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Review Article: On the New Cosmopolitanism

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Since the early 1990s there has been a growing attempt in the US academy to free the term cosmopolitanism from its traditional implications of rootlessness and privilege and to make it work in the context of postcolonialism and globalisation. Taking their cue from Paul Rabinow's (1986) call for a 'critical cosmopolitanism', a host of thinkers have contributed to this retooling of cosmopolitanism. Appadurai (1991) calls for a cosmopolitan anthropology that does not presuppose the primacy of the West. James Clifford (1992) coins the term 'discrepant cosmopolitanisms' to describe the travelling cultures of migrant workers, refugees, tourists, and other mobile communities. Bruce Robbins (1993) explores the possibility of 'comparative cosmopolitanisms' that seek to reconcile a self-conscious academic professionalism with a worldly expansiveness of subject matter and political engagement. As the debate gathers momentum, the term attracts a series of qualifying adjectives, leading to a proliferation of new cosmopolitanisms-from-below: 'postcolonial cosmopolitanism' (Parry 1991), 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Cohen 1992), 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Bhabha 1996), and 'patriotic cosmopolitanism' (Appiah 1998). In the past year this renewed attention to cosmopolitanism has extended to the practice of book titling and anthologisation, giving rise to the two texts under consideration here: Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (1997) and Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (1998).

These works represent opposing tendencies in the debate on cosmopolitanism. Brennan takes the new cosmopolitanism to task, accusing it of US-centredness, complicity with transnational capitalism, insensitivity to indigenous issues, and dismissiveness towards postcolonial nationalism. *Cosmopolitics* claims the resurgence of cosmopolitanism as a viable and alternative political project. While there are significant disagreements among its contributors, and indeed among its editors, the overall thrust of the anthology is to understand cosmopolitanism as a contested political domain that works both within and beyond the nation. Both *At Home in the World* and *Cosmopolitics* take a stance against a celebratory postnationalism that claims the ethico-political redundancy of the nation-state. Both seek to outline the conditions for a global cultural outlook that respects autonomy and contestatory values without appealing to universal humanism or to abstract notions of linguistic disruption/translation. Yet, as Brennan recognises, the question is not so much the desirability of building a transnational political sphere in which it is possible to resist the uneven developments of global capitalism, but *how* to do it. It is on the crucial question of how anti-capitalist political activities intersect with the current academic celebration of transnational and hybrid cultures that significant divergences emerge between the two volumes. For Brennan, the nation-state remains the linchpin of any attempt to counter the workings of transnational capitalism, since 'any meaningful politics is still about the control of states' (1997: 317). By contrast the contributors to *Cosmopolitics* explore the risks and opportunities associated with political activities that extend beyond state jurisdictions, arguing that these are not necessarily incompatible with nationally bound political practices. Just how far it is

possible or advisable to abandon the nation-state as the central arena of an anti-imperialist cultural politics is the principal issue at stake in these recent additions to the US cosmopolitanism debate.

Approaching these texts as an Australian (and as an erstwhile US graduate student) poses particular dilemmas. For a start, the sheer proliferation of contributions from US-based scholars attests to what Brennan calls cosmopolitanism's American base. Of the 16 contributors to *Cosmopolitics*, 14 work in the US academy (the exceptions are Jonathan Ree and Etienne Balibar). The statistic is not interesting as an indicator of editorial preference or neglect. As one expects of a collection of critical essays published by a major US university press, the volume is well balanced in its contributions by gender, ethnicity/race and nationality. It is gratuitous to denounce an anthology that emerges from the US for its privileging of US academic viewpoints. The more pressing question concerns the emergence of cosmopolitanism as a problematic and political project in the US academy. For while the topic has attracted commentators who work in other national contexts for example Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* and *Nations without Nationalism* (1993), Jacques Derrida's *Cosmopolites de tous les pays* (1997), and the essays by Jürgen Habermas and others in *Perpetual Peace* (Bohman & Luntz-Bachmann 1997), a volume commemorating Kant's famous essays on cosmopolitanism - it is primarily in the USA that cosmopolitanism has emerged as a new credo for the academic left. According to Brennan, this reflects a surreptitious perpetuation of American national interests. He contends that the new cosmopolitanism leaves the US sense of national pre-eminence untouched and limits a confrontation with alternative values implicit in the reception of the Third World. Above all, he maintains that the current academic interest in transnational cultural formations overlooks the importance of postcolonial nationalism as a means of countering inequalities that are structural to the global political economy. This argument is also put forward, in complex theoretical terms, by Pheng Cheah in his contributions to *Cosmopolitics*. While I suggest that cosmopolitanism's advocates have largely thought through and answered these objections, the problem remains as to the concentration of cosmopolitical rhetoric in US academic work.

