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Digital Cosmopolitanism: Notes from the Underground

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This article interrogates new forms of digital cosmopolitanism(s) by introducing a critical postcolonial framework that allows an investigation of how digital connectivity operates in the everyday lives of migrants. We are talking today not of the disenfranchised but of the “connected migrant” (Diminescu 2008), a new citizen of the world, who is both rooted and routed, and whose global interactions are marked by the use of social networks. This allows physical distance to be bridged by digital proximity, creating new paradigms for the understanding of the affective turn online, which significantly changes the experience of migration and the idea of connectivity. Yet the ubiquity of digital connectivity does not mean an end to social inequalities; it can lead to new forms of isolation and radicalization for subaltern subjects. New forms of datafication, biometric assemblage, and algorithmic culture have intensified the ways in which bodies and identities can circulate across and beyond borders, heightening the speed of connectivity and circulation. Despite and because of these new technological innovations, many bodies remain stuck in space and kept on hold. The undesired effects of function creep, data leaks, and biometric sorting lead to discriminatory practices that put the notion of digital cosmopolitanism in jeopardy, reactivating old, long-standing forms of colonial practices and surveillance, but now in the form of data extraction and biometric categorizations. A postcolonial intervention into the notion of digital cosmopolitanisms is therefore needed in order to chart the reproductions of power asymmetries, by focusing, for example, not only on digital voices from below but also on the everydayness of cosmopolitanism and on the banal ways of engaging with digital connectivity and transnational belonging. This article is part of the *Global Perspectives* Communication and Media special issue on “Media, Migration, and Nationalism,” guest-edited by Koen Leurs and Tomohisa Hirata.

INTRODUCTION

This intervention proposes to interrogate new forms of digital cosmopolitanisms by investigating how digital connectivity operates in the everyday lives of minorities, migrants, and refugees, contributing to a renewed understanding of the self, the other, and the world while accounting for new forms of divides and exclusion.

It will do this by providing a postcolonial framework that focuses on how the intersection between technological innovation and migration has provided new challenges and opportunities to resignify the notion of cosmopolitanism in a digital era. Recent cases of migration to Europe, for example, have shown that smartphones and digital connectivity are not just a privilege of the happy few but are easily accessible and affordable tools whose widespread use has changed not only the nature of migration but also the sense of identity and belonging (Ponzanesi and Leurs 2014; Van Liempt and Zijlstra 2017; Leurs and Smets 2018; Gillespie, Osseiran, and Cheesman 2018; Latonero and Kift 2018). We are talking today not of the disenfranchised but of the “connected migrant” (Diminescu 2008), a new citizen of the world, who is both rooted and routed, and whose global interactions are marked by the use of social networks.

This article is devoted to exploring the notion of “cosmopolitanism” and its possible encounters and frictions with the ideas of migration and ubiquitous connectivity. Its intent is by no means to offer cosmopolitanism as an ultimate solution to digital divides or other inequality concerns online or as a replacement for the postcolonial critical disposition. Given the uncompromising universalism of traditional cosmopolitan thought and the histories of complicity between cosmopolitanism and colonialism, it is necessary to proceed from a revision of its liberal tradition through postcolonial interventions, engaging with the cosmopolitan option both critically and affirmatively, in an attempt to rearticulate it within a postcolonial and anticolonial political standpoint.

Cosmopolitanism is therefore embraced here not as an ideal and a privilege of the West but as a traveling concept (Said 1984) that has moved through time and geographical constituencies to acquire new meanings and valences beyond its normative aspect. To this end, the notion of cosmopolitanism will be revisited as based on crossing and transgressing borders, not only through displacements but also through shared imaginaries on the move, as theorized by Arjun Appadurai (1996), and further elaborated upon in a rising field of digital diaspora studies that crisscrosses and

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overlaps with that of digital cosmopolitanism (Gilroy 1993; Franklin 2014; Zuckerman 2013; Arora 2019).

But in order to understand what the notion of “digital cosmopolitanism” can capture and the many pitfalls of this new label, it is necessary to review the main ideas in the long history of the term “cosmopolitanism,” from its classical origins to its contemporary diversification and appropriation.

CONCEPTS AND DEBATES

The notion of cosmopolitanism is often used to convey the crossing of borders and the abolition of national frontiers. Yet the resurgence of ethnonationalism and xenophobia at a worldwide level, from the United States to India and Brazil, testifies to a term that not only is under pressure but also needs to be requalified in order to be of any use and significance. To talk of cosmopolitanism means, in fact, to open Pandora’s box, because since its inception in Greek times, the definition of *cosmopolitan*—from the words *cosmo* and *polis*, meaning “citizen of the world”—has been subjected to many developments, contestations, and *querelles*.

