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# The Death of Vernacular Cosmopolitanism

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## ABSTRACT

The paper offers a multiscalar appreciation of vernacular cosmopolitanism as changing across space, time, and networks of relations. Drawing on observations from the UK and Greece, I argue for an expanded understanding of vernacular cosmopolitanism to incorporate everyday appreciations of multiculturalism, tolerance, and social liberalism that are produced within specific socio-historical contexts. Proposing a theory of ‘timespace’ where epochs are structured by networks of potential relations, affects, bureaucracies, and prevailing ideologies that guide individual and collective actions, I argue that vernacular cosmopolitanism is no longer a prominent worldview in Western democracies. Freedoms to fully realise cosmopolitan ideals are intimately entwined with the structures and affects of a timespace, which gives momentum to, provides guidance, and inherently opens and closes doors to the types of life that can be pursued. In the UK and Greece, current affective structures present people with vastly different projects, recommended paths, and futures to aspire to. With the sharp turn to the right in the post-truth age, vernacular cosmopolitanism has receded at the grassroots level. I thus propose that vernacular cosmopolitanism is under attack as epochal change offers alternate prevailing worldviews.

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## Scene Setting

For a teenage boy in the 1990s growing up in the south of England in a working class family on the edge of an estate, to me cosmopolitanism meant multiculturalism and acceptance of difference. Whether in the form of religious belief, political stance, or sexual orientation, to hear the word ‘cosmopolitan’ being uttered meant reference to social liberalism, or more simply the understanding that anyone could ‘be whoever they want, believe in and practice whatever they choose’. This layperson’s understanding was drawn from the popular culture of the 90s, central to the music and fashion trends of the time—from the influence of Seattle grunge that championed feminism and social equality, to the all-conquering carefree Brit-pop revolution. For kids in a run-of-the-

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mill state school in the Westcountry, cosmopolitanism was vernacular for sociocultural understanding and acceptance of otherness; there was certainly no conscious association with a philosophical movement with roots in Kantian methodologies. The first I heard of this 'academic' cosmopolitanism was sometime in my postgraduate studies at Durham, around a decade later.

The cultural version of cosmopolitanism is the starting place for exploring how shifts in politics and popular culture in two places I know well—the UK and Greece—have altered individual and shared worldviews. From an era lined with tolerance and the acknowledgement of individual identities, I argue that there has been a general shift away from the understanding of cosmopolitanism widespread in the places I frequented as a youth in 90s England, a change fuelled by the rise of right-wing populism across Europe and the attempted plateauing of identity politics. As such, the timespace of vernacular cosmopolitanism has collapsed.

Such a version of a past of rosy coexistence is, of course, partially romanticised, essentialised, and subjective. Yet my prerogative as a cosmopolitan individual maintains that the reflection holds general elements of truth that help understandings of how cosmopolitanism is lived at the grassroots and change over time as part of wider networks of relations. My take on an era of vernacular cosmopolitanism could never be objective, but does sincerely make up a significant part of a shared worldview in the context of a working class estate in 90s southern England—and, what is more, also forms an analytical pivot for analysing social changes brought about in Greece following the 2008 global financial crisis that later became the focus of my anthropological research. Similar to my experience of life on an English estate, in Greece, where I have worked ethnographically for nearly two decades, the common understanding of cosmopolitanism is pinned to accepting the Other, no matter race or ethnicity, and the ability to sample other cultures (physically or virtually), thus becoming 'a citizen of the world'.<sup>1</sup>

What I offer here is more than simply a stagnant after-the-fact reminiscence on the good old days, being rather an account of history-as-lived. This paper thus comes from the place of decades of observation in two contexts, both Western democracies. Instead of a base in traditional fine-grained thick description of research findings, I intend to provide a punchy, perhaps provocative, contribution to discussions on cosmopolitanism that take place within and beyond the confines of this special issue collection. As a political subject of the United Kingdom and with research expertise in Greece, the paper provides social commentary while hopefully representing a contribution to wider conceptual debates in the discipline on the changing face of cosmopolitanism in 'Western' Europe. Among a group of people in a particular time and place, vernacular cosmopolitanism as identified above was the prevalent way of seeing and living the world. I argue that this is no longer the case and an epochal change can be observed on the level of both individual and collective orientations.

