

Progress reports



Geography and ethics: spaces of cosmopolitan responsibility

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I In search of perpetual peace

In the final decades of the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant set forth his now paradigmatic vision of what he called a 'universal cosmopolitan condition' among states, 'a peaceful, if not yet friendly and universal community of all peoples on the earth who can come into active relations with one another' (Kant, 2006: 146). Kant pointed out that all human beings share 'the right of common possession of the surface of the earth'. Since humans 'cannot scatter themselves on it without limit', he reasoned, 'they must . . . ultimately tolerate one another as neighbors' (2006: 82). As a political project, then, Kant's cosmopolitanism anticipates a kind of world citizenship within a federation of free and sovereign states, the first step toward the possibility of a 'perpetual peace' (see Linklater, 2002; Brock and Brighouse, 2005; Pojman, 2005).

But Kant's call to 'tolerate one another as neighbors' also suggests an ethical stance. From this perspective, cosmopolitanism would indicate a wider, spatially extensive sense of responsibility toward others, recognizing, as Kant did, that 'the growing prevalence of a (narrower or wider) community among the peoples of the earth has reached a

point at which the violation of right at any *one* place on the earth is felt in *all* places' (Kant, 2006: 84). If Kant's cosmopolitan ideal still resonates today, this is perhaps because Kant's era was witness to the emergence, in nascent form, of the political and economic relationships that have come to characterize our own global modernity. Writing at the apogee of the mercantile trading system and on the cusp of the industrial revolution, Kant was able to capture both the challenges and the opportunities posed by a truly global community of nations, and to articulate the need thereby to rethink the grounds for political and ethical thought.

To be sure, the challenges of developing such a global ethics are formidable. Writing in 1784, Kant lamented that 'one cannot suppress a certain indignation when one sees men's actions on the great world-stage and finds, beside the wisdom that appears here and there among individuals, everything in the large woven together from folly, childish vanity, even from childish malice and destructiveness' (Kant, 1986: 250). If we reflect for a moment on our own contemporary condition, it is not difficult to identify sufficient folly, vanity and malice to wonder how far we have progressed over the past 200 years.

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Now as then, however, the very fact that we are, as Kant says, 'woven together' with geographically distant peoples and places impels us to work toward a cosmopolitan stance that would transcend our narrow nationalist or sectarian interests. It is perhaps salutary in this regard that now, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the political and ethical implications of a cosmopolitan order are once again the subject of significant reflection (see Beck and Sznaider, 2006a, for an extensive bibliography).

In this report, I take up these issues in three quite different registers: urban space, migration and hospitality, and postcolonial studies. In each of these cases, as we will see, the cosmopolitan has been deployed as a figure for reasserting certain claims about global responsibility, and for reanimating a form of ethics that is not solely dependent upon spatial proximity.

II Urban cosmopolitanism and its skeptics

According to Michael Keith, 'if the cosmopolitan is to represent a normative vision of the future, the city is to be its empirical realization' (Keith, 2005: 22), and indeed the cosmopolitan vision has long been associated with the urban experience. It is the city, after all, that serves as the setting for various kinds of global flows and interactions, the 'evidence', as it were, of our cosmopolitan condition. We can usefully begin our appraisal of cosmopolitan thinking, therefore, with recent attempts to consider the nature of urban space.

Within geography, two of the most consistent commentators on such issues have been Ash Amin and Doreen Massey, both of whom have advocated a 'relational politics of place' that would foster a wider geographical scope of concern. Massey's wide-ranging *For space* (2005) deftly explores both the philosophical underpinnings and empirical implications of thinking space in more open and relational ways. Doing so would, in the first instance, pay heed to what she calls our 'throwtogetherness' with others (2005: 181), which

inevitably entails confronting various kinds of difference. In similar fashion, Amin has elaborated a 'politics of propinquity', which would entail 'negotiating the immanent effects of geographical juxtaposition' (Amin, 2004: 39). Doing so, he suggests more recently, demands an ethic of care and 'mutual regard towards those unlike us' (Amin, 2006: 1017). Similar cases are made in a recent edited volume on cosmopolitan urbanism (Binnie *et al.*, 2006) and also in recent books by sociologists Keith (2005) and Ulrich Beck (2006). Beck's *Cosmopolitan vision*, in particular, is perhaps the most systematic attempt to elaborate the contours of what he calls the "'dialogic imagination" . . . the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience, which makes it a matter of fate to compare, reflect, criticize, understand, combine contradictory certainties' (Beck, 2002: 18).