In his introduction to *Cosmopolitics* Bruce Robbins outlines two reasons for the existence of a book on cosmopolitanism in the USA of the late 1990s: the misperception of the US multiculturalist debate as a celebration of difference for its own sake, and the resurgence of a new and dangerously reinvigorated US nationalism since the end of the Cold War. For Robbins, cosmopolitanism describes a striving towards common norms and mutual translatability that challenges the reading of multiculturalism as merely particularistic. It also names a mode of political practice that extends beyond national borders, recognising the moral weight of non-citizens to be equally valid as those of the citizens of any given polity. Robbins points to the special role of culture in naturalising national interest. Citing John Judis and Michael Lind's 'For a new nationalism' (1995), he shows how an affirmation of US cultural identity (manifest as a call for checks on immigration and capital flight) issues in an affirmation of US economic advantage and military strength. Claiming shame as his own modality of US national belonging, he proffers a located and embodied cosmopolitanism as a means of opposing such chauvinism both at home and abroad. Coupled with this is a recognition of actually existing cosmopolitanisms, whether they be the multiple forms of dislocation and habitation registered by Clifford, the institutions of international civil society (NGO, and more sinister supranational bodies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), or the transnational imagined communities enabled by the increased but still uneven spread of communication and information technologies. Robbins is surely right to point to the existence of these forms of transnational belonging, and he is not alone in doing

so. Yet his elaboration of local reasons for the turn to cosmopolitanism does not explain why the specificity of the US multicultural debates or of resurgent US nationalism necessitates this particular intellectual/political project of reworking an established Enlightenment idea.

In Australia a discrepant experience of multiculturalism and resurgent nationalism has produced a different response from the academy. Since the election of the conservative government in 1996 there has been a gradual rolling back of official state multiculturalism and a persistent attempt to restrict the Wik and Mabo High Court decisions granting greater freedoms on indigenous land rights. This has accompanied and enabled the rise of a nationalist populism that identifies Asian immigration as a source of unemployment and the provision of government services to indigenous groups as 'politically correct' favouritism, granted that this racial intolerance lay dormant in the multiculturalism promoted by the previous Labor government. By constructing minority cultures as particularities in contrast to a dominant Anglo-Celtic majority, Australian multiculturalism worked to museumise cultural differences, leaving the door open for the present racist backlash. Nonetheless, the new national populism pits itself against multiculturalism, which it understands as the project of a political, economic, and cultural elite. Much of the intellectual commentary on national populism in Australia stresses the disaffection at stake in this rejection of supposedly elitist perspectives. The tendency is to denounce the racist elements of national populist thought but to treat its accumulated resentments as evidence of popular resistance to government policies that tune the national economy to global capitalism. Drawing on cultural studies approaches that stress the oppositional potential of popular practices, these arguments emphasise the association of multicultural and transnational perspectives with political and social positions that are considered meritocratic and elite.¹ Political debate in Australia remains polarised around an elite/popular divide, with groups and individuals who advocate more open immigration policies, indigenous rights, and/or greater integration with Asia persistently labelled as privileged, favoured or arrogant.

