THE COSMOPOLITICS OF INHABITING MULTIPLE WORLDS

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The idea of a cosmopolitan world that recognizes the humanity of all as equal fellow-beings has perhaps never been felt as powerfully as now when the feeling of inhabiting a world in crisis seems to be a widespread concern. We believe it is important to return to the debates and discussions around the concept of cosmopolitanism to grasp what it means to inhabit a world that seems to be fast imploding, and to be cosmopolitan today, if at all that is possible or even desirable.

In her seminal work, *Life and Words* (2007), Veena Das writes on the aftermath of violence, "What it is to inhabit a world? How does one make the world one's own?". Drawing on such questions, we ask, can there be *an* inhabitance of *the* world? What does it mean, what would it mean, to reimagine the world(s) in order to inhabit it (or them) differently? How do we live with the Other(s) in such world(s)? As anthropologists, we offer our thoughts on cosmopolitanism such that the *concept* of cosmopolitanism remains entangled with life as lived. Drawing on and extending the existing work on cosmopolitanism, we prefer the term "cosmopolitics" in its incorporation of "politics" with "cosmos" or the world.

For us, the notion of cosmopolitics enables a move away from universalism as well as reified cultural differences. This double departure allows us to build on the notion of the world as multiple in itself, that neither takes the nation-state as the primary referent of identity and co-habitation nor renders it irrelevant. Taking the lack of finality in identity-making as central to our anthropological conception of cosmopolitics, we argue that cosmopolitics is simultaneously *lived practice* and *abstract potential.* For us cosmopolitics as lived practice refers to the practices of

trying to reconcile with differences, and therein lies and emerges the abstract potential of inhabiting the world in ways that neither simply tolerate nor obliterate Otherness (Stengers 2005).

We present two ethnographic examples from our respective field sites of Puducherry and Kashmir. By focusing on the local textures, we show how people grapple with their worlds as these become unsettled and unfamiliar; fraught with differences. At times, reconciliation leaves differences unresolved exemplifying the cosmopolitical impulse, while at others cosmopolitics remains an impossibility or gets engulfed within universals. Yet, if cosmopolitics is a potential, then its deferral too remains hopeful in opening out to futures unknown.

From Cosmopolitanism to Cosmopolitics: The nation-state and cultural differences

Scholars of cosmopolitanism have variously engaged with the nation-state and nationalism. Whilst humanist understandings of cosmopolitanism underpinned by some notion of universal humanness emphasize the transgression of national boundaries as imperative to cosmopolitanism, critics of such universalism pay attention to the local within transnational contexts. Differences notwithstanding, many on either side of the divide are united in opposing cosmopolitanism to nationalism.

Exemplifying the former stance, Ulrich Beck conceptualizes cosmopolitanism as the product of European Enlightenment and subsequently as a matter of "global experience," "For in the cosmopolitan outlook, methodologically understood, there resides the latent potential to break out of the self-centered narcissism of the national outlook and the dull incomprehension with which it infects thought and action, and thereby enlighten human beings concerning the real, internal cosmopolitization of their lifeworlds and institutions" (Beck 2006:2). For Beck, cosmopolitanism is both experiential—"the cosmopolitan outlook"— and normative ideology and aspiration—"cosmopolitization of lifeworlds and institutions." However, Beck (2006) does not oppose the national to the international, nor suggests that cosmopolitanism can replace nationalism since the nation-state is necessary for upholding human rights and democracy. Yet, nationalism per se, for Beck, cannot provide the ground for the cosmopolitan ideal to germinate and grow.

Further, whether or not a universal ground for common-ness can afford a tenable politics is another issue. Etienne Balibar, in the context of European borders, cogently argues, "Nomadic subjects" who "resist territorialization remain located outside the normative 'political space,' in the land of (political) *nowhere* which can also become a *counterpolitical* or an *apolitical* space" (Balibar 2009:192, emphasis in the original). Thus, if cosmopolitanism, rooted in some universalism, means opposition to nationalism, then it remains to be seen how such an opposition can be upheld without dissolving into yet another (cosmopolitan) homogeneity. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (1998), in their seminal work on cosmopolitics, complicate cosmopolitanism as the ground for contested politics, recognizing the limitations of a cosmopolitanism-versus-nationalism/nation-state model.

Dissatisfaction with these terms related to the politics of universalism has led many to think of plural cosmopolitanisms. James Clifford's (1992) "discrepant cosmopolitanism," for instance, locates agency in culture and its ability to resist hegemony under neocolonial global

capitalism. Ever increasing movements of populations across global inequities and regimes of oppression lead to the birth of varied and discrepant cosmopolitanisms, Clifford argues. Homi Bhabha's (1996) "vernacular cosmopolitanism," and Robbins and Horta's (2017) much celebrated "cosmopolitanisms" also present the possibility of cosmopolitanism always being in the plural, negating a normative universalistic ideal of one unified scheme of belonging and identification.

However, proponents arguing that multiple cosmopolitanisms resist and subvert the universalist ideal of imperialist cosmopolitanism, and the nationalist ethos of the post-colonial nation state, disregard the nation-state a bit too easily. They assume that radical hybrid cosmopolitanisms allow everyone the means to reject and resist it. Cheah, by contrast argues, "that the accounts of radical cosmopolitan agency offered by hybridity theory obscure the material dynamics of nationalism in neo-colonial globalization" (Cheah 1997:160). Further, "this foreclosure occurs because hybridity theorists subscribe to the same concept of normative as the old style philosophical cosmopolitanism they reject: this understanding of culture as the realm of humanity's freedom from the given" (Cheah 1997:160).

