Cosmopolitanism and World Politics: Bringing the Global World to International Relations*

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ABSTRACT

The discipline of International Relations tends to be powerless facing sea-changes in world politics. Many cope with the challenge of change through incremental adjustments in their theoretical frameworks. Others, departing from more critical perspective, argue for more radical change through re-introduction of International Relations. While differing on the way to respond to changes, both responses depart from the same basic assumption and understanding of the world as the world of states. This paper deals with different way of understanding the world, not as that of states but as global world as put forward by cosmopolitanism. This paper argues that bringing cosmopolitanism to International Relations will make the discipline more relevant.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, global politics, international political theory.


Kata-Kata Kunci: kosmopolitanisme, politik global, teori politik internasional.
The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else . . . Sooner or later, it is ideas, not vested interest which are dangerous for good or evil (Keynes 1935, 383).

It is very common, even too common that it becomes a cliché, to talk about change or transformation in world politics. The theme of change can easily be found in the rhetorics of political leaders, in the media, as well as in the academic world. While it is not the intention of the paper to deny that changes or some forms of transformation have taken place or are taking place in the world, it argues that the notion of change tends to be dealt with very poorly within the discipline of international relations. Most of International Relations scholars are simply not well equipped for change and are in continuous search for new paradigms. International Relations as a discipline has been simply powerless and is in the state of disarray amid sea-changes in the contemporary world. This is, of course, very ironic given the fact that a body of thought on world politics has been available for a long time. But, the tendency of many International Relations scholars to be allergic to theory and theorizing, on the one hand, and their preoccupation with issues, on the other hand, have led them to be simply reactive to those changes. Their understanding of contemporary changes is, consequently, tends to be common sensical rather than a reflection of deep understanding of the problem. Critical ways of looking the world simply doesn't exist.

This article is aimed at reminding the scholars of International Relations of the existence of a body of thought which is native to world politics, i.e. cosmopolitanism. This body of thought is arguably a political theory with real global character (international political theory). Different from most political theories, cosmopolitanism does not depart from the significance of borders and identities in its view of world politics. In addition, cosmopolitanism does not pretend to be value free in its theorizing of world politics. In fact, as far as its aspiration for change is concerned, cosmopolitanism can also be seen as a political project. As such, contemporary changes in world politics should not be seen as inconceivable. The first part of this article deals with the changes, which many believe as new phenomena in world politics. The second part of the paper focuses on the body of thought called cosmopolitanism. It discusses the nature and the essence of cosmopolitanism. Finally, the implication of cosmopolitanism in world politics concludes the discussion of the paper.

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1 In this paper, the term 'International Relations' (with capital 'I' and 'R') refers to the academic discipline of international relations, while the term 'international relations' (with small 'i' and 'r') refers to the relations of international actors.
Sea-Changes and Cosmopolitan Conditions

The world is changing and International Relations is desperately coping with this change. The scholars of International Relations seek to adjust the way in which we should view and understand the world of world politics. For those working from critical side, better understanding of the change taking place in world politics requires even more than simply small adjustment in International Relations. The discipline itself needs to be ‘reintroduced’ (George 1994; Weber 2009).

There are at least three most significant changes believed to be responsible for the transformation of world politics: the emergence of new actors, increased interdependence and interconnectedness, and the growing role of global governance (Heywood 2011). The first change is related to the fact that the dominant role and the position of the state in world politics are increasingly contested. Many believe that it is not possible anymore to see the state as the most, let alone the only, significant actors as we are witnessing more and more actors other than state played significant roles in the world politics such as transnational corporation (TNCs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Many scholars have noted the increased significance of the non-state actors in world politics. Many works have been done on the issue dealing both empirical as well as theoretical aspects of the role of non-state actors in world politics. Most notably are the collection of works edited by Keohane and Nye (1973), Risse-Kappen (1995) and Hall and Biesteker (1999). Individual works by Huntington (1973) and Strange (1996) have also brought the importance of non-state actors in world politics. All those works suggest that the significant role of the non-state actors can