## **The Changing Faces of Cosmopolitanism**

Writing in 2020, in the ruins of financial collapse, millions displaced by armed conflict in the Middle East, the resurgence of right-wing populism, and impending ecological disaster, it could be argued that cosmopolitanism is under attack. The vernacular cosmopolitanism to which I refer is less derived from the pages of Immanuel Kant or Søren

Kierkegaard, or even the anthropology of discipline-leaders, including many of those writing on the pages of this journal special issue. By its vernacular definition, cosmopolitanism is in crisis. From the tensions of Brexit Britain where European Union (EU) citizens feel that their human rights are restricted by the neo-imperial xenophobia now unashamedly endemic in mainstream politics, to the much publicised police brutality played-out on the bodies of Black residents in the United States. One may add the fuelling of religious division and nationalist sentiment in France since the Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan attacks, and also the breaking down of social and familial networks in the devastating austerity years in Greece. Then there is the curtailed freedom associated with the heavy-handed (though often inept) top-down governance of the Covid-19 pandemic. The list is endless. Nigel Rapport (2019) argues that with every new human life history begins again. From a Kantian perspective that insists on prioritising ontologies of the human species and individual embodiments, all other systems of classification are epiphenomena (*i.e.* nations, classes, communities, religions) (Rapport 2014, 111). The human capacity to author individual life-stories, primary to historical and social conditioning, is at the heart of classic readings of the cosmopolitan project; cultural systems are rhetorical devices, epiphenomenal upon the ontological realities of individuality and humanity (Rapport 2012, 2019). However, when one considers the everyday vernacular understanding of cosmopolitanism, freedoms to fully realise the human condition are intimately oriented by the historical and socio-political timespace into which an individual is born. The atmosphere and socioaesthetics of the epoch gives momentum to, provides guidance, and inherently opens and closes doors to the types of life that can be pursued.

Far from being outside of historical experience or immune from social and political fluctuation, everyday understandings of cosmopolitanism are now being ravaged on all sides. The argument here is simple: the social, political, and historical networks that encourage vernacular cosmopolitanism as an outlook on life, as lived on a 1990s southern English housing estate or Andreas Papandreou's Greece, for instance, now find themselves under critical stress. As argued by Pipyrrou and Sorge (2021) on the pages of this very journal, the violence of the contemporary timespace of Western social life has become axiomatic, taken for granted, psychosomatically engrained. I contend that humans are not born into a vacuum with life-choices based on rationales of pure individual freedoms. Nor are they solely the product of socio-historical conditioning. But it is fair to assume that those born into slavery in the 1800s American South did not have the same freedoms to engage with social relations and cultural domains as a lecturer at the University of St Andrews. The birthright of self-determination will also be restricted by political and historical circumstance in Nazi Germany. A Greek pinned-down by a decade of suffocating austerity administered by what they perceive as a foreign Other (read, Angela Merkel, the International Monetary Fund etc.). does not feel compelled towards cultural tolerance and admiration for the global. The opportunities to fulfil potentiality are limited for a working-class English child. Human capacities of becoming are inextricably tied to context and this is reflected in how vernacular understandings of cosmopolitanism are currently in crisis. With the sharp turn to the right in the post-truth age, there is a structural discouragement of vernacular cosmopolitanism, provoking a regression in the liberal social outlook at the grassroots level. Going back to the opening definitions as supposed by the everyday Brit or Greek, how many would now

say that Western European politics promotes cultural tolerance, racial equality, and religious diversity among its citizens?

Introducing the concept of cosmopolitanism to the unacquainted, Rapport (2014, 114) offers five ‘key applications’ for the discipline of anthropology: cosmopolitanism as attitude or orientation, that is being above categories of cultural identification; cosmopolitanism as someone who prides themselves on heterophilia, or the ability to participate in diverse forms of life; cosmopolitanism as a social condition, or the dissolution of borders for global openness; cosmopolitanism as global human morality; and cosmopolitanism as the application of universal human reason to advance peace, equality, and justice. Certainly, three of these proposals seem to tally with the vernacular understandings I mentioned above. Common ideas of the cosmopolitan being a ‘citizen of the world’ resonate with Rapport’s point on heterophilia (see also Wardle and Shaffner 2017), while the social condition of transcending borders is mentioned by people when they discuss global travel, even, the cynic might say, if this may be for purposes of overtly essentialising cultural tourism. Finally, there is connection between the claim that cosmopolitanism is an attitude that foregoes cultural identification. Even the idea of moral responsibility could be said to bubble underneath some of the uses of cosmopolitanism in common parlance (cf. Josephides 2010, 394). Now, considering the contemporary socio-political landscape in Western Europe and North America, and speaking in broad brushstrokes, can we uncritically say that these three cosmopolitan orientations are either being widely upheld or indeed are broadly possible under current socio-historical circumstances?