We concur that it is necessary to locate ideas of cosmopolitanism, "both within and beyond the nation" (Cheah and Robbins 1998:12). While globalization and trans-border movements of people signal significant individual and collective trajectories, the nation-state cannot be ignored. For, transnational does not immediately mean post-national. In our ethnographic examples, the nation-state keeps surfacing as an important referent of identity, an interlocutor in plural imaginaries of belonging to and inhabiting one's worlds.

We also reject the proposition of a *cultural spectrum,* central to several theories on alternative cosmopolitanisms, accommodating the flow and movements of people across borders and territorially bounded spaces as cosmopolitan based on cultural richness. Such conceptualizations celebrate local cultural agency as inherently emancipatory in light of global inequities. Consider Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of Robbins, "To suggest now that global minorities, labour export, paperless immigrant women achieve cosmopolitanism is to forget that they must exist in race-class divided situations where it is impossible to feel or exercise the sense of general equality that must be the definitive predication of epistemic cosmopolitanism" (Spivak 2013:111).

It is at this juncture that cosmopolitics appears as a more productive term. Cosmopolitics poses, "not as universal reason in disguise, but as one on a series of scales, as an area both within and beyond the nation (and yet falling short of humanity) that is inhabited by a variety of cosmopolitanisms" (Cheah and Robbins 1998:12). David Harvey's privileging of the term also echoes such a position, "cosmopolitics is a process by which different persons negotiate issues that arise within different spaces in different ways" (Harvey 2017:54).

We envisage the world as multiple-in-itself, both encompassing the nation-state and going beyond it. For us, the constituent world(s) refers to the order(s) from which its (their) members derive and compose the referents of self-identity and relatability to others at any given point in time. Thus, one's primary referent could be Indian but also simultaneously Muslim and inhabitant of a trans-border Muslim identity. Alternatively, one could find resonances of Indian anti-casteist politics in the Black Lives Matter movement; or identify as a postcolonial feminist

from the "Global South." None of these inhabitances, social, political, economic, and epistemic, can presume either marginality *or* privilege as given. Nor can they presume the irrelevance or the absolute centrality of the nation-state to the concomitant and potential cosmopolitics. Instead, these worlds are both stable and contingent, beset with differences.

Our conception of the world takes multiple but coeval belonging as its central facet. As Nina Glick Schiller argues, a new cosmopolitanism must challenge and move beyond, "projecting and statistically representing a world of monistic identities rather than overlapping simultaneous belongings" (Glick Schiller 2017:32). Such simultaneous belongings must be recognized as coeval despite their differences, and the world emerging from such belongings and within which belongings participate as always lacking finality. Viewing the world as such creates the possibilities of recognizing the incommensurabilities between people, communities, their politics, and their worlds, which neither make a coming-together inevitable nor impossible, neither promising a better future (if only to ask, for who?) nor negating its possibility (Glick Schiller and Irving 2017). Thus, cosmopolitics is simultaneously lived practice and abstract potential realized in the task and craft of inhabiting a world, which is constantly being made and remade anew. We extend such understandings of lived practice to include the ways in which one grapples with differences, in coming to terms with others' worlds, and also in the constitution of one's own world(s) and thereby one's self.

Differences and divergences are integral to inhabiting worlds. We inhabit worlds through our negotiations with multiplicities, sometimes intimately known and sometimes uncannily outside our grasp. Cosmopolitics emerges as *lived practice* in and through such 'cosmic' play. Simultaneously, we envisage cosmopolitics as the *abstract potential,* immanent in such practices, in the sociopolitical attempts to reconcile with and come to terms with differences. The process of reconciliation could be through organized political mobilization or simply demanding the visibility of one's precarity without annihilating difference. Yet, such politics of difference, necessarily grapples with the sociopolitical temptation to negate differences and tame them within an all-encompassing and therefore imperial universal frame. It is this paradox that resists cosmopolitics as guaranteed outcome but also fuels it insofar as the possibility of its realization cannot be completely foreclosed.

Inhabiting the world(s)

Through two ethnographic vignettes, we demonstrate the ways in which people try to inhabit their worlds and grapple with the vagaries born out of specific relations between people, histories, social structures, and institutions. Whereas Goswami's example comes from conflict ridden Kashmir, Ganguly's example is set in the relaxed atmosphere of Puducherry. Despite the significant differences in the sociopolitical context, there are common thematic concerns around multiple modes of dislocation, identity, and belonging. In both, we see cosmopolitics as lived practice and abstract potential in the interaction and intersections of differences; sometimes achieved in a transient moment, at others best understood as a possibility (realized or not) when faced with universalist frames, be that of an overarching nation-state that brooks no questions or ideas of common albeit homogenous humanness. Both vignettes are recounted in the first-person voice of the respective authors.

