

BORDERS AND TOLERANCE IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DISCOURSE

Round table “*Borders and Tolerance in Contemporary Political and Cultural Discourse*” took place at the International conference “*Cultural and Religious Borders in Europe: continuity and change*” on May 22, 2015 in the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute (LCRI) in Vilnius. Round table’ moderators were Viggo Rossvær (University of Nordland, Norway) and Basia Nikiforova (LCRI).

During our meeting, important questions were discussed such as historical memory of the region and it’s nowadays discourse, the particularity of Lithuanian-Polish-Belarusian borderland in the context of European identity, historical and imaginary Eastern and North European maps. We analyzed the importance of Lithuanian and Norwegian history’ ability to transcend old borders and set up new ones, the cultural capitals, and industries in the condition of changing borders, virtual and geographical space, cross-border ethnicity. We discussed our future common research activity and projects.

Viggo Rossvær: Dear colleagues, I want to repeat my thanks to the leaders and to members of the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute for inviting me to this conference. As I have already become a serious reader of Creativity Studies (former LIMES: borderland studies), this round table is a great opportunity to start a common discussion of projects related to borders and tolerance problems in search for philosophical and methodological basis for further research.

Basia Nikiforova: Dear colleagues, our international conference is a part of the long-term

program “Lithuanian Philosophy: history and present”. Our international conference brings together researchers from Eastern and Western Europe to develop the interdisciplinary research on cultural and religious borders changing through a focus on the issues of new images of acceptance of diversity in contemporary Europe. The accommodation and toleration of religion-related cultural differences start to be very important challenge for a united Europe. Diversity as such is both a fact and a process, which will be more and more important in the future. Change of paradigms – religious and cultural, became characteristic features of our epoch. The problem of tolerance, its limits, and borders start to be discussable. Today, adapting the complex paradigm of the border, we look on the territory as the waves of territorialization and deterritorialization in an endless process. Transcultural possibilities on the borderland, regional forms and examples of international education will be important subject of the round table. I want to invite you to the discussion about these subjects and questions.

Viggo Rossvær: I am arguing for research concerning the use of local mobile universities as peace agents. According to the vision of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat (Kirkenes), whose goal is to develop the Norwegian-Russian relations in the north by promoting cooperation projects and coordinate the national goals with the regional political priorities, the Northern border-culture between Russia and Norway is a great resource for the universities. The Northern

border-culture in the Pasvik Valley (by the local Russian population called the Valley of Peace) was in 1993 updated as providing the raw material for an academic dialogue in borderology, based on a cross border respect well hidden away from the view of the far-away capitals of Oslo and Moscow.

I now want to invite partners in the Baltic countries to follow up on this Northern vision with Kantian roots. In practice, this can be done by participating in the development of borderology in so-called mobile universities – after the model of the Bakhtin/Kant Institute in Nikel in the Russian/Norwegian border zone. Mobile universities means that mother universities from all over the world are invited in to participate in this kind of peace study and research. The ambitious idea is to engage universities from the Baltic countries to participate.

My most important errand to Vilnius is to discuss a future cooperation with Lithuanian universities and research institutes. The cooperation concerns a new form of student exchange and research practice between border universities all along, what one may call the Huntington line, the geographical line separating what is thought of as two confronting civilization in the Eastern parts of Europe.

The research should be directed first towards some well-defined border region – to describe the clashes of civilization in the Eastern borderlands for instance of Lithuania and the Belarus, but in the end to change the prevailing understanding of these borderlands. The idea is to change the political understanding of these important border regions. They are often seen as problems, or as risks for future peace, whereas the border population should be seen as having cultural resources, living in a region producing cultural bridges. Our kind of border-oriented local peace research that is here suggested, therefore, supports the Kantian perspective that peace will not come as a product of negotiations between governments in the main capitals of the world. It depends on the emergence of a society of visitors, with a willingness

to insist on a border transcending culture and constructing their true home identity by going to mobile universities.

