



## **The cosmopolitan imagination: critical cosmopolitanism and social theory**

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### **Abstract**

Critical cosmopolitanism is an emerging direction in social theory and reflects both an object of study and a distinctive methodological approach to the social world. It differs from normative political and moral accounts of cosmopolitanism as world polity or universalistic culture in its conception of cosmopolitanism as socially situated and as part of the self-constituting nature of the social world itself. It is an approach that shifts the emphasis to internal developmental processes within the social world rather than seeing globalization as the primary mechanism. This signals a post-universalistic kind of cosmopolitanism, which is not merely a condition of diversity but is articulated in cultural models of world openness through which societies undergo transformation. The cosmopolitan imagination is articulated in framing processes and cultural models by which the social world is constituted; it is therefore not reducible to concrete identities, but should be understood as a form of cultural contestation in which the logic of translation plays a central role. The cosmopolitan imagination can arise in any kind of society and at any time but it is integral to modernity, in so far as this is a condition of self-problematization, incompleteness and the awareness that certainty can never be established once and for all. As a methodologically grounded approach, critical cosmopolitan sociology has a very specific task: to discern or make sense of social transformation by identifying new or emergent social realities.

**Keywords:** Culture; globalization; global publics; modernity; social transformation; society

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The idea of cosmopolitanism is most recognizable as a term of political governance but with a history that extends to the Enlightenment and to classical antiquity.<sup>1</sup> Until recently it was not associated with social processes. With the separation of the social and the political that has been a feature of much of modern thought, cosmopolitanism has on the whole been seen as part of the

political. Although the origins of cosmopolitanism lie in an essentially moral view of the individual as having allegiances to the wider world, it was to acquire a political significance once it was linked to peoplehood. The main tradition in modern cosmopolitan thought, which derives from Immanuel Kant, sought to extend republican political philosophy into a wider and essentially legal framework beyond the relatively limited modern republic. With this came the vision of a world political community extending beyond the community into which one is born or lives. Cosmopolitanism thus became linked with the universalism of modern western thought and with political designs aimed at world governance. Cosmopolitan political theory has been much discussed in recent times and has tended to overshadow the contribution of social theory (Cohen 1996; Lu 2000; Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Tan 2004).

The fact that social theory, and more specifically sociology, has been relatively absent from cosmopolitan theory is not entirely surprising.<sup>2</sup> As previously noted, the separation of the social from the political in the modern imagination had the implication that cosmopolitanism was equated with the political in opposition to the social. Cosmopolitanism thus reflected the revolt of the individual against the social world, for to be a 'citizen of the world' was to reject the immediately given and closed world of particularistic attachments. Not surprisingly it became associated with the revolt of the elites against the low culture of the masses. Sociological theory, which arose in the age of the nascent nation-state and industrial society, tended towards a view of the social as bounded and moreover was sceptical of notions of freedom that were associated with cosmopolitanism. The social world as territorially given, closed and bounded by the nation-state and the class structure of the industrial societies did not sit comfortably with the openness of the cosmopolitan idea, with its universalistic orientation. Moreover, since Auguste Comte, sociology as a positive science was opposed to the cultural and political claims of the Enlightenment intellectuals who were associated with a mode of critique not grounded in positively given facts. Whether Kantian political cosmopolitanism or the cultural cosmopolitanism of the intellectuals and elites, cosmopolitanism was thus marginalized by twentieth-century preoccupations. Few works captured the decline of the cosmopolitan idea more than Frederich Meinecke's *Cosmopolitanism and the National State* (Meinecke 1970). In this influential work, published in 1909, the German historian documented the decline of the nineteenth-century cosmopolitan imagination with the rise of the national idea. Meinecke was reacting not merely to Kantian cosmopolitanism but to what he regarded as the impotent cultural cosmopolitanism of the German intellectuals who did not succeed in translating their lofty vision into a viable political order. So in place of the world republic or the republic of letters of the Enlightenment intellectuals was to be the modern national republic in which the cosmopolitan elites would have to find identity with the masses. This resulted in a certain repudiation of cosmopolitanism.

Viewed from a different perspective – a broader vision of social theory as a critical reflection on modernity – the decline of the cosmopolitan imagination associated with the Enlightenment and the rise of the nation-state could be seen as the beginning of a different kind of cosmopolitanism, one less premised on the assumptions of a world republic or on elites and also one less Eurocentric. In contrast to the dominant Enlightenment notion of cosmopolitanism as a transnational republican order, current developments in social theory suggest a post-universalistic cosmopolitanism that takes as its point of departure different kinds of modernity and processes of societal transformation that do not presuppose the separation of the social from the political or postulate a single world culture. Current debates in political theory draw attention to the revival of the Kantian ideal, which it is argued is relevant in the present context of globalization, the alleged crisis of the nation-state and the need for global civil society (Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann 1997). It is not the aim of the present paper to argue against such normative positions, but to highlight a different and more sociological approach to cosmopolitanism which is relevant to a critical social theory of late modernity. Viewed in such terms the emphasis shifts to the very conceptualization of the social world as an open horizon in which new cultural models take shape. In this approach, which I term critical cosmopolitanism, the cosmopolitan imagination occurs when and wherever new relations between self, other and world develop in moments of openness. It is an approach that shifts the emphasis to internal developmental processes within the social world rather than seeing globalization as the primary mechanism and is also not reducible to the fact of pluralism.

