

**VERNACULAR COSMOPOLITANISM AND
THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNITY
IN GIANNINA BRASCHI'S *UNITED STATES OF BANANA* ^a**

Arijana Luburić-Cvijanović*

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad, Serbia

ORCID iD: [Arijana Luburić-Cvijanović](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9361-6848)  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9361-6848>

Abstract

In the aftermath of 9/11, Giannina Braschi's *United States of Banana* (2011) envisions a world of crumbling empires, destabilized economies, and new alliances among its vulnerable subjects. While exploring the possibilities for resistance in the changing landscapes of political and economic power, Braschi focuses specifically on "the immigrant and the terrorist" (Perisic, 2019, p. 26), and examines kaleidoscopic transformations of community, which are effected by global circulations of people and capital. Formally reflected by Braschi's endless experimentation with genre, what she repeatedly calls foreign-speaking English, structure, plot, and character, such transformations involve "the cosmopolitanization of reality" (Beck, 2006, p. 18) and the formation of what Homi Bhabha has termed vernacular cosmopolitanism, which is born marginal, on the border and in between, as cosmopolitanism of the underprivileged. Relying on a rich body of interdisciplinary theory on migration and cosmopolitanism, this article analyses the narrative's conceptualization of vernacular cosmopolitanism as cosmopolitanism 'from below', and the ongoing transformations of community that open up a space for new forms of solidarity and cooperation across difference in a time characterized by both global opportunity and global threat.

Key words: community, Giannina Braschi, migration, United States of Banana, vernacular cosmopolitanism.

^a The article was presented at the *Language, Literature, Process 2023 Conference* at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia.

* Corresponding author: Arijana Luburić-Cvijanović, University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, Dr Zorana Đinđića 2, 21101 Novi Sad, Serbia, alcvijanovic@ff.uns.ac.rs

ВЕРНАКУЛАРНИ КОСМОПОЛИТИЗАМ И ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЈА ЗАЈЕДНИЦЕ У ДЕЛУ *СЈЕДИЊЕНЕ БАНАНА ДРЖАВЕ ЂАНИНЕ БРАСКИ*

Апстракт

Експериментално дело *Сједињене Банана Државе* (2011) Ђанине Браски, написано десет година после 11. септембра, замишља свет обележен сломом империја, нестабилним привредама и новим савезништвима међу његовим рањивим субјектима. Док истражује могућности отпора у променљивим крајолицима политичке и економске моћи, Браски се посебно усредсређује на „имигранта и терористу“ (Perisic, 2019, стр. 26) и испитује каледоскопске трансформације заједнице као последицу глобалних токова људи и капитала. Формално изражене кроз ауторкино непрекидно поигравање са жанром, језиком који Браски често назива туђинским енглеским, структуром, заплетом и књижевним ликом, такве трансформације подразумевају „космополитизацију стварности“ (Beck, 2006, стр. 18) и формирање онога што је Хоми Баба назвао вернакуларним космополитизмом, који настаје на маргини, на граници и у међупростору, као космополитизам непривилегованих. У оквирима богате интердисциплинарне теорије о миграцији и космополитизму, овај чланак анализира концепт вернакуларног космополитизма у *Сједињеним Банана Државама* као космополитизма „одоздо“, те неумитне трансформације заједнице које крче простор за нове видове солидарности и сарадње преко граница разлике у времену које једнако карактеришу могућности и претње на глобалном нивоу.

Кључне речи: Ђанина Браски, миграција, *Сједињене Банана Државе*, вернакуларни космополитизам, заједница.

INTRODUCTION

Tectonic shifts in cosmopolitan perspectives after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which inspired a wave of utopian internationalism, and the attacks of 9/11, which exposed those utopian sentiments as naïve, have sparked debates in the rapidly expanding body of interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary cosmopolitan theory as to the precise nature and aims of contemporary cosmopolitanism. Whether it is understood as an attitude, a disposition, a strategy of resistance, a series of projects, a conceptual framework, or a defining feature of our times, post-9/11 cosmopolitanism is experienced as politically and ethically engaged, and decidedly realistic (Luburić-Cvijanović & Krombholc, 2024). Thus defined, cosmopolitanism as a theoretical framework is vital for understanding transforming late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century communities, and highlighting the issues of distributive justice, responsibility, accountability, solidarity, and empathy. Therefore, the framework plays a crucial role in examining the political, social, economic, demographic, and cultural changes in the twenty-first century, exposing the many underlying problems of continually reinforced inequalities, and proposing solutions. As such, cosmopolitan theory is frequently used to explore contemporary

narratives of underprivileged migration, which articulate the experiences of some of the world's most precarious subjects, illegal migrants, refugees, victims of human trafficking, and asylum seekers. For this reason, the present article employs studies of the new cosmopolitanism and migration to read a radically experimental text that dissects the post-9/11 political, economic and social realities in the Americas and the world. The significance of the selected text and the specific aims of this analysis are outlined in the following chapter.