This dialogue with difference, of course, is not merely a local concern. As Massey and Amin both point out, the politics of propinquity must be supplemented by a 'politics of connectivity' that would recognize the ways in which cities are 'locked into a multitude of relational networks of varying geographical reach' (Amin, 2004: 43; see also Massey, 2004). Urban cosmopolitanism, in other words, should strive to inculcate what Massey more than 15 years ago called a 'global sense of place' (Massey, 1994). From an ethical standpoint, this would then imply a relationship of responsibility toward those others who may be implicated in the city's heterogeneous links and connections.

In the real world of actually existing cosmopolitanism, as a number of critiques have suggested, the cultivation of this wider sense of responsibility can be fraught with challenges. For one thing, as Beck and Sznaider note, the condition of being inserted into global networks and relations is not always one that is chosen: 'The everyday experiences of cosmopolitan interdependence is not a mutual love affair', they caution, but is often 'a function of coerced choices or a side-effect of unconscious decisions' (Beck and

Sznaider, 2006b: 12, 7). For many people, then, cosmopolitanism is experienced as forced migration, predatory transnational capitalism, threats to culture or sense of identity, or heightened forms of nationalism or xenophobia. In such contexts, it may be difficult if not impossible to entertain a sense of mutual regard toward one's fellow urban dwellers, much less distant strangers (see Kofman, 2005). Practical, everyday cosmopolitanisms, as Mohan (2006) shows in his study of Ghanaian immigrants in the UK, are embedded within a complex politics of obligation and concern in which local demands must necessarily be weighed against, and at times may supersede, what might be seen as more 'global' claims. A cosmopolitan sense of responsibility may therefore end up being the luxury of a gentrifying urban elite (Ley, 2004) or corporate jet-setters who seek out the bland familiarity of global hotel and restaurant chains. As Söderström notes, the standardized global sensibility of the world city can in this way become a means for transnational elites to 'escape the continuous exposure to a "culture shock" rather than to engage with ordinary ... daily life' (Söderström, 2006: 555).

A similar skepticism can be identified in recent work on the cultural politics of aspiring global cities, where a form of cosmopolitanism is often deployed by civic leaders in the service of place promotion. Paul (2004: 588), for example, describes how Montreal has pursued what he calls a 'consumerist cosmopolitanism manifested through the social relation of the spectacle' and Yeoh (2004) likewise highlights the ways in which authorities in Singapore have used cosmopolitanism as little more than a hollow marketing strategy. Ho (2006) points out further that there is an implicit paradox woven into Singapore's promotion of a cosmopolitan imaginary, because the state wishes to instill at the same time a strong sense of *local* attachment and belonging. 'Meaningful cosmopolitanism', concludes Yeoh, 'must involve an emancipatory political project which gets under the skin of society,

not just rhetorical gestures and visionary pronouncements which fail to relate to everyday life and places in the city' (2004: 2442).

Other authors have pointed to a retreat from the messy business of engaging difference, an attitude that has become something of a cultural norm within the industrialized West. Katharyne Mitchell (2003), for example, shows how national education within the USA, England and Canada has moved away from a more collective, multicultural sensibility in favor of an individualized 'strategic cosmopolitanism' emphasizing notions of global competitiveness. In similar fashion, Don Mitchell details how recent US court decisions appear to be upholding what he calls a 'right to be left alone' (2005). Far from cultivating an ethos of ethical engagement, then, contemporary western discourses of citizenship are reinforcing the hyper-individualist subject of neoliberal society. 'We are now, truly, the liberal, autonomous subject', Don Mitchell suggests, 'we own ourselves and no one can intrude upon us without our permission' (2005: 97).

III Movement, migration and hospitality

Or can they? One of the corollaries of neoliberal globalization is of course the increased movement of people across borders, 'intruding' upon our sovereign territory. Indeed, this recognition was central to Kant's original conception of cosmopolitan right. Kant's well-known 'Third definitive article for perpetual peace' states that 'cosmopolitan right shall be limited to the conditions of universal *hospitality*', which for Kant meant 'the right of a foreigner not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival in the other's territory' (Kant, 2006: 82). Even a cursory glance at contemporary political debates surrounding the presence of 'foreigners' in the USA and Europe will suggest that Kant's hospitality is far from being realized, and this would suggest the need for a cosmopolitan ethics to address questions of mobility and migration.

