology of migration. What is required is a paradigm shift, an approach that departs theoretically from the national paradigm and adopts what has been called the perspective of globality. Global flows, networks and positionings are then regarded as the key frame within which to consider the significance of contemporary migrations. Migrants are seen, not as moving between containing societies, but rather as operating across transnational social spaces –spaces with a multipolar geographic orientation, rather than one limited exclusively to a single coherent geographic space. Indeed, we may say that the new migrant practices –economic, political, religious, ideological, cultural– are one of the most significant factors now constituting transnational social spaces as a new geographical space layered across the old imagined geography of nation states.

The point is to avoid constructing a false polarisation between this transnational, or global, perspective on migration, on the one hand, and the national perspective, on the other. It is, rather, to suggest that there are now competing frameworks within which we may reflect on the significance of the new migrations. And the crucial issue now concerns how to bring these two different perspectives into constructive dialogue. What this would essentially mean *in practice*, at the present time at least, is that nation

states should become more open to the transnational perspective; that, in the elaboration of social and cultural policies, they should seek to negotiate between both national and transnational perspectives. It would mean pursuing national interests, but refusing the logic of national homogenisation and closure. Pursuing national interests, but recognising how much the congruity between cultural, political and territorial spaces has been complicated over the last decades. Pursuing national interests, but being open to the positive and productive potential of cultural diversity and complexity. *In practice*, in the European context, it would involve a more flexible approach by national governments to cultural diversity issues. It would amount to a more truly European approach.

TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPACES AND TRANSCULTURAL DIVERSITY POLICY

European borders have become more and more porous (that was the point, after all, of economic union), and the "containing" function of the nation state is increasingly inoperable. European culture and society has consequently become more and more complex and diverse. Diversity and complexity are a *de facto* presence in European social and cultural life now, not the aspiration or fancy of idealistic cosmopolitan intellectuals. They are by now an overwhelming reality in the life of all those living in the continent, and their significance needs to be urgently addressed, rather than disavowed. Diversity and complexity are integral to the "real Europe"; they are a crucial resource for the continuing Europeanisation process. To be quite pragmatic, what is now called for is some accommodation between national and cosmopolitan principles. Realistically, this must mean a greater awareness on the part of national governments of both the realities and the potential of the new diversities –a greater openness to new transcultural possibilities, that is to say.

There is certainly ground to build on. Whilst European integration has provoked new expressions of cultural nationalism, it is also the case that national governments have, in another mode, been responding to the proliferating complexity within their populations. In recent years, there has been a growing acknowledgement of the cultural dimension of citizenship and, particularly, the diversity aspect. Policy initiatives have generally grown out of the claims for cultural rights and autonomy put forward by national and ethnic minorities. In this context, where culture has become synonymous with collective identity, minority groups have made claims for both recognition and resources. During the 1990s, the topic of multiculturalism and cultural diversity was widely debated between liberal and communitarian positions, giving rise to a well-

developed discourse on the "politics of recognition" and the "right to culture" on behalf of minorities. The debate also extended beyond minority issues, to take account of the role of culture more generally in the life of the polity. There was a growing awareness that the dimensions of citizenship identified classically by T. H. Marshall –civic, political and social– might be extended to include cultural entitlements. What began to be recognised was the value of cultural empowerment in the citizen body as a whole, involving the capacity on the part of all citizens to participate fully and creatively in national cultural life –accepted as a diverse and complex cultural life.

What the present report advocates is the extension of this approach to include not just cultural diversity, but also transcultural diversity. The problem with the agenda as it is presently framed is that it remains very much caught up in the national paradigm. Much of the debate quite explicitly seeks to contain the diversity debate within the national frame. Thus, in one of the most prominent contributions to the debate, Will Kymlicka says that he is "using "a culture" as synonymous with "a nation" or "a people", claiming that "political life has an inescapably national dimension". What is ultimately problematical is the conception of culture that is being mobilised within this agenda, in which the apparently neutral term "culture" actually turns out to be culture in the national image. Thus, a culture is conceived as a unitary and a bounded entity; as the property of a particular ethnic or national group; as distinct from the cultures of other groups; and as fixed and constant through time. We should be attentive to the peculiarities of this cultural worldview and the consequences it has for those who live "in" such cultures. It is a conception of culture in which the prevailing assumption is that individuals should achieve integrated identities, and that to do so they need to inhabit self-consistent, unitary cultures or lifeworlds. It is thought normal for people to live in one culture at a time, for example; to speak one language; to adhere to one polity. It is a principle that defies the actual complexity of people's cultures and identities.