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2 Literatures on global change and the way in which International Relations deals with such change are not difficult to find. The most popular study on global change is probably a piece written by David Held, Anthony G. McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton, Global Transformation (1999), while Charles W. Kegley's World Politics: Trend and Transformation (2008) as well as Ian Clark's Globalization and International Relations Theory (1999) tries to catch the response of International Relations to the change at the global level. This obsession with change and with adjusting International Relations to the global changes has undoubtedly also been influential in Indonesia. This can be seen from various courses at the Departments of International Relations throughout Indonesia. At Universitas Gadjah Mada, for example, this takes the form of various courses under the category of ‘Contemporary Issues’ (Jurusan Ilmu Hubungan Internasional UGM 2011). In addition, two recent publications on international relations in Indonesia have supported further the tendency (Hermawan (ed.) 2007; Asosiasi Ilmu Hubungan Internasional Indonesia 2009).
be seen not only in relations to its capacity, but also in term or their authority to influence world politics.³

The second form of change seen as very significant in transforming world politics has been the tendency towards interdependence and interconnection. Again Keohane and Nye pioneered the works in this direction with the publication of their Power and Interdependence (1977). Keohane and Nye argue that the nature of world politics has changed quite significantly. Along with their argument for the rise of non-state actors, they criticize the state-centric dominance in International Relations and argue that world politics has increasingly been characterized by complex interdependence. This complex interdependence character of world politics is manifested in the two forms of external influence to the domestic affairs of the state: sensitivity and vulnerability.⁴

Finally, the growing tendency towards global governance is also believed to be another driving force for change in the world politics. This tendency has changed the nature of world politics away from anarchy to a more or less governable world politics. But, as the proponent of the concept of global governance suggest, the notion of governance is by no means brings world politics under the world government as the case of domestic politics. Global governance refers to a more orderly, patterned and predictable relations as well as to a wider participation of actors beyond states working more on network than hierarchy. In the word of

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³ The former refers to the fact that many non-state actors have the economic capacity beyond that of many states. This is true for many transnational corporations as well as for non-governmental organization. Some transnational companies, for example, are among those in the list of the world's 100 biggest economies and have bigger economies than many small countries, including the wealthy ones, such as New Zealand, Czech Republics and Luxembourg (UNCTAD 2002; de Grauwe and Camerman 2003, 26-27). Similarly, many NGOs can also be characterized as gigantic and the biggest among them such as Oxfam, World Vision, CARE and Save the Children have bigger economic resources than many small countries. In terms of authority, the role and influence of the non-state actors refers to the control of the agenda in world politics. The increased importance of the issues of human rights, environment as well as democracy, for example, has given more and more significant role and influence to those organizations working on the issues (Willet 1982; Smith et al. eds. 1997; Keck and Sikking 1998; Evangelista 1999; Risse et al. 1999).

⁴ The notion of interdependence gained its prominence in the discourse on international relations soon after the publication of Power and Interdependence. Apart from being referred to in various works, the notion of interdependence has become important part in the introduction to International Relations in the 1980s as exemplified by an influential textbook co-authored by Bruce Russett, Harvey Starr, and David Kinsella, “World Politics: The Menu for Choice” (1981).
one of its proponents, therefore, contemporary world politics is a world of 'governance without government' (Rosenau & Czempiel 1992).

In addition to those three changes in world politics as identified by International Relations scholars, a growing body of literatures on globalization has also reinforced the preoccupation of the International Relations scholars with change. Globalization is a wide and all encompassing theme which, in the cynical words of the late Susan Strange (1996, xiii), “can refer to anything from the internet to hamburger.” But, many International Relations scholars have taken the issue of globalization very seriously. In fact, it becomes an important ingredient in the curricula of International Relations. Various courses as well as programs on or related to globalization are offered at the universities throughout the world. While the nature and the essence of globalization are subject to intensive debates, the influence of the studies of globalization in International Relations cannot be neglected. Arguing that power is becoming more and more diversified, globalization has challenged the very basic understanding of international relations based on the primacy of the state in world politics. Globalization means ‘the retreat of states’ (Strange 1996) and, consequently, International Relations scholars begin to speculate on the consequence of the study of globalization to International Relations. Ian Clark (1999) and James Mittelman (2002) are probably among those who seriously address this issue.

Finally, closely related to the notions of interdependence and globalization, sociologist Ulrich Beck along with others develops what so called ‘risk society’ (Giddens 1990; 1999a; 1999b; Beck 1992). The notion of risk society refers to conditions that human beings as a single category is facing. These conditions are global in character and common to human beings as a whole regardless of their identities and their social or political attachment or association. Those challenges cannot be solved partially, but must be seen as global problems. Modern institutions which tend to work and to divide human beings into artificial categories based on identities and social or political affiliation are, therefore, increasingly incompatible to address the challenges.