For Kwame Anthony Appiah, cosmopolitanism has two essential qualities: (1) it shows an interest in the beliefs and practices of others, people who are unlike us, striving to understand and bridge, if not adopt, other ways of being and worldviews; (2) it entails also an obligation to help people who are not our kin, alleviating their suffering and offering assistance in case of need (Appiah 2007, xv). John Urry (2003) similarly conceptualized cosmopolitanism as a disposition of intellectual and aesthetic openness to people, places, and experiences that involves mobility, curiosity, self-reflexivity, and cultural literacies. This understanding of cosmopolitanism as a normative but also ethical engagement has a long history. From the Greek Stoics to cosmopolitanism in the age of digital connectivity, the term has evolved, retaining a flexibility as well as a foundational necessity to continue to exist. Kant’s “Toward Perpetual Peace” ([1795] 1999) argues that cosmopolitanism is a necessity born out of the modern nation-state. Kant argues that world peace is possible only when states organize themselves internally according to “republican” principles and externally as a league of nations, for the sake of keeping peace, and with respect for the human rights not only of their citizens but also of foreigners. The league of nations would also ensure that no wars or coercive military powers violated the sovereignty of states. According to Kant’s general principle, a good citizen needs to travel, and those who want to expand humankind can broaden their horizons through traveling. That he himself rarely traveled seems of no great consequence. He was an avid reader of all kinds of travel reports and hung out with tradesmen and seafarers at the docklands around his city—Königsberg, in the heart of Prussia—to hear all about the rest of the world. This links up with the idea of being connected from afar, creating imaginaries on the move that surpass physical location.

Cosmopolitanism as a way of thinking, feeling, and acting beyond the nation, as Cheah and Robbins have phrased it (1998), has been seen as a universalism of a specifically Western concept. It has often been linked to elite and privileged mobility, a refined and noble concept that could be experienced and practiced only by those who, through education or financial means, could afford to cross borders, languages, and political systems. Therefore, many critics have focused more recently on a critique of the Eurocentric bias of cosmopolitanism, debating how most cosmopolitan for-

mations derive from coercion or inequality, such as slavery, colonization, and imperialism (e.g., Gilroy 2004; Bhabra 2011; Baban 2016).

So the question is whether it is possible to have it both ways—a cosmopolitanism, with its promise of universal knowledge, justice, and peace, that also foregrounds a non-coercive and egalitarian politics, with respect for difference and locality. Posited in this way, cosmopolitanism emerges not as a normative concept but as an aspirational idea, something we should strive for in order to bring about a more equal and just world system. James Clifford has written that, instead of renouncing cosmopolitanism as a false universal, one can embrace it as an impulse to knowledge that is shared with others, a striving to transcend partiality that is itself partial, but no more so than the similar cognitive strivings of many diverse peoples (Clifford 1992, 1998).

Cosmopolitanism is, in fact, necessary and yet not enough. While we would like to celebrate a world without borders, the reality as we know it is that of increased entrenchments (both physical and imaginary; see Brown 2010). We have examples of the building of new walls à la Trump, barbed-wire fences in Eastern Europe to block the recent refugees from reaching Fortress Europe, as well as the pushback operations causing innumerable deaths in the “Black Mediterranean” (Di Maio 2012). These antic cosmopolitan standpoints are embraced by anti-immigrant parties, which provoke populism and ethnonationalism as a reaction to too much cosmopolitanism and free movement, and have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created regional and national lockdowns to contain global contamination. In times of crisis, cosmopolitanism returns to its elite definition of free movement for the happy few with visas and passports, in opposition to the illegal immigrants, the *sans-papiers*, the *haragags* (people who burn their documents and fingerprints to reach Europe; see Kaiser and Thiele 2016), though in extraordinary times, these distinctions seem to be blurred in favor of a new take on “mobility” and “immobility.”

In their introduction to the special issue on “Cosmopolitanism” that appeared in *Public Culture* in 2000, the guest editors—Sheldon Pollock, Carol A. Breckenridge, Homi K. Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty—sabotaged the classical notion of the term in favor of the “true cosmopolitans”: “Cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism’s upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community” (Pollock et al. 2000, 582). Cosmopolitanism becomes pluralized and recuperated as “cosmopolitanism(s)” by opening up to “other” forms of cosmopolitanism that have not been taken into consideration because they were left in the margins of history and therefore reduced to “unauthorized forms of cosmopolitanism.” But these forms of cosmopolitanism from below give way to a plurality of modes and histories, national and international; “we propose therefore that cosmopolitanism be considered in the plural, as cosmopolitanisms” (Pollock et al. 2000, 577).

This also explains why the term has multiplied in many adjectival variations. The emergence of many cosmopolitan neologisms since the 1990s testifies to the need to safeguard the ideal of cosmopolitanism while also attending to new realities and practices that call for a provincialized version or particularization of the term: “critical cosmopolitanism” (Rabinow 1986), “postcolonial cosmopolitanism” (Parry and Brantlinger 1991), “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Cohen 1992; Ackerman 1994), “nomadic subjects”

(Braidotti 1994), “discrepant cosmopolitanism” (Clifford 1992), “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Bhabha 1996, 2000; Werbner 1999, 2006; Gunew 2012), “patriotic cosmopolitanism” (Appiah 1998), “border cosmopolitanism” (Mignolo 2000), “planetary cosmopolitanism” (Spivak 1999; Gilroy 2004), “banal cosmopolitanism” (Beck 2002), “subaltern cosmopolitanism” and “cosmopolitan legality” (Santos, Boaventura, and Rodríguez-Garavito 2005), “indigenous cosmopolitanism” (Goodale 2006; Forte 2010), “emancipatory cosmopolitanism” (Pieterse 2006), “ordinary cosmopolitanism” (Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis 2009; Skrbis and Woodward 2007), “postcolonial cosmopolitanism” (Bhambra 2011; Baban 2016), “Cosmopolitan Europe” (Beck and Grande 2007; Pichler 2009; Ponzanesi 2018), “libidinal cosmopolitanism” (Boston 2016), “accidental cosmopolitanism” (Titley 2005), “cosmopolitanism(s)” (Robbins and Horta 2017a), “virtual cosmopolitanism” (Woolgar 2002; Hall 2018), and “digital cosmopolitans” (Zuckerman 2013).