*UNITED STATES OF BANANA:
PROCESS AND TRANSFORMATION*

Giannina Braschi's experimental fiction *United States of Banana* (2011) represents an example of "[p]rocess-oriented writing" that "invites us into the workshop to witness the experiment as it unfolds" (Bray et al., 2021, p. 13). This process is characterised by endless generic, linguistic and structural transformations and alternations, which mirror the transformations of the individual and the community in the text. At the same time, the characters of Braschi's highly political work engage in an endless dialogue, which points to another process and transformation, "the process of coming into relation through dialogue" (Perisic, 2019, p. 172). This phrase, as we shall see, equally applies to the underprivileged masses of the world that her characters represent and to the narrative's many disparate elements. Namely, the text is pervaded by a sense of deliberate randomness and capriciousness of composition, which combines prose, poetry, treatise, philosophical musings, colloquial dialogue, foreign-speaking English and Spanish, fictional and non-fictional characters. Braschi's experiment dispenses with plot, characterisation and spatiotemporal linearity, it plays with language, structure and form, defamiliarising the genre of the "novel", which is why I will refer to *United States of Banana* as a fiction or a text. Fragmented and scattered, the text aptly reflects a world of crumbling empires and shifting power relations in the aftermath of 9/11, which is signalled in the beginning by the death of the businessman, whose dismembered body intimates the fragmentation of both empire and Braschi's text. As such, Braschi's experimental fiction is ideally suited to the task of strongly political and playful but merciless dissection of the political, social and economic problems of the globalised world in the twenty-first century. Her narrative's compositional instability also suggests "the impossibility of identifying a clear and stable counterposition", which requires that "[n]ew modes of resistance" (Perisic, 2019, p. 157) are conceived. Precisely *what* these new modes of resistance might be remains unclear in the text – Braschi refers to them in general terms, as resistance or insurrection – but *who* should conceive of and exercise them is beyond doubt: the masses, the multitudes, the strangely re-

sistant cockroaches, as she variously refers to them in the text (Luburić-Cvijanović, Krombholz, & Vujin, 2023, p. 217).

By examining the implications of the intertwined transformations of text and community in *United States of Banana*, I wish to bring to light the significance of Braschi's discussion of the relations between Puerto Rico, Latin America and the Global South on one hand, and the United States, North America and the Global North on the other, a discussion which flushes out social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities that call for action 'from below'. This action, the text suggests, can only be successfully performed by vernacular cosmopolitans as representatives of one among several variants of cosmopolitanism, a concept that has itself undergone numerous transformations. In my examination, I will rely on recent studies on migration, especially Aleksandra Perisic's *Precarious Crossings* (2019), and contemporary cosmopolitanism, without outlining cosmopolitanism in detail as I have done so elsewhere. Instead of an in-depth analysis of cosmopolitanism, this article will focus only on the notion of contemporary cosmopolitanism as defined by Ulrich Beck (2006), Berthold Schoene (2010) and Philip Leonard (2014), and, more specifically, the notion of vernacular cosmopolitanism as defined by Homi Bhabha (2001 [1996]). Both are crucial for understanding the social, political and cultural implications of *United States of Banana*.

BRASCHI'S POLITICAL VISION

Put simply, if simple descriptions suffice, Braschi's politically radical literary experiment focuses on "[t]he era of global transition, the decline of US power, as well as the fundamental role of Atlantic migrations in redefining power relations" (Perisic, 2019, p. 152). In other words, Braschi explores connectivity, "the buzzword of our era" (Winterson, 2021, p. 112), against our acute awareness of both (unequal) global opportunity (for business, travel, cultural cross-pollination) and (relatively equal) global threat (of terrorist attacks, war, natural disasters, viruses) (Luburić-Cvijanović et al., 2023, p. 219). She particularly focuses on the link between "connectivity and subalternity" to discuss

the proximity and multicultural compression of peoples, which often clash with their actual segregation and the persistence of strictly policed rules of entitlement and exclusion.

