Cosmopolitanism
Pheng Cheah
*Theory Culture Society* 2006; 23; 486
DOI: 10.1177/026327640602300290

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://tcs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/23/2-3/486

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *Theory, Culture & Society* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://tcs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://tcs.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations http://tcs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/23/2-3/486
Cosmopolitanism

Pheng Cheah

Abstract  In modernity, the concept of cosmopolitanism has changed from an intellectual ethos to a vision of an institutionally embedded global political consciousness. The central problem that troubles cosmopolitanism from its moment of inception in 18th-century philosophy to the globalized present is whether we live in a world that is interconnected enough to generate institutions that have a global regulatory reach and a global form of solidarity that can influence their functioning. Examination of Kant's pre-nationalist cosmopolitanism, Marx's postnationalist cosmopolitanism, and decolonizing socialist nationalism indicates the normative attraction of the nation as a mode of solidarity. Contemporary arguments about new cosmopolitanisms focusing on the rise of transnational networks of global cities, postnational social formations created by migrant and diasporic flows and Habermas's recent revival of Kant's project of cosmopolitan democracy have likewise failed to address the persistence of nationalism as a normative force within the field of uneven globalization.

Keywords cosmopolitan democracy, cosmopolitanism, diaspora, global civil society, globalization, Habermas, Kant

The story of the concept of cosmopolitanism in modernity is that of a passage from an intellectual ethos to a vision of a global political consciousness that is generated and sustained by institutional structures. The central problem that troubles the modern concept of cosmopolitanism from its moment of inception in 18th-century European philosophy to the globalized present is whether we live in a world that is interconnected enough to generate, on the one hand, institutions that have a global reach in their regulatory function and, on the other, a global form of political consciousness or solidarity, a feeling that we belong to a world that can take root and be sustained within these institutions and influence their functioning in turn. Any theory of cosmopolitanism must therefore address two related questions, first, an empirical question concerning the cosmopolitan extensiveness of a regulatory power embedded in institutions, and, second, a question about the normativity of these institutions, whether they can be in a relation of mutual feedback with a global political consciousness that voices the universal interests of humanity and tries to maximize human freedom. If both these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily, cosmopolitanism remains an intellectual ethos of a select clerisy, a form of consciousness without a mass base.
Arbitrary Conceptual Roots: Cosmopolitanism in Modern European Philosophy

D'Alembert's entry in the *Encyclopédie* notes that 'cosmopolitan' derives from the Greek words for 'world' (*cosmos*) and 'city' (*polis*) and that it refers to 'un homme qui n'a point de demeure fixe, ou bien un homme qui n'est étranger nulle part' (a man without a fixed abode, or better, a man who is nowhere a stranger) (Diderot and d'Alembert, 1751–65: 4, 297). The term's philosophical usage to indicate a 'citizen of the universe', however, emphasizes that this intellectual ethos or spirit is not one of rootlessness. Instead, what is imagined is a universal circle of belonging that involves the transcendence of the particularistic and blindly given ties of kinship and country. The cosmopolitan therefore embodies the universality of philosophical reason itself, namely its power of transcending the particular and contingent. Hence, the popular view of cosmopolitanism as an elite form of rootlessness and a state of detachment and nomadic non-belonging is mistaken. The cosmopolitan's universal circle of belonging embraces the whole of humanity. When cosmopolitanism is criticized for being a form of elitist detachment, the real point of dissatisfaction is that it is merely an intellectual ethos or perspective espoused by a select clergy because the philosophers of the French Enlightenment could not envision feasible political structures for the regular and widespread institutionalization of mass-based cosmopolitan feeling. The bonds of humanity, whether they are predicated in terms of reason or moral sentiment, may be the strongest possible ties. But for various reasons, not many people are able to feel their pull. Rousseau lamented that in relations between different societies, the Law of Nature, or natural pity, the original root of social virtues such as clemency and humanity, has lost almost all the force it had in the relations between one man and another, [and] lives on only in the few great Cosmopolitan Souls (grandes âmes cosmopolites) who cross the imaginary boundaries that separate Peoples and, following the example of the sovereign being that created them, embrace the whole of Mankind in their benevolence. (1766: 174)

