

XXI International Conference

The Twenty First International Conference of the Forum on Contemporary Theory will be held in The Chariot Resort & Spa in the temple town of Puri in Odisha from the **18th to the 21st of December 2018** in collaboration with the International Lincoln Centre for American Studies, Louisiana State University in Shreveport. The theme of the conference is: “**Revisiting Cosmopolitanism.**” Galin Tihanov, George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature at Queen Mary University of London and Bruce Robbins, Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University are the Academic Conveners and Keynote Speakers of the conference.

Thematic Introduction 1

Galin Tihanov

Background

Ever since Diogenes, banished from his home town of Sinope (in today’s Turkey), referred to himself as “a citizen of the World” (a *cosmopolitan*), cosmopolitanism, while evading a precise definition, has been understood as a belief in the need to recognise the dignity and rights of people across borders, cultures and communities. To be a cosmopolitan is not only to declare a belonging to the world, but to belong to it in a particular way: through acknowledging, appreciating, and indeed embracing difference. Cosmopolitanism begins by recognizing a shared human nature, but only comes into its own when also recognizing cultural difference: we can truly respect our fellow human beings when we learn to see them both as equal to us (in their humanness) and different from us (because of their culture, background, customs and traditions).

In our increasingly interconnected world of global risks and opportunities cosmopolitanism has become a catchword, a slogan seen and heard from the covers of popular magazines (*The Cosmopolitan*) to the offices of politicians. It is to this intensely contested and riveting idea – its history, its present and fortunes – that this conference turns its attention. Its papers will span political theory, cultural history, literature, and popular culture; they will place reflections on cosmopolitanism from Indian perspectives and drawing on Indian examples at the heart of the proceedings.

Suggested Sessions:

1. History and Context: What is Cosmopolitanism, who is a Cosmopolitan?
2. Political Dimensions of Cosmopolitanism: Re-Calibrating the Polis in War and Peace
3. Cosmopolitan Cultures: World Literature, Fashion, Consumerism
4. Cosmopolitan Trajectories: Exile, Border-Crossing, Memory
5. Friends and Enemies, or What Future for Cosmopolitanism?

Session 1: History and Context

The center of attention here are the history and the current state of discussions about cosmopolitanism. The participants are encouraged to ask questions such as: what is cosmopolitanism? and who is a cosmopolitan? Cosmopolitanism is here understood as (a) an ethos and a set of values that includes openness to other cultures, tolerance, respect for others despite their background and traditions; (b) a foundation for a specific world order built on peace and mutual recognition amongst states and communities; (c) a particular methodology in the social sciences since the fall of the Berlin Wall that looks at social phenomena not through the prism of the nation state (what is known as ‘methodological nationalism’), but from a more global (‘cosmopolitan’) perspective. The first (a) of these three uses pertains to a number of interconnected areas: philosophy, politics, culture, and the arts. Historically, this is the earliest manifestation of cosmopolitanism; it points to the need for humans to go beyond the comfort zone of their own cultures and accept other cultures, thus learning to inhabit the entire world as its citizens. Philosophically, cosmopolitanism rests on two premises: the assumption that it should embody order (cf. the Greek ‘cosmos’ as opposed to ‘chaos’), and the assumption that being human is not an abstract feature but a quality that needs to be validated and recognized again and again as we move across different cultures and different communities (ideally to the point where this validation can occur everywhere in the world). It is clear from this that cosmopolitanism is not value-free or value-neutral: it already comes loaded with ideas of order, and with notions of human dignity, human rights, etc. The second use (cosmopolitanism as a foundation for a specific world order) is a more recent manifestation of cosmopolitanism that begins in what we still tend to refer to as the age of Enlightenment, more specifically with Kant. Papers can look in some detail at Kant’s project of eternal peace and universal hospitality and trace its significance for current notions of cosmopolitan law and global institutions that are meant to uphold human rights, fairness, dignity, and assist in cases where humanitarian intervention is necessary. Finally, there is a third incarnation of cosmopolitanism (c), understood as a recently developed methodology in the social sciences, believing that in order to understand the various forms of social life we need to look at them not through the prism of the nation and the nation state but rather through a ‘cosmopolitan’ prism, one that thinks the world in its entirety and interconnectedness.

