Introduction: Towards a New Cosmopolitan Anthropology

Pnina Werbner

In the Beginning…

Ten people met in July 1946 to found the professional Association of Social Anthropologist, joined by a score of other anthropologists the following year. In many ways, Elizabeth Colson (who was there) tells us,

those who came to London, as well as the absent members, were a cosmopolitan group. They had crossed disciplinary and territorial boundaries in becoming anthropologists… They came out of history, law, geography, psychology, economics, biology, and engineering. They drew on their reading in other fields as they dealt with what they regarded as anthropological questions. Those born in Great Britain were in the minority. The remainder of that first group of perhaps 30 members were born in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and India, of parents some of whom had never visited Great Britain, while Nadel came from Austria and Peristiany from Cyprus. A cosmopolitan cohort, yet their subject matter was far removed from the cosmopolitan metropolis in which they gathered.

The New Cosmopolitanism(s)

Sixty years after the founding of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth, the aim of this book is to reposition social anthropology in relation to an evolving new cosmopolitanism, theorised in political philosophy, sociology of globalisation and postcolonial cultural studies. Words like cosmopolitanism may seem remote from anthropology’s subjects, embedded in European liberal elitist ideas of world consciousness artificially imposed on the out-of-the-way locales that anthropologists mostly study. Yet it is remarkable that anthropologists have made significant contributions since the 1990s, and even before that, to contemporary debates on cosmopolitanism. In inaugurating a new anthropology of cosmopolitanism, we argue in this book that both in practice and substantive terms a situated cosmopolitanism, broadly defined, may indeed today be at the heart of the discipline.
Cosmopolitanism, derived from the Greek conjunction of ‘world’ (*cosmos*) and ‘city’ (*polis*), describes a ‘citizen of the world’, member in a ‘universal circle of belonging that involves the transcendence of the particular and blindly given ties of kinship and country’ (Cheah 2006: 487). Against ‘globalisation’, a term implying the free movement of capital and the global (mainly Western) spread of ideas and practices, cosmopolitanism is a word used by the new cosmopolitans to emphasise empathy, toleration and respect for other cultures and values. Thus, at its most basic, cosmopolitanism is about reaching out across cultural differences through dialogue, aesthetic enjoyment, and respect; of living together with difference. It is also about the cosmopolitan right to abode and hospitality in strange lands and, alongside that, the urgent need to devise ways of living together in peace in the international community. Against the slur that cosmopolitans are rootless, with no commitments to place or nation, the new post-1990s cosmopolitanism attempts to theorise the complex ways in which cosmopolitans juggle particular and transcendent loyalties – morally, and inevitably also, politically.

Whatever the definition, and whether we are talking of rooted, vernacular or elite interpretations of the term, cosmopolitanism has to be grasped as an ethical horizon – an aspirational outlook and mode of practice. Cosmopolitans insist on the human capacity to imagine the world from an Other’s perspective, and to imagine the possibility of a borderless world of cultural diversity. We often label as cosmopolitan individuals with a certain subjective capacity to enjoy cultural diversity and travel; but because cosmopolitanism is itself a product of creativity and communication in the context of diversity, it must ultimately be understood not merely as individual, but as collective, relational and thus historically located.

**The New ‘Normative’ Cosmopolitanism**

The year 1990 was a watershed one for the new cosmopolitanism scholarship. The fall of the Berlin Wall, signalling the end of the cold war, coincided with an awareness of a ‘speeded up’ economic globalisation, the spectacular rise of extraterrestrial media during the 1992 first Gulf War, and increasing consciousness of the perils of a looming ecological planetary disaster. The new normative cosmopolitanism, heralded by David Held’s *Democracy and the Global Order* (1995), took up the vision of Immanuel Kant’s ‘Perpetual Peace’ to argue for the apparently utopian possibility of cosmopolitan citizenship. Kant, it will be recalled, proposed that only a confederation of republics could guarantee peace and the cosmopolitan right of individuals to venture out as strangers and sojourn in other territories.

There were, originally, three discernible strands to this new normative cosmopolitanism. These have increasingly converged as empirical research reveals the
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complexity of the contemporary global public sphere. All three strands respond to the demise of the so-called Westphalian order, the sacralised, inviolable sovereignty of the nation-state. This inviolability was first questioned by the post-World War II Nuremberg Tribunal and UN 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, followed by a subsequent series of international rights conventions. National boundaries were also increasingly undermined by multinational economic globalisation and the lowering of trade barriers. Issues of rights and accountability within and among states, and limitations on state sovereignty, came however to dominate international policy in the aftermath of the cold war (Held 1995: 101–7).

The first strand in the new normative cosmopolitan relates to global governance. Daniele Archibugi, while acknowledging its critics and sceptics, phrases it optimistically as an ‘endless process’ of globalising democracy or democratising globalisation (2004: 438). The idea is that ‘democracy cannot be understood in static terms’ (ibid.: 439) and that the move is from local democracy to democratising the international arena, underpinned by treaties, alliances and binding international conventions. The basic Kantian assumption is that democracy within states favours peace between states (ibid.: 441–2).

Perhaps the horizons of democracy are even greater than Archibugi suggests. David Graeber (Chapter 14) traces the provenance of concepts associated with ‘Western freedoms’ like democracy, and demonstrates that they are the product of ‘endless entanglements’ within and beyond the West, to the extent that, ironically, ‘[o]pposition to European expansion in much of the world, even quite early on, appears to have been carried out in the name of “Western values” that the Europeans in question did not yet even have’. Put simply, notions of rights to popular self-governance and autonomy have been widespread in many quite separated societies. The US constitution, particularly its federal structure, Graeber reminds us, was inspired in part by the Iroquois Six Nation Confederacy. Democracy could be and was invented in widely separated places: from pirate ships to African assemblies. Democratic practice, whether defined as procedures of egalitarian decision-making, or government by public discussion, tends, Graeber argues, to emerge from situations in which communities of one sort or another manage their own affairs outside the purview of the state, while democratic innovation, and the emergence of what might be called democratic values, has a tendency to spring from what he calls ‘zones of cultural improvisation … in which diverse sorts of people with different traditions and experiences are obliged to figure out some way to get on with one another’. He concludes that in the contemporary world ‘the endless elaboration of new cosmopolitan spaces, and the retreat of states in so many parts of the globe, suggests that there is the potential at least for a vast outpouring of new democratic creativity’.
Perhaps surprisingly, Graeber’s suspicion of the coercive aspects of democracy is one that was shared by Immanuel Kant. In *Perpetual Peace* Kant rejects a world superstate as inevitably ‘despotic’. A state, Kant says,

> [is] not, like the ground which it occupies, a piece of property (*patrimonium*). It is a society of men whom no one else has any right to command or to dispose except the state itself. It is a trunk with its own roots. . . . to incorporate it into another state, like a graft, is to destroy its existence as a moral person, reducing it to a thing (Principle 2).

With this organic image of nations and cultures Kant attacks the senseless ‘plunder’ by the ‘civilised’ of the remote corners of the earth. ‘The injustice which they show to lands and peoples they visit (which is equivalent to conquering them) is carried by them to terrifying lengths,’ he says,

> [u]nder the pretence of establishing economic undertakings, they brought in foreign soldiers and used them to oppress the natives, excited widespread wars among the various states, spread famine, rebellion, perfidy, and the whole litany of evils which afflict mankind.

In the face of this violence, he maintains,

> [s]ince the narrower or wider community of the peoples of the earth has developed so far that a violation of rights in one place is felt throughout the world, the idea of a law of world citizenship is no high-flown or exaggerated notion (Third Definitive Article).