It is this presumed elitism of multicultural and transnational practices that the new cosmopolitanism challenges. Australian scholars have produced a wealth of work on the social, economic and cultural effects of globalisation, but the move to work under the banner of cosmopolitanism has been more limited than in the USA. This is not to say that Australian groups or issues have not figured in the cosmopolitical sphere. Consider the question of indigenous land rights, which are under threat from a loose alliance of conservative policymakers, national populist organisations, and rural lobby groups. At a time when opinion polls indicate that most Australians favour policies that perpetuate colonial attitudes toward land ownership, there seems little chance that the national political process will uphold the legal decisions on native title rights. Indigenous groups have become active internationally, making representation to UN forums such as the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, preparing to organise an international boycott of Australian beef products, and threatening to stage protests at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Whether the possible international pressure resulting from such activities can reverse ingrained national prejudices and secure ongoing legal recognition of Aboriginal land rights is doubtful. Nonetheless, this indigenous protest provides the perfect example of a located cosmopolitanism—from-below. Not only does it lift contentious political issues beyond the nation-state but it retains a grounding in local realities. After all, the dispute is about territory.

¹ For instance, see Wark (1997), which explores how the constituency of Australian nationalist populism was alienated by meritocratic policies in support of multiculturalism, economic rationalism, and integration with Asia.

To what extent can such cosmopolitical activity stand as a model for professional intellectual radicalism in a cultural studies frame? As Robbins comments, linking the global and the grassroots is on everyone's agenda, but there is no guarantee that one link will not block or sever another. There is every possibility that the academic appropriation of cosmopolitanism in the US academy will obstruct or obscure grassroots struggles that occur in other contexts. Nonetheless, Robbins advocates an intellectual oppositionality that enables an embrace of worldliness in two senses: '1) planetary expansiveness of subject matter, on the one hand, and 2) unembarrassed acceptance of professional self-interest, on the other' (1998b: 247). For Brennan, such professional self-interest blocks or severs the activist efforts of downtrodden communities world-wide, serving as a thin cover for a cultural politics that safeguards the US interest in the free passage of transnational capital. One area he finds the new cosmopolitanism to jeopardise is indigenous rights. Engaging with Andrew Ross's essay 'Cultural preservation in the Polynesia of the latter day saints' (1994), he criticises a politics of cultural complexity that attacks the mythical purity of pre-contact indigenous cultures. Brennan objects to what he calls the 'logic of circularity' in Ross's argument. He contends that Ross's emphasis on the recontextualisations and exchanges between cultures in the neocolonial situation obscures the lopsidedness of power that the USA, France and others hold in the Pacific region. Phenomena such as the oppression of Indo-immigrants by indigenous Fijian rulers or the ersatz performance of indigenous rituals at Hawaiian theme parks need not detract attention from the devastation of indigenous cultures by imperial activity in the Pacific. Brennan believes it is possible to register the adverse effects of imperialism and capitalism upon indigenous cultures without subscribing to idyllic myths of pre-contact paradise. This means questioning the ethics of non-binary complexity that inhabits much work in transnational cultural studies. *At Home in the World* positions itself against the multivalent ambivalence of postcolonial hybridity, arguing that binary thought continues to make sense as a register of what colonial and postcolonial conflict has been all about: collectivity, community, and self-sufficiency.

Brennan develops this argument by engaging with a wide range of textual materials and cultural practices, including academic readings of hip hop music, anthologies of world literature, popular management handbooks, US university affirmative action policies, African American performance art, and Aijaz Ahmad's critique of postcolonial literary theory. The strength of *At Home in the World* is its willingness to suggest alternatives to the celebration of hybridity and cosmopolitanism that Brennan believes has gripped the US academy. This is most noticeable in the final two chapters, which present the works of C.L.R. James and Alejo Carpentier as examples of a socialist nationalism that resists the lures of transnational capitalism. Brennan contrasts what he calls socialist desire with the tendency in cultural studies to locate oppositional practices in the reception of capitalist popular cultural forms. The argument works particularly well in the context of Carpentier's works on Afro-Cuban popular music. Pointing to the global popularity of *salsa* music, Brennan notes Carpentier's insistence on its association with the revolutionary national culture of Cuba. *Salsa* exemplifies a globally popular musical form that falls outside the hegemony of the US cultural industries, registering what socialism has to offer pleasure. Furthermore, Carpentier's sceptical engagement with the European avant-garde supplies the basis for a critique James Clifford's (1988) work on surrealist ethnography. Brennan unfavourably compares Clifford's celebration of surrealist irony and juxtaposition with Carpentier's denunciation of surrealism for its neglect of the importance of indigenous cultures to national revolutionary movements. This allows him to question the political values that underlie Clifford's appraisal of surrealist approaches to the primitive. For Brennan, Clifford's emphasis on the impurities and syncretisms of colonial transculturation silences the cultural nationalism of left intellectuals