I. Inhabitance in Defiance: Neighbors in Exile

Kashmir is overbearingly known via discourses of war, occupation, militarization, and death. Distrust, betrayal and agonizing pain of loss and suffering are lenses through which most Kashmiris have experienced and known the place. Though large sections of the Indian population outside the valley have long maintained that Kashmir is an integral part of India, clearly circumscribing who a Kashmiri is or supposed to be, there are contestations over Pakistani, Indian, and Kashmiri imaginaries of the histories and political futures of the region (Snedden 2012). The Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus), a demographic minority, historically constituted the administrative, educational and political elite within the Muslim majority Kashmir, and were the ruling class in the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (Rai 2004). In the post-colonial context, being a contested administrative territory between India and Pakistan, Kashmir has had a complicated history in terms of who can lay claims to it and who can inhabit it. The ensuing conflict has led to the birth of various rebel factions in Kashmir (Schofield 2010). The post-colonial Indian state has often retaliated with a heavy hand.

Focusing on the long and complicated sense of betrayal and mistrust between Kashmiri Muslims and long exiled Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus), this section asks what we can make of this fraught "composition" (Latour 2010)[i]. Given the vexed position of the nation state's claim on Kashmir, be it of India or Pakistan, the everyday modalities of existence between the Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits becomes even more complex. The non-exiled Kashmiri Muslim can never lay complete insider claims to Kashmir and the apparent exile, the Kashmiri Pandit, can never be a complete outsider either. For both, the escalating and ever-present violence keeps alive the potential of realizing the claim of being Kashmiri and yet not. What is a composition of such a world where differences do not necessarily get resolved neatly, and where inhabiting a home implies living with irresolvable dilemmas and quandaries about one's own home? What are the modes of inhabiting a world dislocated for those residing there physically and those torn apart from it?

Addressing these unresolved dilemmas, I follow the making of a play on Kashmir whose research and scripting brought some of these issues to the fore. I do not aim to foreground what may be construed as an aesthetic representation of a political context. Rather, the emergence of the play, the conversations that fed into making it, and the deep unsettled differences of its characters, present a *refracted* sense of the context.

I had travelled to Kashmir with playwright, Irawati Karnik (Ira hereafter), and theatre director, Abhishek Majumdar, for their research on the final play in a Kashmir centred trilogy. The first play dealt with the martyrdom of young Muslim separatist men while the second dealt with the psychological effects of violence on women and children. He felt an aspect missing from his oeuvre was that of the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in the early 90's resulting from the ongoing conflict (Rai 2004; Duschinski 2008). Abhishek and Ira wanted to tackle the complexity of Kashmir keeping the Kashmiri Pandit question as central without simplifying the wider dynamics and factors leading to their exile. The play they eventually made centered on two characters, *Gasha* and *Nazir,* childhood friends and neighbors, the former a Pandit and the latter a Muslim. Portraying years of mistrust among the two, the play highlighted the complicit and complex position of the Indian state vis-à-vis Kashmir, and the irresolvable unexpressed

animosity and suspicion playing out between the Kashmiri Muslim and Pandit communities. Let me recount the dominant motifs of the play:

Gasha and *Nazir* are nine-year old best friends, growing up in violence-torn Kashmir, with a secret hideout, a shack in the middle of the large lake in the city. The two unwittingly bear witness to a tragic fire in their school and the subsequent shooting of a younger boy. Traumatized and scared, both escape to their secret hideout after this incident as a space of refuge. Well into the night, much against *Gasha's* protests, *Nazir* leaves the shack to fetch oil to light a fire and never returns. *Gasha* feels betrayed and let down by his closest friend at the most vulnerable point in his life. We learn in the next scene why *Nazir* did not return. When he reached home, *Nazir's* father forces *Nazir* to go to *Gasha's* house to inform his parents that "circumstances had taken a turn for the worse and it would be in their best interest if they left home (Kashmir) right away." *Nazir's* father could not go himself to convey this message as he feared it could raise suspicion if he was seen visiting a Pandit family, particularly on that volatile night. So, he decides to send his son to "deliver the message" in a neighborly act, hoping it would not attract attention. *Nazir,* on the other hand, is confused at his father's vehement insistence and wants to return to his "best friend" in distress, but is unable to. Gasha's family leave Kashmir in a mass exodus soon after. The childhood friends do not see each other until twenty-five years later. As adults they have completely different lives. *Gasha* is affluent and lives in the cosmopolitan city of Mumbai while *Nazir* who stayed back in Kashmir makes ends meet as an aircraft loader. In the story, *Gasha* returns to Kashmir in the present for a pilgrimage with his family and sees *Nazir* at the airport, but they do not speak to each other, unable to bridge the chasm of their worlds made vastly different.

The unresolved past of the protagonists' lives highlights the themes of betrayal and struggle to come to terms with the history of the valley writ large on its present and future. The audience becomes privy to their unsettled lives, refracted through their adult gaze. What can *Nazir* and *Gasha* make of each other's lives today? On the one hand, we have the Kashmiri Pandit in exile who has returned to his lost home. On the other hand, *Nazir,* who never had to or could leave Kashmir, is unable to find a safe space at home despite his rootedness. As Edward Said writes, "the exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity" (Said 2000:147). In the case of *Nazir,* the familiar is shot with uncertainty and the unpredictability of the unknown while for *Gasha* the lost home is contingent on the intrinsic unpredictability of the Kashmiri context. Said goes on, "Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, one's native place; what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both" (Said 2000:148). In the context of Kashmir, however, this loss is not only true of the exiled Pandits but also for those left behind – the Kashmiri Muslims who can never lay claims to one's birthplace vis-à-vis their own autonomy as a people. What mode of inhabitance can both the Kashmiri Muslim and the Kashmiri Pandit lay claims to when neither can locate themselves in Kashmir or be at home on terms of their own reckoning.