What such an ethics would entail, however, is open to debate. Those faithful to the Kantian legacy would argue that our responsibilities should transcend state boundaries, and entail at least some measure of welcome toward others who might land on our shores. Within geography, this kind of position has recently been articulated by Bauder (2003) and Megoran (2005). From a slightly different perspective, David Smith draws upon a Rawlsian tradition to make a 'liberal egalitarian' case for open borders, one built on the recognition that 'most, if not all, sources of inequality among persons are contingent', arising from what Smith has called 'the place of good fortune' (2004: 116).

Daniel Hiebert's rather less optimistic response to Bauder highlights some of the practical difficulties entailed in bringing this vision of open borders to fruition (Hiebert, 2003). For starters, we can note the obvious fact that public perception toward migrants in the USA and Europe hardly resembles the tolerant and relational conception of space and identity proffered by more cosmopolitan visions (see, for example, Pijpers, 2006; Sparke, 2006). Another objection to open borders arises from communitarian arguments, which suggest that democratic communities share distinctive political cultures, and that it may be beneficial to limit membership in order to preserve the values that support such cultures (for discussions, see Bader, 2005; Parker and Brassett, 2005; Seglow, 2005). In practice, then, as Smith has acknowledged, 'liberal egalitarianism is obliged to concede something of its commitment in principle to open borders and free population movement' (2004: 124). Indeed, Kant's original notion of hospitality was also limited: his cosmopolitan right was not a right to permanent residence, only temporary sojourn, and it held only for citizens of sovereign states, thereby excluding stateless peoples. Kant's hospitality, furthermore, was a question of *right* based in contractual obligation, rather than a form of ethics or responsibility.

These limitations within Kant's notion of hospitality were discussed in a number of Derrida's later works (1999; 2000; 2001). Derrida reads Kant's cosmopolitanism alongside the ethical injunction theorized by Emmanuel Levinas, in order to highlight the inherent tensions – but also the possibilities – of an ethics of hospitality. Most fundamentally, Derrida points out that an offer of hospitality – a welcome into my space, my household or territory – requires that I maintain a measure of sovereignty over my home. Hospitality is, therefore, always-already *conditional*, for 'sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence' (Derrida, 2000: 55). To this Derrida contrasts what he calls an *unconditional* or absolute hospitality: 'absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner . . . but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names' (2000: 25).

From this more philosophical perspective, an ethics of hospitality would consist in an opening and responsibility toward the potential arrival of the unknown other, from wherever she or he might come. In his recent discussion of these ideas, Clive Barnett (2005) has expressed a skepticism about the complete erasure of boundaries that might be implied in this kind of unconditional welcoming. An ethics of hospitality, he suggests, cannot be founded on a passive response to an abstract and generalizable other, but must entail a measure of engagement with the singularity of any particular address. What this suggests, I think, is that a cosmopolitan responsibility should not be envisioned as a merely abstract ethical demand. We must also be capable of accounting for the material histories and contemporary networks of deprivation, exploitation and inequality that arise precisely because of our cosmopolitical condition.

IV The postcolonial difference

It is perhaps worth recalling at this stage that Kant's cosmopolitan project, including his call for a 'universal hospitality', was aimed primarily at 'establishing certain universal laws governing . . . commerce' (2006: 146). If Kant's mercantile world, 'so linked in its commercial activities' (Kant, 2006: 14), required a form of hospitality toward foreign traders, the global geographies of capitalism a century later required an even grander vista. Here, for example, is the geographical perspective articulated by Halford Mackinder in 1907: 'It is essential that the ruling citizens of the world-wide [British] Empire should be able to visualize distant geographical conditions . . . our aim must be to make our whole people think Imperially – think, that is to say, in spaces that are world wide – and to this end our geographical teaching should be addressed' (quoted in Ó Tuathail, 1996: 89).

It is difficult to imagine a more cosmopolitan vision, and it should remind us that the lineage initiated by Kant is inseparable from the historical practices of European modernity and colonial conquest. It follows that modernity's cosmopolitan ethos is also tarnished by its consequent denigration of any system of moral or ethical thought which lay outside Enlightenment rationality. As Grovogui has put it, 'by imagining the world through mere generalizations of "Western" experiences, some cosmopolitans entertain the fantasy that universal norms and institutions arise solely from Western philosophical systems and ontological categories' (Grovogui, 2005: 105; see also Harvey, 2000; Mignolo, 2000a; Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005).