(Schoene, 2010, p. 127)

In the text, this is (quite literally) debated in the context of the unequal political, social and economic relations between the United States and Puerto Rico, North America and Latin America, and more generally, the Global North and the Global South, which frees her cosmopolitanism from the dangers of dehistoricised and, therefore, unanchored positions.

This allows Braschi, a Puerto Rican herself, to simultaneously consider two contexts, both of which place her cosmopolitan interests “‘outside’ the cartographic circle of Europe” (Dharwadker, 2001, p. 3).¹ The first context is America, and the intention is to undermine American myths (rooted in stories of individualism, the self-made man, and the cultural and racial melting-pot) from the position of the underprivileged (concretely, immigrants and terrorists). The second context is contemporary cosmopolitan fiction’s staple setting: the world in its interconnected yet splintered totality. To consider the links between these contexts, the author focuses on two central, intertwined figures, the immigrant and the terrorist:

[T]he United States of Banana has created the immigrant and the terrorist as two figures that embody its paradoxes and contradictions. Within the logic of Empire, an immigrant is always a potential terrorist; among immigrants is where ‘terrorists’ are fashioned, when they are needed to justify the state of exception. Both are, ultimately, the consequence of Empire’s military and neoliberal invasions.

(Perisic, 2019, p. 161)

To clarify this, the fiction considers two related movements: invasion and immigration as counter-invasion and a consequence of invasion. The movements are examined within the context of the war on terror, which creates a world of terror and an atmosphere of terror in which “‘anyone is a possible suspect” (Perisic, 2019, p. 162). Well, not anyone but anyone from the Global South, especially the Middle East, and especially a Muslim, a contemporary embodiment of the barbaric enemy.

In his celebrated poem “Waiting for the Barbarians” (1904), Constantine Cavafy brilliantly captures the significance of the barbarian enemy for self-definition and confirmation of the self’s purpose – “And now, what will become of us without barbarians? / Those people were some sort of a solution.” (Cavafy, 2007, p. 15) – as does J.M. Coetzee in the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), which was famously inspired by Cavafy’s poem. In a similar vein, Achille Mbembe explains the mechanisms behind the need for the enemy and for the identification or construction of the enemy:

In the context of the mimetic rivalry exacerbated by the ‘war on terror,’ having an enemy at one’s disposal (preferably in a spectacular fashion) has become an obligatory stage in the constitution of the subject and its entry into the symbolic order of our times.

(Mbembe, 2019, p. 48)²

¹ Vinay Dharwadker sees this as crucial for propelling cosmopolitan theory and practice in new directions. The quoted words do not relate to Braschi’s text, but are vital for understanding its contexts.

² Also mark the following elucidation: “Distinguishing between friends and enemies is one thing; identifying the enemy with accuracy is quite another. A disconcerting figure of

Here Mbembe is interested specifically in the war on terror, which provides a link to Braschi's text. Her characters – immigrants and terrorists, immigrants-cum-terrorists – are imprisoned in the dungeons of the Statue of Liberty in the heat of this war. They have migrated in search of a politically, economically and/or culturally better life and freedom, but have faced alienation and captivity in their stead. The immigrants' captivity in the text illustrates that

[i]ncluding in democracies, political struggle increasingly consists in a struggle to know who can develop the most repressive measures faced with the enemy threat.

(Mbembe, 2019, p. 31)

Braschi's lengthy examination also tries to determine how the enemy threat is identified, so "the qualification of the enemy" becomes crucial: "what type of enemy are we dealing with, against whom are we fighting and how?" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 25) In *United States of Banana*, from the point of view of the crumbling empire, the enemy is, of course, the immigrant, the potential terrorist, who for this reason becomes a prisoner of war (on terror). From the position of the immigrant and the terrorist, however, the enemies are US imperialism, capitalism and neoliberalism. To borrow Mbembe's words, these enemies openly advance among us and around us (Mbembe, 2019, p. 49) during the state of emergency, so Braschi's playful examination of the state of emergency and the state of exception grows inseparable from her penetrating critique of the post-9/11 perceptions and treatment of immigrants in and by the United States.

