



# The prospects of cosmopolitanism and the possibility of global justice

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## Abstract

The article explores the considerations that are at stake in assessing the prospects of cosmopolitanism today. It is argued that there is scope for fruitful dialogue between sociology and political science around the question of how a normative idea, such as global justice, becomes an empirical phenomenon. The idea of global justice should be placed in the context of the broader framework of cosmopolitanism. Rather than focus only on the normative project, attention needs to be given to the process by which cosmopolitanism emerges. Cosmopolitanism, in this view, involves socio-cognitive shifts for critical publics in ways in seeing the world. It is such changes in cognitive capacities and in individual and societal learning that often make possible the articulation of new normative principles or their application in domains where they previously did not apply.

## Keywords

cosmopolitanism, global justice, other, political community, self

The notion that global justice is both a challenge and a possibility is a relatively new idea.<sup>1</sup> Notions of justice have traditionally been confined to territorially limited political communities, generally nation-states, and global justice seen as a secondary or derivative matter. It was not very long ago that all questions of justice were thought to pertain to nationally defined political communities. This was certainly the assumption that Rawls made in *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, and which set the terms of debate for more than four decades. In the past two decades there has been a steady increase in what may be called discourses of global justice – including theoretical conceptualizations – and political practices that reflect notions of global justice. It would appear that global justice has

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become part of the *Zeitgeist* or the political imaginary of critical publics in contemporary societies as they address a range of global challenges.

To create new or possible worlds it is first of all necessary to be able to imagine them. The fact that we are unsure of what exactly constitutes global justice, but nonetheless speak of it, suggests that it is a reality of a certain kind. One might say it is a reality creating idea. The reality of global justice can now be declared to be a constitutive feature of political community. It is a way of judging the world and a way of thinking about the world, as well as a way of examining the world that challenges the exclusivity of national borders as determining the boundaries of justice. Global justice has a normative, a cognitive and an epistemological dimension: it offers principles against which injustice can be measured, it offers a language to speak about human interconnectedness, and it is a topic on which knowledge can be acquired through social research. The concern with global justice is central to the idea of cosmopolitanism, though not the only aspect of cosmopolitanism. In this article I am largely concerned with the political dimension of cosmopolitanism, which I see as the context in which to discuss global justice. The aim of the article is to explore the considerations that are at stake in assessing the prospects of cosmopolitanism today as a political project. I argue that there is scope for fruitful dialogue between sociology and political science around this question, which asks how a normative idea becomes an empirical phenomenon. In the first section I discuss the notion of global justice before outlining a theoretical approach to the analysis of cosmopolitanism. The third section of the article moves on to look at the conditions of the possibility of cosmopolitanism, before finally considering the prospects of cosmopolitanism.

## Global justice and cosmopolitanism

Most academic discussions of global justice have concentrated on its normative significance. Political theorists, who have dominated discussion on global justice, have mostly considered it in terms of a project, that is a normative political project to be realized in the world. I would like to comment briefly on this before I move to discuss the other and more sociological dimensions, in particular the cognitive dimension, and more specifically the process by which global justice emerges. A striking feature of normative conceptions of global justice is that political theorists are in disagreement with the aims of global justice, which we can add to the lexicon of essentially contested terms. Much of this disagreement arises when it comes to the tricky problem of how to create policies to realize normative aims, assuming that these can be agreed on, since unrealizable aims are useless. There is perhaps wider agreement on the presuppositions of global justice as regards, for instance, the responsibilities of citizenship. Assuming that the aims of global justice derive from the responsibilities of citizenship, which entail not just rights but also obligations, a good place to begin is with the condition of citizenship.

There is general agreement that citizens have an obligation to others beyond those who are members of their community, generally taken to be a state, but disagreement on how far it should extend – to humanity at large, for instance, as Peter Singer (2004) has argued – and, moreover, there is disagreement on what the obligation entails and how far into the future such obligations should extend (for instance, to future generations). In the