In many respects, the true inaugurator of modern cosmopolitanism is Immanuel Kant. Kant retained the idea of membership to humanity as a whole by insisting on the importance of 'knowledge of man as a citizen of the world' (des Menschen als Weltbürgers) in his writings on pragmatic anthropology and universal history (1968a: 400). However, Kant was primarily concerned with man as a practical being and actor in history, someone who not only knows the world as a spectator of a play but knows his way about the world as a participant (1968a: 400). A world-citizen acts from the pluralistic standpoint of humanity as a collective actor as opposed to that of an egoistic individual (Kant, 1968a: 411). Accordingly, Kant articulated at least four different modalities of cosmopolitanism that would become the main topoi of contemporary discussions of the concept in normative international relations theory (including accounts of global civil society and the international public sphere), liberal political economy and theories of globalization. These different modalities, which are part of a systemic whole, are: (1) a world federation as the legal and political institutional basis for cosmopolitanism as a form of right; (2) the historical basis of cosmopolitanism in world trade; (3) the idea of a global public sphere; and (4) the importance of cosmopolitan culture in instilling a sense of belonging to humanity.

What Kant calls 'a universal cosmopolitan existence' is nothing less than the *regulative idea* of 'a perfect civil union of mankind' (1968b: 47). It is a constitutional global federation of all existing states that is based on cosmopolitan right ([Weltbürgerecht](http://tcs.sagepub.com), in so far as individuals and states, coexisting in an external relationship of mutual influences, may be regarded as citizens of a universal state of mankind ([allgemeinen Menschenstaats](http://tcs.sagepub.com)) ([ius cosmopoliticum](http://tcs.sagepub.com)). (Kant, 1968e: 203n)

Although it would not possess the coercive means of enforcement available to a world-state, it would nevertheless be a legitimately institutionalized world community, able to make rightful claims on its constituent states regarding their treatment of individuals and other states.
Individual states would retain their sovereignty, but would be held accountable by a universal citizenry – humanity – with regard to issues such as disarmament and imperialist expansion. Kant’s world federation would therefore fall somewhere between the political community of the state in its lawful relations with other states and a world-state.

Kant regarded state sovereignty as inviolable because the state was formed through an original contract by rational consensual individual wills. He also believed that the state had a fundamental role in the moral-cultural education of its citizens. Hence, his idea of cosmopolitan right remained restricted. The cosmopolitan community is a federation of states and not of world citizens, and the ultimate purpose of ‘a cosmopolitan system of public political security [weltbürgerlichen Zustand der öffentlichen Staatssicherheit]’ is to bring about lasting peace so that states can devote their time and efforts to the cultural education of their citizens and increase their aptitude for morality instead of wasting their resources on expansionist war efforts (Kant, 1968b: 44–7). Consequently, the scope of cosmopolitan right is limited to the provision of hospitality. It is ‘the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else’s territory’, a mere right of resort and not a right of a guest to expect to be entertained (Kant, 1968e: 213–16). The protection of individual rights that we call ‘human rights’ does not fall under cosmopolitan right but is left to the civil constitution of each state (Kant, 1968e: 204–6). Matters concerning relations between states such as the principle that a state has no right to use its citizens for war against other states are also not governed by cosmopolitan right, but come under the right of peoples (Völkerrecht) (Kant, 1968d: 467–9).

In Kant’s view, world trade provided the historical basis of cosmopolitan unity. As the spirit of commerce spreads throughout the world, states find that it is in their self-interest to enter into a world federation to prevent war and violence because these deplete their financial power (Geldmacht) (1968e: 226). Moreover, the unity brought about by trade and other forms of encounter between countries creates something like a global public sphere that will safeguard cosmopolitan right by protesting any violations of it in the same manner that a critical national public sphere safeguards the rights of citizens vis-à-vis the territorial state:

the peoples of the earth have thus entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere. The idea of a cosmopolitan right is therefore not fantastic or overstrained; it is a necessary complement to the unwritten code of political and international right, transforming it into a public right of humanity [öffentlichen Menschenrechte]. (Kant, 1968e: 216–17)