The question who is a cosmopolitan, then, has been answered – in philosophy, literature, and the arts – chiefly with reference to the first of the three meanings of cosmopolitanism discussed above, insisting on a particular ethos (often individual rather than collective) of openness to what is non-familiar and alien, and on a particular range of values, such as tolerance, hospitality, cultural and intellectual curiosity. In order to contextualize these changing ideas of cosmopolitanism, the papers in this session could look at three defining moments: Ancient Greece (especially the Stoics), the European Enlightenment, and the last three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall. But we also want to examine how the rich philosophical and religious traditions of the Indian Subcontinent generated ideas related to/diverging from cosmopolitanism, in other words: how did they reflect on what is essentially a concept with undisguised Western baggage.

Session 2: Political Dimensions of Cosmopolitanism

This session will focus on the most significant *political* aspects of cosmopolitanism as a foundation for a specific world order. The underlying idea here is that the rise of interest in, and discussions about, cosmopolitanism is usually a signal of important social and political change. As societies face significant crises, their self-identity also changes. Talking about cosmopolitanism is a way of discussing such crises. Sometimes cosmopolitanism is rejected: witness Germany after World War One or the Soviet Union in the first decade of the Cold War, with the sustained assaults on cosmopolitanism, often disguising anti-Semitism, during 1948-49. At some other times, it is welcomed by societies that grow in self-confidence and seek to reach out and grapple with global problems: an early classic example is nation-building in Germany in the last quarter of the 18th century, accompanied by an expansion of the sense of nationhood that begins to bind together ever wider territories; significantly, at that time, journeys from one German province to another were being described as “cosmopolitan journeys,” ‘cosmopolitanism’ becoming a byword for discovery, opening one’s mind, and asserting the new, larger polis of a nation in the making. It is precisely at this juncture in history – far from being a mere coincidence -- that Kant formulates his conditions for attaining and safeguarding eternal peace. A more recent example is the way in which, in the regime of globalisation, especially since the early 1990s, both NGOs and (some) governments have been formulating strategies of responding to global challenges and upholding human rights across the globe.

This session will, then, explore in more detail two ideas – peace and universal human rights – that shaped modernity and ideas and practices of cosmopolitanism, but also at the institutions that have historically engaged with this process: League of Nations, UNO, international courts, the history of citizenship and passports with reference to refugees and stateless people.

Session 3: Cosmopolitan Cultures

Here are three guiding questions to serve as a point of orientation for the third session: How and when did appreciation of cultural difference become a hallmark of cosmopolitan attitudes? Why is culture so important for asserting cosmopolitanism? Is there a connection between appreciation of cultural difference and the embrace and defense of human rights? The session takes as a concrete example the idea of ‘world literature’ (emerging, notably, at the same time as Kant’s cosmopolitan project of ‘world peace’); it also traces current debates on world literature which highlight the need for transnational approaches to culture and assert a cosmopolitan vantage point that denies the primacy of national literatures and cultures. Crucial here is the French concept of “literary cosmopolitanism” shaped simultaneously with the first steps of comparative literature as a discipline. The papers should also address the central question of whether cosmopolitanism is the exclusive domain of high culture, or, rather, is embodied in acts of everyday life (e.g. fashion, shopping). This is not a trivial question: it goes right to the heart of the larger questions: how do we conceive of cosmopolitanism: as a norm-setting ideal (what we can call ‘cosmopolitanism from above’) or as a particular life-style

(‘cosmopolitanism from below’), and – flowing from this – who is a cosmopolitan. In the course of this session, the papers could offer some reflections on the (not always unproblematic) link between cultural cosmopolitanism and political cosmopolitanism, thus casting a bridge between the current session and the previous one. Examples in this session could include life-style magazines (“Cosmopolitan”); the history of a famous department store (Selfridges) and its filmic representation; cuisine and fashion (phenomena such as hybridity and the blending of various local traditions into globally recognizable brands and styles); as well as a myriad of other examples drawn from the cultures of the Indian Subcontinent and from elsewhere.