case of debt crisis Europe, there is the issue of whether obligations extend to member states to assist those states in financial trouble on the grounds that the EU as a whole will benefit. In this case it is evident that obligations are related to interdependence. However, if we have an obligation to people with whom we are not directly connected – to make that assumption – the question arises as to what kind of deeds should follow (donations, changes in consumption such as fair trade, boycotting the products of exploitative companies, increased taxation to fund aid, etc.). This is often seen as a question of solidarity, whether it is a ‘thin’ or a ‘thick’ solidarity. There is a second debate as to whether responsibility falls on individuals or on states, for some it is enough that states fulfil the obligation, for instance through humanitarian aid financed through general taxation, but for others individuals as active citizens also have additional obligations of a pro-active nature. Also, there is a range of pragmatic issues concerning efficiency, that is, who is best placed to achieve the desired results – states, inter-governmental organizations or global institutions – and what kinds of action are required (e.g. military intervention, high-interest loans or aid, changes to migration policies, reduced carbon emissions, etc.). There is a further layer of complexity, too, if we add responsibility. To have an obligation to others is all the stronger if one has a responsibility to them, but not all obligations are based on responsibility; they can be inspired by solidarity, which in turn rests on sources such as identity and is generally relational (in the sense of bonds that derive from having a direct relation to others). Indeed, I would argue that cosmopolitan solidarity does not necessarily derive from the obligations (or duties) of citizenship, which is largely determined by rights secured by a state. But this is a question that is essentially one of process or emergence rather than one of the project of global justice, that is, it is a development that is determined by changing social realities and how publics respond to problems in the social world.

With regard to global justice as a political project, there are essentially four positions, ranging from fairly weak to strong views, depending on where one stands on the question of the limits of obligation and whether or not the norms that apply within a given state also should apply beyond the jurisdiction of the state. One position is that the aim of global justice is to alleviate poverty so that basic needs can be fulfilled. This is a fairly weak objective in that it is achieved once the problem of absolute poverty has been solved and very basic problems of health have been solved. This position generally corresponds to humanitarianism and development aid, and is inspired by a basic desire to provide assistance to vulnerable persons or societies that have experienced a major catastrophe. However, the obligation to provide assistance to those in need does not challenge the obligations of citizenship and does not necessarily lead to cosmopolitan consequences. A second position is to see the problem of global justice in terms of the pursuit of human rights. In this case the objective is rather more focused on individuals than on societies as a whole and is concerned with securing basic liberty. These are two weak demands since the aim is to bring societies up to a certain level or to eliminate specific obstacles or to make possible certain basic capabilities, as Martha Nussbaum (2002, 2006) argues, such as needs and freedoms. A third position is to see the aim of global justice to be the pursuit of equality, this being a stronger position, as Gillian Brock (2009a, 2009b) has convincingly argued, in that to achieve equality in many parts of the world it is necessary to change power relations in those countries and put in place new

social structures. This is more than the satisfaction of basic needs, but extends into the domain of the politics of recognition. None of these three positions – assuming effective means can be established as to how to achieve them (which for positions one and two is rather less complicated than for the third) – has any significant qualitative implications for the developed world or for planetary sustainability. They are compatible with liberal and statist as opposed to globalist arguments.

Finally, there is the stronger position that the aim of global justice is to achieve equality between states, as opposed to taking for granted existing relations, and to achieve certain goals within states, such as the removal of absolute poverty, the enforcement of human rights, greater equality. In this stronger position, which we can term globalist, the question of global justice is inescapably one of redistributive justice and strong demands as to what obligation to others entails. In the case of migration, for instance, it may be necessary to create significant changes to membership of the polity. Strong conceptions of global justice also arise on redistribution, challenging liberal humanitarianism. Once the satisfaction of basic needs and freedoms has overcome absolute inequality, the challenge of overcoming relative inequality remains. This puts egalitarianism to the test, since if the entire world were to achieve the same standard of life as the developed world, the planet would self-destruct in terms of ecological sustainability. This, then, is where global justice and global environmentalism are interlinked, and where the objective of planetary sustainability may be the ultimate aim of global politics. Strong conceptions of global justice are also related to the idea of global democratization and call into question the statist and liberal assumptions of the other positions with the argument that global institutions need to be created rather than relying on existing states or the actions of individual citizens.