During our research I was hosted by many Kashmiri homes. In one such stay, the elderly reticent father of our host would come up to the attic everyday, where we stayed, right after we were served food to inquire if we liked the food or not. After one such meal, discussing the recipe

of an herb meat dish that we savored, I told him that my family and I usually consumed a lot of greens but never with meat. The elderly man responded how he used to relish *nadur olu* (lotus-stem potatoes) that his erstwhile Kashmiri Pandit neighbor would make. He said tasting greens without meat was unusual for them as well (as Muslims) but he loved this delectable lotus stem dish without meat, especially the one cooked by his erstwhile neighbor's mother. Recalling this, he didn't say much except remarking while leaving the room, "how we have lost tastes in Kashmir and we have to live with it."

Losing "tastes of Kashmir" captures the essence of what it meant to lose neighborly living, a loss one laments but cannot reconcile with. The ethos of neighborliness, I argue, is cosmopolitical. Its loss is not simply the loss of the concrete person next-door but that of the lived practice and abstract potential of co-evalness. For Emanuel Levinas, the figure of the Other made proximate as the neighbor is at the heart of a hopeful sociality and ethics, "The Other becomes my neighbor precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question" (Levinas 1989:83). Neighborliness or neighborly love is an ethical approach to the Other who appears as mysterious and inscrutable, "a kind of ideal engagement with the Other that exalts their alterity, neither ignoring the Other nor laying claim to the Other's identity or reducing the Other to logic or number" (Rappaport 2019:76). Thus, neighborliness demands responsibility without the annihilation of difference or mere tolerance. Instead, that neighborliness involves witnessing where the self is called to fulfill the obligations toward the Other without demanding sameness or the promise of acculturation.

However, during my time in Kashmir, no one ever refuted or acknowledged what led to the neighbor's exodus, whilst all of them mourned losing the 'taste of neighborliness.' It is impossible to determine who is responsible for the other's loss, and both insist on inhabiting Kashmir (physically and from afar) almost in defiance of one another creating fraught multiple worlds. The creators of the play focused on this fraught relationship. The audience can only imagine the anguish and tragedy underlying the creation of these multiple worlds that *Gasha* and *Nazir* come to inhabit as adults. Nazir's family responds by helping their neighbors flee, thus, becoming complicit in their exodus, while Gasha's family blames their neighbors, once close, but now occupying a figure of those who betrayed. The abstract potential encapsulated in the lived practice of neighborliness in a world suddenly made vastly different despite the shared history, remains deferred in the play. This was astutely captured by Ira and Abhishek in the inability of *Gasha* and *Nazir* to speak to each other as adults. These on-stage conundrums were reflected off-stage in one conversation we had with a well-known Kashmiri journalist, Bilal.[ii]

Bilal ran an extremely popular magazine in Kashmir carrying incisive and hard hitting investigative journalistic pieces. Ira, Abhishek, and I arrived at his office in Srinagar on a pleasant summer day to discuss the play. We ran through old magazine editions while waiting for Bilal. Abhishek and Ira had barely begun introducing themselves when Bilal suddenly interjected and asked "how our trip from India to Kashmir" was going. I could tell that the reference to us 'from India' presumed an Indian statist affiliation on our part, irrespective of our ideological subscriptions. We were after all mainland Indians with ostensible Hindu names. Bilal had known about Abhishek's earlier play and was surprised at his endeavor to make one on Pandits. For Bilal, the complicity of Kashmiri Hindus in remaining mute spectators to the vexed question of

identity during the upsurge of separatism was self-evident. Abhishek and Ira explained that the play would not glorify the sufferings of the Kashmiri Pandits nor was it was about the exodus per se but was intended to offer a nuanced narrative including both sides of the story. Nonetheless, one could sense Bilal's palpable discomfiture at what was being spoken and shared. As the conversation continued, Bilal asked who in "India" would watch a play like this, what stakes would an "Indian audience" have in watching a play through the lens of a Kashmiri Pandit position, and why should such a play be made at all.

Said's argument about identity "nourished in the exile milieu, where everyone not a blood-brother or sister is an enemy, where every sympathizer is an agent of some unfriendly power, and where the slightest deviation from the accepted group line is an act of the rankest treachery and disloyalty", holds true for the not-in-exile Kashmiri Muslim's outlook as well as reflected in Bilal's assertions towards us. (Said 2000:141). Bilal's defiance and outright rejection of even the possibility of imagining Kashmir through a Kashmiri Pandit lens lays bare the deep seated betrayal and mistrust that he was forced to live with. "Because *nothing* is secure, exile is a jealous state" argues Said (2000:141, emphasis in the original). Bilal's insistence on his positionality revealed how it is not a jealous state as much as a sense of not trusting even the possibility of an alternative claim. The only way out of this conundrum would be to think of a cosmopolitics that does not iron out differences but makes us realize what it means to live with it in a state of flux. However, the masculine state makes it impossible to imagine modes of inhabiting Kashmir without some sort of reference to the former. It is this impossibility that was reflected in Bilal's rhetorical questions, for what answer from us could possibly align the different ideas of Kashmir and India, making them coeval in this instance.