Yes, the realisation that people are part of a human community at large exists more than ever (Wardle and Shaffner 2017, 3), however the characteristics attached to vernacular understandings of cosmopolitanism—heterophilia, multiculturalism, tolerance of the Other, social freedoms—are disintegrating under the pressures of the historical moment. ‘Emergent mutual recognition’ does not necessarily lead to the advancement of peace, equality, and justice since the socio-historical milieu is filled with competing orientations that seem to preach quite the opposite. It might be going too far to suggest comparisons with the slave in the 1800s American South or the Jew in Nazi Germany, but for a historical anthropologist heading a Centre for Cosmopolitan Studies, I have to interrogate the intersection of the universal individual human capacity for becoming—the capacity of free acting beings—and the powerful tides of the historical epoch that seem to be pushing back against this philosophy. The idealised form of the cosmopolitan subject as recognising their duty to human beings at large, thus experiencing personal liberation from historical contingency (Wardle and Shaffner 2017, 4; Rapport 2012), is not something, I believe, that is a foremost characteristic of our times. There can still remain the admirable principle that every individual has the right to develop a worldview that fits them personally (Rapport 2010, 465), to practice their own version of cosmopolitanism, but it seems pertinent to me that *what* the worldview becomes and *how* it is shaped is at least partially dependent on the characteristics of the world each individual encounters.

In this respect, my approach is closer to that of Pnina Werbner who argues that there exist multiple ‘cosmopolitan practices coexisting in late modernity, each with its own history and distinctive worldview’ at least partially located in the ‘local and relative’ (Werbner 2006a, 7, also 1999). For Werbner (2018, 275), vernacular cosmopolitanism refers to the ‘routine boundary crossing, physical, ethnic or religious, alongside the

customary habits of hospitality and social exchange among strangers'. Werbner is primarily concerned with individual non-elitist moral and ethical action in everyday situations. My usage of vernacular cosmopolitanism, while no doubt linked to Werbner's, differs in at least two ways. Rather than an observation of routine behaviour as Werbner would have it, I am more concerned by what people mean when they use the term cosmopolitanism to describe their lives and what they understand to be related concepts that fashion their worldviews—as the opening vignette in this paper outlines. It is the everyday terminology that describes an orientation to life and the world around that comprises the vernacular as I propose. Also, rather than being focused on individual activities, I suggest that collectivities of individuals are architects of an epoch or timespace that defines the affective structure of society over the course of many years. As a bundle of networks of relations, affects, and bureaucracies with an atmosphere or orientation, a cosmopolitan timespace is a marker of a collective era. Not so much interested in the ethical parameters of individual action, I see vernacular cosmopolitanism as a feedback loop between historical circumstances, top-down bureaucratic pathways that facilitate becoming, and the capacity to pursue potentiality at the grassroots, much as I *felt* the context was growing up in 1990s southern England when government, economy, popular culture, historical circumstance, all fed into a shared collective atmosphere of cosmopolitanism, at least from where I was standing.

My argument is twofold: that cosmopolitan worldmaking cannot exclusively be taken outside of the historical moment into which the individual is born—what I call the 'timespace'—and that definitions of cosmopolitanism must be expanded to incorporate vernacular understandings that may only loosely fit the philosophical genealogy of the concept. To be clear, I am not contesting the merits of the cosmopolitan method as legitimate and desirable in how people could or should author life-stories, nor am I offering a moral critique of the approach. I am, however, stating that common understandings of the meaning of cosmopolitanism as a set of relations between individual and a wider world of Others is profoundly linked to the historical moment and the complex social and political relations of the timespace. If, as Nigel Rapport argues (2019), 'a cosmopolitan anthropology insists that history be seen to start afresh with each individual life' and a 'liberal state (enshrines) this principle as a birthright', I argue for more historicization of the cosmopolitan subject, and question the limitations a given timespace may serve upon the assumed liberal state. The tug-of-war between the individual's ability to practice cosmopolitan freedoms thus pursuing their potentiality of becoming and the restrictions of the timespace is constant and ever fluctuating. At present, the collective momentum of history in the two places I know best is curtailing cosmopolitan ideals. For instance, the website for the Centre for Cosmopolitan Studies at the University of St Andrews, of which I am Director following in the footsteps of both Rapport and Wardle, states that cosmopolitanism stands for 'the openness of a free and just society' (cf. Rapport 2010, 470). Simply, the criteria cited as cosmopolitanism, particularly in its vernacular forms, are being eroded—in places like Brexit Britain, Trump's United States, and southern Europe in the midst of financial and migration crises. In these contexts, tolerance of alterity is wearing thin, desires for multiculturalism are not as widespread, and we have witnessed a significant move away from the global citizen as people flock to associate with neo-nationalist initiatives that promise security in collective identification. The openness of a free and just society is not generally a characteristic easily accessible for

many subjects in the West, despite their desires to author lives according to specific ideals (e.g. the EU citizen in the UK having to bureaucratically prove their legitimacy as a worthy human subject, the African-American victim of police brutality). This is why I suggest that vernacular understandings of cosmopolitanism are in crisis, confined and redirected by the powerful tides of historical circumstance. Yes, people can still aspire to practice cosmopolitan lives, but the socio-historical assemblage, the timespace, is pushing collectives of individuals towards different ends, making the vernacular cosmopolitanism I encountered in my youth and my early research years in Greece constrained, overpowered, and remarkably thin on the ground.