The point holds equally for western understandings of ethics. Take Levinas, for example. Widely regarded as the pre-eminent philosopher on the question of 'the Other', he seems to have held a peculiarly narrow conception of who that other might be, as suggested by the Argentine philosopher and liberation theorist Enrique Dussel, who recounts a conversation he had with Levinas in 1971:

When I told him that the experience . . . of the last half millennium of human history was the ego of European modernity, a conquering ego, colonialist, imperial in its culture and oppressor of people in the periphery, Levinas recognized that he never thought that 'the Other' could have been an (Amer)Indian, an African or an Asiatic. (Quoted in Mignolo, 2000b: 29)

What is needed, it would appear, is a form of cosmopolitan ethics that is capable of acknowledging this excluded non-European Other, which has always served as modernity's hidden supplement (Venn, 2002). Here we might turn to postcolonial theory, which is concerned with the nature of our responsibilities arising from the material and discursive forms of violence that lie at the heart of the western tradition. In this sense, the postcolonial project can contribute to the development of a non-Eurocentric cosmopolitan ethics.

Within geography, much recent discussion of postcolonialism has focused on questions of development, including two recent special issues (Power *et al.*, 2006; Sharp and Briggs, 2006), and a review in these pages by Radcliffe (2005). A number of other authors, while not explicitly drawing upon postcolonial theory, have focused our attention on the very similar ethical issues of power and responsibility within both global South research settings (Howitt, 2005; Gibson, 2006; Hodge and Lester, 2006) and professional development practice (Townsend and Townsend, 2004; Bondi and Laurie, 2006; McKinnon, 2006; see also Gasper, 2004). For my purpose here, I want to return to the question of hospitality, for if we take on board the insights of postcolonialism regarding questions of power and privilege, it is perhaps germane to ask: who has the right to ask for hospitality, and who has an obligation to grant it?

V The ethics of engagement

Take as an example Ivan Illich's scathing rebuke of American student volunteer activities in Latin America, delivered as an address to the Conference on InterAmerican Student

Projects in 1968. 'Next to money and guns', Illich asserts, 'the third largest North American export is the US idealist . . . [arriving to] help Mexican peasants "develop" by spending a few months in their villages . . . "salesmen" for a delusive ballet in the ideas of democracy, equal opportunity and free enterprise among people who haven't the possibility of profiting from these' (Illich, 1994).

If we read Illich via Derrida, we can view his stance as a rejection of the presumption that Latin Americans should offer an *unconditional* form of hospitality. Such an expectation denies the Other her historical and geographical specificity, and thus potentially any subject position from which to speak or act. Far from instilling a responsibility across distance, then, a one-size-fits-all cosmopolitan sensibility can be a hindrance to the development of a context-specific ethics (Harvey, 2000).

At the same time, however, there is surely something disempowering about Illich's proposed solution, which is simply for everyone to stay home. As Radcliffe notes (2005), development theory has recently moved away from this kind of position, a belief that the only way to avoid epistemic violence is disengagement, 'as though there were a space of purity beyond or outside development that we could access through renunciation' (Gibson-Graham, 2005a: 6). Besides, in a cosmopolitan world, as Paul Robbins puts it, 'the critical researcher may choose to stay at home, [but] the rest of the world most definitely will not' (Robbins, 2006: 315). Perhaps, then, the point is not to renounce the possibility of hospitality, but to work through its inevitable historical and geographical dynamics.

In this regard, Walker *et al.* (2007) recount an interesting example from Oaxaca state in Mexico. They describe what they term a 'politics of invitation', in which a Zoque indigenous community actively contested the terms under which an environmental NGO was allowed to intervene in their territory. In terms of the ethics of hospitality discussed above, we might say that the Zoques claimed their right to negotiate a *conditional* hospitality, one

that would recognize their sovereignty and positionality within the larger context of material histories and environmental politics.