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5 Universitas Gadjah Mada is no exception. The author has been teaching a course on globalization for more than five years. The course has so far been among the most favourite courses at the Department of International Relations at least, as indicated by the number of student’s enrolment. The Department of International Relations has also established a centre specifically devoted to study globalization, that is, Lembaga Studi Globalisasi (LSG) which later became the Institute of International Studies (IIS) within which globalization remains one of the institute's core components under the program of globalization and cities development.
Amid those global changes, International Relations everywhere are in need of changing the way they address contemporary issues. This is, however, not gonna be easy nor practical. In part, reflective and critical traditions are simply lacking within the discipline. In its aspiration to be regarded as a ‘normal science’, International Relations has sought to stay away from all academic enterprises which cannot be measured or, empirically, tested and from all activities which are characterized as value-laden. Its scholars have been preoccupied with developing theories with universal applicability. Consequently, political theory has for long been suffering from a benign neglect in International Relations. Instead of producing critical and reflective theories, International Relations has only produced ‘theory of survival’ which, in essence, is no more than simply ‘recurrence and repetition’ (Wight 1995, 25-32).

It is within this context that International Relations tends to be powerless in coping with contemporary global changes. The changes are not only a shock for many scholars of International Relations, but have also led the discipline of International Relations to the state of disarray. These are, of course, somewhat ironic as there is a body of thought in international relations which can easily accommodate those changes, that is, cosmopolitanism. But, the fact that cosmopolitanism is not only an international relations theory, but also, more importantly, a political theory of international relations with its moral, normative and political dimensions, it has tended to be neglected for the sake of the attribute ‘scientific’.

Cosmopolitanism

This article depart from the argument that cosmopolitanism is a promising political theory for contemporary world politics. It can arguably help International Relations coping with the challenges of change. Before presenting my arguments in more detail, however, let me first in this section introduce what cosmopolitanism is.

Cosmopolitanism is not a new idea. It emerged more than two millennia ago in the Greek and Roman civilization. It is not exclusively Greek and Roman tradition though, as it can also be found in almost all great world religions. It is also important to note that cosmopolitanism is not unified or uncontested concept either. There are different varieties of cosmopolitanism. Kleingeld and Brown (2011), for example, provide a

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6 The fact that cosmopolitanism is essentially contested concept leads many to dismiss its significance. Cosmopolitanism is simply seen as ‘an idealist sentiments’ and has no significant contribution to academic work simply because it has no specified ‘empirical sociological dimension’ (Skrbis et al. 2004, 131).

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neat taxonomy of contemporary cosmopolitanisms which include political, economic, cultural, as well as moral cosmopolitanisms. The taxonomy does not imply a rigid separation of those varieties of cosmopolitanism. It simply shows different emphasis found in the cosmopolitan ideas. But, more importantly, it does reflects the pervasiveness of the manifestation of cosmopolitan ideas. The variety of cosmopolitanisms clearly shows us how cosmopolitan ideas has permeated throughout the whole aspects of our life.

Kleingeld and Brown also remind us of the different ways in which cosmopolitanism is perceived and understood. Cosmopolitanism is understood both positively and negatively. On the negative side, cosmopolitanism has been interpreted simply as a negation of patriotism or disloyalty to one’s own fatherland or motherland. The statement made by Diogenes, the first philosopher who gave an explicit expression of cosmopolitanism in the 4th century BC, replying to the question of his origin, that “I am a citizen of the world [kosmopolitês]”, has been interpreted negatively as a statement of disobedient to serve Sinope and Sinopean. As a cosmopolitan, therefore, Diogenes has been seen as traitor. This negative connotation of cosmopolitanism as opposition to nationalism and patriotism has also been the case during the rules of Hitler in Germany and Stalin in the Soviet Union. Cosmopolitanism tends to be understood more positively in the modern thought. Understood positively, cosmopolitanism refers to positive propensities towards open mindedness, tolerance and empathy towards fellow human beings. This modern cosmopolitanism is mostly, but not exclusively, associated with political thought of Immanuel Kant. Arguably it is exactly those positive propensities of cosmopolitanism which made cosmopolitanism an enemy of totalitarian and fascist leaders.