What distinguishes the ‘league of peace’, then, is not the obliteration of difference, but *procedural* universalism: the rule of law, the separation of the executive from the legislative and judicial (which he terms republicanism), the rights of citizens (in a ‘kingdom of ends’), and the right of strangers to temporary abode.

Reflecting on the popular roots of democracy and cosmopolitanism, Hall (Chapter 17) says:

> I don’t think we can march around the world and make people cosmopolitan. On the other hand, the more people can begin to hope and aspire in a cosmopolitan way, the less we will be driven to ethnically cleanse people who are not like us, to murder people who won’t convert to us, people who won’t subscribe to the western way of life, etc.

Terms like cosmopolitan, he confesses, make him uneasy, evoking for him colonial claims to bring enlightenment to the natives. At the same time, he admits,

> I am a child of the Enlightenment. I think the one good thing the Enlightenment did understand was, it required a big argument, it required a row, it required a lot of talking . . .
Not stabbing them in the street… It is quarrels that created the enfranchisement of women. Or that gave the majority of people the vote.

Hence, if the first strand in the new normative cosmopolitan is to theorise the democratisation of a new international order, the second strand is often attributed to Habermas’s revisioning of Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, Habermas argues that international non-governmental organisations have created an alternative ‘global public sphere’ of debate and advocacy (Habermas 1999: 176). Listing UN-sponsored world conferences on global issues which took place in the 1990s – human rights (Vienna), ecology (Rio), women (Beijing), population (Cairo), poverty (Copenhagen), global warning (Berlin),

Habermas points to the central role played by non-governmental actors which ‘confront states from within the network of an international civil society’ (ibid.: 177). Nevertheless, he also recognises that the possibility of global peace is undercut by international inequalities, leading to civil wars and autocratic regimes in the developing world. In the post-cold war period ethnic conflicts – in the former Yugoslavia, Chechnya, several African countries (Ruanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Somalia), South East Asia (Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand) and the Middle East (Afghanistan and Iraq) – and the apparently inviolable persistence of autocratic regimes, like Robert Mugabe’s in Zimbabwe, threaten world peace and expose as hollow claims of international human rights.

The third strand in the new normative cosmopolitanism is perhaps best defined by Ulrich Beck when he distinguishes between globalisation, on the one hand, and cosmopolitanism as an emerging ethical response (‘vision’) to it on the other. Beck’s ‘banal’ or ‘latent’ cosmopolitanism is, arguably, very close to what we normally call globalisation. Against that, the interest in his work lies in his theorisation of what may be termed ‘reflexive’ globalisation; his insight that ‘What is new is not forced mixing but awareness of it, its self-conscious political affirmation, its reflection and recognition before a global public via the mass media, in the news and in the global social movements of blacks, women and minorities’ (2006: 21). For Beck this constitutes a new process – cosmopolitanisation. It involves a move from globalisation, to consciousness, to institutionalised normative cosmopolitanism, from principle to practice. ‘Under what conditions’, he asks, ‘subject to what limits and by which actors are certain cosmopolitan principles nevertheless translated into practice, and thereby acquire an enduring reality?’. Conscious recognition creates the grounds for ‘cosmopolitan solutions’ (ibid.: 22).

While Beck’s stress on consciousness makes a critical advance, his argument has to be qualified in the light of anthropological analyses of rooted or vernacular forms of cosmopolitanism. In these, the salient move is from cosmopolitan *practice* to cosmopolitan consciousness or *conviction*. Whereas Beck posits a simple denial of nationalism, for anthropologists, cosmopolitanism is as much
a local engagement within postcolonial states – with cultural pluralism, global rights movements, ideas about democracy and the right to dissent – as beyond their borders. Consciousness of cosmopolitan values may emerge where in the past a taken-for-granted de facto cosmopolitanism flourished, as in Sarajebo, in response to violent internal ethnic or religious conflicts and civil wars within states.

In a far-reaching critical evaluation of Beck’s work, Parry argues against the view that cosmopolitanism is necessarily antithetical to the ‘national outlook’ or that it is entirely value-neutral, accepting all cultures on their own terms, as equal in their difference. Nor is it true in the context of Indian caste, religious and cultural hierarchies and divisions, he contends, that the ‘salad bowl’ mixing without an implicit universalism advocated by some Indian scholars can lead to toleration and egalitarianism. The hidden assumptions on value behind cosmopolitan theorisations are here exposed by Parry through a subtle analysis of steel workers’ demotic cosmopolitanism, in contrast to a sons-of-the-earth local movement. He highlights the role of the Nehruvian state in promoting universal values of equity and merit, and providing the structural conditions of work in which these can thrive. The experimental worldliness and enthusiasms of workers and their ever-more-sophisticated children, as they socialise across previously unbridgeable social chasms, are described by Parry with an eye to the wonderfully humorous intimate details of contemporary Indian cosmopolitanisms. Equally remarkable is the communal harmony maintained in the town, in the face of religious rioting and violence elsewhere.

Beck’s critique of so-called ‘methodological nationalism’ in sociology – the conflation of ‘society’ with the nation-state – has never been applicable to anthropology – the study of part-societies and social fields (see my Chapter 3). While the discipline is perennially accused of a tendency to reify the little community or ‘culture’ contained within or straddling international borders, arguably a major advance in anthropology has been the recognition of the need to theorise the engagement of the people we study with the colonial and postcolonial state (Asad 1973; Werbner and Ranger 1996).

Even for sociology, Bryan Turner argues against Beck that it began as a study of the ‘social’, not of ‘society’ (2006: 135). Because the social is a ‘moral field’, he says, it can contribute directly to ‘the study and promotion of cosmopolitanism which must also reflect on the ethical dimensions of the social, especially in developing a hermeneutics of Otherness’ (ibid.: 134). Durkheim espoused ‘world patriotism’, an anti-nationalist cosmopolitan sociology, so that

[while anthropology was the study of Man, its exploration of difference produced a science of men, or the local in the global. Sociology, as a science of the social, has
retained a stronger sense of the universality of its moral field, of the global in the local. In this sense, sociology points towards a cosmopolitan epistemology of a shared reality (ibid.: 140–1).

Thus, Turner says, in ‘equating what he called ‘true patriotism’ with cosmopolitanism, Durkheim anticipated the modern debate about republicanism, patriotism and cosmopolitanism by almost a century’ (ibid.: 141).

Despite the optimism, the new normative cosmopolitanism has thrown up painful dilemmas. Beck remarks that the ‘concepts of emancipatory and political cosmopolitanism are interwoven with despotic cosmopolitanism’ (2006: 154). The ambivalence at the heart of normative cosmopolitanism has been driven home by the war in Iraq, fought against ‘terror’ in the name of liberty and democracy. In a world of unequal power relations cosmopolitan intervention in the affairs of other states, however lofty its stated ideals, continuously risks being construed as Western hegemonic expansion in disguise. The same accusation of false (hegemonic) cosmopolitanism has been applied to anthropology’s claims as a discipline, a matter I return to below.

