Global Dialogues 8

# Global Cooperation Through Cultural Diversity: Remaking Democracy?

Jan Aart Scholte (ed.)

Centre for
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**Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21)**
Schifferstr. 196
47059 Duisburg, Germany
Tel.: +49 (0)203 29861-100
Fax: +49 (0)203 29861-199
E-Mail: info@gcr21.uni-due.de
www.gcr21.org

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# Preface

This booklet reports on a special exploration of the relationship between cultural diversity and democratic global cooperation. Usually cultural differences are assumed to be a problem and a hindrance for people to work together in a democratic way. Yet could divergences in understandings and practices instead be made a foundation and a resource for collective handling of planetary challenges such as climate change, peacebuilding, and social inequality? Could cultural diversity be not an obstacle but an opportunity for constructive and democratic global public policy?

To consider this possibility the Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21) in collaboration with the Building Global Democracy programme (BGD) convened a working group of ten researchers with extensive experience in theories and practices of cultural politics. Indeed, the group itself encompassed large geographical, social, disciplinary and ideological diversities. The motivating inspiration was that a dialogue among differences about difference might generate different (and helpful) insights on the subject.

In the course of 2013 each of the ten researchers prepared an initial reflection on the possible contributions of cultural diversity to democratic global cooperation. The working group then met in conversation at KHK/GCR21 offices in Duisburg, Germany on 13–15 November 2013. After this meeting the participants rewrote their individual reflections in the light of their dialogue together, while the project convener prepared an overview of the arguments. These writings are assembled in the present publication.

Although, as might be expected, the contributors take varying positions, broad agreement emerged from the project that new politics of cultural diversity could open greater possibilities for democratic cooperation on global problems. Instead of the usually suggested formulas of assimilationism, multiculturalism and interculturalism, an alternative of 'transculturalism' might make diversity and difference a major asset for effective responses to pressing global issues.

As elaborated (and critically assessed) in this report, guiding principles of a transculturalism could include: (a) intense reflexivity; (b) explicit attention to knowledge/power relations; (c) recognition of cultural complexity; (d) embrace of cultural diversity; (e) cultivation of humility in the face of cultural incommensurabilities; (f) deep listening across cultural differences; and (g) cross-cultural learning for positive social change.

Not surprisingly, the Duisburg dialogue has revealed that transculturalism brings its own philosophical as well as practical problems. Addressing both, the promises and the pitfalls, this booklet offers to open wider horizons for, and invigorate further debate on, democratic global cooperation.

# Project Contributors

**Ahmed Badawi,** Transform e.V.
**Karen Busby,** University of Manitoba
**Nadezhda Fedotova,** Moscow State Institute of International Relations
**Sitiveni Halapua,** East-West Center
**Charity Musamba,** Zambia
**Zeynep Sezgin,** University of Vienna
**Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza,** University of São Paulo
**Paul Brendan Tjon Sie Fat,** Suriname
**Shiv Visvanathan,** O P Jindal Global University
**Yang Xuedong,** China Centre for Global Governance and Development
**Jan Aart Scholte,** University of Gothenburg/University of Warwick (project convener)

# Overview
## Jan Aart Scholte

**Jan Aart Scholte** (Universities of Gothenburg and Warwick)
Jan Aart Scholte is Chair of Peace and Development in the School of Global Studies at the University of Gothenburg as well as Professor of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick. In 2012-13 he was a Senior Fellow at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research. Scholte's research interests span globalisation, global governance, civil society in global politics, and global democracy. His publications include *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), *Building Global Democracy? Civil Society and Accountable Global Governance* (editor, Cambridge, 2011), and *New Rules for Global Justice: Structural Redistribution in the Global Economy* (editor, forthcoming). He regularly advises civil society groups and global governance institutions on their interactions.

### Introduction

Cultural diversity is a key issue for global-scale cooperation. People across the planet know and live their existence in often varying and different ways. This circumstance can, if treated positively, be a rich resource for innovative and effective policy on the many global-scale problems that confront contemporary society. Yet cultural diversity can also, if handled unconstructively, form a large barrier to global cooperation on matters such as digital communications, disarmament, ecological changes, finance, food security, health, migration, trade, and more. The challenge, therefore, is to nurture principles and practices around cultural diversity that advance rather than hinder gainful global cooperation.

Positive politics of cultural diversity also lie at the heart of possibilities for *democratic* global cooperation. 'Good' global cooperation would be pursued in democratic ways, where all affected people enjoy due participation in, and control over, the processes involved. However, to be veritably democratic, public engagement in global politics would need to accommodate diverse life-ways. In other words, all affected people should *experience* the democracy to be meaningful in their own cultural terms. Indeed, inventive approaches to cultural diversity could promote alternative and perhaps deeper ways of 'people's power' in respect of global cooperation.

But how can this appealing outcome of global cooperation through cultural diversity be achieved? The three main existing approaches to cultural politics in global affairs are wanting in this regard, thereby making a fourth alternative of 'transculturalism' worthy of exploration.

One conventional formula, liberal universalism, prescribes that people across the planet should abandon their cultural differences by assimilating to a western-modern life-world.[1] However, western modernity does not have all the answers to global challenges and may indeed in some ways (such as capitalist exploitations and the arrogances of science) be a substantial part of the problems. Moreover, it is plain that large swathes of humanity do not accept (everything in) western modernity and regard its spread as an imperialism. To this extent liberal cosmopolitanism can – against its proponents' frequently good intentions – undermine rather than underpin democratic global cooperation.

A second major approach to cultural diversity, communitarian multiculturalism, likewise fails to deliver sufficient democratic global cooperation. This view suggests that humanity is divided into mutually exclusive cultural groups who best lead mostly separate lives in a spirit of respectful mutual tolerance, since deeper contacts between cultural differences readily breed conflict, fear and violence.[2] However, in practice cultural maps are much more blurred, as humanity does not split neatly into discrete nations and civilisations. Nor is communitarian cultural separatism feasible given the density of today's global interconnections. Furthermore, contemporary global challenges such as handling ecological limits unavoidably require significant cooperation across cultural differences. Thus communitarian segregation is not an option.

A third approach to cultural diversity in global politics, interculturalism, improves upon universalist cosmopolitanism and multiculturalist communitarianism by accepting the need to forge global cooperation out of plural life-worlds. Interculturalism maintains that, with carefully pursued cross-cultural communication and negotiation, destructive scenarios of 'clashing civilisations' can be avoided and constructive collaboration achieved.[3] However, interculturalism retains multiculturalism's unsustainable assumption that culture maps onto neatly separable groups, when in practice life-worlds overlap and intersect. In addition, interculturalism tends to neglect that the negotiation of cultural differences must address power inequalities among life-worlds. Also, interculturalism can rather too sanguinely overlook that some cultural differences are unavoidably a source of deep conflict, such that good will alone is not always enough to reach intercultural condominium.

Of course these accounts of conventional approaches are simplified, but this brief review serves the present purpose to indicate that each has core flaws as a framework for substantial democratic global cooperation. To explore possible alternatives to assimilationism, communitarianism and interculturalism, the KHK/GCR21-BGD project engaged with notions of 'transculturalism'. The rest of this report presents the results of these collective reflections.

The first section below examines the question of culture and its diversities. The second section assesses transculturalism as a philosophical stance vis-à-vis cultural diversity in global

[1] Cf. Archibugi, D. (2008). *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Toward Cosmopolitan Democracy,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Brown, G.W. and Held, D. (eds.) (2010). *The Cosmopolitanism Reader,* Cambridge: Polity.

[2] Cf. Taylor, C. (1992). *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition',* Princeton: Princeton University Press; Miller, D. (1995). *On Nationality,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[3] Cantle, T. (2012). *Interculturalism: The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity,* Basingstoke: Palgrave; Taylor, C. (2012). 'Interculturalism or Multiculturalism?', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 38 (4-5) May.

affairs. The third section considers practical implications of transculturalism. The fourth section addresses the political strategies that might be pursued to advance positive transculturalism in global politics. Following this overview chapter, the rest of the booklet comprises commentaries from the individual participants in the project.

Preliminarily, it should be noted that the project working group took nothing as given. The ten participants held divergent notions of 'culture'. Indeed, some were deeply uncomfortable with the term itself. Likewise, some contributors were wary of the word 'democracy', given the many abuses committed in its name. Yet, rather than discard democracy altogether, the workshop problematised and struggled through the concept, seeking to enrich the confusions and possibilities. As one participant put it, 'we must rescue democracy from the democrats'. The word 'global' was similarly treated with caution, given how this vocabulary has readily become a hegemonic instrument of western-modern-liberal cosmopolitanism. However, it was also considered that the language of globality could, in critical hands as through this project, become a tool for transformational politics.

## Culture and Its Diversities

The Duisburg dialogue on transculturalism began by exploring conceptions of 'culture'. Coming from widely varying geographical, social, disciplinary and ideological contexts, the working group participants held quite disparate notions. For one contributor, culture included 'everything that humans do which is not genetically programmed'. For another participant, culture was what takes humanity beyond the 'raw' life of hunter-gatherers to a 'cooked' condition of civilisation. For a third colleague, culture involved 'processes of meaning making'. Others related culture to 'the basic values of a society' and 'what people do in relation to what they think they should do'. For many around the table, culture linked the present to the past, by means of tradition, customs, heritage, roots. The conversation also often connected culture with collective identity, whether on national, religious or other bases. This variety of conceptions indicated that it is not possible to construct a definitive standard framework for understanding 'culture'.