like Carpentier and obscures the links between interwar European socialism and Third World modernism. However one understands the more general rejection of cultural hybridity here, Brennan's critique of Clifford's surrealist ethnography is effective for its close engagement with historical figures like Carpentier who challenge the anti-imperial credentials of the European avant-garde.

Another compelling feature of *At Home in the World* is in, engagement with cultural theoretical investigations of Brennan's own neighbourhood, New York City's Lower East Side. Drawing on Dick Hebdige's (1992) study on Krzysztof Wodiczko's homeless vehicle project and Celeste Olalquiaga's *Megalopolis* (1992), Brennan criticises the postmodern intellectual tendency to treat the Lower East Side as a hybrid site that unsettles the ontological security of home. While noting the attempts of Hebdige and Olalquiaga to anchor their work in an analysis of the political economic transformations that have affected the Lower East Side over the past decade, he rejects their tendency to find compensation in cultural mixing. Brennan takes Hebdige to task for a series of word plays (on the Freudian *unheimlich*) by which the idea of homelessness is expanded to encompass the worldliness of the nomadic scholar. He counters Olalquiaga's stance against cultural fixity and ethnic authenticity by soliciting a reaction to her arguments from Chino Garcia, a longstanding Lower East Side community activist. Garcia claims that the debate around culture has been misconstrued as a theatre of images, a struggle in and through representation. He contends that despite the cultural mixing in New York City, immigrant groups strive to maintain a culture they can call their own. The vision that emerges is not one of cosmopolitan hybridity but of immigrant communities longing for their national cultures and imprisoned in the USA by economic circumstance.

In an important sense, Brennan's arguments work better as critiques of the academic enthusiasm for cultural hybridity than as analyses of the new cosmopolitanism. Time and time again he criticises figures like Ross and Hebdige (in whose work cosmopolitanism is an understated or implicit term) and glosses over the more forceful claims made for cosmopolitanism by thinkers like Clifford, Robbins, and Appadurai. Perhaps this is because his understanding of the term derives from an earlier article, 'Cosmopolitans and celebrities' (Brennan 1989a), which pre-dates the current intellectual/political speculation surrounding transnational cultural formations. This piece, which prepared the ground for Brennan's controversial attack on Salman Rushdie in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (1989b), critically examines the metropolitan reception of postcolonial literature. The term cosmopolitanism, which Brennan borrows from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1971), is used to describe a network of publishers, literary agents, academics, reviewers and celebrity authors supposedly responsible for presenting a non-threatening Third World literature to a First World audience. *At Home in the World* extends this critique to cover the new cosmopolitanism of the 1990s, but Brennan's earlier, more specifically literary understanding of the term continues to hold sway over his arguments. Thus he devotes more energy to denouncing the metropolitan promotion of postcolonial writers like Bharati Mukherjee and Naguib Mafouz than to criticising the normative claims of the new cosmopolitanism. Granted that the first chapter outlines the positions of the major players in the recent debate, but Brennan's polemic here is brief and often accusatory. Appadurai, for instance, is dismissed for claiming the tension between cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation as the central problematic confronting students of globalisation. Brennan sidesteps the complex theoretical modelling of transnational flows accomplished by Appadurai and the *Public Culture* group to claim that they simply ignore the more banal realities of military and economic oppression. Robbins's work is also given short shrift, with its important analysis of professional

intellectualism and cosmopolitan expansiveness written off as an *ex post facto* elaboration of an argument already developed by Clifford. This reluctance to engage carefully with recent reassessments of cosmopolitanism means that Brennan's understanding of the term remains extremely broad, becoming effectively substitutable for hybridity, a related but not equivalent term.