The first two positions have the merit of being achievable, while the second two, in particular the fourth, are less clear in terms of a way forward. The pursuit of the normative objectives of global justice cannot be separated from the means to achieve them and we have to entertain the possibility that to ignore such problems as the enforcement of global justice can be counter-productive, if not destructive. The misuse of human rights, for instance, has brought the very notion of human rights into disrepute, though I strongly disagree with the view of critics such as Costa Douzinas (2000) that this has altogether discredited human rights (see for a different view Moyn, 2012). It does mean that global justice is a contested domain and historically variable. We only have to think of the atrocities committed in the name of regime change and liberal democracy. However, I reject the strong critique of global justice that argues that, while it may be desirable, any attempt to create it is either impossible or oppressive due to the measures it would require. I think these positions are as wrong as the conservative realist position (espoused by David Miller and Michael Walzer, for instance) that only cohesive national communities are real and we have no obligations beyond the borders of nation-states. To pursue this further it is, in my view, best to place the idea of global justice in the context of the broader framework of cosmopolitanism, since this has generally provided the terms of analysis for the transformation of political community in the context of global challenges, for as I shall argue global justice is part of a wider socio-cultural shift and thus tied to other processes of change. To understand the prospects of cosmopolitanism is especially important in the context of a great number of global challenges, ranging from

ethnic-national conflict to racism and the exclusion and discrimination of minorities, ecological destruction, human trafficking, the exploitation of vulnerable workers, etc.

## **Cosmopolitanism and social change: a theoretical framework**

Political philosophers will continue to debate the normative project of global justice. I am more interested in global justice as a discourse in contemporary societies that tells us something about the nature of social change and changing assumptions about the objectives of global justice, such as the bonds that constitute political community or the perception of what responsibility requires. Rather than focus only on the normative project, we also need to consider the process by which cosmopolitanism and the related forms of knowledge on which it rests emerge. Beck (2006) has referred to this as ‘cosmopolitanization’, meaning the empirical manifestation of cosmopolitanism. The objectives of global justice will ultimately be determined by public argumentation and reflect the outcome of social processes in which normative ideals are contested and decontested. It is possible to speculate that the outcome will be highly pluralist, with different objectives invoked for various problems. It is very unlikely, probably undesirable and certainly problematic, for the norms that apply in domestic national contexts to be simply transposed to the global context, as globalists would have us believe. In my view, a cosmopolitan position involves the recognition of differential levels of obligation and membership. For this reason, I have some sympathy for the enigmatic argument that Rawls proposed in his last work, *A Law of Peoples*, in 1999 that the norms that should be applied to the global context are (mostly) different from those that apply to domestic politics. However, in his concern with ‘peoples’ rather than persons he confined the demands of distributive justice too much and effectively narrowed the range of global justice to exclude much of the cosmopolitan imaginary that has made visible the cracks in the walls of the nation-state in ways that have implications for solidarity and how membership of the polity is perceived. This is because his main concern was with ‘peoples’ and with issues such as the promotion of autonomy, the prevention of persecution, etc. Nevertheless his ‘well ordered’ ‘peoples’ end up looking very much like nation-states. It is not surprising, then, that cosmopolitan political theorists have been unhappy with Rawls, who did not take up the radical project in *A Theory of Justice* (1971) in a cosmopolitan direction, remaining instead within a narrow liberal position. I would like to make the argument that while the liberal heritage may survive to varying degrees within the national state, is deeply problematical when it comes to global justice. While many cosmopolitan goals are compatible with liberalism, the challenge of global justice is not easily achieved within a liberal framework, which assumes a sovereign state.

The politico-normative appeal of cosmopolitanism is also due to the alternative it suggests to both nationalism and to globalization: it offers an alternative to the homogenizing aspects of globalization and related visions, such as, on the one side, the end-of-history scenario and, on the other, it challenges highly particularistic ways of life associated with nationalism and predictions of a world-wide clash of cultures. Broadly speaking, cosmopolitanism concerns ways in which diversity (different conceptions of the common good)

and unity (belief in the possibility of a common good and the equality of all persons) can be reconciled both within given societies or cultures and in the wider global context through taking into account the perspective of others. For this reason, cosmopolitanism has an unavoidable cognitive dimension in that it is also about the degree to which societies can develop ways of thinking and feeling about justice; it is not simply a matter of the application of normative principles, such as the pursuit of freedom or specific human rights, since those principles themselves – which are best seen as meta-norms – need to be interpreted and realized in different forms. The central issue, I would argue, is learning. Cosmopolitanism is centrally about learning; it is about how the moral and political horizons of individuals, groups, the public in general, societies are broadened through the capacity for connectivity. The short answer to the question of realizing global justice is that it requires major cognitive transformation, that it can only come following shifts in the self-understanding of contemporary societies in the way they imagine the world. Just as nations have imaginaries, so too does cosmopolitanism have an imaginary dimension to it.