In addition, forms of culture also instill a deeper subjective sense of cosmopolitan solidarity or the feeling of belonging to humanity by encouraging universal social communication and sympathy. The fine arts and the sciences play a crucial role in developing our humanity (Menschheit) because they involve ‘a universally communicable [allgemein miteilen] pleasure’ (Kant, 1968c: §83, 321). The humanities (humaniora) cultivate our mental powers by instilling in us the universal feeling of sympathy, and the ability to engage universally in very intimate communication. When these two qualities are combined, they constitute the sociability [Geselligkeit] that befits humanity and distinguishes it from the limitation of animals. (Kant, 1968c: §60, 300)

It is important to emphasize that although the different modalities of cosmopolitanism exhibit universalistic tendencies, unlike the philosophers of the French Enlightenment, Kant did not conflate the normativity of cosmopolitanism with that of moral reason and universal freedom. True freedom or autonomy could only be found in a kingdom (Reich) of ends, a systematic union of all rational beings through the moral law that each member is to treat himself and all others never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves. Such a community could never be realized in the finite, sensible world because all sensible existence,
including the actions of human beings, is determined by circumstances and principles that are not wholly rational, for instance, sensuous impulses and inclinations in the case of human action. The best we can hope for is that cultivation will curb our sensuous inclinations so that our resistance to acting out of obedience to the moral law can be minimized. What cultural education within the external institutional framework of a cosmopolitan federation attempts to create is ‘humanity’, the unity of the species as an empirical consciousness in general. But this can only be a simulacrum that asymptotically approximates the realm of ends.

Marx’s Proletarian Cosmopolitanism and the Mistaken Antinomy between Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism

The distinction between the normativity of morality and that of cosmopolitan right indicates that cosmopolitanism is not identical to moral freedom but is merely an institutional vehicle for its actualization. Consequently, cosmopolitanism is not necessarily opposed to nationalism in the way that universalism is opposed to particularism. Both forms of solidarity are alternative vehicles for the actualization of moral freedom. It is also erroneous to regard cosmopolitanism as the transcendence of the particularistic and parochial limits of the nation-form because cosmopolitanism may in fact precede the popular nation-state in history and nationalism in the history of ideas. Significantly, Kant does not have an understanding of the nation (Volk) as a self-conscious and strong form of popular solidarity that constitutes the basis for political solidarity. Like many of his contemporaries in the 18th and early 19th century, Kant spoke of the character of nations as a set of distinctive acquired or artificially cultivated traits that have developed from an innate character. However, national character is not considered a basis of solidarity. Solidarity only comes about in a civil condition (a society with distributive justice) and this is instituted by an original contract that constitutes the people as an articulated whole (Volk, populus) and the state (which has rights over the people) in one and the same moment (Kant, 1968a: 174; 1968d: §41, §43). Hence, for Kant, the people is defined by the state. ‘It is absurd,’ he suggests, ‘to speak of the majesty of a people [Volksmajestät]’ as a reason for war. It is the majesty of a state that leads a ruler ‘to order thousands of people to immolate themselves for a cause that does not truly concern them’ (Kant, 1968e: 209).

This means that Kant’s cosmopolitanism is not opposed to nationalism but to absolutist statism. His vision is formulated prior to the spread of popular nationalism in Europe, the period between 1825 and 1831 where nationality, in search of statehood, emerges for the first time as the primary basis of revolution. This period saw the rise of Greek, Belgian and Polish nationalist movements, first aroused by the Napoleonic invasion, and now rebelling against their Ottoman, Dutch, and Russian governments for the primary reason that these were foreign regimes. Formulated too early to take into account the role of nationalism in the transition between the age of absolutism and the age of liberalism, Kant’s cosmopolitanism is more a philosophical republicanism and federalism designed to reform the absolutist dynastic state than a theory opposing the modern theory of nationality. Indeed, because Kant writes at a time when the phenomenon and concept of ‘the nation’ is still at an embryonic stage, he points out that the Right of Peoples or Nations (Völkerrecht) is a misnomer since it actually refers to the lawful relation of states to one another, ius publicum civitatum (Kant, 1968d: §53, 466).