The point of departure for this kind of critical cosmopolitan social theory is the recognition that the very notion of cosmopolitanism compels the recognition of multiple kinds of cosmopolitanism, including earlier kinds of cosmopolitanism, and which cannot be explained in terms of a single, western notion of modernity or in terms of globalization. Cosmopolitanism refers to the multiplicity of ways in which the social world is constructed in different modernities. Rather than see cosmopolitanism as a particular or singular condition that either exists or does not, a state or goal to be realized, it should instead be seen as a cultural medium of societal transformation that is based on the principle of world openness, which is associated with the notion of global publics. Today global publics are playing a critical role in such processes of transformation. In equating world openness rather than universalism as such with cosmopolitanism the basis for a more hermeneutic and critical cosmopolitan sociology will hopefully be established. In sum, then, the argument of this paper is that a sociologically driven critical cosmopolitanism concerns the analysis of cultural modes of mediation by which the social world is shaped and where the emphasis is on moments of world openness created out of the encounter of the local with the global.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section locates the notion of critical cosmopolitanism within the cosmopolitan tradition through a critical reading of the different approaches, which are summed up under the headings of moral cosmopolitanism, political cosmopolitanism and cultural cosmopolitanism. The second section outlines an alternative theoretical conception of critical cosmopolitanism with a focus on how it opens up a different vision of modernity. The third section elaborates on some of the methodological assumptions of a critical cosmopolitan analysis. The overall aim of the paper is to see the complexities of cosmopolitanism as an emergent social phenomenon that has major implications for a critical social theory of modernity and sociological inquiry.

### **Types of cosmopolitanism**

Cosmopolitanism has a long tradition and takes many forms. It is possible to discern within its manifold genealogies three broad strands and which can be divided for the purpose of illustration into strong and weak forms. These are moral cosmopolitanism, political cosmopolitanism and cultural cosmopolitanism.

The dominant conception of cosmopolitanism can be termed moral cosmopolitanism due to the strong emphasis in it on the universalism of the cosmopolitan ethic. In the most well known version of this, which goes back to antiquity, the basis of cosmopolitanism is the individual whose loyalty is to the universal human community. This has generally been identified with the Cynics and the later Stoics and is reflected in the philosophy of Plato. This tradition is based on a strong notion of a universal morality, which can be seen too as reflecting the decline of the closed world of polis and the rise of the universal empire of Alexander (See Inglis and Robertson 2005). While having resonances in later western thought, this kind of cosmopolitanism has been revived in recent times. A much discussed essay by Marta Nussbaum can be seen as a contemporary example of cosmopolitanism as a moral universalism (Nussbaum 1996). Habermas's communication theory too can be seen as an example of an approach to the social theory of modernity that is strongly informed by a moral universalistic kind of cosmopolitanism (Habermas 1996, 1998). A weaker conception of cosmopolitanism might be found in liberal communitarian approaches to multiculturalism as in the idea of universal recognition of the moral integrity of all people. Moral cosmopolitanism suffers from a major drawback in so far as it lacks a nuanced sociological dimension and assumes a too strong universalistic sense of universal humanity. It has been criticized for failing to see cosmopolitanism as 'rooted' and not necessarily universalistic (Breckenridge et al. 2002). Cultural cosmopolitanism, to be discussed below, offers a less dualistic view of the relation between the particular and the

universal, while political cosmopolitanism suggests an alternative to the individualism that underlies moral conceptions of cosmopolitanism.

The revival of cosmopolitanism in recent times is due to the rise of an explicitly political conception of cosmopolitanism relating to citizenship and democracy. Strong and weak versions can be found. Strong conceptions of cosmopolitanism can be found in notions of world polity as advocated by John Meyer or notions of cosmopolitan democracy as put forward by David Held and others (Held 1995; Meyer et al. 1997). Such approaches, in particular, the proponents of cosmopolitan democracy have revived the Kantian notion of a cosmopolitan world order of republic states (Archibugi 1995).<sup>3</sup> These approaches generally takes globalization as the basis for a new conception of a transnational democracy beyond the nation-state. These are strong positions in that they see cosmopolitanism as manifest in a fundamentally new political context brought about by globalization. There is also a firm commitment to universalism in these approaches, which on the whole are normative in their approach and do not engage with existing political systems.<sup>4</sup>

Weaker conceptions of political cosmopolitanism can be found in theories of citizenship. Here the universalistic assumptions of cosmopolitan democracy are more nuanced. Where for T. H. Marshall full citizenship had been achieved with the rise of social rights associated with the welfare state, theorists of citizenship today have identified a wide range of new challenges to citizenship (see Turner 1993). Marshall's trajectory of civic to political to social rights must now be complemented by cultural rights, a sphere of rights that incorporates the cosmopolitan dimension. Cultural rights concern at least three areas. In place of the individual as the bearer of rights, the emphasis shifts to rights largely for minorities, but also lifestyle rights including consumer rights, and rights relating to new technologies and environmental concerns (see Delanty 2000; Stevenson 2000, 2002).

It is in reconciling the universalistic rights of the individual with the need to protect minorities that the cosmopolitan moment is most evident. In this context cosmopolitan citizenship is understood in terms of a cultural shift in collective identities to include the recognition of others. Cosmopolitan citizenship is marked by a decreased importance of territory – as measured by the place of one's birth – in the definition of citizenship rights as well as a lesser salience on an underlying collective identity, in other words a political community does not have to rest on an underlying cultural community. Cultural rights are thus possible in the space that has been created by multiple and overlapping identities. As Seyla Benhabib, has argued: 'Cosmopolitanism, the concern for the world as if it were one's *polis*, is furthered by such multiple, overlapping allegiances which are sustained across communities of language, ethnicity, religion, and nationality' (Benhabib 2004: 174–5). Such developments have arisen as a result of cultural pluralization arising from migration, ethnic multiculturalism, cultural diversity of all kinds and the

growing demands for the recognition of different life choices (see Cheah and Robbins 1996). Iahwa Ong draws attention to the creation of a 'flexible citizenship' arising out of transnational migrations in the Pacific-Asian world where practices of multi-location of refugees and business migrants and their families have redefined the meaning of citizenship (Ong 1999). In addition, but of more relevance to Europe, there is considerable evidence to suggest that national rights and international human rights are becoming increasingly blurred (see Eder and Giesen 2001; Soysal 1994). It is now more difficult for states to equate nationality and citizenship since many rights can be claimed on the basis of human rights. In short, membership rights are not exclusively defined in terms of a community of decent or of birth but of residence. These examples illustrate the rise of a cosmopolitan concept of citizenship, which varies from being a modification of the traditional understanding of citizenship in liberal political theory to an emphasis on global citizenship and post-national kinds of membership.