Segismundo, a central character in the fiction, "the model for illegal extraterrestrial aliens" (read: enemies) and an allegory of Puerto Rico, which has been declared by the United States of Banana "a state of exception, a state of emergence, an emergent state" (Braschi, 2011, pp. 164-165), as such represents a result of the combined *production* of exception, emergency and fictionalised enemy. Again, Mbembe's reflections provide a striking parallel with Braschi's discussion:

In such instances, power (which is not necessarily state power) continuously refers and appeals to the exception, emergency, and a

ubiquity, the enemy is henceforth more dangerous by being everywhere: without face, name, or place. If the enemy has a face, it is only a veiled face, the simulacrum of a face. And if the enemy has a name, this might be only a borrowed name, a false name whose primary function is dissimulation. Such an enemy advances, at times masked, at other times openly, among us, around us, and even within us, ready to emerge in the middle of the day or in the heart of night, each time his apparition threatening the annihilation of our way of life, our very existence." (Mbembe, 2019, p. 49) These words go to the very heart of Cavafy's, Coetzee's and Braschi's works even if they discuss different contexts.

fictionalized notion of the enemy. It also *labors to produce* these same exceptions, emergencies, and fictionalized enemies.

(Mbembe, 2019, p. 70; my emphasis)

Such fictionalised enemies are produced during the state of emergency and exception, which are likewise produced, to justify a relation of hatred “that authorizes the giving of a free rein to all sorts of otherwise forbidden desires” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 48). Braschi allegorises the giving of a free reign to otherwise forbidden desires in the following way: Americans are reptiles and employ Oliver the Exterminator to chase after cockroaches (Puerto Ricans and other Others), which literalises the idea that “the enemy is a prey” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 88), a pest to be eliminated. The “chase” unfolds on the micro level, on Liberty Island, and on the macro level, around the globe. It is on the micro level where the seeds of insurrection are sown, among the fictionalised and allegorised enemies as representatives of vernacular cosmopolitanism and the New Man.

*POSTCARDS FROM LIBERTY ISLAND:
VERNACULAR COSMOPOLITANISM AND THE NEW MAN*

The book-length debate among Braschi’s characters that makes up the fiction takes place on Liberty Island, where real and fictionalised “representatives of formerly colonized countries encounter each other to discuss alternatives to US domination, forming the Atlantic undercommons” (Perisic, 2019, p. 158). The island’s Statue of Liberty was historically associated with liberty as a revolutionary idea – it was meant to signify a fight against the status quo as a symbol of equality, freedom and democracy – but is now “a symbol of the establishment” (Braschi, 2011, p. 85), of democracy as advertised and practised by the United States. In Braschi’s outspoken text, Lady Liberty says: “When immigrants come looking for freedom, I suck their juice...” (Braschi, 2011, p. 82). In *United States of Banana*, immigrants become prisoners in the dungeons of Lady Liberty, and like the underdogs that they are made to be – “They wanted us to be stray dogs—not belonging—not forming part—not incorporating—not given a chance.” (Braschi, 2011, p. 223) – they sniff the smells of her vagina there and feed on leftovers like dogs. But these people, who have inalienable qualities but no inalienable rights, since rights are “full of privileges—and permissions—and escape doors that don’t allow everybody the same access” (Braschi, 2011, p. 57), start the process of transformation whose potential is signalled by the very place where they are.

Braschi’s characters, if characters they can be called, find themselves in the city as “the archetypal geopolitical unit of cosmopolitanism” (Dharwadker, 2001, p. 10). Specifically, they are in New York, “a place where the very concept of nation is a splintered internationalism, where

the national language is a babel” (Boxall, 2013, p. 136). The narrative’s splintered form reflects this, as does its foreign-speaking English, seasoned with the odd Spanish word that the voices of this polyphonic narrative speak. Such a language points to one among a myriad changes that characterise the experience of migration:

Habitual language use may slide or be jolted from one tongue to another, with all that such a change implies about the means of representation in words.

(White, 1995, p. 3)

Braschi demonstrates how it may slide or be jolted, so her foreign-speaking English, as untamable as her fiction, exemplifies “creative destruction of English from inside” (Perisic, 2019, p. 169) but also, I might add, its creative reconstruction. The language’s purpose is “to function as a terrorist threat to the language of Empire” (Perisic, 2019, p. 170), and to “convey the heterogeneous and splintered nature of the masses” (Luburić-Cvijanović et al., 2023, p. 214) that are locked up in the dungeons of Lady Liberty. This is a space of cultural cross-pollination, of “multilingualism and cultural heterogeneity that underlie cosmopolitan formations” (Dharwadker, 2001, p. 5), and the setting which gives birth to Braschi’s *New Man* as an embodiment of vernacular cosmopolitanism and a potential threat to the logic of empire.

