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Session Review

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Publication date
2015

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
ASA Sociology of Cuture Newsletter

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Sezneva, O. (2015). The Cosmopolitan Nation: The Politics of Cultural Representation in a Global World: Session Review. *ASA Sociology of Cuture Newsletter*, *27*(2), 17, 32. https://asaculturesection.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/2015-fall-culture-vol-27-issue-2-fall-2015.pdf

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Download date:18 Nov 2026

SESSION REVIEW
The Cosmopolitan Nation: The Politics of Cultural Representation in a Global World

Olga Sezneva, University of Amsterdam

What kind of project exactly is "cosmopolitanism", and who may be its main "executive"? In what relation does it stand to the national project? What are the institutional repertoires in which national or cosmopolitan ideologies are articulated, their subjects consolidated, and the registers of speech and practice are perfected? Special session 271, titled "The Cosmopolitan Nation: The Politics of Cultural Representation in a Global World," targeted these questions through four papers ranging in their topics from a French TV program promoting cultural patrimony in the ninety-sixties (Alexandra Kowalski's "Circulating Immovables: TVs, Cameras, Historic Sites, and the Birth of National Heritage in 1960s France"), to museums around the world struggling for cultural relevance in the twenty first century (Peggy Levitt's "Artifacts and Allegiances: How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display"), to the revival of Jewish culture and identity in the ostensibly "monocultural" Polish society of today (Genevieve Zubrzycki's "The Institutional Rediscovery of Jewish Poland and the Creation of Cosmopolitanism in a 'Monocultural' Society"), and to the global wave of media piracy of the last decade (Olga Sezneva's "Pirate Cosmopolitics and the Transnational Consciousness of the Entertainment Industry").

In spite of their thematic diversity and differences in theoretical toolkits deployed, the four papers pushed strongly the central claim of the session: cultural institutions create local, national, and global citizens at once, not in isolation or opposition to one another. The task that cultural sociology faces today when dealing with globalization, the papers suggested, is to theorize the national and the cosmopolitan in a relational and mutually constitutive way, rather than as opposites.
Olga Sezneva

In spite of their thematic diversity and differences in theoretical toolkits deployed, the four papers pushed strongly the central claim of the session: cultural institutions create local, national, and global citizens at once, not in isolation or opposition to one another. The task that cultural sociology faces today when dealing with globalization, the papers suggest, is to theorize the national and the cosmopolitan in a relational and mutually constitutive way, rather than as opposites. The task is therefore also to uncover the various registers through which "local," "national," "transnational," and "cosmopolitan" are articulated in practice and rendered meaningful.

While aiming at similar goals, each paper operated in different ways and through distinct material. Three papers (Kowalski's, Levitt's and Zubrycki's) focused on the nation as a form, emphasizing its ideational, ideological and affective dimensions. The nation has been, and is still, apparently, awe-inspiring and venerable. The historical and geographic diversity of registers in which it comes together, however, is remarkable. The cult of banal, vernacular "antiquities" and other ancient knick-knacks emerged as a new register of national identification in 1960s France, as an effect of mass media representations, for example. By contrast, the grandeur of Qatar today is being achieved through grand architectural projects such as I.M. Pei's Museum of Islamic Art, whereby Qatar's pan-Islamic nationalism is construed through collection and display of contemporary art works, sometimes in tension with the cultural tradition they represent. In contemporary Poland, building the nation's image as a "modern polity" has meant inventing cultural diversity in an ethnically, religiously, and culturally highly homogeneous country. The striking Jewish revival movement is explained as a key device in this process of cultural invention.

These papers look at a dimension of culture, cultural identity and heritage that is considered inalienable and protected from the market. In contrast to them, Sezneva chose to discuss culture as produced for the market, and to examine what kind of cosmopolitan stances are enabled by its global, commerce-driven circulation. Building on the familiar dictum that markets are the most "internationalizing" forces, she followed what happens to music and movies when they enter the uneven landscape of technological development, purchasing power, and politically-motivated taboo. She showed how two different logics of the circulation of culture — one as a semiotic text that gravitates toward the unrestricted flow and another a commodity whose value can only be realized under scarcity — result in two different cosmo-politics: the politics of the transnational public and another of the global consumer.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

SEZNEVA REVIEW

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

Comments by Peter Stamatov encouraged the presenters to reflect on the material in such a way that a robust conceptualization of "culture" could be devised across the institutional fields represented in the papers. Going back to the established theoretical tropes in cultural sociology, he argued, might prove productive. Are we looking at the "culture" of one and the same order, he asked, when we address the cultural heritage of the nation and cultural goods of a corporation? Does it matter that the former is inalienable and the latter for sale? The discussion that followed probed into the adjacent areas of politics — asking, for instance, whether piracy can be interpreted as resistance to corporate appropriation, and how to balance the rights of a nation to protect its integrity, with the demands of cultural inclusion imposed by globalization. Together, the presentations, comments and discussion made up a lively session, the insights of which were appreciated by scholars of migration, transnationalism, religion, Jewish studies, and popular culture.