

# **Beyond Unity in Diversity: Cosmopolitanizing Identities in a Globalizing World**

Diogenes  
2014, Vol. 60(1) 10–20  
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0392192113519739  
dio.sagepub.com  


**Ian Ang**

University of Western Sydney, Penrith, Australia

## **Abstract**

The greater interconnectivity and interdependence unleashed by globalization are not creating a more harmonious, cosmopolitan humanity. On the contrary, the more global the world becomes, the more insistent particular differences, especially of the nationalist kind, are being articulated around the world, often leading to tension and conflict. This seeming paradox cannot be reconciled through simple mantras of ‘unity in diversity’. Rhetorical references to ‘a single humanity’ to overcome structurally entrenched divisions (as institutionalized in the world system of nation-states) are not sufficient for the attainment of greater pan-human solidarity. In response to this predicament this paper argues for a cosmopolitan perspective, in which a humanistic universalism should not be seen as a static moral ideal, but as a social and political horizon that must be worked towards, but probably never achieved, through a painstaking and continuing process of cosmopolitanization against the grain of powerful modes of particularist closure.

## **Introduction**

It is commonly recognized that we live in an increasingly globalized world today. This is a world increasingly underpinned by global interconnectedness and interdependence. This does not mean, however, that humans are all becoming more alike, nor that we are creating a more harmonious, cosmopolitan world. On the contrary, the paradox is that the more globally connected we have become, the more insistent local and particular identities are being articulated around the world, often leading to tension and conflict. This is not surprising, given the massive inequalities and persistent power hierarchies shaping economic, social and political relations at global, national and local levels. Although we are a single humanity living on one planet, we all live our lives in different, sometimes incompatible social communities. The globalized world, then, is characterized by a complex and contradictory multiplicity of co-existing, sometimes overlapping, at other times clashing cultural worlds (Appadurai, 1996; Tomlinson, 1999; Erikson, 2007).

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### **Corresponding author:**

Ian Ang, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney, Parramatta campus EM, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith NSW, 2751, Australia.  
Email: i.ang@uws.edu.au

Thus, globalization goes hand in hand with the increased salience of difference. Paradoxically, as Erikson points out, 'it is only after having been "globalized" that people may become obsessed with the uniqueness of their locality' (2007: 14). Familiar mantras such as 'many cultures, one world' or 'unity in diversity' are often mobilised to even out the inevitable frictions emerging from this paradox, in order to reconcile the yawning gap between unity and diversity. But such oft-repeated slogans are abstract catchphrases, hiding rather than illuminating the complex contradictions and challenges of the increasing webs of interdependencies created within our globally entangled world. In philosophical terms, this global paradox is expressed in the antinomy between universalism and particularism, or the gap between the presumed universality of human nature and the irreducible particularity of different cultures. In social and political terms, the desire to close this gap is manifested in the ongoing universalist effort to achieve a fully inclusive humanity despite our differences; in other words, by subsuming particularism within an all-encompassing, humanist universalism (Laclau, 1992; Todorov, 1998). The slogan 'unity in diversity' is an expression of this high-minded ideal.

In this paper, I will interrogate the 'unity in diversity' slogan in order to argue that the attainment of this humanistic universalism is bound to fail if it is envisioned as a static moral ideal. Instead, it is more useful to conceive it as a social and political *horizon* that must constantly be worked towards, without it ever being fully achieved. In doing so we need to explore how the complex intersections of globalization and cultural diversity manifest on the ground, within and between nation-states. In recent times we have seen that tensions between nations and cultures have been rising *despite* the common calls for international peace and understanding, and global solidarity. In other words, the world we live in is not just a *diverse* world, it is in many respects a *fractured* world. Not only is the world rife with conflicting interests and values, the reality of which cannot be ignored; we also tend to *perceive* the world as a place inhabited by peoples who are so very different from ourselves – in terms of races, ethnicities, languages, religions, and so on – that we often struggle to see them as part of a common humanity, leading the sociologist Alain Touraine to ask: 'Can we live together?' (Touraine, 2000). Popular experience tends to construct the world in terms of 'us' and 'them', self and other, insider and outsider, in various configurations, so much so that it seems part of human nature (Berreby, 2008). Overcoming this master dichotomy is a daunting task, because it is deeply ingrained in common ways of seeing and imagining the world. In the contemporary globalized world, in which 'us' and 'them' are irrevocably entangled, developing conceptual and practical perspectives able to overcome such divisive ways of seeing and imagining is more urgent than ever, without overlooking the real differences which will always remain.