In particular, project participants disagreed on the relationship between 'culture' and 'knowledge'. Some in the group distinguished between 'culture' as understanding that is embedded in a specific social context and 'knowledge' as understanding that encompasses truths which lie outside of social context. In contrast, others in the group argued that all understanding is a product of context, so that claims to 'objectivity', 'science', etc. are also cultural constructs. For example, from the first perspective it would be possible to have an external point of reference from which to evaluate whether or not a translation is a good one, while from the second perspective no such 'supra-cultural' position of definitive judgement is available.

Alongside these differing viewpoints, however, all workshop participants agreed that culture is pervasive in social life. No person and no human situation can exist without cultural features. All social relations have cultural aspects (although this does not necessarily mean that society is reducible to culture). Thus global life – including cooperation and democracy on a global scale – cannot be adequately understood without significant attention to cultural aspects.

The working group also agreed that culture is highly diverse across humanity. Several participants suggested that contemporary globalisation is bringing greater convergence around a common 'world culture', although even these contributors noted that great cultural diversity persists in local contexts. In contrast, other participants argued that global spaces themselves also house considerable cultural diversity, including around purported universals such as 'humanitarian aid'. As one participant put it, 'the Other is going to stick around' in global politics. Another contributor affirmed that 'even if a single cultural frame could be imposed on all humanity, it would soon fragment'. Everyone around the table agreed that currently prevailing cultural diversities mean that deep consensus on ways of global cooperation and global democracy is not in prospect for the foreseeable future, if ever.

Participants repeatedly noted that cultural diversity is related to the variability of context. Each feature of culture is related to a place and a genealogy. This relativity holds also for so-called 'global' culture, which can masquerade as being timeless and universal, when in fact it too has particular conditions of its production. For example, 'human rights' do not make sense in a context (e.g. of many indigenous peoples) where the human is not separated from the rest of life. Hence viable constructions of democratic global cooperation would need an openness and flexibility which accommodates the varying contexts of the parties to that cooperation.

The workshop also regularly emphasised that cultural diversities in global politics fall on a variety of lines. These diversities tend to be most frequently described in terms of nationality, ethnicity and religion. However, cultural variations in global arenas can also arise in relation to age, caste, class, (dis)ability, gender, language, profession, race, region and sexual orientation. The relative prominence of these multiple axes of diversity varies depending on the situation. In any case it is clear that veritably democratic global cooperation needs to address many contours of cultural diversity, and not just ethnicity and religion.

Participants further agreed that culture is diverse over time, being fluid and dynamic. Cultural production is ever a mix of conservation and change. Culture is a process of both preservation of the old and emergence of the new. Indeed, even fundamentalisms that claim to restore old truths may in fact be inventing new ones. Given this inevitable changeability of culture, a defensive insistence on preservation can be problematic. Frameworks of democratic global cooperation should therefore not be fixed and rigid, but evolutionary and adaptive.

The working group also gave particular attention to the issue of cultural *difference*. In these situations cultural diversity involves not just variety, but also incommensurability. In cases of cultural difference, concepts and practices of one lifeworld cannot be understood by those situated in another lifeworld: a comprehensible translation between the contexts is not available. Democratic global cooperation is particularly tested on these occasions. Indeed, the parties may even have incommensurable understandings of 'democracy', 'globality' and 'cooperation'.

The project contributors highlighted difference to varying degrees. For some participants cultural incommensurability is the exception, arising only, for example, in certain radically divergent religious beliefs. In this view, people of diverse cultures mostly understand each other, and difference need not normally pose much difficulty for global cooperation. However, other participants suggested that incommensurability is far more pervasive, where even people who purportedly share the same culture and speak the same language have major areas of mutual incomprehension. In this case cultural difference is a first-order challenge for democratic global cooperation.

The project conversation furthermore drew a key distinction between incommensurability that is innocuous (i.e. where people can respect and accommodate the differences in question) and incommensurability that is unpalatable (i.e. where people cannot accept the differences). For example, logging might be regarded as vital livelihood by some and as immoral ecocide by others. Female circumcision might be seen as an essential rite of passage by some and an abhorrent patriarchal violence by others. Unpalatable incommensurabilities present some of the greatest problems for democratic global cooperation.

Assessing the ways and means of negotiating diversity and difference, the KHK/GCR21-BGD roundtable continually emphasised links between culture and power. Most participants agreed that all culture is inherently political. Thus power relations in society invariably affect the forms that culture takes, as well as the relative influence of one and the other cultural position. Conversely, cultural constructions can, depending on their form, either reinforce or subvert existing social power relations.



Owing to power alignments, the various cultural positions generally have unequal access to arenas of global cooperation. Indeed, although mainstream theories often describe culture as 'soft power', its effects can be quite 'hard' and coercive. Cultural power can arbitrarily and even violently exclude certain life-ways from global decision-taking. Such dynamics have been witnessed, for instance, in respect of Islamophobia, decimation of indigenous peoples, fundamentalist suppressions of dissent, and erasure of languages. Yet cultural power in global affairs could in principle also be horizontal, with an emphasis on equal capacity, equal worth, and cross-cultural sharing.

**Principles of Transculturalism**

To explore ways that politics of cultural diversity could advance democratic global cooperation, this project has highlighted the theme of transculturalism. Although the roundtable participants lacked a common understanding of what, more precisely, transculturalism might entail, there was general agreement that a novel approach to cultural diversity in global politics could offer promising paths to knowledge, justice, peace, community, and democracy.

Fittingly, the workshop explored transculturalism in a substantially transcultural fashion. Thus the seven principles briefly set out in the preface above – i.e. of intense reflexivity, sensitivity to power, recognition of complexity, embrace of diversity, cultivation of humility, pursuit of deep listening, and learning for change – also largely defined the dynamics of the project conversations. In this sense the roundtable was something of a microcosm of democratic global cooperation through transculturalism, revealing potential benefits as well as possible limitations of this approach.

The first of seven suggested cornerstones of transculturalism is an insistence on reflexivity. This principle affirms that the negotiation of cultural diversities is more likely to further democratic global cooperation if all parties are constantly alert to, and questioning of, the particularity (i.e. not universality) of their own ideas and practices. The KHK/GCR21-BGD workshop enacted this insight inasmuch as participants continually related their interventions in the discussions to the specific positions from which they spoke: that is, in relation to country, class, language, religion and so on. Reflexivity made the contributors acutely aware of the contextual character of their views, and this consciousness arguably also provided a 'hearing aid' in listening to others. No participant presumed to occupy a 'supracultural' ground from which they could offer a neutral and objective account of the conversation, and no one expected that the workshop could discover a universally acceptable single and fixed formula for democratic global cooperation.

A second proposed core principle of transculturalist politics of cultural diversity is an acknowledgement of, and sensitivity to, the power dimensions of culture. The proposition is that democratic global cooperation becomes more possible if the parties openly recognise the power relations among cultural positions that mark their encounters and seek to minimise the effects of any arbitrary structures of dominance and subordination. As noted above, the Duisburg discussion continually emphasised that, explicitly or implicitly, culture is steeped in power relations, whether hierarchical or horizontal. Regarding its own proceedings, the project acknowledged that various power questions were in play, including in respect of class, country, gender, knowledge, race, region and sexual orientation. Crucially, participants consciously strove to accord all cultural positions round the table equal possibilities for recognition, voice and influence in the conversation. This resistance to hierarchy arguably fostered more open and collaborative exchanges from which, even in the short duration of the workshop, a wide variety of understandings and propositions emerged. The implications of this microcosm experience for wider global cooperation could be encouraging.

A third suggested lynchpin of transculturalism is recognition of cultural complexity. As indicated above, the Duisburg workshop extensively examined the manifold dimensions of cultural diversity, as well as culture's highly fluid and adaptive character. All agreed that culture does not take pure forms that map onto neatly distinguishable groups of people. In this sense there is no 'African', 'Chinese', 'Indigenous' or 'Turkish' culture, with a uniform in-group that is clearly separated from its contrasting out-groups. So-called 'Western' culture is also a shifting interplay of many currents. On the principle of complexity, each participant in the KHK/GCR21-BGD roundtable from the outset presented themselves as a multidimensional moving cultural interface that could not be pinned down with single categories and simple stereotypes. Moreover, recognition of cultural complexity meant that the contributors did not construct binary self-other dichotomies among themselves. Instead, the conversation was multidirectional, inclusive and nuanced. Cross-cultural dialogue did not rest on artificial simplifications. This dynamic, too, could hold an encouraging lesson for democratic global cooperation more generally.

A fourth proposed tenet of transculturalism is the celebration of diversity. Assimilationism and communitarianism in their different ways see cultural pluralism as a hindrance to global cooperation. In contrast, transculturalism regards cultural variety as a significant resource for creative, effective and democratic global governance. In this respect the workshop promoted more than 'tolerance' of cultural diversity, but also its positive embrace and indeed active promotion.



