



# W. E. B. Du Bois and transnational cosmopolitanism: a conversation

Begüm Adalet<sup>1</sup>  · Charisse Burden-Stelly<sup>1</sup> · Adam Dahl<sup>1</sup> · Katrin Flikschuh<sup>1</sup> · Inés Valdez<sup>1</sup>

Accepted: 29 January 2023

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## Abstract

In October 2021, Charisse Burden-Stelly, Katrin Flikschuh, Adam Dahl, and Begüm Adalet met with Inés Valdez to discuss her ground-breaking *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Our Zoom conversation began with a series of opening remarks from the participants, which were followed by a response from Valdez. We also had the opportunity to discuss the important questions that were raised by the text, such as the relationship between transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, Black Internationalism, and Pan-Africanism, as well as questions of normative and contextualist interpretation, and the scholarship on Kant, Du Bois, and cosmopolitanism more broadly. As a result of its multidisciplinary significance and fluency, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* occasioned a wide-ranging conversation, drawing on literatures in political theory, philosophy, international relations, disciplinary history, Black studies and history, and anti-colonial thought. What follows is a lightly edited and annotated version.

**Keywords** Cosmopolitanism · Transnationalism · W. E. B. Du Bois · Immanuel Kant

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✉ Begüm Adalet  
ba375@cornell.edu

Charisse Burden-Stelly  
cburden@carleton.edu

Adam Dahl  
adahl@umass.edu

Katrin Flikschuh  
k.a.flikschuh@lse.ac.uk

Inés Valdez  
inesvaldez@protonmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Cornell University CAS: Cornell University College of Arts and Sciences, Ithaca, USA



## Charisse Burden-Stelly (CBS)

I enter into this conversation with the realization that I am not the audience of this book. In the fields through which I approach political theory, including critical Black Studies, Black intellectual history, and Africana philosophy, Du Bois is neither marginal, at the margins, or ignored and in fact, is among the “big three,” alongside C. L. R. James and Frantz Fanon.

My interventions emanate from the question of whether “transnational cosmopolitanism,” as a theoretical framework, does more harm than good in displacing Pan-Africanism or Black Internationalism as the means of understanding the dynamics under study throughout the text. In a footnote on page 7, the author writes:

My aim here is to position Du Bois as a global thinker and an interlocutor in the political theory of cosmopolitanism. By doing so, I go beyond Pan-Africanism by focusing on Du Bois’s interest in establishing affinities and extending solidarity beyond Africa and toward Asia and the Americas. Vis-à-vis the historical reconstruction of realms of solidarity among Africans and the Afro-diaspora, and Asians as a form of ‘colored cosmopolitanism,’ I show the purchase of the writings of one participant in this movement and the instances of coalition making for theorizing cosmopolitanism. As a consequence, my focus is on a more textured analysis of the normative and political dimensions of Du Bois’s writing and political practice, and how they should inform theorizing of cosmopolitanism in contemporary political theory.

My understanding of Pan-Africanism is as both a normative and political engagement with the problem of the global color line that is not reducible to connections between and among Africans on the continent and in the diaspora. This is abundantly evident in the fifth Pan-African Congress—as opposed to the 1919 Congress—which is considered by many to be the most important of these gatherings. Influenced by the World Trade Union and Subject Peoples’ Conferences held earlier that year, the fifth PAC signaled a militant phase of anti-colonialism, emphasizing the right of all colonized nations to be self-determining, self-governing, and to control their own destinies. Participants insisted upon emancipation for the whole of the Black world. They demanded the complete and absolute independence of West Africa; the removal of armed forces from and democratic rights in North Africa; and that the principles of the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms be put into practice in East Africa. They passed resolutions supporting the voluntary federation of the British West Indies predicated on self-government, universal adult suffrage, and the introduction of modern social legislation afforded to citizens in the metropolises. They also supported defense against imperial imposition upon Haitian and Ethiopian sovereignty and made a case for representation of colonized and oppressed people in the United Nations.

While the PAC included participation from prominent intellectuals, activists, and future heads of state including Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Ras



T. Makonnen, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and of course, W. E. B. Du Bois, delegates emphasized that peasants, workers, and the laboring classes were the key actors in throwing off colonialism and imperialism. The “Declaration to the Colonial Workers, Farmers, and Intellectuals” insisted that the strike and the boycott, along with struggles to form trade unions and cooperatives, were essential tools for liberation. The PAC explicitly excoriated capitalism and the rule of profit for undermining democracy, freedom and peace, foreign imperialist control for exploiting and dispossessing indigenous populations, and white supremacist oppression for its impediment to the flourishing of “otherized” peoples. Participants expressed their solidarity with other Third World populations by sending greetings to the masses of India struggling for “national freedom and social emancipation; to Indonesia and Vietnam who were fighting for “national freedom and economic emancipation” from Dutch and French imperialism; and to U.S. Blacks for their “heroic struggle” for full citizenship and the equitable distribution of wealth and resources. In turn, a message to the Congress from India emphasized the common struggle between Indian and African people.

Black Internationalism also seems to do the work of transnational cosmopolitanism. The seeds of Black Internationalism were planted in the interwar period when events including the Russian Revolution and New Negro militancy borne out of World War I set to work a form of coordinated Black radicalism, enunciated by the likes of Hubert Harrison and Grace Campbell, that traversed colonial and imperial borders. With respect to geopolitics, Black Internationalism is ensconced in broader regional, intercontinental, and inter-ethnic offensives that span the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In this way, it is the Pan-African enunciation of Afro-Asian solidarity, Third Worldism, and Tricontinentalism emanating from the global left.

Informed by and engaged with real-world struggles, Black Internationalism simultaneously envisions and endeavors to build institutions, communities, and societies that affirm the humanity and prioritize the political, economic, social, and cultural well-being of the superexploited. It therefore encompasses African descendants’ multivalent and persistent anti-systemic and counterhegemonic challenges to political economies and legitimating discourses that sustain racialized and gendered exploitation, oppression, dispossession, and class-based domination. As Black Internationalism reached its zenith in the context of post-World War II capitalist restructuring, the Cold War, and the international insurgency of “les damnés de la terre” against coloniality, the United States became the focus of unrelenting criticism given its position at the nexus of global capitalist hegemony, neocolonialism, imperialism, militarism, and anti-African violence and repression. Likewise, Black Internationalists in the United States became understood as constituents of the Third World waging struggle in the heart of empire.



In addition to the issues of Pan-Africanism and Black Internationalism, I'd also like to consider the forms of burdened, onerous, and predatory inclusion—to use the concepts of Adom Getachew and Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor—that constitute the modes of transnationalism under study.<sup>1</sup> This dialectic between inclusion and exclusion likely complicates distinctions between Western/non-Western and public/counter-public; the emphasis on marginalization; and questions of identity and political subjectivity that structure *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*. Moreover, we might take time to reconsider or challenge the stagist reading of Du Bois's work and “intellectual and political turn toward transnationalism” which is a much messier and more meandering than conveyed in chapter three.

### Katrin Flikschuh (KF)

How should we approach individual thinkers within the history of philosophy/political theory? There are three standard approaches—“contextual,” “systematic,” and “normative.” The first is best known as the Cambridge School; according to it, past thinkers' thoughts can only be understood within their own historical context. The second approach is often dubbed “continental”—it strives after an understanding of a thinker's body of philosophical work on its own terms. The third approach is currently the most dominant: it assesses the work of a past thinker in light of current normative concerns.