Against the commonly stated objection that cosmopolitanism is weak or non-existent due to the dominance of the national imaginary, I would reply by saying that, first, the cosmopolitan imaginary is already part of the nation today. There are few national identities that can exclude cosmopolitan challenges, be it the integration of minorities, human rights or the need for global dialogue. Everywhere the nation has become the site of contested claims. It is possible to argue, as Scheffler (2001) has, that there are two competing claims within political community around local and global claims. Second, one could make the stronger claim that the cosmopolitan imaginary is in fact prior to the national imaginary, in that the idea of the nation is always a particularization of a universal. This was how the modern idea of the nation first arose in the 18th century – as a particularization of the universal – and while there have been many attempts to deprive the nation of its universalistic legitimation, the connection is still preserved in the constitutions of most countries. Further examples of the priority of the universal over the particular would include anti-slavery movement in the 19th century and the civil rights movement in the mid 20th century. In my view, it is important for the cosmopolitan project to locate itself within the category of the nation, rather than transcending it, for the nation is capable of redefinition in light of universalizing claims. For this reason there is no fundamental antagonism between the national and the cosmopolitan: the latter can be seen as a counter-factual embedded within modern political community.

Before developing this further and suggesting how the prospects of cosmopolitanism might be assessed, I would like to outline the main intellectual sources of cosmopolitanism with a view to arriving at the core of the cosmopolitan imagination. While having Greek origins, it is essentially a product of modern societies as they address global problems. The origins of the term lie in Stoic thought, at least in its most important philosophical legacy, and the early Christian thinkers St Paul and St Augustine made an important contribution in developing the ideas. There were of course also non-western traditions that can be associated with cosmopolitanism, which should not be equated entirely with its European heritage.<sup>2</sup> However, despite its origins in antiquity and the civilizations of what Karl Jaspers has termed the Axial Age (see Bellah and Joas, 2012),

cosmopolitanism is an essentially modern movement in its concerns with global justice and the vision of the essential unity of the world but without presupposing a transcendental or sacred order. Cosmopolitan ideas are not simply ideas projected on the world, as was the case in ancient thought, but are part of the modern world. The defining tenets of modern cosmopolitanism can be seen in the work of three key thinkers: Immanuel Kant, Alexander von Humboldt and Karl Marx, each of whom made a key contribution to modern cosmopolitanism.

In *Perpetual Peace* in 1795 Kant (1991) established the principle of hospitality as the defining tenet of cosmopolitanism, which he contrasted to internationalism, which for Kant was based on treaties between states. Cosmopolitanism, in contrast, is based on the centrality of the individual and the need for the rights of the individual to be recognized even where the individual is a foreigner. It is this idea of cosmopolitan law, rather than the vision of global government – which Kant believed was desirable but not realistic – that has been the real legacy of modern cosmopolitanism. The writings of Alexander von Humboldt brought an additional contribution to the modern idea of cosmopolitanism. This consists of what he called ‘world consciousness’, a term that he coined and which has entered to language of cosmopolitan thought to refer to the interconnectedness of the world. For von Humboldt the world was the primary reality of being and guaranteed the unity of humanity and nature. While Kant’s world was the European order of republican nations, von Humboldt had a genuinely more cosmopolitan temperament and vision of the unity of the world, as reflected in his famous *Political Essay on the Island of Cuba* in 1856 (von Humboldt, 2011) and his criticism of slavery, and in his major four-volume work *Cosmos* (see Walls 2009). Finally, Karl Marx articulated a cosmopolitan vision of political community with the claim that ‘the workers of the world have no country’ and the foundation of the First International. Neither Kant nor von Humboldt gave much thought to how the cosmopolitanism that they believed in would be possible. Marx, in contrast, had a very clear vision of a cosmopolitical project and one that would realize global social justice. For Marx, justice had to be social and had to be globally realized. Taking these three conceptions of cosmopolitanism, with their respective roots in European republicanism, romanticism and socialism, we can arrive at a broad view of cosmopolitanism as based on the following dimensions.

It is in the first instance a condition of openness to the world in the sense of the broadening of the moral and political horizon of societies. It entails a view of societies as connected rather than separated. Cosmopolitanism is made possible by the fact that individuals, groups, publics, societies have a capacity for learning in dealing with problems and, in particular, learning from each other. In this sense, then, cosmopolitanism is not a matter of diversity or mobility, but a process of learning. Dialogue is a key feature of cosmopolitanism since dialogue opens up the possibility of incorporating the perspective of others into one’s own view of the world. It can thus be associated with a communicative view of modernity. Rather than being an affirmative condition, it is transformative and is produced by social struggles rather than being primarily elite driven or entirely institutional. In this sense, cosmopolitanism can be related to popular and vernacular traditions rather than exclusively to the projects of elites (see Holton, 2009). From an epistemological perspective, cosmopolitanism involves the production of essentially critical knowledge, such as the identification of transformative potentials within the present.

