

# Smashing Cosmopolitanism: The Neo-liberal Destruction of Cosmopolitan Education in East-Central Europe

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*Critiques that seek to examine cosmopolitanism as a concept suffer from a severe popularity problem. Rather than engage in this pro/con debate, we are interested in demonstrating that cosmopolitanism can wax and wane, ebb and flow, and has appeared as a grounding ideology for educational programs before, only to be torn asunder by those seeking to consolidate regime change. We do not suggest that cosmopolitanism is good and righteous politics, normatively opposed to or supporting patriotism, nor is it ideologically left, right or centre. We see a burgeoning cosmopolitan outlook in a particular time and place, that was smashed by political and social forces both unforeseen and powerful, changing foundational concepts of education in East-Central Europe in general and Hungary in particular.*

As a popular concept in the English-speaking world, cosmopolitanism conjures up notions of a well-read, well-fed, bourgeoisie with economic and social capacities to move around the world using their networks and sophisticated understandings of cultural diversity. A cosmopolitan understanding of the world encompasses a commitment to universal human rights, universal human potential, and a deeply embedded acceptance of difference and diversity. These ideas are core parts of a universalist frame of reference, and a philosophical underpinning of a particular view of the modern world held during the Industrial Revolution until today (Held, 2003).

This paper challenges the idea that cosmopolitanism exists exclusively in the post-Cold War period in East-Central Europe, and also challenges the idea that the Hungarian education system was a monolithic neo-Stalinist version of 'ideology expression'. We claim here that the neo-liberal version of cosmopolitanism which privileges cooperation among nation-states based on an economic free-market, is essentially positing economic cosmopolitanism as the best way forward in the post-Cold War period. This position can be challenged by examining institutions of the Cold War period. Cosmopolitanism is a contested concept, and this is a lens through which we can analyse changes to education from the Cold War to the post-Cold War period in East-Central Europe, rather than discuss the problems of the idea itself (see Vertovec and Cohen (2002) for a comprehensive treatment of various interpretations of cosmopolitanism as an idea). The prevailing neo-liberal ideology that supported the deconstruction of the system can thus be critiqued and challenged.

Many 'transitionologists' and democratisation analysts have claimed in the past that Cold War East-Central Europe suffered under a kind of ideological dictatorship (Linz and Stepan 1996). This might be true to a great extent in terms of single-party rule, a planned economy, and the sometimes violent management of dissent. In this paper, through a meta-analysis, we develop the argument that these factors do not necessarily mean that some form of cosmopolitanism did not exist. As Mincu (2009) suggests, Hungary experienced time periods in which there were a mixture of cosmopolitan views. For example, while Hungary was undergoing a process of late modernization

between 1770 and 1850, a particular vision of cosmopolitanism emerged as a synthesis of ideas of “historical cosmopolitanism and paternalism (as Josephinism) of the Hapsburg empire, and second, the romantic feelings of belonging to an ethno-linguistic community” (Mincu, 2009, p. 58). The cosmopolitan ideal of French Enlightenment in this way was entrapped with nationalistic visions particular to the region which still influence the development of the politics in this area (Neumann, 2001, p.39 cited in Mincu).

Here, we use the case of Hungary to demonstrate the existence of another understanding of cosmopolitanism under socialism, one which manifested on practical grounds and had a certain democratic effect. This resulted in social justice-based ideas attached to social, cultural, political and economic rights (Mincu, 2009). Further, cosmopolitanism itself has had a broad range of views (see in comparative education for example Popkewitz, 2002, 2007; Snauwaert, 2002; Walker & Serrano, 2006), and the interpretation of those views has been more important than arguments for the value of a cosmopolitan ethos. We are using cosmopolitanism as an ‘existential mirror’ to demonstrate that cosmopolitanism can wax and wane, ebb and flow. It has appeared as a grounding ideology for educational programs in particular times and places before (see for example Hansen, 2008; Popkewitz, 2002; Rizvi, 2000; Todd, 2007), and has been torn asunder by those seeking to consolidate regime change. Cosmopolitanism can also show a way to understand how education policies and educators themselves have reacted to the possibility of global cooperative endeavours. Utilizing a hermeneutics of cosmopolitanism, we can come to better understand the shifts and changes of educational policy, especially during the Cold War, and the post-Cold War periods.