There can be little doubt that cosmopolitanism has been greatly enhanced as a sociologically pertinent topic due to the tremendous transformation in rights that has occurred in recent times. However, while the domain of rights is one of the main sites of cosmopolitanism it is not the only one. The tendency in the citizenship literature is to see cosmopolitanism as constituted in rights. As a practice concerning rights, citizenship is too limited to constitute the central dynamic of social transformation and, moreover, rights do not exhaust the category of peoplehood (see Archibugi 2003). The criterion of residence as opposed to birth may open Europe to more cosmopolitan possibilities, but it does not solve the problem of the additional category of aliens and persons who migrate to Europe from outside and as a result suffer marginalization. From the perspective of the cosmopolitan social theory proposed in this paper one dimension of cosmopolitanism that is critical and not adequately recognized is the construction of peoplehood around competing visions of the social world: peoplehood is increasingly being defined in and through global communication with the result that the 'we' is counterposed not only by reference to a 'they' but by the abstract category of the world. This is a point that has a more general application to the constitution of society and will be returned to later in this paper. It will suffice to mention in the present context that a sociological perspective on cosmopolitan peoplehood suggests not merely an allegiance to the world community as opposed to national community, as Nussbaum et al. (1996) argues, or the establishment of cultural rights, but a reframing of identities, loyalties, and self-understandings in ways that have no clear direction. Thus for Appiah in his defence of 'rooted cosmopolitanism', cosmopolitans are people who construct their lives from whatever cultural resources to which they find themselves attached (Appiah 2005). Although this is a position that is largely a modification of liberal cosmopolitanism, there is the interesting suggestion of culture as an on-going

process of construction as opposed to being embodied in a particular way of life. This perspective reinforces the notion of cosmopolitanism as a mode of cultural framing which is not reducible to rights or particular identities, but concerns cultural models by which the social world is constituted. In sum, the significance of cosmopolitanism goes beyond post-national membership, but this is inadequately brought out in the existing approaches concerned with the political dimensions of cosmopolitanism.

The third strand in cosmopolitan theory can be termed cultural cosmopolitanism to distinguish it from the previous models. In current theory this takes a largely strong form, in contrast to earlier forms of cultural cosmopolitanism which could be related to Enlightenment notions of the 'citizen of the world' whose cosmopolitanism consisted in travel. Several social theorists have attempted to reconceptualize the idea of society in a cosmopolitan direction, although this is not always explicitly stated. These developments concern major changes in the cultural fabric of society leading to the erosion of the very notion of a bounded conception of the social (see Gane 2004). The key to all of this is the notion of societal pluralization. Examples of cultural cosmopolitanism are to be found in theories of mobilities and forms of consumption, hybridities, networks and even modernity itself. These can be briefly commented on.

Manuel Castells's notion of networks as open and flexible structures suggests a basis for a cosmopolitan sociology (Castells 1996). For Castells society exists today in the form of networks rather than territorial spaces. What is significant about the network are the modes of connectivity by which different things are related. Networks are open structures connected by nodes rather than hierarchical structures. Under the conditions of globalization the network is organized through informational flows. This notion of cosmopolitanism offers a new view of society, but is not without problems and can be criticized on three grounds. First, Castells tends to see networks as horizontal and tentatively open democratic systems, whereas it is easy to show that in fact networked systems are differentially organized systems of power and have their own hierarchies. Second, there is no basis for distinguishing between globalization and cosmopolitanism: the global context is the primary reality and everything else is a reaction to it. This neglects cosmopolitan resistances to globalization. Thirdly, his notion of a network is largely a technocratic one determined by informational technologies and does not give any room to communicative spaces and global publics. The implication of this is that only societies that are integrated into the global informational economy can be cosmopolitan. This approach excludes earlier and alternative kinds of cosmopolitanism and fails to appreciate the significance of global publics in the constitution of the social.

According to Urry (2000, 2002), who also aligns his position more explicitly with cosmopolitanism, the key feature of the current situation is the fact of



mobility. For Urry mobility is an ontological condition and is expressed in processes as different as global complexity and reflexive modernity: people, commodities, cultures, technologies are all mobile and their reality is one of mobility. Mobilities are not just flows but networked relations and are globally organized in new kinds of spaces and temporal processes. In his theory, which is a development of Castell's and influenced by Bruno Latour, the idea of society is redundant and with it all of classical sociology because it suggests an entity that is bounded, territorial and constituted by the state. Global processes have undermined the nation-state creating an entirely new context for social relations, which instead of being relations between people are relations between mobile and immobile elements. This thesis lends itself to a cosmopolitan perspective since it sees the social world in terms of open as opposed to closed processes. The difficulty with this argument is two-fold. On the one side, the argument that society has become redundant makes unwarranted assumptions about the concept of society in classical sociology as entirely defined by the categories of the nation-state and thus neglects earlier and more cosmopolitan notions of society which cannot be reduced to territorially bounded ideas. On the other side, it exaggerates the novelty of current mobilities. Aside from neglecting earlier mobilities, such as Marx's definition of capital, the main drawback with this approach is that too much explanatory power is given to global mobilities and hyper-chaotic phenomena. For instance, it is by no means evident that nation-states outside the relatively small part of the world within the European Union are losing power. If anything they are gaining power, as the examples of the USA and China suggest. Moreover, if the concept of society is jettisoned it will have to be replaced by something similar. From the perspective of a cosmopolitan social theory, global mobilities are of central importance, but the fact of mobility is not the key feature of the cosmopolitan movement. Indeed, many kinds of mobilities are not cosmopolitan in the sense used here. They may be open structures, as Urry argues, but the openness that he associated with cosmopolitanism is in fact global fluidity, or 'cosmopolitan global fluids' (Urry 2002: 133). The problem here, again, is the reduction of cosmopolitanism to globalization. In opposition to this emphasis on mobility as the chief characteristic of cosmopolitanism, the argument in this paper is that cosmopolitanism cannot be entirely separated from the normative vision of an alternative society and that this imaginary is also present as a cultural model within the cultural traditions of societies.<sup>5</sup> Identities and modes of cultural belonging, while being influenced by global mobilities, are not reducible to mobility. The aspect of globalization that is more pertinent is the abstract presence of the global public within the social world.

