

Chapter 15

Laclau's Ontological Rhetoric, Universality, and Collective Identity: A Lesson for Cosmopolitan Education

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Ernesto Laclau's theory is one of the most complete achievements in political philosophy in recent decades. One of its assets is how Laclau understands universality, and in this chapter his contribution to this field is used to propose an argument in the debate on the (im)possibility of cosmopolitan education. The chapter starts with a brief recapitulation of the basic tenets of Laclau's theory. Next, I present four instances of the universal which can be distinguished in his work. The first is a uniform sequence of events in the process of identity construction (from scattered demands to identity built around empty signifiers). The second is the universal, ontological impossibility of attaining social totality. The third is the ethical dimension of the process of identity formation. The fourth are theological contexts and connotations of the notion of identity (totality), especially in its relation to emptiness. From this reconstruction, I proceed to the often expressed claim that cosmopolitanism is impossible, arguing that Laclau's theory sheds new light on this issue, and, further, to my suggestions concerning some points of departure for a possible theory of cosmopolitan education.

15.1 Laclau: An Outline

This section presents a highly condensed and simplified reconstruction of the basic structure of Ernesto Laclau's theory of identity and undeniably ignores numerous important features. Some of its elements will be repeated in the following sections, but an understanding of the richness of Laclau's theory will not be possible on the basis of this reconstruction alone. Because of the limits of the chapter, I can only suggest that for a full account, one should refer to the original texts, especially to the most extensive presentation of Laclau's theory of populism (Laclau 2005) and to his earlier texts on social ontology (e.g. Laclau 1996, 1997; Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

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Laclau's theory is praised for its unique explanatory power, even by its critics (Žižek 2008). It presents an attempt at redefining universalism in a way that aims to resolve the 'postmodern crisis' without abandoning the diagnosis of social heterogeneity. Laclau is radically critical towards claims to universalism, if these are understood in terms of historical logic and determination or as unitary normative foundations of the social. His critique undercuts all ideological positions, right or left, the aim of which is to propose uniform political imaginaries based on a belief in historical necessity, rational objectivity, economical determination or any other deterministic presumption. He challenges the idea of politics as a rational system which permits inferences as to objectively grounded political actions, which can thus be claimed to be 'necessary'. This includes a critique of the Hegelian and Marxist tradition, in which – as he notes – conceptual coherence can only be gained at the expense of exclusions, i.e. of eliminating, from theoretical models, those elements of the social which do not follow the logic of the conceptual system. For instance, Hegel's political logic does not encompass 'peoples without history', and Marx's binary conflict between labour and capital can only be theorised when social heterogeneity is excluded and denigrated under the label of the *lumpenproletariat*. The problem is not one of Laclau's being 'against exclusion'; on the contrary, Laclau criticises Hegel and Marx for their failure to make exclusion a significant part of their theoretical models, because – as he claims – no identity can be striven for without exclusion, and one of the main tasks of the theory is to explain such a relation.

A very important distinction that Laclau makes to secure the universal dimension of his theory is that between *the ontic* and *the ontological*. It is explained in detail in his book on populism (Laclau 2005). Laclau observes that even though populism has been given extensive attention in political debates, there is no agreement as to the nature of this phenomenon. The reason of this failure is that all previous attempts were based on the search for a specific (ontic) *content* of populist ideologies (right-wing orientation, blaming the elites for the misfortunes of common people, etc.). Instead, Laclau defines populism in ontological terms and speaks of its fundamental role in the political construction of societies. What is ontological here is that no society has a stable or predefined identity and, thus, that society needs to establish itself in course of political action; that, in turn, is impossible without populist mobilisation. On the ontic level, populism is always 'about something' (e.g. foreign capital or immigration). On the ontological one, such particular demands are but representations of the ongoing and never-ending struggle of those who are deprived of the right to fully participate in social life (*plebs*) and who articulate their diverse demands into a political front, which attempts to represent the whole of society (*populus*). In sum, the ultimate political demand is that of fullness, identity or totality (synonyms in Laclau) of a 'fully reconciled society' (Laclau 2005). However, it is impossible to achieve such totality.

The whole structure of Laclau's theoretical argument can be summed up in the following sequence:

1. The objectivity of the social is of a discursive nature. The notion of discourse is understood here as structure preceding the formation of elements. This allows Laclau to claim that the identity of the social is construed by means of rhetoric.