Some dangers attach to the third approach. Often, the motivation is to seek moral guidance from influential past thinkers; the expectation is that such guidance will be forthcoming. One danger is that one ends up doing what the contextualist warns against, e.g., one reads Kant's texts as though he were addressing our problems. A second danger is that the desire for a “practical solution” takes over, and a solution is duly read into Kant's texts. A third danger is uni-dimensionality: reading Kant as though he were solely concerned with exactly our problem.

Valdez seems to me largely correct in her diagnosis of contemporary “Kantian cosmopolitanism.” Much of it takes the normative approach, and much of it reads contemporary concerns into the text, attributing normative commitments to Kant of which it is in fact an open question as to whether he did or could have shared them with us. In consequence, Kant comes out looking not like the complex and difficult philosopher he was, but as the guy with the solution to our practical problems.

However, not only Kant's admirers read him that way; his detractors do too. Take Robert Bernasconi, according to whom Kant “invented” the concept of race.<sup>2</sup> That is quite a claim: it suggests that it was impossible to talk about race before Kant. This is of course utter nonsense. Nonetheless, well-played by Bernasconi strategically,

<sup>1</sup> Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019); Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bernasconi, “Who Invented the Concept of Race?” in Bernasconi, ed. *Race* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2001), pp. 11–36.



for this type of nonsense has turned Kant into a poster-boy for philosophical racism much like his admirers had turned him into a poster-boy for liberal cosmopolitanism.

Valdez seems to me to walk straight into Bernasconi's trap: Kant is the bad guy, Du Bois is the good guy. This is one-dimensionality with a vengeance. More specifically, Valdez argues that Kant was not a cosmopolitan but a racist Eurocentric. Her chief claim is that the underlying concern of Kant's cosmopolitanism was to preserve the European balance of power; Kant objected to colonialism because he believed it undermined that balance. Now, I know less about European political history than Valdez might do—but her argument implies that if European powers had not engaged in colonialism, peace would have reigned among them. Mmh. Alternatively, colonialism was a consequence of intra-European warring, not its cause. Not only do I think this alternative historically more plausible; I also think it unlikely that Kant thought that if European powers stopped expanding beyond Europe they would live peacefully with one another.

Valdez also makes a normative point; it comes off the back of her historical assessment. She believes that when Kant eventually spoke out against slavery, his concern was not with the suffering of slaves, but with Europeans' morally unacceptable behavior. Valdez thinks this a moral failing of Kant's. I don't see why it should be. First, the two are not mutually exclusive: might not Kant's moral censure of the Europeans be an expression of sympathy with the slaves? After all, the latter's suffering is a direct consequence of the former's behavior. Second, is it not in fact appropriate for a European to criticize fellow Europeans for their actions? Given that the suffering of the slaves was a consequence of the behavior of the Europeans, it would surely have been the height of moral duplicity if Kant had expressed his concern over the suffering of the slaves without saying a single word about the source of their suffering. Again, therefore, I cannot see the force of Valdez' objection to Kant's position.

If Kant is the bad guy, Du Bois comes out looking wholly unblemished by contrast. Valdez contrasts what she calls Du Bois solidaristic transnationalism with Kant's statist, hence top-down Eurocentrism. The claim is that Du Bois sought to forge links of solidarity across borders among the domestically and internationally oppressed. Valdez leaves it unclear in what sense solidarity among the oppressed amounts to a form of transnational cosmopolitanism. The latter would presumably include the (former) oppressors as well as the (formerly) oppressed. So why is the transnational class of the oppressed equated without argument with transnational cosmopolitanism? Secondly, Valdez depicts Du Bois as one who sought to make common cause with American-African, African Africans, and all persons "of color" on an equal footing. Again, I am no expert on Du Bois, but the account given by Valdez strikes me as breath-takingly US centric. At least on her account, Du Bois simply "universalized" from the plight of African Americans to that of Africans and of all "persons of color": as if the problems of colonialism were identical to those of slavery.

Why is it okay to conflate US-centrism with cosmopolitanism, when it is not okay to conflate Euro-centrism with the latter? In truth, Du Bois was not quite as good a guy as he is made out to be: he thought of African Africans as rather inferior to American Africans, whom he regarded as more civilized. Is Du Bois not himself



suffering from a dose of “colonial mentality” here? Insofar as he thinks of African Americans as natural leaders over Africans and other “persons of color,” he seems to have introduced a civilizing hierarchy within his racial solidarity. Is this okay simply because Du Bois was Black? Why is this not racist in turn? In one concluding paragraph Valdez acknowledges that Du Bois’ attitude toward (Black) women as well as his civilizing superiority complex are problematic—but she brushes these reservations aside as historically contingent. Are Kant and Du Bois evaluated by different standards here?

My chief question: how should we read historical thinkers in light of current concerns? Should we read them one-dimensionally, and as though they were either wholly good or wholly bad by our current moral preferences? Or should we go for more differentiated readings, readings that are perhaps both a bit more contextual and a bit more systematic but that are also aware of the fact that no historical thinker can solve our own very complex, difficult, and multi-faceted moral problems for us?

### Adam Dahl (AD)

Through a creative juxtaposition of W.E.B. Du Bois alongside Kantian and neo-Kantian strands of cosmopolitanism, Inés Valdez’s book opens new horizons in the study of anti-colonialism, global justice, and international political theory. Valdez’s central concern is with theorizing forms of injustice that work across the boundaries of discrete nation-states and the international system. Valdez calls for attention to transnational politics that link disparate injustices across and beyond conventional arenas of domestic and international politics.

In this effort, Valdez makes three interlocking but distinct interventions. First, the impetus for Valdez’s search for an alternative form of cosmopolitanism that can address postcolonial forms of transnational injustice stems from her account of the limitations of Kantian cosmopolitanism. To highlight these limitations, Valdez offers a reading of Kant that seeks to uncover the initial problem-space within which he formulated his arguments about cosmopolitan right. Through meticulous historical contextualization of Kant’s writings on race, justice, and cosmopolitanism, Valdez argues that the limits of Kant’s anti-colonialism derive from his central concern that intra-European conflict over control of the colonies generated instability within the European society of states. The historical problem Kant was dealing with did not concern forms of injustice imposed on colonial peoples, but rather the threat that colonialism posed to republican principles and the project of perpetual peace in Europe. Read contextually, therefore, there is “little correspondence between the problem space that motivated Kant’s cosmopolitanism and the normative goals that a cosmopolitanism must serve today” (54), i.e., theorizing contemporary hierarchies growing out of European imperial domination.

The second intervention Valdez makes is to foreground how Du Bois used his own writings and editorial practices with *The Crisis* in the 1920s and 30s to construct a transnational public sphere as an “alternative political realm” that stands apart from yet connected to domestic and international political spheres. Specifically, Valdez highlights how Du Bois constructed “alternative networks of



communication” among colonized and other subaltern actors through a range of editorial practices that accomplished four key functions. First, in publishing articles about racial injustice across a range of topics, Du Bois disseminated information that allowed anti-colonial actors to diagnose oppression. Second, the circulation of these diagnostic discourses allowed anti-colonial actors to connect forms of oppression across colonial contexts. Third, identifying diplomatic venues where grievances could be addressed politically activated these anti-colonial constituencies. Fourth, the insertion of these connected diagnostic claims into diplomatic spaces such as the League of Nations and the United Nations exposed the exclusions built into Western notions of sovereignty. What is exciting to me about this approach is the attention Valdez devotes not just to Du Bois’s writing, but to his editorial practices, which provides genuinely novel ways to read neglected portions of his vast intellectual production.