The turn to networks and mobilities from action thus does not solve the problem of comprehending the social world in terms of cosmopolitan challenges. An alternative to these approaches is the notion of hybridity. From the



vantage point of Actor Network Theory (ANT), Bruno Latour advances a different notion of network conceived of in terms of the idea of a hybrid (Latour 1993, 2005). He argues the social as society explains nothing; it is, he says, like the notion of ether in late nineteenth-century physics, namely a necessary illusion we have lived to learn with. In his view the central issue is associations, that is the social concerns relations between things and what social actors do, rather than something that lies behind them and constituting, as in Durkheim and Bourdieu, a reality or objectivity of its own. This idea, which extends the notion of the network, suggests a cosmopolitan sociology in that the object of study is the relation between things. This relational dimension is very important in sociology, since the object of study is very often the relation between things, as in for example Marx's famous definition of capital. For cosmopolitanism, the significance resides in the notion of hybridity. While Latour's writing has mostly concerned hybrids of nature and society, the notion of hybridity has had a wider resonance in cultural approaches to globalization. Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2004) has written extensively on globalization as creating hybrid cultures arising out of transnational movements of people and cultures. Globalization involves grey zones, for example, creolization, which exist alongside other processes produced by globalization and entail not just networks and contacts, but also conflict. It is this dimension of conflict and resistance that is often neglected in the approaches inspired by Castells's work on the network society.

While avoiding many of the difficulties of global networks, the notion of hybridity does not fully account for cosmopolitanism. First, like Urry's mobilities, if everything is a hybrid then the concept loses any explanatory usefulness. Most societies and cultural entities have arisen out of a process of syncretism whereby different elements are combined to produce something new. Secondly, there is a sense in which it could be argued most aspects of contemporary societies entail some degree of mixing as a result of the cross-fertilization of cultures. In this respect the connection with cosmopolitanism is evident but only up to a limited degree. Cosmopolitanism is more than the simple fact of cross-fertilization since many hybrid phenomena – for example national socialism – are not in any coherent sense of the term cosmopolitan. It is easy to refer to many examples of multicultural communities, which may be called hybrid, but are not cosmopolitan in their denial of universal norms. In short, hybridity is a major aspect of cosmopolitanism but it is not itself the defining feature. Without some notion of an alternative society, cosmopolitanism has a limited normative application (see Fine 2003). One major dimension to cosmopolitanism, then, is that it opens up normative questions. Now, while this normativity has been more central to political cosmopolitan approaches discussed above, what is lost in ANT conceptions of cosmopolitanism as hybridity is precisely this normative orientation. Nature, for example, has been one of the key references in reshaping politics along

cosmopolitan lines as is evidence by the cosmopolitan politics of the environmental movement. For the same reason, the notion of the network as a new societal reality is also limited as a model for cosmopolitanism.

From a wider historical sociology cosmopolitan possibilities are increasingly being noted in modernity itself in terms of the interaction of different modernities. Several theorists have developed a notion of multiple modernity and have related this to a culturally nuanced notion of cosmopolitanism. The work of S. N. Eisenstadt (2003) and Johann Arnason (2003) have been at the fore of such developments which have led to an entirely new approach to modernity based on multiplicity and which is highly relevant for cosmopolitan social theory. For reasons of space this cannot be discussed in detail, but it can be remarked that this notion of multiple modernities challenges the classical theories of modernization and signals a particular view of the contemporary world in terms of a multiplicity of cultural and political projects based on civilizational transformation.<sup>6</sup> The cosmopolitan thrust of the argument is that civilizations are internally plural and based on frameworks of interpretation which can be appropriated in different ways by many social actors within and beyond the contours of the given civilization.

The idea of modernity as plural was already introduced by postmodernism, which by general agreement has not displaced modernity but opens the concept up to cosmopolitan possibilities. As Zygmunt Bauman (2000) has argued the current form of modernity is not postmodernity, but what he calls 'liquid modernity', which is characterized by social forms based on transience, uncertainty, anxieties and insecurity and resulting in new freedoms that come at the price of individual responsibility and without the traditional support of social institutions. Although Bauman does not link this condition to cosmopolitanism, such a connection can be established with respect to social relations based on contingency. From a wider historical sociology of modernity cosmopolitan possibilities are more evident in a conception of modernity that stresses the interaction of different modernities. The notion of multiple modernity can be seen as a basis for a cosmopolitan conception of modernity.