Session 4: Cosmopolitan Trajectories

This session traces cosmopolitanism as a specific trajectory of movement across borders. The figures of the exile and the tourist loom large here as we analyze in this session different ways of border-crossing as a cosmopolitan experience. Starting with Hannah Arendt and Kristeva, but also with reference to Derrida, in this session we can discuss hospitality, border-crossing and exile (experiences that put us in touch with cultural difference, not least by changing our own selves in the process) in their relationship to cosmopolitanism. What is at stake in this session is the need to dispel the myth of exile as an unyielding machine for the production of cosmopolitan attitudes. Conceiving of exile solely as facilitator of cosmopolitanism can, and often does, leave out its other essential aspects: the need to circumscribe one’s experience in a new cultural framework, the imperative to begin to translate that experience in languages that are often not yet one’s own, and to grope one’s way through the loss and trauma intrinsic in this process of border-crossing. When this work of translating and accommodating one’s experience and life-world fails, when the participation in a new polis proves beyond reach, the specter of rupture, deprivation, and disenfranchisement makes a numbing appearance. These tensions are at the heart of this session, which situates cosmopolitanism vis-à-vis the practices of border-crossing and exile. Examples of “failed” exilic cosmopolitanism can be drawn from the stories of a number of Left Central- and East-European exiles in Stalin’s Moscow in the 1930s-1940s, who arrived in Moscow as Left-minded cosmopolitans inspired by the cosmopolitan charge of Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*, only to end up with no polis to which to apply their cosmopolitan ethos. These examples could be countered by looking at another figure of mobility – the tourist, and especially at the history of the Grand Tour as a tool of cosmopolitan education and socialization.

Session 5: Friends and Enemies

In this session we reflect on cosmopolitanism in the context of current debates on its underlying values. The proponents of cosmopolitanism have lately been in search of a political and legal framework that could ensure it thrives across the globe. We could examine here in more detail (establishing a connection with Session 1) Habermas’ latest work on world governance, as well as other proposals from the Social-Democratic Left in Europe, including those seeking to deploy cosmopolitanism in mitigating the unpalatable effects of globalisation and mobilising solidarity to deal with global risks (Ulrich Beck). At the same time, such efforts are constrained by the scepticism of those who see in cosmopolitanism little more than a

theory of emphatically Western provenance, and thus just another conceptual tool to establish dominance and subjugate others by smuggling in and imposing notions of universal culture and morality. Again, this argument has a long tradition and has been changing hands between those espousing political conservatism (invoking the erosion of communities and of cultural specificity, etc.) and those on the Left who would consider cosmopolitanism a doctrine of cultural re-colonisation by the West. But the enemies of cosmopolitanism also inhabit another camp: those who believe that mainstream cosmopolitanism is too prescriptive (cf. Session 3), a rigid set of values dictated from above (through global political and juridical bodies or by global cultural elites), which denigrates and neglects grassroots activities and everyday experiences. It is the intersection of these two vantage points that bears out the most important struggle over cosmopolitanism today.

All this is just a modest proposal. Additions/variations are most welcome. It is of paramount importance that Indian reflections on cosmopolitanism as ultimately a Western concept are at the centre of our proceedings, and also examples drawn from Indian social and political thought, philosophy, literature, journalism, etc.

Thematic Introduction 2

Bruce Robbins

Over the last two or three decades, some of the old questions about cosmopolitanism have come to seem less pressing. Aware that no one can really be a “citizen of the world” in the strongest and most ideal sense, as devoted to the welfare of distant strangers as to those in one’s native place, cosmopolitan thinkers have spent less energy on asking whether, for example, cosmopolitanism can overcome its Western origins and its associations with social elites, and even with imperialism itself, as in the figure of the stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius. These older questions have been displaced by a set of new interests and concerns. What historian David Hollinger calls the “new” cosmopolitanism has entered the field. Its premise is that cosmopolitanism is not singular, but plural. Following philosopher Anthony Appiah, Hollinger stresses the historical reality of diverse compromises between loyalty to the world and loyalty to the nation.

Many scholars, often working in the social sciences rather than in moral philosophy, have thus given over debating the pros and cons of the cosmopolitan norm or ideal in favor of studying moments of “actually existing” cosmopolitanism. They have stressed the existence of versions of cosmopolitanism among non-elite and non-European constituencies, many of them diasporas that left their places of origin more by coercion than by choice. Each diaspora arguably has its own cosmopolitanism, its own multiple and overlapping loyalties to society of origin and society of destination, its own moral and political synthesis of those different loyalties.