One such perspective is to conceptualize our globalized world as a *network of flows*. The experience of planet Earth as 'one world' is fostered in different ways today through international trade and the flow of goods and services, the unprecedented movement (or flow) of people across borders, and with them the flow of forms of cultural practice and knowledge, information, images and ideas through digital communications networks. The effects of these technologies are now apparent almost everywhere, with the blossoming of internet and mobile phone communications in the remotest and poorest of villages. They have facilitated the creation of an intensively networked world, or what the sociologist Manuel Castells (1996; 2005) calls a 'network society'.

These networks of flows boosted by globalization do not simply make the world more unified or integrated; they also produce new power hierarchies and shifting forms of disunity and disintegration, creating what international relations theorist James Rosenau (2003) calls a 'fragmegrated' world – a world of simultaneous fragmentation and integration. For instance, economic and technological globalization may promote the hegemony of powerful corporate forces (e.g. Westernization or Americanization), but one of its effects may be a proliferation of diverse cultural experiences and social activities as a consequence of such flows. Here, processes of globalization

and localization are taking place at the same time, leading to what some theorists have called *glocalization* (Robertson, 1995; Roudometof, 2005). Glocalization is a term originally used in Japanese business practices in the 1980s, coming from the Japanese word *dochakuka*, which means ‘global localization’. It is used to describe how global products or processes are adapted to suit local needs and conditions. What is interesting in such a situation is that what is ‘global’ and what is ‘local’ cannot be separated out: they are intertwined. For example, the spread of the Internet has been dominated by some large American corporations such as Google, Apple and Microsoft, but the uses of the Internet, especially social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (all American-owned), have created massive virtual network societies shaped by local interests and priorities, as has been the case recently during the Arab Spring. In other words, although the technology is global, its spread is dependent on how people around the world adapt it to local uses (e.g. by developing websites in their native languages). In short, ‘glocalization’, or the ‘glocal’, although awkward, is a useful shorthand term to signal the ways in which things we tend to see as separate (such as local and global, but also old and new, familiar and alien, similar and different, self and other) are actually complexly interwoven.

This complex interweaving of seemingly opposite forces should lead us to a different way of thinking about cultural diversity: not as a mosaic (where each element is a separate entity), nor as a melting pot (where all differences are dissolved), but perhaps as a maze (where identity and difference are seen not as opposites but as simultaneous, complementary and entangled presences). I will clarify these different conceptualizations further below, as they are very important for our understanding of the relationship between universalism and particularism. My starting point here is to reflect on the nation-state, especially in relation to the issue of multiculturalism.

## Nation-states and the multicultural question

Nation-states are the central agents of government and governance in the modern world. A common general definition of the nation-state is that it is an autonomous political unit inhabited predominantly by a people sharing a common ethnicity, culture, history and language. This idea of the nation-state has been a guiding principle since the French Revolution of 1789, which stressed the political unity and independence of peoples (the state coincides with the nation, which in turn coincides with a territory and a people). Today’s modern world order is one which takes the legitimacy and sovereignty of separate nation-states for granted.

The ideal nation-state is a territorially bounded political entity comprising a population characterized by cultural sameness and homogeneity. Actually-existing nation-states, many of whom were established only after the second world war, tend to fall short of this ideal, but generally work hard to produce national integration through the imposition of nationalizing cultural processes (Calhoun, 1997). In this sense, the authority of the nation-state is based on the internal universalization of a self-contained, particularist sense of national identity, and the assertion of its uniqueness (or difference) vis-à-vis all other nation-states. In this way, we can describe the modern world order as the embodiment of the absolute dichotomy of universalism and particularism: it is constructed as a universal humanity comprised of resolutely particular, mutually exclusive, internally cohesive nations – racially and culturally. The world, in short, is imagined as a ‘family of nations’.