### **Religious, Ideological, and Nation-state Cosmopolitanism: Quasi-Cosmopolitanism during the Cold War**

There are at least two kinds of cosmopolitan education that predate the modern nation-state, and while neither form is necessarily linked to empire, both have continued into the modern period. First, religious education has long had a cosmopolitan lived reality, in potential as well as everyday practice. The original *madrasses* in South Asia, in what is now northern India and Pakistan, had nothing to do with the Wahabism of current Taliban supporters (9/11 Commission, 2004; Tahir, Jishnu, & Khwaja, 2008) and during the British Empire expansion and Queen Victoria’s reign, *madrassa* education was multi-lingual and delivered an education that emphasized science and reason in the modern world (Sengupta, 2006). Religious education in many parts of the world continues to be a counter to nation-states, and does so in both conservative and progressive ways. It is not always the case that religious schools are anti-cosmopolitan, unprogressive, and anti-modern. We do not claim that religious schools are necessarily anti/pro-cosmopolitan, and we instead demonstrate that religious education in a specific setting, Hungary, was in competition with different political forces that were established in the post-World War II period.

In the socialist states of the post-World War II period, there was a general move to inculcate modernist values in formerly denominationally-run schools (Nagy, 2003). Religion as a social force in Hungary, especially through religious organizations in the education system, operated as an obstacle to solving problems faced in Central Europe in the immediate post-World War II period. Religious institutions were seen as obstructing the modernization and industrialization programs of the newly emerging socialist states. The Church’s hold on the education system was seen as a reinforcement of the class system, as well as preventing the necessary post-war rebuilding. (Braham, 1970; Mészáros, Németh, & Pukánszky, 2004). Hungary, like others in the region in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, was faced with this problem, and as a solution nationalised most denominational schools (Nagy, 2003). The religions themselves were

cosmopolitan, since they had shared values that went beyond the nation-state and had a global reach. However, this is often conflated with a kind of moral cosmopolitanism that maintains a common value system, somewhat different from a Kantian position with an adherence to various articles of faith rather than specific principles of law. It is our view that while these religious approaches can be cosmopolitan, they are not always cosmopolitan, and in general this lends support to the multiple natures and concepts of cosmopolitanism.

The second kind of cosmopolitanism we discuss here is one of a political ideology. This political, ideological cosmopolitanism is rife with questions and debates that predate and exceed the modern nation-state, and their origins can be found in the debates surrounding Socrates. It is not new to have discussions around the political dimensions of 'global citizens' as opposed to citizens loyal to a local political community. Typically, modern political ideological types of cosmopolitanism (liberal cosmopolitanism, socialist cosmopolitanism, Kantian legal-plural cosmopolitanism which is very close to Habermasian legal-constitutional cosmopolitanism) will be used by nation-states to further agendas of political elites of these bodies, only to see a conflict between national agendas and the cosmopolitan ones, even when they share the same ideological bias or pattern (liberalism can compete with cosmopolitanism for example). Political cosmopolitanism can thus turn into an instrumental cosmopolitanism performed 'in the best interests of the nation-state'.

During the 1980s a strong decentralization of education started in Hungary that provided more autonomy for local councils (representing society) and schools (that were represented by the professional body of teachers). This process of decentralization, self-administration, and the creation of local authorities also served as vehicles for political change after the collapse of communism (Sáska, 2002-3). However, there is a great difference between the relative autonomies of councils and professional bodies of teachers in these two systems—reform socialism and market liberalism—due to the operation of two interrelated administrative structures. These structures were the 'party administration' that influenced and controlled local decision making through "youth, women and other organizations such as the National People's Front" and the "inner civil intelligence corps" that provided "reports about the atmosphere" (Sáska, 2002-3, p. 36). These latter structures ensured that the governing socialist principles were kept. "[T]he abolishment of alienation, the elimination of inequality based on division of labor, and the ideal of self-regulation" (Sáska, 2002-3, p. 35) provided a quasi-cosmopolitan look. After the Cold War, these structures were abolished, and the local councils and teachers' bodies were in opposition rather than in a hierarchical relationship with each other, as it would be expected in a market economy. Sáska (2002-3) argues that schools' autonomy became so strong that it was above party politics, since autonomy was their only solution for survival in a starved education system under the neo-liberal regime.

In the Eastern Bloc countries, especially Hungary in the 1970s, governments and educators alike saw the benefits of trying to get religious, ideological, and nation-state cosmopolitanism to work in a cooperative way. Cosmopolitanism was to be a way in which a cooperative (i.e. a number of nation-states in the region) and collective (i.e. organising for groups within the nation-state to work together unfettered) world-view was established. This ideological example was part of a successful campaign to inculcate cosmopolitan values in East-Central European education systems similar to what Miller (1998) and Unterhalter (2008) describe as thick cosmopolitanism. The regime transformations that occurred there in the 1990s destroyed this notion.

It is a common misconception to view the former Eastern Bloc as a place in which propaganda replaced 'real' education, bread lines replaced food production and nationalism was buried under

an avalanche of ideology (for example Reuter, 1991). This particular view of the Cold War period is in itself an ideological reading of the historical circumstances surrounding the construction and dismantling of the 'Eastern Bloc' and critical social scientists have challenged this myth (Neumann, 1999). The success of this cosmopolitanist position in East-Central Europe provides a way of critiquing the hegemony of liberal discourse described above, through utilizing everyday educational practices from socialist Hungary. The idea that people could choose to move from one socialist state to another, and the notion that life might actually be good enough in a place like Hungary to move there, can offer a powerful critique of the commonly-held belief of an overtly ideologically driven and oppressive socialist state. The cosmopolitan position had some difficulty in establishing itself in Hungary and the Eastern Bloc in the post-World War II period, since the Marxist-Leninist parties still had a negative view of the term.

### **Educational Policy and Practice in Hungary in the Cold War**

With the establishment of the Hungarian People's Republic in 1945, and the new Socialist constitution in 1949, Hungary's educational policy changed dramatically. Like the rest of East-Central Europe, Hungary was a society that was steeped in nationalism and its education policies reflected this. The nation-states in the region were all grappling with the aftermath of World War II, and in doing so were in the middle of large industrialization programs. These programs were meant to modernize all of the societies found in the newly created 'Eastern Bloc'. This involved the support for heavy industry, manufacturing, and industrializing agriculture so that food production would be able to meet the demands of a burgeoning post-World War II population.

The new Hungarian government was faced with a problem in which the peasantry, a large and very poor segment of the population, was left without resources to counter this poverty, and had very low education levels (Braham, 1970). Moreover, the "Hungarian culture oscillated between urbanism and populism" (Gyurgyak, 1991 in Mincu, 2009), and the experience of fascism in conjunction with the enactment of racial laws influenced civic culture and reinforced intolerant values. As such, there was a great difficulty in bringing together an educated populace, a modern workforce, which could help drive modernization and industrialization. One way to mobilize people of all social classes was to frame modernization and industrialization as a 'national duty', which was relatively easy to do since nationalism was such a strong force in all of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. All of the 'socialist' nation-states of the Eastern Bloc, engaged in the same nationalist rhetoric.

The other aspect of the post-World War II development of the region was an attempt to solidify a political bloc that supported, and was supported by the Soviet Union. Stalin's USSR had also embarked upon the same project to modernize and industrialize, and was looking to counter the effects of the war. Since the 'realized socialist' countries of the new Eastern Bloc were looking to build cooperative endeavours with their socialist neighbours, their nationalism was now coupled with the idea that socialist countries were the most advanced in all aspects of modernity, and were naturally suited to cooperating with each other. This also meant that in order to counter the imperialism (whether real or imagined) of the 'west', ostensibly led by the United States, the socialist states also engaged in a particular kind of cosmopolitan rhetoric, followed by a set of policy initiatives. One of the battlegrounds for this new ideology was the education system in Hungary.

In reconstructing education policies and initiatives, the socialist government in Hungary needed to include as many of its citizens as it could in a kind of large mobilisation effort to begin its mass education programs (Braham, 1970). Women and minorities in Hungary, as well as technical

expertise from neighbouring countries, were made to be seen as participants in the greater project. This is where a particular kind of cosmopolitanism emerged. As Miller (1998) describes:

all moral principles must be justified by showing that they give equal weight to the claims of everyone, which means that they must either be directly universal in their scope, or if they apply only to a select group of people they must be secondary principles whose ultimate foundation is universal. (p. 166)

Affirmative action programs were instituted in order to ensure that poor families had a much larger representation in high schools than wealthy families (Braham, 1970). The attempt at universalisation and equalisation of education was achieved through scholarships for students who could not pay, as well as scholarships for students who achieved high grades (Braham, 1970). Universalisation of education served to prepare “dedicated and productive socialist citizens” (Robinson & Robinson, p. ix) to cope with rapid industrial development. Children of factory workers, smallholder peasants, un-propertied families, and those with little or no sources of income, were streamed into primary schools and high schools in large numbers (Mészáros et al., 2004).