2. The basic elements of which social discourse is composed are *demands* related to particular *lacks* or faults of social structures. Demands are prior to the existence of social groups whose identities are built around them. No social group can exist without being related to unfulfilled demands. The ultimate demand that 'shines through' particular ones is that of fullness or the 'true existence' of a 'fully reconciled society'. Laclau puts it radically: such society is ontologically impossible, but politically necessary – we can never establish ourselves, but we cannot stop trying either.
3. Demands which start the process of identification are addressed to a particular location which must be opposed to their articulation, to 'the other' (e.g. the government). The first step in the construction of social identity is thus *exclusion* of a given element of the social which becomes the 'constitutive outside' for the identity to come. Referring to the same example, the present government may be excluded from the attempts at creating a new political identity. Claiming that all identities are set against something, Laclau continues and at the same time counters, Hegel, for whom identity is built in a *logical* relation to difference. This is why it is possible, according to Hegel, to absorb difference back in the gesture of synthesis, which restores totality. In Laclau's thinking, *no totality is ontologically possible*, and the social always remains heterogeneous. Therefore, Hegel's notion of logical difference is replaced by that of exclusion. The excluded element is part of the heterogeneous social, but it does *not* take part in the identity to come; it is its constitutive outside. Consequently, identity will never become totality – society will never be reconciled.
4. Unfulfilled demands are diverse and heterogeneous (e.g. demands for higher social benefits, lower taxes, a ban on abortion and freedom of speech may be expressed simultaneously in the same populist movement), and there is no conceptual framework in which they can be united. However, once a populist movement begins, it gains a somewhat universal feature – all such movements are defined *against the excluded* (e.g. the government, the rich, etc.). This means that their demands are *equivalent* in relation to one another, as long as they all oppose the same excluded element. The 'chain of equivalence' of such demands becomes the first element of the coming identity.
5. Each element of the chain has a double status. It is particular (it represents a given demand, like a ban on immigration, or for freedom of speech) and universal (it is equivalent to other demands and represents a desire for fullness).
6. As there is no logical or conceptual framework through which such equivalent articulation can achieve positive identity, this task has to be completed *rhetorically*. One of the elements of the chain has to be given the role of representing the whole (*synecdoche*). It still remains a particular demand, but it is *invested* with the meaning of the whole (Laclau borrows the term *cathexis* from psychoanalysis here). It is thus 'elevated to the dignity of the thing', in Freudian terms. This kind of representation of totality by the particular is called by Laclau, following Gramsci, *hegemony*.
7. In rhetorical terms, hegemony (particularity invested with the meaning of totality) is a *catachresis*: an articulation of heterogeneous elements which cannot be represented by a literal term. To perform this function, the hegemonic element

must become an *empty signifier*: it has no ontic referent, and it represents what cannot be represented – the impossible totality (identity) of the society.

8. Once so created and elevated, the empty signifier works backwards on the whole chain of equivalence, so that all its elements become united ‘in the name’ of that signifier. Social identity is, thus, temporarily established. In one of the examples given by Laclau, the demand for creating free trade unions started to represent all demands (economic, political, related to the conditions of labour, etc.) in the Polish revolution against the Communist government in 1980, and the name of the union thus created (*Solidarność*) became the signifier uniting the whole political movement (Laclau 2005).

15.2 Dimensions of the Universal

What is universal here? As I have mentioned, Laclau denies universality to the forces identified in the ‘grand theories’ of modernity, like those of Hegel and Marx (Butler et al. 2000; Laclau 2005, 2014). There is no universal historical logic that determines how societies proceed from one political form to another or how they construe themselves. As Laclau and Chantal Mouffe say in their classic work (1985), societies are ultimately heterogeneous, and if they are made unitary, this is done through power relations, the traces of which will always keep them in a state of antagonism. However, there are dimensions of the universal in Laclau’s theory, and I want to point four of them: a uniform sequence of events leading to identity, the ontological impossibility of social totality and the representation of such failed totality by empty signifiers, the ethical dimension of the struggle for totality, and a monotheistic theology tacitly implied, and sometimes overtly discussed, in Laclau’s work. I will briefly refer to these issues now.

