Think piece: Cosmopolitan ways of experiencing a globalizing world

Cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitans and cosmopolitan culture crop up throughout the textbook in relation to globalization and global sociology. This short piece brings together all of these strands, discussing the core approaches to cosmopolitanism, trans-sociality and ethical glocalism. Read the piece then answer the questions below it which encourage you to think about your own experiences and personal relationships.

1. The impact of globalization.

Philosophers, artists and others have always ruminated on the meaning of cosmopolitanism. However, globalization has encouraged and perhaps even compelled us to attach much more significance to it and many recent global thinkers from all disciplines have been writing about this phenomenon. Thus, globalization increases our awareness of the interconnectedness of all peoples and we are more conscious of the shared problems all nations now face and which require cooperation. Moreover, we can no longer define our sense of identity solely by drawing on resources from within our own culture.

2. Core approaches

As part of the recent upsurge in writing on cosmopolitanism (see the last part of chapter 2), thinkers highlight different ways of understanding it. Nevertheless, we suggest there are two core approaches:

- Cosmopolitanism involves openness to, and knowledge about, cultures different from our own. This may involve deliberately sampling their art, customs and cuisine and/or by trying to build local social relationships in the host society. This approach is closely associated with the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz. Critics have suggested that this interest in the cultural 'other' is predominantly aesthetic in nature and found mainly among those who are highly educated, wealthy and who speak several languages fluently.
- Alternatively, John Tomlinson emphasizes that irrespective of whether we are open to the cultural 'other', cosmopolitanism arises where we display a degree of moral or perhaps political responsibility for people we do not know and who come from societies very different from our own. He defines this as 'ethical glocalism' as we care simultaneously about the local and the global. This view links up directly with the concept of globality as a growing consciousness of the world as one place. Both

conceptualizations are essential. We further suggest that they are neither mutually exclusive – we need not choose between one or the other – nor are they coterminous or simultaneous, such that expressing one will necessarily engender or require the other.

3. Trans-sociality

Many people probably find it difficult to demonstrate cosmopolitan orientations because their personal lives do not expose them to situations where they come into close contact with people from different societies. But it is through our inter-personal interactions with friends, colleagues, teachers, romantic partners, neighbours, members of the same political group, cultural enthusiasts and so on, that the most profound influences shaping us are forged. Consequently, as globalization draws more of us into intercultural relationships - for example through migration - we may find ourselves crossing cultural borders as our emotional attachments propel us to mutually explore each other's meanings. We might define such relationships as trans-social in character and as engendering trans-cultural interactions and explorations. Trans-sociality may involve either living abroad and/or encounters with strangers at home.

4. Cosmopolitanism and trans-sociality in practice

Approximately three fifths of the 61 postgraduate migrants from 13 different EU countries who were living and working in Manchester – and who were interviewed in 2005 (see Kennedy 2010) – claimed that through meeting people from different countries in the city they had become much more knowledgeable about and tolerant of other cultures. Important here was the fact that nearly all arrived alone and so had been compelled to build completely new social relationships from scratch. Often they found it difficult to break into local social networks since Manchester people already enjoyed dense relations from living all their lives in one place. For example, a young Greek who came originally to Manchester for study reasons and who had started his own business said:

'Recently I have been describing myself as a European ……But ……I think I'm just a leftwing citizen of the world really who happens to be behind the so-called gates of the European Union……..Yeah, I have changed. I have been meeting people from many different places and that has shaped my view of the world ….you know, I am much more aware of what the world is now'.

5. Tran-social relationships and taking moral responsibility for distant 'others': ethical glocalism

A sub-group (fifteen people) claimed that the interpersonal relations they had forged in Manchester (and sometimes elsewhere) had enabled them to become more empathetic towards that person's society and the conditions experienced by its members. In short, feelings of globality can be fostered or intensified through strong personal ties involving emotional loyalty to particular individuals. Here are three examples. We allow the respondents to speak for themselves. Case study 1. When asked if living abroad had changed her, a young Spanish woman working in a health-food emporium said yes:

'I think because I have met people from different kinds of environment. I have a friend from Malawi and I think how difficult it must be for her and how it is over there in her country. Because, one thing is what you read in newspapers and the other thing is what you really know through people and their experiences, you get the truth. You can put yourself in the skin of other people'.

Cast study 2. An Italian doctoral student in his early thirties had spent seven years studying in Manchester, but during this period he also lived in Namibia as part of his research. Recounting his experiences he observed:

'I feel loyalty to the places I've been and worked in. …….Yes, I have strong links with the place I did my research, the people I worked with in Namibia ……I went back already two times after I finished my research and I'm going back again ….I feel very strongly attached to it, emotionally. Because of the human side of it – I left behind a lot of good friends and I feel for the things they had to go through'.

Case study 3. A student from Germany had worked in the Netherlands and Sweden before coming to Manchester and noted:

'A very important experience of my life was when I worked in the Netherlands' social services. I was involved in asylum, refugee work …..I read a lot about the personal histories of these persons ….and the development of their countries…….and then you meet people from this country and from a personal point of view you maybe change the perceptions you have. But also ……this happened to me when I met people from different countries ….I didn't know anything about them and then through personal contact you

get more interested in that specific country or culture and then you start reading about it'.

Further reading

P. Kennedy, *Local Lives and Global Transformations: Towards World Society*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2010. See pages 248-251. You can also find more examples of the process outlined in point 5 above on pages 248-251.

You could also read R. Holton's excellent book, *Cosmopolitanism: New Thinking and New Directions*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2011.

Questions and assignments

1. How many of your own close personal relationships, past or present, including with romantic partners, have involved first generation migrants? Is the incidence of this changing – compared to your parents or grandparents time – and in what ways?

2. Think about these relationships. Did they produce any lasting effects on your ideas, ambitions, loyalties or values?

3. If you have not personally experienced such relations, talk to those you know who have – a friend or relation (uncle, cousin, sister, grandparent who lived abroad), someone currently married to a foreigner, a teacher or a work colleague. Ask the same questions as in 2.

4. What resulting conclusions can you draw about the nature and incidence of cosmopolitanism?