The conference invites papers that will further the “new” cosmopolitanism’s ongoing and exciting agenda. But it is also interested in the normative commitments of the “old,” singular cosmopolitanism. And it is especially interested in papers that will look at the geographically and socially diverse spectrum of plural cosmopolitanisms by *combining* descriptive with normative concerns, the old with the new. It is the normative concern for equality, for example, that underlies and animates Silviano Santiago’s path-breaking “Cosmopolitanism of the Poor.”

In the essay “Long-Distance Nationalism,” Benedict Anderson offers an implicit critique of cosmopolitanism, proposing that the historical experience of diaspora can often intensify racial and ethnic hatred rather than soothing or diminishing it. Responses to Anderson are still needed and welcome. The same holds for demonstrations of anti-militarism: cosmopolitanism as a principled, norm-based willingness to stand apart from one’s own country even in time of war, when the pressure to be patriotic can be overwhelming. How successful has cosmopolitanism been, judged by this standard?

New cosmopolitan thinkers have explored alternative genealogies (like Walter D. Mignolo on cosmopolitanism’s Spanish heritage), alternative geographies (like Amitav Ghosh on commercial contacts centered in the Indian Ocean), alternative anthropologies (like Nina Baym Schiller on remittances sent from the US to Haiti), and alternative urbanisms (like Ato Quayson on street life in Ghana). Literary history has begun to pose the question of when it became possible for literary works to condemn their own country for atrocities committed against another. The conference welcomes contributions in these and related areas, like cosmopolitanism and religion. But it is particularly interested, as suggested above, in contributions that are at once empirical—exploring little-known areas of trans-national contact—and conceptual, using their research to further thinking about cosmopolitanism as a prospective candidate, embraced by some if shunned by others, to serve as a universal ethic for our globalized world.

Special Session

FCT’s annual conference includes a special session on a close reading of a regional language text from India, available in English translation; this year’s choice is Rabindranath Tagore’s novel *The Home and the World* (“Ghare-Bahire”). Published in 1916, as part of a trilogy, this novel (*novella*) tries to capture in its thematic complexity and richness the mood of the period spanning at least the first ten years of the 20th century. During this period Bengal was a site of many radical movements; vigorous debates on such issues as nationalism, imperial modernity, role of women in politics, and nature of protest took place around Calcutta (now Kolkata), which was the epicenter of the Indian freedom struggle at its early phase. Tagore’s writings during this period, while reflecting this mood, try to articulate the author’s own creative

response to what was happening around him. Through a close examination of the three protagonists, Bimala, Sandip and Nikhil, in their intricately ambivalent relationships, Tagore tries to understand the nuances of their respective positions within the context of their struggle in a charged political space and time involving their filiation with both the “home” and the “world.” But this conflict is mostly acute in the woman protagonist Bimala, who is caught between her duty to a masculine world and her responsibility to her own gendered self. Thus in Tagore’s scheme of things, both nationalism (home) and internationalism (world) are fraught with an anxiety so deep that there does not seem to be a clear-cut choice between them, particularly when one is faced with a political impasse arising out of a divided consciousness. This is Tagore at his quintessential best.

Academic Conveners & Keynote Speakers

Bruce Robbins is Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, New York. He works mainly in the areas of nineteenth and twentieth century fiction, literary and cultural theory, and postcolonial studies. He is the author of *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence* (Duke, 2012), *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (Princeton, 2007), *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (NYU, 1999), *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (Verso, 1993) and *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (Columbia, 1986; Duke pb 1993). He has edited *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics* (Minnesota, 1990) and *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minnesota, 1993) and he has co-edited (with Pheng Cheah) *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minnesota, 1998), (with David Palumbo-Liu and Nirvana Tanoukhi) *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture* (Duke, 2011), (with Paulo Horta) *Cosmopolitanisms* (NYU Press, 2017). He was co-editor of the journal *Social Text* from 1991 to 2000. *The Beneficiary*, a sequel to *Perpetual War*, is recently published by Duke UP. In 2013 he directed a documentary film entitled *Some of My Best Friends Are Zionists*. He is now completing a documentary on the Israeli historian Shlomo Sand and working on a book about literary representations of atrocity.