### The End is Nigh(?)

The Western world is experiencing an unusual (though not unprecedented) set of crises—recently termed a ‘polycrisis’ (Tooze 2022; Henig and Knight 2023). The global financial crash drastically changed the outlook of many on life based on vernacular cosmopolitan ideals of tolerance, multiculturalism, and global citizenship. The economic collapse spawned a decade of austerity that fuelled the rise of populist politics behind the election of neo-nationalist leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Brexit and the Trumpocene are direct descendants of the 2008 crisis, pleading that resources are scarce and must be protected at all costs. Make Britain/America great again in the face of attacks from a malignant and scheming Other, sowing the seeds of resentment and encouraging the citizen to rebuild categories of othering that had slowly been dismantled in many of the liberal democracies of the 1990s. With purportedly limited social and economic reserves on the European continent, a new wave of xenophobia informed governmental and public responses to the Mediterranean migration crisis that commenced in 2015: no room here, national jobs for national peoples, borders closed, go home. Asylum seekers to the UK are now threatened with relocation to Rwanda. Rather than encourage reflection on shared human experience on a global scale, the worst pandemic for more than a century has further provoked an inward turn towards vaccine-nationalism, Sinophobia, and increasing localism even within the borders of the nation-state. Two-thousand-and-eight triggered a cascade effect that continues to be played-out at a grassroots level. This is the historical moment, or timespace, that individuals are born into, where basic human rights are threatened, the atmosphere of suppression of liberal ideals is thick. The pathways for cosmopolitan subjectivity are drastically curtailed, an individual’s freedom to practice a cosmopolitan lifestyle is narrowed.

Tossed around on the choppy waters of multifaceted crisis, the Time of Cosmopolitanism is bombarded from all sides. Cosmopolitans might have to resign themselves to the idea that to practice a cosmopolitan lifestyle is harder than ever, or at least is becoming a lonely space. Now branded in the mass media (and in some wings of academics) as an out-of-touch figure of elitism, the cosmopolitan is confined to hide-out below-deck on an embattled ship that has been boarded by the dastardly pirates of populist intolerance, Blackbeard Bolsonaro, Peg-Leg Le Pen, Long John Donald, and BoJo Sparrow. Their accomplices: my dad, my grandmother, your next-door neighbour, your colleague. Publicly condemned as the indulgent niche of an elitist class, the cosmopolitan must bide their time by looking through the crack in the door just waiting for an opportunity to spring their daring escape. This is not to prioritise the political domain (with small or

big ‘P’, take your pick) over people’s ability to author individual life-stories, but to set the affective atmosphere into which human beings are now being born. This rather dramatic and completely randomly nautically-themed anecdote is simply a way of saying that in the maelstrom of current crises, vernacular expressions of cosmopolitanism that were once expected to be birthrights in places like Britain and Greece do not play out as once anticipated or hoped. Cosmopolitanism as a shared epoch of social liberalism, individual freedoms, the acknowledgment of the human condition above all else, and aspirational utopias of relativist acceptance is facing its biggest foes for many a decade, residing in a state of ‘suspension’ (Knight 2017, 238).

Here I wish to explore the era of vernacular cosmopolitanism as a timespace, an epoch with a particular set of expectations, aspirations, hopes, and speculative positionings, where overlapping and interconnected networks advocate individual freedom as a possible and desirable way to realise the capacities of the human subject. The promotion of everyday understandings of what it is to be cosmopolitan hinged on all forms of diversity and multicultural expression and flourished as a ‘social orientation’, to paraphrase Rapport, before 2008. I draw attention to the cracks that have been gradually appearing in this epoch of social liberalism as the pathways for cosmopolitanism are reduced, elbowed to the side by alternative vernaculars that now orient life in a radically changing Europe. The individual born in 2020 has a spectacularly different landscape to negotiate than the so-called millennial—or, to narrow the timeline, let’s say those born in the 1980s, like yours truly—and this is historicization of the individual subject, I argue, which is inextricable from the choices they have laid out before them. Even in the individualism of the cosmopolitan method it is widely accepted that society is built by a collectivity of individual architects (Wardle 2010). If this is the case, then the epoch seems to have been encroached upon by a Time of Populism fashioned on fear and a rhetoric of assimilation and homogeneity (cf. Mazzarella 2019; Kapferer and Theodossopoulos 2019). The collectivity of individual architects is building a new labyrinth and it leads away from decades of multicultural acceptance and promotion of freedoms towards a thorny entanglement of bureaucratic boobytraps and restrictions intended to localise and blinker individual experience. Even individual interaction with the public face of governmental domains has been renegotiated—the EU citizen in the UK showing Settled Status identification to gain access to the NHS or writing letters to the Home Office pleading their case as a UK taxpayer springs to mind. The Time of Cosmopolitanism as many have known it—and its associated vernaculars of affective orientation—is in crisis. There is epochal change and a new, previously dormant, vernacular is awakening.