Finally, cosmopolitanism is related to subject formation: it is constitutive of the self as much as it is of social and political processes. This is reflected in the von Humboldtian – in this case Wilhelm von Humboldt's – understanding of cosmopolitanism as a particular kind of consciousness that is best exemplified in education. In the acquisition of knowledge, the self undergoes a transformation, for *Bildung* is a form of self-formation and occurs through the encounter of the individual with the world. *Bildung* is a means of encountering the universal, as reflected in the category of the world, and is the aim of education.

These features of cosmopolitanism challenge the received view of normative ideas, such as global justice as transcending political community or as simply utopian. The conception of cosmopolitanism I am putting forward is that it is constitutive of modernity and part of the make-up of political community. This is why cosmopolitanism is not a zero sum condition – either present or absent – as its critics often argue and its defenders mistakenly argue in its support. It is present to varying degrees in contemporary societies.

In order to assess the prospects of cosmopolitanism it is therefore necessary to determine the extent to which cosmopolitan phenomena are present in the cultural model of societies and in their modes of social organization and institutions. By the cultural model, I mean the social imaginary of societies, that is the dominant forms of collective identity or self-understanding. The cultural model of all modern societies involves the amplification and metamorphosis of transcultural ideas such as liberty, justice, freedom, autonomy, rights, which of course are variously interpreted and are not always fully institutionalized. But the existence of such ideas (essentially meta-norms), means that societies have the cognitive means of reaching beyond themselves. For this reason, there is generally a tension in modern societies between the cultural model and institutions. Related to these levels of analysis is the dimension of subject formation, the cosmopolitan self. It is possible that any one time in the history of a society there is a tension between subject formation, the cultural model of society, and social institutions. It is for this reason that cosmopolitanism can be seen as a critical theory of society (see Delanty, 2009): it shares with the critical heritage the concern with possibilities within the present or the immanent transcendence of society.

I am emphasizing, then, the formative dimensions of cosmopolitanism, which in other words is a structure forming itself out of both the self and society. It entails a subject (the cosmopolitan subject), a discourse in which ideas, knowledge, modes of cognition are produced, and social practices. Viewed in such terms, cosmopolitanism is a process as opposed to a fixed condition. It is marked by conflict, contradictions, negotiation. The implications of this view are that evidence of cosmopolitanism must be found not in an end state – a cosmopolitan society or state as opposed to a non-cosmopolitan one – but in the process by which it emerges. It is the task of sociology to determine whether and how this process is occurring.

## **The conditions of the possibility of cosmopolitanism**

What would be the evidence for such a process and how can it be assessed? My proposal is for a three-fold level of analysis. First, four levels of cosmopolitanism can be



specified. Second, three main processes can be identified by which norms or normative systems emerge. Third, a number of key areas can be identified for empirical evidence. The first two will be outlined in this section, with the third, the focus of the final section of the article.

Cosmopolitanism can be understood in terms of four levels of relationships, as I have argued in my book *The Cosmopolitan Imagination* (Delanty, 2009). These range from low to high levels of intensity and can also be seen as constitutive of subject formation and thus elements in the making of a cosmopolitan subject.

The first level of cosmopolitanism can be described as cultural and typically concerns curiosity about other cultural values. One of its most pervasive forms is in consumption, but it can also be seen in educational programmes aimed at understanding other cultures. In these instances cosmopolitanism entails a relation to the Other that does not involve extensive self-scrutiny or reflexivity and is fully compatible with most expressions of liberal tolerance. It may also exhibit a general tolerance of diversity, recognition of interconnectedness and a disposition of openness to others. In sum, it is a soft kind of cosmopolitanism and akin to the condition of 'cultural omnivorousness'.

A second form of cosmopolitanism concerns a stronger and more positive recognition of the other. Here cosmopolitanism can be related to political than purely cultural relations of alterity. In this case the question of the inclusion of the other is paramount, not just awareness or curiosity about difference. Such expressions of cosmopolitanism can be related to what Honneth (1996) and Taylor (1994) refer to as recognition, in particular recognition based on rights. The enlargement of the boundaries of political community in both the national and international context can be seen in terms of the cosmopolitan ethnic of 'solidarity among strangers'. Expressions of solidarity as opposed to tolerance illustrate this deeper level of the engagement with the other. While such forms of cosmopolitanism can be found on the global level, it is more characteristic of local contexts.