But this neat concept of the family of nations, as institutionalized pre-eminently in the United Nations, is being corroded increasingly and unavoidably by the cross-cutting flows of globalization. The idea of national sovereignty – that is, the claim of a nation-state to be the judge and jury of its own cause, to have supreme, independent authority over its territory – has come under severe pressure as a consequence of the intensifying global mobility of money, technology, information, people, and ideas, which has enhanced the porosity of national borders. Still, it is widely

recognized that globalization has not, as yet, led to the gradual dissolution of the power of the nation-state. Instead, the era of globalization has resulted in a reconfiguration of the place and role of the nation-state in the management of the global (dis)order. Thus, nation-states are not bound to disappear or to lose their influence any time soon, not least because their legitimacy is constantly reproduced through their status as central agents in institutions of international governance from the UN to the European Union to APEC. Rather than being the pinnacle of sovereignty, however, nation-states now operate more as nodes of socio-spatial power where the very contradictions of economy and society in a globalized world are being negotiated (Sassen, 2007). As national territories are being traversed by highly contradictory flows of multiple, cross-cutting and intersecting local and transnational forces, they should be conceived as fragmented, disorderly and permeable social spaces, not as ordered, bounded totalities. Nevertheless, the very imagination of the nation-state as a bounded entity is part and parcel of the performative work of states in their efforts to secure nation-wide managerial control. Indeed, representing the nation as a distinct and unique imagined community (Anderson, 2006) is perceived by governments as being an even more urgent, if increasingly challenging, cultural task, precisely in the current age of globalization. We live in a networked world where the national and the transnational are irrevocably intertwined, yet where nationalizing forces attempt to disentangle our image of the nation from its transnational enmeshment by insisting ever more strongly on drawing its borders and boundaries (Castells, 1996; Paasi, 2003). This paradoxical tension between the national and the transnational is a crucial factor in the shaping of much political conduct around the world today. This is strongly evidenced in the complex impact of international people flows, especially migration, on nation-states.

Clearly, the social reality of most nation-states today is not at all one of sameness and homogeneity. On the contrary, most nation-states, to a greater or lesser extent, have very diverse populations, not least as a result of burgeoning international migration (Castles 2000; Solimano, 2010). Even those nation-states which have traditionally been characterized by exceptional racial and cultural homogeneity, such as Japan and Korea, are today becoming more diverse with the presence of many migrants from other countries. Thus, the reality of nation-states is that they are internally diverse, yet they also tend to promote national unity through the integration (or assimilation) of all their citizens into a common imagined community (Anderson, 2006), for example through national education, the imposition of a national language, the teaching of a national history, and so on. The recent introduction of so-called citizenship tests in various Western countries in response to the increased presence of migrants is another example of this preoccupation with integration and assimilation (Leeuw, de and van Wichelen, 2012). In this way, nation-states work to confine their internal cultural plurality under the umbrella of a homogenizing national identity.

Policies of multiculturalism, which have been introduced in several nation-states in the late twentieth century, especially in Western immigrant societies such as Canada and Australia, are an official recognition of ethnic and cultural diversity within the nation. Such state-driven multiculturalism generally refers to 'the strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up' (Hall, 2000: 209). This definition of multiculturalism stresses its status as a mode of governmentality, consisting of particular ensembles of institutions, procedures, analyses, reflections, calculations and tactics, aimed at regulating and reconciling the tensions and conflicts raised by cultural, racial or ethnic differences among a population within a territory (Foucault, 2009). Seen this way, multiculturalism is a particularly modern technology of government which has emerged as an alternative to the assimilationist strategy to manage the diversity within nation-states. At the same time, however, wherever it is deployed multiculturalism is a deeply contested idea, whose meaning is never settled and always attracting both passionate proponents and ardent opponents from both left and right, conservative and radical. Why is this the case?