Kant could not predict that global capitalism was also the material condition of possibility of a different type of collective glue with similar humanizing aims. Like cosmopolitanism, nationalism in the initial moment of its historical emergence is a popular movement distinct from the state that also sought to provide rightful regulation for the behavior of absolutist states towards their subjects (Anderson, 1991). Before the tightening of the hyphen between nation and state through official nationalism, the ideals of cosmopolitanism and European nationalism in its early stirrings are almost indistinguishable (Meinecke, 1917). Pre-statized nationalism had an unbounded and cosmopolitan extensiveness and patriotism was viewed as a concrete actualization of ideals and ends that would merely be abstract under cosmopolitanism. One could describe Giuseppe Mazzini’s argument that the nation is the only
historically effective threshold to humanity as well as the nationalism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1808) as types of cosmo-nationalism (Mazzini, 1961; Fichte, 1978). Cosmo-nationalist themes are revived in the republican nationalism of Sun Yat-sen, the father of modern China, the idea of the proletarian nation in early Chinese socialism, and the decolonizing nationalisms of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral (Fanon, 1963; Meisner, 1967: 47–8; Cabral, 1979).

In the history of ideas, the notorious tensions between nationalism and cosmopolitanism become more apparent from Marx onwards. For Marx, proletarian cosmopolitanism is no longer just a normative horizon of world history or a matter of right growing out of international commerce. It is a necessary and existing form of solidarity grounded in the global exploitation that has resulted from the global development of forces of production. In stark contrast to Kant’s vision of cosmopolitanism, Marx’s characterization of the nation and its appendages – national economy, industry, and culture – in naturalistic and primordial terms in the Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848) indicates that a significant sense of national belonging had already developed (Marx and Engels, 1932b). But the nation is a false natural community, an ideological construction that marks the class interests of less developed bourgeois states such as the various German states and obscures the truly cosmopolitan essence of economic activity and civil society. Because economic activity transcends territorial borders, modern civil society is inherently cosmopolitan:

> It embraces the whole commercial and industrial life of a given stage and, insofar, transcends the state and the nation, though, on the other hand again, it must assert itself in its external relations as nationality and internally must organise [gliedern] itself as a state. (Marx and Engels, 1932a: 25–6)

The proletarian revolution must be directed against the national state because it contradicts the unbounded nature of civil society qua medium and form of economic activity. Because universal exploitation creates a universal class in advanced countries that has been dispossessed and freed of any illusions by utter poverty, the bourgeois ideology of ‘humanity’ will be demystified and bourgeois cosmopolitanism will be sublated (aufgehoben) and replaced by the cosmopolitan solidarity of the proletariat.

Marx’s proletarian cosmopolitanism is thus different from Kant’s pre-nationalist cosmopolitanism. Kant missed the potential of popular nationalism as an emancipatory force against statism because he could not predict that the material interconnectedness brought about by capitalism would engender the bounded political community of the nation. Marx’s socialist cosmopolitanism is an anti- and post-nationalism that reduces the nation to an ideological instrument of the state. He dismissed nationalism although he witnessed its rise. Identifying the nation too hastily with the bourgeois state, Marx reduced the nation to an ideological instrument of the state and saw nationalism as a tendentious invocation of anachronistic quasi-feudal forms of belonging in modernity. However, this antagonistic relation between socialist cosmopolitanism and nationalism has almost never been maintained from a historical-practical standpoint. The uneven character of capitalism as an actually existing global system implies an irreducible disparity between the working class in different parts of the world. This has repeatedly posed obstacles for the formation of a global proletarian consciousness or world community based on labor. The national question was most notably raised in response to anti-colonialist struggles in Asia and Africa. In the historical scene of decolonization, it is not only the material economic wealth that workers have produced that needs to be reappropriated. The nation’s spiritual or cultural personality has been taken away by territorial imperialism and continues to be expropriated by neo-colonial forces. In Amilcar Cabral’s exemplary reformulation, national liberation

> [is] the phenomenon in which a socio-economic whole rejects the denial of its historical process . . . [T]he national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, it is their return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination. (1979: 130)
Imperialism determines that the primary shape of struggle for the (neo)colonized peoples who make up the mass of the world’s population is nationalist. To remove the *nation* from the global circuit of property and commodification so that its people can have access to the products of their labor, the people must first achieve or regain their rightful cultural *personality*, which imperialism has violently usurped.

