

*Report on ASSA ISL Workshop, April 2011*

**AUSTRALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
COSMOPOLITAN CIVIL SPHERE.**

**Workshop Convenors:**

Dr Ian Woodward, Griffith University  
Emeritus Professor Robert Holton, Trinity College Dublin and Flinders  
University of South Australia  
Professor Zlatko Skrbis, The University of Queensland

Though a concept of antique provenance, the idea of cosmopolitanism has been at the forefront of innovations in the contemporary social sciences since Martha Nussbaum's polemical essay on patriotism and cosmopolitanism. The concept has attracted much recent attention through encouraging innovative approaches to the study of the networked social and cultural consequences of mobilities and globalisation. While the concrete realisation of a cosmopolitan global society may quite rightly appear to be an unrealistic fantasy, being able to think 'ourselves beyond the nation', beyond forms of national belonging, and beyond the fixities of time and space is becoming not only easier, but also increasingly vital in an age where global issues manifest and effervesce locally. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that Australia, like all other nations, is undergoing an uneven process of cosmopolitanisation. The consequences of this process confronts Australian citizens on an everyday basis in the form of bubbling public issues related to migration, global environmental issues, matters of national sovereignty, the impacts of global economic processes and the flow of different cultural goods such as movies or music.

This development comes under the rubric of what Ulrich Beck and other theorists have called 'cosmopolitanisation'. Part of the social scientific challenge of such an idea is finding its articulation at the layer of everyday life and it is here we can turn to the notion of the civil sphere to explore the impact of such cosmopolitanisation processes on the lives of citizens. The idea of the civil sphere has been important for understanding the constitution of social collectives which are formed as a result of the feelings and connections within and amongst citizens (for example, in the works of Habermas, Cohen and Arato, and Alexander). In the terms posited by cosmopolitanisation theory, the civil sphere of any nation is shaped by national and local events, but also increasingly by events outside its borders. Thus, the processes which tie citizens together, including the legal and

normative processes by which disputes are resolved, cultural differences negotiated and hospitalities afforded, is determined significantly by international contexts and their playing out in local contexts. Australia's embeddedness within such global networks is a sign of our dependency on such sets of connections. This embeddedness presents opportunities and challenges not just in terms of Australia's economic health, but also in terms of its social and cultural cohesion.

The workshop was led by three Australian scholars who have been at the forefront of recent international developments in studies of globalisation and cosmopolitanism theory (Prof R. Holton, ASSA Fellow); migration, transnationalism and belonging (Prof Z. Skrbis); and culture, consumption and cosmopolitanism (Dr I. Woodward). It gathered an interdisciplinary mix of researchers to examine the way Australian society is being shaped and challenged by this process of cosmopolitanisation. In addition, the injection of leading scholars from Asia and the United Kingdom encouraged local scholars to compare and contrast their own methodologies and standpoints in the light of international perspectives. Specifically, the workshop's scholarly goals were: (i) to understand theoretically the effect of these cosmopolitanisation processes on various aspects of Australian society and culture, (ii) to apply diverse empirical approaches to understand the way cosmopolitanisation processes influence parts of Australian society, and (iii) to apply the insights of leading international researchers to understand the composition and make-up of the national civil sphere in the context of the global networks it is a part of.

At the start of the first day, Dr Ian Woodward (Griffith) opened the workshop by offering a welcome on behalf of the organisers and also introduced the workshop's major themes and goals. Dr Woodward gave an overview of contemporary understandings of the notion of cosmopolitanism; foregrounding current debates, issues and areas for further research opportunities. Professor Chris Rumford (Royal Holloway, London) presented his research on borders and processes of bordering in the UK and Europe. Rumford's research shows that borders are to some degree more flexible and permeable than we have imagined, and that through processes of 'bordering' and various types of 'borderwork' citizens engage in practices which can effectively open, close and shift geographic borders. Thus, it is not just citizens which are mobile across borders, but borders themselves which are to some degree flexible. Borders are thus somewhat more permeable than imagined and are able to be influenced by various types of transnational agents and actants. Rumford's research shows that while borders are spaces of connectivity and agency - making them potentially cosmopolitan in nature - in reality the capacity to influence

borders is related to types of privilege and mobility. Following Professor Rumford, ASSA Fellow Professor Robert Holton (Flinders University and Trinity College Dublin) gave an analytic, precise discussion of the history, dimensions and issues related to theories of cosmopolitanism. Holton's talk clarified strands of cosmopolitan thinking and discerned the particular qualities associated with cosmopolitan ethics and practices, distinguishing it from globalisation in terms of its qualities and consequences.

The talks that followed those by Professor Rumford and Professor Holton considered the nature of meaning of cosmopolitan practices through various empirical and applied endeavours. Dr Val Colic-Peisker (RMIT) discussed the links between the cosmopolitan civil sphere and global capitalism; Dr Raelene Wilding (La Trobe) presented findings from her research project on the use of internet communication technologies as a way of assisting refugees to settle in to their communities and to stay in contact with their home; and Dr Sara Davies (Griffith) presented an overview of her research on global disease monitoring and surveillance networks. Dr Davies's research reveals the issues related to monitoring global health scares, mechanisms for reporting them and the variable types of responses nations make to them. In short, her research reveals something of the 'drama' related to managing global health scares, and the ways in which transnational monitoring of disease is currently made difficult by the often conflicting interests of nation-states and the international community. Day one of the workshop also featured a talk by Professor Brenda Yeoh (National University of Singapore) on nation-state imposed forms of cosmopolitanism, modeled on the Singaporean experience. Emphasising the arrangements within Singapore which have led to a particular state-led expression of the cosmopolitan ideal, Yeoh's talk charted Singapore's migration history and multiracial legacy. She argued that although this legacy it provided a possible framework to build cosmopolitan sensibilities, in reality it charts a pathway ridden with considerable contradictions in the city-state's attempt to forge its own globalised future.

The second day of the workshop opened with Professor Mica Nava's (University of East London) talk on her ideas about 'visceral cosmopolitanism'. Nava's research focuses on particular times and spaces of modernity when cosmopolitanism flourished. Her research focuses on instances of exemplar cosmopolitans of early modernity, and the link between commercial cultures and cosmopolitanism. More broadly, Nava argues for a strand of research into cosmopolitanism which emphasizes its basis in emotions and the 'allure for difference'. Papers by Dr Moran (La Trobe) and Professor Jakubowicz (University of Technology Sydney) explored the links between multiculturalism and

cosmopolitanism in the Australian context. Both shed light on the peculiar civic and social processes within Australian nationalism that can mitigate the development of strong cosmopolitan attachments. The paper by Dr Luke Howie (Monash) analysed the links between global media and the development of cosmopolitan attachments. In his summing-up presentation of the workshop's major themes, Professor Zlatko Skrbis (The University of Queensland) highlighted a number of tensions and contradictions within the cosmopolitanism research program which need clarification and further exploration: the normative dimensions of the cosmopolitan idea; the plural social manifestations of the cosmopolitan impulse and their contextual expression; 'top-down' versus 'bottom-up' versions of the cosmopolitan ideal; and, the links between the cosmopolitanism agenda and research agendas in globalization and multicultural studies.

In conjunction with the workshop, Professor Mica Nava delivered a Griffith University public lecture on 'visceral cosmopolitanism'. Drinks and an invited dinner followed this lecture. In partnership with Griffith University's Centre for Cultural Research, Professor Mica Nava also led a 3-hour postgraduate research methods workshop offered to research higher degree students across Brisbane's three major universities.