The idea of modernity as a plural condition has led to several theorists to establish more explicit links between cosmopolitanism and modernity (see Breckenridge et al. 2002; Gaonkar 2001). Cosmopolitanism is now seen as a plural and post-universalistic notion. There are many cosmopolitan movements and which cannot be subsumed under an overarching notion of modernity. It may be suggested too that the pluralization of cosmopolitanism can be furthermore linked to modernity as a dialogic process, as opposed to a strictly universalistic one. In the present context what is of particular significance is the implication of alternative cosmopolitan projects in history. Sheldon Pollack, for instance, links the notion of vernacularization to cosmopolitanism. Arguing that cosmopolitanism, as a medium of communication that travels unbounded across different cultures, can be found in situations that were not

specifically termed cosmopolitan, it possible to see how people in the past have able to be cosmopolitan or vernacular (Pollack 2002). One such example was the vernacularization of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, which is one of the major expressions of a non-western univeralizing cosmopolitanism. The universal and the particular are thus linked in the continuity of present and past.

It will suffice to remark in conclusion that theories of multiple modernity have led to a new conception of cosmopolitanism that gives particular emphasis to post-universalism. A post-universal cosmopolitanism is critical and dialogic, seeing as the goal alternative readings of history and the recognition of plurality rather than the creation of a universal order, such as a cosmopolis. This is a view that enables us to see how people were cosmopolitan in the past and how different cosmopolitanisms existed before and despite westernization. It may be termed 'cultural cosmopolitanism', that is a plurality of cosmopolitan projects by which the global and the local are combined in diverse ways. In this sense cosmopolitanism would be mostly exemplified in diasporas and in transnational modes of belonging. Such expressions of cosmopolitanism can be related to what is often called cultural globalization, that is expressions of globality that are evident in resistances to the culture of the metropolitan centres and manifest in creative appropriations and new cultural imaginaries which, unlike earlier cosmopolitan projects, are more present in popular cultures than in high culture.

The position argued for in this article differs in one respect. Critical cosmopolitanism is not merely about plurality. Although this is one key aspect of cosmopolitanism, it is not the main or only aspect: cosmopolitanism is not a generalized version of multiculturalism where plurality is simply the goal. A post-universalistic conception of cosmopolitanism should rather be seen in terms of the tensions within modernity. Of particular importance in this respect is the tension between the global and the local, on the one side, and on the other the universal and the particular. It is possible to see this tension which is expressed through communication as constituting the basic animus of cosmopolitanism. While diversity is one outcome, it is not the only one and not any more so than is a universal global order. So against notions of globalization and universality, on the one side, and plurality and particularism on the other, the cultural dimension of cosmopolitanism consists more in the creation and articulation of communicative models of world openness in which societies undergo transformation. The inevitable diversity that comes from the pluralization of cultural traditions should not detract from processes of communicative transformation that arise as a result of responses to the presence of global publics. Cosmopolitan culture is one of self-problematization and while diversity will, by the pluralizing nature of cosmopolitanism, be inevitable the reflexive and critical self-understanding of cosmopolitanism cannot be neglected. Cosmopolitanism must be seen as one of the major expressions of the tendency in modernity towards self-problematization. The approach

adopted in this paper stresses what will be called critical cosmopolitanism to make this distinction more evident.

### **Defining cosmopolitanism: the global public and world openness**

Underlying the various approaches discussed in the foregoing analysis is a failure to distinguish globalization from cosmopolitanism. Yet there is clearly a connection, but the distinction needs to be clarified. The trend towards cultural cosmopolitanism clearly offers some of the most promising developments and avoids the characteristic bias towards universalism typical of the other approaches discussed above. The view put forward in this paper is that cosmopolitanism concerns a dynamic relation between the local and the global. This is suggested by the term itself: the interaction of the universal order of the cosmos and the human order of the polis. Cosmopolitanism thus concerns the multiple ways the local and the national is redefined as a result of interaction with the global. The resulting situation will vary depending on the precise nature of the interaction. Hybridization, creolization, indigenization may be the result of interactions in which the local appropriates the global or in the case of global diasporas where the local is transformed into a new cosmopolitan global flow. Where, as in the example of the global diaspora, the outcome of local global relations is a phenomenon that is neither local nor global the term 'glocalization' has been used (Robertson 1992). These examples, which could be seen in terms of instances of localization, have been much discussed under the general terms of cultural globalization (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996; Nederveen Pieterse 2004; Tomlinson 1999). In contrast, examples such as McDonaldisation and other instances of McSociety illustrate the predominance of the global over the local. It is of course disputed the extent to which any global process can entirely impose itself on the local (see Beck, Sznaider and Winter 2000).

The previous points are a reminder of the essentially contingent, multi-levelled and indeterminate nature of globalization, which is an unavoidable context for almost every aspect of the social world as structured and framed by global processes. The global is not outside the social world but is inside it in numerous ways. The aspect of this, decisive for cosmopolitanism, that needs to be emphasized is the notion of the global public. By this is not meant a specific public but the global context in which communication is filtered. The global public is the always ever present sphere of discourse that contextualizes political communication and public discourse today. It has been for long recognized that social reality entails processes of social construction entailing knowledge and socio-cognitive structures, but what is only becoming clearer in recent times is that this now occurs in the context of risk, uncertainty, and contestation – in other words contingency. The role of the public in this is of

course also well documented, as is evidenced by the significance which is now attached to the public sphere, which must be conceived as having a cosmopolitan and hermeneutic dimension (Eder 2006; Kögler 2005; Strydom 2002). While debates continue on the question of the global public sphere as a transnational space, what is more important is the emergence of a global public, which is less a spatially defined entity than a manifestation of discourse. The discursive construction of the social world takes place within the wider context of global communication in which the global public plays a key role. The global public has a major resonance in all communication in the sense that it structures and contextualizes much of public discourse.<sup>7</sup>