Ceaseless global flows of people and capital have led to what Ulrich Beck calls banal cosmopolitanism and banal cosmopolitanisation of everyday life that testifies to our “anonymous coexistence and the overlapping of possible worlds and global dangers” (Beck, 2006, p. 10). It is the kind of cosmopolitanisation of reality that we find in food and fashion, for instance, which is associated with cultural consumption. Braschi’s immigrants participate in reality’s cosmopolitanisation, and are themselves being cosmopolitanised. In the process, they occupy “[t]he interstitial spaces – the in-between, hyphenated spaces made available by globalisation” (Boxall, 2013, p. 171), the spaces where vernacular cosmopolitanism is born as cosmopolitanism ‘from below’. If ceaseless flows of people and capital have created various kinds of cosmopolitanism, or cosmopolitanisms, they have also given birth to different types of cosmopolitans. In an informed classification that touches a raw nerve despite its apparent simplification, Alfredo González-Ruibal identifies

two kinds of cosmopolitans: the powerful and the disempowered, those who have chosen to live with others in different countries, and those who have been forced to do so (such as labor migrants and refugees).

(González-Ruibal, 2009, p. 117)

Vernacular cosmopolitanism, which is marginal and born “on the border, *in between*” (Bhabha, 2011, 48), is associated with the latter kind, the disempowered, whose common denominator is their position “below”, and whose heterogeneity is endlessly emphasised in and mimicked by Braschi’s text. In the text, this cosmopolitanism of the underprivileged develops as “a strategy of resistance” (Schoene, 2010, p. 5) in the dungeons of Lady Liberty, literally “below”. Light years away from “a comfortable cosmopolitanism that allows Western(ized) elites to keep their lifestyles and worldviews” (González-Ruibal, 2009, p. 118), vernacular cosmopolitanism is vital in resisting the conditions that have created and perpetuated inequalities. Its embodiment is Braschi’s New Man:

twenty-first-century man, a messenger of a mixed racial and cultural background, who has blue or hazelnut Chinese eyes, freckles and an afro, and speaks Spanglish with a Russian accent.

(Luburić-Cvijanović et al., 2023, p. 212)

S/he is “not a product of naïve internationalist perspectives or of mobility as a privilege” but is instead “brought about by the unequal global circulations of people, capital and culture”, which is reflected by the perpetual movement that underlies the text, and s/he “embodies the more realistic post-9/11 internationalism and cosmopolitanism” (Luburić-Cvijanović et al., 2023, p. 213). The New Man’s simultaneously split and plural identity, a product of migration and shifting power relations, translates into an endlessly reassembling form. The form’s fragmentation and restructuring, therefore, acts out the New Man’s, and the fiction’s, cosmopolitan nature.

The New Man’s identity provides evidence of “the construction of countless hybrid and miscegenated identities” in the last few decades, and in the fiction reflects:

the changing status both of the nation and of the global community, as we struggle to fashion a new idea of global relations and a new idea of democratic freedom.

(Boxall, 2013, p. 169)

More than ten years after the publication of *United States of Banana* we are still struggling, perhaps even more so in the aftermath of Covid-19 and in view of the current war between Russia and Ukraine. Despite the struggle, there *is* potential for positive transformation, and it lies in the New Man, whose identity crosses cultures, nations and ethnicities. Admittedly, the identity of the New Man is only postnational in going beyond national identifications, because the text shatters global culture’s myth of “the porosity of national borders” (Leonard, 2014, p. 3) and of a borderless world: national borders may be porous for cultural influences, viruses and, most importantly, capital, but they are far less po-

rous for people. At the same time, Braschi rewrites what Leonard calls “the prevailing *mythos*” of late twentieth-century “narratives of a connected humanity” (Leonard, 2014, p. 4) by exposing the underside of such connectivity.

Within this *mythos*, power is seen to be distributed across regions of the world, markets are no longer limited to national – or even international – economies, information is disseminated as a force for global democracy, and the social sphere has been refigured as a universal association.