While the second type of cosmopolitanism demands of the political subject a change in their relation to alterity, it does not require much more than the inclusion of the other. A third expression of cosmopolitanism is to be found in a stronger reflexive and critical attitude whereby both self and other undergo transformation. This concerns the mutual evaluation of cultures or identities, both one's own and that of the other. To achieve it a degree of cultural distance is required in order to create a space for critique and scepticism. This more critical kind of cosmopolitanism makes it possible for people to mediate between cultures. Such forms of cosmopolitanism will be expressed in dialogic encounters and in deliberative communication. This is also what allows for the critique of cultures and cross-cultural communication.

The fourth type of cosmopolitanism builds on the previous one in its orientation towards a shared normative culture. The characteristic expression of such forms of cosmopolitanism is not simply mutual critique, but the formation of new social relations and institutions. This is where the consequences of the other levels become evident. In this case it is possible to speak of cosmopolitanism as a societal condition as opposed to being an aspect political community or characteristic of people. Unlike the previous types, it is also possible to relate this form of cosmopolitanism to an engagement with global problems or consciousness of the urgency for global justice and the need to find solutions that may require giving primacy to the non-national interest and the

perspective of others. Thus when cosmopolitan forms of consciousness penetrate beyond the level of individuals to reach the societal level, creating not only new institutions but also wider social transformation beyond the national societies, we can speak of a global cosmopolitanism.

These four levels of cosmopolitanism are not necessarily consecutive and can be extensive. However, it makes sense to see them as analytically separate and embodying degrees of strength, from 'soft' to 'hard' forms. This approach offers a rejoinder to the common critiques of cosmopolitanism that tend to see it as a global condition unconnected with local contexts or a view of cosmopolitanism as necessarily 'thin' in contrast to 'thicker' local identities and solidarities. The differentiated conception of cosmopolitanism put forward here would on the contrary see it as engrained in all social contexts.

From a sociological perspective, the task is also to explain the emergence of cosmopolitanism, for instance to account for how the different levels emerge and interact with each other. This can be seen in terms of three processes: generative, transformative and institutionalizing processes.

Generative processes involve the creation of new ideas, new perceptions of problems, new interpretations of meta-norms (liberty, freedom, autonomy, equality, etc.), leading to new kinds and cycles of claim-making, which challenge the given order. Such processes, which lead to an increase in variation, are associated with social movements which are generally the initiators of social change. This is the first step in the emergence of norms. This may also involve the combination of different meta-norms, for instance equality and autonomy.

Transformative processes follow from the selection of the variety generated and occur typically when a dominant social movement brings about major societal change through the mobilization of large segments of the population and the transformation of the political system during a period of contestation. This is where the question of solidarity and identity is relevant: changes in consciousness occur following from new ways of framing problems.

Institutionalizing processes occur when a social movement succeeds in institutionalizing its project in a new societal framework, for example in the establishment of a new state or in new legislation and brings about the reorganization of state and society.

Cosmopolitanism is produced in all three processes; it is not then simply one level, such as an institutionalized policy, but the outcome of diverse movements and actions. In answering the question whether or not cosmopolitanism is real, one needs to consider the process by which it emerges. Norms are produced in such processes and not simply given. It follows that there will be different interpretations of such norms in different contexts (including in different civilizational contexts). This approach would thus give centrality to agency in the shaping of cosmopolitanism, which ultimately derives from the capacity of social actors in specific places and at specific times to reinterpret their situation in light of new ideas or new interpretations of ideas, as in, for instance, the reinterpretation of the meaning of solidarity or rights. It is also a matter of how social actors interpret their situation in light of public interpretations of social issues.

This might be one way in which there could be useful cross-fertilization between political philosophy and sociology, for an under-researched area is exactly this: how norms emerge and undergo change in light of new interpretations. Political philosophers

simply postulate norms and debate their feasibility and desirability, while social scientists are interested in their empirical existence as something that can be measured. However, before something can be measured it must first exist and, as I have argued, there are degrees of emergence.

