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Arturo Chang

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## REVIEWS

### **Solidarity and Place-Making in Supranational Politics: A Review of Inés Valdez's *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* and Paulina Ochoa Espejo's *On Borders***

**Arturo Chang**

**Inés Valdez. *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 228 pp. \$105.00 (hc). ISBN: 9781108630047. Paulina Ochoa Espejo. *On Borders: Territories, Legitimacy, and the Rights of Place*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. 344 pp. \$32.95 (pb). ISBN: 9780190074203.**

Recent debates in political theory have turned to supranational politics to better delineate spaces of collective resistance, emancipation, and solidarity. Beyond the international sphere, this supranational turn centers varied forms of place-based practices and spaces that frame political organizing—among these are transnational, hemispheric, convergent, and scalar approaches.<sup>1</sup> The role of the nation-state and nation-led global order within these frameworks, however, remains in dispute. To what extent can theories of political solidarity and collective resistance truly decenter the nation-state given its dominance as an organizing and regulating institution? Similarly, questions remain regarding the respective commitments that political leaders, thinkers, and marginalized groups hold toward the nation-state as an emancipatory project. While the field has attended to these problems via the history of political thought and contemporary political theory, space remains for addressing them from a normative standpoint. Two recent books speak to this need in significant ways: Inés Valdez's *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft* (2019) and Paulina Ochoa Espejo's *On Borders: Territories, Legitimacy, and the Rights of Place* (2020). While Valdez and Ochoa Espejo respond to distinct, and sometimes contrasting political questions, both are invested in constructing a normative framework that can adjudicate between experiences of injustice as they manifest across state jurisdictions and within local, national, transnational, and territorial contexts. In this regard, putting Ochoa Espejo and Valdez in conversation provides a helpful account of where studies of supranational politics stand; further, their overlap reveals a need to attend to questions of place and place-making politics within these debates.

Valdez's, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* proposes a framework that transnationalizes cosmopolitan thought to better capture forms of "solidarity that contest the exclusionary structure of domestic and international realms of politics" of national spaces (1). In doing so, Valdez draws on W.E.B. Du Bois's writings on transnational solidarity among marginalized groups, which emphasize the "political craft" of building networks of commiseration via place-based politics—what Valdez calls the transnational "counter-public" (153). Transnational cosmopolitanism, however, also draws on neo-Kantian principles that

are themselves enmeshed in the domestic and international politics that subject marginalized groups to colonial and neocolonial power. Thus, as Valdez argues, transnational cosmopolitanism offers a “normative and theoretical problem” that questions to what extent neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism can be reimagined to account for solidarities which “facilitate emancipatory forms of political subjectivity, hospitable political exchanges, and coalition making that contest exclusionary forms” of governance (123).

*Transnational Cosmopolitanism* embarks on the task of amending neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism and its privileging of Eurocentric notions of solidarity from the outset (6). In response to the limitations of Kantian and neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism, transnational cosmopolitanism proposes four changes in its approach to global politics (18–19). First, it accounts for the role of “heterogeneous racial structures of power” in grounding different forms of subjection across domestic, international, and transnational politics. Second, it aims to think beyond state and interstate politics by centering the “political craft” (18) of cosmopolitan solidarity that operates beyond these contexts. Third, it highlights identity-based coalitions that support “transnational counter-publics” (19) by pursuing emancipation from the margins. Fourth, transnational cosmopolitanism “transfigures extant understandings of cosmopolitanism, communication, and hospitality” through the “transnational and solidaristic political craft of subaltern actors” (19). Valdez aims to identify the “processes of will-formation” that allow coalitions to organize toward overcoming domination within domestic and international politics.

Valdez’s critique of Kantian and neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism comprises the first two chapters of the book. As Valdez shows through a contextualist account of the anticolonial principles behind *Perpetual Peace* in chapter 1, Kant’s cosmopolitanism was committed to a civilizational and racial hierarchy (24). As such, Kant was concerned with colonialism insofar as it hindered the possibility of peace among European states due to expansion, competition, and “uncivilized” forms of violence (25). The normative premises of Kantian cosmopolitanism are thus grounded in colonial order as a set of conditions affecting European progress, but otherwise overlook these same effects in the rest of the world. As Valdez argues in chapter 2, neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism must contend with the Eurocentric premises of Kant’s vision as well as its regional, racial, and colonial priorities. To do so, Valdez proposes a tripartite account of Kantian Eurocentrism (federative, unworldly, and ahistorical) to suggest that transnational practices create a more radical form of hospitality that accounts for the investments of “subaltern” actors (83–85).

Valdez’s transfiguration of neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism operates through W.E.B. Du Bois’s works on progress, developmental politics, and anticolonial solidarity. Specifically, transnational cosmopolitanism, as Du Bois characterizes it, produces three principal changes that reconstruct justice into a “transnational problem from within which domestic politics operate” (88). The first is a “transformation in consciousness” that opens space for racialized people to understand themselves as part of a transnational collective to exit “dynamics of misrecognition” in domestic politics (88). Valdez suggests that while Du Bois’s early writings on international solidarity largely endorsed the developmentalist character of modernity, his turn to aesthetic politics recognizes domination as a shared experience among subjected peoples (100). This

leads to the second moment of transfiguration: the “inauguration of a public relying on ties of solidarity and a common sense of imperial temporality as bloody and radical regress” (88). Here racial justice emerges as a coalitional project built from heterogeneous experiences of subjection (102). Finally, this transnational anti-imperial consciousness leads to a third transfiguration in the form of disruptive practices seeking to upend existing spaces of politics (88). Chapter 3 of *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* traces Du Bois’s developmentalism by providing contextual examples of these transfigurations in his turn to aesthetic politics and international organizing behind the 1919 Pan-African Congress (106).

Chapters 4 and 5 move Valdez’s analysis of Du Bois’s politics forward, constructing a normative framework that contends with injustice as a transnational problem. Chapter 4 begins with an account of transnational solidarity and how it relates to the categories of race and identity as foundations for coalition building. In this section of *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, place-based politics become central to Valdez’s argument. She contends that political theorists tend to define national identities as oppositional to a contrasting “Other” (117). This leads scholars to treat identity-based claims as being in contention with projects of solidarity since they operate beyond—or at times disrupt—the bounds of domestic politics. In decentering international and domestic spaces, Valdez’s transnational lens proposes that solidarity can emerge across a multiplicity of standpoints and that identities are central to constructing emancipatory spaces (123). Chapter 5 builds on these claims by proposing the concept of a transnational “counter-public” that “constitutes the condition of possibility to challenge the injustice imposed by domestic and international politics” (153). This proposed counter-public redefines transnational politics as a bottom-up phenomenon that in turn influences the evolution of local, national, and international spheres (160). As Valdez writes in conclusion, the “transfigured hospitality” of transnational cosmopolitanism operates horizontally, making systemic exclusion visible (178). Via its account of from-below solidarities, transnational cosmopolitanism seeks to rupture the binary of domestic and international politics by tracing experiences of injustice as they manifest across multiple positionalities and receptions of subjection.

Valdez’s *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* proves a convincing problematization of the politics behind cosmopolitan thought (neo-Kantian and beyond). The book also sheds important light on the interpretive commitments, and thus limitations, of cosmopolitanism’s conception of justice. Valdez’s analysis fruitfully brings together debates on transnational and emancipatory politics that might otherwise remain too distant. Naturally, these convergences also produce questions. While *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* convincingly explicates the anti-colonial sentiments behind W.E.B. Du Bois’s writings on empire, it is less clear why his politics should be interpreted as cosmopolitan. In broader terms, Valdez’s analysis of colonial legacies and global injustice is convincing, and I am left wondering whether her account of alternative solidarities operates primarily with the investments of postcolonial and decolonial politics in mind.<sup>2</sup> In other words, how does a postcolonial counter-public differ or compare to a transnational cosmopolitan one? More than a categorical question, the place of postcolonial and decolonial politics in Valdez’s framework perhaps problematizes the feasibility of reforming cosmopolitan lenses altogether.

Indeed, Valdez's critique of the varied ways in which Eurocentrism undergirds Kantian and neo-Kantian cosmopolitan theories is so convincing that the decision to reform the framework seems surprising at times. Here the Ship of Theseus thought experiment comes to mind in relation to colonial order and its legacies: if, as Valdez shows, Kantian cosmopolitanism is contextually and principally committed to European hegemony, and assumes racial as well as regional hierarchies dependent on these conditions, and if neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism has inherited some of these assumptions, how much of the cosmopolitan framework can be replaced before it is something else entirely? In this regard it would be helpful to know how Valdez's interjection in cosmopolitan theory responds to postcolonial and decolonial studies of solidarity, insofar as it provides an alternative lens for studying subversive coalitional practices. In this regard, the book fruitfully pushes its reader to scrutinize cosmopolitan lenses, transnational or not, and to contend with the evolving positionalities of marginalized groups and the place-based politics from which they organize. *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* moves the field forward on key debates in transnational politics, global justice, as well as marginalized claims-making, and in doing so, reveals important areas of conversation for future research.

Paulina Ochoa Espejo's *On Borders: Territories, Legitimacy, & the Rights of Place* (2020) offers an indirect response and critique of the limitations of cosmopolitan frameworks as they relate to place-based politics via an analysis of borders and bordered thinking. *On Borders* begins from the premise that borders, usually understood as spaces that delimit (and are delimited by) identity, operate paradoxically. Not only is the bordered state in a continuous process of identifying the *demos*, but in a world marked by climate change, migration, and refugee crises, as well as globalization, physical borders do little to stop the flow of evolving collectivities.<sup>3</sup> As Ochoa Espejo suggests, the bordered state is fixed on a dilemma. On the one hand, legitimate democratic politics within closed borders leaves migrants excluded from governance decisions that affect their lives. On the other hand, the "promise of diversity and inclusion" is met with more "democratic control and less political legitimacy" to protect bordered states (2).

*On Borders* argues that this dilemma only appears when we think of borders in terms of *who* we are. Instead, one should think of borders "place and presence," *where* we are, to understand "place-specific relations" by taking the "environment into consideration" (2–3). To do so, Ochoa Espejo thinks from the Topian tradition, which connects environmental and contextual conditions with institutional design, to build resilient political practices and publics. This place-based notion of borders leads Ochoa Espejo to propose a "Watershed Model" of borders that shifts the jurisdictional capacities of bordered states to shared collective problems by designing borders that "run along the limits of institutions for managing ecosystems at a human scale" (187). This maintains the jurisdictional capacities of the border to encourage cooperation between individuals confronting shared environmental and contextual problems. In shifting the focus from identity to place, Ochoa Espejo rejects the premise that culture or nationality should frame political legitimacy. Instead, the model identifies cultural practices as a primary reason that borders, and bordered institutions, should *necessarily* evolve along with their environments and people. Thus, by deploying a critical-Topian lens, the book proposes an "ecolog-

ical revival of the old idea of natural boundaries" that takes geography and contextual relations seriously to delimit the scope and capacities of jurisdictional spaces (19). Borders are not "primarily the boundaries of identity," but rather comprise the "limits of jurisdiction" defined as governance decisions related to relational problems such as resource management, taxation, commerce, and migration (xi).

*On Borders* builds its critical appraisal and normative proposal of the border by first assessing current arguments surrounding bordered institutions. Chapters 1 and 2 provide a thorough account of the "Desert Island Model" of territorial politics and its approach to border design. As Ochoa Espejo shows, the Desert Island Model (DIM) holds a hegemonic position in both practical politics and academic debates on territorial rights and borders. The DIM assumes that territorial claims can be made by existing states, or by individuals who hold original right of occupation (18). Once "legitimate" claims are acquired, the DIM allows institutions and collectivities the right to "control the territory's natural resources and its borders" and thus to "exclude foreigners" (29). Importantly, Ochoa Espejo argues that the DIM is not specific to the state. While this notion of territorial regulation is conventionally used by state institutions, these types of claims are also made, for example, by Indigenous groups appealing to landed belonging (30).

The prominence of the DIM has led scholars to focus on *whether* the state has a right to jurisdiction, rather than *where* and *how* jurisdictional capacities should operate due to the characteristics of a given context. This is because DIM is premised on three fundamental principles: (i) the notion of territorial distinctiveness, (ii) an assumption of ownership through inhabitation, (iii) and an assumption of independence requiring *separation* from other territories. Drawing on Francisco de Vitoria (37), John Locke (40), and Emmanuel Kant (41), *On Borders* demonstrates that the DIM operates via colonial assumptions of improvement and ownership that normatively justify identity-based borders. Among contemporary scholarship, as chapter 3 shows, the DIM has been mostly embraced across statist frameworks, critical border studies, and cosmopolitan theories that view borders as the limits of inclusion and exclusion between identity groups (60). By critiquing both statist and open-border arguments, *On Borders* contends that borders may be "necessary to have justice" insofar as they unite people in practice, but they do not *represent* the territorial limits of identity. Borders unite publics living in shared geographic spaces, who converge on cultural and place-based problems as a result. Chapter 4 concludes that if both statist and cosmopolitan frameworks rely on territory to substantiate their claims, then a practical, territory-centered conception of the border is needed (93).

It is in Part II that *On Borders* moves toward an account of place-specific duties and territorially sensitive border design. Chapter 6 draws on the works of Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kant, and Machiavelli to center context, localism, and realism as the three basic "doctrines" of Topian politics used to establish bordered institutions that meet the needs and capacities of its intended publics (125). While the naturalist rhetoric of these thinkers often situates Topianism in a deterministic lens (whether it is through geography, race, gender, or material conditions), Ochoa Espejo's argument emphasizes that natural conditions will *necessarily* intervene in human-made institutions (133). Taking land and the

finite character of resources seriously, as chapter 7 shows, changes how we think about borders and their capacities. Namely, the border becomes a potential tool for “sustaining and resisting domination,” by establishing cooperation through place-based duties that make rules “predictable and fair,” while clearly delimiting the territorial scope and deployment of the law (168).

This line of thinking moves into chapter 8, which expands on the Watershed Model of border design to respond to the paradox of bordered identity-based jurisdictions. The Watershed Model resolves two problems embedded in this paradox, according to Ochoa Espejo. First, the model assumes that territories are necessarily interconnected, and that jurisdiction cannot be based on identity (175). Second, by extension, cultural practices matter but they cannot become the criterion for exclusion (175). These principles lead to a conception of border design which assumes that the limits of political institutions are framed by questions of sustainability – both environmental and social – which define the capacities of jurisdiction (187, 190–192). Ochoa Espejo’s theory of border design prioritizes resiliency and longevity as contextually defined characteristics for the development of more realistically equitable boundaries. The goal is not to abolish the border, but to instrumentalize its regulatory capacities among *already*-related collectivities living in shared environments.

Part III of the book deploys these normative and political assessments to evaluate real-world examples of migration, environmental sustainability, and border design to account for the viability of the Watershed Model. Chapter 9 begins by assessing the moral justifiability of border control when understanding jurisdictional power as a primarily conventional political practice (214). As Ochoa Espejo writes, border control is grounded in a recognition of institutional boundaries by neighboring states and international order; but if borders are indeed pluralistic spaces, territorial rights cannot be reduced to jurisdictional capacities. This pluralistic lens allows *On Borders* to morally justify border control by emphasizing its organizational, conventional, and legitimating capacities (215–216), while also limiting its jurisdictional scope by focusing on interstate cooperation and reciprocity among evolving bordered communities. But what are the practical consequences of this pluralistic lens? As chapter 10 suggests, it begins with shifting our expectations for who gets to participate in designing and managing borders. Using the example of presence-based rights along the US-Mexico border (231), Ochoa Espejo argues that granting non-citizens a right to participate in local politics would allow bordered communities to fulfill their political duties (224). Chapter 11 shifts this claim toward environmental sustainability by using the example of rivers as a shared, transborder resource that requires place-based cooperation (251). Here the case of water access and sustainability illustrates the cooperative necessities behind place-based duties as well as the normative value of deploying the Watershed Model to protect shared ecosystems. Finally, chapter 12 turns to the proliferation of physical border walls to assess whether building borders, as a policy stance, should be understood as “prudentially rational” and morally acceptable (274). Here the US-Mexico border reappears as a case study for arguing that the policy is neither rational due to its human costs, nor morally justified, because the action is not connected to its goals (274).

Ochoa Espejo’s compelling argument in *On Borders* leads to a perhaps unexpected conclusion. Borders are useful, and can be morally justified given

their organizational capabilities, but keeping borders requires abolishing the notion that they synonymize jurisdictional power and collective identities. Thus, as Ochoa Espejo suggests, our language on border design, control, and reform would benefit from distinguishing between the “borders of states” and the “boundaries of belonging” (293). In a world where globalization and climate change quickly erode national boundaries, even as calls for border walls are simultaneously on the rise, *On Borders*’ appeal for place-based duties, trans-border cooperation, and sustainability are convincing. Questions instead arise given Ochoa Espejo’s careful recognition of the limitations of the Watershed Model for non-ideal contexts (194–195). In the non-ideal state of our world, in what situations does the Watershed Model prove the necessary change for addressing migratory, economic, and sustainability crises? This is not to say that the Watershed Model *should* address all these issues, but the framework is invested in doing so more effectively than competing (and more prevalent) approaches to border design. For example, while the model aims to advance beyond the paradox of popular sovereignty, at times it seems to risk expanding it by enlarging membership without resolving the need to identify a public (Ochoa Espejo recognizes as much on page 197). Would this model function just as well in a post-border world in which scalar political institutions (local, regional, global) could offer similarly place-based approaches? In other terms, is the Watershed Model a solution to an *insistently* bordered world, or does it argue for the border because it is a definite and *necessary* tool for collective politics? Ochoa Espejo’s thorough examination of border studies, as well as its place-based notion of border design, moves these debates forward across an impressively interdisciplinary area of research. The book’s rejection of the Desert Island Model, for instance, is convincing and largely concludes arguments for that framework. Other targets of rebuttal remain open for further explication. For instance, the book’s critique of abolitionist frameworks does not seem to be resolved by the Watershed Model given the author’s emphasis on regional and local spaces of belonging as the basis for addressing collective problems – two characteristics that are not exclusive to bordered jurisdiction. How do these same capacities manifest, or fail to do so, in a post-border society? The border is jurisdictionally useful, but it is less convincingly a *needed* institution for garnering collective cooperation.

Putting Ochoa Espejo’s text in conversation with Inés Valdez’s *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* brings forward important questions regarding how injustice and shifting collectivities can negotiate a Watershed Model of bordered jurisdictional power. For example, while *On Borders* calls for a place-based approach that accounts for spaces of belonging, it is unclear how it would deal with cases of Indigenous reclamation of land rights that appeal to the injustices of colonial legacies, and which seek to overcome the jurisdictional reach of bordered states. While this example rests on a territorial claim, it also emphasizes temporalities of injustice that operate transnationally and appeal to genealogies of belonging that many times undergird postcolonial critique. In other words, how would *On Borders*’s framework contend with the historical relationship between territory and justice, which many times precedes borders and is bound to transnational publics? Here Valdez’s *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* reminds us of the shifting, global character of counter-public movements that influence how people resist injustice. At the same



time, Ochoa Espejo's *On Borders* makes the indispensable point that borders *do* offer concrete institutional, regulatory, and jurisdictional capacities which are difficult to replicate in an equitable manner. To this end, it is perhaps best to use the power of the border whilst it is still fruitful to live in a bordered reality—and Ochoa Espejo makes a strong case that it is. These debates, like its problems of interest, can only continue. It is clear, however, that Valdez's *Transnational Cosmopolitanism* and Ochoa Espejo's *On Borders* expand, problematize, and complicate current studies on supranational politics in compelling ways. This proves an impressive feat when writing from a world in which centering place and space unequivocally involves contending with the crown jewel of global order: the nation-state system.

## Notes

1. These include the work of Juliet Hooker (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 2017), Adam Dahl (*Perspectives on Politics* 15[3]: 633–46, 2017), Joshua Simon (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2017), Adom Getachew (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2019), and Begüm Adalet (*Political Theory* 50[1]: 5–31, 2022).
2. Here we might think of Robert J.C. Young's *Postcolonialism* (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons 2001) for an account of postcolonial solidarity as a transnational political program. Adom Getachew's *Worldmaking After Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2019) also offers an analysis of postcolonial solidarities among Pan-African movements.
3. Ochoa Espejo's analysis of the dilemma of popular sovereignty builds on her previous book, *The Time of Popular Sovereignty* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press 2011).

## We're Not All Sick but None of Us is Well

Nate Holdren

Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Vierkant. *Health Communism: A Surplus Manifesto*. New York: Verso, 2022. 240 pp \$24.95. ISBN: 9781839765162.

*Health Communism* examines the destructive effects of capitalism on human well-being through two theoretical concepts, the worker/surplus distinction and extractive abandonment. The worker/surplus distinction focuses on the role of money in regulating the health and well-being of individuals, households, and populations in capitalism. Workers are conceptualized here as people supplied enough money—via labor markets, as wages received for the sale of labor power—to maintain their and their households' lives and cur-