Several participants even affirmed that the furtherance of cultural diversity is necessary for the survival of humankind, as a way to provide novel and dynamic responses to problems. In this spirit the workshop conversation acclaimed the diversity found around the Duisburg table itself. Participants were keen to identify, elaborate, emphasise and explore their own variety. Such curiosity about 'otherness' kept on the table a very broad range of insights and possible policy actions. Indeed, embrace of cultural pluralism could make policymakers more open to discovering and experimenting with novel cross-cultural combinations to achieve deeper global cooperation.

A fifth building block for transculturalism is humility in the face of cultural difference. As noted earlier, the KHK/GCR21-BGD roundtable repeatedly highlighted the issue of cross-cultural incommensurabilities, including some divergences that may be unpalatable to the parties concerned. How could such clashes be handled for the betterment of – or at least minimal harm to – democratic global cooperation? The workshop rejected the liberal cosmopolitan response (i.e. to dismiss difference as another culture's 'backwardness'), the multiculturalist communitarian response (i.e., to meet difference with defensive confrontation), and the interculturalist response (i.e. to skirt politely around differences). Instead, transculturalist politics responds to difference with a humble acknowledgement of the narrow limits of one's cultural understanding. Such humility in turn fosters hesitation to cast aspersions upon difference and readiness to accommodate incommensurability wherever possible. In particular, people in dominant social positions (e.g. professional classes, northern countries) could recognise that presumptions of their own cultural superiority result largely from power advantages. Transculturalist humility does not require a person to accept every difference or to like others whose views and practices seem offensive. However, by discouraging hasty denigrations of difference, as well as its violent suppression, transculturalism can wherever possible nurture the cross-cultural trust that is vital for democratic global cooperation.

Humility could promote a sixth suggested guiding principle of transculturalism, in the form of deep listening. In this approach, as one roundtable participant formulated the point, cultural difference is treated not as a black box (where the issue is ignored) or a Pandora's box (whose opening causes havoc), but as an impetus to conversation. The workshop did not suggest that listening could bridge the gaps of cultural incommensurability. Nor, again, does listening require one to like different others. Yet it is possible to honour, make space for, nurture empathy, and promote care across differences. As a result, those in culturally incommensurable positions accord each other recognition that their respective lives are worth living. Listening in this way is an act of solidarity which, when

practised on all sides, can advance democratic global cooperation. Such was the spirit of the KHK/GCR21-BGD roundtable itself, where gaps in understanding between the contributors were engaged with interested, respectful, probing questions to discover more. Thanks to deep listening, by the end of the three-day workshop individuals from widely varying contexts who had not previously met were closely acquainted with and trusting of each other.

A seventh and final cornerstone of transculturalism is cross-cultural learning for change. As noted earlier, the Duisburg discussion repeatedly underlined the fluid and adaptive character of culture. Transculturalism treats exchanges across cultural diversities as learning opportunities that can in turn promote positive social changes: for example, towards increased human dignity and/or greater ecological integrity. Transcultural politics are in this sense a process of revealing that new ways are possible. The exercise does not normally lead to cultural convergence, however, as different parties take different lessons from the exchange and apply them to different contexts to generate different changes. In this vein the participants in the KHK/GCR21-BGD project learned divergent things from the encounter and changed in multiple directions. Given these diverse experiences the participants could never totally agree on a single account of the proceedings (including as presented in this overview). Yet this point emphasises once more that consensus is not a prerequisite for democratic global cooperation.

In sum, then, the Duisburg discussion showed much interest in principles of transculturalism and went quite some way to enact them in its own proceedings. At the same time it was recognised that the meeting was not a 'normal' situation. Most people are not, like the individuals who gathered in this roundtable, adept in and committed to exploring alternative politics of cultural diversity. Nor did the calm seclusion of the Duisburg conference room reflect the hurly-burly of everyday global governance. Several participants indeed worried that transculturalism could be rather utopian and impracticable.

**Promises and Problems of Transculturalism**

The workshop indeed pointedly asked: why spend time on principles and practices of transculturalism as an approach to cultural diversity in global politics? The broad answer was that the prospective benefits for global politics of carefully executed transculturalism could be great.

For one thing, transculturalism can advance cultural vibrancy as a value in its own right. A situation of diverse and dynamic life-worlds is core to human flourishing in a good society. Unpalatabilities excepted, cultural difference is intriguing, stimulating, enriching and fun. Cultural variation and change is worthwhile for its own sake.

In addition, cultural vibrancy as fostered through transculturalism can advance other primary values in society. A circumstance where cultural diversity is recognised, celebrated and sensitively engaged towards mutual change is also a circumstance where democracy, distributive justice, liberty, peace and solidarity are more likely to thrive. In addition, humility, listening and learning across cultural differences could open new paths to enhanced ecological integrity and material security for all.

That said, the KHK/GCR21-BGD discussions also repeatedly underlined that transculturalism is not a panacea for democratic global cooperation. For example, Suriname was highlighted as a site of considerable transculturalism; yet this context still suffers from ecological damage, abuses of human dignity, and fragile democracy. More generally, project participants cautioned that the social changes which emerge from transculturalist exchanges need not always be for the better.

Moreover, the workshop noted that power inequalities could give some people little interest to enact transculturalism. For instance, transculturalism could be used to challenge existing global elites, who might see their privileges better served by the assimilationist demands of liberal cosmopolitanism: 'shut up about your differences and become like me'. Meanwhile certain social movements gain much of their strength through multiculturalist insistence on conserving 'tradition' and would therefore resist transculturalist tenets of humility, listening and mutual change: 'shut up about your complexities and let me defend myself'.

Indeed, transculturalism itself is political: its practice will, in each context, always favour some relative to others. The KHK/GCR21-BGD project mainly considered the positive empowering potentials that transculturalism could bring greater respect, voice and influence to marginalised circles in global politics. However, it was also appreciated that, in some scenarios, transculturalism might reinforce or even increase power differentials in society. In certain instances transculturalist discourse could even be a hegemonic tool that convinces subordinated groups to cooperate with dominant power. In this case transculturalism could legitimise injustice rather than resist and subvert it. Some critics might view the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the United Nations as a co-optation of this kind, for example.

Hence while the prospective benefits of transculturalism for democratic global cooperation might be considerable, the KHK/GCR21-BGD project found that the realisation of these gains could not be taken for granted. Transculturalist principles do not intrinsically bring good: it depends on the contexts and practices of implementation. For all that transculturalism might hold promise, it requires continual critical scrutiny.

## Strategies for Transculturalist Global Cooperation

In addition to reflecting on transculturalism and establishing that this alternative politics of cultural diversity has, in certain scenarios, considerable potential to advance democratic global cooperation, the KHK/GCR21-BGD project gave much attention to the practices that could help to realise these possibilities. It was agreed that transculturalism needed to be about action as well as abstraction, behaviour as well as attitude, form of living as well as rhetorical strategy. A dissenting imagination would not by itself reverse concrete harms. One needed also to specify, discover and nurture the practices through which beneficial transculturalism might be enacted.

The particular practices in focus for the Duisburg workshop were those of global cooperation. So the question was: by what political strategies could transculturalism advance collaboration across cultural diversities in respect of planetary challenges? Moreover, that transculturally grounded global cooperation should be conducted democratically, that is, in ways that offer all affected people due participation in and control over the process.

All project contributors agreed that current mainstream practices of global governance do not come close to embodying transculturalist principles. The issue then is what alternative strategies to pursue in order to effect change. The Duisburg dialogue distinguished five general paths to advance transculturalist ways of democratic global cooperation.

One of these strategies, which might be labelled 'waiting game', involves doing nothing proactive vis-à-vis existing global governance practices. This approach derives from an analysis, held by several project participants, that the contradictions of current global institutional arrangements in and of themselves will open up spaces for new politics of cultural diversity. Thus one need only wait for today's hegemonic globalism to undermine prevailing institutions of global cooperation and then to enter the resultant vacuum with novel transculturalist practices. In this vein sites such as the World Social Forum might be regarded as transculturalism-in-waiting. However, critics of a waiting game could object that politics of change need a more proactive promotion of transculturalist global cooperation.

Others at the Duisburg table inclined towards a second strategy, which could be called 'global reform'. In contrast to the waiting game approach, this perspective sees the main existing global governance institutions (United Nations, World Trade Organisation, etc.) to be more robust and also more adaptable to transculturalism. A global reform strategy prescribes adjustment of currently operating global-scale cooperation processes so that they move towards incorporating transculturalist principles. Steps to this end could include staff training on cultural sensitivity, greater outreach to a more culturally diverse civil society, and a general 'mainstreaming' of transculturalism in global governance. For instance, proponents of this second strategy would tend to embrace the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. However, critics of global reform might worry that such initiatives involve little substantive change and could have the effect of co-opting resistance to a harmful status quo.