### **Timespaces and Their Vernaculars**

What do I mean by timespace? As individuals walking through life we intersect with multiple networks of relations, institutions, and ideologies that make up every social interaction—including what in cosmopolitan parlance might be called ‘structures of meaning carried by social networks’ (Hannerz 1992, 248–249). In every aspect of daily practice, no matter how minor, we encounter these networks of relations—other human actors, inanimate bureaucracies, potent affects. To complicate matters, we are always operating across different amalgamations of these networks within multiple timespaces, overlapping and intermixing as one may imagine the most complex of Venn



diagrams. One of those timespaces, complete with potential relations and affective structures that guide present and futural action, has been the Time of Cosmopolitanism, where the liberal state, as Rapport notes above, provides room for the cosmopolitan subject to interact across sets of relations based on principles of freedom and choice. Scaling up from the individual, I have recently argued that there can be a collective perception of time—a collectivity of individuals in Wardle's words—where multiple actors share a sense of living within a period that has a particular temporality with a set of orientations that facilitate certain forms of social activity. There are overlapping and entangled networks of timespaces in which we carry out our everyday lives that include all the orders of people and objects that share a particular affective structure and orient towards specific goals.

At the communal level, timespaces and their affects can therefore be described in epochal terms—a Time of War, a Time of Prosperity, a Time of Brexit. Inspired by philosopher Theodore Schatzki, Rebecca Bryant and I term the collective experience of particular sets of relations, affects, and orientations 'vernacular timespaces' which are thick in an atmosphere of what is achievable in time and place—*i.e.* the particularity of how overlapping timespaces constitute the historical moment (Bryant and Knight 2019). Further, we argue, the characteristics of the timespace promote distinct teleologies. For Schatzki (2010, 52), a timespace incorporates 'ends, projects, actions, and combinations thereof that participants should or acceptably pursue'. Depending on the nature of the vernacular timespace, the affective structure presents people with projects, recommended paths, and futures to aspire to, drawing the future into the present and giving it a vibrant essence as something that not only should be sought after, but is also ultimately achievable. In extreme cases, this makes the future a foregone conclusion—when destiny is the predominant orientation, for instance—but usually the affective structure guides practice within the timespace without forgoing novelty.

Let me provide some brief examples, taken from a wide-ranging reading of ethnographic literature, that readers may be familiar with. For instance, living in the Time of Brexit may evoke panic, apocalyptic speculation, perhaps resignation for the Remainer. The world 'feels' different, the atmosphere has changed, and, practically, certain corridors to forming social relations have been closed off while others are promoted. The collectivity of individuals, architects of their society, have structured networks that may be restricting to the everyday liberties of the cosmopolitan. Moving outside of Europe, the conceptual point holds firm: A Time of Peace in the Middle East may be eaten into by the anticipation of imminent displacement and violence, as noted in the work of Sami Hermez (2012), Joyce Dalsheim (2015), or what Dafna Shir-Vertesh and Fran Markowitz (2015, 209) describe as permanent 'almost war, almost peace'. These mutually constitutive contexts underwrite everyday life, with violence either receding into dormant potentiality or rising to the fore as penetrative expectation and imminence. The suspended state of the 'not-quite' (Markowitz 2018, 8) and its bundle of expectations, affects, and infrastructures provides direction to daily choices and social interactions and is a marker of a Time of Peace in the Middle East. In my work in Greece, I argue that a Time of Crisis is a vernacular timespace where there may be no hope of emergence, the present has become elongated or inescapable, the future empty, and my research participants locked into a form of Stockholm Syndrome, feeling uncomfortable comfort with their captors (international creditors) (Knight 2020, 2021). The possibilities to carry

out the freedoms of the pre-crisis years are impeded, while priorities of heterophilia and multiculturalism that could be said to define many individuals' worldview in the pre-crisis years are not so commonplace. Timespaces require or induce responses and produce their own affective temporal orientations, giving the vernacular timespace its own resonance, rhythm, and set of expectations.

Orientations—the shared expectations, hopes, aspirations felt by a collectivity of individuals in a particular timespace—lend texture to the experience of the 'now' moment in history and how people prepare the groundwork on the path of individual becoming (Pandian 2012). Thus, the orientations bound up in vernacular timespaces draw the future into the present. In a vernacular timespace certain futures seem more attainable, while technologies of the imagination offer glimpses of how the future appears malleable or set in stone, projecting potential pathways of becoming. While the sets of relations prominent in a timespace may encourage dynamic planning towards and imagining the future, they also often involve the collapse of previous regimes—like a collapsing wormhole on a pulsating episode of *Star Trek*, or a red dwarf going supernova. Previous dynasties can be consumed. This is what I suggest has happened to the Time of Cosmopolitanism, at least in the contexts of the UK and Greece. The vernaculars of cosmopolitanism that populated the lifeworlds, decision-making, and interactions between individuals and other social beings have been eroded by over a decade of powerful intersecting crises that have knocked the cosmopolitan worldview off its axis. Whereas in the scene from my youth described to open this paper, the bureaucratic, popular culture, economic, and governmental apparatuses were overlapping to point towards the attainment of certain social liberal goals, however partially romanticised these might now seem, now the formidable rhetorics of populism, xenophobia, and local identification form part of the guiding contours of a contrasting epoch.