First, the sequence of events in the process of identity construction repeats itself in the diverse histories of populist mobilisation and revolutions analysed by Laclau. It starts with scattered demands reflecting various ‘lacks’ in a social structure. The demands are articulated as equivalent against an excluded element of the structure (the government, the rich, the foreign, etc.). One of such particular demands is invested with the meaning of the desired whole (a ‘fully reconciled society’ in which the underdog element will find its place) and represents – both politically and semiotically – the whole chain of equivalent demands. Such demands do not have any *logical* connections; they are just *articulated* as equivalent and need, therefore, rhetorical instruments to be united into a uniform social movement. Consequently, the hegemonic signifier of the demand ‘elevated’ to represent all demands needs to erase its particularity, and, thus, it becomes an empty signifier: it is empty not only in terms of ceasing to represent a particular demand but also as pointing to the ‘absent fullness’ of society. As such, this signifier works retroactively to give common meaning to the so far disparate demands and struggles which are now articulated ‘in the name’ of that hegemonic demand. This sequence is universal: it repeats itself in various struggles and social upheavals *regardless their ideological orienta-*

tion, and in different historical and geographical settings, which Laclau extensively documents in his book on populism (2005).

Second, there is a universal, *ontological impossibility* of attaining such desired wholeness. The sequence mentioned above leads to precarious identities, which will start to disintegrate with the very moment of their closure, i.e. when a social movement gains hegemony and establishes a new identity. Laclau links this moment of disintegration to the need for diversifying demands into separate logics reflecting their content: when the revolution is over, the issues of unemployment, health provisions, or tax reductions for the poor return to the competence of specific offices and departments, which destroys their equivalence and, in consequence, also the identity acquired through their common representation. The moment of 'the political' (populist mobilisation, equivalence, cathectic investment of the desire for unity into a particular demand) gives way to democratic institutions and the lack or incompleteness of the social returns as a daily experience. In sum, it is precisely this always-returning impossibility of the fullness of society that is universal in Laclau's theory, and – also in a universal manner – this ontological lack needs to be represented by empty signifiers created on the basis of particular demands. To quote Laclau, '... [T]here is a series of terms whose semantic consists in pointing to an absent fullness, to an absolutely empty space deprived of any formal determination. It is in that sense that I have spoken of the "universal" not as an ultimate content that all things share, but as something that necessarily eludes all of them' (2004, 286).

Third, this absent fullness is where Laclau grounds the instance of *the ethical*. 'This experience of fullness as that which is essentially lacking ... is the root of the ethical' (2004, 286). Laclau discusses the notion of the ethical in response to Simon Critchley's critique of the 'normative deficit' of his theory (Critchley 2004). The critique results from what otherwise is the strongest asset of the theory, i.e. its ontological character. For Critchley, the deficit concerns the lack of normative claims and political programmes derivable from Laclau's ontological models. From my point of view, the fact that Laclau is able to explain the dynamics of identity regardless of the ontic content of social movements and their ideologies leads to the question as to how one can prevent this theory from being used as a technology of staged revolutions guided by undemocratic ideologies. For instance, if political identity is dependant on *empty* signifiers, how do we know that a given, current mobilisation will lead to the establishment of a democratic rather than a fascist regime? Can we classify and judge diverse signifiers of emptiness in normative terms (Szkudlarek 2007, 2011)? The most important aspect of Laclau's dealing with such a critique is the distinction between *the ethical* and *the normative*, which reflects that between *the ontological* and *the ontic* described above. The ethical relates to the very need to overcome particularity and to establish social totality. The normative speaks to particularities in which the ethical (with its ontological impossibility) has to be invested and which present normative limits to its possible incarnations:

... [T]he moment of the ethical is the moment of the universality of the community, the moment in which, beyond any particularism, the universal speaks by itself. The other side of it, however, is that society consists only of particularities, and that in this sense, universality will have to be incarnated in something that is utterly incommensurable with it. This

point is crucial: there is no logical transition from an unavoidable ethical moment, in which the fullness of the society manifests itself as an empty symbol, to any particular normative order. There is an ethical *investment* in particular normative orders, but no normative order which is, in and for itself, ethical. (2000, 81)

In this respect, particular normative orders existing in given, historical societies present limits to the possible investments of the ethical:

[T]he radical investment looks, on the one side, like a pure decision, on the other it has to be collectively accepted. ... The subject who takes the decision is only partially a subject, he is also a background of sedimented practices organising a normative framework which operates as a limitation on the horizon of options. (2000, 82–83)

To sum up, what is universal here is the justified struggle of every society to establish itself as totality, which is the ethical justification of political decisions. However, this can only work whilst being invested in particular normative orders expressed in social practices of particular communities.