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7 Political cosmopolitanism is associated with the orientation towards global citizenship and global institution building, economic cosmopolitanism with concerns for social justice, cultural cosmopolitanism with intercultural relations, and finally, moral cosmopolitanism with moral obligation.

8 The anti-Semitic character of both leaders owed to the association of the Jews with cosmopolitanism. In the Soviet Union, the attacks against Jewish people were as part of the campaign against what they referred to the ‘rootless cosmopolitanism’ (Service 2004, 568), while in Germany, the Jews were seen “as particularly dangerous because of their cosmopolitan and rootless way of life” (Mann 2005, 192, emphasis added).

9 Many modern political philosophers, such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Addison, Hume, and Jefferson identified themselves as cosmopolitans. The proponent of free trade such as Adam Smith has also been associated with cosmopolitanism (Kleingeld & Brown 2011).
As a political philosophy, the core idea of cosmopolitanism is that all human beings belong to a single category or community and, therefore, must be treated equally regardless their social or political attachments (Brock & Brighouse 2005; Fine 2007; Delanty 2009). Cosmopolitanism views every single individual as a goal with ultimate value in itself and their existence is primary to any social organization. They cannot be treated as an instrument of social values or treated differently due to its artificial or social attributes such as citizenship. In more concrete terms, this means that an association of an individual with his or her country, as a citizen, should not qualify her or him to more or less rights or responsibility than other individuals of other countries.

While the idea of cosmopolitanism can be found in various forms of manifestation, there are at least two forms of cosmopolitanism which are very influential to the contemporary world politics: cultural and political (Hennerz 2006). Cultural cosmopolitanism refers to the idea that people from different cultural context must be treated equally. It is manifested in the openness to difference, tolerance, nondiscriminatory and the willingness to see others as equally worthy. Political cosmopolitanism can be seen as a political project. As a political project, cosmopolitanism constitutes a critical and transformative political philosophy. It aspires to change all social orders which it believes as based on opposition to the idea of human beings as a single category or on discriminatory practices. The manifestation of the idea of political cosmopolitanism takes the forms of international norms and institutions which are critical to the modern institutions and order especially, but not exclusively, state and its absolute sovereignty.

No doubt, as to other 'isms' cosmopolitanism contains a particular value or even moral orientation. It is a way of life which guides individual in her or his relations to other fellow human beings (Scheffler 2001, 122). This particular orientation, however, should not be equated with dogmatig or prejudiced, and closed-minded ideology. The fact that cosmopolitanism is concerned with human beings as single category, it goes without saying that such exclusionary orientation is simply unthinkable in cosmopolitanism. At the same time, cosmopolitanism's emphasis on the significance of human beings as a single category, should not be confused as an adherence to universalism. The latter refers to the tendency of providing single standard of values applied universally to the whole world. Viewing cosmopolitanism in this way clearly contradicts the very basic principle of cosmopolitanism to view human beings as equally worthy regardless of their affiliation. At the same time, however, cosmopolitanism should not be interpreted as a support for particularism or parochialism either. Particularism denies individuals of their position as part of single category of human beings.
Cosmopolitanism is an idea that scholars of International Relations have to take seriously. It has been very influential in world politics, especially since 20th century, and remains influential today and, undoubtedly, also in the future. Many important developments in world politics do not only reflect cosmopolitan ideas but, more importantly, took place with the significant influence of cosmopolitan ideas. In other words, it does not make any sense to understand those developments without referring to cosmopolitanism.

The idea of cosmopolitanism is reflected in the UN Charter which gives human beings its primacy through the notion of the right to self-determination (Aboulafia 2010). This has arguably been the driving force behind the struggles for independence in 1940s-1960s. The adoption of the universal declaration of human rights in 1948 can also undoubtedly be seen as a manifestation of the cosmopolitan idea or, more precisely, cosmopolitan consciousness (Cheah 2006, 53). Cosmopolitanism has been influential in the change of the way in which the notion of sovereignty is understood. While sovereignty in modern political theory tends to be understood as absolute right, sovereignty in cosmopolitanism is understood more as both right and responsibility (Evans 2006, 709). The concept of the ‘responsibility to protect’ recently adopted in the 2005 World Summit is clearly a manifestation of the cosmopolitanism. In line with cosmopolitan idea of the importance of human beings, this reinterpretation of the notion of sovereignty in the concept of the Responsibility To Protect opens up the possibility for external intervention in cases where serious threats to human life exist (ICISS 2001). Finally, the establishment of the International Criminal Court is another important development which can also be attributed to cosmopolitanism. It is a form of ‘cosmopolitanization of law’ (Hirst 2003; Roach 2009).