(Leonard, 2014, p. 4)

Braschi’s text exposes all of this as a myth, a projection of a world that is not yet ours, for power is not distributed, and there is no global democracy, or justice, or solidarity. Yet. Among the rebellious immigrants and prisoners of war the potential for transformation is mobilised from the “shared conditions of contemporary immigrants” that “precipitate new linguistic and social modes of living” (Perisic, 2019, p. 155). In other words, from vernacular cosmopolitanism, ‘from below.’

Segismundo, the chief prisoner and Braschi’s allegorical representation of Puerto Rico’s slavish position, dreams of a world of Missizona, Nuyoricans, Chiletinos, and Canazuelans, a world without mental blocks (Braschi 134-135), and of a community that ‘thrives on recurrent reassemblage’ (Schoene 21), whose inevitable disorderliness is literalised as Braschi’s unruly text.

(Luburić-Cvijanović et al., 2023, p. 216)

Missizona, Nuyoricans, Chiletinos, and Canazuelans expose the many heterogeneous yet shared experiences of disempowerment while at the same time pointing towards and calling for vernacular cosmopolitanism, which is driven by openness to dialogue.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: “SENSES OPEN TO TRANSFORMATIONS”

The openness of Braschi’s text as an example of “writing that goes overboard and over borders—and that is on the edge of breaking—and finds a light—and beams” (Braschi, 2011, p. 236), a text characterised by change, with no beginning, middle or end, mirrors the openness of the cosmopolitan community: “we are open people” with “senses open to transformations” (Braschi, 2011, pp. 232-233). Openness to transformations, but also “openness to the needs of others” (González-Ruibal, 2009, p. 119) as a key feature of vernacular cosmopolitanism, is rooted in the real, material, lived conditions of the globalised world, which is why transformation into a world in which we include rather than exclude, in

which roads shake hands instead of crossing each other, and everyone is invited on equal turns as a citizen of the world (Braschi, 2011, pp. 286, 253, 279) cannot happen without insurrection; if it can happen at all, sceptics would say. Insurrection replaces

the regressive fantasy of freedom – to invent oneself, to fashion oneself – that is painfully at odds with the material conditions that determine real global relations.

(Boxall, 2013, p. 172)

This conditional relationship also works, and perhaps more frequently, in the other direction: global relations determine material conditions. This is where openness to the needs of others takes centre stage. Alfredo González-Ruibal believes that “[i]f there is any hierarchy in our responsibilities toward others, it should be dictated by the urgency of the situation” (González-Ruibal, 2009, p. 121). Indeed, it should, but González-Ruibal fails to note that what counts as urgency depends on the point of view: an epidemic in Africa may not seem urgent to the privileged in Europe or America, until it knocks on their doors. Similarly, local deforestation problems in the Amazon may appear strictly local, and therefore less urgent, until we feel their effects on the global scale.

To go back to the “regressive fantasy of freedom”, the concept may also apply to freedom of movement. While the privileged world takes freedom of movement for granted since mobility is a part of everyday reality – one travels for work or pleasure, to study abroad or participate in international conferences or sports events – to large populations of the world mobility is impossible or nightmarish, as the world of allegedly disintegrating national borders does not enable equal movement for all³. This is painfully exposed by both fictional and nonfictional migrant writing, which attempts to “capture the essence of what it is like to *be* a migrant [...] cut off from history and from a sense of place” (King et al., 1995, ix-x). For instance, like Braschi’s fictional *United States of Banana, Somewhere We Are Human* (2022), an anthology of fictional and non-fictional writing and art by undocumented immigrants, comprises diverse and deeply personal accounts of migration and life as an undocumented immigrant in the United States, shedding light on matters of politics, economy, class, race, gender and personal relations. In equally formally and generically scattered but different guises, both these works discuss the politically and economically precarious position of the (undocumented) immigrant for whom national borders are not porous, while at the

³ This is precisely what Braschi mockingly criticises when she has Gertrude and Basilio, decontextualised from *Hamlet* (1603) by William Shakespeare and *Life is a Dream* (1636) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, and symbols of the North and the South respectively, promise all Latin Americans US passports.

same time calling for empathy, solidarity and justice. Braschi's text literalises the idea of freedom as a fantasy when she has L/liberty imprison the many fictional and fictionalised immigrants in the *United States of Banana*, establishing the text as one in which "freedom has become alien to itself, corrupted, unthinkable" (Boxall, 2013, p. 190). Unlike the novels by Jonathan Franzen, David Mitchell, Roberto Bolaño, and several other writers that Peter Boxall discusses as those which project the aforementioned vision of freedom, novels which show "the desire to build another world, in which freedom, sovereignty and democracy might *come back* into alignment" (Boxall, 2013, p. 190; my emphasis), *United States of Banana* asks the following question: when were they ever in alignment and for whom?