Epochal thinking also furthers theories of networks, which is of interest in this collection, as it shows how sets of affective orientations may be shared beyond boundaries of cities and nations, as in the collective sense that the Time of Trump has beckoned in a new era of politics with global consequences and a new set of catchwords and imaginaries, or the shared hope expressed by people across austerity-ravished Europe when the radical left came to power in Greece in 2015. These timespaces are bundles that provoke responses and produce reactions beyond the local but not in the manner that vernacular cosmopolitanism supposes. In the historical moment, there seems to be a need to name collectivities, as liberalism is replaced by cultural communities that are ascribed fixed identities as relatedness is redrawn along political lines (Balthazar 2017). Yet the networks of acceptance or resistance of this new world do unite like-minded architects globally in a cause of moral future-making—conflicting moralities though they may be. The place of networks in a theory of vernacular timespaces is thus twofold: (a) the timespace as a bundle of interlinked and inextricable relations, affects, bureaucracies, and orientations that guides social action, and (b) the networks of global actors who share a determined moral belief in/rejection of the timespace and its orientations as a means for future-making.

### Tales from Greece and Britain

The Time of Cosmopolitanism in Greece was a political project of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, leader of the socialist PASOK party which came to power in 1981. With the

country fresh out of a seven-year dictatorship (1967-74), Papandreou led a top-down process of mass change in political thinking, a legacy that would shape social activity and identity formation at the grassroots for nearly three decades (Kirtsoglou and Theodosopoulos 2009). Papandreou proposed that cosmopolitanism was a birthright for all Greek citizens based on principles of civilisation that were linked to ancient times (Clogg 1992). Greeks were living in the cradle of democracy and the home of civilisation and thus should have the liberty to practice individual lives of equality and abundance, free from worries about how others might judge. Part of a strategy of modernisation that took Greece into the European Union in 1981, Papandreou delivered a liberal social contract that preached gender equality, increased marital rights for women, expanded welfare, tackled inclusive curriculum reform, and promoted multicultural understanding of Greece's neighbours and historic foes. He further decoupled politics from the Orthodox Church, made inroads into dismantling cronyism, and encouraged Greek citizens to explore new opportunities for international travel. Above all, Papandreou told Greeks to demand deservedness, materialised in their work ethic, enjoyment of free time, and outlook on life based around a timeless philosophy of freedom. The timespace spoke to three of Rapport's pins: heterophilia, transcending local borders towards global awareness, and appreciating multicultural identification. This approach spurred vernacular cosmopolitanism that became the birthright of two generations.

As such, the Time of Cosmopolitanism was a historically contingent timespace of top-down / bottom-up interactions of power, produced (and fervently embraced by citizens) to counter divisions in the country in the post-war years that had seen both a bitter civil war and a suffocating dictatorship. Papandreou promoted the global awareness of Greeks in the world based on the work of local 'historically situated imaginations' (Appadurai 1996, 33). Multiculturalism, for instance, was viewed as a new idea imported from the West, while an outlook of vernacular cosmopolitanism, Kirtsoglou and Theodosopoulos (2009, 84) argue, was associated with urbanity and pluralism that resonated with Ottoman society. On these premises, vernacular cosmopolitanism was encouraged as an approach to life that became embedded at the grassroots. It was the birthright of the Greek citizen and was lived as such until 2008. At this point, the onset of the Greek economic crisis brought the walls crashing down on the Time of Cosmopolitanism, exposing it as a historical construct, a timespace of relations, affects, and ideals that was not sustainable in the crisis world. The following Time of Crisis with its discontents and otherings, was not a form of 'cultural fundamentalism' in so far as the concerns of local actors were indeed global and related to the problematisation of being a citizen of the world. For Kirtsoglou and Theodosopoulos (2009, 87), 'the articulation and expression of discontent in this context constitute in effect a commentary on the workings, transparency and distribution of political power, and not a superficial manifestation of lagging modernisation, nationalism, traditionalism or regionalism' (cf. Werbner 2006). Yet the philosophical basis of vernacular cosmopolitanism as the birthright of all Greek citizens as proclaimed by Papandreou was deconstructed as an orientation to life that did not tally with the new social reality. The timespace was a historical product, it became an existential certainty, and was only again proven to be historically contingent in hindsight when the wheels came off.