The same challenges to the formation of cosmopolitan solidarity continue to be raised today by popular nationalist responses to neocolonialism and uneven development. Two central issues stand out here. First, in a world where the nation-state is the primary form of political organization, can socialist cosmopolitanism have an adequate institutional basis if it does not work through a form of popular nationalism that seeks to shape state actions in accordance with the interests of humanity? Second, does a postnationalist form of cosmopolitan solidarity leave peoples in the postcolonial South vulnerable to the unequal and predatory imperatives of capitalist globalization under its current neoliberal dispensation?

**The Challenges of Contemporary Globalization: A New Cosmopolitanism?**

Although visions of cosmopolitanism have mutated from an intellectual ethos to an institutionally grounded global political consciousness, this institutional grounding has been put into question by the uneven character of global capitalism. There is an inadequation or lack of fit between the material interconnectedness brought about by global capitalism and the degree of formation of global solidarities. In other words, we cannot automatically assume that experiences of a globalizing world where people, things, and events have become more and more connected necessarily lead to and form the substrate for a cosmopolitan form of politics that displaces that of the nation-state. In the past decade, various processes of contemporary globalization such as transcultural encounters, mass migration and population transfers between East and West, First and Third Worlds, North and South, the rise of global cities as central sites for the management of global financial and business networks, the formation of transnational advocacy networks, and the proliferation of transnational human rights instruments have led to greater hopes that this inadequation can be overcome and that feasible global forms of political consciousness have in fact arisen. It is suggested that whatever its shortcomings, contemporary transnationalism furnishes the material conditions for new radical cosmopolitanisms from below that can regulate the excesses of capitalist globalization. In comparison with older philosophical approaches, some of the proponents of new cosmopolitanism attempt to dissociate it from universal reason, arguing that cosmopolitanism is now a variety of actually existing practical stances that are provisional and can lead to strategic alliances and networks that cross territorial and political borders. However, these new cosmopolitanisms still contain a normative dimension. It is claimed that they are normatively superior to more parochial forms of solidarity such as nationalism and that they represent, however provisionally, the interests of humanity because they exhibit a degree of autonomy from the imperatives of economic globalization.

Theories of new cosmopolitanism are essentially syntheses of three different arguments, which can be found in different combinations. First, it is suggested that cultural and political solidarity and political agency can no longer be restricted to the sovereign nation-state as a unified spatio-temporal container because globalization has undermined many of the key functions from which the nation-state derives its legitimacy. Second, the various material networks of globalization are said to have formed a world that is interconnected enough to generate political institutions and non-governmental organizations that have a global reach in their regulatory functions as well as global forms of mass-based political consciousness or popular feelings of belonging to a shared world. Third, this new cosmopolitan consciousness is characterized as a more expansive form of solidarity that is attuned to democratic principles and human interests without the restriction of territorial borders. In some cases, it is also suggested that the new cosmopolitan consciousness is in a relation of mutual feedback with emerging global institutions, taking root and finding sustenance from these institutions and influencing their functioning in turn.
The thesis of the spatial-geographical destriation of the world economy is most clearly expressed in Saskia Sassen’s work on global cities. Whereas the globalization of industrial production under post-Fordism created a hierarchical new international division of labor between center and periphery, Sassen argues that the outstripping of industrial capital by much more profitable non-industrial forms of capital such as international finance and the production of high-value specialized producer services crucial for the managing of global production networks (such as legal, accounting and business management services) have led to the rise of new geographical formations, global networks of interlinked cities, that no longer respect the center–periphery distinction. New York, London and Tokyo, the paradigmatic global cities, have become dislocated from their respective nation-states, and function instead as ‘a surplus-extracting mechanism vis-à-vis a “transnational hinterland”’, ‘as a transterritorial marketplace’ in which each plays a different complementary role (Sassen, 1991: 127, 327). These networks are a complex border-zone that facilitates the penetration of the nation-state by global forces.

However, for ‘the partial unbundling’ of the nation through global economic processes to have any normative significance, it has to be aligned with the rise of new supranational political formations that can replace the normative deficit caused by the nation’s weakening. Otherwise, the denationalization of the state merely serves the predatory rights of global capital. Here, the focus inevitably shifts to the concomitant proliferation of global political institutions radiating from the UN system and organizations and discourses centered on human rights and the rise of a new cosmopolitan culture through transnational migration and global cultural and media flows (Sassen, 1998: 21–2). A combination of these two phenomena is seen as constituting globalization’s normative payoff, namely a cosmopolitan political culture that exceeds the imperatives of merely economic globalization.