The third intervention is to lay the groundwork for an alternative genealogy of cosmopolitanism that moves beyond its conventional narrative structure: Greeks and Romans like Diogenes, Cicero, and Marcus Aurelius; Spanish scholastics like Francisco Vitoria; Kantian notions of perpetual peace; and twentieth-century institutions like the League of Nations, the UN, and the European Union. Focusing on Du Bois’s career as an entry point for this alternative genealogy is appropriate and novel. In his involvement organizing several Pan-African Congresses over five decades, his attendance at the Universal Races Congress, his presence at the founding of the United Nations, and his failure to secure passports to definitive events in the emergence of Third Worldism such as the Bandung Conference in 1955 and the Congress of Black Artists and Writers in 1956, Du Bois’s life tracks a counter-history of Western cosmopolitanism.

That Valdez makes all three of these central interventions suggests something of the innovative interpretive approach she employs. Valdez offers not just a novel juxtaposition of divergent figures like Du Bois and Kant, but a differentiated interpretive approach: specifically, a contextualist reading of Kant focused on uncovering the historical concerns motivating his authorial intention alongside a presentist account of Du Bois focused on searching for past answers to problems that are most pressing in our own postcolonial present.

Valdez deftly moves between different modalities of interpretation in order to construct a multilayered argument. If a contextualist reading committed to reconstructing the historical background of Kant’s arguments reveals his irrelevance to contemporary debates about global justice, a creatively anachronistic reading of Du Bois foregrounds his role as a better guide to addressing transnational forms of post-colonial injustice.

What Valdez calls for, however, seems less a call for exegetical disloyalty to Kant than a form of normatively infidelity—a partial acceptance of Kant’s concepts and categories that is unfaithfully put to other uses than Kant would have intended himself. I use the term infidelity here not in the sense of a faithlessness in Kantian cosmopolitanism, but rather in the sense of an unfaithful commitment embodied in the desire to transfigure the concept of hospitality. In this way, Kantian terms and categories (e.g. hospitality) continue to structure the alternative genealogy that she constructs via Du Bois, who after all does not himself use that language.



While these novel forms of reading and interpretation allow Valdez to make a number of important interventions, the celebration of anachronism in this account generates significant tensions. In “placing interpretive authority in the present” (11), for instance, Valdez calls for “exegetical disloyalty” to Kant. But rather than loosen the “authority of the past,” I read Valdez doing precisely the reverse: as upholding the past’s interpretive authority in order to demonstrate Kant’s inaptness for theorizing global justice today.

A central tension in this interpretively differentiated account of Kant and Du Bois thus emerges. How should the presumption of Kant’s *irrelevance* informed by attention to his problem space exist alongside the presumption of Du Bois’s *relevance* to the postcolonial present, which largely depends on rejecting deep contextualization of his own problem space? To be sure, Valdez admits that “the world Du Bois inhabited was not the neoliberal world we live in” (14), but the subsequent historical retrieval does not bear this qualification out.

In David Scott’s formulation, the notion of a problem space prompts attention to how the questions motivating past anti-colonial thinkers such as C. L. R. James are not our own.<sup>3</sup> One then wonders why this framework should be imposed on Kant but not Du Bois. Parsing out the continuities and discontinuities between Du Bois’s problem space and our own might provide a more nuanced way of theorizing the present that is foreclosed by the celebration of anachronism.

For instance, reconstructing the historical context surrounding Du Bois’s involvement at the UN might help us specify some of the politics of his transnationalism that are left underdetermined in Valdez’s account. Du Bois did of course contest the exclusions built into expressions of international order such as the League of Nations and the UN, but he also invested a great amount of normative and strategic promise in those institutions. In the 1940s, he routinely proclaimed, “The United Nations is the greatest hope of abolishing colonialism and thus abolishing poverty in the world.”<sup>4</sup> Read through his own problem space, Du Bois appears less as simply contesting and overcoming institutional venues like the UN than as an immanent critic who identified elements within the international order that could overcome its imperial lineages.

## Begüm Adalet (BA)

*Transnational Cosmopolitanism* is a timely and important intervention into literatures on cosmopolitanism, global justice, and transnational political theory. By offering an original reading of Du Bois as a necessary resource for cosmopolitan thought and practice, Valdez invites a shift in the locations, subject positions, and normative orientations of this body of thought.

<sup>3</sup> David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> “The United Nations and Colonies” (June 26, 1944), W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Box 1, 1.





In the first part of the book, Valdez clearly demonstrates the limitations of Kant as a source and model for democratic peace and cosmopolitanism. She does so by situating Kant's writings in his context of intra-European colonial competition and war. In doing so, she contributes to critical literatures that have argued that Kant's moral and political philosophy needs to be read in relation to his writings on anthropology, geography, race, and gender, especially between the 1770s and 1780s. As this literature highlights, Kant's writings during this period include his attempts to develop a systematic racial theory, his reflections on what he describes as African and indigenous peoples' "cognitive ceilings" and the innate and lifelong immaturity of women, and as well as what he deems to be European civilizations' singular capacity to sustain humanity's moral progress, among other things.<sup>5</sup>

Valdez also offers an alternative to neo-Kantian accounts that tend to emphasize the obligations that people who live in wealthy countries might have to distant others in need and theories of cosmopolitanism that are formulated in terms of the duties of social institutions worldwide. In doing so, she shifts the perspective away from a liberal cosmopolitan framework that reproduces the very global institutions that perpetuate an imperial world system and function through racial hierarchy. Thus, she contributes to a growing literature that scrutinizes the relationship between global justice, racism, and empire from a critical perspective.<sup>6</sup> Given that current structures of global inequality, poverty, and violence are underpinned by racial hierarchies and legacies of colonialism and empire, the call to turn away from Kant as a resource for theorizing global justice is a compelling one.

But rather than abandon Kant altogether, Valdez proposes what she calls a disloyal reading of him that allows for the transfiguration of his key concepts, such as hospitality and complementarity. Against the fulfillment of Kantian concepts, transfiguration entails rupture, inaugurating, in Seyla Benhabib's words, "a new and imaginative constellation of the values and meanings of the present."<sup>7</sup> Through this reading, Valdez identifies in Kant resources for modulating the Westphalian paradigm of sovereignty (78), by laying out a conception of hospitality that both "strengthens the sovereignty of non-European peoples and restricts the sovereignty of Europeans" (77). In a provocative interpretive move that suggests alternative ways to engage with canonical texts and figures, Valdez also suggests that "frustration with the limitations of the Kantian version can fuel a creative process of reconceptualization of a concept that can connect realms in more political and transformative

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<sup>5</sup> Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology" in Katherine Faull, ed. *Anthropology and the German Enlightenment* (Bucknell University Press, 1995); James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key, Volume II: Imperialism and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); Inder Marwah, *Liberalism, Diversity and Domination: Kant, Mill and the Government of Difference* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> For excellent overviews of the literature, see Duncan Bell, ed., *Empire, Race and Global Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Oumar Ba, "Global Justice and Race" *International Politics Review* 9 (2), 2021: 375–389.

