Introducing 'New Cosmopolitanisms'

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Abstract

In May 2023, the editorial board of *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies* hosted an online conference on 'New Conceptualisations of Cosmopolitanism'. Discussions were rich and varied, across two days and several panels. The event was an experiment for the journal. This Special Issue is the result. There are ten papers in this Special Issue, falling into three broad fields of debate: four on themes of cosmopolitics, ethnonationalism and the national state; three on aspects of work, gender and cosmopolitan identification; and three on issues of climate action, land use and environmentalism. The editorial introduction seeks to summarise papers and draw out some common themes for wider debate.

Keywords

Cosmopolitanism; New Cosmopolitanisms; Cosmopolitics; Cosmopolitan Identity; Environmentalism

In May 2023 the editorial board of Cosmopolitan Civil Societies hosted an online conference on 'New Conceptualisations of Cosmopolitanism'. Discussions were rich and varied, across two days and several panels. There were sessions on spatial local-global relations, on gender, work, environment and climate change, and ethnonationalism. These were each led-off by keynote presentations, from Patrick Bond (University of Johannesburg, South Africa), Margaret Walton-Roberts (Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada), Debal SinghaRoy (Indira Gandhi National Open University and Nehru Memorial Museum, India), and Michael Samers (University of Kentucky, USA). Sessions demonstrated the breadth of debates, and also the relevance of cosmopolitanism across multiple fields of social life. Online presentations were well-attended, with participation across several continents, and the discussion demonstrated a very high level of engagement with the issues.

The event was an experiment for the journal, and we hope to repeat it in 2025. The intent was, in part, to publish formal session papers in the journal – and this Special Issue is the result. There are ten papers in this Special Issue, falling into three broad fields of debate: four on themes of cosmopolitics, ethnonationalism and the national state; three on aspects of work, gender and cosmopolitan identification; and three on issues of climate action, land use and environmentalism. This editorial introduction seeks to summarise papers and draw out some common themes for wider debate.

In announcing the call for papers, we posed the urgency for reconceptualising cosmopolitanism in terms of the need to address multiplying global crises. As we argued:

> *Global crises require global solutions, yet the last decade is marked by a growth in military and geopolitical tensions, with governments choosing national chauvinism over global problem-solving. While élite governance is increasingly inadequate, multiple social transitions produce new agendas and possibilities in local and trans-local contexts, beyond disaggregation or division. Social and political movements, for instance for human rights and social solidarity, can find new traction, sometimes with wide cross-sectoral and cross-national scope. New 'glocal' relations may be emerging that require new perspectives on the ways societies deal with alternated migration and mobility trajectories.*

With this provocation we asked a series of questions, 'How do new and diverse forms of cosmopolitanism emerge in civil societies, and what do they look like? Are they co-opted to the national imaginary? Do they become counter-narratives, generating new agendas and options? Or are they an irrelevance, at best in abeyance, sub-narratives waiting to surface? Where, in the current context, are cosmopolitan perspectives being mobilised on the ground, and what answers can they offer?' We ended by asking for contributions 'on the theme of developing cosmopolitan agendas within civil societies that may meet the challenges of our times', in order to 'correlate conceptual understandings, and move to a clearer strategic understanding of the possibilities in play, both for today and for future projections'. We hope the following Special Issue delivers on at least some aspects of this ambitious agenda.

The first section of the Special Issue debates ethno-nationalism and cosmopolitanism and is composed of three papers. The first, from Kazuma Matoba, focuses on historical amnesia, arguing that the post -War periods heralded the end of an assumed necessity for 'cosmopolitan peace'. The insight is powerful, as an epoch-changing moment where the necessity to prevent a third iteration of (nuclearized) world war is seen as passing into history, replaced by a myriad of hegemonic power-seeking projects directed at repressing and forgetting the lessons of history. For Matoba, the public are amenable to amnesia as a collective expression of 'post-trauma', of both knowing and denying culpability in global suffering. The traumas of refugee expulsion, and of climate change, are cases in point, as cosmopolitical crises that produce self-suppression and 'historical unconsciousness', and a state of 'doing nothing and just acting as bystanders'. Matoba suggests narratives of grounded 'social resilience' can help inoculate, generating the required dialogic reflexivity to overcome past traumas and reinstate the project of cosmopolitan peace.

In the second paper, Arnab Das and Madhumita Roy wrestle with a related problem of how to generate a concept of cosmopolitan 'home' that can transcend sectionalism and communalism. Das and Roy draw inspiration from the Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh, finding a cosmopolitanism centred on 'citizens of the world through their socio-economic activities while being at their homes and keeping their communal and cultural identities'. The figure of the footloose global cosmopolitan is often seen as 'homeless', an elite globalist; the alternative of localist homeliness is no more attractive, as entailing a constraining embrace. The preferred alternative is of home embedded in a dialogue with cosmopolitanism and vice versa: 'true cosmopolitanism welcomes strangeness and always rejuvenates one's sense of inquisitiveness, and also realizes that in order to emerge as a true cosmopolitan one needs to get immersed into the discursive space of domestic life'.

The third paper, from Debal SinghaRoy, brings these psychological and philosophical conceptions more into dialogue with the realm of the political. In addressing ethno-nationalism directly, SinghaRoy shows how cosmo-political claims need to be embedded in themes of social and cultural life in order to gain and retain traction. Abstract affiliation holds little power in confrontation with communalism or ethnocentrism. Using India as a case study he shows how socially-embedded anti-colonial resistance produced an aspiration to create a cosmopolitan and secular 'civic' nation able to express the wide range of identifications that constitute the country. The subsequent encounter with neoliberalism, post-1990, and the intensified struggle for individual economic advancement, has posed new challenges. Economic uncertainly has empowered 'ethnic' nationalists, threatening the post-colonial political project. In this context, primordial identities can gain ground, posing a danger to the civil peace. Against these tendencies SinghaRoy points to the reserves of Indian cosmopolitanism especially vested in Gandhian tradition of personal and collective sacrifice.

The second broad section of the Special Issue addresses issues of work, gender and cosmopolitan identification. Elisa Bertuzzo addresses the radical potential of cosmopolitanism as an answer 'from below' to authoritarian exclusions. The lived experience of migrant solidarity, forged in particular places, is explored as a foundation for a radicalised cosmopolitan identification, against the injustices of displacement. These are seen as centring on informal livelihood strategies, that break from the formal nexus of globalised capital. The strategies are created in states of 'precarity', and themselves carry a cosmopolitical impulse, especially when embedded in feminist critiques and in political ecology. The result is a relocating of cosmopolitics, away from dominant institutions, and instead vesting it in forms of marginalised collective sociality and socio-ecological connection. This type of cosmopolitan agency can offer something of an antidote to wider disruptions, as an immanent response that arises out of the collective experience that they generate. As such, Bertuzzo points to the possibility that social and ecological crisis can be seen to be 'enabling life, not threatening it'.

Mingyue Yang and Ching Lin Pang explore such connections in a focused investigation of women's work and identification set in Ruili, a Chinese trading town on the border with Myanmar. Here local women have become transnationalised as central players in a digital 'streaming' market for jade commerce. The women mediate between sellers and buyers, performing modes of adornment and cultural appreciation, along with detailed narrativization of the types, forms and origins of these highly-valued precious stones. Their online persona is accordingly magnified, and the women have become highly skilled and sought-after. Through these connections, Yang and Pang suggest, the women have created forms of 'strategic cosmopolitanism' related to new gender relations and forms of inter-cultural connectivity. Here digitally-mediated commerce is made visible as a site for cosmopolitan agency: it creates its own confinements but also reconfigures gender relations away from established patterns.

The fifth paper, from Christina Gabriel and Luisa Veronis, returns to the debate about migrant workers, questioning whether they can meaningfully be positioned as carriers of cosmopolitanism when the central state undermines work rights. The paper debates the barriers that skilled workers face when they seek recognition of their qualifications in Canada, and the consequent literal and figurative

exclusion by the Canadian state that results. This is seen as contradicting Canada's own commitment to inclusivity and actively to seeking skilled workers to meet its labour market needs. Canada's model of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' is eroded by these in-practice exclusions, especially as disenchanted migrants seek recognition elsewhere. The paper outlines reported experiences, and debates government and employer efforts to address the issues.

The final paper on issues of work and cosmopolitanism extends the debate about labour migrancy to South Africa. Greg Ruiters and Denys Uwimpuhwe focus on an apparent preference amongst South African employers for migrant workers from neighbouring countries, mainly from Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, rather than from South Africa itself. They outline how local workers are relatively well organised into unions and are more capable of organising effective industrial action; against this, employers seek unorganised migrant workers, a tendency that has accentuated post-Apartheid. This class context for recent anti-migrant xenophobia in South Africa is directly addressed by a range of new migrant rights organisations, and by the South African trade union movements, that together seek to regularise the employment status of migrants. This, the authors argue, creates the potential for a new Southern African 'cosmopolitanism from below', enacted through the migrant and labour movements, that offers a powerful materially-grounded alternative to abstracted and asocial human rights narratives.

The third broad section of the Special Issue focuses on themes of climate action, land use and environmentalism. The first paper in this section, from Patrick Bond, stays with South Africa, addressing its proposed transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. The paper focuses on the impacts of proposed large-scale solar power to fuel heavy industry in a Chinese-run Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Makhado. Interestingly, the driver for transition is European Union climate policy which from 2027 will penalise carbon-intensive imports; it was also presented as responding to opposition to the SEZ on the basis that it was to be fuelled by a new coal-fired power plant. Despite the move to solar power, many of the concerns about climate and social impacts remain in place. As Bond outlines, there are substantial emissions associated with industrial processing and a nearby coalfield is proposed for coal gasification, adding to SEZ emissions. Here we can see EU-centred cosmo-political climate policy being extended through trade linkages, but in this case inadvertently thereby enabling new industrial emissions.

From South Africa we move to India, and to the question of grassroots social agency for environmental action in the form of local 'self-help' initiatives. Sunita Dhal discusses the capacity for initiatives led by marginalised subsistence and Indigenous women, as practical responses to growing precarity under climate change. Self-help infrastructures have enabled local-level forest management, salinity prevention, pest management and seed-saving, as well as micro-financial initiatives. The 'social consciousness' that arises in this 'gender-neutral' space is seen as creating the basis for shared reflection and deliberation by women. A key issue identified is how to respond to the effects of climate change, and especially in terms of the use of local knowledge for cultivation and the growing use of livestock for food security. Dhal identifies this as a generative process of cosmopolitical engagement, initiated, translated and circulated at the grassroots, and she illustrates how this proceeds using in-depth ethnography.

The final paper in the Special Issue, from Kelechi Okoh and Kialee Nyiayaana, takes these questions of climate change and rural impacts to Nigeria. They find increasing pressure on the land as drought leads to land degradation and desertification, and pastoralists increasingly encroach on arable lands in search of foodstuff. The resulting tension is magnified by cultural and ethnic animosities between pastoralists and arable farmers and can erupt into serious conflict. Okoh and Nyiayaana show how the issue has exposed the unfinished business of inclusive citizenship in Nigeria. There have been successful efforts at allocating specified lands for pastoralists including the 5,000-hectare Rural Grazing Area in 2017. These come with regional government restrictions on grazing, based on the continued constitutional distinction between 'settler' and 'Indigenous' Nigerians, undermining prospects for an inclusive response to the growing climate

crisis. In outlining these counter-tendencies Okoh and Nyiayaana chart a powerful relationship between climate action, inclusivity and cosmopolitan governance, that can only deepen unto the future.

Overall, this Special Issue offers a remarkable range and depth of analysis. There is theoretical inquiry, ethnographic investigation and policy research. There is rich discussion and conceptualisation of the questions, along with in-depth analysis of practice and implementation. Most importantly, case studies range across Northern and Southern contexts, with a strong emphasis on Africa, India, and China, as well as Canada. Across most of the contributions there is a strong focus on contestation and on cosmopolitanisms 'from below', and the extent to which they offer critical counter-narratives. With this we can certainly respond to our original questions in the positive, that the papers help us gain a 'clearer strategic understanding of the possibilities in play, both for today and for future projections'.

We encourage you, the readers, to reflect on the questions that sparked these papers and to consider your own responses to them. The time is ripe for further debate and discussion of this important concept.

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