The progressive implications of a cosmopolitanism arising from the social experience of global cities – a cosmopolitan corporate work culture, the sophisticated consumption patterns of this high-income bracket, and the global culture of its growing immigrant population from the Third World, who are needed to support the lifestyle of the former group – are, however, dubious. The cosmopolitanism of corporate workers is essentially the cosmopolitanism of a new technocratic professional class whose primary aims in life are making a profit and conspicuous consumption. The only feelings of solidarity manifest here are to the global firm as a terrain for professional self-interest and advancement. This type of attachment is gradually disseminated throughout the world through the global outsourcing of white-collar jobs, which in turn establishes more bridges for higher-end South–North migration.

Similar questions should be raised about the cosmopolitanism of transnational underclass migrant communities in the North. Contemporary studies of global culture that focus on post-colonialism often connect this kind of cosmopolitanism to the political culture of human rights activism as evidence of the postnational spatialization of politics. For example, Arjun Appadurai has grouped transnational NGOs and philanthropic movements, diasporic communities, refugees, and religious movements under the rubric of actually existing ‘postnational social formations’, arguing that these organizational forms are ‘both instances and incubators of a postnational global order’ because they challenge the nation-state and provide non-violent institutional grounding for larger-scale political loyalties, allegiances and group-identities (1993: 421). It is claimed that these global social and political movements emanate from the grassroots level and exhibit autonomy from dominant global economic and political forces (‘grassroots globalization’ or ‘globalization from below’) and that they can be the sustaining basis for transcending or overcoming the constraining discourse of nationalism/statism (Appadurai, 2000).

The connection between transnational migrant experiences of global cultural diversity and institutionalized forms of cosmopolitan solidarity, however, remains largely unelaborated. One should cast a more discriminating eye on the various emergent forms of cosmopolitanism and distinguish them in terms of how they are connected
Problematizing Global Knowledge – The Enlightenment/Cosmopolitanism

493

to the operations of neoliberal capital. For instance, over and above interventions on behalf of underprivileged migrant minority groups on an ad hoc basis, to what extent can activist cosmopolitanisms take root in the latter in a consistent manner to generate a genuinely pluralized mass-based global political community within the Northern constitutional nation-state as distinguished from the defensive identity politics of ethnic, religious or hybrid minority constituencies? Can these cosmopolitanisms be embedded in a global community in the South forged from transnational media networks?

It is doubtful whether transnational migrant communities can be characterized as examples of cosmopolitanism in the robust normative sense. It is unclear how many of these migrants feel that they belong to a world. Nor has it been ascertained whether this purported feeling of belonging to a world is analytically distinguishable from long-distance, absentee national feeling. It is, moreover, uncertain that cultural minorities who have achieved multicultural recognition in Northern constitutional democracies are naturally sensitive to the plight of their former compatriots in the peripheries. They are more likely to be driven by the desire for upward class mobility and to become the new bearers of the imperatives of national/regional economic competition. The example of Asian-American entrepreneurship shows that Americans of South Asian, Chinese or Vietnamese heritage often lead the vanguard of outsourcing initiatives in their countries of origin, justifying super-exploitation in the name of transnational ethnic solidarity. The NRI (Non-Resident Indian) businessman or multinational executive professes diasporic patriotism as he sets up call centers in India, just as the diasporic Chinese investor who exploits cheap female labor in Southern Chinese factories wishes to benefit people in his ancestral village. The argument that transnational print and media networks extend a world community beyond transnational migrancy to include peoples dwelling in the South has to reckon with the banal fact that many in the South are illiterate and/or do not have access to a television or hardware capable of receiving CNN and Rupert Murdoch’s Asia-based Star TV.

What is sadly missing from celebrations of new cosmopolitanism in the softer social sciences and cultural studies is a thorough discussion of the normative implications of globalization, or more precisely the relationship between universality or weaker normative forms of wide inclusivity and the global extensiveness of economic, political, and cultural processes. There are, however, more recent arguments from philosophy that suggest that contemporary post-Cold War human rights regimes, other emergent transnational legal and political institutions, and the so-called international civil society of NGOs constitute a contemporary revival and updated affirmation of Kant’s vision of cosmopolitanism. Among these arguments, that of the German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, is the most sophisticated. For Habermas, the curse of globalization turns out to be a blessing in disguise. In his view, globalization is not reducible to global capitalism, but has relatively autonomous cultural and political aspects that create the conditions for an Aufhebung (transcendence/sublation) whereby the earlier national shell that imprisoned democratic republicanism will be destroyed and its kernel or truth-content, preserved in the form of deliberative democratic procedures, will rise up, phoenix-like, to a higher supranational state of existence.