Rather than being autonomous, Held argues, the no-longer-sovereign state lies ‘at the crossroads of a vast array of networks and organisations that have been established to regulate and manage diverse areas of international and transnational activity’ (2004: 366). Transnationally networked NGOs are often the ‘wild cards’ of normative cosmopolitanism, DeMars’s penetrating analysis discloses (2005). Held demonstrates the plurality of these actors and stakeholders; the complexity, overlap and often conflicting or competing mandates they hold; the fragmentation, incoherence, paralysis and ‘accountability deficit’ of global decision-makers vis-à-vis relevant constituencies; the inequalities and responsibility gaps, all of which plague the international arena. It is precisely these factors, it may be argued, that point to the continued importance of the nation-state as the most accountable political community for mediating and implementing decisions taken in international forums. But this itself discloses, as Sally Engle Merry proposes, a central conundrum:

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, states are no longer trusted by the international community to govern their own citizens without international oversight. On the other hand, the focus of much human rights activism is the state. Sometimes the state is the human rights violator, when it subjects its citizens to torture or extrajudicial killings, for example. Ironically it is also the agent for carrying out human rights reforms in many cases. Social and economic rights, such as the right to development or the right to adequate housing, require state action, as does the provision of many civil and political rights… Thus, human rights activism ends up demanding more state regulation and service. (Merry 2006: 5)
The relationship between the local and the cosmopolitan is even more complex, Merry proposes, since for cosmopolitan ideas such as human rights to be effective, they ‘need to be remade in the vernacular’, to be interpreted, reframed and translated by local activists (ibid.: 1–2). This process of translation and negotiation points also to the central preoccupation of the present book: not to focus solely on cosmopolitan travellers outside their own milieus, but on the way individual and collective actors in the postcolonial world make that world by engaging with each other and with cosmopolitan ideas and movements beyond their immediate locales.

In her study of the Maasai indigenous rights movement, Dorothy Hodgson (Chapter 11) portrays the dialectics and dilemmas of this engagement among a new generation of Maasai intellectuals and civic-cum-global activists. These activists have mobilised to defend the rights of pastoralists in the face of predatory land expropriations, legitimised by a state neoliberalism that endorses private ownership and market-oriented economic development. From being stigmatised as ‘primitive’, Maasai intellectuals and NGOs have worked, first in the international arena and subsequently in Tanzanian civil society, to create cross-ethnic alliances, lobbies and advocacy groups to protect their pastoral citizenship rights under the umbrella of a global rights movement. Starting with the biography of a single local-turned-global activist, Hodgson traces the historical development of this movement in the context of a liberalising post-socialist Tanzania. Her analysis discloses the emergence of a kind of rooted, pragmatic cosmopolitanism which recognises the crucial need to redefine ‘indigeneity’ (a label the government rejects) as the basis for universalist claims, by creating a broad, cross-ethnic alliance in which claims as Tanzanian citizens to both economic and cultural rights can be legitimately made in the newly emergent democratic, post-socialist public sphere and civil society.

The New Anthropological Cosmopolitanism

The mobilisation of the Maasai in Tanzania to claim their rights within this newly emergent democracy points to the contours of the new anthropological cosmopolitanism, which theorises the cosmopolitics of increasingly democratising postcolonies. ‘Third wave’ democratisation has ‘swept’ Latin America, parts if Asia and Africa, Central Europe and some former Soviet republics (DeMars 2005: 115). Archibugi reports that there were in 2004, 120 states with elected governments compared to 41 in 1974 and 76 in 1990, an indication of how much democracy — albeit often in imperfect forms — has expanded worldwide (Archibugi 2004: 442). In Africa there is talk of a Second Liberation Movement. Although often still an aspirational horizon bogged down by past failures, imposed neoliberal policies
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and incompetent or corrupt elites (Osaghae 2005), it nevertheless signals a radical
departure. Unlike the first liberation that led to independence from colonial rule and
was hijacked by kleptomaniac, intolerant and often violent authoritarian regimes,
the second liberation signals the (patriotic) right to dissent, demand accountability
and claim the rights of minorities to legitimate cultural and religious recognition
within the nation. Richard Werbner speaks of this movement as ‘post-liberalism’,
a ‘ferment of ideas and debate on the just balance between different rights, group
and individual . . . open-ended enough to be heuristic for . . . the renewed debate in
Africa marking a second postcolonial era, after nearly all the early nation-building
tyants have had their all too long day’ (R. Werbner 2004a: 263).

Such post-liberal ideas about multicultural, feminist and indigenous rights, the
contributors to this volume disclose, are taking root not only throughout Africa
(Hodgson, Chapter 14, Werbner, Chapter 9, Fardon, Chapter 12, Sichone, Chapter
15) but in post-Suharto Indonesia (Robinson, Chapter 6), India (Parry, Chapter
16, Ram, Chapter 7), among progressive Islamists in Malaysia (Stivens, Chapter
5) or Zapatista in Mexico (Graeber, Chapter 14). While it may be true, however,
that ‘in the cosmopolitan paradigm of the second modernity’ as Beck says, ‘non-
Western societies share the same time and space horizon as the West’ (2004: 70),
and that the ‘idea’ of cosmopolitanism ‘can find fertile soil in many cultures and
many contexts . . . though the language, idiom and form in which it is expressed
may differ’ (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 16), the urgent need remains to theorise
the distinctive historical trajectories which make the post-1990s, new postcolonial
cosmopolitanism so important, and so vulnerable. (On this distinctiveness, see

One scholarly pitfall denied by the new anthropological cosmopolitanism
is the idea that all postcolonial elites are rootless – endemically corrupt and
hence anti-cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitanism does not imply rootlessness. Rooted
cosmopolitanism is a salient feature of many in the postcolonial elite, whether they
are organic intellectuals leading indigenous and minoritarian rights movements or
privileged, affluent minority elites in the capital (R. Werbner, Chapter 9). Mitchell
Cohen, who coined the term, speaks of multiple patriotisms and ‘multicultural
exchange’, while recognising that these are ‘not easily harmonised’ (Cohen 1992:
483).

What is needed is the fashioning of a dialectical concept of rooted cosmopolitanism,
which accepts a multiplicity of roots and branches and that rests on the legitimacy of
plural loyalties, of standing in many circles, but with common ground. (ibid.)

This belonging to multiple circles of sentimental loyalty, having a ‘multiplicity
of roots’, ‘layers of identification’ – despite the xenophobic separations generated
by the Middle East conflict, is analysed reflectively by Aref Abu Rabia (Chapter
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8), recalling a trip he made with his family from Palestine-Israel across the Jordanian border and back again, in which he was painfully reminded of his Israeliness, but also more pleasurably of his Bedouin and Palestinian roots and connections. Abu Rabia criticises as parochial Ghassan Hage’s definition of white elite Australian ‘cosmopolites’ who ‘consume’ ethnic commodities and espouse multiculturalism, but whose declared tolerance ‘obscures an underlying racism.’ Instead, he argues,

Within the university and anthropological community in Israel there are some who document the Palestinian minority’s predicament, and this is true of some members of the Jewish and Jewish-Palestinian peace movement. Not all are ‘false’ cosmopolites. In this respect, I do not feel that I am alone. But we rooted cosmopolitans are weak politically and marginalised socially.

Despite all this, I am not a stranger. I live in my own land and want its long-term welfare, the welfare of my people, Israel, Palestine and the whole Middle East. In this sense, perhaps, I am a ‘rooted’ cosmopolitan, or cosmopolitan patriot.