Bilal started stating statistics on the Kashmiri lives lost because of long years of conflict. He gave detailed accounts of brutal torture that Kashmiri Muslims had to undergo at the hands of the Indian armed forces based on personal accounts, and hinted at grief, fear (*khauf*) and pain (*dard*) repeatedly in narrativizing the particularly brutal accounts. Ultimately, I intervened and expressed how we were acutely aware of the violence and injustice and the price that Kashmiris had to pay in losing their freedom and autonomy in asserting an independence for Kashmir. Over the conversation, Bilal got reassured of our intent, and the initial mistrust gave way to a temporary space of understanding, still uneasy and anxious, but a momentary relief nonetheless. It was only through prolonged negotiation that we could arrive at the cosmopolitics, of not simply tolerating differences but having these differences themselves offer a way out of the impasse. There would be no joyful return of the Kashmiri Pandits, just as Kashmiri Muslims' fate would continue to hang in the balance.

The play worked with these irrevocable differences without resolution. Let me recount a scene between *Gasha* and a temple priest in the play working with such irresolute differences:

Gasha and his family are currently visiting Kashmir. *Gasha,* still unable to reconcile with his friend's supposed betrayal, is seen questioning his family's return to Kashmir, for him a "dead place". Many times in the story, Gasha makes it evident that he has temporarily returned only because of his family's insistence. In this particular scene at a temple, *Gasha* makes conversation with the Hindu priest, and asks why he chose to never leave Kashmir despite the unrest and threats. To this, the priest responds that his *wajood* (sense of being/existence) lies with the river

Jhelum and not with the Ganga or Yamuna, and he never felt the need to seek any identification with these rivers.[iii] The priest, sensing unease in *Gasha's* demeanor, casually mentions that he should wander through Srinagar to get a feel of the "air and pulse" (*aabo-hawa*) of the place. In the same breath, the priest says since *Gasha* left for "India" he wouldn't know what it means to belong to Kashmir. At this point, *Gasha* retorts, "why, isn't this India, isn't Kashmir in India too?" The priest responds, "for you it might be", but for him, "India is there", pointing to military bunkers and barbed wire cordons around the temple (which are present not just around the temple but have become permanent fixtures all over Kashmir). *Gasha*, in sensing a tensed moment, asks the priest if Kashmir gains independence from India would he choose to go to India or would he remain here. The priest chooses not to answer.

In letting a Hindu priest, whose *wajood* is tied to the river Jhelum and not Ganga, articulate a position presumably contrary to that of the majority Hindu population of the country, and in his refusal to answer the question of where he would settle, Ira and Abhishek express their own inability to give, "a 'good' definition of a 'good' common world" (Stengers 2005:995). The priest's defiant silence echoes Bilal's resistance and Gasha's stubborn questioning, who refuse to participate in a common world order. As outsiders who cannot know Kashmir in the ways in which it is known to Bilal or the old man missing "tastes of Kashmir", Ira and Abhishek assume the role of witnesses, exhorting the audience outside Kashmir to bear the same role, making Bilal present, "not arguing in their (his) name(s) but conveying what it may feel like to be threatened by an issue that one has nothing to contribute to" (Stengers 2005:1003). In that, the promise of cosmopolitics is gentle but profound.

II. Inhabiting Puducherry, Inhabiting a Spiritual Universe?

We now turn to Ganguly's fieldwork in Puducherry among primarily North American and Western European spiritual seekers living there for decades, having found their guru. Questions of belonging surface here too. Who truly belongs to India, and to which India? What is the cosmopolitics of inhabiting spiritual worlds that seem to transcend national boundaries and yet remain circumscribed by them? These questions are anchored here through one incident:

In early 2014, I heard from one of my German interlocutors, Yvonne, about the death of her friend, a German man called Klaus. I had never met Klaus but Yvonne told me that Klaus had been living in Auroville for almost thirty years. The previous night Klaus had died of a heart attack, alone in his house. I did not give it much thought since I had never met Klaus. The next morning, I went to meet Eva, another German woman and a friend of Klaus'. Eva managed a guest house in one of the fishermen's villages or '*kuppam*'. When I arrived at Eva's office, the printer was busily whirring and churning print-outs. Eva herself was in the midst of attending to a flurry of phone calls; turns out she was busy taking care of the bureaucratic formalities which had arisen unexpectedly related to Klaus' death. Since Klaus was a 'foreigner' without family in India and had died before he reached the hospital, the hospital was insisting on performing an autopsy to rule out any possibility of unnatural death. Despite the protestations of Eva and other friends, the hospital was intent on performing the autopsy. Horrified at the idea of Klaus' body being cut up, Eva was trying to do whatever possible to stop the procedure. Apparently, Klaus had given power of attorney to a woman in Germany who this morning had sent an email to Eva

stating her opposition to the autopsy. Eva was now busy taking print-outs of the email and Klaus' power of attorney document, and making urgent phone calls to find a local lawyer who would vouch for the legality and ethical validity of the power of attorney.