This is why a complete overhaul is necessary, and Braschi believes it can only be achieved through resistance. *United States of Banana* proves wrong Boxall's claim that the twenty-first-century novel finds that the global forces which bring different peoples and histories together "deprive such peoples of a common language with which to articulate a hybrid existence", so "the hyphenated identities in the twenty-first century tend to remain ungathered" (Boxall, 2013, pp. 173-174). In Braschi's text, hyphenated identities gather around a common purpose and find a common language in resistance: resistance to US imperialism. Resistance is powered by an alliance between "the Puerto Rican immigrant and the Middle Eastern war prisoner, so-called terrorist", who "meet in Lady Liberty's dungeon" (Perisic, 2019, p. 153), an alliance among the "wretched of the earth", to borrow Franz Fanon's famous phrase. However, some of the crucial issues that Braschi addresses, concerning the forms of resistance which are available in the state of emergency, as well as the question of how "politics, philosophy, and aesthetics" can "participate in this process conjointly" (Perisic, 2019, p. 154), remain open to debate. Nevertheless, the text is committed to the idea of resistance, which, it believes, has to be organised from below, by the New Man as a vernacular cosmopolitan.

The idea of resistance and the concept of politically and ethically engaged post-9/11 cosmopolitanism permeate every aspect of *United States of Banana*. Braschi's wish to imagine "the totality of the world, not simply by representing it but also by creating a world in its totality" (Perisic, 2019, p. 157) is decidedly cosmopolitan, as are her focus on underprivileged cosmopolitans, the world's "countless sub-worlds of powerless, disenfranchised daily living" (Schoene, 2010, p. 14), and a strong sense of communality and solidarity that saturates her kaleidoscopically shifting fragmented yet cohesive text. As such, the text undermines the common vision of globalisation "as an emergent . . . diffuse, technologically enabled, universally connected, politically decentralized and inclusive condition" (Leonard, 2014, p. 8), and shows just how far we are from

that version of reality, which remains inaccessible to most people on this planet. Today, authority continues “to gravitate towards the locations preferred by the market”, while globalisation continually fails to develop “mechanisms for consensual and participatory inclusion which extend to all populations and regions”; instead, globalisation has “delivered new systems for maintaining structural imbalances and the reassertion of sovereign authority” (Leonard, 2014, pp. 29, 28). This is why total transformation is needed, as *United States of Banana* suggests, calling for cosmopolitanism not only as “a way of articulating a concern for others without couching it in universalistic or paternalistic terms” (González-Ruibal, 2009, p. 119), but also as a strategy of *actively* challenging universalism and paternalism. The first step towards that kind of transformation is insurrection.

In the end, what transformations and processes does Braschi’s endlessly transforming “process-oriented” text discuss? The post-9/11 shifting power relations and economic balances from the point of view of those who are below, transformation as conscientious cosmopolitanisation of both individual and community, and the transformation of society whose potential is unlocked by resistance and rebellion from below. The dungeon of Lady Liberty welcomes new arrivals until “they become a whole population, the size of the state, living in the Empire’s underbelly” (Perisic, 2019, p. 163), and their heterogeneity and unruliness, literalised by the heterogeneous and unruly text, has the potential to take down the system and reimagine the US and the world.

REFERENCES

- Beck, U. (2006). *The Cosmopolitan Vision*. Translated by Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bhabha, H. (2001). Unsatisfied: Notes on vernacular cosmopolitanism. In G. Castle (Ed.), *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology* (pp. 39-52). Oxford and Malden: Blackwell.
- Braschi, G. (2011). *United States of Banana*. Seattle: Amazon Crossing.
- Bray, J., Gibbons, A., & McHale, B. (2012). Introduction. In J. Bray, A. Gibbons, and B. McHale (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (pp. 1-18). London and New York: Routledge.
- Boxall, P. (2013). *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cavafy, C.P. (2007). *The Collected Poems*. Translated by Evangelos Sachperoglou. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dharwadker, V. (2001). Introduction. In V. Dharwadker (Ed.), *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture* (pp. 1-13). New York and London: Routledge.
- González-Ruibal, A. (2009). Vernacular Cosmopolitanism: An Archaeological Critique of Universalistic Reason. In L. Meskell (Ed.), *Cosmopolitan Archaeologies* (pp. 113-139). Durham and London: Duke University Press.