To be a rooted cosmopolitan in an intolerant environment requires enormous courage and faith, Abu Rabia discloses, and this is signalled also in the biographies of Maasai and Kalanga activists in modern Africa (Hodgson, Chapter 11, Werbner, Chapter 9). Against that, there has been a tendency among some on the left to expose metropolitan postcolonial intellectuals as mere ‘cosmopolite’ pretenders. Timothy Brennan (1997: 37–41), for example, has argued that Third World novels in English by diasporic writers such as Salman Rushdie, while admittedly promoting genuine aesthetic novelty or ‘hybridity’ within the English novel, are celebrated because they fit a Western liberal aesthetics and novelty-dominated consumer market. By contrast, politically committed Third World novelists like the Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz, who write from within richly layered indigenous aesthetic traditions and address Arab audiences beyond the English-speaking metropolis, are marginalised (ibid.: 42–3). Jonathan Friedman, rejecting the postmodernist celebration of cultural multiplicity and hybridity, argues in somewhat similar vein that ‘Today’s cosmopolitans are cosmopolitans without modernism.’ Unlike the old, progressive ‘rationalist universalist’ cosmopolitans, ‘whose identity was defined in terms of the abstract, the rights of man, not of cultures’, they lack rootedness in the ‘street’, i.e. in the plight of the underprivileged (1997: 74, 75). Elite intellectuals from the Third World living in the First, he argues, have quite different life experiences from immigrants in the ghetto yet they invoke their cosmopolitan sensibility as the only morality and truth against so-called reactionary ethnics, as though hybridity was not itself just another identity (ibid.: 78 passim).
We see in Friedman’s denunciation the swan song of the ‘old’ cosmopolitanism that refuses to acknowledge that the politics of difference is a genuine politics – that postcolonial and diasporic intellectuals today grapple with intractable political challenges arising from essentialising racisms, religious communalisms, fundamentalisms and castism, the tyranny of culture. The politics of recognition and of cultural dignity must tread the fine line among individual and social rights, essentialising identities and hegemonic cultural homogenisation. In embedding their writing in rich and varied non-European literary and mythological traditions, the best of these cosmopolitan writers, like Salman Rushdie, rewrite their own histories as world histories even as they enrich the English novel. Nevertheless, Brennan in particular rightly points to the urgent need to focus on the predicaments faced by organic intellectuals and activists in contemporary postcolonies. This is the theoretical challenge the new anthropological cosmopolitanism must address.

Global Movements, Counter-Cosmopolitans

The fear of essentialising identitarian movements points to the fact that cosmopolitanism is threatened on two fronts: on one front is xenophobia, a fear and rejection of strangers; on the other, hegemonic cultural universalisation which is homogenising and intolerant of difference. Both have dire consequences from a cosmopolitan point of view. As Stuart Hall warns (Chapter 17), an attempt to ‘homogenise the world globally . . . look like us, learn our languages, learn our histories, become like us’ can lead to a defensive retreat into essentialised identities. The homogenising version of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism would make it, as Joel Kahn points out (Chapter 13), no different from new universalising, culturally effacing, homogenising global Islamic ‘reform’ movements. By contrast, the Malay world of migratory movements and cultural interchange that he describes, although grounded (in postcolonial Malaysia) in self-conscious ethnic and religious categorisations, is nevertheless characterised by ethnic co-responsibility, mutual exchange and cosmopolitan practice.

Not all boundary-crossing, globally oriented groups are cosmopolitan. Anthony Appiah labels religiously exclusivist global movements such as Al Qaida, that appear to espouse a singular truth and demonise the other, at times violently, as ‘counter’ cosmopolitan, despite these movements’ transnational networks and global moral aspirations (Appiah 2006). One needs to avoid, however, lumping all global ‘fundamentalist’ movements together. Some strands of global Islamism play a critical, dissenting, advocacy role, as Stivens (Chapter 5) highlights in her analysis of Islamic feminism in Malaysia. In Indonesia, women in the ‘Islamic Pribumi’ movement position themselves in opposition both to global Islamism.
and a generic traditional Islam originating in the Middle East. Robinson (Chapter 6) compares this movement’s cosmopolitan religious hermeneutics to the counter-cosmopolitan position of radical Muslim women’s ‘global fundamentalist thinking’, which nevertheless stresses the evils of poverty and inequality. Like in Malaysia, Islam has thus opened up possibilities for women’s activism and progressive interpretations of the scriptures in the context of broader alliances for women’s rights, struggling to overturn centuries of traditional paternalism. For Tamil Christian Dalit women in India, Kalpana Ram shows (Chapter 7) emancipatory politics necessarily involves a rejection of custom and tradition in favour of universalist, modernist notions of rights.

Such nuanced observations highlight the complexity of analysing situated cosmopolitanisms in the postcolonial world, and particularly so in relation to contemporary feminism or Christianity’s and Islam’s global reach. As a great ethical religion with a universal moral message, many cosmopolitan civilisations have repeatedly flourished in the realm of Islam, from Andalusia in Spain through the Near East to Mughal India, Indonesia and China, well before so-called Western democracy took root.

**Demotic Cosmopolitans, Cosmopolitan National Spaces**

Elite cosmopolitan literary intellectuals are not the only cosmopolitans in a globalising world. Along with the view that postcolonial elites are necessarily rootless and corrupt, a second false assumption the new anthropological cosmopolitanism rejects is the idea that cosmopolitanism is only and singularly elitist. Cosmopolitanism can equally be working class, as Jonathan Parry shows in his study of Indian workers (Chapter 16). Indian factory workers deny and transcend divisions of caste and ethnicity entrenched elsewhere in India, and mobilise consciously as part of a global trade union movement. Proletarian cosmopolitanism, rooted in Marx’s exhortation to workers of the world to unite, was undermined by popular nationalism (Cheah 2006), but in the post-liberal postcolonies of today, worker cosmopolitan consciousness of rights is a growing reality, underpinned by ILO conventions and international trade unions.

In a rapidly industrialising India, the experience of working together has created its own historical trajectory, Parry argues, and this is echoed by Richard Fardon’s study of Nigeria (Chapter 12), a large linguistically and religiously plural state that some would contend may be conceived of as cosmopolitan from its inception. Fardon argues in relation to the Chamba, a small peripheral group by Nigerian standards who historically have struggled to resist domination from the neighbouring Fulani, that ‘Particularly if you belong to a minority ethnic group nationally, a cosmopolitan sensibility, in so far as the term is understood
to apply to a capacity to reach beyond cultural difference – and not only the cultural differences of people outside your own nation – is necessary to feel any sense of belonging to your own nationalist project.’ Patriotism in multi-ethnic nations, at least for minorities, as Richard Werbner too argues (Chapter 9), is by definition cosmopolitan. Indeed, it is minorities, Werbner proposes, who extend notions of citizenship by insisting on universal rights for all, while also insisting on their entitlement to public recognition. For the Chamba in Nigeria, the nation is, in a sense, internally, a ‘cosmopolitan nation’, a space of myriad cosmopolitan encounters and dialogues. The same may be said of India (Parry, Chapter 16), Malaysia (Kahn, Chapter 13, Stivens, Chapter 4) Indonesia (Robinson, Chapter 5) South Africa (Sichone, Chapter 15) and the Caribbean (Hall, Chapter 17). But even smaller nations like Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Botswana and Israel are ethnically plural (Hirsch, Chapter 10, Hodgson, Chapter 11, Werbner, Chapter 9, Abu Rabia, Chapter 8). Within ethnically plural nations the social contract guiding relations among the multitude of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups is historically produced and continuously renegotiated culturally and politically in different spaces and arenas. Hence, for example, in non-secular but democratic Malaysia, Kahn shows, an appearance of rigid religio-ethnic separations, defined constitutionally, disguises a long history of regional migrations, and with it a more fluid and hybridised sense of Malayess, so that the achievement and preservation of a ‘relative peace’ relies ‘on the presence not of a single, culturally neutral public space but of a myriad of spaces and language games that together may be labeled peranakan [creole] Malay.’ Despite nationalist narratives of Malay indigeneity and purity, Kahn argues then, all Malays are to some extent peranakan (Chapter 13, Kahn 2006). Rooted cosmopolitan practice thus emanates, against the grain, from a uniquely Malaysian social contract among ethno-religious groups.

