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Camil-Alexandru Parvu

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## COMPTE RENDU

CICHELLI Vincenzo, 2019, *Plural and Shared: The Sociology of a Cosmopolitan World*, Brill, Leyde, 228 p.

Camil-Alexandru PARVU

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### *Sociétés Plurielles*, n° 3 Varia

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# Sociétés plurielles

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*Varia*

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**CICCHELLI Vincenzo, 2019, *Plural and Shared: The Sociology of a Cosmopolitan World*, Brill, Leyde, 228 p.**

Camil-Alexandru PARVU  
Associate Professor, University of Bucharest

Vincenzo Cicchelli's ambitious new book *Plural and Shared: The Sociology of a Cosmopolitan World* is a timely and erudite addition to the wider debate on the possible contours of a sociology for cosmopolitan times. As the book's title indicates, the author's main take on the potential for a cosmopolitan sociology lies in the very paradoxical traits that he attributes to the current globalized world: humanity's increasingly salient diversity is concomitant with its sharing more commonalities than ever before; we're both increasingly plural and yet we share ever more in common; our contemporary societies "are both opening up and closing off to an unprecedented degree" (p. 16). Therefore, Cicchelli's endeavor is to develop Kwame Anthony Appiah's definition of cosmopolitanism as "universality plus difference" into a full reflection on the necessary elements of a sociology of this globalized world, that is, a cosmopolitan sociology.

The book aims to characterize cosmopolitanism as an enduring and recurrent historical human trait, even while abandoning any naïve notion of "cosmopolitanization" being a linear and irreversible endpoint of human destiny. Rather, Cicchelli argues, cosmopolitanism is best understood through its cyclical comeback in human history, each time under different guises. The inherent complexity of contemporary globalized societies calls for interpretive sociological frameworks that articulate notions of cosmopolitanism which eschew easy generalizations and which at the same time account for the spatial-temporal coordinates of the lived individual experiences in a global society.

Cicchelli's cosmopolitan sociology departs from a purely normative reflection on the desirability of cosmopolitanism as a political theory, and rather centers on the "cosmopolitan imagination" (as articulated by Gerard Delanty) of a world that is characterized by openness and closeness at the same time. It does not aim to break free from all the historical traditions of sociological research, but to integrate and critically adapt previous disciplinary perspectives into the emerging elements of a cosmopolitan sociology that the author defines as combining the theoretical instruments of cosmopolitan theory and those of global studies. Crucially, the author aims to combine a broader theoretical understanding of the new cosmopolitan social imaginaries that shape our understanding of networks, identities, borders, and risks in a globalized world, with an examination of the new forms of socialization that shape the lives of individuals today.

These two levels of inquiry inform Cicchelli's cosmopolitan sociology (emerging global social imaginaries and individual experiences) and determine the analytical choice of structuring the book into two parts: the first examines the advent of the shared and plural world through the transformations of the nation-states that were the central institutions of modernization, the shifting meanings of sovereignty and borders, the emergence of global risks as well as of new paradigms in social sciences that challenge the default methodological nationalism and lay the groundwork for methodological cosmopolitanism; this part follows not only the evolution of social institutions, globalized networks, transnational processes, and of new scientific paradigms from a cosmopolitan perspective, but also of the corresponding shift in the social imaginaries of the contemporary world; the second part proposes, on the other hand, an exploration of the empirical attributes of the transformations in the individuals' own experience of globalized societies. It furthermore articulates a four-fold classification of ways in which individuals inhabit a globalized world and builds upon existing empirical research to suggest the broad directions of a more programmatic systematization of cosmopolitan sociology.

The first part begins with an overview of the wide-ranging changes in the nature of the nation-states, the evolving nature of their sovereignty and corresponding political agency. State sovereignty is precisely not dissolved by the dynamic of globalization, the author claims against earlier accounts that predicted it, but instead reattributed and redefined. For instance, borders are repurposed from their earlier modern function of defending territory to their new critical role, that of selectively controlling human movement. This capacity for control is selective since the same physical border may be invisible and innocuous to some category of individuals while at the same time it becomes an unbreachable, deadly obstacle for others. Moreover, borders—and border regimes—become increasingly

de-territorialized when European states, for instance, set up border controls on other states' territory, marking a profound shift in the understanding of the central modern notion of sovereignty as grounded on the primacy of the territorial dimension of the border.