Fourth, one can speak of a theological instance of universality in Laclau's thinking. There are indirect and direct references to theology in Laclau's writings, for instance, when he occasionally quotes Levinas or Meister Eckhart, or in a chapter in his last book (Laclau 2014) fully devoted to theological rhetorics, called 'On the names of God'. The main topic of these references is the semantic emptiness of representations of totality. This semiotic structure has been contemplated for ages in the discourse of theology, e.g. in the mystical tradition of Christianity (hence, quotations from Eckhart), as well as in other religions, some of which are occasionally mentioned by Laclau. In brief, 'God' is an empty signifier: 'Since He is God the ineffable, we could use whatever name we want to refer to Him, as long as that name is not granted any determinate content' (2014, 44). However, because there is always some equivalence of the particular behind an empty signifier, *any* name given to God, including the word 'God' itself, bears the risk of contamination. Hence, as Laclau notes, some mystical schools, e.g. in Buddhism, express themselves in the language of atheism.

'On the Names of God' links the rhetorics of theology and political theory, which leads both to structural homologies and to the question of difference between these discursive practices. I will focus on the ethical aspect of these analyses. In one excerpt, where Laclau discusses the connection between particularity (finitude) and naming, he says:

This can be seen most clearly in the argument about God showing Himself in everything existing. If the argument is admitted in all its implications, we should conclude that actions we would call immoral express God as much as all the others. This is a conclusion that was accepted by some extreme mystical sects: as far as I live in God, I am beyond all moral limitations. But in most cases the mystic accepts conventional religious morality. It is clear, however, that the latter is not dictated by mystical experience, but by the positive religion to which the mystic belongs. (2014, 47)

The structure of this argument is identical with that pertaining to the ethical and the normative of which I have spoken before, and it positions God in the same structural location where the absent fullness of society and the ethical also reside. The

limits of possible incarnations of the ethical, like the limits of actions performed in the name of God, are conventional and cannot be derived either from God or from the elusive fullness of the 'fully reconciled society'. On the other hand, however, the conventional or the particular cannot provide grounds for moral engagement by themselves. Referring to Eckhart, Laclau says: 'It is only insofar as I experience my contact with the Divinity as an absolute, beyond all particularised content, that I can give to my particular courses of action their moral seriousness. ... [I]t is only if I experience the absolute as an utterly empty place that I can project into contingent courses of action a moral depth that, left to themselves, they lack' (2014, 50).

The critical question of the ethical/normative relation, of the limits of the incarnation of the universal, remains open in Laclau's thought. He says:

Even if we grant that this gap between the experience of the absolute as an empty place and the engagement with the particular contents that are going to incarnate it becomes a permanent one, does this not leave us entirely guideless as to what are the *right* incarnating contents? Certainly, it does. ... If the experience of what I have referred to in terms of the dual movement 'materialization of God' / 'deification of the concrete' is going to live up to its two sides, neither the absolute nor the particular can find a final peace with the other. This means that the construction of an ethical life will depend on keeping open the two sides of this paradox: an absolute that can only be articulated by being something less than itself, and a particularity whose only destiny is to be the incarnation of a 'sublimity' transcending its own body. (2014, 51)

15.3 On the Impossibility of Cosmopolitan Society

The interest in cosmopolitanism nowadays is largely influenced by the process of economic globalisation (which sometimes is seen as 'economic cosmopolitanism', e.g. Kleingeld and Brown 2014), often understood not only as a chance for global betterment but as global exploitation as well. The new types of global wars on terror and the dramatic radicalisation of some fractions of Islam may be seen, in this context, as fuelled by the greed for global markets on the one hand and as an uncompleted struggle for decolonisation on the other. The global economy definitely creates infrastructures for the creation of global communities; on the other hand, however, it is held responsible for the destruction of numerous communities globally (Bauman 2000). It is tempting, therefore, to think of economic globalisation as a challenge, as the situation in which 'something' needs to be done in order to prevent the final catastrophe of unlimited exploitation and a total global war. Zygmunt Bauman (2001), who describes economic globalisation as the escape of capital from the control of nation-states, sees the remedy in inventing global institutions capable of limiting the flow of deterritorialised capital, and he is perfectly aware that this is beyond contemporary imagination.

The world order has to be reinvented, and the Western perspective obviously implies *peaceful* reinvention. It is in this context that the current return of the idea of cosmopolitanism can be seen. The feature of political solutions to the global crisis being 'beyond imagination' is one of the most frequent critiques of

cosmopolitanism (Kleingeld and Brown 2014). The formation of a global state, or an efficient organisation of a global federation of states, is often claimed impossible. Even the gesture of implementation of the Kantian concept of how to provide for perpetual peace (Kant 1903 [1795]) after the First World War, the establishment of the League of the Nations, was incomplete: it never encompassed an attempt to abolish standing armies, for instance. However, as Kleingeld and Brown say (*ibidem*), the ‘impossibility’ argument has to be, in this context, made milder: *some* supranational organisations and federations (like the UN, USA or EU) do exist. ‘So in order to be taken seriously, the objection must instead be that it is impossible to form a *good* state or federation of that magnitude, i.e. that it is impossible to realize or even approximate the cosmopolitan ideal in a way that makes it worth pursuing and that does not carry prohibitive risks’ (online, no page numbering).

Why I think Laclau’s perspective on universality is telling here is not because it gives an easy solution to the impossibility of a ‘good’, global political organisation. What Laclau tells us is in a way the opposite: *no* society can be established as good, as complete and not carrying ‘prohibitive risks’. Society is *ontologically impossible* – but it is *politically necessary* at the same time. To the critics who say that it is impossible to arrive at the politically necessary state of global control over the flow of capital, Bauman says: ‘I’m asked questions like these very often, and I usually reply with an Irish joke: a driver pulls over and asks a passer-by about the way to Dublin and the man replies, “Dear sir, if I wanted to go to Dublin this is not where I’d start!”’ (in Wiśniewski 2011, 6).

The ‘good news’ for the proponents of cosmopolitanism is therefore paradoxical and twofold. First, *no good society is possible*. Laclau is very clear that the demand of ‘totality’ of a fully functional and reconciled society will never be met. And yet there is no doubt that local and national societies *do* exist – as failed totalities, as incomplete and always conflictual *perpetual projects*, which occasionally reinvent themselves and, through populist mobilisation, gain energy to act until the next crisis. Second, the fact that we see the current global situation as making cosmopolitan projects unthinkable should be countered by, perhaps, two counterstatements. The first is this: So what? We *must* find the way. Second, the current state of economic globalisation and the active role of undoubtedly effective transnational bodies like GATT or G7 show that cosmopolitan ideas are not utterly utopian in all their aspects; if it is possible in the domain of corporate economy, why can’t it be possible in the political field?

15.4 From Laclau to Educational Theory

In the context of Laclau’s theory, education appears to be an important instance of the *identity rhetorics* through which societies construe themselves (Szkudlarek 2007, 2011, 2013). There are several dimensions to how this connection operates. One of them is that in schools, words often operate in a decontextualised space

where they relate one to another rather than to their referents (Bruner 1973), which creates conditions for their abstraction and the construction of complex conceptual domains. However, some words never attain a purely conceptual status: they are constantly talked about and their ultimate meaning is never agreed on. School essays and classroom disputes have always been filled with 'pedagogically productive' topics. What is friendship? Is public good superior to personal happiness? What is patriotism nowadays? What is true love? What is justice? Has the restoration of the sciences and arts contributed to the purification of morals?¹ The never-ending circulation around such words makes students master their rhetorical skills, and at the same time it contributes to the creation of a particular, pedagogical genre of 'postulational rhetoric' (Szkudlarek 2014), where that which exists as part of everyday experience is confronted with its elevated, ideal version: 'being in love' with 'love', and 'I like it here' with 'patriotism'. This Platonic gesture of transcending the daily *doxa* towards true ideas has two effects: it invalidates the daily experience as the designate of elevated concepts (that infatuation was not true love, my feelings are not really patriotic), and thus it deprives these very concepts of experiential referents. The postulational rhetoric, working through 'thou shall'/'you ought to' operators typical of religion and education, is a powerful tool for the *production of empty signifiers*. Laclau's analysis of the names of God can have numerous equivalents in the analysis of the language of education.