At work in such processes is a mechanism which can be described as akin to the logic of translation. The key aspect is the transformation in meaning that occurs when a concept or idea is taken from one context and placed in another, for a translation always involves a change in meaning. In a similar way, the language of rights, for instance, undergoes a certain metamorphosis when the rights that apply normally in one context are applied to another or when one group uses the rights claimed by another. The history of democracy has been characterized by the constant contestation and negotiation of its terms and very meaning. The language of rights, obligations, democracy, citizenship is never settled in its meanings, but is perpetually open to new interpretations. This cognitive condition is ultimately what makes possible the generation of new norms; it makes possible the emergence of new politics and claims, and enables the shaping of new institutions.

Viewed in such terms cosmopolitanism is not to be defined only with respect to normative change but also involves socio-cognitive shifts, namely shifts in ways in seeing the world (see Strydom, 2011, 2012). It is such changes in cognitive capacities that often make possible the articulation of new normative principles or their application in domains where they previously did not apply. In this sense, then, cosmopolitanism entails learning capacities: individuals, collective actors, and societies find solutions to problems that require the critical reflexive capacity to take the point of view of the other into account. The cognitive dimension of cosmopolitanism should be distinguished from its epistemic level, that is the form of knowledge that it may engender. Many accounts and discussions of cosmopolitanism have been confined to its normative and symbolic levels of expression, that is the level of norms and principles and the level of meanings and values. The concern with the normative has been more a feature of the political philosophy of cosmopolitanism while interest in the symbolic has been a feature of the culturally orientated social sciences, such as anthropology and cultural studies. This has been to the neglect of its cognitive dimension, which can be seen as a more basic level and one that provides the condition of the possibility of the normative and symbolic forms, as well as knowledge. However, a fuller picture will involve looking at the interaction of all four forms. Specific examples of the cognitive order include reflexivity, self-problematization, critique, connectivity. Of these an important one with regard to cosmopolitanism is the latter: shifts in cognition occur when individuals see new connections between things that were previously seen as separate. The capacity to see connections between phenomena is the basis of the possibility of global justice.

## **The prospects of cosmopolitanism**

Finally, I present some reflections on the prospects of cosmopolitanism in view of the preceding considerations and the argument for a differentiated conception of cosmopolitanism with the emphasis on identifying the processes by which its various components

and forms emerge. This entails giving attention to the cognitive, normative, symbolic and epistemic levels. While cosmopolitanism may be less evidenced in terms of the fulfilment of a specific project, there is considerable evidence of the emergence of cosmopolitanism, at least of significant preconditions. For reasons of space, this can be only a brief sketch of some substantive topics to indicate the broad lines of empirical inquiry for cosmopolitan research. Overall, the evidence suggests that there has been considerable progress in the past five decades or so in terms of cognitive and epistemic shifts, significant change on the cultural level in a direction of symbolic cosmopolitanism and some evidence of normative cosmopolitanism.

### *The rise of normative internationalism*

Since 1945 – arguably since 1941 with the Atlantic Charter – there has been a significant expansion in cosmopolitanism as reflected in global political institutions. The aftermath of the Second World War led to the foundation of the United Nations, UNESCO (the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), which was founded with an explicitly cosmopolitan mission, and later the various embodiments of what was to become the European Union, which in turn provided a model for the world-wide spread of normative transnationalism, for example, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA and in Latin America MERCOSUR and UNASUR), the Organization of American States, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in Asia, and the Organization of African Unity. The statist underpinnings of these developments should not detract from the fact that in these decades a new breakthrough was made in international politics by which the national interest had to accommodate other claims, which were not always those of other states. Developments in international law, the category of crimes against humanity, and the recognition of human rights – and in many cases its incorporation into national law through legislative changes and in judges' interpretations (Sassen, 2011: 383) – has led to an entirely different situation from that of the pre-1945 world. As in technological innovation, once something is invented it has the tendency to remain and often to develop into new forms, as the example of European integration reveals. Other examples can be found in the sphere of global dialogue, from the notion of a dialogue of civilizations to religious ecumenism. While new norms have emerged, the true significance of these developments rather lies in opening up the space of the political and creating the elements of a global as opposed to a national public sphere.