Yvonne, Eva and Klaus may be thought of as "citizens of the world". Traveling to India between the late 1970s and early 1980s,[iv] they may have been slightly late travelers in the global circuit of young Westerners journeying "Eastward' on a spiritual quest, but were nonetheless part of the West's spiritual journey to India. Looking for a more meaningful way of life that would answer such existential questions as "who am I" and "what am I here for", as many of my interlocutors articulated separately but in almost identical terms, Yvonne, Eva and Klaus came to occupy not only a different geopolitical territory, but also different cultural, religio-spiritual, and ontological worlds. In the 1980s when Klaus arrived at Auroville, he would have found himself in the midst of a thriving cosmopolitan spiritual project.

Auroville, "an international utopian community" (Pillai 2005) is about twelve kilometers from the city of Puducherry. My fieldwork was primarily in Puducherry, home to Sri Aurobindo Ashram (monastery), with Western seekers affiliated with the Ashram. But Auroville occupied my research in indirect ways since some formal members of the Ashram, such as Yvonne and Eva, also had friends in Auroville and would routinely visit the community. The relations between the Ashram, Auroville, the colonial and post-colonial Indian nation-state, and the historical imaginaries of "spiritual India" are central to understanding the differences foregrounded by Klaus' demise.

The Ashram is based on the teachings of Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950), or Sri Aurobindo as he is called by devotees, and the French woman, Mirra Alfassa (1878-1973), addressed as the Mother. By 1926, the Ashram was a stable but expanding community in what was then a French colony in India. Sri Aurobindo's status as a sage and the Mother's role as a spiritual guru make the Ashram a spiritual place par excellence, both embodying the apperceived spiritual essence of India and providing a cosmopolitan spiritual place.[v] In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, the divinization of the world required a, "rediscovery of the spiritual [...] through a return to Indian mystical sources", and "India would be the laboratory, sacred territory, and launching pad for this planetary rejuvenation" (Aravumudan 2006:96). Unlike the context of exile in the previous example, we do not encounter here nostalgia for a lost territorial homeland, rather the nostalgia is for the lost Indian past of spiritual superiority, a national essence at once universalist in its teachings and scope.

For the Mother too, India occupied a special place as the spiritual centre of the world, and in Auroville, she envisaged, "India's role is to be the spiritual heart of the terrestrial body" (Auroville 2010:16). The global city of Auroville, inaugurated in 1968 and separate from the Ashram, was a cosmopolitan experiment envisioned by the Mother and was to be, "a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of good will, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth" (Auroville 2010:2). People from across the globe were drawn to this experimental place that promised a world like no other, situated simultaneously in the Indian physical territory and the virtual space of spiritual India.

Following the Mother's passing in 1973, Auroville came to be governed by Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS), an organization committed to Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings but separate from the Ashram. Differences arose between the SAS and many Aurovilians on matters related to management of funds by the former, and its manner of control and governance (Pillai 2005). Shanti Pillai (2005), researching on Auroville, writes, "In the minds of some people I spoke with, the conflict of interest was generational as well as cultural; most of the individuals representing the SAS were older, conservative Indians, while the Aurovilians were a largely rebellious, young bunch of Westerners. Several conflicts ensued [...] Seeking to protect the integrity of the Auroville project from outside influence, a group of Aurovilians sought to place the community directly under central Government control" (72). The decision about Auroville's break from the control of the SAS hinged on the question of whether or not the government had the right to intervene in matters concerning Auroville since the Indian Constitution prevents the government from interfering in religious organizations. It was argued in court that Auroville was not a religious organization characterized by rituals and ceremonies, rather it was a spiritual community aimed "at a change of consciousness" (Kapoor 2021:261); an argument that was accepted by majority of the judges enabling them to intervene in Auroville's organization. The Supreme Court of India ruled in favor of the Aurovilians in 1980 and in 1988 the Auroville Foundation Act was passed, "permanently placing Auroville under the purview of the State" (Pillai 2005:73). The intervention by the nation-state was thus crucial to maintaining the autonomy of the cosmopolitan community of Auroville in the face of administrative and (multi)cultural disputes, and the rights of its inhabitants as Aurovilians irrespective of their nationality. This judgement further bolstered the idea of Auroville as a cosmopolitan spiritual community.

Pillai (2005) writes that many Aurovilians were "ambiguous" of any form of state involvement. Ambiguity and ambivalence certainly characterize the agonisms between, on one hand, cosmopolitanism as ideal and practice of becoming world citizens if only to transcend it, and on the other, the nation-state. Such ambiguities inherent in the national/cosmopolitan interplay also extend beyond the governance of the space of Auroville, reflected in the quotidian but profound matters of life and death, as in the case of Klaus, inscribing his post-mortem body. Even though Auroville's administration comes under the purview of the state based on an understanding of it as an international spiritual community, for some non-Indian citizens living there and regularly visiting it, bureaucratic requirements necessarily impinge on dreams of inhabiting a world free of all kinds of boundaries including legal ones:

Eva proceeded to tell me about the problems that she and others faced from time to time as 'foreigners'. Visa renewal and maintaining bank accounts could be particularly challenging. Eva had been facing several issues with her bank in India for the last one year and her efforts to resolve the issues had borne no fruit so far. 'It is ridiculous', she said. With indignation, she continued, "we don't feel like foreigners here. We have a past life connection with India. That's why we come back here" (Ganguly, 2018: 1030)

For many of my interlocutors, arriving in India signaled a true homecoming. They often spoke of how they felt at home "as soon as" they crossed the border or realized soon after that this was their true home. Eva's narrative of *karmic* connection and "return" to India resituates her life in her country of birth and upbringing as spiritual exile while here in the strange

elsewhereness of India, was/is home (Ganguly 2018; 2022). Insofar as these notions of home are far removed from the bureaucratic regimes of the nation-state rooted in physical territorialization, the lives of many of its dwellers is marked by peculiar forms of precarity. It is unsurprising that the events around Klaus' death had foregrounded the anxieties of being a "foreigner" in India, and also disrupted the certitude of metaphysical belonging. The uncertainties surrounding Klaus' death were not incidental but woven into the very history of these worlds. Similarly, the negotiations by Eva are situated within the tussle between a cosmopolitan spiritual space, the nation-state, and the cosmopolitics of devotional love and intimacy.