Is the multiplication into various inflections of “cosmopolitanisms” (Robbins and Horta 2017a) not an undermining of the very notion of cosmopolitanism itself, or a Eurocentric attempt to save a Western concept? It is important to focus on the definition of cosmopolitanism from below, or, as suggested earlier in this article, from the point of view of migrants and refugees who are not choosing cosmopolitanism as a badge of honor but who engage practically and concretely in cosmopolitan practices on an everyday basis (Werbner 1999). Those are the subjects on the move who, for better or for worse, come into close contact with other cultures, ethnicities, and regimes of sovereignties. As such, they contribute to a radical revision not only of the notion of citizenship and belonging but also of nations and networks. Many migrant people are in the diaspora, and the diaspora constitutes an interesting ally and bubble within the “realm” of cosmopolitanism. On the one hand, it allows the strictures of the nation to be transcended, identifying with wider networks of belonging that are scattered and transnational. On the other hand, it functions as a glue that encapsulates and safeguards identity and the national while moving in and out of the national space (Leurs and Ponzanesi 2018).

A COSMOPOLITANISM OF CONNECTIONS

In his chapter on “A Cosmopolitanism of Connections,” Craig Calhoun talks of cosmopolitanism as emerging in the 1990s out of a new world order, with the dissolution of the Soviet Empire and the proliferation of global institutions, such as the United Nations and other nongovernmental organizations, but also of terrorism, war, and financial collapse, in addition to increased migration, climate change, and other viral contaminations that know no borders. This globalization calls for cosmopolitan justice but also for new forms of cosmopolitanism that can address new challenges. Electronic media allow us to transcend distance, meaning that no nations stand alone. But globalization is about different patterns of interconnections (Calhoun 2017, 191). And as Calhoun so famously writes, “although we are growing more connected, the patterns of our connections are varied and incomplete, not universal. It reminds us that we engage the larger world through our specific localities, nations, religions, and cultures, not by escaping them” (191). So even though cosmopolitanism is often seen as a style and as a form of consumption, cosmopolitanism is also about material conditions that are unevenly distributed. In short, Calhoun reminds us, cosmopolitanism is not equally available to everyone (193). Calhoun concludes therefore that

“We are connected, but incompletely. We have responsibilities because of our connections, because we are affected by and affect others; not just because of abstract similarities” (198).

And within this constellation, migrants emerge as the real cosmopolitans because they embody the imperfection of cosmopolitanism while continuing to practice its aspirational politics:

Migrants are agents of interconnection in a global world and sources of multicultural diversity in societies that cannot readily understand themselves as homogeneous even if some of their members—or their governments—want to. They are often cosmopolitan in the sense of having loyalties and connections to cross national borders, but for them globalization is not the abstract universalism of cosmopolitan theory. It is not that globalization is only for the rich, or powerful, or privileged; rather it is experienced very differently with different resources. Of course, globalization affects also those who do not travel, or travel far, and we need to ask what responsibilities educated cosmopolitans have towards them. (Calhoun 2017, 198)

According to this notion, cosmopolitanism is not just about the space beyond the nation but about a form of connections that is mutable and hypertextual: “Cosmopolitanism needs to be explored in terms of webs of specific connections that position us in the world—from friendship and kinship through national states or religions to market or global institutions. These are not just nested at different scales; they cross-cut each other, and it is good that they do so, for differences on one dimension are met by connections on another” (Calhoun 2017, 198). These ideas of cosmopolitanism not as territorial but as linked to different scales and ranges of connectivity are very useful and fit the needs of our times, in which different forms of migration, different forms of diasporic digitality, and different forms of cosmopolitan everydayness do indeed crisscross and stumble upon each other.

VIRTUAL COSMOPOLITANISM OR DIGITAL COSMOPOLITANISM?

Following Calhoun, connectivity emerges as an essential trait of cosmopolitanism in a digital age. In media and communication studies, connectivity refers to relations enabled via digital media technologies (Van Dijck 2013). Virtual expression of critical cosmopolitanism now takes place through technologically mediated networks that allow the exchange of symbols, ideas, and communication across the internet. Though the two terms—*virtual* and *digital*—are often used interchangeably, they pertain to different historical and media specificities. Whereas the virtual was often used in early debates on cyberspace and the utopian idea of an online world as separated/different from offline worlds, the digital is a more contemporary definition that breaks down the boundaries between online and offline, and posits digital practices as embedded in everyday life, contiguous and constitutive of individual and networked relations (see Candidatu, Leurs, and Ponzanesi 2019). The scholars below show the origin and development of the two terms, leading to a preference for the second in recent times.