First, the homogeneous national-cultural base of civil-political solidarity, which is already undermined by the global dissemination of mass culture, is further eroded by economically-driven South to North and East to West migration, which changes the ethnic, religious and cultural composition of European nations. Habermas regards such cultural pluralization/multiculturalization of society as a boon. Xenophobic conflicts and the tyranny of the hegemonic cultural majority can only be controlled by the construction of a multicultural civil society that respects the differences of minority cultures. Hence, transnational migration, Habermas argues, actually accelerates the decoupling of political culture from the pre-political identity of the majority cultural group so that it can be completely co-extensive with the public-discursive democratic process (2001: 71–6). Second, following Ulrich Beck’s thesis of the rise of a world risk society, Habermas suggests that political solidarity is also decoupled from its national base by the creation of globally shared risks such as ecological and environmental
damage, international organized crime such as the traffic in arms, drugs and women. Because the political interests of the people affected by such global issues will no longer be co-extensive with the territorially-based decisions of nation-states, these actions will suffer from a legitimation deficit (Habermas, 2001: 68–71). Third, the growing number of regulatory political institutions and forms of cooperation at various levels beyond the nation-state that attempt to compensate for its declining competencies suggest the blurring of the distinction between foreign and domestic policy, thereby indicating the irreversible development of a genuinely global politics (Habermas, 2001: 70–1). These bodies range from the United Nations and its agencies to international regimes, some more tightly organized than others, such as NAFTA, ASEAN, and the European Union, as well as informal networks of NGOs. Finally, the increasing proliferation of human rights instruments indicates the emergence of a weak form of cosmopolitan solidarity, that of a quasi-legal community of world citizens.

Habermas’s cosmopolitan vision consists of a dynamic complex of interconnected public spheres at both the national and transnational level rather than a world organization. He emphasizes the importance of global Öffentlichkeit for democratizing the processes of international negotiation that lead to agreements between states (Habermas, 2001: 110). Insofar as such processes connect internal nation-state politics to policies of world organization, global Öffentlichkeit exploits existing structures for the formation of solidarity in national public spheres to further develop cosmopolitan solidarity in individual citizens and foster a world domestic policy on the part of state actors. This is a significant update on Kant’s idea of a global public sphere, which Habermas argues, is now more securely actualized through global communications. Examples of its emergence and development stretch from the polarized global public debates over the Vietnam War and the Gulf War (and we may now add the US invasion of Iraq) to the series of UN-organized conferences over important global issues such as poverty, population growth and the status of women. Although the global public attention and world opinion elicited by these global summits are channeled through national public sphere structures and are issue-specific and temporary, the ability of the international civil society of transnational NGOs to create and mobilize transnational public spheres through press and media coverage indicates the beginnings of more permanent communicative structures for genuine global debate. Such NGO participation gives greater legitimacy to the deliberations of international negotiating systems by making them transparent for national public spheres and reconnecting them to grass-roots decision-making.

Although it offers a thorough elaboration of the normative implications of globalization for the formation of a new cosmopolitanism for the contemporary world, Habermas’s project is unfeasible for three reasons. First, because the key features of Habermas’s cosmopolitan vision are projected from the Euro-American-centric prototype of the Northern constitutional welfare state, it relies on a utopian over-idealization of the cosmopolitan virtues of Northern states, something that must increasingly be doubted after the US invasion of Iraq. Second, the criteria that make the First World welfare state the ideal model depend on a high degree of economic development that cannot be attained in the postcolonial South because its capacities have been actively deformed by the structures of the global economy. Postcolonial states forced to undergo structural adjustment, especially those in Africa and Latin America, are too impoverished to provide social welfare to their citizens. Worse still, states adopting the neoliberal path of export-oriented industrial development actively sacrifice the welfare of their people to provide conditions to attract transnational capital flows. This scenario is not exactly friendly to any of the three aspects of democratic will-formation (political participation, the expression of political will or the public use of reason) Habermas desires and celebrates. Finally, while a degree of mass-based cosmopolitan solidarity has arisen in the domestic domains of Northern countries in response to exceptionally violent events such as the Vietnam War, the Rwandan genocide, or the war in Iraq, it is unlikely that this solidarity will be directed in a concerted manner towards ending economic inequality between countries because Northern civil societies derive their prodigious strength from this inequality. Indeed, we can even say that global economic inequality is simultaneously the material condition of possibility of
democratic legitimation in the North Atlantic and that which hampers its achievement in the postcolonial South.