This points, as we have seen, to the fact that cosmopolitanism’s fundamental values are not necessarily ‘Western’ – a feature, we saw, Graeber documents in a wide-ranging comparative analysis (Chapter 14). Indeed, it may be said that cosmopolitanism is always, in some sense at least, vernacular, historically and spatially positioned, and hence also necessarily political, contested, dialectical. This is also the point made evocatively by Bruce Robbins (1998a, 1998b) in his discussion of transnational commitments, feelings and loyalties within and beyond the nation. Cosmopolitanism reflects the striving for universal ideals and local multiculturalisms within a particular field of power. Related to this politicised aspect of cosmopolitanism, the final canard rejected in this volume is that anthropology itself, rather than being a comparative cosmopolitan discipline is merely another expression of Western hegemony (Colson, Chapter 2; P.Werbner, Chapter 3; Hann Chapter 4), a point I return to below.

Despite some optimism about the cosmopolitanisation of the postcolonial world, global inequalities still threaten to undermine any genuine sense of
universal solidarity across class and wealth, north and south (Cheah 2006). Critical cosmopolitanism engages with these inequalities as well as with the sense that cosmopolitanism remains a term too closely associated with the rhetoric of former imperial colonisers or moralising elites (Hall, Chapter 17), whereas the people anthropologists study, like the Chamba in Nigeria, aspire – more modestly – to autonomy and self-rule within a local context (Fardon, Chapter 12). At the same time it is possible to argue, as Graeber does, that since the values associated with democracy and cosmopolitanism are widespread and not singularly the creation of the ‘West’, it is indeed questionable whether the West ever existed at all.

Vernacular and Rooted Cosmopolitanisms

This questioning of the ‘West’ by the new anthropological and postcolonial cosmopolitanism points to the conjunctural dialectics of what might broadly be called vernacular cosmopolitan. Vernacular cosmopolitanism – an apparent oxymoron that seems to join contradictory notions of local specificity and universal enlightenment – is at the crux of current debates on cosmopolitanism. These pose the question first, whether local, parochial, rooted, and culturally specific loyalties may coexist with translocal, transnational, transcendent, elitist, enlightened, universalist and modernist ones; and second, whether boundary-crossing demotic migrations may be compared to the globe-trotting travel, sophisticated cultural knowledge and moral worldview 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 dialectical elements of postcolonial and precolonial forms of cosmopolitanism and travel, while probing the conceptual boundaries of cosmopolitanism and its usefulness as an analytic concept. Paul Rabinow early on called cosmopolitanism a ‘twin valorisation’ of ‘worldwide macro-interdependency encompassing any local particularity’. He adds that ‘[w]e seem to have trouble with the balancing act, preferring to reify local identities or construct universal ones. We live in-between’ (Rabinow 1986: 258).

Vernacular cosmopolitanism is perhaps the most ambiguous of all these conjunctural terms: are we talking about non-elite forms of travel and trade in a postcolonial world, as in the case of the Senegalese Mourides described by Diouf (2000) and others, or of non-European but nevertheless high cultures
produced and consumed by non-Western elites, such as those of the Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian or Ottoman worlds? The Sanskrit cosmo-polis spanned an area extending from Afghanistan to Java and from Sri Lanka to Nepal, a non-Western but nevertheless cosmopolitan literary world that is contrasted by Pollock (2000) with the vernacular traditions that succeeded it. Are we to define, by analogy, contemporary south-east Asian, Hindi/Urdu or Cantonese mass-consumer and mediatised cultural worlds as cosmopolitan, or as vernacular (Robinson 2007)? So too, how are we to place minority elites in new postcolonial nations, who struggle to defend their vernacular cultures, and seek justice through multicultural citizenship, while being at the same time liberal, tolerant and highly educated world travellers, as Richard Werbner (Chapter 9) highlights in his portrayal of a Kalanga elder statesman? Werbner calls such cosmopolitan practice among Kalanga elites in Botswana ‘cosmopolitan ethnicity’ (Werbner 2004b; also 2002).

Terms such as cosmopolitan ethnicity or rooted cosmopolitanism, rather than denying the legacy of the ‘old’ Enlightenment cosmopolitanism of universalism beyond the local, as Friedman (2002) or Hollinger suggest (2002: 228), aim to incorporate the Greek and Kantian ideas which first defined cosmopolitanism into a more complex and subtle understanding of what it means to be a cosmopolitan at the turn of the twenty-first century. The worldview of Kalanga ‘reasonable radicals’ highlights the conjunctural features of cosmopolitanism, the fact that ethnic rootedness does not negate openness to cultural difference or the fostering of a universalist civic consciousness and a sense of moral responsibility beyond the local. This is also the point made by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1998), who argues that cosmopolitanism is equally an argument within postcolonial states about citizenship, equal dignity, cultural rights and the rule of law. Appiah speaks of cosmopolitan ‘patriotism’, a ‘rooted’ cosmopolitanism, and proposes that cosmopolitans begin from membership in morally and emotionally significant communities (families, ethnic groups) while espousing notions of toleration and openness to the world, the transcendence of ethnic difference, moral responsibility for the other. Postcolonial traveller elites may and do feel sentimentally attached to several homes in several different countries. In a wide reaching critical appreciation of Appiah’s foundational text(s), Richard Werbner (Chapter 9) considers a lack in Appiah’s stress on the liberal individual: public cosmopolitanism is necessarily, Werbner argues, a socially inclusive political project of creating alliances between like-minded individuals and collectivities. This project is rooted in and involves, he shows, ‘first, the restless quest for the further horizon; second, the imperative of moral re-centring; and third, the constructing and transcending of difference’.

Intellectuals in Malaysia (Kahn, Chapter 13), post-civil servants in Botswana (Werbner, Chapter 9; 2004: 27), Muslim feminists in Indonesia or Malaysia (Robinson, Chapter 5; Stivens, Chapter 4), Dalit women in India (Ram, Chapter 6), an Israeli Palestinian Bedouin academic in modern Israel (Abu Rabia, Chapter 8),
Maasai activists in Tanzania (Hodgson, Chapter 11), a village intellectual in Papua New Guinea (Hirsch, Chapter 10) or Chiapo activists in Mexico (Graeber Chapter 14) are all examples of rooted cosmopolitans who first make parochial interpretations of culture, religion and ethnicity in order to transcend them and assert wider cosmopolitan values. The conjunctural dialectic between particular and universal is never, it seems fully resolved.

**Elite and Demotic World Travellers**

Our analysis of rooted cosmopolitans expands the horizons of an earlier anthropological debate on the cosmopolitan as world traveller. The debate was initiated by Ulf Hannerz who proposed a set of useful distinctions among such travellers between cosmopolitan aficionados ‘willing to engage with the Other’ aesthetically (Hannerz, 1990: 239), who consciously foster their knowledge, understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of traditions and cultures other than their own; locals, ‘representatives of more circumscribed territorial cultures’ (Hannerz, 1992: 252), and transnationals, frequent travellers (usually occupational) who share ‘structures of meaning carried by social networks’ (ibid.: 248–9). By contrast to foreign correspondents or oil engineers, Hannerz lumps migrants and refugees, the demotic travellers of a global age, with ‘tourists’ because, he says, they regard involvement with other cultures as a ‘necessary cost’ (ibid.: 248). They lack, in other words, consciousness and appreciation of the cultural milieu into which they are inserted.

This has led to accusations of elitism and Eurocentrism (Robbins 1998b; P. Werbner, 1999). In my own work I bring a counter-example of a ‘working-class cosmopolitan’ in the figure of the expanding cosmopolitan subjectivity of a Pakistani migrant working on a building site in the Gulf, a simple man who embraces different cultures and members of diverse ethnic groups, but who nevertheless retains his transnational yet rooted identity as a Sufi.

African migrants display similar competencies, Owen Sichone argues, when they are away from home (Chapter 15). He portrays the complex life history of a certain type of migrant, the sort that travels without passports or visas, without any particular destination, making a new life wherever he or she happens to land. Such itineracy challenges, he argues, the system of global apartheid by claiming the right to move freely in defiance of state border regimes. These migrants also make it possible for others, who belong to the immobile 97 per cent of the human population that never leaves home, to connect with the world in ways that allow cultural and economic transfers between centre and periphery. Sometimes their dramatic and unpredictable impact upon the host population belies their small numbers.
Sichone’s chapter celebrates demotic cosmopolitanism – personal mobility in post-apartheid South Africa, and seeks to shift the focus in migration studies from labour migration and refugees to independent ‘economic’ migrants. Despite the best efforts of postcolonial states to tie Africans’ mobility to labour contracts, some migrants have managed to venture beyond the confines of their nation-states, crafts or levels of education in order to ‘find a place for themselves’ wherever they choose.

The challenge to the idea that cosmopolitans are necessarily members of the elite was first posed by James Clifford who reflects on the status of companion servants, guides and migrant labourers, and the grounds of equivalence between privileged and unprivileged travellers (1992: 106–7; cf. also 1998). Clifford proposes that ‘the project of comparing and translating different travelling cultures need not be class- or ethno-centric’ (1992: 107). Differential, often violent, displacements that impel locals to travel create, he says, ‘discrepant’ cosmopolitanisms (ibid.:108). Nevertheless, Clifford accepts the definition of cosmopolitans as individual travellers, exiles or diasporics, which he pitches against an allegedly restricted anthropological focus on the little community or culture. Our volume challenges this historiography of anthropology, as it challenges the idea that cosmopolitans necessarily reside or move permanently beyond their nations and cultures. Not all postcolonial cosmopolitans are travellers – nor are all travellers (as Hannerz reminds us) cosmopolitan. At the present cosmopolitan moment in anthropology there is a temptation to label almost anyone – African labour migrants, urbanites, Pentecostals, traders, diasporics – ‘cosmopolitan’. This obscures the ethical grounding of the new cosmopolitan anthropology in ideas of tolerance, inclusiveness, hospitality, personal autonomy, emancipation.

For the Nigerian Chamba inhabiting a country torn by bitter animosities between Christians and Muslims, their ethnic identity enables them to transcend divisions among themselves to live in peace, Fardon argues (Chapter 12); so too the Sufi order I studied preached tolerance, inclusiveness and peace (Chapter 3); Muslim feminists in Indonesia were part of a peace alliance with Chinese and other persecuted minorities (Robinson, Chapter 6).

The notion that there are many, different, cosmopolitan practices co-existing in late modernity, with their own historicities and distinctive worldviews, has led nevertheless also to an exploration of marginal cosmopolitanisms. Homi Bhabha, who possibly coined the term ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’, is uneasy with Martha Nussbaum’s image of the self, following the Greek Stoic Hierocles, as at the centre of a series of concentric circles, with universal liberal values privileged above family, ethnic group or nation (Nussbaum, 1994). The notion of a borderless cosmopolitan community seems inadequate, he proposes, in relation to the millions of refugees and migrants fleeing violence and poverty. Drawing on Appiah’s vision, Bhabha proposes a ‘cosmopolitan community envisaged in
marginality’, a border zone which he terms vernacular cosmopolitanism (1996: 195–6).

Such violently dislocated populations differ significantly from settled groups on the margins. Melanesian cultural groups, positioned on the margins of the metropolitan world, Eric Hirsch argues (Chapter 10), nevertheless view themselves as located at the centre, managing a vast symbolic world of exchange in which cultural boundaries and horizons were never fixed. So, too, the Stoics’ vision of concentricity, Richard Werbner contends (Chapter 9) was not ‘static’ but ‘dynamic’: ‘to be civic and truly moral … Stoics demanded active, deliberate change of a certain kind in the light of moral reason and perceived virtue’.

Although Hannerz has revised his earlier position, acknowledging that more people beyond the elite may now be identified as cosmopolitan, he notes that ‘bottom-up’ cosmopolitans are unlikely to be recognised as such in their own environment (2004: 77). Societies differ culturally in the extent to which they celebrate (or denigrate) familiarity with diverse cultures. Stuart Hall (Chapter 17) says of ‘cosmopolitans from below’, part of the ‘enormous tide of transnational movement’, who are driven by civil war, ethnic cleansing, famine, economic disaster, and search for economic benefits, that they ‘live a global life’ by necessity, arising from ‘the disjunctures of globalisation’. Despite that, their understanding or knowledge is just as complex, he points out, as that of global entrepreneurs; they too are ‘in translation’.

This raises the critical question of cosmopolitan consciousness: in what sense does cosmopolitanism need to be grounded in an open, experimental, inclusive, normative consciousness of the cultural other? Such a consciousness would need to include elements of self-doubt and reflexive self-distantiation, an awareness of the existence and equal validity of other cultures, other values, and other mores. Is travel without such an inclusive consciousness cosmopolitan? Does travel inevitably lead to such openness and reflexivity? Despite their global commercial acumen, Senegalese Mouride traders are said to engage in ‘rites of social exclusiveness’ so that ‘Mouride diasporic culture is homogenised in a way that excludes foreign values’ ((Diouf, 2000: 694, 695). Similarly, members of the jet-setting wealthy Chinese overseas trading diaspora studied by Aihwa Ong (e.g. 1998, 1999), with their multiple passports and multiple homes in different countries, appear to lack the kind of cultural openness and sensitivity normally associated with cosmopolitanism. Diasporas, by definition, are heterogeneous, and not all their members are equally cosmopolitan as I show elsewhere, in my analysis of the Pakistani diasporic public sphere (Werbner 2002). Sometimes it is factory workers rather than wealthy merchants who display more openness to their non-diasporic compatriots. So, too, diasporic intellectuals may be alienated from underprivileged members of their community despite their celebration of cultural hybridity. But not all diasporic elites are so alienated. Similarly, not all
Senegalese in Italy are inward looking, even if Mourides regard Italy as a ‘polluting’ environment. Riccio (2001) reports that Senegalese in Italy are a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community who seek, as one migrant told him, not ‘only to look for jobs. To emigrate is to know new things, to broaden one’s horizons in such a way that one can bring back home what one discovered and learned’.

Much depends on context. Some environments are more cosmopolitan than others. Zubaida (1999) invokes the ‘legendary cosmopolitan enclaves of Cairo, but especially Alexandria, the paradigm case of Middle Eastern cosmopolitanism’ – a hub of ideas, religions, goods and people from East and West, protected by an imperial context. Thessalonica was, according to Kenneth Brown (forthcoming), ‘a great Balkan cosmopolitan city for centuries, a veritable Babel of languages, religions, cultures and local traditions’. If we take vernacular cosmopolitanism to refer to a multcentred world, beyond the West, in the sense proposed by Arjun Appadurai, it is perhaps among the elites of such cosmopolitan cities that distinctive vernacular cosmopolitanisms are created.

**Feminist and Non-Violence Cosmopolitan Movements**

Feminism introduces a new kind of ‘difference’ into the cosmopolitan debate. Despite some attention to women and globalisation, and to the complex relations between First and Third World feminists, cosmopolitanism has been a ‘virtually insignificant presence of gender issues in the now voluminous literature on cosmopolitanism’ as Maila Stivens (Chapter 4) points out, an absence ‘all the more remarkable,’ she observes, because ‘feminisms have engaged both theoretically and practically with many of the besetting difficulties within the cosmopolitanism debates’ – ‘universalism, ethnocentricity, neo-imperialism’, and have developed ‘ideas of transversal politics and versions of what can be seen as grounded cosmopolitanism’. In a wide-ranging review of the literature, Stivens suggest that the hiatus may be linked to ‘a long-term disdain in political thought for what is deemed the “private”, “domestic” or intimate’, the main focus of women’s democritisation movements. For Islamic feminists in Malaysia and Indonesia, highly self-conscious translation and interpretation, as well as political activism and lobbying, have been the crux of their cosmopolitan project.