According to Oliver Hall, “the prospects for a virtual cosmopolitanism are contingent upon the socio-technological capabilities of the internet to not just mediate, but reciprocate and bridge cross-cultural connections, ties and networks within and across national boundaries” (Hall 2018, 407). Critiques of the internet have seen the virtual as inau-

thetic and corroding, fragmenting and displacing the social capital based on “real” and “authentic” forms of face-to-face interactions (Turkle 2011). The affective and collective aspects of social capital are seen as being replaced by a more ephemeral, individualized, and leisure-related usage of the internet to the detriment of thick bonds with friends, neighbors, and relatives. This negative understanding of virtual cosmopolitanism creates an erroneous dichotomy between the virtual and the real by romanticizing contiguous face-to-face relations in contrast to the inauthentic, simulated, and hyperreal. However, as Woolgar described, “mediated sociality suggests the virtual to be every part of the real, not set against or replacing it, but supplementing if not enhancing the social” (Woolgar 2002, 16–18). Virtual communities are, like cosmopolitanism, based on broader, diffused, and plural networks. These wider networks allow the advancement of intercultural communication and the broadening of worldviews, with more heterogeneous ideas and a sense of belonging to the world beyond the local. This leads to the idea of imagined communities envisioned by Anderson, which are based not on face-to-face relations but on a modern sense of belonging to the same community by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson 1983, 6).

But these virtual engagements can also lead to encapsulation instead of cosmopolitanism, based on the idea of homophily (love of the same), the assumption that “birds of a feather flock together” (boyd 2014, 155–56). Therefore, rather than enhancing transnational communication and cosmopolitanism, they encourage ethnic encapsulation and segregation (see Leurs and Ponzanesi 2018, 11). As Ethan Zuckerman writes in *Digital Cosmopolitans*, the digital flow of interactions and ideas can potentially create and promote diverse networks across cultures and many groups, but what happens in practice is that the information flows remain within the bordered, homogenous, and local networks of one’s own environment (2013, 70). Networks, exchanges, and interactions tend to consolidate around shared identities and preferences that are marked by commonalities of ethnicity, gender, and nationality, age, social class, religion, etc. (Zuckerman 2013, 70). According to Ethan Zuckerman, the internet has created only an “imaginary cosmopolitanism” whose interactions are mostly between people who have similar points of view and share many commonalities (Zuckerman 2013, 70). “Homophily offers a reminder that our view of the world is local, incomplete, and inevitably biased. Our knowledge of other parts of the worlds, and our interest in stories from other nations, is influenced by the people we know and care about, and those people are more likely to be our countrymen than people from a different continent” (Zuckerman 2013, 73). Zuckerman calls for a reevaluation of what it means to be a true cosmopolitan in the age of the internet. His conclusion is that it is simply not enough to use social media and have access to the global flow of information. The essence of cosmopolitanism remains the aspiration and capacity to encounter the other, as Appiah highlighted above, and discuss and share beliefs, views, and ideas that might be different from ours, while maintaining the capacity to empathize with another’s point of view, as illustrated by Appiah in the opening section: “When we encounter content on the internet, physical distance is largely irrelevant; we seldom know whether we’re reading a web page hosted nearby or halfway around the world. But we need to consider another sort of distance, a distance between the familiar and unfamiliar. We celebrate the Internet’s ability to put unfamiliar and unexpected content at our fingertips, but we have to be cognizant of the difference between infrastructure and flow”

(Zuckerman 2013, 69). Therefore, virtual communities do not automatically produce a cosmopolitan openness but also lead to “enclavization” or “cyberbalkanization,” where similarities of beliefs, opinions, tastes, and interests become divisive. They can also lead to polarization through extreme ideologies shared online, such as antic cosmopolitan movements and right-wing and xenophobic nationalist white supremacists or terrorist networks that promote division and intolerance rather than communal and cosmopolitan values (Calhoun 1998, 384). Yet as Oliver Hall argues, even though homophilic networks tend to be formed around common interests, beliefs, and orientations, they can still cut across a wide spectrum of experiences and horizons, intersecting with various categories of identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and religion (Hall 2018, 409). Therefore, besides “bonding” with one’s own ethnic group, digital online activities can also lead to “bridging,” connecting with other groups “unlike us” and thus can enable a cosmopolitan disposition (Christensen and Jansson 2015).

These debates show that digital communications have not replaced existing forms of cosmopolitanism, but they have nonetheless greatly enhanced the possibilities for cosmopolitan interconnectivity, making it possible to have a deeper cultural engagement with the other. But within this constellation we should pay attention to “cosmopolitanism from below,” which Kurasawa defines as built from the connection between civic associations dispersed through a vast web of shifting nodes of commonality; shared interest; and solidarity negotiated across discursive networks (Kurasawa 2004, 234–39). According to Kurasawa, these bottom-up networks of virtual communication allow structures that facilitate processes of intercultural exchange, collaboration, and critique. This can create the conditions for a cosmopolitanism based on a “dialogical widening of horizons.” This implies also a conflict among different cultural modes, which can lead toward the acceptance and learning of difference and otherness, associated with an understanding and appreciation of tolerance and cultural pluralism (2004, 246). Digital cosmopolitanism is, therefore, intended as the power of the internet to engage with the other and shape new networks of solidarity, contributing to intercultural exchanges, global justice, and new types of subpolitical activities/counterpublics.