Universal education meant a facilitation of the harmonious development of children’s versatile capabilities; thus the same education, including skill development, was provided for all children. It is argued by Engels (Bakonyi, Földesi & Hermann, 1963) that a person needed to be versatile to help overcome the capitalist division of labour and consequently to facilitate the building of classless society. By having versatile capabilities every person was ready to use his or her abilities and skills in all possible ways to fulfil society’s shifting needs and his or her own individual inclinations (Bakonyi et al., 1963). Thus, having these abilities and skills at every individual’s disposal opens up and equalizes possibilities for all.

Along with the view that education should be made universal, the Hungarian government also sought to include programs of diversity in order to ensure that students of non-Hungarian background remained part of this great modernising enterprise (Mészáros et al., 2004). For example, schools teaching minority languages were established and Roma children were integrated in schools. Until the 1960s most Roma children in Hungary only attended school for a short time period. After identifying this problem and making it a priority in the 1961 Resolution, the number of Roma children attending school increased considerably, and by 1990 the majority of Roma children completed primary school (Forray, 2003).

The imagery of certain groups of society also changed considerably. Capitalists and liberal-bourgeois people were thought to be stuck in their nationalist-imperialist ways. People who lived decadent lives in the ‘west’ were depicted as sickly and weak, while the global proletarians inhabiting socialist states in other parts of the world were divested of the European colonial stereotypes attached to people with dark skin, or originating from various parts of Asia (Burucs, 1997). This ‘de-orientalization’ that went on in the socialist countries of East-Central Europe meant that cooperative initiatives could be promoted throughout the world by bypassing culturally inhibiting stereotypes through the creation of this new form of cosmopolitanism. This view changed dramatically in the 1990s.

### **Liberalism and Capitalism Triumphant**

Cosmopolitanism was hijacked in the 1990s by globalisation theorists, and was equated with economic cosmopolitanism (Kleingeld & Brown, 2009). That is, economic globalisation by way of

liberalization of economies was meant to level out all previous disparities between and among nation-states. This, of course, did not occur, but there still exists a kind of hegemonic interpretation of the primacy of the market. Since we are all cooperating capitalists in the contemporary world, this remains proof of the cosmopolitan success under these liberal capitalist norms. Normative aspects found in the socialist countries regarding difference and diversity that was meant to be unaffected by economics, were now gone. Education policy was increasingly brought into harmony with the economy (Gutche, 1993).

These normative aspects included the civic, political, economic, social and cultural equality under the law that was enshrined in the Cold War version of the Hungarian Constitution (Republic of Hungary, 1949, 66. § (1). The Constitution declared that the ethnic and national minorities in Hungary are participants in the rule of the people's democracy: they are essential constituents of the State (68. § (1)). Under the same points the responsibilities and duties of minorities are detailed, their rights are affirmed and their self-organization to form self-governing councils are promoted in the 1949 Constitution. University places were held for children of labourers. Women's Day and Labor Day were celebrated in the spirit of international unification of women and labourers. Toys also expressed the political and social context of internationalism. In Hungary, toys were manufactured with the particular aim to socialize children to be good workers and to shape children's consciousness with appropriating ideas of internationalism. Zsuzsa Révész in *Jatekkeskedelem (Toy Trade)* called for the production of dolls with all skin colours. Révész argued that 'racial' dolls before the (anti-Fascist) Liberation (1945, with the expulsion of Nazi troops by the Soviet Red Army) "were represented as grotesque caricatures of people. Proletarian internationalism was served by representing 'racial' dolls just as kindly as 'whites'" (Burucs, 1997, p. 54). Children's books described children's lives in other countries.