The aim is to make our students realize that peace will *not* come by removing the national borders, but by strengthening the right of people of all nations to visit others on the surface of the Earth. The rights belong to a global, but earthbound cosmopolitan culture rooted in local experience of endlessness under the stars. To strengthen the work for peace today, one should focus on the border regions as the right places for the development of a clearer consciousness of cosmopolitan rights. The right of the visitor as a right to subjectivity, and the defense of this very right is leading to the conclusion that the subjective recognition of such experiences should be encouraged at universities.

One policy is to establish Mobile Universities permitting students the experiment of writing out their subjectivity. A mobile university is a university that has taken Kant's idea of the visitor seriously and moved its peace studies to the border, permitting students to write out their subjectivity in dialogues with students from other nations. Such a university is in line with Kant's own idea that pedagogy must be cosmopolitan.

Mother Universities of international standing might cultivate the Kantian role of visitor, for instance by developing joint studies of borderology in the manner of the universities of Murmansk and Nordland. To widen the original perspective of the Barents Secretariat means to develop joint peace-studies after the manner of the Bakhtin/Kant Institute in Nikel on every border in universities all the way from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea. But this would only be the first stage: A Central Institute for the development of the idea of subsidiarity should be established in one of the Baltic Countries in the name of Kant and Karsavin to take the lead in this development.

Inna Ryzhkova: In continuation of Viggo Rossvær' idea about mobile universities as peace agents, I want to add that the numerous

subsequent meetings between Norwegian and Russian philosophers, our joint seminars and discussions have made it clear that the phenomenon of the border should be understood as broadly as possible, and that it is how it should be accepted. To be precise, it should be seen not only as something that separates and distinguishes one thing from another, but also as a real place and intellectual topos for conjoining what is different, one where the experience of the Other first becomes relevant and important, and then even a necessary moment of your own, personal experience. In this sense, the border serves as a mirror, or maybe even a prism, with the help of which men and society can view themselves through the experience of the Other; it gives you a kind of experience that reflects your self-understanding and your understanding of the phenomena of life, culture, language and society. We hope that new possibilities will be open our future cooperation in Lithuanian-Norwegian-Russian common research and educational project which will use comparatists and descriptive methods.

Vida Savoniakaitė: Dear colleagues, I am looking on the border and identity under conditions of globalisation. Under these conditions we come across what theorists call “cross-border ethnicity”. Throughout history the importance of ethnicity has changed, as some ethnic groups are submitted to domination by others. The relationship between ethnic and national identity has given rise to much discussion and continues to do so. The ideologies of the modern world’s political nationalism requires citizens of the nation state to be united and integrated into the nation state. Globalisation in economic and cultural life has a tendency to reduce ethnicity to the folkloristic boundaries of society (Featherstone, Smith). In many cases, ethnicity has become less important to people who support the multicultural policy and other ideas of post-industrial polyethnic states (Giddens, Smith). Ethnic differences have eroded because of the economic and political demands of modern industrial societies and the

influence of recreated ethnic myths and ethnic heritage (Hutchinson, Smith). Our research into Lithuanians of the Polish borderlands and later observations encourage the supposition that we may regard their ethnicity as one that crosses borders and is constructed and passed down in families and communities. Ethnographic research shows how an individual’s behaviour depends on rational choice.

According to many scientists, it is important for cosmopolitanists to liberate themselves from the chains of ethnicity and from other classifications and essential identities, to occupy a universal state, and to manifest openness, i.e. to challenge ordinary societal spaces. Nigel Rapport stresses strong and important connections between the individual and the social framework of cultural identity, in which framework “difference” becomes completely politicised. The collaborations on borderlands of individuals themselves and the actions of the elite constructing people’s ethnicity and nationality are no less so important. Rational choice theorists stress that the choices of every individual can be unique in the labour market and the regulation of economic markets in the search for advantage and so on (Hechter). An actor’s models in ethnic relations are known when assimilation or the cultural strategy of the majority is selected and children are educated in majority schools and so forth. The circumstances of the Polish borderlands which we have studied find much resonance in the globalised world. From my view, Lithuania’s case is interesting due to its opposing elements, i.e. the clash of the new mental models with the old ones. Many new theoretical methodological models for the investigation of regional space are acceptable for both anthropologists and ethnologists, i.e. attitudes towards identity boundaries, comparative special features of the social structures, cultural policy, and cultural tradition research. The distinctive definitions of people’s identity, the historical memory, and the attitudes towards cultural traditions show the idiosyncrasies of the spaces and places.