<sup>7</sup> Seyla Benhabib, "The Utopian Dimension in Communicative Ethics" *New German Critique* (35) Spring–Summer 1985: 83–96, p. 84.



ways...even if this involves a misinterpretation of the principles as originally articulated” (83).

In order to transfigure the concepts of complementarity and hospitality, Valdez proposes that “cosmopolitan theorists must relocate the cosmopolitan subject away from the charitable Westerner and toward subaltern colonized and neocolonized subjects” (7–8). In doing so, she calls our attention to the transnational spaces of politics that are forged through coalitions between globally racialized communities. In particular, this move reveals the concrete ways in which anti-colonial movements, civil rights movements, and global south solidarity networks, of which Du Bois himself was a part over the course of his long life, challenged the international order.

One way to make sense of Valdez’s recuperation of Du Bois as a central interlocutor in the literature on cosmopolitanism is perhaps in the context of his marginalization in the social sciences throughout his own academic career. As Aldon Morris argues, Du Bois was, in a sense, the “scholar denied,” as he was practically erased out of the history of the discipline of sociology, despite having published the *Philadelphia Negro* in 1899, which was practically the first major empirical text in sociology in the United States.<sup>8</sup> Despite training a cadre of sociologists at Atlanta University, Du Bois was excluded from the canon of sociology, from professional meetings and funding agencies, during a time when the discipline was becoming institutionalized. At the University of Chicago, Robert Park and others developed a disciplinary agenda that basically pretended that Du Bois did not exist, at the same time as many sociologists adopted his methodology without ever citing him.<sup>9</sup>

As Bob Vitalis and others have shown, Du Bois was also a critical part of conversations about the so-called race development orthodoxy of International Relations circles which actively excluded and ignored the critical and innovative work being contemporaneously done at the Howard School of IR.<sup>10</sup> One way of thinking about *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, then, is in terms of its contributions to these revisionist accounts, not necessarily from the perspective of disciplinary history as Morris, Vitalis, and others have done, but by positioning Du Bois as a crucial yet neglected resource for political theoretical literatures on cosmopolitanism. In other words, I read the book as a timely and important intervention into our discipline’s belated reckonings with racism, colonialism, and empire.

Despite his erasure from disciplinary histories of sociology and international relations, and as Charisse has already pointed out, Du Bois has received the recognition, respect, and careful study he deserves from other fields of inquiry, such as Black studies, history, literature, and Africana philosophy. Many of these accounts have in fact addressed Du Bois as a central thinker and actor in networks of Black Internationalism and pan-Africanism. Scholars like Robin Kelley, Gerald Horne,

<sup>8</sup> Aldon Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (University of California Press, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> See also Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2015).



Michael West, and many others have all chronicled the transnational imaginations and activities of Black activists and have explicitly called for a transnational research agenda.<sup>11</sup>

I am wondering about the failure of scholars of cosmopolitanism and political theory more broadly to engage with these literatures. What would it mean to call on scholars of cosmopolitanism not only to read the main theorists and practitioners of these movements, such as Du Bois, C. L. R. James, George Padmore, Claudia Jones, and others, but also the historians of Pan-Africanism and Black Internationalism, who have studied these figures precisely in terms of the work that they have done in forging transnational solidarity? And what would Valdez's book look like if her account situated Du Bois more explicitly in both these secondary literatures and the densely social and transnational networks and organizations that he participated in, including the Pan-African Congresses, the Council on African Affairs, and others, rather than adopt a thinker-oriented approach that begins with Kant and the project of transfiguring Kantian concepts like hospitality?

### **Inés Valdez (IV)**

I am very thankful for these close and incisive readings of my work. I want to start by noting how these productive readings already are acting against each other in significant ways. On the one hand, each of the commenters engages with the particularities of each of the readings that I do, but also offer sharply contradictory accounts of whether I'm too loyal or too malicious toward Kant, or how joining Kant and Du Bois works interpretively. So this conversation is already a rich account of what interpretation is and of the difficulty of adjudicating right from wrong interpretations to instead show how our positionality and intellectual background determine how we approach texts and their context. So that is already a rich, lesson that I hope to keep in mind in my response. Let me start with Charisse's comments, some of which turn to the more militant anti-imperialist period of Du Bois and Black Internationalism to which I am also turning in my ongoing book manuscript, though that is a separate conversation, though it means that I am in basic agreement with the questions of emphasis that you note.

I do think that your way of motivating your intervention is actually quite important. It is true that the audience of the book is not scholars in African studies and Black Internationalism, but rather political theorists doing work on cosmopolitanism and Du Bois scholars within political theory. And that, of course, explains the way

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<sup>11</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883–1950," *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 1045–77; Gerald Horne, "Toward a Transnational Agenda for African American History in the 21st Century," *Journal of African American History* 91 (2006): 288–303; Michael O. West and William G. Martin, "Contours of the Black International: From Toussaint to Tupac," in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*, eds. West, Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2009), 1–44; Nico Slate, "Introduction," in *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*, ed. Slate (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).



I motivate the book, which presents Du Bois as a marginal figure because despite Du Bois's weight within American political thought, until very recently, even within political theory work happening within political science, Du Bois is far from canonical.

In this field, it wasn't really until the work by Juliet Hooker in 2017, and then Adom Getachew's book and my book, both out in 2019, that the transnational dimension of his work was really engaged by political theorists.<sup>12</sup> This is not true, of course, outside political theory, where Gerald Horne's work and others have highlighted these dimensions a long time ago. Thus, my goal in the book was not to separate Du Bois's transnationalism from either pan-Africanism or Black Internationalism. Your attention to the footnote, though, allows me to expand on the quick nod to Black internationalism and to clarify that rather than placing Du Bois in this tradition my goal is to bring Du Bois's account to bear critically on a literature concerned with global politics that has so far proceeded without his insights. And this is an opportunity to also address Begüm's questions about the potential of the global justice literature engaging the broader canon of Black studies, or my book itself doing so. Here I will first say that bringing together Kant and Du Bois, raises a lot of questions and prevents me from engaging other fields with the depth that a book on Du Bois alone would have allowed me to do.

There is a sense in which I will never fully satisfy Kantian and Duboisian readers' desires to have *their* author (or *their* field) be the sole protagonist of the book. But I tend to return to Du Bois's own effort, more or less successful, depending on the period that we think about, to occupy mainstream spaces very intentionally. He published in *Foreign Affairs*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The New Republic*, in addition to his columns in the *New York Amsterdam News* and his editorial work as well as his editorials in *The Crisis*. So while I am not able to incorporate the discussions of Pan-Africanism and Third Worldism that are dynamic and ongoing, I do think that some dimensions of this transnational cosmopolitanism that I build emerge out of this conversation and this dialogue that I put together that otherwise would not, and here the work of juxtaposition or creolization of two unexpected interlocutors is crucial.<sup>13</sup>

I think it's gotten me in trouble and continues to get me in trouble because these are different literatures with different assumptions, and addressing both at once implies addressing two audiences that are unlikely to be happy with the combination. But I nonetheless think there is a value in these conversations, even when I think of my own biography, my time in graduate school. What does it mean for current graduate students that these conversations between traditions exist, and that they are becoming more common? Perhaps, to answer the question that Begüm posed, establishing this dialogue provides an entry point for other young scholars to imagine other such conversations, or to find the incorporation of Fanon, C. L. R. James

<sup>12</sup> Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (Oxford University Press, 2017); Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Fanon* (Fordham University Press, 2014).



into their work commonsensical. I certainly prefer these dialogues to the establishment of separate conversations, which sometimes with the growth of comparative political theory, increasingly happen, but without integrating non-western thinkers into mainstream conversations. Thus, I think there is a value not only in diversifying the traditions that we study in the discipline as a whole, but also in establishing dialogues among these traditions.

Regarding the question of thinking beyond inclusion versus exclusion and in terms of unequal integration—what the work of Adom Getachew and Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor are tracking—my focus was somewhat different, perhaps more micro, in the sense that I follow Du Bois's interest in questions of identity and transformation of consciousness toward the transnational. As a consequence, the book did not explicitly address the question of how domination and in particular domination that passes off as inclusion also took place, particularly after formal decolonization. That is something that I am turning to in my second book, where I'm focusing much more on the way in which democratic regimes emerge out of imperial regimes at the turn of the twentieth century.

To turn to Katrin's comments, and shift gears toward Kant, I was somewhat disappointed at hearing the comments because the book was neither about making Kant the bad guy nor making Du Bois the good guy. The book was about transnational cosmopolitanism. As Adam, in particular, highlighted, I am really using both Kant and Du Bois to theorize transnational cosmopolitanism. Thus, I was somewhat taken aback by the good guy/bad guy framing, and by aligning me with Robert Bernasconi, when perhaps he gets a few lines in the first chapter. I know the continental Kantian literature has received Bernasconi very defensively and that is one way to understand Katrin's response to my critical approach to Kant, which is to reduce it to one more entry to the literature on race, into which I do not really intervene in the book.

I agree with Katrin and many others that Kant was definitely a racist. I am not invested in providing an account of his scientific racism or deciding whether he was the first one or not. And I do actually very clearly recognize that there are moments when Kant expresses moral qualms at the actual cruelty and oppression entailed in colonialism. I just think that it is important to analyze how this concern plays out vis-à-vis European war, which is the core preoccupation of *Perpetual Peace*.

So I'm not saying that this is all he thought about colonialism. I just think that we must understand his claims in the context of the problem space, i.e., the core problem that he is trying solve. And so the question is not if he is the bad guy. The question is, why are we using Kant to think about global injustice if he was trying to think about European war and European peace? So my critique is narrower but nonetheless important, and does not mean abandoning all Kantian influences in how I think about cosmopolitanism as it is clear in chapter 3, i.e., how do we think about hospitality for our times, how can it be re-theorized with attention to the present? I am both making claims about what a contextual reading of Kant tells us about meaning, and offering an interpretation of how to rework Kant for our times, a move that needs a substantive engagement with Du Bois's transnationalism.

The last thing that I will say about the goodness/badness of Kant is that my reading of Kant also entails reading him against neo-Kantians, and finding not only that



he *is not* the bad guy, but that he actually had a broader reading of the world than more recent neo-Kantian work. And so when I first incorporated the historical background of the six colonial locales he mentions in *Perpetual Peace* by name I honestly wondered why nobody had bothered to look at what was happening in these six places that Kant mentions. It is a very short Third Article in which Kant introduces cosmopolitanism, and nonetheless, he fits in these six colonial conflicts. Yet nobody went out of their way and read what was going on there. So there is this breadth in Kant and concern with what's going on around the globe, that I don't think always translates to contemporary readings.

This is particularly the case when it comes to Kant's notion of complementarity, there is no need for complementarity to refer to Europe's influence toward the rest of the world. Despite this, the readings by Pauline Kleingeld and Jurgen Habermas repeatedly, when they talk about complementarity, refer to how democracies in Europe and the European Union can serve as models for the rest of the world. And so not only are they praising Europe and hoping for their benevolent and beneficial effect on the rest of the world, but they're also doing the opposite of what Kant was doing, which was condemning European behavior. So I wanted to highlight here how chapters 2 and 3 show that a part of my critique applies primarily to neo-Kantians rather than Kant himself.

About Du Bois and US-centrism, I can rely on the comments by Charisse, Adam, and Begüm in the sense that there is a recognition that Du Bois was a thoroughly transnational thinker. While he was making claims about the affinity between racial injustice in the US and the rest of the world, and while he did at the beginning place US Blacks and Black activism in a vanguard position of leadership, this is something that he recognizes and criticizes later on, which I acknowledge in the book. But there is a second aspect at play in particular in *Dark Princess*, where Du Bois's move to locate African Americans as leaders does not have to do with their superiority, but with the fact that they are part of a white Imperial polity. Thus, unlike the colonies, which are detached and spatially distant from the center of imperial power, the development of the US as a settler colony that became an imperial power, gives Black Americans a certain clout or access to this political space that other colonial peoples lack. Rather than a question of hierarchy, Du Bois here makes a political argument regarding the different roles that different actors can play in a transnational collective that shares ties of solidarity.

The balance between Du Bois and Kant in the book is also scrutinized by Adam, who notes that Kant's categories are kept, even if put to other uses via Du Bois. He further questions whether Du Bois's problem space is in fact ours. It is true that the notions of complementarity, hospitality, and the public sphere are Kantian aspects of my book, though in a transfigured form. And this transfiguration depends crucially on the reading of Du Bois, whose problem space was still different from ours but closer to the concerns of global justice in the sense of focusing on the marginalized majority of the world rather than narrowly Europe.

But, most importantly, the goal of the book is not to get either Kant or Du Bois right, but to get transnational cosmopolitanism right, which requires some disloyalty vis-à-vis both Kant and Du Bois in order to highlight those spaces of politics that we don't see when we think about states and the international sphere. Here Adam



inquires about whether the authority of the reading remains rooted in the past. It does and it does not, in the sense that a back and forth is required. First to read Kant contextually to understand what his intervention *means*, thus engaging seriously with a historical reading, and then proceeding disloyally to this uncovered reading by transfiguring his concepts and putting them to work differently, thus loosening the authority of the past.

Transnational spaces of politics are only visible once the Kantian concepts of complementarity, hospitality, and the public sphere are completely transformed. When hospitality is transfigured in the sense that Seyla Benhabib proposes (i.e., the imagination of an alternative regime that qualitatively departs from the current one).<sup>14</sup> They suddenly appear, right, so it is a sort of Arendtian moment of appearance but not in the traditional sense, but rather in the novel visibility of transnational spaces that are muted within the Kantian tradition. This is where I find the value of juxtaposing Kant and Du Bois.

In more recent work I do contextualize and bring Du Bois in conversation with the Black radical tradition, like in a response to Jane Gordon's book on Rousseau and Fanon, and in ongoing work where I engage Du Bois alongside Fanon, Saidiya Hartman, and Martin Luther King, among other thinkers. In this work, I also engage Du Bois within the field of racial capitalism.<sup>15</sup>

My first book, however, was doing something different. In it, I wanted to make sense of what these two different traditions were doing. I was trained in the first tradition, the cosmopolitan tradition and I started reading on the second tradition more systematically after finishing my dissertation. This book came out of that grappling with the question of what framework was more helpful to make sense of transnational politics and global inequality, which entailed enlisting Du Bois as an interlocutor and substantive corrections to neo-Kantian cosmopolitanisms.