- Grande, R., & Guiñansaca, S. (Eds.). (2022). *Somewhere We Are Human: Authentic Voices on Migration, Survival, and New Beginnings*. New York: HarperVia.
- King, R., Connell, J., & White, P. (1995). Preface. In R. King, J. Connell, and P. White. (Eds.), *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration* (pp. ix-xvi). London and New York: Routledge.
- Leonard, P. (2014). *Literature After Globalization: Textuality, Technology and the Nation-State*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury.
- Luburić-Cvijanović, A. & Krombholz, V. (2024). "Atom and Dream": Meatspace and Cyberspace in Jeanette Winterson's *The PowerBook*. *Contemporary Women's Writing*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpae001>.
- Luburić-Cvijanović, A., Krombholz, V., & Vujin, B. (2023). *Out of Bounds: Transgressivity in Poetry, Drama and Fiction*. Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu.
- Mbembe, A. (2019). *Necropolitics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Perisic, A. (2019). *Precarious Crossings: Immigration, Neoliberalism, and the Atlantic*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Schoene, B. (2010). *The Cosmopolitan Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- White, P. (1995). Geography, Literature and Migration. In R. King, J. Connell, and P. White. (Eds.), *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration* (pp. ix-xvi). London and New York: Routledge.
- Winterson, J. (2021). *12 Bytes*. London: Jonathan Cape.

ВЕРНАКУЛАРНИ КОСМОПОЛИТИЗАМ И ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЈА ЗАЈЕДНИЦЕ У ДЕЛУ СЈЕДИЊЕНЕ БАНАНА ДРЖАВЕ ЂАНИНЕ БРАСКИ

Аријана Лубурић-Цвијановић

Универзитет у Новом Саду, Филозофски факултет, Нови Сад, Србија

Резиме

Концепт вернакуларног космополитизма, преузет од Хомија Бабе, дефинише се као космополитизам који настаје на маргини, на граници и у међупростору. Као такав, погодан је за тумачење савременог космополитизма у делу *Сједињене Банана Државе* порториканске ауторке Ђанине Браски. У овом експерименталном делу, он се успоставља као космополитизам непривилегованих који настаје „одоздо“, у контексту миграција глобализованог света, односа између Северне Америке и Порторика, Северне Америке и Латинске Америке, те Глобалног севера и Глобалног југа, као и рата против тероризма, и игра кључну улогу у трансформацији заједнице. У разматрању његовог потенцијала у пружању отпора и остваривању нових видова солидарности и сарадње преко граница разлике, Браски се усредсређује на неке од најрањивијих светских субјеката, а посебно на имигранта као потенцијалног терористу, у свету обележеном политичком и економском нестабилношћу. Позивајући се на интердисциплинарну теорију о миграцији и савременом космополитизму у тумачењу космополитизма и трансформације заједнице у делу *Сједињене Банана Државе*, овај рад долази до следећих закључака.

Отвореност као једна од суштинских карактеристика ове фикције Ђанине Браски одражава отвореност космополитске заједнице и Новог човека. Као и *Сједињене Банана Државе*, дело посвећено разоткривању митова глобализова-

ног света обележеног застрашујућим неједнакостима, а написано на „туђинском енглеском“ и на порозним границама између романа, филозофског трактата, поезије и драме, космополитска заједница је у непрестаном процесу преображавања. Отвореност према трансформацији, као и отвореност према потребама других, кључне су одлике овог експерименталног текста и вернакуларног космополитизма који у њему настаје у тамницама Кипа слободе, где се заточени имигранти и/или (потенцијални) терористи удружују у отпору. За успех отпора неопходан је Нови човек, отеловљење вернакуларног космополитизма. Нови човек, чија културна, расна, етничка и свака друга хетерогеност отелотворује и хетерогеност самог овог текста, указује на неопходност отпора политичком и економском угњетавању, демонизовању и дискриминацији појединаца и заједница, и, конкретније, америчком империјализму, као и на потенцијал истинске космополитске солидарности, одговорности и правде као основа за настанак праведнијег, толерантнијег и слободнијег света.