My comment on Laclau's theory in this respect is that empty signifiers do not emerge in a 'natural' way in the process of identity construction, at least it is not always so. Elsewhere (Szkudlarek 2011), I have tried to show how the signifier of solidarity (*Solidarność*) in the 1980 revolution in Poland was artfully crafted in a way which made it a perfect representation of the ongoing political struggle and how its specific construction not only contributed to the creation of a hegemonic totality but also foretold some of the investments and exclusions needed in order to sustain it. In this context, I see educational rhetorics as one of the most important fields of the construction of empty signifiers to be utilised in the political construction of societies: both in their current hegemonic operations and in oppositional populist mobilizations. 'To be utilised' means here, in the first case, to be invested in particular normative orders congruent with current politics (e.g. the utilisation of the notion of patriotism in post-9/11 politics in the USA seen in calling the regulations limiting civil rights the PATRIOT Act) and, in the second case, to question such orders by reclaiming the ethical, 'empty and impossible' dimension of such signifiers ('we want *true* democracy' in almost every electoral campaign) or by investing the desire for fullness into a new particular demand (the case of *Solidarność*).

Education is a specific field of such constructions; probably the only one where one may experiment, in a relatively secure way, both with the creation of emptiness and with its investment in particular normative orders. This is because such orders in schools do not have to be fully congruent with those outside its walls. School can

¹The last example is the topic of essay competition announced by the Academy in Dijon in 1749, won by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

be a fictitious community, an artificial society, where some rules are made deliberately different from those operating outside. In the context of the discussion on the impossibility of cosmopolitanism, this means that such impossibility can be, in a way, ignored in schools and that one can *invent* elsewhere non-existent particular orders in which the demands of fullness (of the ethical, cosmopolitan community, of perpetual peace, of universal human rights) can be invested. In other words, school is not entirely about socialisation to existing norms; it has a disruptive, utterly political dimension which may contribute to social change and emancipation (Biesta 2010). In short, in schools one *can* create normative orders organising the process of learning, such that they can be invested with cosmopolitan ideas. Just as with other ideas, for that matter.

A very important issue concerns exclusions. According to Laclau, identity is not possible without exclusion. Linking disparate elements of the social is only possible when they appear equivalent *against* something or somebody. The idea of cosmopolitanism seems to be at odds with this theoretical statement. Is cosmopolitanism not the contrary – the idea of global inclusiveness where every person is treated as the bearer of universal human rights? Writing about nineteenth- and twentieth-century cosmopolitanism, Kleingeld and Brown mention this interesting phenomenon:

Most past cosmopolitan authors did not fully live up to the literal interpretation of their cosmopolitan theories, and one can find misogynist, racist, nationalist, religious, or class-based biases and inconsistencies in their accounts. These shortcomings have often been used as arguments against cosmopolitanism, but they are not as easily used for that purpose as it may seem. Because the universalist potential in the discourse of ‘world citizenship’ can itself be used as a basis for exposing these shortcomings as problematic, one should say that they stem from too little, rather too much, cosmopolitanism. (Kleingeld and Brown 2014, online)

How can we interpret this passage? The fact that cosmopolitan discourse is not different from other political ideas is not surprising. What one can also see in this passage is the contrast between ‘failed’ cosmopolitanism in its particular manifestations and its ‘universalist potential’, which renders the shortcomings insignificant and calls for ‘more cosmopolitanism’. In Laclau’s terms, one may interpret this relation as that between the hegemonic demand represented by the empty signifier and its investment in particular demands. It is on the level of the particular, in course of being invested in concrete, context-dependant demands (political or educational projects), where the universal recedes and where exclusions need to be made in order to create chains of equivalence or to win particular games of power.

The problem with both education and politics, in their relation to the universal, is that they always have to be performed on the ontic level, within *particular* normative contexts, by *particular* people and through *particular* content. To put it simply, when cosmopolitan ideas are employed to frame educational experiences, through which positive attitudes to otherness or competencies imagined as necessary for world citizenship are to be created, they will inevitably create exclusions. They will appear conflictual, for instance, to some aspects of national or religious education, to some versions of immigration policy and to some elements of cultural heritage.