We might suggest from these two examples that the ethical challenge is to recognize both demands. If there is an unconditional injunction to be responsible for the arrival of the unknown other, it must be tempered by the postcolonial reminder that arrivals and encounters do not take place in a space free from history or power. Perhaps the way forward, then, is not to maintain the illusion that we can somehow either predetermine or evade our entanglements with others, but instead to focus, as a number of recent commentators have, on the *nature* of the engagements and negotiations that inevitably ensue. McFarlane, to take one example, draws upon Spivak's concept of 'unlearning privilege' to argue that 'development geography would gain from attention to ethical considerations around learning, which involves an attempt to listen and to (un)learn, and to develop new positions through interactions with subalterns' (McFarlane, 2006: 45; see also McEwan, 2003). Mohan and Wilson (2005) emphasize a view of development as a 'dialogue' between multiple rationalities, a conception that recalls Beck's characterization of cosmopolitanism as a 'dialogic imagination'. And, in a somewhat different context, Chatterton draws upon the ideas of Bakhtin to describe an ethics of encounter that 'involves a certain commitment to finding common points of contact in terms of values and ethics, and integrating our multiple selves across different times and places' (2006: 270; see also Sutherland, 2004). Each of these examples stresses the need to be open to different ways of doing and being, to be open to allowing our own subject positions to be altered through our dialogues and engagements.

VI Conclusion: for a subaltern cosmopolitanism

The postcolonial provocation to unlearn our privilege also draws attention to the possibilities for an alternative reading of cosmopolitan

ethics, one that ‘begins with the recognition of . . . “epistemic colonial difference” within the Eurocentric traditions of modernity (Mignolo, 2005: 118). One instructive theorist in this regard is Dussel (1993; 2000), who has sought to reinterpret Levinasian ethics from the perspective of the colonized Other (for reviews, see Barber, 1998; Alcoff and Mendieta, 2000). For Dussel, the critique of modernity cannot emanate solely from within either the Eurocentric tradition or its exterior, but rather arises through a kind of mutual exchange. ‘What is at stake here’, argues Dussel, ‘is what I have called “transmodernity”, a worldwide ethical liberation project in which . . . modernity and its denied alterity, its victims, would mutually fulfill each other in a creative process’ (Dussel, 2000: 473).

Such a project requires, to begin with, that we acknowledge and work to cultivate alternative geographical imaginations (Cumbers and Routledge, 2004). A recent theme issue of *Geografiska Annaler*, focused on indigenous geographies, contributes significantly to this task. In their introduction to the issue, Shaw *et al.* (2006) call for an ‘epistemological decolonization’ that would foster an understanding of the diverse forms of connection and responsibility characteristic of non-Eurocentric thought. J.K. Gibson-Graham’s recent work in the Philippines offers another example (Gibson-Graham, 2005a). Her ethnography of the ‘community economy’ in a local municipality details a diverse range of emergent subjectivities and ethical practices not easily captured by standard, western narratives of development. What results is a reworked understanding of community, as ‘a social project rather than a geographical given or utopian dream . . . the ethics of community is the social process of negotiating our (inevitable) interdependence’ (Gibson-Graham, 2005b: 121).

Similar projects have been undertaken in other parts of the world. From Latin America, for example, we can point to examinations of the ‘moral economy’ of the Movement of Landless Workers in Brazil

(Wolford, 2005), the ‘environmental ethic of care’ found within the indigenous cultures of Latin America (Heyd, 2005), and the ‘solidarity economy’ of recent autonomous movements in Argentina (North and Huber, 2004; Chatterton, 2005). From Australia, Deborah Bird Rose (2004) has elaborated an ‘ethics for decolonization’ based in indigenous understandings (see also Howitt and Suchet-Pearson, 2006), and African philosophers have explored the roots of communalism and ethical responsibility based in the ideals of *ubuntu*, or ‘humanness’ (Venter, 2004; Mnyaka and Motlhabi, 2005).

By themselves, of course, such projects can risk becoming isolated examples of local particularity. The challenge is to respect their specificity while also fostering a wider sense of ethical responsibility toward their open-ended outcomes, to engender, in other words, what Santos calls ‘a cosmopolitan politics networking mutually intelligible and translatable native languages of emancipation’ (Santos, 1999: 227; see also Gidwani, 2006). To enact this kind of cosmopolitanism, we will need to continue to foster the kinds of negotiations, dialogues and responsibilities that have been reviewed here, to open ourselves to alternative forms of geographical reason, and to actively take up the ethical challenges arising from our ‘throwntogetherness’ with others.

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