DIGITAL COSMOPOLITANISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS: DATA COLONIALISM, ALGORITHMS OF OPPRESSION, AND BIOMETRIC ASSEMBLAGE

Ideally, digital cosmopolitanism promotes the digital world as a place where social justice, equality, and respect for other forms of use, literacy, and practice are encouraged. However, in the current neoliberal context, this engagement with the other can be a rather fraught and biased notion. Digital cosmopolitanism is not only about the new potentialities of technologies to establish connections but also about the power of technology to create bias, othering, and classifications. This would mean that technology and the ways in which it operates through the internet need a critical assessment and must be decolonized. This need for decolonization is necessary in order to make sure that the invisible mechanisms of racism and sexual discrimination are also understood in their recomposition and transference in the online world, as evident, for example, in cyberbullying, Gamergate, and hate mail (Nakamura 2002; Daniels 2013; Sharma 2013; Titley 2019).

A postcolonial intervention is needed here in order to assess not only how digital divides continue to persist through

changing forms of literacies, access, and competencies but also how inequalities, segregation, and othering morph in the digital sphere as a result of new technological innovations. Postcolonial and decolonial discourses have been jointly challenging the dominance of European historical narratives. They are part of connected debates and contestations as both postcolonialism and decoloniality are developments within the broader politics of knowledge production that contest the world order established by European empires. Yet they have a different time frame and geographical orientations (Bhambra 2014). Furthermore, the decolonial discourse has emphasized the interconnected economies generated by the conquest of the Americas with a focus on the material and socioeconomic consequences that are still impacting the conditions of the Global South. Giving precedence to the economic above the discursive and to global interconnectivity above the center-periphery, the decolonial paradigm offers an interesting addition to the postcolonial intervention in elaborating on the internet as both discursive and material infrastructure in need of critical evaluation. This intervention proposes to decolonize the internet, in line with postcolonial critique, by arguing that technology is never neutral or innocent and that this assumption can lead to an antic cosmopolitan stance despite the connectivity mantra. By reviewing some of the recent developments, defined as technological assemblage, that include critical data studies, algorithmic culture, and biometrics, this section focuses on the dark side of technology and the need to reposition the ideal of digital cosmopolitanism as the antithesis of fraught infrastructures.

Therefore, we first need to acknowledge that decolonizing the internet should not be just a facile term. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have argued, “Decolonization is not a metaphor.” The term “decolonize” has been recently used rather loosely: “decolonize the curriculum,” “decolonize the museum,” and “decolonizing methods” turn decolonization into a metaphor. Though used to reach important goals for social justice and strengthen critical methodologies that decenter Eurocentric perspectives, it is incommensurable with the experience of decolonization. This form of domestication of decolonization is instead a way of recentering the discussion around white people’s guilt. The metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, “or settler moves to innocence,” the authors argue, that attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity and to rescue settler futurity. “When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization: it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (as a verb) and decolonize (as a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation [...] Decolonization is not a swappable term [...] Decolonization doesn’t have a synonym” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3). This move to innocence (Mawhinney 1998) has disenfranchised many indigenous peoples in their history of struggle and ongoing decolonization. Therefore, decolonization as a metaphor turns into an empty signifier.

Being aware of how the term *decolonization* has been hijacked by mainstream discourses implies a deeper understanding of how the metaphor of “decolonizing the internet” needs to be applied to an increasing datafication of our world in which the presupposed “others” are turned into algorithmic difference (Gangadharan 2014; Milan and Treré 2019; Apprigh et al. 2019). Such an understanding leads us to the need to also rethink a more structural operation

of colonization that takes place in the realm of digital media infrastructure. With the increasing datafication, which implies the conversion of subjects and daily life into data streams, bytes, dots, and pixels, a new form of “data colonialism” takes place that relates to the exploitation of human subjects through data extraction. According to Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias, this frame of colonialism is not just a metaphor or a simple echo of historic forms of territorial colonization but a new form of colonialism that is distinctive for our contemporary digital age: “Data Colonialism combines the predatory extractive practice of historical colonialism with the abstract quantification methods of computing. Understanding Big Data from the Global South means understanding capitalism’s current dependence on this new type of appropriation that works at every point in space where people or things are attached to today’s infrastructure of connection” (Couldry and Mejias 2019, 337). The extraction of data for commodification benefits mostly the Global North, in particular the United States and China, and it is, therefore, resonant of colonial practices of exploitation of land, resources, and bodies, although the epicenters have shifted. If data is the “new oil” (World Economic Forum 2011, 5, 7; Couldry and Mejias 2019, 340), to be appropriated by corporations and functions as a “raw material,” digital labor is also dispersed, deterritorialized, and decentralized (Terranova 2000; Ross 2013; Mezzadra and Neilson 2017). Labor outsourcing also takes place in digital assembly lines, remote call centers, and e-waste, the disposal of obsolete technological materials in non-Western countries that is harmful and toxic because of the metals and chemicals that, once released into the environment, lead to long-term illnesses and impairments. The disposal of e-waste runs counter to the idea of information and communication technology as clean and ecologically benign (Maxwell and Miller 2012).