I would suggest that multiculturalism is controversial as a policy framework because it brings into sharp focus the fundamentally problematic nature of the nation-state as a bounded, sovereign entity. The fact, as Hall (2000: 212) points out, that what he calls 'the multi-cultural question' has intensified and taken centre-stage in the field of political contestation in recent times, is indicative of the shifting and ambiguous nature of national identity in an increasingly globalized world. Discourses of multiculturalism often limit themselves to issues and arrangements *within* a particular nation-state; that is, they tend to be focused inward on a strictly national frame of reference. It is precisely this nation-centric focus of multiculturalism, as it is predominantly conceived, which reveals its deeply problematic relationship with the idea of the nation.

One way to explain this is to note that what policies of multiculturalism tend to do is redescribe the nation-state explicitly as a 'unity in diversity'. Multicultural societies are generally described in terms of the diversity of ethnic groups living within it. To be sure, many non-western countries, which became nation-states in the modern sense in the wake of European colonialism and imperialism, have always had to establish themselves in multi-ethnic terms. Malaysia, for example, is a postcolonial nation-state which officially describes itself as consisting of three ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese and Indians – a composition which is a legacy of British colonialism (Hefner, 2001). Iran is also officially a multi-ethnic society with Persians as the dominant group, but consisting further of Azari Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Balouches and Turkmans, and many other smaller ethnic groupings (Tohidi, 2006). In a different way, India is equally characterized by great diversity, not least in terms of language: there is no such thing as the Indian language and the Indian currency is printed in 15 languages. Indians even pride themselves on their diversity, and the slogan 'unity in diversity' is often invoked as quintessentially applicable to India (Gore, 2002). In the nation-states of the developed West, meanwhile, ethnic and cultural diversity have resulted mostly from waves of immigration. In such contexts, a liberal version of multiculturalism prevails, in which migrants are recognized for their difference but are still expected ultimately to integrate into the dominant national culture.

As Hall (2000: 210) has noted, 'Just as there are different multi-cultural societies there are very different "multiculturalisms"'. Yet despite this wide variety, what all multi-cultural societies have in common is that they harbour different cultural, racial or ethnic communities who live together in a common polity. In other words, multiculturalism poses the overarching national community as the universal domain within which each of the particular ethnic communities (minorities and majority) find their rightful place. This is the 'unity in diversity'. Yet this image of the nation-state is too neat, and too far removed from the more liquid and messy realities of *de facto* multicultural societies.

One key problem with notions of 'unity in diversity' is that it often implies a static conception of ethnic groups, as if they were bounded and internally coherent entities. It does not account for the fluidity and dynamic nature of social relations between and amongst members of these groups. The Nobel prize-winning Indian economist, Amartya Sen, has criticized approaches to multiculturalism which define the nation-state as a 'plural monoculturalism', where people and communities are categorized within rigid boxes of inherited identities (Sen, 2006). Such a model makes identity and difference absolute, and thus constructs a fixed and unchanging image of diversity, fitting with J.S. Furnivall's classic description of a 'plural society' as comprising ethnic groups 'which live side by side, yet without intermingling' (quoted in Hefner, 2001: 4). Today's controversy about multiculturalism is based on this separatist notion of diversity, as in critiques – articulated especially in Europe – that stress the divisiveness of multiculturalism, accused of promoting segregation and 'parallel lives' (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010; Rattansi, 2011).

Against such a static image of diversity many theorists have mobilized concepts of hybridity and hybridization, emphasizing the dynamic fluidity and multiplicity of identities and the intercultural

mixture and cultural translation taking place in multicultural societies (Ang, 2001; Bhabha, 1994; Werbner and Modood, 1997; Wise and Velayutham, 2009; Nederveen Pieterse, 2009). Here, multiculturalism is associated more with cross-cultural exchange than with the inward-looking maintenance of group identity. This involves a more cosmopolitan understanding of multiculturalism as opposed to a more essentialist, pluralist one. However, these opposing tendencies cannot easily be disentangled, leading to what John Nagle (2009) calls the 'double bind' of state-sponsored multiculturalism. US historian David Hollinger (1995) has eloquently articulated this double bind:

Multiculturalism is rent by an increasingly acute but rarely acknowledged tension between cosmopolitan and pluralist programs for the defense of cultural diversity. Pluralism respects inherited boundaries and locates individuals within one or another of a series of ethno-racial groups to be protected and preserved. Cosmopolitanism is more wary of traditional enclosures and favors voluntary affiliations. Cosmopolitanism promotes multiple identities, emphasizes the dynamic and changing character of many groups, and is responsive to the potential for creating new cultural combinations. Pluralism sees in cosmopolitanism a threat to identity, while cosmopolitanism sees in pluralism a provincial unwillingness to engage the complex dilemmas and opportunities actually presented by contemporary life. (Hollinger 1995: 3–4)

Cosmopolitanism has attracted the interest of many scholars in recent times (Delanty, 2009; Held, 2010; Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002). Hollinger's description highlights what I consider of key importance in conceptualizing cosmopolitanism: it should not be conceived as a fixed attitude or disposition, but, in its responsiveness to 'the potential for creating new combinations', it should be seen as encouraging a social and cultural *process*. It is this process – call it the process of cosmopolitanization – which needs to be promoted in multicultural societies.

### **The cosmopolitan process**

Historians have pointed to situations in the past where a strong cosmopolitan ethos emerged in situations of intensive exchange relationships in many places, particularly in trading centres and colonial outposts. Sri Lanka, for example, because of its geographical position in the Indian Ocean, was long at the heart of maritime trade routes between East and West, frequented by Roman, Arab, and Chinese traders before the arrival of Portuguese and Dutch seafarers from the fifteenth century onwards, until the island was submitted to British colonial rule in the early nineteenth century. Sri Lanka's capital Colombo, like many other trading posts in the region, has a history of being a meeting point where people from different lands came into contact with each other, often for extended periods of time, leading to an incredible exchange of ideas, technologies and goods. Thus, a fluid cultural diversity around the Indian Ocean existed for centuries *before* the establishment of modern nation-states. These traders were thoroughly cosmopolitan in that they would routinely transact and translate across different languages, and knew how to conduct themselves in different cultural settings with people of different religious beliefs, while respecting the disparate religious, social and cultural practices of their neighbours (Gupta, 2008).

Since Sri Lanka has become a nation-state, however, the country has been riven by protracted inter-ethnic conflict, even civil war, between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations. Even now that the civil war has ended, the question of how Sri Lankans of different ethnic backgrounds can learn to live in harmony remains an urgent one. The nation-state cannot prescribe a singular cultural identity for all its citizens. Peace-building efforts using a pluralist approach to multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue tend to take the form of programmes where members of each group are encouraged to get to know the other group, for example, through the showcasing of each other's dances, food and music. Such programmes presume that ethnic categories such as Sinhalese and Tamil have fixed, pre-given identities, putting every person in a hermetically sealed box. But as a

consequence differences between the two groups tend to be reified and presented as unambiguous and absolute. This may paradoxically work to reinforce the sense of being different and in conflict (Orjuela, 2008).

A more cosmopolitan approach would encourage conversations which do not take pre-existing ethnic boundaries and mutually exclusive ethnic identities as a given but, on the contrary, attempt to help open up such ethnic boxes. Such conversations should nurture the idea, as Sen argues in his book *Identity and Violence*, that identities are robustly plural and that the importance of one identity does not obliterate another. The Ghana-born American philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) argues that cosmopolitanism can provide us with a set of principles that allow us to 'to live together as the global tribe we have become'. Cosmopolitanism is, as the subtitle of his book says it, a form of 'ethics in a world of strangers'.