One symptom of this is Brennan's understanding of cosmopolitanism as a form of postnationalism that overrides postcolonial nationalism. Subscribing to the Leninist belief that postcolonial nationalism is a stage on the path to socialist internationalism, he contends that a 'cosmopolitanism worthy of the name ... would have to give space to the very nationalism the term is invoked to counter' (1997: 25). While it is true that some thinkers, like Appadurai, embrace a postnational version of cosmopolitanism, this tendency is by no means common to all advocates of the idea. The contributors to *Cosmopolitics* recognise that cosmopolitanism does not offer a clearcut alternative to nationalism. As Robbins explains, there 'is a growing consensus that cosmopolitanism sometimes works together with nationalism rather than in opposition to it' (1998a: 2). Cheah (1998a) points out that Kant's initial formulation of cosmopolitanism preceded the formation of the modern nation-state and thus cannot be cast as a concept that seeks to erode nationalism. Likewise, Allen Wood (1998) explains that Kant did not propose a world-state but a federation of sovereign states united under common principles of right. There is simply no basis, either in the philosophical record or the contemporary cultural debate, for asserting that cosmopolitanism necessarily aims to counter nationalism. The concept allows space for the postcolonial nationalism that Brennan believes it to deny. Indeed, the kind of situated, national-in-the-international activism that Brennan opposes to cosmopolitanism resembles many of the affirmative versions of the idea developed in the *Cosmopolitics* anthology.

The position closest to Brennan's in *Cosmopolitics* is that of Cheah, whose hesitancy toward the revival of cosmopolitanism in the US academy deliberately contrasts Robbins's more positive assessment of the situation. Cheah's essay 'Given culture' (1998b) presents a sophisticated theoretical critique of Clifford and Bhabha on cultural hybridity, arguing that this concept obscures a 'closet idealism' that glosses over the uneven structures of the global political economy. Drawing on the economist Samir Amin, Cheah claims that postcolonial nationalism remains essential to the struggle against global capitalism. For him, Clifford and Bhabha's indifference to postcolonial nationalism stems from their adoption of a linguistic culturalism that has its philosophical roots in Kantianism. They ignore the 'givenness' of national culture for the vast majority of postcolonial nationals who, unlike the mobile subjects of diasporic theory, do not have the economic option of postnationalism through transnational migrancy. Cheah's argument has the force of demography on its side. Yet his polemic against Clifford and Bhabha is predicated on a theoretical sleight of hand similar to that which he locates in their own work. In claiming that their theories of hybrid cultural agency rely on an ontology of linguistic freedom that derives from Kant, Cheah ignores Clifford's complex engagement with surrealism and twentieth-century ethnography on the one hand and Bhabha's reliance on Lacanian psychoanalysis and deconstruction on the other. In its willingness to engage with the intellectual predilections of its agonist, Brennan's critique of Clifford via Carpentier on surrealism is more satisfactory. Cheah's belief that the new hybrid cosmopolitanisms rely on notions of linguistic ambivalence that continue the culture-concept of philosophical modernity requires further specification. Otherwise his argument lies open to the simple disavowal offered by Clifford in his afterword to *Cosmopolitics*; i.e. that discrepant cosmopolitanisms embody a pragmatic response to given historical powers and not an ontology of freedom from nature based in linguistic flux.