These new forms of data colonization are the effect of a computational turn that concerns the datafication of everything and the replacement of subjects by automated data processes, a development that demands careful, critical engagement (Van Es and Schäfer 2017) as it undermines our idea of a cosmopolitan world, in which identities and subjectivities are coded according to new paradigms. This datafication of everything has led to influential works such as John Cheney-Lippold’s *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves* (2017), which explores what identity means in an algorithmic age, where clicks, likes, and purchases make the algorithm determine the information we can and should access, from ads to friend networks, turning complex social relationships into aggregated data that can assign and reassign us our gender, race, sexuality, and citizenship status. Algorithms create and recreate us, using our data. And this easily leads to forms of control and surveillance that make our datafied selves an object up for grabs.

Following this approach, Safiya U. Noble challenges the belief that algorithms are neutral and unbiased managers of information in *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018). This assumption obscures the programmers responsible for writing the algorithm’s code, as well as the commercial interests using algorithms to their advantage. Noble focuses more specifically on how digital decisions reinforce oppressive social relations and modes of racial profiling. The ubiquity of algorithmically driven software, both visible and invisible to ordinary people, leads to technologically embedded forms of discrimination, reproduced by computer codes and increasing artificial intelligence (AI). It is important to understand that these automated decisions are prepro-

grammed by humans in the first place. So while we may think that “big data” and “algorithms” are benign, objective, and transparent, the reality is that their architecture incorporates and reproduces sexist and racist attitudes and modes. Noble’s study focuses mainly on Google’s monopoly over our information infrastructure and economy. Referring in particular to representations of black culture through different examples, Noble shows that “algorithmic oppression is not just a glitch in the system but, rather, is fundamental to the operating system of the web... It is of particular concern for marginalized groups, those who are problematically represented in erroneous, stereotypical, or even pornographic ways in search engines and who have also struggled for nonstereotypical or nonracist and nonsexist depictions in the media and in libraries” (Noble 2018, 10). Noble uses black feminist theory and critical race studies to orient information sciences and algorithmic studies toward an agenda that centers on how algorithms affect the ability of marginalized communities to fight race- and gender-based oppression. In doing so, Noble’s work lifts up the voices and experiences of communities who are systematically excluded or misrepresented because of the way in which search engines manage society’s access to, and engagement with, information. For Noble, creating new epistemologies around science and technology that include historically marginalized people has the power to help us rethink our relationship with innovation, design, and resistance, in and outside of tech.

This rethinking of the relationship between technology and marginalized subjects contributes to a critical race studies approach to digital cosmopolitanism as it signals the protracted inequalities that are now entangled with the computational turn. Turning subjects into data also happens at the institutional level, through governmental classification and sorting that makes use of biometrics. As Koen Leurs and Tamara Shepherd elaborate in their work on “datafication and discrimination,” automated social sorting has become commonplace, and it has been used systematically in the past decade to control flows of undesired migrants at the borders: “For those privileged subjects carrying desirable passports, e-borders and iris scans sustain liquid flow across borders and planetary nomadic mobility as an effortless normality. By contrast, undesired subjects have to provide fingerprints—a genre of biometric data with a long history of criminal connotations—to be cross-referenced among a host of other identifiers in data-based risk calculations” (Leurs and Shepherd 2017, 214). Therefore, structural biases are at the basis of new forms of biometric registrations that have been increasingly used for humanitarian interventions. Refugees are faced with the choice of getting their “data” (fingerprints, iris scanning, or facial recognition) registered in order to receive humanitarian aid and food (Jacobsen 2017; Madianou 2019a, 2019b). Since the early 2000s, these biometric technologies have been used on a large scale, not only to provide the refugee with a digital identity but also to validate cases of frauds and criminalization (Ajana 2013b). As Btihaj Ajana defines it, “biometric can be defined as a new form of new media to the extent that it digitally mediates between the body and identity, the technology and biology, becoming a dominant form of governmentality” (Ajana 2013a, 3). These forms of identification and validation raise concerns not only about the sorting, categorization, and registration of people but also about “function creep,” the spilling over of technology devised for certain purposes into other areas, uses, and purposes, with impacts on safety, privacy, and bias. While systems of measurement and classification are not a recent

phenomenon (think of physiognomy, anthropometry, and phrenology), they have now become commonplace and give cause for serious concern when applied on a mass scale, without agential choice or clear consent, to vulnerable subjects such as refugees and asylum seekers, who have no control over how their data are stored, safeguarded, and shared. There are risks of leaking, hacking, and breaching with the new biometric systems of registration. Moreover, the systems are intended not only to aid the processing of large numbers of refugees but also to experiment with new forms of technological innovation, turning the refugee camp into an experimental laboratory, where risks and bias have not been researched and established/excluded (Madianou 2019b; Jacobsen 2017; Ajana 2013a; Aradau and Blanke 2017; Pugliese 2010; Duffield 2016; Magnet 2011; Amooore 2006). “Critical analyses of algorithmic security and digital surveillance have also focused on techniques and devices that produce ‘data doubles’ through data patterns and associations. These have emphasised the work and profiling and normalization that produce categories of ‘undesirables’ and risky selves to be monitored, corrected, or excluded based on the anticipation of future behaviours, while ‘normal’ citizens are integrated within the flows of capital” (Aradau and Blanke 2017, 6). The UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, aiming for an integrated worldwide registration system, highlights only the benefits of these massive-scale operations—efficiency, accuracy, and preventing fraud (Jacobsen 2017, 537)—but a critical reading of the effects/consequences of these technologies for refugees needs to be done. The normalization and routinization of biometric registration poses serious ethical issues, making the refugees into subjects who are even more at risk and therefore turning the technological solutionism into a new problem.