**BA:** Thank you so much for your illuminating responses, Inés. I am reminded of a recent roundtable in the *American Historical Review*, where Black Internationalism, Pan-Africanism, and transnationalism are discussed as both actors' and analytic categories.<sup>16</sup> I am wondering if we can say the same about "transnational cosmopolitanism," which seems to be your own analytic category. Would Du Bois agree with this description and what do we gain (or lose) by attaching this label to his body of thought and activism?

I'm also wondering if we might talk about what you mean by transnationalism more broadly. In parts of the book, I understood you as defining transnationalism as the forging of a counter-public through political and esthetic craft. You very nicely discuss Du Bois' editorial work and his organization of alternative diplomatic venues that occasioned the appearance and speech of marginalized subjects. But

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<sup>14</sup> Benhabib, Seyla, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: (Columbia University Press, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Inés Valdez, "Cosmopolitanism without National Consciousness is not Radical: Creolizing Gordon's Fanon through Du Bois," *Philosophy and Global Affairs* 1(2) (2021): 283–296 and "Empire, Popular Sovereignty, and the Problem of Self-and-Other-Determination," *Perspectives on Politics* (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Comment by Tejasvi Nagaraja, "AHR Conversation: Black Internationalism," *American Historical Review* 125 (2020): 1699–1739, p. 1711.



Adam questioned to what extent it is possible to talk about a coherent, consistent, and uniform transnational public sphere, asking to what extent there was a “shared understanding” of the connections between segregation in the US and colonialism in Africa? Meanwhile, Katrin identified problems with what she understood to be Du Bois’ universalizing from the plight of African Americans to that of Africans and other racialized groups. And finally, Charisse mentioned that we might want to reconsider or challenge the stagist reading of Du Bois’s work and that his “turn toward transnationalism” was in fact messier than the way it is presented in chapter 3 of *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*.

So, Inés, I am wondering if you can elaborate what you mean both by transnational cosmopolitanism as an analytic, as opposed to an actor’s, category, and transnationalism more broadly.

**IV:** That is a great question. The term transnationalism, as Adam noted, was not Du Bois’s but Randolph Bourne’s.<sup>17</sup> Bourne was more interested in questions of domestic and transnational politics in terms of migrant and communication flows, rather than what I refer to as these different spheres of politics. For me, the usefulness of the term is that it most closely reflects the spaces of politics that I want to highlight, those located neither domestically nor in the society of states, where actors excluded from those realms actually converge, develop ties of solidarity, and act politically. Du Bois provides a helpful entry point to these spaces, because his aim was to connect activism and groups in the US that are struggling for emancipation to causes, narratives, and activism abroad. While Adam noted that *The Crisis* was an American publication and it’s about the highest ideas of American democracy, every cover of *The Crisis* reads “A record of the darker races,” thus signaling a more universal project.

So Du Bois’s project is to expose Black Americans to this transnational world of Black and colonial politics. This is precisely what I mean when I conceptualize the functions of activation and diagnosis of the transnational public sphere. *The Crisis* is not the same as *Présence Africaine*, the magazine of the Black Artists Association or a forum like Bandung, but I am focusing on a realm that is nonetheless necessary to make the connections that these other fora will pursue. Here I find Begüm’s language of scales, in her recent *Political Theory* piece on Fanon, helpful to convey how transnationalism refers to connecting different locales that are not really necessary univocally connected, in the sense that one develops before or after the other one, but nonetheless meaningfully interconnected.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, in addition to theorizing the transnational public sphere, I focus on how Du Bois tries to shift the consciousness and orientation of Black activism by pointing out these affinities. What happens when state politics are not a satisfactory realm for marginalized groups? Where do these group find actors with whom to develop solidarity, and how does that transform political demands? This is lost

<sup>17</sup> Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (July 1916). Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1916/07/trans-national-america/304838/>.

<sup>18</sup> Begüm Adalet, “Infrastructures of Decolonization: Scales of Worldmaking in the Writings of Frantz Fanon” *Political Theory* 50(1) 2022.





if one focuses on the level of international institutions or multilateral institutions or even regional organizations. And so this possibility of affinities and coalition-making that do not go upwards, but expand horizontally, a reading that is not incompatible with Kant, but it is with the vertical and stagist reading of Kant put forward by neo-Kantians.

Focusing on transnational/horizontal politics is not to completely escape the national level, but to acknowledge that responding to transnational processes, like today's transnational corporations, or global systems of finance and capital circulation, or before the transnational slave trade or other forms of capital accumulation, encompasses more than one people. In other words, to the extent that we acknowledge that the sources of injustice are transnational, we need to think about emancipatory politics in ways that can match that formation.

**KF:** Thank you. That's clarifying, but I still don't really understand what the difference is, in your mind, between Du Bois' Pan-Africanism and what you call transnationalism. Du Bois was obviously a Pan-Africanist, and in that sense, he was a transnational of sorts — i.e., he was interested in forging solidarity among some people across some borders. But I can't quite see in what sense you think of him as a cosmopolitan, given that this would require not just ties of solidarity with other marginalized Black persons and "persons of color," as you say in the US. But anyone? That is what cosmopolitanism at least nominally aspires to, so I'm not sure what you think Du Bois' work can do for cosmopolitans as opposed to Pan-Africanism? The two just seem to be different concerns.

**IV:** That's a great question because it allows me to clarify how one can see Bandung or the earlier Pan-African Congresses as addressing the globe. They are, of course, not able to participate in the Paris conference after the First World War, because they are formally excluded. But they are nonetheless meeting in Paris at the same time that they are meeting because they wish to establish a dialog that is, at the moment, impossible. Or how Du Bois sees the UN as a valuable interlocutor, Adam notes. But the way in which these fora are seen by Du Bois as appropriate for addressing questions of racial injustice because they concern every single country in the world, because these countries are either imperial countries that are enforcing institutions that are built around the color line or because, like the United States, they are also enforcing the color line within their own territory. In this sense, the struggle of Blacks within the U.S. proves to be a universal struggle once it is seen in this manner, as connected with other struggles, which lead to the establishment of African or Afro-Asian coalitions, who nonetheless are, or even must be, in constant conversation with more mainstream realms.

**CBS:** I think the way that the question is set up is really interesting to me, insofar as cosmopolitanism that only includes a conversation with and between the racialized or the colonized somehow is an incomplete cosmopolitanism. I would push back against that. But even within your own framework, it is significant that the Pan-African conference of 1900, as well as the Pan-African congresses of 1919 1921, 1923, 1927, and 1945, are all held in European metropolises. And I think that that's about the colonial situation, but also the types of conversations that Du Bois is trying to have. If you look at the notes and transcripts from these Pan-African congresses, they are appealing to the League of Nations, for example.



And so a distinction that's drawn between the earlier conferences and the 1945 gathering, for example, is that the petitions to the League of Nations contend with the question of receivership, namely how the transfer of the former German colonies to British trusteeship continues the attenuation of African self-determination if there is no consultation with the Africans who are fitted for self-government. It's not even an immediate call for independence. It's a call for recognition by colonial powers or by Western Europeans for a sort of global talented tenth.

And so that brings me to my next or to the sort of idea of Du Bois's US-centrism. I think that there might be a conflation of his critique of US imperialism that permeates much of his scholarship and US centrism as such, to be sure, I do think that there's an understanding of a role that African Americans might play in a leadership capacity, but at the same time, there's a way that Africa is his locus of enunciation whereby he sees particular types of social organizing on the African continent, not least matriarchy as superior to a sort of western forms of social organizing and ways of being. And so I think, this idea that there's a complete imposition of African American superiority over and above that of the natives is an incomplete reading. I think he's complicated, right? Just like Kant or any other figure. That is the same reading also of gender. I did not bring that up in my remarks. But I think that the reading of Du Bois and gender is incomplete because as early as 1915, when Kelly Miller says, women should not have the right to vote, Du Bois absolutely pushes back on this and supports (Black) women's suffrage to the extent that they are part of the Black community.<sup>19</sup>

And this is 1915. All of the people who write about the way that sexism is important to his relationship with Ida B. Wells, but they completely overlook his relationship with somebody like Mary Church Terrell and so like any other figure, much like Kant, Du Bois is complicated. He's caught up in Victorian notions of gender on the one hand, but also is very progressive, relatively speaking. And as somebody who studies Du Bois, I wanted to raise these issues. I don't expect everybody to pick up on these nuances or whatever. But like, I just wanted to throw that out there because I feel like there are some particular interpretations of Du Bois that are a little bit convoluted, much like there's accusations of or interpretations of particular readings of Kant being convoluted.

Du Bois is absolutely transnational from the outset as early as the 1890s. He's critiquing US imperialism in the Philippines and in the Caribbean. He's pushing back against US imperialism in Haiti, and not because of some African American saviorism, but because of his understanding of the global color line. It's not just about some Manichean reversal between the racialized and Western or white folk. This is why when he says the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, he conveys the effect that it has on the racialized and colonized as well as those who are engaging in those projects. When he talks about democratic despotism in 1915, it is precisely because of the dehumanizing effect that these processes have on both those who engage in them and those who are subjected to them. So anyway, I think that even if Du Bois is situated in the US, and he is an African American,

<sup>19</sup> Kelly Miller, "The Risk of Woman Suffrage," *The Crisis* (November 1915): 37–38.



and so that's sort of his point of reference, I would push back on any type of US-centrism, because from his very earliest works, not to mention his study in Germany, he is thoroughly a transnational. I don't know about cosmopolitanism. I don't have a dog in that fight. But he's certainly a transnational thinker, because he does move I think relatively seamlessly between these different levels of local, national, and international.

**AD:** This might be something that you may somewhat disagree with, but it has to do with the way that I think about Du Bois as a transnational thinker. I think it's so important to emphasize that this word, "transnational," wasn't an actor's category for Du Bois, but it was an actor's category for others writing at the exact time that Du Bois was writing. When Bourne coined the term transnational America, it was a year after Du Bois published the "African Roots of War" in the *Atlantic Monthly*. They're writing in the same venues. And so the reason I bring up the way that Bourne uses it is if we think about it as an actor's category for Du Bois, I think it has a particular resonance. The way that Bourne meant it was that the United States would be transformed through open immigration and through regimes of multiple citizenship and dual loyalties, through the kind of weaving back and forth of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities.

"The transnational" there does a lot of work. It's movement across levels and scales, but it also entails transformation. US identity would be transformed and changed in this perpetual movement back and forth across the borders of the nation. And I think that in some ways is how we might think about Du Bois as a transnational thinker. I get the sense that throughout the most of his life, probably until the 1950s (aside from his period of separatism in the 1930s, which I think he saw as an instrumental means of integration), he does hold out some hope for the integration of African Americans into US citizenship out of these regimes of second class citizenship. There's a commitment to national citizenship in some sense there. Part of what he's getting at with the transnational is that the transformation of American citizenship can't be achieved from within the United States, that there must be a kind of appeal to these broader solidarities. That's what I meant when I said that his transnational cosmopolitanism is politically underdetermined, because I wonder, what is the end that Du Bois is shooting for? In some cases, yes, it is national self-determination for colonized peoples, but not always, especially in the case of what he would refer to as semi-colonial peoples within the United States. There is quite a bit of complexity in the way the transnational operates that isn't captured in calling it an alternative spatial realm.

**IV:** Thanks for those two interventions. Charisse, I really agree with the way in which Du Bois' Victorian morals and outlook do intersect with more progressive stances, also if you think about his sociology, for example, his moralization of the black family and how this coexists with extremely egalitarian and an emancipatory position toward women and a critique of the structures that produce such families. I think your earlier point about the stages is relevant here, and important given the need to read the nuances of Du Bois's thought. I don't know if I should have highlighted the stages so much, but the reason why the stages matter to me is not that there was no transnationalism before and there is a transnationalism later, but because the later transnationalism, that emerges in the interwar period, is coupled



with a theorization of subjectivity and consciousness that wasn't there so prominently before. So it's really that distinction that I want to highlight, but I also agree that the anti-colonialism and the theorization of the color line in relation to Empire is there, from the very beginning.

And to Adam, I, again, on Bourne's transnationalism, I do think that there is some of that transnationalism in Du Bois as well, a stance of hope associated with the transnationalization of the U.S., nowhere as clear as in New York City, where Du Bois moved when he became the founding editor of *The Crisis*. This also responds or continues the conversation on US centrism, what is US-centrism when the US is a settler colony, to which Caribbean and Indian migrants and anti-colonial activists were flocking, where one of the utmost labor leaders was English (Samuel Gompers), and where a great portion of the white working class was foreign, a factor not remarked upon because the dividing line was race, rather than national belonging. Du Bois himself issues a call to ethnic Europeans in his essay "Americanization" to join those who have been oppressed and struggle for a true American democracy rather than joining Anglo-Saxons and aiming for world domination.

And that is Du Bois's moment of trust or hope in American democracy that I think declines as his critique of capitalism is radicalized. Yet I presume that what you're pointing out is the distinction between the overlapping realms that you see in Bourne and the transnationalism that joins separate spaces. Yet these are not mutually exclusive, Du Bois writes from 1920s New York City, so Du Bois aims to appeal to differently located subjects even while coming from this highly multi-cultural overlapping realms. And this appeal to anti-colonial subjects elsewhere in the world emerges from necessity, from the fact that they were excluded from mainstream fora like the League of Nations or that they cannot raise questions of empire and transnationalism within the US public sphere. But, yes, both Charisse and Adam's comments are helpful to think about this complexity.

**BA:** I'm wondering if we can end by reflecting on questions about interpretation and relevance that have been raised. Katrin argued that Kant and Du Bois appear to be evaluated by different standards in the book, with more generosity granted to Du Bois than to Kant. She also posed questions about whether or not we should read historical thinkers in light of our current concerns and moral preferences. Meanwhile, Adam pointed out that the book appears to adopt an interpretively differentiated account that presumes Du Bois's relevance to the postcolonial present, while the contextualist reading of Kant renders him irrelevant to our present moment. What are the stakes of reading Du Bois in this particular way, alongside Kant, as we grapple with particular configurations of capitalism, racism, and empire in this moment?