Appiah admits that cosmopolitanism is a problematic term, often associated with abstract, rootless notions of 'citizen of the world', as if cultural traditions and ethnic attachments do not matter. This does not have to be the case, in his view. Rather than dissolving differences of background, practice and belief in a kind of melting pot of 'shared values', Appiah sees the aims of cosmopolitanism as more modest and more processual, indeed, as an ethics. As an ethical mode of conversation and engagement with others it is *not* meant to work towards a consensus of values, which is so often foregrounded as a prerequisite for the achievement of a common humanity. Instead its purpose is, more humbly, to get to know and learn from and about one another. In multicultural societies, conversation across lines of difference helps us to gradually change the way we understand, to see the world from other points of view, and to become more comfortable with the presence of others who are different. 'Conversation doesn't have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values, it's enough that it helps people get used to one another', Appiah (2006: 85) notes. What is important about cosmopolitan conversations is not that they teach us *about* differences, but the very fact that they take place. It is the *process* of conversation that matters, not its outcomes. This is a process of leaving fixed categories behind, and bringing out the fluid plurality and dynamic complexity of our identities. The goal is not to know, in any definitive and positivist sense, how they are different from us, but *to become used to the fact that they inhabit the same world as we do*. In other words, cosmopolitanism involves the ongoing process of nurturing of what Appiah calls 'the habits of co-existence'.

Appiah insists that citizens do not have to agree on all common values in order to live in harmony, as long as they agree to make living together work (which, of course, is a crucial precondition). In this way, he distinguishes cosmopolitanism from universalism: 'Cosmopolitans suppose that all cultures have enough overlap in their vocabulary of values to begin a conversation. But they don't suppose, like some universalists, that we could all come to agreement if only we had the same vocabulary' (Appiah, 2006: 57). In other words, we do not all have to embrace a universe of 'shared values' – that is, achieve full unity – to live harmoniously in a diverse world. At the same time, cosmopolitanism brings out a different understanding of particularism, where cultural diversity is conceptualized not as a mosaic (a composite structure consisting of individual pieces, each neatly separated), but as a maze – an intricate tangle of interconnecting pathways and passages where identities are always in process, a matter of becoming. Or to use a different metaphor, which I derive from the French philosopher Roger-Pol Droit (2007), identities are not like unyielding, impenetrable stones, but like porous and fluctuating clouds, where self and other do not have clearly demarcated boundaries but constantly influence and shape each other.

In short, from a cosmopolitan perspective a multicultural society is not a static 'unity in diversity', but a dynamic confluence of fluctuating, cloud-like identities, sometimes overlapping and merging, at other times breaking up and dissolving. Rather than seeing identity and difference (or

unity and diversity) as opposite to one another, cosmopolitanism acknowledges that contradictory processes of unification and diversification take place simultaneously and ongoingly.

## Beyond the nation

This shift in conceptualizing and imagining multicultural societies is perhaps quite realizable within the context of a nation-state, where different ethnic and cultural groups are forced to live together within a shared jurisdiction. Even so, we know all too well that it is difficult to overcome habits of thought where the absolutism of ethnic difference is deeply ingrained and, often, reinforced by governments. This difficulty is enormously magnified when we wish to break down cultural barriers *between* nation-states. This is because in a strictly legal sense citizens of different nation-states do not need to see themselves as sharing a common world, on the contrary. If, for example, it would be possible to persuade the deeply divided Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka to embrace a shared Sri Lankan national identity, then they would collectively see themselves as a national 'we' in contradistinction to other national identities.

Nations operate as the ontological building blocks of the world community. The United Nations is the preeminent supra-national organization where nations are assembled and receive recognition for their individual autonomy and sovereignty (Lechner and Boli, 2005). The world according to the United Nations is irrevocably a mosaic: a mosaic of independent nation-states, each with their own government, culture, flag, anthem, etc. Oppressed peoples around the world often aspire to the status of independent nationhood as a way of casting off their sense of subjugation – think, in recent times, of the people of East Timor, Southern Sudan and the Palestinians. National independence, then, is generally prized as an incontrovertible good. National pride is whipped up by governments and internationally through worldwide ceremonies such as the Olympic Games, which are staged as a global competition between national teams. Nation-states are mutually exclusive entities: they occupy territories which are separated from each other by keenly patrolled borders. As a result, nations are generally conceived as hard, unyielding stones rather than malleable, flowing clouds.