In her richly documented account of the development of Indonesian Muslim feminism, Kathryn Robinson (Chapter 5) shows the extent to which Muslim women scholars and political leaders have engaged with Muslim feminist revisionist thought in the wider Muslim world. Their aim has been to create jointly a gendered revolution in theorising the positioning of women in Islamic societies, based on a new hermeneutics of sacred texts. As in Malaysia, the movement has created alliances with other women’s organisations to address a range of issues
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– from domestic violence to polygamy, marriage and divorce laws – and mobilised in public protest against paramilitary military and ethnic violence against women, internationally and within Indonesia.

Robinson grounds her analysis in the changing political landscape of Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. She argues that the flood of new Islamic feminist literature exemplifies the cosmopolitan character of Islamic social and political thought as a counterpoint and complement to western thinking (in a manner remarkably similar to the development of Indonesian nationalism in the early twentieth century). The principles of gender equity discovered through hermeneutical readings of texts are similar to the principles put forward by proponents of Islam as a basis for democracy, or for a distinctive Islamic form of human rights. For these scholars, feminism (like democracy and human rights) is not exclusive to western cosmopolitan ideals.

The activists have successfully converted a popular women’s ritual of joyous singing in praise of the Prophet into one of joyous singing in praise of ‘Justice’ or ‘Jender’ equality, as a way of spreading their message among the wider population.

The high level of cosmopolitan consciousness among feminists is thus rooted in the local and political specificities of Indonesian society. In Malaysia, too, a women’s coalition has set out a manifesto of women’s rights and Agenda for Change, which ‘deplores the manipulation of ethnicity and religion and the use of fear and oppressive forces to divide women’. One member organisation, Sisters of Islam, is well known internationally and has been highly active in global NGO forums. As in Indonesia, SIS engages Malaysian society ‘in a highly reflexive and participatory process of “cultural” mediation or dialogue,’ in which it locates women’s (universal) rights, and intellectual and political activism within the evolving state, within culturally particular, communal values, rather than denying these values.

In addition to these highly conscious cosmopolitan elites, other women, more underprivileged and living on the margins, may also engage in cosmopolitan practice. Within a general atmosphere of xenophobia in post-Apartheid South Africa, Owen Sichone says (Chapter 15), local women in the townships in Cape Town, much like the British women who welcomed black American GIs in World War II (Nava 2006), are far more hospitable to strangers from other African countries than are their menfolk; more willing to understand, as Sichone puts it quoting Julius Nyerere, ‘greeting strangers with gifts of food and on the third day, giving them the hoe and inviting them to join in the cultivation of land’ – in other words, incorporating prior strangers into the community.

In India, Dalit Christian women, Kalpana Ram proposes (Chapter 7), break the bondage of home and village community as they embrace modernist cosmopolitan
values which postcolonial writers have critically viewed as merely – and exclusively – defining the middle classes in India. Inspired by these values, the women take on new responsibilities and assert their agency by moving freely between villages. Theirs is a local cosmopolitanism, but it is nevertheless associated with a wider vision of the world and their rights as unbounded citizens. Ram wants to develop the emotional, embodied, phenomenological groundings of cosmopolitanism in the flow of feelings of unboundedness in relation to an Other.

Both Stivens and Robinson draw on Yuval-Davis’s notion of transversal dialogue to point to the challenge of bridging divisions between actors, all the more so in the context of violent conflict. Although Appiah rightly points out that in some cosmopolitanism ‘conversations’, protagonists can only agree to disagree (2006: 78), endemic ethnic conflict, gender inequalities or imposed religious dogma do require a committed and genuine attempt to arrive at agreed strategies for living in amity, without denying differences.

Public Cosmopolitans, Cosmopolitan Subjectivities, Fluid Boundaries

Several of the chapters examine in depth the personal biographies and evolving subjectivities of postcolonial intellectuals or public radicals, from different perspectives. Among the Fuyuge in Papua New Guinea, a world of fluid exchange relations of objects, places and names is premised on the idea of cosmopolitan centrality, Eric Hirsch argues (Chapter 10). Each group sees itself as at the centre of this universe of exchange between equals. The ‘entification’ of territorially demarcated groups by gold-mining companies has divided the indivisible and created relations of inequality and power imbalance between local people and the mining company, the latter supported by the state. In this new context, Hirsch shows, both a travelled public urban intellectual and a local Fuyuge village intellectual perceive a danger of being overwhelmed by an outside culture, in a new kind of fear that did not exist previously in the fluid, constantly re-centering indigenous Melanesian form of cosmopolitanism. Aref Abu Rabia traces his own intellectual biography and the predicaments Palestinian public intellectuals faced in Palestine-Israel (Chapter 8), while Dorothy Hodgson traces the biography of a Maasai intellectual and activist (Chapter 11). In modern Botswana, Richard Werbner locates the biography of a leading Kalanga public activist in his experiences of ethnic persecution and the changing landscape of racist southern Africa, and traces his subsequent role in nation-building republicanism, and in the formation and defence of civil society in postcolonial Botswana (Chapter 9). A trained lawyer committed to public transparency and the rule of law, he nevertheless remained rooted in his Kalanga identity and the values of the countryside until the end of
his life. His funeral was an occasion for memorialising his visionary life history as a maverick and as a rooted public cosmopolitan. In reviewing Anthony Appiah’s impressive oeuvre on cosmopolitanism, Werbner is concerned that perhaps his ‘holistic optimism’ underestimates the painful social and political contradictions and the price involved in struggling to be both patriotic and cosmopolitan.

Writing Social Anthropology as Cosmopolitan Theory and Practice

In a deeply insightful keynote address analysing the historical phases of anthropology as a cosmopolitan discipline, Elizabeth Colson (Chapter 2) stresses the relative fieldwork isolation of the early generation of modern anthropologists when compared to today’s jet-setting, in-and-out-of-the-field generation. This inevitably led, she argues, to a greater ‘intensity’ of knowledge of a smaller region, to less dialogue with members of other disciplines — who rarely ventured into the hinterland — and to the unlikelihood of being ‘bothered by frequent visits from officialdom or missionaries’. The rest of the world seemed very remote by comparison to today’s locales of anthropological study.

In the aftermath of World War I, and in the face of the rise of European fascism, anthropologists in the inter-World War period were cosmopolitan in a unique sense, Colson argues: ‘The superiority of western values and western institutions was not nearly as taken for granted as it was in later prosperous decades’, and hence they ‘were likely to respect the political economies, ritual orders, and dogmatic beliefs they described as viable alternative systems of order, i.e. ideal models of alternative reality from which much of the contention caused by perceptions of inequality and other evils was eliminated’. Sceptical of ‘innate European superiority, the long term viability of European institutions’ and Western ideas of progress, in some ways the inter- and post-war anthropologists resembled today’s postmodernists. But they were not textual deconstructivists: ‘They had seen for themselves the importance of economic and political factors in determining the history of their own times, and they gave primacy to such factors in pursuing their own research agendas.’