It is no longer possible to see national societies or any particular social form in terms of autonomous actors isolated from the global context. The global public is inside as well as outside national publics and is the central dynamic in cosmopolitanism, conceived of as an opening up of discursive spaces and which has a critical function in shaping the social world. This is one reason why, as remarked earlier, it is so difficult to define peoplehood or political community more generally today. Dynamics and boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are constantly changing, making society a category that can be analysed only as a process. This idea of the social as a process is reflected in Luhmann's concept of society as existing only as 'world society' (Luhmann 1990). But this world society exists only as a concretely existing society in so far as it is a plural condition in numerous discourses. Moreover, and a point of considerable significance is that the Self, or the 'We,' is not merely defined by reference to an 'Other', a 'They' that is external to the Self – whether in adversarial terms or in more exclusives modes – but is defined by the abstract category of the world. The constitution of the social world in and through globally filtered processes of communication cannot be seen in the simple terms of Self and Other, terms which are often attractive illusions for many social scientists and social commentators. A cosmopolitan-oriented social theory should rather have as its goal the identification of the broader context of the constitution of the social world in which Self and Other are articulated in self-problematizing ways within discursive processes. It is thus possible to speak of world openness in cosmopolitan terms in situations where the global public impinges upon political communication and other kinds of public discourse creating as a result new visions of social order. To speak of cosmopolitanism as real – what Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznaider in their contribution to this issue (Beck and Sznaider 2006: 153–62) call 'cosmopolitan realism' – is thus to refer to these situations, which we may term the cosmopolitan imagination, where the constitution of the social world is articulated through cultural models in which codifications of both Self and Other undergo transformation.

To an extent this cosmopolitan dynamic is something that goes on even in relatively closed societies, including earlier societies. However it is only with the enhanced momentum of globalization and more extensive modes of

communication that it takes on a specifically cosmopolitan significance. Under the conditions of advanced globalization the radical impetus within modernity has a more general sphere of application. This has nothing to do with the alleged crisis of the nation-state or with the transformation of sovereignty. The notion of cosmopolitanism put forward here is distinct from traditional notions of Kantian cosmopolitanism. Rather than seeing the cosmopolitan imagination in an international order, it is, as Beck and Sznaider argue, more reflexive and internalized. The notion of an 'internalized cosmopolitanism' that they suggest is therefore a contrast to notions of the 'world system', 'world society' or 'world polity', as proposed variously by Immanuel Wallerstein, Niklas Luhmann, and John Meyer. For Wallerstein the 'world system' is essentially the world economy and emerged out of the rise of the west: it is based on the dominance of a single centre over the periphery. Cosmopolitanism in contrast concerns less the homogenizing capitalist world economy than the different combinations of periphery and centre. Luhmann's 'world society' and Meyer's approach regards the global level as the primary reality which simply impacts upon the local. The notion of critical cosmopolitanism put forward in this paper stresses the mutual implication of centre and periphery and local and global levels as a transformative process. In sum, what is missing in these accounts is the cosmopolitan moment conceived of as a creative combination of different forces – centre and periphery, the local and global. While a major aspect of cosmopolitanism, the central dynamic of cosmopolitanism comes from modernity. This dynamic is enhanced but not created by globalization. The notion of critical cosmopolitanism sees the category of the world in terms of openness rather than in terms of a universal system. It is this that defines the cosmopolitan imagination.

Modernity takes different societal and civilizational forms, but fundamental to it is the movement towards self-transformation, the belief that human agency can radically transform the present in the image of an imagined future. It is this impetus that constitutes the cosmopolitanism of modernity since through it different modernities interact. It lies in the basic self-understanding of modernity there are no secure foundations for identity, meaning and memory. The term cosmopolitanism signals a condition of self-confrontation, incompleteness; modernity concerns the loss of certainty and the realization that certainty can never be established once and for all. Globalization – as a process that intensifies connections, enhances possibilities for cultural translations and deepens the consciousness of globality – is the principal motor of modernity. Modernity is not a global condition as such, but a transformative condition which can be called cosmopolitan due to its plural nature and interactive logics. Cosmopolitanism is the key expression of the tendency within modernity to self-problematization. On the basis of these remarks it can be established that cosmopolitanism has become one of the major expressions of modernity today due to the extent and speed of globalization. It follows, then, that the solutions

to the problems of globalization do not come from globalization itself but from the cosmopolitan possibilities with modernity itself.

No society can resist this and hope to survive. As Habermas has argued: 'A dogmatically protected culture will not be able to reproduce itself, particularly in a social environment rich with alternatives' (Habermas 2005: 23). The inescapability of cosmopolitanism can be partly explained by the very fact of globalization, which in penetrating to all parts of the world and into most spheres of activity in markets, in media, in education, has created a situation in which societies have become increasingly more and more embroiled in each other and in global processes. This has led some theorists to speak of global modernity (Dirlik 2003; Therborn 2003). However, this external or environmental situation is only one aspect of the cosmopolitan challenge to societies. The other is the internal, developmental transformation of cultural models arising as a result of learning processes associated with modernity. Societies as well as social groups contain within their consciousness and cognitive structures ways of responding to the challenges modernity presents. Whether it is due to societal complexity or the demands of living in multi-ethnic societies and competing conceptions of the common good, it is possible, following Habermas, to speak of a limited universality of problem-solving methods based on reasoned deliberation and recognition of the integrity of the individual (Habermas 1994, 2005). This is not a transcultural rationality, but rather a competence that is present in all of cultures to varying degrees and it therefore follows that such a universalism will take culturally specific forms. Within the limits of this article it is not possible to give detailed consideration of the problem of reconciling universalistic norms and particular cultural values. It will have to suffice for present purposes to state that there is considerable empirical evidence that bears out philosophical arguments concerning the reconciliation of universal claims and the limits of the particular context (Cowan, Dembour and Wilson 2001). As Seyla Benhabib (2002: 25–6) has argued, 'cultures themselves, as well as societies, are not holistic but polyvocal, multilayered, de-centred, and fractured systems of action and signification'. To put this in yet stronger cosmopolitan terms the point is that the diversity of cultures should be seen in terms of cultures being related rather than different. To think in such terms requires an epistemic shift in the direction of what Beck and Sznaider 'methodological cosmopolitanism', as against assumptions of ontological difference that pervades much of academic and political thinking.<sup>8</sup> Cosmopolitan sociology needs to move beyond a view of the social world as empirically given to one that captures emergent cultural forms and the vision of an alternative society. As a methodologically grounded approach, critical cosmopolitan sociology has a very specific task: to discern or make sense of social transformation by identifying new or emergent social realities. Therefore the cosmopolitan imagination is not identifiable with the mere condition of pluralism or the attachments of the individual; it is rather more concerned



with openness and societal transformative. Although particularly characteristic of recent social theory and relevant to trends within late modernity, it is a logic integral to modernity and, as Bryan Turner, has argued was a major concern of classical sociology, which cannot be reduced to methodological nationalism (Turner 2006: 133–51).