Ironically, while playing very important role in the major developments in world politics, cosmopolitanism tends to be marginalized in the discipline of international relations. Cosmopolitanism does not belong to the most influential theories of international relations. One reason for its marginalization is probably due to the fact that cosmopolitanism as political theory departs from the basic assumptions alien to most International Relations scholars’ understanding of the world, i.e. the world as consisting of nation-states. For them, looking at the world as a single category, global, is at best unrealistic. In addition, cosmopolitanism tends to be seen as political agenda with obvious moral, normative as well as political preferences rather than academic
The strength of cosmopolitanism and its significance for International Relations however, lie exactly in its two characteristics which many scholars criticized and dismissed: as a truly global political theory and as political project. Arguably, the two dimensions of cosmopolitanism provide a breakthrough to the impasse in the discipline amid sea-changes. This is at least for two reasons.

As truly global political theory, cosmopolitanism departs from the very basic assumption and understanding of the world which are quite different from those of most of the modern political theories. While most political theories depart from the assumption and understanding of the world as consisting of nation-states, cosmopolitanism views the world as a global space with a single category of identity, that is, human beings. As consequence, borders dividing and differentiating people living inside and outside political entities of nation-states into different category are of special importance for most of modern political theories, they do not play any significant role in the view of cosmopolitanism. As can clearly be seen, for cosmopolitans, all crucial aspects in the social relations such as empathy, justice, ethics and morality must not be subjected to artificial borders of the states. They are, in the words of the cosmopolitans, ‘global’ or ‘beyond borders’ in character (Jones 1999; Pogge 2001; Tan 2004; Caney 2006; Brock 2009).

Apart from its nature as a global political theory, cosmopolitanism is also of practical use as an analytical framework and, consequently, also as the basis for policy recommendation. Analysis and policy recommendation of international relations departing from state-centric assumption has been flawed since the very beginning. The state-centric character of the mainstream International Relations Theories oversimplifies the complexity of the social world and does not reflect the real world of international relations. But, this flaw is increasingly exposed through the contemporary transformation towards more globalized world, where the role and the position of state are believed to be in constant decline. Indeed, as many argue, the world increasingly reflects what Beck refers to ‘cosmopolitan outlook’ as well as ‘cosmopolitan condition’ or it conforms more and more cosmopolitan view (Beck 2006, 2-4; Held 2002, 313).

Beyond academic world, bringing cosmopolitanism to International Relations will make the discipline more relevant to the life of the most inhabitants of the planet earth. As a political project, cosmopolitanism...
provides an agenda and a direction for change or transformation of world politics. Emphasizing the centrality of human beings above anything else, cosmopolitanism will turn International Relations into empowering discipline. A cosmopolitan International Relations will not only teach the students to be spectators or observers of international relations as separate reality out there, but to educate them to be active parts of the reality and to steer the transformation of world politics to better serve security, justice and welfare of human beings. In short, cosmopolitanism in International Relations will bring human agency back in world politics.

**Conclusion**

The paper argues for cosmopolitanism in International Relations. While the discipline is facing a serious crisis in relations to contemporary global changes, cosmopolitanism helps us to make sense of these changes. Not only can cosmopolitanism easily cope with the changes, but it has also been the driving force to these changes. At the same time cosmopolitanism can also provide us with genuine global political theory. One of the problems preventing International Relations from better understand world politics is the fact that it does not have concepts and theories which are designed specifically to look at the world of the world rather than that of the states. Most of the concepts and theories that most scholars of International Relations have been using are those derived from (domestic) political theory within which international is simply attributed as ‘outside’. Finally, cosmopolitanism can also help International Relations not only more relevant, but also beneficial, for human beings. It helps us realizing our ideal of promoting a 'just and civilized' international relations.

**References**

**Books**


Cosmopolitanism and World Politics


Journals

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**Online Articles**


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