In my chapter (Chapter 3) I address the deconstructive critique of social anthropology in the mid-1980s that challenged the discipline’s claims to be cosmopolitan in practice (doing fieldwork in out-of-the-way places) and in social theory (the comparative study of societies and cultures). The attack focused on the evident power imbalance between predominantly Western researchers and non-Western subjects during the colonial era. In many ways this imbalance has persisted into the present. Beneath the scientific façade of ethnographic objectivity, the critics argued, the hegemonic fieldworker remains invisible and the ‘native voices’ of the cultural and social other are suppressed.
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Of course, although undoubtedly well-intentioned, this denial of anthropology’s cosmopolitan claims starts from the distinctly sceptical, un-cosmopolitan assumption that just because one happens to come from a certain society, one is incapable of understanding other societies, empathising with their members’ predicaments and joys, learning their language, poetry, myth making or story telling, appreciating their material culture, the challenges of their environment, their mundane everyday lives. In short, celebrating their difference. This identitarian ‘nativist’ approach, Adam Kuper has argued, sees its salvation in representing the (unedited) voices of the people – the oppressed other (1994: 542–3), buying into the ‘gospel’ that ‘white people could never appreciate what it meant to be black, that men could not understand women … that only the native could understand the native, only the native has the right to study the native’ (ibid.: 544). The alternative view, I argue, is that the gaze of the stranger enables new insights (Chapter 3).

A second strand is that the denial of social anthropology’s cosmopolitanism relates to an alleged tendency of the discipline to study ‘closed’ cultures – to misrecognise cultural openness, fluidity, internal contestation or mobility. Structural functionalism, it was taken for granted, was the study of closed social systems, just as cultural anthropology studied closed cultures. Against that, I argue (Chapter 3) that social anthropologists, especially those in the Durkheimian Radcliffe-Brownian tradition, studied unbounded social fields, much as Bryan Turner, we saw, argued for sociology. Referring to Herder’s notion of volk culture, Chris Hann (Chapter 4) considers the cosmopolitan impact of central European thought on social anthropologists such Malinowski and Gellner, who came to Britain from Poland and Czechoslovakia, and argues that both were influenced by Herder’s ideas, as was Boas in the United States. There is little doubt that Malinowski, originating from the small Polish academic elite of a ‘subjugated nation’ (Stocking 1991: 34), displayed a Herderian impulse in his theorising and defence of the integrity of pre-contact cultures and his open recognition of the destructiveness of modern ‘civilisation’ (ibid: 60–1) – despite his faith in enlightenment ideas of science. The same impulse is evident in Herder’s romantic nationalism, which evolved in opposition to the imperialist hegemony of French metropolitan culture in Germany, and its civilisational and rationalist message. Against that, Herder insisted that all cultures were equally authentic, rooted, organic, inviolable and constitutive of overarching collective values.

In practice, however, Malinowski’s and Gellner’s visions of culture were in some ways more sceptical than Herder’s. Culture was something individuals or groups manipulated for personal or collective utility; their reach was regional; and they were epiphenomenal: the real truths were environmental, economic, political or psychological. Gellner recognised that Muslim society was riven by political conflicts, ideological divisions and moral disagreements, and he
saw national culture as an invented tradition for the sake of capitalist expansion. Like their fellow British social anthropologists, Hann argues, Malinowski and Gellner regarded anthropology as a science, yet both were patriots, hence rooted cosmopolitans. Gellner returned to the Czech Republic after the fall of communism to help establish anthropology in the university. Malinowski, Hann tells us, was engaging himself actively on behalf of Poland when he died in New Haven in 1942. Hann argues that the principle of rooted cosmopolitanism has far-reaching implications for the discipline – specifically, that local folklorists ‘at home’ should be incorporated into anthropology departments in Eastern Europe.

The intellectual biographies of modern anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown or Boas raise the question: how deep have been the differences between British social and American cultural anthropology? Kuper maintains that ‘the American project of cultural anthropology … [was] quite distinct … from the dominantly European project of social anthropology’. American anthropology was grounded in the German romantic tradition’s stress on each society possessing a distinct culture, a ‘complete way of life’, which created ‘distinctive modes of experiencing the world’ and ‘moulding personality’ (Kuper 1994: 539–40). Culture was a ‘system of symbols’ or ‘texts’. Echoing this division, Colson recalls that the early ASA rejected American anthropology (with the exception of Radcliffe-Brown’s students at Chicago). Against that, Marshall Sahlins (1999), citing cultural diffusion theories, argues that ‘it is astonishing from the perspective of North American cultural anthropology to claim that our intellectual ancestors constructed a notion of cultures as rigidly bounded, separate, unchanging, coherent, uniform, totalized and systemic’ (Sahlins 1999: 404). Indeed, they spoke ‘of “the fallacy of cultural separation”: the mistaken idea that because cultures are distinctive they are closed’ (ibid.).

In Chapter 3 I show that social anthropologists from the start analysed transcultural systems of economic exchange, pilgrimage and regional cults,. Critiquing the idea of an ‘anthropological obsession, exclusively, with self-containment, closed culture, social boundedness’, Richard Werbner has argued that the ‘trans-interest’ in anthropology, including ‘creolization, hybridity and syncretism is at least as old as the nineteenth century ethnography of the Ghost Dance … among American Indians … or the Kula ring’ (R. Werbner 2004c: 390). My chapter proposes that such flows and movements are central to understanding regional and pilgrimage cults,. Following Sahlins, Jonathan Friedman (2002) similarly rejects a currently pervasive trope positing that in the past, anthropologists studied only ‘bounded’ cultures, localities and communities, while transnational or global encounters necessarily generate hybrid objects (or cultures). This, he argues, stems from a current tendency to individualise and reduce culture to a substance that ‘fills’ people or objects so they can either ‘be pure or mixed’ (ibid.: 25). Rejecting
attacks on indigenous movements, Friedman defends an earlier ‘global systemic anthropology’ which argued that ‘[t]he fact that people occupying a particular place and living and constructing a particular world are in their entirety integrated into a larger system of relationships does not contradict the fact that they make their world where they are’ (ibid.: 31, emphasis added).

It seems, then, that in practice neither British nor American modern anthropology were ever the study of closed cultures. Most anthropologists would agree with Kuper and others (e.g. Kahn 2003) that we are increasingly involved in a collaborative effort, in dialogue with the people we study, with local academics, journalists, public activists and other experts from a range of disciplines, in regional debates (Fardon 1990), and beyond that, in conversation among ourselves and with closely allied disciplines like sociology or social history. Above all, social anthropologists, with their comparative knowledge and cosmopolitan sensibility, can add a less parochial dimension to what are all too often Eurocentric analyses in the social sciences – even these days when the focus is on globalisation. To quote Colson, ‘the anthropologists of the 1940s encroached upon the realm of the social philosophers, moralists, religious thinkers, and other social critics … [They] directed attention to the narrowness of vision of economists, psychologists, and humanitarians who unthinkingly adopted western yardsticks and assumed the givenness of western categories’.

Hence, I argue (Chapter 3) that it is not the encounter during fieldwork which makes the anthropologist a cosmopolitan; rather, anthropologists become cosmopolitan as a community of scholars engaged in building a comparative subject through argumentation and critical debate. From this perspective, cosmopolitanism is dialogical – a collective, creative endeavour, beyond the individual. But as travellers and strangers, anthropologists rely on the hospitality and welcome of the people they study. Paradoxically, then, it is they who, as cosmopolitan hosts, enable the emergence of a shared cosmopolitan dialogue.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Elizabeth Colson and Richard Werbner for their helpful comments on this introduction.
2. Habermas misses some of these.
4. As I write this, Robert Mugabe is still in power, one of the last irrational tyrants, with the international community and neighbouring African countries apparently helpless to replace him.
5. Anna Tsing, from another perspective, shows the creative re-centring of the Meratus (Tsing 1993: 251–83).

6. On Malinowski see Sahlins (1976), especially Chapter 2. Invoking Gellner, Rapport (2007) has recently advocated an individual ‘enlightenment’ vision of cosmopolitanism anthropology, while perpetuating the stereotypical myth of the ‘closed society’ or ‘culture’ (British and American) – holistic, collectivistic, relativistic – and thus devoid of individual consciousness, agency or moral imperatives, supposedly characterising anthropological theory (ibid.: 262).

References

Introduction

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