### *The spread of global civil society*

The global spread of transnational activism is one of the most striking aspects of the relevance of cosmopolitanism, which is more present in social struggles than in institutional forms. As several theorists of global transnationalism have observed, for example Benhabib (2004) and Castells (2012), the state now operates in a very complex field of contested norms. Organized social actors operating through global networks have challenged the capacity of states to exercise a monopoly. While not all such activism is necessarily cosmopolitan – as the 'Arab Spring' suggests – it can have the effect of producing the necessary preconditions, for instance democratization and the opening of public

spaces, for cosmopolitanism to emerge. Global social movements are not always in direct opposition to states. One of the most important developments in recent years has been a move in the direction of co-governance, whereby state-centred institutions collaborate with global social movements, as argued by della Porta and Marchetti (2011) and others. Indeed, the very shift from government to governance is an example of a wider discursive shift in the way we now think of the political, and is due in no small part to the tremendous impact of global civil society movements. Sassen (2011) comments on the 'de-nationalization' of the state in the face of transnational opposition by which the powerless mobilize and win concessions from the state. Many of these come from the South and are locally based and challenge the hegemony of the North and the forms of globalization that emanate from the West. In general, such insurgent movements reflect a different understanding of cosmopolitanism to notions of world government or global citizenship as well as to globalization more generally.

### *The diffusion of cosmopolitanism in domestic politics*

Undoubtedly the most extensive evidence of cosmopolitanism can be found within national societies. While it is not entirely possible to separate internal processes of change from those that are externally induced, it can be said with some confidence that social change over the past few decades has resulted in greater pluralization within national societies. The impact of globalization has not undermined cultural diversity and produced more homogenization, as has been demonstrated in the World Values Surveys (Norris and Inglehart, 2009). The general trend has in fact been towards a greater emphasis on significant value change in the direction of what can be broadly termed symbolic cosmopolitan values. Homogeneous national identities have increasingly come under scrutiny in societies that are more conscious of their multi-ethnicity. There is considerable empirical evidence in many societies of increased multiple identities, especially among young people. Viewing cosmopolitanism as a process of cultural opening and self-problematization, the nation is one of the main sites of cultural contestation. Examples of this can be found in debates around memory and commemoration, heritage, representations of the nation, the curriculum and educational policy and media, and popular culture.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the obvious rise of anti-cosmopolitan trends – xenophobic and recalcitrant nationalism, religious fundamentalism, new technologies of surveillance and population control – should not detract from the potential of cosmopolitanism to bring about alternatives. However, what is not present is a significant cosmo-political project that would deliver greater global justice. The challenges for cosmopolitan social science are very great, but if the proposals made in this article are accepted it follows that the focus of attention should be the capacities and learning potential in contemporary societies for social change in the direction of cosmopolitanism. While a global cosmopolitan social actor as such does not exist, there is a plurality of such actors in the world and thus some indication of the making of a cosmopolitan subject. Moreover, the existence

of cosmopolitan orientations in critical publics world-wide offers some hope for the prospects of cosmopolitanism to have a greater impact. This is where the real hope for global justice ultimately resides.

Global justice is not simply a set of normative principles of justice that are applied in given situations, but a process that regulates and structures much of the political and is constitutive of social spaces. The normative order of justice, with which cosmopolitan notions such as global justice is often associated, is not permanent but open to contestation and to new interpretations, self-understanding and narratives. So what is occurring today is a cognitive expansion in the nature of justice. In this sense then global justice has a generative impact in opening up new ways of seeing political community and in responding to injustice. In terms of the three mechanisms discussed in the foregoing, while cosmopolitanism is reflected in all three, it is more strongly evidenced as a generative process that provokes new challenges to political community through enhanced consciousness of the interconnectivity of the world.

Evidence of major change can never be easily found in the short term. Criticisms of cosmopolitanism that invoke the obvious presence of counter-cosmopolitan trends – which presumably presuppose cosmopolitan currents – are too short-sighted in focusing on a short time span or on reactive events. The Axial Age breakthrough itself took several centuries – 800 to 200 BC – to produce the first universalistic visions, which laid the foundations for the emergence of cosmopolitanism, and the tumultuous history of democracy is itself a reminder of the need to take a longer view on major social and political transformation. Thus the fact that there is much evidence of global injustice does not mean that global justice is absent from the self-understanding of contemporary critical publics or that it has no consequences. The thesis of this article is that the most compelling evidence resides less in manifest institutional change – despite considerable gains, as discussed in the preceding section – than in socio-cognitive shifts in learning competences. Thus the structuring impact that global justice has had on the political imagination in recent times is essentially more of a cognitive than a normative development in redefining the self-understanding of political community.

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2. For reasons of space a consideration of the sources of non-western cosmopolitanism is not possible. On Asian cosmopolitanism see Pollock (2006); see also Holton (2009).

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