Looking to the UK for an example of how timespaces guide individual becoming, I have written elsewhere about how the English class system forestalls potentiality

(Bryant and Knight 2019, 105). Born into a working-class family, the subject is offered certain pathways of becoming, beyond which they cannot begin to imagine. Only through strokes of luck or chance encounters can the working-class youth break free from the constraints of class to which they are born. The birthright of cosmopolitan becoming is guided by the circumstance of time, place, networks, and familial social background. In the tale of David presented in *The Anthropology of the Future* (2019), I present how restrictions of the class system prevent the individual from pursuing their full capacity of becoming. Despite top grades at school (straight 'A's') he is advised not to accept a scholarship for private education lest he be seen as the odd one out. He is told not to be too ambitious since the future is already set. A school careers advisor asks him questions about his family background, parents' education and employment (both left school at 16, both unskilled), his hobbies, and postcode, to be fed into a computer that would predict his future. Allowing just a hint of social mobility, he is advised to pursue a career as a golf course green keeper, for he enjoys the outdoors. At sixth-form colleague, notwithstanding his continued 'A' grades, he is not invited to the lunchtime Oxbridge preparation club and he discovers that his UCAS form required for university entry still lists his parents' employment and education details. David was told from an early age by parents and teachers alike to trust his own destiny as a working-class citizen, that he had preordained capacities and 'all the potentiality in the world could not make up for circumstance of birth' (Bryant and Knight 2019, 107). He did not have the belief nor the resources to transcend his birthright future.<sup>2</sup>

'Do boundary-crossing working class ... evolve the open toleration, cultural competence and utopian worldview claimed by globe-trotting elite travelers?' Werbner (2006a, 7) somewhat bluntly asks. Skimming over the use of 'evolve' and the manner the term seems to directly contradict the equity of human capacity that Werbner assumably means to signify, David's case is less about evolution and more about opportunity. Again, we see that the capacity of becoming—the capacity to pursue individual potentiality—is not detached from the socio-historical context. The timespace of David's birth presented him with certain pathways while others not only remained closed but were completely beyond the realms of imagination. Another student with his grades, energies, and ambitions who was brought up just two neighbourhoods to the south might have harnessed potentiality along quite a different trajectory. The freedoms David experienced were partially determined by social environment. Although his orientations to those he met along the way were open and accommodating, the vernacular cosmopolitanism was shut down in childhood in favour of bottlenecking potentiality into destiny. An individual life-story did start again upon David's birth, but history did not.

Growing up, David's only encounter with cosmopolitanism as concept in state education was in a Religious Studies class. Far from being a philosophical approach to the human condition, the teacher was more concerned with trying to convince a group of forty fifteen-year-olds not to ridicule the only Sikh family on the council estate, who had been the target of much verbal abuse and mockery. To this end, she showed a documentary of the 1919 massacre at Amritsar where the British Indian Army opened fire on unarmed Indian citizens, killing 379 and injuring over 1,200 more. Wrapped-up in a mix of (anti)imperialist rhetoric and a vague message of cultural tolerance, for David, this cosmopolitan stuff was all rather confusing.

## Conclusion

In the academic literature, cosmopolitanism is concerned with the plurality of human freedom, with openness and individual expression and the universal right to pursue human potentiality across hegemonic categories (Wardle 2010, 386). On a vernacular level, the everyday understanding of cosmopolitanism in the UK and Greece is based on a worldview of tolerance, multiculturalism, and transcending localised identities. The arguments I have made here have first encouraged us to expand the definition of the cosmopolitan method beyond the traditional philosophical genealogy to encompass grassroots usage, as well as how people now consider their previous cosmopolitan outlooks a luxury of the pre-crisis past in parts of the UK and Greece. Second, I have proposed that there is historical contingency in the pathways available to engage in cosmopolitan becoming. Individual history does start again with each new life, but this is different from the need to acknowledge the socio-historical moment into which that individual is born. The turbulent topological braiding that constitutes the history of history punctuates the horizon of each new present (cf. Hartog 2022). Put simply, each timespace is comprised of ongoing and ever-transforming sets of relations, affects, and networks which inevitably open and close available paths for individual becoming. The resonant mix of collective individuals, bureaucratic and political apparatus, and affects contribute to the formation of historically distinct timespaces with atmospheres and momentums that inform social action. The third and final pin to my argument is that as collectivities of individuals engage in the networks of relations within timespaces that have become the new normal, vernacular cosmopolitanism has taken a back seat, its ideals no longer the driving force they once were. The assemblage of relations that makes up the timespace in the UK and Greece no longer predominantly supports vernacular cosmopolitan visions and pathways of becoming.