The spread of biometrics into an increasing number of refugee settings is also the production of data which is of value to national authorities in host states, as well as to other actors who have adopted biometrics as a key security and anti-terror technology. Adding to this, another sense in which these practices are not a peripheral concern is their role in facilitating an expansion of sovereign power into new domains of life. By taking seriously the constitutive character of biometrics, it is possible to appreciate how humanitarian refugee biometrics has rendered new domains of life intervenable. (Jacobsen 2017, 545)

These biometric data are also increasingly interesting for commercial partners and ventures—for example, Google and Facebook—which can lead to malevolent forms of commercialization. Every “calculation” point—data gathering, organization, aggregation, algorithmic design, interpretation, prediction, and visualization—serves to construct legitimized difference by reproducing existing inequalities across individuals as data subjects.

This reproduction of inequalities leads to what Mirca Madianou defines as “technocolonialism,” a concept that captures how the convergence of digital developments with humanitarian structures and market forces continues to perpetuate social domination and to explain the endurance of coloniality after the emancipation of colonized territories from empire (Madianou 2019b, 2; Quijano 2000). Technocolonialism, Madianou argues, shifts the attention to the constitutive role that data and digital innovation play in entrenching power asymmetries between refugees and aid agencies, and ultimately inequalities in the global context. This reinvigorates and reworks colonial relationships of dependency as [t]he reworking of colonial relations of in-

equality occurs in a number of ways: through the extraction of value from the data of refugees and other vulnerable people; through the extraction of value from experimentation with new technologies in fragile situations for the benefit of stakeholders, including private companies; by materializing the intangible forms and “ruins” of colonial legacies such as discrimination; by contributing to the production of social orders that entrench the “coloniality of power” (Quijano 2000); and by justifying some of these practices under the shibboleth of “emergencies” (Madianou 2019b, 2). Therefore, the myth of digital cosmopolitanism is often belied by technological advancement, experimentation, platformization, and datafication that reinstall and reproduce barriers, inequalities, and bias. This predicament is inescapable, as one of the striking things about the “faults” and “failures” of the rising world of machine learning, artificial intelligence, and big data is how human they all are. Facial recognition and Google’s imaging algorithms are notoriously racist (Browne 2015). Identification (recognition to determine who a person is) and verification (authentication to establish whether the person is who he or she claims to be) are reproducing many of the racial and discriminatory paradigms that the internet in its utopian early phase was supposed to abolish/undo. It is important to remain conscious and aware of this infrastructural repurposing of anticosmopolitan dispositions. Yet, following Spivak’s deconstructive mode, digital cosmopolitanism is something that “we cannot not want” (Spivak 1999, 110); therefore we should productively embrace the tension of cosmopolitanism.

To look for practices and instances of digital cosmopolitanism means acknowledging the implicated nature but also the resilience of digital imaginaries to forge alliances and connections, thinking, feeling, and acting beyond the nation.

DIGITAL POSTCOLONIAL COSMOPOLITANISM

As the various debates have shown, the increased connectivity and digitization of our society does not automatically mean an accelerated adoption and more widespread form of cosmopolitanism. This outcome also holds for the world of academia, where computation has not led to a digital cosmopolitan outlook but has instead reinforced difference between the Global North and the Global South, what Apadurai captures as “a new academic digital divide” (Apadurai 2016). On the contrary, the ubiquity of virtual connectivity does not bring an end to social inequalities, which are re-proposed in the online world in transformed but not unmitigated forms of racism, segregation, and securitization, which can lead to new forms of isolation and radicalization for subaltern subjects (Spivak 1988; Fernández 1999; Nakamura 2002; Gajjala 2012). Refugees, stereotypically perceived as exemplary “have-nots,” as a form of high-tech Orientalism, are afforded the celebration of technological access only as long as they remain ethnically distant, foreign, alien, and exotic, and consequently not included in this Western ideological model of participatory culture. The entry of these “ultimate outsiders” bearing the markings of digital technologies—indeed, sometimes enabled by these markings to escape their contexts and risk mobility—signals a crisis, and the technologies that were supposed to be their “saviors” end up becoming technologies that mark them as inauthentic and undeserving.

Yet despite Europe’s blocking migrants before they even reach its borders, connections and relations to Europe and its many diasporas cannot be prevented. Europe is becoming more than a legal and territorial entity as it opens up

to crisscrossed histories and new forms of entitlements. It is therefore important to acknowledge, account for, and gauge the ways in which the borders of Europe are porous and shifting, being replaced by digital networks and flows (Castells 1996) along with new forms of confines and divisions.