SUSTAINING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN A TRANSCULTURAL CONTEXT

Through the 1990s, the objective in cultural diversity policy was to construct public spaces in which the diversity or heterogeneity of the national population were made apparent and visible. This might be in terms of the representation and participation of the overall population in the mediated public space of national broadcasters. Or it might be in terms of access and involvement of both mainstream and minority populations in cultural venues (concert halls, theatres, galleries, etc). At whichever level, the objective was

to promote spaces reflecting the national diversity, and to give all groups an equal sense of presence in, and ownership of, public space. Transnational developments have now made things a great deal more complicated. Cultures are giving way to transcultures, and cultural diversity is increasingly a transnational matter. For many people now, the national cultural space is too circumscribed, and they express the wish to participate in different cultural spaces within (and beyond) Europe. This might be in terms of artists or musicians seeking to collaborate in multicultural initiatives. For those with a certain cultural capital, it might be in terms of travelling to exhibitions or concerts in Rome or Berlin or Prague. For many migrants, it might be in terms of watching Arabic or Indian or Chinese satellite television channels. Through such developments as these, transculturalism is becoming more and more ordinary and familiar. And there are, of course, significant and important consequences arising from this process, in which both cultural production and consumption are migrating, as it were, away from the "home" nation context. In the context of these transformations, quite new sorts of questions are being posed for European cultural policy. What are now called for, then, are new cultural policies that take this transcultural frame into account: policies that regard transcultural diversity as a resource –an essential resource, to be nurtured in taking European cultural citizenship and creative economy forward in the age of globalisation.

The first principle must clearly be to build on existing achievements –which are by now quite significant– in the area of cultural diversity and cultural citizenship, as they have been formulated in national contexts. What are put forward in this Report are propositions that aim to build on the Council of Europe's *In From the Margins* (1997) and its *Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001). The latter text made the point that cultural diversity occurs as a function of cultural mixing: new cultural forms emerge and new cultural products are developed when different cultures participate in intercultural exchange. The great richness of European cultural heritage is a product of a long history of intercultural exchange. Freedom of movement and freedom of cultural exchange are the premises upon which cultural citizenship depends. The *Declaration* also made the case that cultural diversity can and should be harnessed to the creative economy. "Where large-scale cultural industries encourage linguistic diversity and artistic expression", it stated, "they reflect genuine diversity and have a positive impact on pluralism, innovation, competitiveness and employment". And the creative economy also feeds back into everyday cultural life, further mobilising and enhancing the dynamics of cultural diversity. This synergy between cultural diversity and the creative is central to the new Council of Europe project, *Creating Cultural Capital for Democratic Diversity*.

The *Declaration* draws attention, then, to the synergistic relation that can exist between cultural diversity and cultural creativity. But what it makes clear is that the productive working of these synergies is by no means automatic. We are reminded that "cultural diversity cannot be expressed without the conditions for free creative expression, and freedom of infor-

mation existing in all forms of cultural exchange". And in order for these conditions to exist, it is necessary to have an interventionist and imaginative policy framework. The dynamics of globalisation have led to great movements of people and cultures, but globalisation in and of itself –rampant globalisation– does not provide the best conditions for fostering cultural citizenship or creative expression. There is a profound need for policy and regulation, in order to channel these new developments in positive and socially productive directions.

The conclusions of the Project *Cultural Policy and Cultural Diversity* are that we need to build on the principles of the *Declaration*, but in such a way as to elaborate a new type of cultural policy appropriate to the new transnational and transcultural context. Transcultural diversity necessitates new kinds of transnational collaboration and co-operation between states and other institutions, at both European and local levels, taking cultural policy agendas to a truly European level. A new type of transnational cultural policy is required, to supplement and extend existing national provisions for cultural management. We call this transnational cultural policy for transcultural diversity, and use the term "transnational" to refer to policy dimensions that are no longer directly tied to a national state and a historically defined national polity. A transnational perspective requires an enlargement of imagination and concern on the part of governments and other institutions –beyond the conventional national imagination and concerns. It means acknowledging the inescapable reality of the new transcultural frames within which many cultural identities and communities are now being constructed and sustained, and cultural lives and activities enacted. It means acknowledging the significance of new policy areas and issues that can no longer be contained within the remit of individual national polities, with a consequent readiness to deal with issues of cultural diversity across national frontiers and on the basis of regional collaboration. This would amount to the acceptance of a more cosmopolitan approach to the complexities of European cultural diversity, and to the imperatives of new types of cultural rights and new approaches to citizenship in Europe in the twenty-first century.

The development of an agenda for transcultural diversity in Europe presents considerable challenges, at both conceptual and practical levels. We believe that it represents a real paradigm shift in cultural policymaking. In making clear the need for this shift, we believe that the Council of Europe has a particular role to play. First, as an organisation with 45 member states (21 of them in Central and Eastern Europe), the Council has an unprecedented range in the development of democratic and cultural policy. Second, in its fifty-five year history, it has succeeded in constantly pushing forward the agenda on European culture and identity. It has been particularly instrumental in building bridges between East and west Europe. And, third, the Council commitment to "promote awareness of European identity based on shared values and cutting across different cultures" already adumbrates the transcultural agendas addressed in the report. In our view, the Council of Europe is uniquely placed to lead forward debates on cultural identity and diversity in the new, enlarged Europe.