If cosmopolitanism as a force for authoring individual lives and collective futures is not of primary concern for those with whom we work, if it is not at the forefront of the timespace of Brexit, Crisis, or the Trumpocene, then one is automatically led to question whether it remains a worthy academic pursuit. In the wake of the Brexit/Trump fallout of 2016, there were cries from the halls of certain UK Higher Education institutions for academics to get down off their perch and open their eyes to the concerns of the majority. The accusation, with which I do not necessarily agree, went that scholars unwittingly indulge in their stereotype of being primarily white, middle-class, wealthy, educated elites that have the luxurious possibility to continue to inhabit the ideals of cosmopolitan timespace (for critique see Werbner 2006a; Hannerz 2004). As one anthropologist colleague told me a month after the Brexit referendum, 'shouldn't we do the admirable thing and actually start trying to understand normal everyday people' (*i.e.* in this case, the working-class informants whom, the assumption went, were not as liberal in their outlook on life)? Although I still find this quite paradoxical because I do believe that this is precisely what most anthropologists are concerned with, her point was that the world had moved on and anthropologists were left way behind, in the minority, perhaps not even really wanting to catch-up lest they find the morally repugnant Other a little too close to home.<sup>3</sup> The colleague suggested that cosmopolitanism in its vernacular forms that seemed to drive 1990s Britain (generally speaking and not

unreflexively), were no longer prominent in the country. A different entanglement of rhetoric, governance, popular culture and technological relations was providing momentum to the new timespace. I may add that if the previous timespace supposedly encouraged a vernacular cosmopolitan outlook but was still pretty unsuccessful on the fronts of human rights, social equality, and cultural coexistence, then it is even more disappointing that the 'project', if there was one in any coordinated sense, failed. The inability of academics as the poster-boys-and-girls of cosmopolitanism to build on this opportunity to further vernacular cosmopolitanism while the soil was fertile—and then be slow to recognise the changing tides of public sentiment—was a double moral failure.

Yet I would argue that it is precisely this type of naivety in categorisation and cultural glossing as presented by my colleague that enforces the need, now more than ever, to retreat to the centre of a cosmopolitan viewpoint and defend the cosmopolitan method, albeit with a reflexive nod to the observable reality that the vernaculars of the historical moment are radically changing. There needs to be a vocal promotion of the moral obligation in human social practice (Josephides 2010, 394) that transcends epochs, timespaces, cultural stereotyping, and the rhetorical imaginary promoted as facilitating specific teleologies. I would be far from the first to suggest that since the anthropological project is to capture the diversity of human life, the discipline itself is inherently cosmopolitan, embracing alterity, dissolving borders, and intimately getting to know the *Anthropos* (and here we can go back to Kant). The place where anthropology 'could do better' is in communicating Rapport's five principles of cosmopolitanism as-lived beyond the boundaries of academia, engaging more with policy-makers, governmental bodies, and those who promote political and economic rhetorics that fill the timespace and feed highly persuasive technologies of the imagination (see Bear 2015a; Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen 2009). That would require a deeper, most likely uncomfortable, relationship with other areas of political and economic life, but might ultimately prove productive in restoring the vision of social liberalism we hold dear by helping to shape it across scales and domains.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps with the mass movement of people, fracturing political unions, and increasing economic precarity comes more diversity, emergent transnational networks, and more pieces of the puzzle to understand from a cosmopolitan perspective—and this includes the side that many cosmopolitans may find morally problematic. In any case, to better understand the world we live, we should engage with grassroots iterations of cosmopolitanism, considering their intrinsic relation to the affects and orientations of the particular socio-historical moment. Vernacular cosmopolitanism is, then, an orientation embedded in a network of contingent relations and cannot be abstracted from the timespace within which individual and collective worldviews are authored.

## Notes

1. Some Greeks perceive cosmopolitanism 'as a handmaid of globalization, as yet another tool for the establishment of Western cultural and political domination' (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2009, 86).
2. Pnina Werbner (1999, 2006b, 497) discusses 'working-class cosmopolitanism' through the example of a Pakistani migrant worker on a building site in the Gulf. The vernacular cosmopolitanism she argues for is based on a subjectivity that embraces different cultures while maintaining an identity rooted, in this case, in religion.

3. Indeed, the opinion that anthropologists in particular should have ‘seen this coming’ but were too indulgently engaged in their own ideologies was captured in publications such as the 2017 *American Ethnologist* Forum on ‘Brexit, Trump, and Anthropology’.
4. To an extent, although not explicitly through the lens of cosmopolitanism, this is what Laura Bear has suggested. In her book on structural austerity in India (2015b), and through further projects on macroeconomics in the UK, she has advocated reintroducing the social and ethical into economic policy. As well as providing concrete suggestions, Bear has engaged with bodies such as the Bank of England and the UK Treasury, as well as former members of the IMF and city bankers, to consider the potential contribution anthropology and the wider social sciences could and should make to economic modelling and political policy.

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