To conclude, I would like to briefly mention the ERC project ConnectingEurope (see <http://connectingeuropeproject.eu/>) that I and my team have been working on, in which issues of locality, particularity, and urban situatedness are coming up against the ideas of flows and networks, connecting migrant women of Romanian, Somali, and Turkish descent living in major European metropolitan centers (London, Amsterdam, and Rome) to their own ethnic groups and diasporas but also crisscrossing diasporas and establishing relations with other groups. Therefore, we study how bonding and bridging works in their everyday online practices, focusing not only on digital methods and big data but also on the everydayness of their digital practices, what Ulrich Beck would call “banal ways.” This approach to cosmopolitanism does not refer so much to the downgrading from elite cosmopolitanism to banal, from privileged to ordinary; rather, it expresses the core notion of the Stoic definition of cosmopolitanism, which, for critics like Werbner and others who have professed “cosmopolitanism from below,” refers to the experience not of elite and privileged actors but of ordinary people, including migrants and displaced people.

For Beck, the distinction between cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitanization lies in the fact that the latter typically affects modern society at large in “banal” ways (Beck 2002, 2006). This fact is inescapable and happens whether we notice and acknowledge it or not. Cosmopolitanization means that “the key question of a way of life, nourishment, production, identity, fear, memory, pleasure, fate, can no longer be located nationally or locally, but only globally or *glocally*” (Beck 2002, 29–30). However, Beck states, “it would be utterly mistaken to equate cosmopolitanization with the idea that nowadays everyone is automatically a cosmopolitan. The opposite is more likely to be true: a world-wide trend towards the re-discovery of national identity” (Beck 2010, 68–69).

This forces us to go against methodological nationalism and to question the very notion of ethnic essentialism and the erasure of the nation-state (Beck 2002).

Cosmopolitanization and digitalization do not bring an end to the encapsulating tendencies of political nationalism and ethnic essentialism. Even though mediated interconnectivity and globalization lead to “the erosion of distinct boundaries, dividing markets, states, civilizations, cultures, and not least of all the lifeworlds of different peoples,” it also “exacerbates economic and representational inequalities and brings exclusivism and tension as in the case of the Mohammed cartoons” (Christensen and Jansson 2015, 16).

The focus on everyday cosmopolitanization and encapsulation develops the concept of the connected migrant as a distinctly located geopolitical figuration, continuously reshaped by the myriad relevant state and nonstate actors in the field of migration, border control, and management. Therefore we need to engage critically with popular meta-categories such as participatory culture, social media users, connected migrants, and digital diasporas.

CONCLUSION

To return to our notion of cosmopolitanism: can it still be a useful category of analysis for addressing communication

and connectivity in the wider sense in a way that allows the transcending of the strictures of nations without losing itself in ephemeral transnationalism? As Robbins and Horta conclude, “the question presupposes that, even if we seek to describe its actually existing shapes and spaces, cosmopolitanism remains for us a strenuous aspiration” (2017a, 16).

This article has proposed a twofold intervention in the debates around cosmopolitanism in the twenty-first century. Firstly, it contends that current discourse does not sufficiently take into account the rise of the digital and digitalization, which are profoundly changing the importance of the nation-state for people in terms of belonging, zones of association, and everyday contact; secondly, it accounts for those who are perhaps the true cosmopolitans—refugees, migrants, and other subaltern subjects who flee war, persecution, and economic disaster in what are often postcolonial spaces. Despite the flourishing of alternative terms and explications, the scholarship has not yet properly adapted to these developments and taken them into account.

The concept of cosmopolitanism has been the object of one of the most significant debates in the social sciences and humanities in recent decades (Beck and Sznaider 2006; Beck and Grande 2010). In the process, cosmopolitanism has refashioned itself, moving beyond philosophy and political theory, its conventional home, to social theory and research, and ranging widely across anthropology, geography, cultural studies, literary criticism, legal studies, international relations, social history, and, most recently, digital media. New, more or less reflexive and critical cosmopolitanisms have since proliferated. They have been preoccupied, first, with squaring the circle of abstract universalism by emphasizing respect for the particularity of human diversity. In the second place, they have sought to expand the circumference of the circle to include (if not to favor) those for whom cosmopolitanism is not a lifestyle choice but the tragic, involuntary condition of the refugee, forced migrant, or the otherwise dispossessed.

Yet the dispossessed are not just the disenfranchised and uprooted migrants; in the new digital environment, a complex intersection of connectivity and bordering versus surveillance and hacking is taking place, revisiting the notion of cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitanization from below. Digital technologies not only help reduce isolation by creating digital proximity but also help create new networks of belonging that transcend traditional notions of boundaries and frontiers despite securitization policies and anti-immigration legislation. It is, in particular, on the practice and analysis of the everyday, mundane, ordinary, and banal ways that the engagement with the digital and the cosmopolitan should focus in order to emphasize locality and rootedness with connectivity and encounters without stumbling into the danger of methodological nationalism. This is a proposal to revisit studies of migration as part of the postcolonial condition where global flows are always marked by spaces of difference and resistance.

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