Added to this difficulty is the problem of what Cheah calls the given-ness of national culture. For if national culture is given by history, it is certainly not, as Clifford points out, the only thing given. One must also account for the other sociospatial attachments (both local and transnational) from which people construct their sense of belonging, and, as Cheah well knows, the body.² There is a deeper problematic at stake in Cheah's figuration of national culture as gift, and it relates to the question of prestation that dominates twentieth-century anthropological discourse. The difficulty of inextricably distinguishing gift economies from market systems is marked by what Derrida (1992) calls the problem of the first gift: the projection of an originary act of prestation that does not involve the expectation of return. As John Frow explains:

the concepts of gift and commodity seem to partake of each other: the gift to be structured ... according to forms of calculation and interest that in some sense resemble those of a market economy and commodities in turn to be constantly endowed with non-commodity meanings as they move within the moral economy of everyday life. (1997: 102)

Perhaps it is because Cheah's claims for postcolonial nationalism as given cannot fully escape the logic of capitalist exchange that he must eventually characterise national culture in terms of an aporia that suspiciously resembles the deconstructive ambivalence that informs at least Bhabha's version of hybridity. The Derridean resonances of the following claim are unmistakable:

[T]he recathexis of the postcolonial state by popular nationalism must occur both within and against the state, through the cosmopolitical that can always work in the service of neocolonialism. It involves a risky self-inoculation where the vaccine could also be poisonous. (1998b, 321)

Cheah's case against hybrid cosmopolitanism falls back on the aporetic logic of ambivalence that provides the object of his critique. Yet far from disqualifying his argument, this supplies the source of its power. In writing of the risky agency of 'the-national-in-the-cosmopolitical', Cheah recognises how postcolonial nationalism can both resist and aid the processes of neocolonial globalisation. The key element is his reframing of the question of national culture in terms of risk. If Cheah ventures little in the gambit of extranational politics, other contributors to *Cosmopolitics* are prepared to wager more.

As understood by Robbins, cosmopolitanism promises both something less and something more than the theories of cultural hybridity criticised by Brennan and Cheah. It promises less because it refuses an ascent to an abstract level of linguistic destabilisation. As Amanda Anderson (1998) points out, this also distinguishes the new cosmopolitanism from recent attempts by poststructuralist thinkers like Judith Butler (1995) and Ernesto Laclau (1995) to refashion the Enlightenment ideal of universalism. The new cosmopolitanism maintains a close attention to the politics of intercommunal contact and exchange in a layered geopolitical context. It values an interest in otherness, while claiming that such interest cannot be reduced to self-interest or to some monolithic conception of pervasive power. In this it offers more than the theory of cultural hybridity, affirming something like the classical notion of liberalism that is so disparaged in contemporary traditions of negative and deconstructive critique. Anderson notes that while cosmopolitanism

² Cheah (1996) presents a similar argument for the given-ness of the body.

can encompass those forms of political struggle and conflict that seek to secure the democratic conditions for the full flowering of cosmopolitanism, it nonetheless imagines democratic institutions as a desired precondition (if never fully secure) rather than a necessary receding horizon. (1998: 281-282)

This means it can become susceptible to a version of liberalism that fails to safeguard against the ravages of transnational capitalism. If not sufficiently articulated to a critical analysis of the global political economy, the new cosmopolitanism can inadvertently serve the interests of a US-dominated free market liberalism. A number of the contributions to *Cosmopolitics*, including those by Richard Rorty and Kwame Anthony Appiah, fall prey to this difficulty.

Rorty's essay 'Justice as a larger loyalty' (1998) seeks to dissolve the philosophical dichotomy between rationality and feeling to reconcile the positions of Habermas and Michael Walzer on social justice. By recognising justice as the name for loyalty to a wide community of human interests, he claims, there is a greater possibility of convincing non-Western societies to adopt Western liberal principles without appealing to notions of universal reason. Positioning himself as a 'loyal Westerner', Rorty embraces ethnocentrism as a means of moving beyond the universalism of the Enlightenment cosmopolitan ideal. Yet he wavers on the crucial question of transnational capitalism, refusing to indicate if he believes it is appropriate to sacrifice political liberty in the West for economic justice on a global scale. Appiah's 'Cosmopolitan patriots' offers a philosophico-autobiographical account of his movements between Ghana, England and the USA to argue that one can be