A third strategy distinguished at the project workshop, that of 'subsidiarity', suggests that global-scale governance arrangements are inherently suffused with hegemonic forces that can never offer adequate space for positive politics of cultural diversity. On this analysis no amount of reform could recast global-level institutions in a substantially transculturalist mould. The answer, for proponents of subsidiarity, is to devolve policies on global challenges as much as possible to 'lower levels' of governance such as regions, countries and localities. Some element of global-scale regulation is necessary to meet global problems, but this third strategy urges that global-level decision-taking is restricted to the minimum required. Instead, policy processes on global issues should be located as much as possible in institutions with smaller geographical remits where – so the subsidiarity principle presumes – there is more possibility to express cultural diversity and enact transculturalist practices. Advocates of subsidiarity could welcome, for example, the development of regional and national human rights instruments alongside – and with precedence over – the global conventions. However, critics of subsidiarity could caution that openness to transculturalism is not a function of geographical scale, such that some local and national sites can be strongly assimilationist, while some global sites can be very accommodating of cultural diversity.

This criticism of subsidiarity points towards a fourth strategy that the workshop identified for the promotion of transculturalism in global cooperation: namely, that of 'polycentric transscalarity'. This approach rejects both the 'top-down' character of the global reform strategy and the 'bottom-up' orientation of the subsidiarity strategy. Instead, polycentric transscalarity urges that transculturalist global politics be advanced through whatever points in the governance architecture – on whatever scale or combination of scales – are most conducive in any given context. On this formula transculturalism would be best pursued across a blend of local, national, regional and global sites – and by moving between whatever venues might be most auspicious at any particular moment. Polycentric transscalarity rejects the presumption that one or the other level is inherently most ripe for transculturalism and urges to look at governance as a complex web of opportunities and obstacles. Proponents of this strategy would applaud

the ways that persons living with disability have used multi-pronged campaigns to obtain recognition, respect, voice and influence in global politics. However, critics might suggest that a strategy of polycentric transscalarity favours actors with privileged access to power and resources.

A fifth type of strategy to advance transculturalism that was highlighted in the Duisburg roundtable is 'transformation'. This approach rejects the notion that transculturalism can be realised through existing governance institutions: not by global reform; not by subsidiarity; not by polycentric transscalarity. From a transformational perspective, one needs to shift from running in circles to creating a new track, to switch strategy from amending rules to inventing a new game. For transformationists, a radically new cultural politics for democratic global cooperation can only emerge outside existing governance arrangements. The implementation of transculturalism therefore requires rejection, refusal, secession and subversion in respect of governance as it is known today. According to transformation strategies, merely rearranging the boundaries of existing regimes cannot create sufficient space to enact transculturalist principles. Nothing short of radically new kinds of institutions for democratic global cooperation will do. Advocates of transformation rally behind subaltern social movements who refuse any engagement with the existing governance architecture. However, critics suggest that transformational approaches might be impracticable and/or could yield outcomes that are even less open to transculturalism than the current situation.

As already intimated, participants in the KHK/GCR21-BGD exploration of transculturalism and democratic global cooperation were divided in their assessments of these five strategies. Each approach had its proponents and its critics. Several contributors saw merit in combining several strategies, which indeed are not always mutually exclusive. Regardless of their preferred action plan, however, all contributors to the Duisburg conversation agreed that the benefits of transculturalism for democratic global cooperation could not be achieved overnight. No quick fix to the limitations of assimilationism, multiculturalism and interculturalism was in prospect. The dialogue was in this sense part of a long-term struggle for alternative global politics.



# Cultural Obstacles to Democratic Global Governance

Ahmed Badawi

**Ahmed Badawi** (Transform e.V., Germany)
Ahmed Badawi joined the Institute of Cultural Affairs: Middle East and North Africa (ICA: MENA) in 1991. He moved to Berlin in 2001 and became heavily engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as both a scholar and a practitioner. He has worked for a number of think-tanks, including the German Institute of International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik), the International Crisis Group, and the Oxford Research Group. He is currently the Co-Executive Director of the Berlin-based Transform: Centre for Conflict Analysis, Political Development and World Society Research. He has an MSc in Development Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and a PhD in Political Science from Humboldt University.

Culture is political. It is simply the worldview of a group. In a complex society made up of numerous groups, the dominant culture in it reflects the worldview of its most powerful group. Culture exists in intimate connection with the economy. Culture shapes the moral and legal frameworks for legitimising ownership and organising exchange in society. The distribution of property rights that is protected by these frameworks is in effect a distribution of social and political power. In other words, culture is a source of power in society.

Cultures can, and ought to be, normatively evaluated. It is not that some cultures are 'better' or 'worse' in a moral or philosophical sense. However, some cultures may perform better in the sense of efficiency and effectiveness. Some cultures may, more than others, enhance the objective welfare of a society, through providing moral and legal incentives for rulers and ruled to achieve higher standards of living through good education and health systems, adequate housing, care for the elderly, meaningful employment for youth, etc. As long as the maximisation of a group's welfare is not achieved at the expense of the welfare of another group, this culture becomes 'better', and the carriers of other worldviews would be well advised to learn from it, without necessarily copying it.

Given this analysis, culture presents at least two major obstacles in the way of achieving democratic global governance. On the one hand, culture could be applied by the dominant group in global society to secure its unfair share of wealth and power. One example of such a dynamic is the deployment of the discourse of 'democracy' and the adoption of strategies that ostensibly aim to spread political freedom in the world when, in reality, they are merely a ruse to subject poorer societies to the dictates of unequal terms of international trade

and to stifle local industry. On the other hand, the prevailing worldviews in some of these subordinated societies may not value genuine political participation and fair competition. To this extent they may also not be equipped to partake in democratic governance of global society.

Resistance is the broad strategy to overcome the first obstacle (exploitative hegemonic dominant culture), while development is the broad strategy to overcome the second (undemocratic subordinate culture). However, these strategies have been only modestly successful. The world has seen heroic acts of resistance in Cairo, Madrid, Athens, New York, and elsewhere. Angry masses, young and old, have stood up to repression, police brutality, corruption and inequality, calling for the fall of regimes that act as proxies and local agents for global structures of domination. Yet so far nothing much has changed. Resistance and development are themselves shaped by the same worldviews that these strategies are meant to resist or develop in the first place. Resistance remains local in its outlook, agenda and potential impact. It is hemmed in by a much more powerful network of privileged transnational elites who have a superior advantage in power and resources. These same elites control the world's development discourse and are keen to impose one-size-fits-all models of development that are inappropriate to local conditions in many parts of the world. Their policies make the rich grow richer and the poor poorer and more disadvantaged.

A politics of transculturalism could empower us to detach ourselves from the shackles of our inherited worldviews in order to construct more effective strategies of resistance and development, thereby paving the way for democratic global governance. A first principle of transculturalism, insistence on reflexivity, correctly sets the tone for this alternative approach to cultural diversity. However, a capacity for reflexivity does not necessarily exist in all cultures, and so it might have to be actively nurtured. The same goes for other pillars of transculturalism, such as appreciating cultural complexity and celebrating cultural diversity. These principles need to be interpreted and promoted differently in different societies that are at different stages of moral and material development.

Building on transculturalism can enhance the positive power of culture in order to overcome the negative culture of domination that is so prevalent in the world today. Transculturalism is not a panacea, but it is as good a place as any to begin constructing solid bases for democratic global governance.



# The Politics of Religious Diversity: Can Legal Principles Advance Cooperation?

Karen Busby

**Karen Busby** (University of Manitoba, Canada)
Karen Busby is a Professor of Law and Director of the University of Manitoba Centre for Human Rights Research Initiative. Professor Busby's current research is on surrogacy, spousal sexual assault, and on the application of human rights laws to lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-identified and questioning (LGBTQ) people, especially where these laws collide with religious freedom. Under her direction The Centre for Human Rights Research has formed a Water Rights Consortium made up of almost 50 community and university-based researchers. Together with Andrew Woolford and Adam Muller, she is editing a collection entitled 'The Idea of a Human Rights Museum'.

The Constitution of Canada 'recognizes the importance of preserving and enhancing the multicultural heritage of Canadians.' At least since 1985, it has been the official policy of the Canadian government, as reflected in the *Multiculturalism Act*, among other measures: (1) to preserve, enhance and share diverse cultural heritages; and (2) to promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation. The Canadian approach to cultural politics is therefore very different from the dominant approach in the United States, where assimilation is the expectation.

The term 'multiculturalism' in Canada has a meaning that is quite different from that used in other countries and contexts. In fact, Canadian understandings of multiculturalism largely embody the principles which the KHK/GCR21-BGD project has assembled under the label of 'transculturalism'. Emphasis is put on celebration of diversity, recognition of complexity, and reciprocal learning and change.

The litmus test for such principles is whether they help to resolve religious tensions. Prejudice against religious groups and tensions between and within religious groups are age-old problems, often destabilizing societies around the world. Do multiculturalist/transculturalist principles assist in situations where the religious rights of one group conflict with the

rights of others or are inconsistent with other fundamental social values?

Most religious rights cases can be resolved using well-established human rights principles concerning the accommodation of difference in employment and services. This means, in a nutshell, that unless the accommodation imposes an undue hardship on an employer or service provider (including cost, safety or security), the accommodation must be made. However, it can still happen that a relatively uncontroversial practice cannot be accommodated because the costs and other impacts of the accommodation are too significant. For example, can a Sikh join the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and be exempt from wearing the Stetson hat which is closely associated with the RCMP's public image? Can some religious minorities refuse to have photographs taken for their driver's licence?

Interesting tensions arise when governments actively support religious groups, in particular when they fund religious agencies to provide social services. The principles of celebrating diversity and cultivating humility seem to operate here. For example, the government financially supports agencies to provide services such as a homeless shelters, youth activity centres and group homes for people with mental disabilities. Some of these agencies have a religious ethos, but only a small fraction of the clients they serve may share that ethos. Can the agency require that its employees share that ethos and abide by a religious code of conduct? For example, could the agency refuse to employ gays or lesbians, even if they profess the same faith?

More difficult issues arise when the religious rights of one group conflict with the rights of another. Usually these cases are resolved by trying to weigh the equities of the case and to find some kind of balance. The principle of understanding cultural complexity is especially important here. The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that 'respect for religious minorities is not a stand-alone absolute right; like other rights, freedom of religion exists in a matrix of other correspondingly important rights that attach to individuals .... The Court [must] deal with the interrelationship between fundamental rights both at a conceptual level and for a practical outcome.' For example, a Muslim woman alleges that she was sexually assaulted repeatedly by her uncle and cousin as a teenager. Must she remove her face veil while she gives testimony in court?

The most difficult cases are those where the religious rights claim involves a clear positive obligation on adherents to do something, but the religious rights claim is one that non-adherents believe has no place in Canadian society because, for example, it is contrary to prevailing beliefs about gender equality or bodily integrity. For example, some Mormons



believe that men who marry more than one woman will have a special place in the afterlife. While it is difficult to enforce criminal code prohibitions against polygamy because women refuse to testify, is the prohibition itself a violation of religious freedom?

Canadians are expected to tolerate religious pluralism, and many celebrate religious diversity, for example, welcoming invitations to attend each other's important festivals. This expectation of tolerance and aspiration to celebration promotes peaceful co-existence. As such, Canadian multiculturalism may be a model that could work in other contexts, including that of democratic global cooperation.

# Multiculturalism, Transculturalism and Global Democracy

Nadezhda Fedotova

**Nadezhda Fedotova** (MGIMO-University, Russia)
Nadezhda Fedotova is Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Moscow State University Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University). Her research and publications focus on contemporary social transformations, theories of identity, politics of multiculturalism, globalization, and economy and society.
Her co-authored book, *Global Capitalism: Three Great Transformations. Socio-Philosophical Analysis of Interlinkages between Economy and Society*, was ranked first in 2009 at the All-Russia competition of Russian Association of Political Science. Her second book is *Study of Identity and Contexts that Form Identity* (2012).

The present global order is marked by inequality, injustice and quasi-colonial discourse. To democratize this situation requires *inter alia* an acceptance of cultural diversity. It is necessary that global politics develops ways to handle different values, different ways of thinking, different ways of acting. The question is how to do this? I would argue that an answer can be found in combining communitarian and liberal understandings of multiculturalism with principles of transculturalism. Transculturalism can provide a framework for interaction between communitarian and liberal approaches to multiculturalism.

To begin with, one must underline that democracy itself is culturally variable. For example, in Russia in the 1990s 'democracy' was interpreted in a certain way by people in power who called themselves 'democrats'. However, many workers, rural populations, intellectuals and pensioners could not accept this 'democracy' that ignored their interests. The 'democrats' imposed a Western development model as they comprehended it, ignoring the local political cultures of a substantial proportion of the population of Russia.

Cooperation across cultural diversities is problematic even for a quite homogeneous region such as Europe. Although Europe has realistic prospects to forge a distinctive unifying identity for itself, its eastern and western parts remain culturally quite divergent. The recent economic crisis in Europe showed that the member countries of the European Union were far from sensing a common European identity. In fact the debtor peripheral countries were held in utter contempt as 'stupid PIGS' (Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain) by the leading



countries. Economic pressures overrode all political correctness of 'transculturalism'.

Principles of transculturalism have some merit for promoting democratic global cooperation. It can be helpful to encourage reflexivity, recognition of complexity, acknowledgement of power, celebration of diversity, cultivation of humility, promotion of listening, and pursuit of reciprocal learning and change. However, these principles are not sufficient by themselves.

For one thing, multiculturalist ideas also have a place. Here one has in mind not the communitarian approach to multiculturalism, where 'cultures' are presumed to be neatly united internally and diametrically opposed externally. In fact every supposedly 'united' community has its cultural diversity within, and purportedly 'clashing' cultures can have a number of common interests. However, there are also liberal versions of multiculturalism which can be relevant to building democratic global cooperation. This approach understands multiculturalism to relate to a diversity of individuals rather than groups.

This mix of multiculturalism and transculturalism is characteristic of Russia. On the one hand, from the long-term past people living in Russia have considerable cultural diversity that was handled in communitarian multiculturalist ways. On the other hand, as modern citizens people living in Russia have come to think of themselves holding an individual as well as a group identity, so encouraging the development of a liberal multiculturalism. With this liberal multiculturalist attitude people living in Russia have come to think of themselves holding an individual cultural identity composed of both transcultural and group identity. Meanwhile transculturalist views help to forge solidarity in Russian society as a whole.

A strategy that unites communitarian and liberal multiculturalism by virtue of transculturalism works for Russia and could provide an inspiration for democratic cooperation on a global scale. Russia's experience could be applied to the contemporary globalized world. In world society single countries as 'individuals' could be the site of liberal multiculturalism, regions as 'groups' could be the site of communitarian multiculturalism, and the global arena as the 'unity' could be the site of transculturalism.

In pursuing this strategy it should be remembered that culture is not primordial but ever changing. A politics that blends multiculturalism and transculturalism must be attuned to this dynamism. Democratic global cooperation cannot assume a fixed cultural constellation, but must continually adjust to shifting values and life-worlds. Russia had to deal with such a situation after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which created needs for new civic identities and new migration policies.

All of this said, efforts to build democratic global cooperation should not overly emphasize cultural issues. Cultural politics can be fraught with distrust, conflict, struggle, violence,

and legitimations of violence – all of which can be quite obstructive to global cooperation. To this extent it can be helpful to put the focus on objective interests (such as peace, material well-being and education), many of which are shared across different nations and social groups and can encourage global cooperation across cultural diversities.

Overcoming or mastering the factor of culture, given that it can be an obstacle, depends on adequate cultural policy. As suggested here, a blend of multiculturalism and transculturalism – coupled with due attention to shared material interests – can provide a sound basis for democratic global cooperation.



# Talanoa: Measure of Relative Human Values in Global Cooperation

Sitiveni Halapua

**Sitiveni Halapua** (East-West Center, Hawaii, USA)
Sitiveni Halapua has had over 20 years of experience as the Director of the Pacific Islands Development Program, East-West Center, Hawaii, USA, and as the Secretary-General of the Secretariat for the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders. An economist with a PhD in Monetary Theory from the University of Kent UK, Halapua has developed Talanoa as a way of measuring and dealing with the changeable human interpretations and valuations of wellbeing, peace, conflict, stability and instability we find in-between human relationships that are essentially rooted in local, national and global relations. Dr Halapua is a former Member of Parliament in the Kingdom of Tonga.

The way that outsiders and insiders (i.e. rule-makers) cooperate globally depends on the experiences that they take from the past and their understandings of how those experiences shape their future. Such temporal understanding is connected to culture: i.e. the social construction and reconstruction of meaning that a group of people generally shares.

Varying degrees of pessimism and conflict can occur when a single mode of thought demands that outsiders and insiders should live in a particular predetermined manner, especially when that single understanding only gives voice to the powerful (the insiders) and is presented by them as the complete truth, without taking into account other modes of concern. For example, the Government of Fiji only used the modern state-based process to reconstruct the meaning of 'native land ownership rights'. This redefinition – away from being a communal element of traditional identity to being commercial property – sidelined Fiji's cultural diversity and created ongoing conflict. Such experiences raise the question: how can global cooperation make the world safe for diversity?

Human beings are capable of thought and therefore of empowering themselves as 'narrative entities' who are constituted, enclosed, accessible, and experienced *inside* their self-conscious situation of concern. Rule-makers are entities who create and recreate narratives of concern with 'right'. However, 'right' as a frame of reference does not take into account concerns which exist outside self-conscious situations. For example, the Tongan monarchy's self-conscious concern with 'divine right' does not include outsider concerns.

Outside of any self-conscious situation, wherever issues are en-framed and manifested within a socially constructed meaning given to the past, human concerns become inextricably integrated with the perceived experience of time. Outsider concerns do not deal with the rules that define 'right'; rather, they deal with perceived historical realities of existence. Thus, to preserve the present generation's freedom to choose and further the freedom of future generations to decide what to value, 'outsiders' liberate themselves from their self-conscious situations to become 'narrative agents' who construct and re-construct the meanings that are given to historical events. How can global cooperation understand and protect culturally driven diversity of meaning, values and ever-changing ratios of commitments to freedoms? We need a way to understand human modes of concern with peace, joy, optimism, pessimism, strife and conflict. We need to unearth the great temporal depth of culture that triggers outsider commitments to preserving and enhancing freedoms of present and future generations.

Drawn from Pacific island practices, *talanoa* is a process of storytelling without concealment of the inside/outside distinctions of being. The first principle of talanoa is that human beings are capable of thinking about whatever *tala* ('point') is given to feeling, judging, and thinking. Talanoa has its own language, whereby seeing, hearing, understanding, and measuring *tala* begins with detachment from all prior concerns – i.e. *noa.* In understanding global co-operation, *noa* un-conceals and marks off the boundaries between the positive (accommodative) and the negative (suppressive) aspects of diverse human values.