And yet, as we have seen, nation-states are not nearly as autonomous and independent as they are imagined, especially under today's globalized circumstances. But precisely because the idea(l) of national sovereignty is so deeply cherished, the interdependencies and entanglements brought about by globalization create ever increasing anxieties over the loss of national autonomy, resulting in intensifying tensions and conflicts. How, then, can we move beyond such deeply entrenched modes of nationalist particularism?

To elucidate the difficulty of the challenge posed in this question, we need to go no further than focusing on relations between neighbouring countries. Such countries – for example, Mexico and the United States, India and Pakistan, Thailand and Cambodia, China and Korea, Korea and Japan – are often driven to mutual enmity precisely because they share a border, which separates them but also conjoins them. National borders are modern constructs designed to manage territories and populations, but because they are sharp lines on a map they suppress cultural continuities and shared histories that may exist on both sides of the border. Border wars over competing national particularisms occur with dispiriting frequency in relation to issues of history and heritage, where the predominance of a national frame of interpretation and sense of ownership is overwhelming.

For example, Thailand and Cambodia have had armed clashes in recent years over the Preah Vihear Temple, which was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for Cambodia in 2008. This led to the rekindling of disputes between the two countries over ownership of the temple, because the temple resides within the borderzone between the two countries and the precise borderline, only insisted upon in the early twentieth century when Cambodia was colonized by France, has never been fully agreed upon. The standoff between the two nation-states over the temple has



inflamed nationalist hostilities on both sides, at the expense of a shared and joint celebration of a site which, in the philosophy of UNESCO, is deemed of universal value for humanity as a whole. Here we see how universalist principles are undermined by the divisive effect of the ingrained particularism of cultural nationalism, which is ironically reinforced by the World Heritage system (Winter, 2010; Silverman, 2011). In other words, it is not universalism that subsumes different particularisms under its overarching umbrella; instead, it is the different particularisms which clash over the opportunities unleashed by the universal. It would seem that if the encompassing family of nations is envisaged as a ‘unity in diversity’, then it is diversity – the diversity of nations – that prevails, undercutting the presumed unity of humanity.

Similar clashes over history along national lines are intense in Northeast Asia, for example between (South) Korea and Japan and South Korea and China. A case in point is the ongoing dispute between Chinese and Korean historians – backed by their respective national governments – over whether the Ancient Kingdom of Koguryo, located in the northern and central parts of the Korean peninsula where the modern border between the People’s Republic China and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea lies, is part of Chinese or Korean history (Chung 2009; Lim 2008). Similarly, in an analysis of South Korean and Japanese national history textbooks, Jie-Hyun Lim has argued that ‘Korean and Japanese national histories have been trapped in a “mutual siege”’, each fully ensconced in their own parallel, yet antagonistic, nation-centred versions of history, with ‘no meeting point at which a reconciliation of historical interpretations might take place’ (Lim, 2008: 2/3).

Such examples illuminate how difficult it is to overcome the powerfully separatist impact of nationalist particularism. In this light, it is clear that the universalist vision of ‘one world’ can provide little counterpoint to the pervasive weight of particularist national belonging in the modern world order we currently live in, bolstered as it is by the structural prevalence of the nation-state.

Universalist rhetorical references to ‘a single humanity’ are not sufficient for the attainment of a greater sense of global human solidarity. Instead, a cosmopolitan perspective, in the processual, conversational way Appiah (2006) has described it, would be more useful in that it may prize open vistas beyond the nation, instilling more outward-looking dispositions and attitudes towards being in the world, which are sensitive to *both* commonalities of history and differences of cultural formation between and across nation-states. But this is bound to be a difficult, interactive process: a process of *becoming* (more) cosmopolitan against the grain of powerful modes of particularist closure. This requires pro-active social grounding and political commitment (Kendall et al., 2009). Moreover, it will be a process in which differences, even incommensurabilities, cannot (and should not) be entirely overcome. A universal, common humanity can only be a social and political horizon that must constantly be worked towards, without it ever being fully achieved. The work of cosmopolitanization will never be done.

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