

Cultural Capital in a Global Cosmopole

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This presentation explicitly wants to be a discussion paper. As such, it will not be a presentation based on extensive ethnographic, archive or other data, but more of an essay. I would like to compare the advantages and disadvantages of individual 'Africans' and 'Westerners' (in this essay a very broad category including broadly the Northern Atlantic and the Pacific Rim, but excluding South-East Europe) in global movement, through the notions of globalisation and cosmopolitanism. I propose to reserve the term globalisation for the material realm and to use the term cosmopolitanism to define and describe the social and cultural realm of human global interaction and adaptation. Especially left leaning scholars see humans as subordinate or having been made subordinate to capital within globalisation. At worst, they are seen as part of that capital in human form (human resources or human capital), and at best as owning or controlling capital (with capital remaining primary). In this view, Africans in general, and poor Africans especially, are strongly disadvantaged to Westerners who dominate the global scene, and who seem unwilling to relegate. This imbalance finds expression in Europe in discourses on illegal immigrants who come to 'profit' and against whom walls should be erected around 'fortress Europe', and in Africa in discourses on Europe as a land of milk and honey, or a land that should seek redemption for its colonial sin in sharing its wealth. Against this image, I would like to place another observation, namely that over the previous century, 'Westerners' have lost a large number of assets useful in living a global cosmopolitan life, whereas 'Africans' have kept these assets, expanded them and are now putting them to use. These assets can be described as personal networks and the capacity of adaptation. I would like to argue that the essential element shaping the participation of groups and individuals in patterns of globalisation and the creation of the cosmopolitan is not to be found in the form of mobility or the access to capital, but in the shape, constitution and potential of human networks created through (ac)culturalisations or the transformation of 'cultural capital'.