Galin Tihanov is George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature at Queen Mary University of London and was previously Professor of Comparative Literature and Intellectual History and founding co-director of the Research Institute for Cosmopolitan Cultures at the University of Manchester. He has published widely on German, Russian, and East-European cultural and intellectual history and some of his work has been translated into Bulgarian, Danish, French, German, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Slovene. His most recent research has been on cosmopolitanism, exile, and transnationalism. Amongst his recent authored and edited books are *Narrativas do Exílio: Cosmopolitismo além da Imaginação Liberal* (2013) and *Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism* (2011, ed. with David Adams). His influential article “Why did modern literary theory originate in Central and Eastern Europe? and why is it now dead?” published in *Common Knowledge* (2004) presented an ambitious overview of the rise and fall of one of the twentieth-century’s dominant intellectual currents; literary theory and its relation to the cultural space of Russia and Eastern Europe. It examined literary theory’s roots in philosophy, its emergence in response to the changing social relevance of literature in inter-war

Eastern Europe and the impact of institutional factors arising from 20th century nation-building processes. Tihanov is winner, with Evgeny Dobrenko, of the Efim Etkind Prize for Best Book on Russian Culture (2012), awarded for their co-edited *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond* (2011). An Honorary President of the ICLA Committee on Literary Theory, member of Academia Europaea, and Honorary Scientific Advisor to the Institute of Foreign Literatures at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Tihanov has held visiting appointments at Yale University, St. Gallen University, the University of Sao Paulo, and Peking University, among others.

Abstract Submission Deadline

Not more than a 500-word abstract or proposal is due by **August 15, 2018**. The abstract should have a title along with the name and institutional affiliation of the presenter. Please send the abstract as an email attachment to Bruce Robbins (robbins.bruce@gmail.com), the Convener of the conference with a copy marked to Prafulla Kar (prafullakar@gmail.com). Complete papers should be limited to 12 pages (approximately 20 minutes of presentation time) and must reach Prafulla Kar by **October 31, 2018**. A longer version may be submitted for possible publication of *Journal of Contemporary Thought* or the conference volume brought out by FCT. Select papers from the conference and those submitted in response to the "Call for Papers" will be included in the conference volume. Completed papers for the conference volume should reach the convener of the Forum as email attachments by **April 10, 2019**.

Registration

The last date for receiving the registration fee is **September 20, 2018**. The fee may be paid through a bank draft or multi-cheque drawn in favor of Forum on Contemporary Theory on a bank in Baroda (Vadodara). An option for a direct bank transfer is also available. Please ask for our bank details, if you want to make a wire transfer. The amount should be sent to the FCT's address mentioned on its website (www.fctworld.org). We encourage the participants to register early so that their accommodation is secured at the Chariot Resort and Spa in Puri where the conference will be held. All participants need to be pre-registered; the registration fee is non-refundable. Accommodation is on a shared basis.

The following are the details of the registration fee:

1. Participant from India – Rs.12,000/-
2. Overseas Participant – US \$500/-
3. Participant from SAARC countries – US \$250/-
4. Local Participant (without accommodation) – Rs.6,000/-

The registration fee for the outstation participant will take care of board and lodging for 3 nights (18th to 20th December), conference tea (twice daily); fee for the local participants will take care of lunch for 3 days and conference tea. Participants should check in at the hotel after

10 am on the 18th and will check out after 9 am on the 21st. The conference will begin with an inaugural ceremony at about 5 pm on the 18th and will be over with lunch on the 21st. A General Body Meeting of the life members of the Forum on Contemporary Theory will be held at about 3 pm on the 18th December.

For further information please contact:

1. Prafulla C. Kar (prafullakar@gmail.com)
2. Bruce Robbins (robbins.bruce@gmail.com)
3. Galin Tihanov (tihanovg@gmail.com, g.tihanov@qmul.ac.uk)
4. William D. Pederson (William.pederson@lsus.edu)

Forum on Contemporary Theory is a member of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI), currently housed in the University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA.