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More-than-human Interconnections: Remedies against the new 'Cosmopolitan Normal' of Precarity?

Elisa T. Bertuzzo
Independent researcher

Corresponding author: Elisa T. Bertuzzo, et_bertuzzo@posteo.de

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Abstract

The essay addresses a disjuncture between the discourse on cosmopolitanism and migrants' everyday experience from a feminist and political ecology point of view, combining theorising with ethnographic observations. Migration as well as urban studies work validating the forms of organisation and 'economies of perception and collaborative practice' (Simone 2004) devised by individuals and communities in states of marginality, particularly in decolonised countries, informs a reflection about more-than-human interconnections emerging from migration between Bangladesh and Italy. Instead of male horizons of potent survival, experiences based on slow, subtle, often hardly visible, non-city-centric cooperations between human and vegetal cohabitants are foregrounded. Can the discourse on cosmopolitanism, seemingly dormant in migrant and activist circles, be activated by tying it more explicitly to movements opposing socio-economic precarity and ecological destruction?

Keywords

New Cosmopolitanisms; Feminism; Social/Environmental Movements; Migration; Bangladesh; Italy

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> 'To track the histories that make multispecies livability possible, it is not enough to watch lively bodies. Instead, we must wander through landscapes, where assemblages of the dead gather together with the living. In their juxtapositions, we see livability anew.'
>
> A. Tsing, H. Swanson, E. Gan, & N. Bubandt, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, 2017

Why cosmopolitanism, now

This article sets out to address a disjuncture between the discourse on cosmopolitanism and the everyday experience of migrants in racialising societies. I choose the style of an essay to lay open an ongoing conceptualisation and develop an argument, supported by theoretical elaborations and empirical observations of everyday life. As a genre, the essay emanates from western European philosophical and didactic traditions, manifesting in the contributions of authors such as *Michel de Montaigne (considered its first exponent), Georg Simmel, the early György Lukács,* Walter Benjamin; Taslima Nasreen, Adrienne Rich, Zadie Smith, Susan Sontag, are some contemporary female and feminist writers who commonly use the essay form. This form of writing is historically related to rhetoric and bound by the conventions of logic but, as Theodor Adorno (1991) put it, 'reflects the object without violence', without wanting to persuade. 'The thinker does not actually think but rather makes himself [*sic*] into an arena for intellectual experience, without unraveling it' (Adorno 1991, p. 13). Once an issue is set out, the essayist's method towards illuminating that issue consists of cross-connecting elements and facts drawn from theory and experience, rather than displaying them linearly, in a conclusive manner[1].

The present essay, informed by the literature on new cosmopolitanisms, should be read as an engagement with the missing but possible link between the discourse on cosmopolitanism and the everyday experiences of people living in circumstances of precarity, particularly migrants. Three main theoretical perspectives, discussed in detail in the second section, will be intertwined: migration studies' and political ecology's converging insight that migration and translocality are effects of intersectional inequality; anthropological and sociological work on self-organisation against poverty and discrimination specially in the 'Global South'; and feminist theorisations of solidarity and multispecies cohabitation, receptive to the perspectives of posthumanism. Evidence gathered through fieldwork in Bangladesh and Italy, presented in the third section, will ground these perspectives before attempting, in the concluding section, a (re)definition which will foreground the continual, and never univocal, process of 'becoming-cosmopolitan' in specific spaces and times.

In the past years, doing research on migration and migrants' organising in cities of South Asia and southern Europe, cosmopolitanism has occupied me rather by its absence. Migrants, community leaders, social workers, use the word reluctantly, if at all; references to 'cosmopolitanism' in social movements and civil society campaigns are rare. Considering that in today's increasingly globalised world, migrants and non-migrants entertain far-flung, often transcontinental, connections and relationships on a daily basis through media, personal information channels, financial transactions, business, diaspora and migrant networks, trade, etc., this fact is not immediately explainable. Theoretically, cosmopolitan lifestyles and horizons should be reflected in everyday speech and discourse. If they are not, we should ask some questions, at least if we agree that it is not people who 'fail' at embracing the theoretical conceptualisations offered by academia, but academic discourses that need to stand the test of contemporaneity, addressing the reality of everyday lives. Has the discourse on cosmopolitanism – compared to discourses that have managed to bridge the gap between academia and civil society quite well, from the 'Anthropocene' (Latour 2018; Chakrabarty 2021) to

1 Adorno himself speaks of 'moments' interwoven as in a carpet. As he points out, the essay 'neither makes deductions from a principle nor draws conclusions from coherent individual observations. It coordinates elements instead of subordinating them' in order to 'polarize the opaque element and release the latent forces in it' (Adorno 1991, p. 22, 23).

intersectionality (Dei 2008) or urban political ecology (Swyngedouw & Kaika 2014) – underperformed? If so, could it be activated?

A preliminary question to ask is, why *should* it be activated? The idea of cosmopolitanism and 'cosmopolitans' has been subject to criticism over the years, not least concerning the insufficient reflection of its patriarchal and colonial legacies (Gilroy 2000; Gupta 2008). However, a number of considerations have led scholars to try and recuperate or 'rescue' the discourse, dealing constructively with its limitations (Clifford 1992; Harvey 2000, 2009; Braidotti, Hanafin, & Blaagard 2013; and also Gilroy 2000; Gupta 2008). Rosi Braidotti, Patrick Hanafin and Bolette Blaagaard characterise these considerations quite well, I believe, as a '*yearning for* or *longing after* a cosmopolitan ideal … that takes into account the political and social reality of our world, so as to provide intellectually robust and constructive new foundations' (Braidotti, Hanafin, & Blaagard 2013, p. 2). A comparatively less optimistic reason to activate such a discourse derives from the continuing re-enforcement of borders, walls, particularisms and protectionisms, often under autocratic or utterly undemocratic governments backed by entangled economic interests, observed in the current age (Pott, Rass, & Wolff 2018; Klein 2022).

As armed conflicts, violence against women, children and minorities, ecological crises[2], supply crises and shortage of basic goods including water and grains, are becoming more severe, gathering projects and discourses on solidarity and collectivisation is important to at least fight off despair and disillusionment. Among those already available, the notion-horizon of cosmopolitanism, especially its promise of circulation and radical equality, seems helpful. Contours of this promise can be detected in a case I'm currently studying in Italy, where migrants from Bangladesh have started to grow 'deshi'[3] vegetables out of seeds imported and selected to fit the local soils and climate. If locally, the cultivation has the potential to improve food security and variety at affordable prices, also rejuvenating regions confronted for decades with land exodus and dwindling agricultural production, by following the migrating seeds and humans one can identify more far-reaching benefits of circulation, which will be discussed.

Summarising, while the horizon of circulation and radical equality offered by the discourse on cosmopolitanism could be helpful to counter some of the most worrying developments of the present age, it is necessary to ask how the discourse could 'perform' better outside of academia. In this essay, leaning on anticolonial and feminist contributions, I will assess the possibility to activate the notion-horizon of cosmopolitanism by linking it more explicitly to the contemporary reality of augmented migration.

Which cosmopolitanism?

While proposing that, I take as fact that living on the move, entertaining far-flung relationships, performing simultaneously different roles in different places, is not a cosmopolitan choice per se at all. For millions of people, it is an escape from circumstances of utter poverty and deprivation which, deriving from colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal exploitation, are unevenly distributed on the planetary level. Along with the discussion in the field of political ecology (Wolf 1982; Sultana 2022), migration studies offer a critical interpretation of this fact that is also being effectively put to use in the climate justice movement (Kofman et al. 2000; Gidvani 2006; Papadopoulus, Stephenson, & Tsianos 2008; Bachmann-Medick & Kugele 2018). The dramatic growth of internal and international migration worldwide in the past decades is exposed as a consequence of a combination of factors, ranging from climate change, persecution, war to chronic poverty, lack of fair and safe jobs and neoliberal austerity policies as well as economic restructuring (Buckley, McPhee, & Rogaly 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] 2020; McAuliffe &

2 The UN recognises three interwoven environmental crises: the biodiversity crisis, the climate crisis and the pollution crisis (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP] 2021). All relate to planetary geological and biological processes.

3 'Desh' means home – or familiar – country, and 'deshi' can be translated as 'local'.

Triandafyllidou 2021; International Organization for Migration [IOM] 2023; Lee & Romero 2023). This literature demonstrates how the drastic, not to say draconian, measures adopted by different governments to restrain people's mobility have not only made the routes of migration more perilous, as testified by the deaths along the US-Mexico border, in the Sahara desert, or the Mediterranean Sea (Castles 2004; De Genova 2005, 2017; Liberti 2011; Jones 2016; IOM n.d., 2017). They are also complcit in the appearance of ever more ferocious forms of exploitation of refugees and 'sans-papiers', both on the way and at their, often temporary, destinations (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013; Sagnet & Palmisano 2015; Buller et al. 2015; Islam & Hossain 2016).

Migration always correlates with socio-ecological processes which it is important to 'spatialise', or situate. In words of Saskia Sassen (2014, p. 222), 'When dynamics of expulsion proliferate, … the space of the expelled expands and becomes increasingly differentiated'; therefore, she urges making these spaces conceptually visible as they are, 'potentially, the new spaces for making—making local economies, new histories, and new modes of membership'. Research in urban anthropology and sociology joins migration studies in validating self-organisation and 'economies of perception and collaborative practice' (Simone 2004), particularly of the working poor in decolonised countries. It describes, e.g., how translocalised people manage to find housing, build coalitions, develop new forms of nomadic citizenship, shape global households with redistributive potentials and partake in politics both in the countries of departure and arrival (Smith 2001; Safri & Graham 2010; Brickell & Datta 2011). Although cosmopolitanism is not the explicit horizon, this scholarship can be said to contribute to a cosmopolitan discourse 'from below' in that it validates so-called 'informal' experiences of organising, sharing and improvising, also introducing them to so-called 'formal' sector disciplines, such as architecture, urban planning, governance, etc. An intention to produce theory from the 'Global South' and transfer its experiences onto a cosmo-political level with policy relevance transpires, most clearly perhaps, in Ananya Roy's (2005, 2009) declaration of informality as a generalised mode of metropolitan urbanisation.

The perspective guiding this essay is feminist. Reading, e.g., AbdouMaliq Simone's ethnographies of South African cities, one cannot but ask herself: Who avails of access, physical and mental stamina, self-entitlement, to sustain endeavours that are often dangerous and criminalised? Most of the time, only able bodied men. If unwillingly, the everyday experience of male-dominant-bodily proficient humans is constructed as universal although they by far do not constitute the majority (Mbembe 2001; Roy 2011; Bertuzzo 2016). Female, racially profiled and/or disabled humans; children; all more-than-human cohabitants of the planet, make fully different experiences (Moraga & Anzaldua 1981; Mies & Shiva 1993; Tsing et al. 2017; Hartman 2019), which must be foregrounded in order to contest the majoritarian masculine legal social contract, built on the desire to survive. As Braidotti (2013a, p. 14) argues, the latter doesn't promote 'a politics of empowerment, but one of entrapment in an imagined natural order which in our system translates into a bio-political regime of discipline and control of bodies'. For the reflection pursued here, striving to link cosmopolitanism and migration outside of andro- and anthropocentric paradigms, the challenge lies in the fact that these paradigms permeate most theoretical conceptualisations in western academia, including cosmopolitanism.

An example of this contradiction is the 'cosmofeminist project', inaugurated more than two decades ago by Sheldon Pollock et al. (2000). The authors, many of whom were from ex-colonial and decolonised countries, promoted domesticity as a 'vital interlocutor and not just an interloper in law, politics, and public ethics' and invoked the power of 'spheres of intimacy [*to*] generate legitimate pressure on any understanding of cosmopolitan solidarities and networks' (Pollock et al. 2000, p. 584). The domesticity and intimacy invoked by cosmofeminism, which explicitly aimed to de-centre hegemonic Euro-US-centric networks of knowledge production, are not reducible to the modern, heteronormative conceptions of both the terms in western thought. They speak to pre-colonial and decolonised relations, essential to projects which aim to valorise transversal cooperation outside the logics of patriarchy, domination and extractivism.

This anticolonial stance makes the project pertinent more than 20 years after its appearance. In its very foundations, however, cosmofeminism presupposed individual, capable, independently reasoning 'subjects', who were also unquestionably only human.

Meanwhile, anthropocentric conceptions are undergoing thorough review also in western thought and currents such as new materialism and posthumanism are engaged in their full deconstruction (Bennett 2010; Braidotti 2013b). Academia's interest in positions which broaden traditional understandings of ecology and assert lived intersubjectivity and multispecies cooperation – also in and through interspecies conflict – has grown steadily (Fox 2006; Haraway 2007, 2017; Multispecies Editing Collective [MEC] 2017). From the 'planetary cosmopolitanism' proposed by Siew Ying Shee, Orlando Woods, and Lily Kong (2023), articulating an ecologically nuanced cosmopolitanism on the basis of Buddhist ethics,[4] to Rosi Braidotti's plea for 'the acknowledgment of a *structural interconnection* among subjects that are complex and *material singularities in process*' (Braidotti 2013a, p. 8; my emphasis), the trend is to assert and embrace the complexity of processes of more-than-human cooperation and transformation. This aspect deserves careful consideration, since making the discourse on cosmopolitanism (or other discourses which promote solidarity and emancipation) more performative in the contemporary context requires us to embrace contemporary ideas around cooperation, and these cannot be restricted to human cooperation any longer.[5]

David Harvey notably brought the debate on how cosmopolitanism remained difficult to collectivise due to class issues – or the fact that throughout (western) history, being 'citizens of the world' has been a privilege reclaimed by urban, economically secure, white, male subjects (Brennan 1989; Gilroy 2000; The Racial Imaginary Institute 2022) – a step further in his book on the topic (2009). Highlighting neoliberalism's debilitating effects on historical movements for political-economic equality, he asserted the necessity to update the discourse on cosmopolitanism by paying more attention to the places and spaces of social relations and how they are co-determined by class and race. By doing so, a synchronisation between the discourse and social movements could be achieved. Judith Butler's interpretation of the assemblies formed during the *Occupy!* movement, with which people united on the streets of cities on the two sides of the Atlantic under the banner 'We are the 99%', offers what could be called the prototype of a class-aware cosmopolitanism along this line.[6] In the historical conjuncture, these assemblies, regarded as embodiments of 'a collective acting without a preestablished collective subject … plural, persisting, acting, and laying claim to a public sphere by which one has been abandoned' (Butler 2015, p. 59), became sites of cooperation and experimentation of new forms of lived organising which included the often neglected aspects of care and reproduction and influenced each other translocally.[7]

The question, 'What about the possibility that one might be hungry, angry, free, and reasoning, and that a political movement to overcome inequality in food distribution is a just and fair political movement?' (Butler 2015, p. 47), conveys Butler's view that precarity, unevenly distributed on the global scale and intersectionally aggravating, as it is, can trigger emancipatory moves and channel collective resistance

4 Shee, Woods, and Kong's sketch of 'planetary cosmopolitanism' is based on their study of neighbourly-led recycling and composting practices in Singapore.

5 As Tsing claims: 'what gave us the crazy idea that sociality was limited to humans? … That was a big part of this 20th-century program for human advancement, which didn't involve anybody else except us. … It turns out that we can't live by ourselves. All of the kinds of interdependencies across species, across many kinds of organisms, are absolutely essential to life, and we can't do it alone' (Mitman 2019).

6 Continuing on Harvey's line (and Judith Butler's) seems worthwhile exactly because of its focus on class, which gets diluted in other approaches.

7 Butler highlights the translocality of the movement, which was inspired by the democratic uprisings of 2009 in Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries, Iran's *Green Movement,* as well as Spain's *Indignados*. The public sphere it reclaimed, as Butler says, was in fact curbed, even strangled, by neoliberal austerity – both in the 'Global North' and 'Global South'.

against the regimes which produce inequality, including neoliberalism. Precarity could easily be declared today's 'cosmopolitan normal' and I believe that integrating into the discourse on cosmopolitanism the structurally uneven distribution of precarity, which (re)produces migration worldwide, could be strategically useful. When precarity is shared, individual control is relinquished and this can facilitate solidarity, the wish to cooperate and resist collectively. Exactly this potential can be harnessed towards making the discourse more performative, whereby the political ecology perspective which orientates this essay dictates that speaking of the unequal distribution of precarity, we focus ecological disadvantage. Endangered urban-rural metabolisms, disrupted supply chains and logistical and financial crises (owing to extractivist practices and austerity measures built upon western linear growth logics) represent a planetary threat, but the inhabitants of this planet are both differently exposed to environmental threats and unequally equipped to face and adapt to those (Calvário, Kaika, & Velegrakis 2021; Hickel & Slameršak 2022). Reading, for example, that of the 21 million people displaced by climate change-related disasters worldwide in 2019, 90% lived in poor countries and small island states (UNHCR 2020), one needs to situate 'poverty' in the context of western imperialism, colonialism and extractivism (Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2015; Morrison et al. 2023).

These considerations back a 'working answer' to the question asked earlier, 'Which cosmopolitanism?'. A concept of cosmopolitanism fit for the present time would have to be ecological, transformational and class-aware, articulated through shared precarity and cooperation, and grounded in the understanding that 'social reality' is not about, by and for humans only, but continuously shaped in more-than-human interconnections – precisely, interconnections among dynamic material singularities which are both structural, as hinted by Rosi Braidotti, and infrastructural, as I shall discuss shortly. How does social reality support, correct, specify, this proposition? The next section will offer examples gathered through fieldwork in Bangladesh and Italy.

Grounding cosmopolitanism

Many realities one encounters in countries ravaged by colonialism, and still dealing with its afterlives, as Bangladesh or India where my research has long been mainly based, speak to the tragic banality of slow ecocide. Lands dried out, flooded, eroded or contaminated because of deforestation, dams, embankments, or waste dumping; soils and water tables exhausted by over-cultivation and 'Green Revolution' measures; coastal lines, riverbeds and mountains disfigured by mining. Harvests deranged by erratic monsoon seasons and lack of rains causing droughts; havens of biodiversity such as the Sundarban encroached by illicit shrimp farms, aggravating the already rising salinity of the soil. Villagers and farmers, urban and circular migrants, are all able to identify the largely anthropogenic causes of such environmental crises[8] and most of the time recognise them as propellers of migration. But in these conversations, one gets the sense that if the circumstances compel people to move, this does not mean that they abandon, or surrender. Put in Butler's terminology, acknowledging precarity does not need interfere with the wish to change the circumstances. And as I learnt doing fieldwork, this transformative impulse often passes through unexpected, human and more-than-human, interconnections.

I think for example of the inhabitants of Phulbari, who in 2007-09 successfully mobilised against the construction of an open-pit coal mine planned by the government with two multinationals (Ahmed 2013). From this 'remote' village in the poverty-ridden district of Kurigram, one of the major 'sending regions' of migrants in and out of Bangladesh, the protests spread countrywide thanks to relatives working in the ship-breaking yards in the south of the country, in Dhaka, and all over Bangladesh, as well as worldwide thanks to NGO workers who reached out to activists in countries as far as the Philippines, Netherlands, Thailand, Kazakhstan and Australia (NGO Forum on ADB 2008). Similarly in West Bengal, India, the inhabitants of

8 Where the 'anthropos' certainly lies with the capitalist-developmentalist logics adhered to by colonial and postcolonial administrators and politicians, not themselves (Davis 2000; Moore 2016; Sultana 2022).

Singur and Nandigram managed to oppose appropriation of farming land for industrial development plans thanks to the support of civil society groups across the whole state, and kin who had migrated abroad (Roy 2014; Bertuzzo 2023). There are innumerable cases of people-on-the-move changing everyday life spaces and whole landscapes thanks to translocal interconnections and cooperation: from the new architectural styles and house typologies 'imported' by returnees, which slowly transform traditional practices of inhabitation (Bertuzzo 2024), to the foreign remittances used to build new homes, shops, factories, which are shaping 'remittance landscapes' all over Asia (McKay 2005; Rigg, Salamanca, & Thompson 2016; Mannan 2017). The more-than-human nature of these interconnections ought to be clear, as far more than only human inhabitants are being linked in larger ecologies, involving also buildings, goods, machinery and documents.

In such instances, a grounded, sturdy, 'everyday cosmopolitanism' shows through, enabling the most diverse material singularities (human and non) to identify and use structural interconnections. In research I am currently conducting, I focus the interplay of socio-ecological infrastructural supports – road, rail, water, air communication, mass media and digital technologies, relational skills, banking networks, money transfer apps, migrant and expat networks, etc. – which back it. I am finding the focus useful to navigate without fully losing orientation through the overlapping, often opaque trajectories of humans and seeds 'migrating' from Bangladesh to Italy. The Bangladeshi community in Italy has emerged only recently, but already makes for one of the country's largest migrant communities (Della Puppa 2022).[9] Conducting interviews in street markets and local shops of different cities in the summer of 2021, my attention was caught by the large quantities, variety and affordable prices of the 'deshi' *sobji* (vegetables) on the stands of Bangladeshi sellers: *karala* (bitter gourd), *sim* (sim bean), *chichinga* (snake gourd), *begun* (Asian eggplant), chillies, coriander, and more. Until not long ago, these had to be imported via the UK or from Dutch greenhouses. Now they are grown from north to south in Italy, thanks to the experiments, investments and labour of migrants who initially carried seeds from their villages and, sowing, cultivating, selecting them for a little over a decade, have developed breeds which are highly adapted to Italy's climate. Meanwhile, the yield is sold in cities all over the country and also in a number of Central-European cities (Bertuzzo 2022).

Migration studies show that migrants' access to the labour market, especially in the informal sector, is often channelled via language, ethnicity, and religious interconnections that are protected, if not guarded, by each community (Brickell & Datta 2011). The migrant labourers employed in Italy's agricultural sector – not rarely through the mafia-like system of *caporalato* (Sagnet & Palmisano 2015; FLAI CGIL 2022) – are mainly from India, Sri Lanka and a number of African countries, but not from Bangladesh.[10] The 'deshi' vegetable growers ventured into rural regions to become Italy's first generation of independent migrant farmers, without any job links or pre-existent community networks. The employment created might be absorbed only by countrymen and barely controlled in terms of labour standards, but the achievement is remarkable. The vegetables themselves, while reminding that biological life of all kinds and scales has always defeated borders, carried by the winds, rivers, seas, migrants or colonialists (Voskuil 2021), represent a novelty with disruptive potential,[11] opening the path for more sustainable, because local, food supply chains

9 Data of the Italian census on Bangladeshis living in Italy in 2017 reported a female-male ratio of ca. 1 to 3 and a total estimated population of 140,000 (Ministero del Lavoro e delle politiche sociali [MdL] 2018). However, the estimate of more than 400,000 calculated in a 2017 report of UNDP Bangladesh which used data on the remittances sent from Italy to Bangladesh, likely approximates the real figure better than the census (Monem 2017).

10 Bangladeshi labourers in Italy have mainly entered the hospitality and the metallurgical industry, aside from finding employment in Bangladeshi-run market stalls, grocery shops and small manufacturers. See Knights 1996; Priori 2012, 2016.

11 In economics, disruptive innovations are such through which 'a whole new population of consumers at the bottom of a market [*gets*] access to a product or service that was historically only accessible to consumers with a lot of money or a lot of skill' (Bower & Christensen 1995, pp. 45).

and more dietary diversity in regions increasingly faced with droughts and ecological distress. With growing awareness of the heavy ecological footprint of the global food industry, and following the devastating food shortages and supply crises which started to be felt also in Europe in recent years (remarkably during the Covid-19 pandemic and in the aftermath of Russia's attack on Ukraine), movements to 're-localise' food production have gained momentum, and increased cooperation between cultivators and local initiatives is at least not difficult to imagine.

Zooming in, one can recognise a number of socio-ecological infrastructures supporting cooperation and the constant becoming of the *sobji* gardens – often, hectares and hectares of fields: to start with, the coordinated, if invisible and often unrecognised workings of water, fungi, bugs, minerals, in the soil. The cultivators can rely on irrigation systems and on an availability of farming land which tells a story about the abandonment of rural areas and decay of agriculture in Italy (Apostoli Cappello 2023). Responding to the different climate, geology and topology, some are also adapting simple technologies, already available on site, and sharing their outcomes with each other. *Kulmi saak*, for example, a type of spinach that grows in water and normally develops in the monsoon and post-monsoon season, can now be cultivated for most of the year thanks to capillary webs of pipes that continuously moisten the plants. While personal, kin-based and regional networks are of course at play when labourers are recruited, these networks also offer support and help. Some of the labourers I interviewed knew each other from times before emigration; others had met in camps south of the Mediterranean and stayed together ever since. Most were in Italy with seasonal agricultural work visas, administered by their employers. As the regulations have been subject to repeated curtailments, repeals, reintroductions in the past years, dedicated *imo*[12] groups are used to share information.

Cooperation, reaching out and interconnections helped by wide-ranging kinship ties and the tools of digital and AI-supported communication[13] – and translation – are essential to the networks through which the *sobji* reach markets and shops across Italy and Central Europe. And again, socio-ecological infrastructures facilitate and multiply the contacts between Italy and Bangladesh. Via smart phones, migrants communicate daily with their spouses, children, parents; sons are prompted to think about marriage and introduced to possible wives; fresh arrivals share their impressions of Italy or seek comfort for their homesickness; imminent purchases, house building works, land transactions, are deliberated; businessmen arrange orders and future investments. Visits are occasions to distribute gifts – including 'Italian plants', such as basil, sage, rosemary, or flowers, for the balconies or gardens of newly built houses – but above all to collect new seeds and/or consumer goods that will be taken back to Italy and planted, and/or sold in grocery stores.

Becoming-cosmopolitans

Research on non-extractivist and collaborative translocal cooperation which women, immigrants, diasporic and disenfranchised groups have been devising for decades, worldwide, shows that people in positions of marginality can manage to shape desirable ways of living in capitalism's ruins, breaking the logic of surplus, growth and control, and validating solidarity, multispecies cohabitation and reproductive practices (Gibson-Graham 2009; Tsing 2015; Esteves et al. 2024). The case I presented joins this literature even though it is early to say whether perspectives which break with the logic of growth, accumulation and human domination will rise among the cultivators and/or the workers. At the moment, the horizon is private accumulation, and the methods of cultivation of the 'deshi' vegetables are innovative but align with the principles of conventional, maximum-output oriented agriculture. The remittances flowing from

12 The most used audio/video calling and instant messaging software among Bangladeshis in Italy.

13 These are creating new possibilities and easing access especially for individuals who are illiterate and/or do not use the Latin alphabet. See Makrygianni et al. 2022.

Italy to Bangladesh – a country of the 'Global South' regarded as a hotspot of climate change and climate migration – at least suggest a circulation with redistributive effects from the 'North', largely responsible for climate change, towards a 'South' that struggles with the long-term consequences of colonial exploitation and unabated global inequality. Looked at this way, more-than-human migration is not a mere consequence of climate change but, *like* climate change, represents a consequence of capitalist-extractivist practices which, *like* climate change, is catalysing transformations, emerging as people search for new ways of living.

The lens of cosmopolitanism and the structures, as well as infrastructures, which can support cosmopolitan practices in migrants' everyday life, offers a welcome occasion to review the equation between migration and cosmopolitanism. It is relevant to mention that the bulk of Bangladeshi arrivals in Italy in the past two decades do not belong – as was the case in previous years – to the urban, educated middle-to-upper classes in their natal country. Whether mediated by bilateral labour migration (exploitation) agreements or networks facilitating the dangerous path of 'illegal' migration, emigrating overseas since the 2000s has transformed from a 'privilege' of the professionals and educated classes into a mass phenomenon. Contemporary emigration from Bangladesh must then be regarded in its correlation with structural poverty and failing wealth redistribution (Bertuzzo 2019; Bhowmick 2023), with climate change and land loss caused by river erosion and rising sea levels (Etzold et al. 2014; Chowdhury et al. 2020), as well as with microcredit loans of whole families invested in the departure of one (male) member (Roy 2010). In the process, the UK – which used to be the main destination in the 20th century, owing to its colonial occupation of South Asia[14] – was flanked and slowly replaced by the Gulf states, Malaysia, Singapore (predominantly within labour migration agreements signed between governments) as well as Greece and Italy (mostly via the 'illegal' routes, leading through Morocco, Turkey, Libya).

Especially in Italy, the favourable immigration policies and family reunification conditions of the first decade of the 21st century are now showing up in the demography (Priori 2012; Fratsea & Papadopoulos 2021). Many of my interviewees reported on experiencing multiple forms of discrimination: from the 'main' community[15] and the other migrant communities, but also within their own community, along the lines of social class and education. In interviews, neither the farmers-entrepreneurs nor the labourers spoke of themselves as '*probashi*' (oversea migrant, exile), a word that evokes enrichment and self-realisation and could be associated with cosmopolitanism (Gardner 1995; Priori 2012). The Bengali term in use, '*bhinndeshi*' i.e. outsider or 'outlander', rather expressed a 'subaltern' consciousness.[16] Can the gap between this social reality and cosmopolitanism discourse be bridged? Yes, if the concept becomes transformational. That is to say, the 'cosmopolitan' should not be seen as a 'finished', established individual with given or acquired privileges but as a figure in the process of becoming, of acquiring emancipation from circumstances of precarity. Such an understanding would open humble and/or disillusioned positions on the condition of being migrant, as expressed in the word '*bhinndeshi*', for 'cosmopolitical' articulations.

Let's re-evoke the transformative experiences which shape, in Sassen's words (2014), the new spaces for making: 'global households' (Safri & Graham 2010); multi-local arrangements devised to bypass restrictive state definitions of 'residence' (Schmidt-Kallert & Franke 2013), or simply to cope with state and corporate-driven expulsions from the commons (Deshingkar & Farrington 2009). From these examples, it appears that people-on-the-move manage to transform conditions of disadvantage and marginality by constantly

14 Also see Adams 1994 and Siddiqui 2004.

15 The diminishing, infantilising and de-masculinising label for the Bangladeshi migrant established in spoken language – *indianino* ('little Indian') – is one example. Italy is still a country embedded in Catholic traditions and crisscrossed by right-wing propaganda; its governments have continually aligned with the European Union's policy of strict asylum procedures at the borders, deportation and rejection. See De Genova & Peutz 2010; Ciabarri 2020.

16 Perhaps also a loss of hopes in social mobility and accumulation?

cooperating, synchronising, participating in what others are doing, rather than by the potent, individual 'seizing the chance' portrayed in narratives of male everyday survival. A sharp awareness that contingencies of chance, time constraints, unforeseen developments at different levels, can always interfere with one's planned actions; that one is not 'in control', not even of one's body, exposed to inherently racist exclusion-inclusion logics of competing nation states (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013), can guide these doings. Therefore, it would be far-fetched to say that the Bangladeshi migrants I am meeting in Italy live as cosmopolitans, freely availing of socio-ecological infrastructures (globalisation-related connections, transnational migration networks and routes, supply chains, foreign remittances) to coordinate and mentally 'synchronise' simultaneous social realities (Massey 1991). I observe what could be rather called a locationally adapted, relational, embodied *attending (and, sometimes, attending to) while going*, mediated through practices which allow interconnection with human and non-human actants and function, or disfunction, in translocal ways, *through* – not 'in spite of' – geographic distance and the cosmopolitan constant of precarity.

In light of such observations, it is possible to conceptualise as 'becoming-cosmopolitan', a situated process of gaining emancipation from precarity through collective negotiations and exchanges in complex ecologies. Italy's landscapes, slowly if imperceptibly transforming as the *sobji* fields expand, are telling me stories of exhaustion and climate change but also of affective interconnections which can facilitate such an emancipatory process. Along with the bonding and friendships between migrants, more-than-human interconnections too form an intuition of ecological cohabitation. In the cases of Phulbari, Singur, Nandigram, whereas related earlier precarity and migration did not hinder but effectively supported inhabitants' resistance, the resistance also drew on affective connections with the landscape. In Italy, whereas the cultivators talked worriedly about increasing temperatures and dryness from Mantova in the north to Terracina in the centre-south, the sinking and 'soaked' territory of Venice was the subject of affective comments and they gave detailed descriptions of its more-than-human co-implications. Probably helped by the resemblance to certain regions of Bangladesh, this announced an emergent understanding of planetary environmental processes as inter-relational and shared. It is not realistic, therefore, to think that becoming-cosmopolitans expelled from their country of birth by privatisations, land erosion, aggravating environmental crises, and currently developing a bonding with the landscape of their country of 'destination', could soon mobilise against the damages done to landscapes far and near, through new strategic interconnections.[17]

Vis-à-vis the historical circumstances, academic discourse in general and the discourse on cosmopolitanism in particular have a role to play in critically studying and circulating instances of hope and working with grassroots organisations, civil society actors, activists and social movements, towards a futurity in which contingent, unforeseeable, even odd, more-than-human interconnections are considered as enabling life, not threatening survival-as-usual. Here I have sought to analyse novel cooperations and how they are manifested across moments of more-than-human intimacy – even if unacknowledged, curbed, or suppressed – linked with experiences of help and solidarity which migrants *also* make in everyday life. Cross-connecting these aspects through feminist and anticolonial literature, and through a political ecology point of view, I have concluded that becoming-cosmopolitan is a process occurring daily, in and through everyday interconnections. Even though those partaking in them may not identify as cosmopolitans, the exposed understanding of cosmopolitanism allows to find hopeful instances and possible ways forward in seemingly humble and marginal experiences, based on translocal interconnection, mutual (non-extractivist) cooperation, sharing and salvaging. Such an understanding, I suggest, could deepen as well as broaden transnational organising and extant social movements asserting the more-than-human right to cohabit a world freed of (neoliberal) precarity.

17 See also the work of Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014) on migrants' gardens in California.

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