Talanoa reveals the socially reconstructed meanings that outsiders give to historical events. These meanings are crucial to understanding questions of global cooperation, because they define the ratios of outsider commitments to preserving the freedom of the present generation to that of furthering the freedom of future generations. These ratios determine the instrumental values by which outsiders measure and assign the relative values of respect for the idea of who insiders are (when, as rule-makers, they are speaking about what action to take) and trust in the rule that defines the 'right' of whatever it is that rule-makers are doing. Values of respect and trust project a value of outsider confidence in growing rule-makers' capability. Here, capability represents the narratives that reveal the possible combinations of speaking and doing (i.e. talking and adopting a (non)binding resolution) for the purpose of directing the use of power toward where rule-makers are going to stand on the issues of importance (i.e. the pursuit of global cooperation) and be accommodative and/or suppressive.



Relative human values bring understanding to global cooperation by simultaneously monitoring modes of concern with optimism, joy, peace, pessimism, strife, conflict and *noa*. These values additionally reveal the inherent risks embedded in the possibilities of increasing global instability, which is associated with rule-makers' growing excess narrative and technological capabilities over and beyond outsider commitments to preserving and enhancing present and future generations' freedoms. In short, relative human values show us how outsiders and rule-makers can choose to cooperate globally, to protect diversity in our shared world.

# Cultural Diversity and Democratic Global Cooperation: A Perspective from Africa

Charity Musamba

**Charity Musamba** (Zambia)
Charity Musamba holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany and is specialized in socio-economic governance, including mainstreaming of gender in the national development process. She is a member of the African Good Governance Network (AGGN) as well as the Technical Committee of the Zambia Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (ZIPAR).
Musamba worked as program manager at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and was Executive Director of the Foundation for Democratic Process (FODEP).

Is there a distinctly 'African' cultural contribution to 'democratic' global cooperation? Can Africa offer suggestions for dealing positively with cultural diversity in global politics? These are the concerns of this brief.

'Culture' is here understood as the ethics, morals, values, language(s) and norms that provide standards of behaviour and reasoning for a group of persons or societies. It is commonly acknowledged that it is not possible to talk about one 'African culture', because the geographical space defined as Africa is occupied by a multitude of 'different cultures'. So, there is no single uniform 'African culture.' Nevertheless, some elements could be considered as common strands across the 'different' cultures, providing core values, themes and patterns that are distinctive of Africa. In this way, culture in Africa can be a single entity that encompasses multi-cultural, inter-cultural and even trans-cultural elements.

Five qualities stand out when relating Africa to a 'culture of democratic global governance'. The first concerns *common humanity and destiny*. Most cultures in Africa are strongly permeated by concepts such as 'brotherhood', 'family' and 'oneness'. It is believed that human beings are involved in a continuous flux of influencing and depending on each other both directly and indirectly. This emphasis on shared fate and gain can greatly encourage global cooperation, since most contemporary development challenges demand global solutions and thus global benefits. Thus an emphasis on common destiny amidst sociocultural differences could be used to enhance consensus, cohesion and legitimacy in global governance.

The second quality from African culture relates to the *sense of egalitarianism*. Most cultures in Africa tend to promote notions that all human beings are the 'same' – i.e. that people look the same, feel the same, want the same, and can do the same. African cultures therefore purposely limit space in society for individual 'differences'. The notion of sameness implies that people are expected to see the world beyond their personal needs, wants and desires. This, in relation to democratic global cooperation, demands that global decisions will transcend the 'individual' expectations of a particular nation-state or society. This is vital for cohesion and consensus building as well as winning compliance and compromise for decisions made at a global level.

The third fundamental feature of many cultures in Africa relates to the norm of *living together*. The dynamism and sustainability of human society are mainly judged by levels of 'togetherness'. Thus the collective is more important than the individual. There is little space for individual self-determination outside the family and the community. One is expected to behave and reason in a manner that prioritises the 'common' and not the 'personal' good. Most practicalities are undertaken as a group, and the emphasis is on unity and consensus in diversity. The focus on commonalities is useful for global governance, as it diverts attention from focusing on 'divisive' issues. In this way, development energies can be targeted towards matters that bring the world together rather than drive people apart, thus making governance at this level more feasible.

The fourth key cultural strand from Africa relates to the *spirit of subsidiarity*. This is evident in the existence of a plethora of cultural practices within one geographical location. Some relate to majorities while others relate to minorities, but they co-exist. This phenomenon is premised on the belief of recognizing and respecting the presence of other cultures other than one's own. On this principle global governance initiatives should have mechanisms of limitation embedded in them to ensure that the global level does not overly influence the final outcomes of certain decisions related to global concerns. For this reason, global cooperation systems should strive to link into systems of sub-global and regional governance, so as to enhance representation, tolerance and acceptance of global decision making.

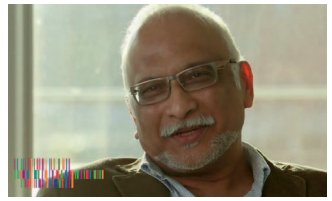
The fifth strand of 'African culture' with positive implications for global cooperation is *religion*. In Africa religion plays a key role in shaping views on politics, economics and social relations, including understandings of the larger world beyond 'society'. The dynamism of religion in most African societies has persisted through historical changes from traditional to

colonial, post-colonial and recent democratic periods. Religion recognises a higher mystical existence above all beings, and all are the same and equal before any form of transcendent authority. This appeal to the principle of the metaphysical (that is, without entering into potentially divisive arguments about which particular divinity holds the truth) could be used to gather legitimacy for cooperation agreements and commitments at the global level.



# Doing Transculturalism and Not Just Talking about it

Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza



**Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza**
(University of São Paulo, Brazil)
Lynn Mario de Souza currently works as Professor of Language Education at the Departamento de letras modernas at the University of São Paulo. He has been Visiting Professor at the University of Goa; the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, India; the University of Oulu, Finland; Monash University, Melbourne, Australia; and the University of Western Ontario, London, Canada. De Souza is member of the editorial boards for *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices* (since 2007), *Diaspora: Indigenous and Minority Education* (since 2009) and the *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* (since 2008). He co-edited *Post Colonial Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education* (Routledge 2011) with V. Andreotti.

Transculturalism involves being aware that what one knows, says and believes does not come out of one's own individual mind, but has been learned from one's family, one's community and one's nation. It is important to remember that each of these groups is itself composed of different elements: for example, old and young, male and female, rich and poor, believers and unbelievers. Likewise, people who don't belong to our groups and seem to be very different to us are not all alike. They too have diversity within their own communities. Thus the world does not divide neatly into two camps of 'us' and 'them'.

However, perhaps the real problem lies not in seeing that we are all similar in our differences, but in learning how to live together *in spite of* our differences and *because of* our similarities. This is why we should *do* transculturalism rather than just understand that it exists. So how can we *practice* transculturalism?

A first step is to realise that our community – our 'us' – is not natural and eternal, but constructed and changeable. Yes, our official institutions – schools, government, etc. – are based on the idea that we exist as a community with things in common. However, these institutions also exist to make sure that we in fact *do* have these things in common. They give us our shared language, services, laws, etc. Indeed, perhaps these institutions create these commonalities because they believe we *should* have them. Perhaps the institutions even exist to *fabricate* commonalities and make them seem *normal* and *natural*, in order to facilitate the functioning of the community as a whole. So to practice transculturalism we need a capacity constantly to *translate* and *change* what we learn as being *normal* and *natural* and to *act* on this.

Take the example of reading a text. How do readers behave when they read a text which was written by someone distant from them – from a different discipline, from a different culture, from a different moment in time? The usual reaction is immediately to identify the difficulty in understanding the text and to attribute this difficulty to the distance between the text and the reader. In other words, the difficulty is felt to lie not in the process of making sense of the text, but in the text itself. The reader then does not assume responsibility for not making sense of the text.

Doing transculturalism in this example involves the reader actively engaging in the process of *translating* both *how and why they make sense or no sense* of the text and *how and why the text makes sense or no sense to them*. This involves understanding that the text was written by someone different to the reader, someone for whom what is natural and normal is very different to what the reader assumes to be natural and normal. Thus the *difficulty in understanding* the text may result from the fact that there is a gap between the reader's understanding of normality and the natural and the writer's understanding of the same elements.

By identifying the complexity of this difficulty in understanding, the reader is motivated to attempt *to bridge this gap*, seeking similarities among the apparent differences. Whatever understanding occurs is substantially the result of *wanting to engage* in the process of making sense. Transculturalism, then, has this *intentionality* to overcome the obstacles that differences present, without expecting actually to overcome these differences. The possibility of total understanding of each other does not exist – the reader cannot become the writer. But this does not hinder the possibility of making sense of the text. More importantly for transculturalism is learning from the process of making sense, learning that one cannot always understand everything, and learning that in spite of this there are still things to be learned from such texts.