**IV:** I think you're absolutely right that the question of the problem space figures much more prominently in my approach to Kant and less in my approach to Du Bois, mainly because I presume that Du Bois can be helpful, so perhaps I do not do the work of showing the reader why that is the case. The lines of relevance that I draw between what Du Bois is doing in predominantly the interwar period are questions of, first, racial inequality, quite significantly, I mean, I do think that definitely transformed questions of racial inequality both domestically and internationally, and domestically not just because of the aftermath of slavery but also due to the



indentured migration and the relatively liberal mobility within the British Empire, increasingly restricted as the twentieth century progresses.

Much could be said about the similar dynamics taking place today all around the Anglo-European world, racialized dynamics in France, the Netherlands, and others toward postcolonial diasporas and different regimes of migration. So Du Bois's theorization of racial difference, racial oppression, and the color line as a meandering line that does not follow state lines, but rather invades every political realm. I think this is one important way in which his problems remain our own.

And a second dimension is that of transnational identity and consciousness, how different groups find affinities with each other, or see their oppression as continuous and interconnected. We can think about as recently as the summer of 2020, Black Lives Matter protest and the echoes across the Atlantic, or we can think about the many anti-neoliberal demonstrations taking place in Lebanon and Chile and elsewhere. I think we need better tools to conceptualize these forms of common oppression and solidarity that traverse borders, and I think Du Bois provides precisely those tools.

**AD:** One of the things that always excites me about reading Du Bois is not where he seems relevant to our present, but where he destabilizes our understanding of the present, where he seems alien to us in the present in some ways. And that's why I find his writings on the League of Nations and the United Nations so fascinating, which as we know from all the histories that have been written about these institutions they are built upon and in key ways form extensions of US imperialism. Yet here is an anti-colonial figure who is working within, appealing to, and trying to gain a seat at the table of these institutions. It foregrounds how appeals to transnational solidarity might be fairly limited without concrete ways of thinking through the institutions that would actually sustain those solidarities. What is fascinating about Du Bois is his willingness to think through transnational solidarity, not just as a form affective identity or subjective consciousness, but as actual institutional regimes of cooperation. The other thing to note is that Du Bois was working at the UN and making these kinds of claims at the moment that the US liberal international imperial order was created, and we're now living in a moment when we are witnessing its collapse. It's a different problem space, but in that difference there is also continuity.

**KF:** I would echo Adam's remarks on Du Bois with regard to Kant. One of the things that I find disappointing about an approach that says "let's go to Kant and get our solutions from his philosophy," or "let's go to Kant and find out where racism started" (!) is that it turns Kant into a very uninteresting thinker. It seems to me that, just as one can read Du Bois as someone who challenges our assumptions, so Kant is worth reading in the same spirit.

One example would be the rights of hospitality. This is a traditional natural law right. Europeans abused the right to hospitality when claiming such rights against Native Americans in the process of conquest. When Kant limits the hospitality right to a right to attempt contact with distant others, but not a right of permanent settlement, he turns the traditional hospitality right against European settler claims. Kant's inversion strategy is likely to be missed if one has already made up one's mind about where he stands on issues of race, colonialism, or European settlements,



and presumes, moreover, that insofar as he is a racist (which, clearly, like virtually any other European thinker, he was), he must also be a colonialist (which is much more doubtful). In other words, if we concede that Du Bois was a complex thinker whose thoughts should not naively be taken to align with ours, it is just not clear to me why one should not acknowledge similar complexity in Kant—or, for that matter, in any other historical thinker, European or otherwise, white or black, blue or green.

I'd like to make one other point about Du Bois more specifically. You say that he is both a marginalized figure and a voice of the marginalized who uses the existing institutional channels of the dominant powers in order to make his “subaltern” case heard. This seems to be in part what you have in mind when you talk about “political craft”—i.e., the use of existing institutional structures as a way of advocating for reform. But one question that arises, and that should be considered, is the attendant risk of co-optation. Why assume that Du Bois would always have been in control of his own agenda? Why not consider the possibility that, to the extent to which he did engage with existing power structures, trying to insert himself into them, he would have risked compromising his position at least to some extent. That is virtually inevitable and does not necessarily speak against the strategy. But the apparent assumption, that Du Bois's aims and objectives remained untouched by his “political craft” strikes me as odd, politically speaking.

This problem of co-optation—and especially conceptual co-optation—is much discussed in modern African philosophy. Current race and anti-colonial theorists hardly ever bother to consult that literature—hence my impression that Eurocentrism has simply been replaced with US-centrism. In modern African philosophy, the question continues to be a very urgent one as to the extent to which participation in conversations on terms not of one's own making ends up compromising one's position. This is the problem of ‘mental decolonization’ discussed by Pauline Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, Olufemi Taiwo, among others. Analogously with political institutions: it is very tempting to think that one can “subvert” existing institutions in order to advance some good cause. Often, what happens instead is that one's engagement with those institutions ends up subverting one's initial objectives. Institutional structures are, after all, extremely powerful. It would be odd to think that anyone could single-handedly transform them.

**CBS:** I think that that was also my problem with the sort of bifurcation of West and non-West. I don't think that Du Bois inadvertently reinscribes the hegemony of these institutions, I think he's working both in and through, but also against them, and related to this point, it would have been interesting to engage *An Appeal to the World*. B. R. Ambedkar actually wrote letters to Du Bois about how the position of African Americans in the United States might inform how Dalits might engage the UN with respect to caste. And so it's not just a one way, there just seemed to be a sort of one-way transaction between Du Bois and others, or Du Bois in institutions or Du Bois in groups. But I think that it's much more, there's much more circulation.

Likewise, the discussion about *The Crisis* and whether or not it's US centric or transnational, if you look at the circulation, and it's very important in the colonial world, but also to Europe to get information about African Americans, and about what's going on with regard to US segregation, but even beyond the United States,



that circulation in that audience is very, very important, not unlike *The Negro World*, which is the paper of the UNIA and many of the other periodicals, the *Chicago Defender*, for example, and the way that they circulate. I think that that's really important to think about with regard to transnationalism—it's not just a one-way production of those things.

Moreover, I think the other thing one needs to figure out about Du Bois and marginalization is, marginalized in relation to what? Because the thing about transnationalism is that it requires travel. And many feminist and other scholars have written about this—that Du Bois is very privileged because he's able to travel to the United Nations meetings and these Pan-Africanist meetings. And he's able to build institutions in particular ways, because he is by no means a rich man, but he has access to resources and cultural capital that allows him to engage in these attempts at worldmaking. And so when you talk about cosmopolitan or transnational cosmopolitan, and from below, well below what? Because he's above many, many people. He's an intellectual, he's an organizer, he's an activist, he's an institution builder, and that allows him an extraordinary amount of privilege. Even when he goes to Ghana you know, and he dies in Ghana, he goes to China, he goes to Soviet Union, he has the reception of a dignitary. So I think that it's important to think about how, his activism is on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed, but he himself is not necessarily positioned in that way. And so I think that again, when I hear Adam, and Katrin talk about Kant, it's the same with Du Bois in terms of being both problematic and productive, in terms of offering solutions, and reinscribing problematics. And so I just think that this reading of Du Bois is really important in terms of thinking about transnationalism.

**BA:** Thank you so much, everyone, especially Inés for writing this very thought provoking book that gave us the opportunity to have this really productive, wonderful conversation.

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