Cosmopolitan - celebrating the variety of human cultures; rooted - loyal to one local society (or a few) that you count as home; liberal-- convinced of the value of the individual; and patriotic- celebrating the institutions of the state (or states) within which you live. (1998: 106)

The piece works admirably to disinvest cosmopolitanism of its universalist and postnational connotations, but by sidelining a discussion of transnational capitalism Appiah deflects attention from the global economic asymmetries that offset the postmodern heterogeneity he celebrates. As Rob Wilson writes of Appiah's essay in his postscript to *Cosmopolitics*, the 'transnational market is all but etherealized into the space of autonomy and private realization' (1998: 355). The danger here is that cosmopolitanism emerges as a secret sharer in American ideals of liberal-market selfhood, leaving the idea open to the polemic Brennan directs against it.³

The difficult weigh-up between political liberty and global economic equality is not necessarily handled better by thinkers who risk more in their departure from national forms of affiliation. Jonathan Rée (1998) imagines a new cosmopolitan world that leaves behind the illusions of internationality and no longer makes a fetish of political form. Yet while acknowledging that the decay of state boundaries is an effect of financial and technical conditions, he makes no effort to explain how cosmopolitanism can guard against the growing inequalities of global capitalism. For Rée, cosmopolitanism seems to carry inherent goodness. Scott Malcolmson (1998) writes with a more limited optimism, detailing a series of

³ The apparent US-centredness of the new cosmopolitanism is not helped by Hollinger (1995), who uses the term to make specific arguments about multiculturalism and identity politics in the USA. For a critical review see Lon (1996).

cosmopolitanisms-from below (religious, political, merchant, and entertainment) to argue that the idea offers most hope when it is indeterminate, inescapable, and shorn of its ethical attractiveness. Malcolmson's reservations receive strong confirmation from the essays on transnational belonging that form the book's second section. Aihwa Ong's (1998) multisituated ethnography of 'flexible citizenship' among Hong Kong Chinese corporate elites shows how transnational lifestyles can serve the ends of profit maximisation and living the 'American dream' outside the USA. It would be interesting to assess how the Asian economic crisis has impacted upon these instrumental postnational activities, but the point remains that diasporic ethnic alliances do not necessarily disturb global capitalist processes. Louisa Schein's (1998) analysis of relations between US immigrants and their Chinese co-ethnics also disavows the construction of transnational ethnic solidarity as 'oppositional cosmopolitanism'. Focusing on the 1995 International Symposium on Hmong People held in St Paul, Minnesota, Schein sets out to show that the common identification of these people counters the marginalisation imposed on them in their respective states. Yet she concludes that the symposium reproduced an American vision of global order, with the staged transfer of symbolic capital from the Miao to the US Hmong affirming the positional superiority of the latter. As Clifford (1998) notes Schein studies the structure of the event and not its reception, but her argument discredits the zero-sum logic that treats cosmopolitanism and the nationstate as mutually exclusive terms.

Benedict Anderson's 'Nationalism, identity, and the world-in-motion' (1998) provides the volume's strongest statement against the oppositional claims of the new cosmopolitanism. Anderson argues that the nation-state continues to supply the fundamental unit of political activity, contrasting national belonging with transnational ethnic movements as unbound to bound serialities. Unbound serialities, which have their origin in print capitalism, are expandable, unsusceptible to enumeration, and open to transformation. Thus one can be a typist, a woman, and an Indonesian, or one can change nationality or profession, because these series remain internally flexible and open to each other. Bound series, which have their origins in the modern census, are limited, enumerable, and static. Thus one cannot be black and white at the same time, or at least the logic of the census specifies such hybrid identities not as fractional combinations but as integral wholes: mulattos, quadroons, etc. As bound communities transnational ethnic subjectivities reinforce identitarian politics, closing off the possibility of transformative political activity such as that carried out by national decolonising movements. Anderson's argument, which has obvious resonances with those of Brennan and Cheah, rests on a binary opposition that, as Clifford (1998) remarks, cannot ultimately be sustained. For national orders can also exclude others, police differences, and generally behave like the bound ethnic communities that Anderson relegates to another category. Nobody would deny that national movements can open horizons to wider solidarities and new senses of political possibility. The difficulty lies in what Tom Nairn (1977) calls nationalism's Janus-faced character, its disposition on the one hand towards popular struggle and anti-colonial resistance and on the other towards xenophobia, class exploitation, and corruption. There can be no guarantee of quarantining nationalism's liberatory promise from the more negative aspects of its bourgeois, capitalist, and comprador moments.