Eva too had traveled to India in the 1980s. Disgruntled with her life in Germany, she gave up her job in 1984 to travel to Sri Aurobindo Ashram which she had heard of while living in Germany. During her visit, a few German and American devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother took her to meet, "Babaji Maharaj", a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who was considered to be a spiritually advanced *sadhak* (spiritual practitioner) himself.

Eyes shining, looking beyond her computer screen, Eva recounted her first meeting with Babaji. That morning, Eva and the others had stood outside Babaji's small room. When he came out in his humble vest and *lungi* (sarong), Eva remembered, there was pin drop silence. No one said a word. Babaji looked at everyone with 'so much love' that the thought seemed to spontaneously occur to her, 'My god, this man is all love!'. Every single strand of hair on her body stood up, Eva said, something that had never happened to her. Extending her hand toward me, she pointed out that she had goose bumps at this present moment, recollecting that first meeting with Babaji. Since that meeting, she began to read Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and felt here were the answers to all her questions about the meaning of life and existence. Eva stayed on.

The unequivocal relation of spiritual love and intimacy that Eva recounts can be seen as an instance of cosmopolitical singularity. In Eva's narrative, although Babaji did not look at her specifically, he looked at everyone with love, all-encompassing, non-discretionary, and intimate, such that Eva felt personally enveloped in it. Such love emanating from the gaze of the guru is not universalist in the sense of overcoming differences by annihilating them. In other words, this is not a matter of "love conquers all." Rather, it is cosmopolitical in that all differences of nationality, ethnicity, and culture are embraced, in the sense of being rendered *indifferent* but not eviscerated, in this experiential moment, where Eva stands in a devotional relation of absolute singularity with Babaji, and subsequently with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as Babaji's gurus. It is this singular relation of devotion and spiritual intimacy that granted Eva the certitude to relocate to India permanently.

Eva was not alone in her convictions. Many of my interlocutors unconditionally thought of themselves as "the Mother's children," an identity that rendered all differences co-eval (Ganguly 2022). Yet, such cosmopolitics is delicate; its everyday unfolding constantly grappling with the vagaries born of my interlocutors' unusual location or rather dislocation in India. The imbrications of Klaus' death in bureaucratic formalities foreground the everyday negotiations that Eva and others undertake in order to live the life of belonging that many experienced in singular moments of cosmopolitical inhabitance of this world. The prospect of Klaus' body having to undergo an autopsy can be seen as a powerful interruption in such inhabitances, in whose wake Eva's own delicately crafted world of familiarity becomes marked by uncertainty.

I went back later in the week to see Eva. Despite all efforts, Klaus' body would have to undergo an autopsy that afternoon. Klaus would be cremated, not buried. After the autopsy, his body would be taken to the cremation ground. Eva was preparing to go to the hospital, and had reconciled to the fate that awaited her friend. She took comfort in the fact that his body had been left in peace for four days. Overhearing Eva talking to me about Klaus, the two Tamil women from the neighboring village who worked as cooks in the guest house asked her about the likely time of cremation. Eva told them the time but added, "No one should go there. You people will go and cry there and get all emotional."

The attachment to India's universalist spiritual "essence" sits uneasily with the everyday markers of difference. Even as narratives of *karmic* connection help Eva make sense of her spontaneous feelings of belonging to India, the cosmopolitan frames of universalist spirituality are unable to accommodate the local Tamil women. Such differences are not incidental but born of the histories, structures, and institutions that enable Eva and Klaus to inhabit these cosmopolitan spiritual spaces that are at once in India and yet dislocated to some degree from their immediate surroundings. Scholars writing on Auroville point to the problematic and asymmetric relations between Western Aurovilians and local Tamils on whose land the global city thrives (Jouhki 2021; Namakkal 2021).

Elsewhere, I have discussed the critical attitude that some of my interlocutors had toward local people's religious practices and beliefs. Yvonne (with whom I began this story), "would often say that she had no interest in visiting temples or following Hindu rituals. Yvonne herself visited the *samadhi* (Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's tomb) every day but did not recognize this as a ritual" (Ganguly 2018: 1039). Instead, for her, visiting the gurus' tomb was done with "consciousness" (recall the argument made to distinguish a spiritual organization from a religious one). As spiritual citizens of the world, their belonging to spiritual spaces within India does not require them to become Indian, nor necessarily accommodate "Indianness." Then again, neither simple accommodation of nor ascribing to another ethnic-cultural identity provides resolution. If anything, that would be yet another universalism, far from the reconciliations imagined by cosmopolitics.