The impasses of Habermas’s cosmopolitan project raise several broader questions: Is the international division of labor the unacknowledged condition and therefore also the non-transcendable limit of all new cosmopolitanisms? If national forms of solidarity remain important, especially for economically weak countries bearing the brunt of capitalist exploitation, does uneven development constitute a crippling impediment to the formation of cosmopolitan solidarity? Does it place such constraints on cosmopolitanism’s efficacy that we may regard it as a constitutive condition of contemporary arguments for the transcendence of nationalism, the limit beyond which theories of cosmopolitanism lose their coherence and become unworkable? In this regard, it is important to note that although transnational advocacy networks at the grassroots level may be animated by principles that are global in scope, although they are unconnected to traditional political parties within the national system of electoral democracy or national unions, and are able to voice their interests at global fora such as the World Social Forum, members of these movements and the participants in such fora may not have transcended feelings of national solidarity or the desire to make their respective nation-states take better care of its people. For instance, the central concept of food sovereignty – the idea that ‘every people, no matter how small, has the right to produce their own food’ – articulated by the Sem Terra Movement, a movement of landless agrarian workers based in Brazil, indicates that although the movement’s goals are global in scope, it begins from the principle of a people’s national integrity (Stedile, 2004: 43). Moreover, the activities of these social movements have to connect with the nation-state at some point because it is the primary site for the effective implementation of equitable objectives for redistribution on a large scale.

The feasibility of institutionalizing a mass-based cosmopolitan political consciousness therefore very much remains an open question today. It is not enough to fold the pluralistic ethos of older cosmopolitanisms into the institutionalized tolerance of diversity in multicultural societies. This kind of cosmopolitanism is only efficacious within the necessarily limited frame of the (now multiculturalized) democratic state in the North Atlantic that is sustained by global exploitation of the South. This type of limited cosmopolitanism has a more insidious counterpart in the state-sponsored cosmopolitanism of developed countries in Asia. Here, cosmopolitanism degenerates into a set of strategies for the biopolitical improvement of human capital. It becomes an ideology used by a state to attract high-end expatriate workers in the high-tech, finance, and other high-end service sectors as well as to justify its exploitation of its own citizens and the lower-end migrant workers who bear the burden of the country’s successful adaptation to flexible accumulation. Cosmopolitanism is here merely a symbolic marker of a country’s success at climbing the competitive hierarchy of the international division of labor and maintaining its position there. The inscription of new cosmopolitanisms (and theories about them) within the force field of uneven globalization must be broached at every turn.

References

Vernacular cosmopolitanism, an oxymoron that joins contradictory notions of local specificity and universal enlightenment, is at the crux of current debates on cosmopolitanism. These pose the question whether the local, parochial, rooted, culturally specific and demotic may co-exist with the translocal, transnational, transcendent, elitist, enlightened, universalist and modernist – whether boundary-crossing demotic migrations may be compared to the globe trotting travel, sophisticated cultural knowledge and moral world-view of deracinated intellectuals. Indeed, the question is often reversed to ask whether there can be an enlightened normative cosmopolitanism which is not rooted, in the final analysis, in patriotic and culturally committed loyalties and understandings.

Vernacular cosmopolitanism belongs to a family of concepts, all of which combine in similar fashion apparently contradictory opposites: cosmopolitan patriotism, rooted cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan ethnicity, working-class cosmopolitanism, discrepant cosmopolitanism. Such conjunctions attempt to come to terms with the conjunctural elements of postcolonial and

**Keywords**

local, migration, multicultural, non-elite, transnational