The cosmopolitan imagination entails a view of society as an on-going process of self-constitution. Alain Touraine has proposed the important notion of the ‘self-production of the society’ in which struggles to define cultural models, or communicative frameworks of societal interpretation, constitute the fabric of the social. It is the nature of such struggles that they are incomplete and what is called ‘society’ is nothing more than the existence of such struggles. According to this definition of the constitution of the social: ‘Society is not merely a system of norms or a system of domination: it is a system of social relations, of debates and conflicts, of political initiatives and claims, of ideologies and alienation’ (Touraine 1977: 30). Despite his tendency to reduce the social to a dominant social movement and a notion of historicity that lacks a connection with modernity as a developmental process, his conception of the social as an open and indeterminate field offers an important foundation for cosmopolitan social theory (see Delanty 1999). The key point in this is that he shifts the emphasis to cultural models, which are wider than group rights and collective identities, and contain what is a key aspect of cosmopolitanism, namely the transformative vision of an alternative society.

### **The dimensions of critical cosmopolitanism**

The definition of cosmopolitanism proposed in this paper has related it to the tendency within modernity towards self-problematization and on the basis of this it has been further linked to processes of globalization, which have led to a global public that is present in all of communication and public discourse now central to the constitution of the social world. The upshot of this is that the relations of Self and Other that pervade the social world are constituted within the broader context of the world as represented by the global public. This thesis goes beyond the postmodernist arguments concerning alterity and the otherness of the Self. Cosmopolitanism does not arise merely in situations of cultural diversity or taking the perspective of the other. It is not an identity as such that can be contrast with national identity or other kinds of identity, except in a restricted sense of the term. In this sense cosmopolitan sociology is not an alternative to all previous kinds of social theory.<sup>9</sup> Critical cosmopolitanism does not take an extreme position in dismissing all that is not cosmopolitanism. Moreover, as used here, cosmopolitanism does not simply refer to cases or situations that are called by those involved in them cosmopolitan, although this dimension of cosmopolitan self-description is by

no means irrelevant; the critical aspect of cosmopolitanism concerns the internal transformation of social and cultural phenomena through self-problematization and pluralization. It is in the interplay of self, other and world that cosmopolitan processes come into play. Without a learning process, that is an internal cognitive transformation, it makes little sense in calling something cosmopolitan. As used here, the term refers to a developmental change in the social world arising out of competing cultural models. This suggests a processual conception of the social.

It is useful to distinguish three main dimensions of cosmopolitanism: the historical level of modernity, the macro or societal level of the interaction of societies or societal systems, and the micro level of identities, movements and communities within the social world. With regard to modernity, cosmopolitanism arises when different modernities interact and undergo transformation, producing a new field of tensions within the project of modernity. The central animus within modernity as discussed earlier – the self-transformative drive to re-make the world in the image of the self in the absence of absolute certainty – provides the basic direction for cosmopolitanism. European cultural and political modernity was formed out of the interactions and mutual interpenetration of different models of modernity, in particular the French and German, but also the British and later American modernity. It may be suggested that in the present time European modernity is undergoing a further cosmopolitan transformation arising from the encounter with the non-European world, as a result of migration, multiculturalism, globalization. There is another dimension to this, and one which cannot be explored in this paper, which is that the formative influences on European modernity were Asian and that the rise of European modernity was dependent on these earlier forms of cosmopolitanism (see Hobson 2004).

The cosmopolitan perspective with regard to modernity is the context in which to view the macro and the micro dimensions of cosmopolitanism. In macro terms, it is possible to speak of cosmopolitanism as an outcome when two or more societies interact and undergo change of a developmental nature in their model of modernity as a result. While modernity itself can be seen in terms of cosmopolitanism, one of the major expressions of that dimension of cosmopolitanism is in the actual inter-relations of societies. In this respect, Europeanization can be cited as one of the most relevant examples of cosmopolitanism.<sup>10</sup> Europeanization entails horizontal links exist between European societies, vertical between European societies and EU, and transversal between European societies and the global, as well as between the EU and the global. The resulting cosmopolitanism is more than the co-existence of difference. Rather than simply co-existence of the various levels as the outcome, what in fact is occurring is the co-evolution of the societal levels and which might be reflected in a transformation in self-understanding. From a macro-societal perspective what is also significant are changing

core-periphery relations, with the core having to re-define itself from the perspective of the periphery. This point has a more general application to cosmopolitanism as a condition that concerns the formation of an emergent reality. As stated earlier in this paper, cosmopolitanism, viewed from a critical perspective, entails world openness and self-transformation.