Thus, for me, translation in transculturalism means three key things. First, I need to reflect on *how* I understand things, to question what I take to be normal and natural. Second, I need to understand that everybody – myself and those different to me – are products of different knowledges, which originate in the groups to which we/they belong. Third, the fact that we are in contact with each other, even as readers and writers, means that at certain levels we are sharing the same space and the same resources, and therefore we have to learn to live with each other. This involves intentionally making an effort to understand each other, understanding how and why we understand or not, and being prepared to live in such situations – of not understanding totally and not being understood totally, without demanding or requiring total understanding.



# Cultural Diversity: Hindrance or Resource for Global Governance?

Zeynep Sezgin

**Zeynep Sezgin** (University of Vienna, Austria)
After completing her PhD in Sociology at the University of Leipzig in 2007, Zeynep Sezgin coordinated the Volkswagen Foundation Research Project 'Diffusion and Contexts of Transnational Migrant Organizations in Europe' at the Section of Sociology/Organization, Migration and Participation, Ruhr-University Bochum. In 2010, she started her postdoctoral research on 'Legitimacy of Faith-Based Humanitarian Organizations in Austria, Germany and Pakistan' at the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict at the same university. Since January 2013, she is Lise-Meitner Fellow of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) and continues her postdoctoral research on faith-based humanitarian organizations at the Department of Development Studies, University of Vienna.

Cultural diversity is often seen as a hindrance to effective politics. For many, the nation-state is premised on the idea of cultural unity; hence, cultural diversity from this perspective is viewed with widespread scepticism and pessimism. Moreover, cultural diversity, associated with oppositions between societies, is seen as a threat to global cooperation. Profound cross-cultural clashes are often presented as fuelling major conflicts challenging humanity.

But does it have to be this way? Could one, by embracing cultural diversities, find innovative and multifaceted solutions to problems that transcend the borders of nation-states, such as global economic crisis and ecological changes? Broad-minded, democratic and legitimate global governance cannot be achieved by denying or ignoring cultural diversities. It is instead based on recognition of these diversities and on understanding the contexts in which these diversities emerge, diminish or widen.

Cultural diversities are clearly a challenge for global politics. For one thing, these diversities take many forms. They arise not only in relation to nationality, race, ethnicity and religion, but also in relation to age, gender, class and profession. It is difficult to accommodate all these axes of diversity in global governance at the same time.

Furthermore, unpalatable cultural differences present important barriers for democratic global cooperation. For example, female circumcision might be seen as an essential religious or customary rite in some communities, but it is seen as a shocking and uncivilized rite by others.

Another challenge for global cooperation is the dynamic nature of culture. Culture is subject to constant change. Hence, cultural diversities may increase or decrease over time, and accommodation of cultural diversities may in consequence become easier or more difficult.

So how to meet these challenges and make cultural diversity a resource for, rather than a hindrance to, global governance? One step is to reject the long-standing notion of a 'clash of civilizations', which presents geo-cultural differences as the only dimension of diversity. This reductionist worldview ignores the previously mentioned other axes of diversity, such as race, gender, age and class. There is no 'Turkish', 'European', 'Western' or 'Islamic' culture with a uniform in-group that is clearly separated from its out-groups. If global cooperation wants to accommodate and benefit from cultural diversities, it should *recognize, appreciate and promote these complexities*.

The existence of unpalatable cultural differences hinders the accommodation of certain diversities in global governance. Yet these conflicts should be handled *independently from power relations*. In other words, the problem of cultural difference should not be 'solved' by one party or several parties arbitrarily dominating the others. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the local contexts in which these differences emerge.

Transculturalism can be accommodated in global governance only if all parties reflect on their own cultural differences, i.e., are aware of the particularities of their own ideas and practices, and do not impose their ideas, values and practices on other parties. For example, top-down approaches to humanitarianism often reflect the political and security agendas of Western donor countries. It would be better to have more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches that are fully accountable to local populations in humanitarian crisis zones. Humanitarian policies require the participation of local populations to set their own priorities through joint decision-making and execution. Otherwise, humanitarian action will continue to be suspected in crisis zones as a Western enterprise that represents, spreads, and promotes values which are at odds with those of the people affected by the crises.

Regarding the dynamic nature of culture, it is important that all parties are *open for cross-cultural learning* and *committed for long-term dialogue*. In Germany, many Catholic dioceses, Protestant churches and Islamic organizations employ official representatives and consultants for interreligious dialogue. Additionally, Christian-Islamic Committees joined together in 2003 to form the Coordination Council of Associations for Christian-Islamic Dialogue in Germany, and grassroots dialogue groups are actively engaged in Christian-Muslim dialogue. As well as these actors, the German state has become a participant in the dialogue with Muslims: the Minister of the Interior has started to meet representatives of Islamic organizations and individual Muslims regularly since 2006 at the German Islamic Conference. Although there are still many obstacles to cross-cultural learning in Germany, several notable successes have been achieved, such as the settlement of conflicts around the construction of Merkez Mosque in Duisburg. These examples from Germany could be extended to global politics, where dialogue and cross-cultural learning can overcome stereotypes and promote mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

# Diversity and Cooperation in the Largest Herd of Elephants

Paul Brendan Tjon Sie Fat

**Paul Brendan Tjon Sie Fat**
Paul Tjon Sie Fat studied Sinology at the University of Leiden and completed his PhD on modern Chinese migration and identity in Suriname at the University of Amsterdam in 2009. He has written on the relationship between Chinese language, community organization and identity in Suriname, and teaches Cultural Studies at university level.
As a student he did volunteer work for the *Meldpunt Discriminatie Leiden* (Leiden Anti-Discrimination Hotline) and helped set up their awareness programme for primary and secondary schools in the Leiden area. He regularly helps out at Stichting Projekta in Suriname (an NGO working on women's issues, democratization and citizenship).

Transculturalism – 'transcending cultural barriers/particularism/identities' – is about practice. It comprises the simplest set of ethical rules that allow humans in any group of any size or composition – including globally – maximally to cooperate. Transculturalism requires empathy: one must be able to stand in another's shoes, explain their point of view to third parties, and defend their position as much as one's own position allows. Respect rather than moral ideals of love are essential: you do not need to like people to coexist with them; you need to respect them.

Transculturalism is not an abstract ideal. Many communities and even some whole countries function on this basis. In Suriname, where I was born, people in a transculturalist vein shift the way they express social identity according to social context. Suriname is routinely described as highly plural – or 'multicultural' in the popular sense of that word. However, the borders between different ethno-cultural groups are in fact much more instrumental, and therefore vague, than multiculturalist discourse dictates. The basic performative distinction in Suriname might seem to be ethnic; however, gender, class and body also figure in the way people shift their identities, often from moment to moment, marked by shifts in language, style, and etiquette. The Surinamer finds that skills are modular, that every group you join, however temporarily, provides you with different abilities. Rather like being part of a Swiss Army Knife.

But transculturalist practices are limited. Gender and class identities seem impervious to the Swiss Army Knife metaphor, also in Suriname. Gender identities are very much linked to access to resources, and class identities to established power structures. Transculturalism seems to fail when unequal access to money and power enables some people to opt out, and allows elites to subvert the rules of the game. Other threats to transculturalism (including in places like Suriname) come from Occidentalist ('anti-West') responses to modernity, such as religious fundamentalism, anti-rationalism and anti-gay discourse. Occidentalism presents 'the West' as a perverted, immoral, de-cultured, weak and debauched Other that makes for a 'good' Us. Anti-establishment resistance, anti-globalism, etc. are also dangerous to transcultural cooperation, as they too reject the principle of coexistence, despite views that may seem reasonable and principled.

Logically, transculturalism should generate change. The different segments under transculturalism will be exposed to alternative practices and will develop ways to incorporate and manage change. For instance, many mosques in Suriname allow non-Muslim women visitors to enter without hijab and to go where Muslim women would not, precisely because they are not Muslim. What is holy in your hands is not holy in those of another, but difference can be accepted when you know there is respect. A variety of choices remain available in transculturalism. As groups constantly form and re-form, options are constantly renegotiated. There is no dogma except respect and avoidance of inter-group violence. One finds that unity arises in disapproval of, outrage over, and strong responses to individuals and groups who ostracize, demonize and violate others.

Now how might transculturalism operate globally: in global governance, global civil society, etc.? That presents something of a problem. Despite having different ethno-cultural backgrounds, people in global elites actually share a particular culture and often have common interests. What appear to be cultural differences might actually be mere variation in styles and strategies of negotiation. Transculturalism cannot be allowed to become empty rhetoric that leaves transnational elite power untouched. And it must not be dismissed by local elites as an irrelevant fantasy of liberal cosmopolitans.

The global – the level of the largest herd of elephants, so to speak – is not fixed, but fractious and contingent. Nor does it reflect an identity that most humans can relate to. The basic challenge is to transcend our basic human tendency to construct identity in terms of an idealized Us and a dehumanized Them. From the tiniest social network to the largest global conglomerate, 'culture' should not be an excuse for refusal to empathize. Transculturalism is not about identity, but about linking oneself to larger groups. Transculturalism involves extending oneself, realizing that it is impossible to define oneself in fixed, primordial terms. In this sense transculturalism is

about losing one's 'identity'. The challenge is how to convince actors to incorporate principles of transculturalism and thereby rewrite the rules of global politics.