The state's sovereignty is not the only element undergoing a massive re-negotiation. Our capacity, as social scientists, to make sense of the globalized phenomena is also at stake. Here, Cicchelli inscribes his account within the broader project of reconsidering, in the global age, some of the basic theoretical frameworks of contemporary social science. In particular, the critical analysis of the role that methodological nationalism has played in shaping our understanding of social phenomena in general, is now—in the aftermath of Ulrich Beck's seminal work on it—a necessary element of any sociological approach to cosmopolitanism. It is Beck's powerful insight that the modern methodological bias in sociology—and social sciences in general—was to frame social phenomena as coextensive with nation-state's territorial limits as defined by borders. Equating society with the nation-state's borders led generations of social scientists to implicitly treat social phenomena as analytically confined within, and intelligible only through, the institutions of the nation-state. Such methodological nationalism is not reasonable to maintain in a globalized world where global risks, for instance, clearly defy not only the states' capacity to regulate and control, but more profoundly their borders, sovereignty, class distribution, etc. Global risks are transnational by nature and therefore they are the privileged revealers of the limits of the theoretical framing assumptions governed by methodological nationalism. While Cicchelli is broadly in agreement with the imperative of developing the theoretical instruments of methodological cosmopolitanism, he is also reluctant to borrow Beck's description of methodological nationalism as a unique and monolithic paradigm of classical sociology, and points to ways in which the classical authors were already offering the nuanced tools for a more complex understanding than the nationalism described by Beck.

The author furthers the debate on how methodological cosmopolitanism might operate and extends the reflection towards the cosmopolitan awareness shaped by the shared imaginaries and shared repertoires of a global society. Yet the effects of such global trends on collective identities is not univocal. Indeed, some identities become entrenched and closed, reifying "the other" in complete antithesis; other identities subjected to the dynamic of globalization, on the other hand, become open, or "cosmopolitan." Cicchelli's contribution here is to aptly insist on the third phenomenon at play in these times—the accelerated hybridization of identities, *i. e.* the production of new identities that borrow and adapt elements from multiple identities. Indeed, the debates around identity tend often to be

marred by simplifying binary understandings that oscillate between polarized figures of the open or closed self. Hybridization, though, is at least as relevant for any meaningful project of cosmopolitan sociology, and it is also as enduring and recurrent a phenomenon as cosmopolitanization itself—the syncretism developed historically since ancient times across the maritime port cities on the shores of the Mediterranean is a valid illustration.

What then, of the impact of these globalized processes on the everyday experiences of individual lives? Cicchelli devotes several chapters to the articulation of the new spatio-temporal dimensions of individual experiences that a cosmopolitan sociology needs to account for. In the last part of the book he aims to move the research of cosmopolitan socialization away from an idealized image of an openminded, tolerant mindset that acknowledges deep moral obligations towards others and forms of responsibility that transcend traditional allegiances. Defining cosmopolitan socialization as “the process by which individuals learn how to navigate the transnational dimensions of the world around them” (p. 83), Cicchelli focuses instead on a more empirical perspective that surveys the different modalities through which individuals learn to rethink their own identities as well as others’ in a cosmopolitan vein.

The author examines the impact of globalization on everyday life in several settings. Herein lies however the main inherent limitation and at the same time the theoretical development brought by the volume: there is a conspicuous absence of systematic empirical studies on the production of cosmopolitan subjectivity amidst globalized intersections. While there are abundant accounts on the more abstract and idealized notions of cosmopolitan normativity, only disparate studies examine the different concrete, situated environments where actual experiences and individual encounters with transnational flows generate specific, complex forms of cosmopolitan subjectivity. This empirical research has for instance already been present in recent social movements scholarship, in research on the impact of Erasmus programs on European students, and in several other settings, but it remains overall still marginal in cosmopolitan research. Cicchelli proposes a systematization of current empirical research on lived cosmopolitan experiences by examining the different “scales of belonging” (p. 112) where cosmopolitan socialization emerges—not only local and national, but also supra-national and transnational.

Building on studies by Pleyers, Castells and others, Cicchelli articulates a more systematic program for a cosmopolitan sociology that follows four “fieldworks”—cosmo-aesthetic, cosmo-culturalist, cosmo-ethical, and finally cosmo-political. Each corresponds to orientations developed in individuals’ global encounter with difference and can be discerned through empirical research on specific mediums.

This volume's great merit is that it helps ground future study of cosmopolitanism within a more definite and quantifiable research program that Vincenzo Cicchelli appropriately deems essential, namely that of a cosmopolitan sociology that connects the interpretative level concerned with making sense, in a cosmopolitan vein, of global transformations—with the level of the empirical analysis of the lived individual experiences of contact with a globalized world. There are still inevitable missing spots in the book—as an example, the varying experiences and perceptions of social inequality at national or global scales, or perhaps the different declinations of the climate change crises in recent years, but such is the nature of a “program” for cosmopolitan sociology, that of delineating the main categories for examining the processes of socialization that have been shaped by globalization.