The micro dimension of cosmopolitanism concerns individual agency and social identities, that is aspects of cosmopolitanism reflected in internal societal change. This is the dimension of cosmopolitanism that is most commonly commented on, but the examples that are generally given tend to focus on trans-national or post-national phenomena. The conclusion of this paper is that this dimension must not only be looked at in the wider context of the macro and historical framework of modernity, but it must also be seen as more than a simple empirical condition, as in the frequently given example of a shift from national community to transnational community or the replacement of national identities by cosmopolitan ones. The micro dimension of cosmopolitanism is exemplified in changes within, for example, national identities rather than in the emergence in new identities. So cosmopolitanism is not to be equated with transnationalization, as is the tendency in political cosmopolitanism as discussed above. The relativizing of cultural values in contemporary society and the experience of contingency has led to a greater self-scrutiny within national identity: there are few national identities that do not contain self-problematizing forms of self-understanding. Rather than find cosmopolitanism embodied in a supra-national identity it makes more sense to see it expressed in more reflexive kinds of self-understanding. Taking the example of Europeanization, a cosmopolitan European identity can be seen less as a new supra identity rather than as a growing reflexivity within existing identities, including personal, national and supranational identities, as well as in other kinds of identities (see Delanty 2005). In addition to the transformation in identity, there is also the transformation in communication and in cultural models.

The indicators of cosmopolitanism go beyond shifts in identity to wider discursive and cultural transformation. In methodological terms, cosmopolitan indicators are necessarily ones concerning socio-cultural mediation. If the cosmopolitan moment arises in the construction and emergence of new identities or forms of self-understanding, cultural frames and cultural models, then mediation is the key to it. This emphasis on mediation between, for example, competing conceptions of the social world accords with the cosmopolitan idea in all its forms: the desire to go beyond ethnocentricity and particularity. In this sense then critical cosmopolitanism is an open process by which the social world is made intelligible; it should be seen as the expression of new ideas, opening spaces of discourse, identifying possibilities for translation and the construction of the social world. Following Bryan Turner's analysis, it can be related to such virtues as irony (emotional distance from one's own history

and culture), reflexivity (the recognition that all perspectives are culturally conditioned and contingent), scepticism towards the grand narratives of modern ideologies, care for other cultures and an acceptance of cultural hybridization, an ecumenical commitment to dialogue with other cultures, especially religious ones, and nomadism, as a condition of never being fully at home in cultural categories or geo-political boundaries (Turner 2001; Turner and Rojek 2001: 225). This is also reiterated in the arguments of other social theorists, such as Calhoun (2003), Gilroy (2004) and Kurasawa (2004) that cosmopolitanism does not entail the negation of solidarities, as liberal cosmopolitan theorists, such as Nussbaum (1996) argue, but is more situated and, as Appiah (2005) argues, it is also 'rooted'.

This notion of cosmopolitanism goes beyond conventional associations of cosmopolitanism with world polity or with global flows. The article stresses the socially situated nature of cosmopolitan processes while recognizing that these processes are world-constituting or constructivist ones. Such processes take the form of translations between things that are different. The space of cosmopolitanism is the space of such translations. While the capacity for translation has always existed, at least since the advent of writing, it is only with modernity that translation or translatability, has itself become the dominant cultural form for all societies. Translation once served the function of communication and was not the basis of a given culture. It is only becoming fully apparent today what the logic of translation has extended beyond the simple belief that everything can be translated to the recognition that every culture can translate itself and others. The most general one is the translation of inside/outside as a solution to the problem of inclusion and exclusion. Other dynamics of translation are those of the local and global, self and other, particular and universal, past and present, core and periphery. It is the nature of such translations that the very terms of the translation is altered in the process of translation and something new is created. This is because every translation is at the same time an evaluation. Without this dimension of self-transcendence, cosmopolitanism is a meaningless term. Conceived of in such terms, cosmopolitanism entails the opening up of normative questions within the cultural imaginaries of societies. The research object for critical cosmopolitan sociology concerns precisely this space, the discursive space of translations.

## **Conclusion**

Cosmopolitanism does not refer simply to a global space or to post-national phenomena that have come into existence today as a result of globalization. The argument advanced in this paper is that it resides in social mechanisms and dynamics that can exist in any society at any time in history where world openness has a resonance. Clearly cosmopolitanism has become relevant

today, due not least to the impact of globalization. Cosmopolitanism concerns processes of self-transformation in which new cultural forms take shape and where new spaces of discourse open up leading to a transformation in the social world. The cosmopolitan imagination from the perspective of a critical social theory of modernity tries to capture the transformative moment, interactive relations between societies and modernities, the developmental and dialogic.

For these reasons, methodologically speaking, a critical cosmopolitan sociology proceeds on the assumption that culture contains capacities for learning and that societies have developmental possibilities. The article has highlighted translations as one of the central mechanisms of cosmopolitan transformation and which occurs on macro-societal and on micro dimensions as well as being played on in the continued transformation of modernities. Cosmopolitan sociology is a means of making sense of social transformation and therefore entails an unavoidable degree of moral and political evaluation. To this extent, cosmopolitanism is a connecting strand between sociology and political discourse in society and in political theory. It has a critical role to play in opening up discursive spaces of world openness and thus in resisting both globalization and nationalism.

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## Notes

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2. For some indicative developments see Beck (2006), Kurasawa (2004), Skrbis, Kendall and Woodward (2001).

3. For a contrary view see Zolo (1997).

4. Bryan Turner argues these approaches exaggerate the demise of the nation-state (Turner 2006: 133–51).

5. The concept of the imaginary as used here is suggested by Castoriadis's notion of the radical imaginary (Castoriadis 1987).

6. For a detailed analysis see Arnason (2003), Arjomand and Tiryakian (2004) and Ben-Rafael and Sternberb (2005).

7. This suggests a constructivist approach and is also indicated in what Strydom (2002) calls a cognitive approach.

8. See the editors; contribution to this issue (Beck and Sznajder 2006: 153–62)

9. For a critique of methodological cosmopolitanism as advocated by Beck, see Chernilo (2006a, 2006b).

10. On Europeanization as an example of cosmopolitanism see Beck and Grande (2006), Beck (2000), (2002), Delanty (2005), Delanty and Rumford (2005), Rumford (2006).

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