The straight ethical division between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is a false one, as indeed is the split between nationalism and cosmopolitanism itself. Anderson is surely right to claim that the nation-state is still the primary locus of political activity. But this does not disqualify Etienne Balibar's observation that 'borders are no longer the shores of politics, but have indeed become ... things within the space of the political itself' (1998: 220). The new

cosmopolitanism operates both within and beyond national cultural borders. It recognises the dangers inherent in transnational organisations such as human rights, which often serve as *de facto* agencies for First World interests. Yet it does not abandon hope for transnational political activities that seek to deliver greater economic, social, and cultural justice to a plurality of overlapping global/local communities. If at times it is given to imaginative longing, it is equally tempered by a sense of pragmatism and *realpolitik*. Gayatri Spivak (1998) warns against a version of cultural studies that is merely symptomatic of postmodern information command, but maintains faith in the work of globe girdling movements that counter phenomena such as reproductive engineering and women's homework. Bonnie Honig (1998), who bases her advocacy of cosmopolitanism in an analysis of the Biblical myth of Ruth, concludes by referring her argument to the practical transnational alliances developed by the sister city movement. It is Robbins, however, who offers the strongest sense of the political opportunities offered by cosmopolitanism. Robbins remains acutely aware of the way in which some cosmopolitical activities can restrict others. He also registers the dangers that can arise from meddling in a state's affairs without accepting the duties of citizenship or physical presence on its territory; e.g. the assault on the Ayodhya mosque in India financed by US and Canadian Hindu communities. Yet he does not abandon the project of encouraging transnational political alliances and demonstrating the oppositional potential of actually existing cosmopolitanisms-from-below. For Robbins, cosmopolitics is not about guarantees but risks. The question is how much one is prepared to risk in pursuing political opportunities that fall outside the secure net of nation-state regulation.

If, as Brennan argues, the danger of the new cosmopolitanism is its unwilling support for a US-centred transnationalism, a retreat back into national politics must confront the equal and opposite difficulty of removing the oppressive barriers that have historically accompanied nationalism. There is no easy way out of this bind. To follow Robbins in asserting that cosmopolitanism is not an apology for capitalism is not yet to face the question of how cosmopolitical allegiances can provide organised political resistance to transnational capitalism. There can be no simple 'how-to' on this matter. The question of how to devise a critical transnationalism that does not simply buy into the values of global capitalism remains more problematic than the question of why. *Cosmopolitics* celebrates the discrepancies between its contributors as if to claim that effective resistance to the new global order must be as disorganised as capitalism itself has become. The worry is that such a discrepant plurality of voices becomes *de rigueur*, recontained by predictable academic formulae and glossy publishing formats. As Meaghan Morris comments, intellectual transnational spaces

can be transnational in name only, and dull: a product of the locally powerful metropolitan academy in which scholars from different university systems give papers formatted perfectly for international publication in a coherent volume and a single language, understanding each other fluently as they discourse about incommensurability and disjunction. (1997: xii)

The publication of *Cosmopolitics* marks the possibility that the enormous vibrancy and political potential that has surrounded the resuscitation of cosmopolitanism in the USA may go the way of another academic trend: a high profile anthology, a journal, a job description ... and eventually an outmoded buzzword. If Brennan's loose fighting can interrupt this fluency and help to shift the discourses of cosmopolitanism from their comfortable US academic home, then he has done a greater service to cosmopolitics than his harsh polemic would imply.

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