With the new Németh government, formed in 1989, the state monopoly on the establishment of new schools was eliminated, the funding of private schools were made possible, various congregational schools were reopened, the expansion of the eight-year Gymnasium academic high school was initiated (Gutche, 1993). These changes were implemented first in order to serve parents' free choice for their children's schooling. The right to free choice of schools, as a sign of the democratising system, however "is not available for all, families with lower income, or level of education, and ones living in small villages only hosting one school can not live with their rights" (Ministry of Education Hungary, 2005, p. 16). The result of free choice was the re-development of a highly segregated school system, especially for Roma children (Havas & Lisko, 2004 in Ministry of Education Hungary, 2005) and in the last 15 years that segregation has grown (Ministry of Education Hungary, 2005). According to the 2000 PISA surveys, the 15 year-olds performances were closely linked to their parents' cultural capital (Vári, 2003). After the regime change Roma youth unemployment grew as a direct consequence of low educational levels (Forray, 2002-3). Groups from the lower economic strata are left out from higher education (Ministry of Education Hungary, 2005). The annual publication of secondary schools ranking showed a steadily increasing distance between schools. This data combined with the PISA survey also demonstrates that a pre-selection of students is in place that is advantageous to those children whose parents have higher education (Ministry of Education Hungary, 2005). Additionally, a comprehensive system of nurseries and kindergartens were set up to provide care and education for mothers to be able to participate equally in all aspects of civic life, such as work or party politics (Hermann & Komlósi, 1972, p. 10).

While the kindergarten system was maintained, the first social benefit to go after the fall of the Berlin wall was the nursery system attached to factories and offices. Socio-cultural approaches to

cosmopolitanism in which representatives of cultural groups had the right to interact with other societies were also gone, smashed by neo-liberal exclusivist values that were encouraged through the restructuring of education policies in the 1990s. The overarching political cosmopolitan approach which sought to bring together political communities concerned with emancipation and emancipatory practices was also subsumed under the banner of global economies designed to function as rational actors in a free market. There was a growing intolerance and hatred against migrants, which reinvigorated far right political parties. Discourse in the media, in schools (Hunyadi, M. Nádasi & Serfőző, 2006) and churches, and violent acts against minorities all testify to this shift (e.g. Népszabadság, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

The development of cosmopolitanism in East-Central Europe, as espoused in the modernization and industrialization project following World War II, was successful in taking education away from the elites and delivering it to Hungarian society as a whole. The attempt to reconstruct ideas of identity in the de-orientalising of the global proletariat opened up the possibility for new kinds of cooperation amongst peoples of various nation-states outside of the 'west'. With the advent of a 'western-style' civic education in the 1990s, most of East-Central Europe has suffered from the return of a particular kind of nationalism, and indeed most of Europe as a whole has emerged from the neo-liberal experiments of the 1990s with a current emphasis on exclusivist nationalism. Today we see the rise of right-wing political parties that espouse the ideologies of 1920s and 1930s-era the fascism. . This is not the result of 'nationalisms buried under socialism' due to the Cold War Soviet domination. It is rather the result of an attempt to align with neo-liberal economic policies pushed by the United States and Western Europe in the immediate aftermath of the demise of the Soviet Union. In the 1960s children of ethnic minorities were instructed in schools set up and administered by minority councils in their mother tongue. Today, increased migration to Hungary means the emergence of a new problem: how to deal with ethnic difference. In the 1960s and 1970s, proletarian populations from Vietnam, Cuba, and Mozambique could walk the streets in safety and be accepted in to people's homes throughout Hungary. Today, it is quite a different matter.

We do not suggest that cosmopolitanism is a good and righteous viewpoint, nor do we suggest that cosmopolitanism is normatively opposed to patriotism, nor do we suggest that cosmopolitanism is ideologically left, right or centre. Our discussion here is that while cosmopolitan ideas might provide avenues for reassessment or illuminate ways forward, we see a burgeoning cosmopolitan outlook in a particular time and place that was smashed by unforeseen and powerful political and social forces. This changed foundational concepts of education in East-Central Europe in general, and Hungary in particular. The issue raised is not merely that cosmopolitanism is vulnerable to political forces and agendas in an instrumental way, but rather the problematic view that there is a one-sided list of positive qualities of cosmopolitanism. We view this as a problem for comparative education for a variety of reasons, including the misconstruction of history during the Cold War, the misunderstanding of the rise of (ultra)nationalism in the East-Central European region, and the incapacity to engage in critiques of the region suggesting that former socialist regimes were all akin to the isolated Stalinist politics of Enver Hoxha's Albania or the Kim family's rule of North Korea.

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