In other words, on the universal (ontological) level, the ethical of the cosmopolitan idea is as much all inclusive as it is inconclusive: it cannot be directly translated into concrete norms or codes of behaviour. To gain a degree of conclusiveness, it must be *invested* in particular, context-dependant normative orders and political demands, in the specific content of classroom curricula or communal struggles. And on that level, it cannot escape exclusion. To make cosmopolitan education operational, it seems inevitable that its normative structure be somewhat selective, *exclusive* against these elements of the social and cultural milieu which call for modes of behaviour hostile to the cosmopolitan imaginary.

In this respect, cosmopolitan education would not seem much different from national or democratic education, for instance. They all speak to *ontologically impossible* 'fully reconciled' communities, and they have to invent their ways of influencing human minds by *selection* and organisation of curricular content and learning experiences. If there is a difference between these three varieties of education for identity, it probably is in the 'politically necessary' part of Laclau's statement. In spite of all three kinds of communities being 'ontologically impossible', in the case of the nation and democracy, there were sufficiently strong convictions as to their political necessity. So far, the cosmopolitan demand seems still too weak to successfully reorganise pedagogical imagination. Perhaps the question, therefore, would be whether we really *want* the world to be cosmopolitan rather than whether we *can* make it so.

For those who do want it so and do strive for it through education, one can propose the following conclusions stemming from Laclau's understanding of universality, particularity, ethics and normativity.

First, cosmopolitan education will be on a collision course not only with most of what we know as national education but also with powerful political, economic and military forces which thrive in the *normative void* of interstate relations. As some 'realist' critics of cosmopolitanism maintain, the condition of perpetual war, rather than Kantian perpetual peace, is the 'natural' state of relations between nations, and 'moral consideration of others stops at the border of society' (Snuawert 2009, 12). Such space, devoid of normative and effective legal regulations, is the milieu of the operation of transnational capital. Bauman's Dublin anecdote reminds us that the fact that we do not know how to subject this space to normative (political) control does not free us from the necessity to do so. But one must be aware that this will not be a globally welcome intervention.

Second, cosmopolitan universalism must be *invested* in particular content which can work as the domain of subjective experience and engagement. When such investments concern education, one must bear in mind that schools are specific sites in the social space, where normative orders may, to some degree, differ from those outside their walls. This feature of schools is usually seen as their fault, an aspect of their 'artificial reality' responsible for educating young generations to non-existing worlds. But schools were created as such: as Gert Biesta (2010) or Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons (2013) remind us, one must differentiate education from socialisation. In the case of ethical ideas like cosmopolitanism, such relative isolation creates the opportunity to educate in spite of, or sometimes even against, the

existing normative orders. To sum up, the normative orders into which the universalist claims of cosmopolitanism are to be invested may themselves be *invented* for the sake of education.

Third, no normative order can operate without exclusions. In Laclau's ontology, they may be seen as operating on two levels, which I have called *deontic* and *deontological*, respectively (Szkudlarek 2013). On the deontic level, every norm implies what should and what should not be done. On the second, deontological one, however, such should–should not relations are only possible within a certain delimited field, which implies a more general exclusion of certain *ontological* elements. To give an example, in Marxism the struggle of workers for a just society is set against capital, and it must exclude bourgeois ideologies. On the second level, however, the antagonistic relation of labour vs. capital and workers vs. bourgeoisie, and granting this antagonism the power to change social structures, is only possible when the social field is conceptually cleared of elements not involved in the relations of capitalist production. To make his system complete and logical, Marx had to exclude the *lumpenproletariat* from the theory of social structure (Laclau 2005).

With regard to education, what this means is that one should be aware of the exclusions made, on the ontic/normative level, in the process of defining the content of learning activities, as well as of exclusions implied in the ontological construction of that 'ontic' domain of learning content and norms. Such exclusions set the desired educational outcomes against the current state of affairs or against the learning outcomes of other, competing educational ideologies and practices. In ontological terms, they refer to the desired and contested *forms of the social*, to the very construction of a 'good world' which inevitably has to be deprived of some of the currently existing elements.

In my opinion, these are fundamentally important ethical questions pertaining to the construction of education serving any form of collective identity. No world can be totally inclusive, as Laclau says; no 'complete' society is ontologically possible. Cosmopolitanism presents itself as amongst the most inclusive political and educational ideologies (if not *the* most inclusive singular ideology). To act responsibly by way of investing this idea into particular 'ontic content', one must also bear responsibility for what and who is excluded on the way to this version of a better world.

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