Thomas Lunden: I think that different countries have different views on minorities, different understanding of its definition, and as a consequence legislation. For example, Sweden for a very long time had no defined minorities, a concept very close to the French model where “nationality” was seen as being the same as “citizenship”. Not until recently, in 1999, several definitions of “national minorities” emerged; Sámi, Finns, Tornedalians (“Swedified Finns”), Roma and Jews. These groups are very different, and some members would not define themselves as “national minorities”. If I were to speak with my Jewish friends in Sweden using this category or definition, I am afraid that they would be astonished and would not understand me, as they have very individual relations to being Jewish. I see the state’s role here is not in defining minorities, but in helping all citizens to preserve their mother tongue and culture if they wish, while also helping them to communicate with the majority population without being pressured into assimilation.

Viggo Rossvær: Dear colleagues, two “big theory” approaches have had big influence in border theory. At the same time as the Norwegian Barents Secretariat was established, two competing “big theory” approaches to border theory were presented to the reading world. These books both were published in New York and represent a continuation of the American debate about Eastern Europe, initiated by USA President Woodrow Wilson’s political engagement in Europe after the First World War. *The End of History and the Last Man* (1994) by Francis Fukuyama published in New York launched his theory and four years later as a direct critical response – came Huntington’s alternative theory, *The Clash of Civilizations*.

Samuel Huntington tried to correct Wilson’s ideas about the political situation in Europe. But the arguments in his book were grounded on shaky empirical evidence. For Huntington world history is a continuous row of clashes. Any form of world order we can have only reveals new attempts to stabilize the constant

outbreak of culture-dependent ideologies in a never-ending attempt at survival.

Nevertheless, some of Huntington’s predictions concerning the civilization borders that are parting Europe have certainly come true. He is right in that the situation on the southern part of this border in Europa to-day has led into war. Huntington was right at least in Ukraine. This borderland contains cultural and religious fault lines that represent a major threat to peace.

But one cannot conclude from that that his theory about borders is all right. Even if he was partly right, I think he is overlooking that the border regions at the local level demonstrate the existence of cultural forces and institutions supporting peace.

He forgot to enquire empirically on the border, *who is the Other?* Therefore, one needs new empirical research about borders to see if borders are also bridges, in this way refuting Huntington and supporting the Kantian idea of borders as meeting places with an empirical fundament.

One would have to start research by operationalizing Huntington’s clash-thesis and also Kant’s ideas of unconditional respect by concepts coming from geography, sociology and anthropology developing tools sufficiently precise for this kind of peace research.

Marija Vabaite (LCRI): The subject of borders is a “hot” topic today. At the same time, it is very interesting for me from the view of its interdisciplinary. Social and humanitarian studies of borders during the last twenty years gave us many interesting theories, sociological and philosophical constructions and conclusions, but today exists “critical geography” which uses humanitarian studies methods. For example, “new geography”, this should be called cyber-geography or virtual space. I think that interdisciplinary approach is very fruitful for border studies.

Vida Savoniakaitė: I want to speak about interdisciplinary in the border and identity studies and our conference is a good example of that. In social science and humanities theory,

identity research concepts are connected with broad interdisciplinary discourses in anthropology, history, ethnology, philosophy, cultural studies, politics, etc. In anthropology and ethnology a modern epistemological approach and the theoretical interpretations of modernity and postmodernity have ushered in a great deal of pluralism. The classic anthropological methodologies and approach to the *other* and to *other* culture have unavoidably changed in post-colonial anthropology. We are seeking to bring attention to bear on several aspects influencing interesting pluralistic modern interpretations of *self* and *other* in anthropology and ethnology, i.e. scientific historical and interdisciplinary approaches, which are interestingly interpreted in the concepts of identity from national to individual *alterity*. I agree with Andre Gingrich whom analyzed this problem from a dichotomist point of view: *identity/alterity* or *difference*. This approach comes to anthropology from philosophy, literature critics, and cultural studies. It is one more argument in defense of interdisciplinary. I have a question to Małgorzata Bieńkowska. In your research, have you found interconnection between genders and different ethnicities?