Amidst these fraught modes of inhabitance, I have suggested that the experience of devotional singularity and intimacy holds genuine cosmopolitical potential. Such cosmopolitics, like the temporary peace afforded Klaus' body, is not definitive. Instead, it is delicate and hesitant. The abstract potential of such cosmopolitics constantly jostles with a cosmopolitan notion of spirituality and the nation-state. Nonetheless, it points toward the horizon of what may yet be.

Conclusion: Cosmopolitics from Kashmir to Puducherry

The two examples demonstrate cosmopolitics as lived practice and abstract potential in varied modes of inhabiting multiple worlds. Relations among people, histories, institutions, and organizations, compose these worlds in specific ways, thus, opening different cosmopolitical possibilities. Both Kashmir and the spiritual spaces in and around Puducherry are marked by multiple modes of dislocation and ruptures. In both contexts, questions of belonging and identity are fractured along the lines of exile and home-making, albeit located in vastly different socio-

political and historical currents, and with different implications. But the two examples speak to each other in highlighting how people negotiate with differences that make the question of co-eval inhabitance paramount.

In both examples, modes of inhabitance are uncertain and tentative in the everyday practices of living with the vagaries of differences and otherness. The Kashmir example demonstrates how differences cannot be resolved in the form of simple allegiance to a nation-state by all parties at the negotiating table, nor by the nation-state's demand to acquiesce to a monolithic identity. In the other example, the nation-state both consolidates and challenges the status of Auroville and those inhabiting the spaces of the global city. Simultaneously, where the latter exemplify cosmopolitanism, such cosmopolitanism does not render everyone co-eval. Yet, in both contexts, cosmopolitics exists as lived practice and abstract potential; in one, as (lost) neighborly ethos, and in the other as devotional intimacy with the all-loving guru. These relations of co-habitance require no submission, assimilation, or tolerance. Rather, they render all entities co-eval.

In conclusion, this paper tries to move beyond the conceptual limitations of cosmopolitanism that promotes either simply tolerance or the annihilation of differences. While the notion of cosmopolitics is affected by the dense local textures specific to the context, we hope that it can be mobilized to understand the "epistemic commonalities" of "poverty, subjugation, hate, humiliation and suffering" across contexts (Arif 2021:257). Our attempt, therefore, is to offer ways of anthropologically thinking about human lives in the midst of contingent worlds where it becomes imperative to question any one mode of belonging and inhabitance. The composition of these worlds is never final, never complete, and in that rests the abstract potential of cosmopolitics.

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THE COSMOPOLITICS OF INHABITING MULTIPLE WORLDS

Abstract
Cosmopolitanism, as an idea that recognizes the humanity of all as equal fellow-beings, remains pertinent to our imagination and inhabitance of the world, in shaping our relations with our selves and others. Yet, cosmopolitanism often celebrates universal notions of oneness or reifies cultural differences. Challenging both these aspects of cosmopolitanism, this article prefers the term cosmopolitics to refer to human endeavors to live with differences. We propose cosmopolitics as simultaneously lived practice and abstract potential. Cosmopolitics as lived practice refers to the practices of trying to reconcile with differences and therein lies and emerges the abstract potential of inhabiting the world with differences in ways that neither tolerate nor obliterate them. Ethnographic examples from our respective fieldwork in India exemplify the ways in which people grapple with their worlds, whereby sometimes cosmopolitics emerges as a powerful impulse while at others it gets engulfed by hegemonic universals yet remaining a hopeful potential.

Keywords
cosmopolitanism; cosmopolitics; differences; India; inhabitance.

A COSMOPOLÍTICA DE HABITAR MÚLTIPLOS MUNDOS

Resumo
O cosmopolitismo, como uma ideia que reconhece a humanidade de todos como seres semelhantes e em pé de igualdade, continua pertinente à nossa imaginação e à nossa vivência do mundo, moldando nossas relações com nós mesmos e com os outros. No entanto, o cosmopolitismo frequentemente celebra noções universais de unidade ou reifica as diferenças culturais. Contestando esses dois aspectos do cosmopolitismo, este artigo opta pelo termo cosmopolítica para se referir aos esforços humanos para conviver com as diferenças. Propomos a cosmopolítica como prática vivida e potencial abstrato simultaneamente. A cosmopolítica como prática vivida refere-se às práticas de tentativa de reconciliação com as diferenças, e nela reside e emerge o potencial abstrato de habitar o mundo com as diferenças de forma a não tolerá-las nem obliterá-las. Exemplos etnográficos de nossos respectivos trabalhos de campo na Índia exemplificam as maneiras pelas quais as pessoas lidam com seus mundos, de modo que, às vezes, a cosmopolítica surge como um impulso poderoso, enquanto em outras é engolfada por universais hegemônicos, sem deixar de ser um potencial de esperança.

Palavras-chave
cosmopolitismo; cosmopolítica; diferenças; Índia; habitabilidade.

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i Bruno Latour (2010) writes, "[...] the word composition underlines that things have to be put together (Latin componere) while retaining their heterogeneity" (473-474).

ii Bilal is a pseudonym to maintain anonymity.

iii Wajood is an urdu word without an exact equivalent in English. It refers to the sense of being or status of being. Ganga and Yamuna are rivers sacred to the Hindu faith, but they do not flow through Kashmir.

iv They traveled separately, becoming friends in India

v Much has been written on the modern imaginaries of India as a spiritual place. It is outside the scope of this paper to dwell on this long history but see King 1999; van Der Veer 2014.