Transculturalism needs to be implemented without too much labelling or theorizing. It is a fairly simple set of rules and principles. One does not have to be an anthropologist or folklore expert. People just need to practice strict nonviolence, empathy, respect, trust, transparency. They must practice the Golden Rule, avoid elite subcultures, and allow change to happen.



# Transculturalism: Towards New Sustainability and Democracy?

Shiv Visvanathan

**Shiv Visvanathan** (Jindal Global University, India)
Shiv Visvanathan is Professor in the School of Government and Public Policy at the O. P. Jindal Global University. He has been visiting professor at the Department of Anthropology, Stanford University; Centre for Science Policy Outcomes, Arizona State University, Centre for Science Policy, University of Maastricht, Netherlands; University of Natal, South Africa; Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmith College, London University; and Henry Luce Visiting Professor, Smith College, Massachusetts. His interests are eclectic and encompass a wide range. He writes regular columns for *Asian Age*, *Times Mirror*, *Mail Today* and several other online forums. He is the author of *Organizing for Science and Carnival for Science* and co-author of *Foul Play: Chronicles of Corruption*.

Social science is a career. As a career, it seeks to sustain its ideals and its interests. In the process, it often fails either to confront the truth of power or to speak the truth to power.

Ideas of 'transculturalism' can attempt to address this failing by creating a term, a site, a threshold around which social science and its discontents could resolve certain core issues. Transculturalism is an attempt to create the possibilities of dialogue, the creation of new experiments, to create a civil society legitimacy which democratizes and pluralizes the current master narratives of modernity. As the proposal of transculturalism unfolds, one realizes that a dialogue on these subjects is not just a recording of voice or speech; it is also a message that has to be remembered, deciphered, translated, absorbed and internalized into the current discourse. The proponent of transculturalism in that sense seeks: (i) to play the creative role of a hearing aid which amplifies the voices of suffering; (ii) to be a truthful broker who accepts the vulnerability of possibly being cursed from both sides; (iii) to look at new experiments in peace building and conflict resolution; and (iv) to be a storyteller who looks both at system and life-world, at new concepts and languages that can capture alternative narratives and paradigms, narratives of half-lost and half-forgotten battles.

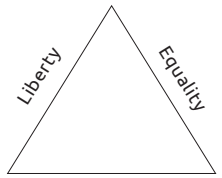
Transculturalism thus becomes an ethics of *memory* and an epistemology for *invention*. It operates on a variety of times, especially beyond the historical linear time of dominant modern narratives. Transculturalism then also becomes a way of creating reflexivity around concepts like 'sustainability'.

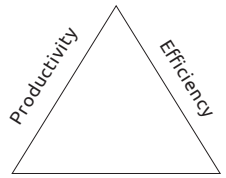
Sustainability cannot only be a standardized term measured by technical indicators. It has to be reworked into dialects, acquire different creation myths. Sustainability cannot merely be articulated in the language of rights, but also needs the language of the commons. Sustainability cannot be a regulatory word, but must be playful enough to evoke a different ethics.

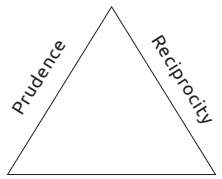
Consider the idea in a different way. Imagine a new version of UNESCO. The existing standard UNESCO values science, humanism, and humanitarianism, but it has to allow for a thesaurus of new concepts. The modern science of UNESCO founding director Julian Huxley has to give way to the risk sciences with their new humility and complexity. To the Red Cross, we need to add an extended idea of the Green Cross: not just to preserve cultural monuments during war, but also to foresee futuristically the depredations of ecocide and even genocide through 'development'.

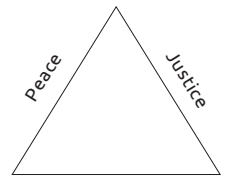
Like any concept, transculturalism has to move across several domains. It has to trace a line across cosmology (as ideas of humanity, nature and god), a constitution both explicit and tacit. In this context we must explore the varying constitutionalities of the term. In addition, it has to be a theory of communities and has to be reworked into the syllabus as a project of the academy. Transculturalism in this sense lines micro and macro worlds.

As a vision, transculturalism can guide reworked practice through a sequence of triangles. We begin with the French Revolution triangle of liberty, equality and fraternity. This encounters the modernity triangle of growth, rationality and efficiency. We look, through transculturalism, for new virtues to resolve the problem of sustainability. To that end we emphasize a new triangle of prudence, reciprocity and reflexivity and on that basis move towards a fourth triangle of justice, peace and plurality.






Finally, transculturalism has to be part of new ideas about the democratization of democracy. What does the Arab Spring as an imaginary mean for transculturalism? How do we go beyond standard vocabularies of nation-state, territory, sovereignty, and rights to look at new ways of conceptualizing citizenship? It is the incompleteness of citizenship at state and interstate levels that allows transculturalism to create hybrid worlds. A civil society theory of war and peace is as critical as any Westphalian notion. In that sense, it is the very playfulness of transculturalism which makes it critical to the emerging world order.

Ideas of transculturalism should not be overly formalised. Its proponents need to be at one and the same time cooks, chemists and alchemists. As cooks, they must be full of passionate recipes which only experience can define. As chemists, they have precise formulas whose effects we can tabulate. As magicians and alchemists, they pull out words hoping they can create new and probable worlds. It is the very vulnerability and inventiveness of transculturalism that make it a promising concept.

# Bottom-line Thinking and Transculturalism

Yang Xuedong

**Xuedong Yang** (Center for Global Governance and Development, China)
Yang is a Senior Fellow and Acting Director of the China Center for Global Governance and Development Strategies (CCCPE). He received his PhD degree from Beijing University with major in Comparative Politics and was a visiting fellow at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University in 2001-2002. From 2003 to 2012 Yang was Fellow and Vice Director of the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics and also works as Assistant Professor for that Centre.
His main research focuses on introducing Western theories to China and studying changes of Chinese politics, especially that on the local level in the past twenty years. Publications include *Globalization Theories in the West* (2002), *Risk Society and Reconstructing Order* (2006), and *Globalization and Socialist Imagination* (2009).

Any form of government needs one culture to underpin it. Global governance as a new form of government to deal with global issues and risks also needs one culture. Although some cross-cultural consensus has been built for achieving global cooperation, it will take a long time for one new culture to form, because nation-states are still major players in global governance. Obviously, building a new culture such as a single global culture remains a faraway ideal. In the meantime we have to treat cultural differences seriously and try to find common basic cross-cultural principles for effective global governance.

In China, it is judged that cultures are naturally diverse; that cross-cultural co-operations and confrontations co-exist; and that cultural confrontations sometimes become radical because of national interests and ideologies. Most importantly, some cultures that have been disadvantaged vis-à-vis Western culture become self-conscious and self-confident as their economies develop and their people's lives become more internationalized. As they become more exposed to the outside world, people in these cultures try to show that they are different from others: either by rejuvenating their traditions or by constructing new cultures.

This trend has two effects. One is that these cultures are more confident to insist on their uniqueness. Another is that some cultures emphasize their contributions to global cultural development, especially the possibility of their universalization. In China, both of these effects exist. With the global power shift, developing countries become more confident regarding their own cultures. In this sense, the future will bring more cultures, not less.



Against this background, it is necessary to build more cross-cultural consensus for emerging global governance. The bottom line requirement is that every culture can find its role in this globalizing world and should be respected by others. No culture should impose itself on the others.

Although Chinese culture is changing dramatically, basic principles are still shared by most Chinese. Two of these principles in particular can contribute to cross-cultural consensus in global governance.

First, life is most important, and its preservation should be a precondition for any global cooperation. According to Confucius, every government should take life as the foremost value. Without life, no government can exist, and no state can become stronger. Thus the right to subsistence should be respected first of all. Other cultures also value life, so this principle can underpin cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. Indeed, life becomes more fragile in the face of emerging global risks such as climate change, pollution, natural catastrophes, etc. It is easier to achieve consensus for global governance among different cultures around the goal of sustaining life.

Second, toleration and patience are needed both to understand other cultures and to improve one's own. It is important to respect others' origins and patiently to listen to them. Confucius said, 'When I walk along with two others, they may serve as my teachers. I will select their good qualities and follow them, their bad qualities and avoid them.' In a traditional age, this principle is followed by ordinary people. Now, in the global age, no state is willing to be isolated from the global family, and it tries to gain recognition from other members by following basic rules. This framework of common rules makes it easier to communicate with others from different cultures. So it is necessary to respect different cultures and to tolerate different states. Toleration means to establish more platforms for dialogues and exchanges. Patience means to respect any state's autonomy in dealing with its domestic issues and participating in global affairs. Historical lessons have accumulated to remind any state and culture to be more open-minded and cooperative vis-à-vis others.

Culture is not separate from practice, and cultural evolution is based on practice. Practically, people increasingly realize the necessity of global governance and its effectiveness in dealing with global issues. As a result, global governance will enjoy higher recognition from national and sub-national governments, social organizations and individuals. Hence sooner or later some basic principles will be globally identified, which will provide ideational supports for a new single unifying culture of global governance. These principles should be disseminated globally and practiced by global institutions and individuals with global influence. Of course, existing

cultures will remain significant, especially for most people living in their own homelands. So these cultures should be encouraged to communicate with each other on a more level playing field than before.

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