Małgorzata Bieńkowska: We are in the beginning phase of our project, but we are ready to suggest, that from the view of ethnicity, mixed families are statistically visible in our borderland.

Basia Nikiforova: What you think about our common research activity? Do you see own niche or place in this project?

Vida Savoniakaitė: Yes, it is interesting for us but from other point of view: investigate borders not only between states, but between regions such as Baltic region and Barents region, as an example.

Inna Ryzhkova: The experience of exploring the border enables us to understand the universal and the particular in our own life and in that of our neighbors across the border, whereas a more profound reflection on this phenomenon helps us to discover new dimensions

of Being and of events on the border. We feel uniqueness of our border during the educational process, when our students from both sides of borders have various and sometime diverse experiences crossing the border. Our students know not only English, but Norwegian too. The process of education has multicultural dimension and creates multicultural environment.

Aleksandr Sautkin: In our project, we conducted research not only on state or geographical borders. In general, our approach is very interdisciplinary; it includes philosophical, metaphysical and educational aspects. Our collections of papers on Kant & Bakhtin problems (two issues) demonstrate this point of view. Multidimensional character of the border researches will also be reflected in the book, which is jointly prepared for publication by philosophers of the University of Nordland and Murmansk State Humanities University.

Basia Nikiforova: I have a question to Małgorzata Bieńkowska. In your presentation you speak about multidimensional person as minority, what about multidimensional person as majority?

Małgorzata Bieńkowska: In our sociological survey, we ask our students about typical futures of minorities, which in reality were very close to majority, later we had long discussion about minority identity backgrounds.

Viggo Rossvær: My proposal comes back to discussion about research project. I think that it should be a large project that invites researchers from many different areas and first of all philosophers and cultural geographers. Our idea to apply project to Baltic Sea Foundation means that the project will be large; it will demand serious multidimensional subject of research and strong team of researchers. Thomas Lunden is the only person that has the possibility to organize an idea, and people, and represent our problem. Today when I mentioned Huntington, I think that his idea about clash of civilizations might be the point of theoretical beginning for our project. At the same time, Basia Nikiforova told about other smaller, but fruitful

possibilities such as the annual conference that can apply through the programs of Nordic Council or European Council of Science and other European institutions.

Basia Nikiforova: Thomas, I agree with you, but when we look almost 20 years back, we should be astonished that Huntington in another political situation foretold about the possibility of nowadays mass migration crises. Viggo analysis of “clash of civilisations” definition only confirmed to me that this subject is the area of theoretical philosophical and geopolitical research.

Thomas Lunden: I understand my responsibility to find a person that can take leadership in preparation of the project and I hope that this mission will be possible. Meanwhile, we should look for another possibility during this time.

Viggo Rossvær: We will go in two directions: even if we will begin discussing our project plan this year, we will prepare new international conference in Klaipeda. The voice of respect for the other that is formulated by Kant is little noticed today. Of course, it is an old voice, having Stoic roots, but I think it is still heard to-day and should be taken seriously as an insight into the local Baltic cross border culture.

Basia Nikiforova: Dear colleagues, we hope that our discussion was fruitful and gave everybody different additional possibility for research. From my view, roundtables are an ideal format for networking and in-depth discussion on a border and its multidimensional topic. In conclusion, it is necessary to underline that one of the important and discussable questions are methodology and level of interdisciplinary in the border’s research area. **Naglis Kordelis, Vida Savoniakaitė and Viggo Rossvær** described importance of theoretical and philosophical levels of borders process understanding, which will give possibility to improve theoretical foundations of the borderology through history of philosophy. In addition, researchers bring attention to the necessity of deeper and more interdisciplinary investigation of aspects such as geographic, economic, geopolitical, gender studies. They add that the problem of tolerance and Other’s visibility are close connected with religious and linguistic situation on the borderlands.

Thank you very much for your collaboration and time.

Basia Nikiforova and Viggo Rossvær