When interrogated about his origins, Diogenes the Cynic evaded the question by declaring himself a *kosmopolitês* or a “citizen of the world” instead of Sinope from which he had been banished in the fifth century B.C.E. This belching, badly-dressed eccentric, who promoted public sex and slept in a tub, would have a lasting legacy in Western history. His vision of cosmopolitanism — of a commitment to one’s humanity rather than one’s home — would inspire ancient Greek Stoicism, Alexander the Great’s imperialism, Enlightenment humanism and humanitarianism after World War II.

Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta’s edited collection *Cosmopolitanisms* (2018) opens up cosmopolitan history’s Eurocentric purview to include the subaltern cultures at the margins of that history. It pushes cosmopolitanism beyond the realm of the jet-setting elite to include refugees, exiles, economic migrants, and peoples of the diaspora. As the title indicates, the book expands cosmopolitanism by pluralizing it. Rather than one “unhealthy skinny ethical abstraction,” their cosmopolitanisms are abundant with “blooming, fleshed-out particulars” that make room for the vernacular, rooted, comparative, discrepant, and marginalized (1). Horta and Robbins’s book is the latest contribution to a growing body of “new cosmopolitan” scholarship that emerged in the 1990s in an effort to decenter and diversify cosmopolitanism. From Derrida’s work on hospitality to Balibar’s seminal *Droit de cité: Culture et politique en démocratie* (1998) and Bruce Robbins and Pheng Cheah’s volume *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998), this new batch of cosmopolitical theory preserves the old cosmopolitanism’s ideal of global coexistence while eschewing its universalism and Eurocentrism.
Theories about cosmopolitanism are ultimately theories about globalization, and those advanced in *Cosmopolitanisms* depart significantly from orthodox Marxism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, for example, Marx and Engels define globalization as the expansion of the fundamental capitalist antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat to a global level. This understanding of globalization as a universalizing division has continued to define Marxist thought, from Leon Trotsky’s theory of combined and uneven development to Frederic Jameson’s notion of a “singular modernity” and Aijaz Ahmed’s definition of globalization as “the emergence of a worldwide capitalist civilization, in which national, regional and local cultures are being represented as so many variants of that singular civilization” (103). Contributors to *Cosmopolitanisms* often resist the universalizing side of this Marxist dialectic. As Robbins and Horta write, they “do not assume that there is a single cosmopolitan idea, and they privilege multiple types of difference in formulating their ideas of cosmopolitanism” (10). Such a formulation, they claim, is better suited to encompass the “many possible modes of life, thought, and sensibility that are produced when commitments and loyalties are multiple and overlapping, no one of them necessarily trumping the others” (3). In doing so, they reflect much postcolonial theoretical production today, which often defines globalization through what Gayatri Spivak describes as the “logic of difference and excess” and Homi Bhabha celebrates as “the empowering condition of hybridity” and the “foreign element that reveals the interstitial.”

*Cosmopolitanisms*’ dedication to difference is its strength. In its pages, readers will find a diverse array of nineteen contributors from north and south, including influential literary and cultural theorists, historians, lawyers, philosophers, and political scientists who often respond and debate with each other. These contributors rethink cosmopolitanism not just as Westernism’s expansion into the peripheries but as an opening for subaltern cultures as well. Together, they examine and expand this new cosmopolitanism synchronically as well as diachronically. Thus, not only do they diversify cosmopolitanism to include those marginalized today, but they also excavate earlier instantiations of this new, subaltern cosmopolitanism, such as Afro-Brazilian culture in the nineteenth century Accra. Readers will not only learn about these new and unlikely forms of cosmopolitanism, but they will also get the chance to read fresh considerations of more traditional forms of cosmopolitanism such as ancient Greeks’ stoicism, Richard Burton’s Victorian adventures and Frederick Law Olmstead’s urban projects.

While the contributors’ attention to plurality, difference, and hybridity is both impressive and salutary, some do so at the expense of contradiction and antagonism. In light of the growing global gulf between the rich and poor in our era of relentless neoliberalism, this oversight will certainly frustrate some. Take Kwame Anthony Appiah’s epilogue in which he reminisces about his nephew’s wedding in Namibia. There, his Norwegian-Namibian nephew, the Moscow-born, South-Korean educated
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bride, European vegetarians and Ovambo carnivores all unite in matrimonial celebration. He writes movingly about this moment as a shining example of a new modern family “connecting people from many nations into a network of relationships that will endure through generations” (271). In less than four pages, this essay distills the major points of his definitive Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (2006), which is frequently cited in books about cosmopolitanism, including Robbins and Horta’s collection. In Cosmopolitanism, he pushes beyond traditional humanist formulations of cosmopolitanism to argue for a universalism plus difference: “We value the variety of human forms of social and cultural life; we do not want everyone to become part of a homogeneous global culture.” He beseeches his reader to learn from and share the world with those who have different backgrounds, religions, cultures and ethnicities. This does not mean giving up one’s own traditions, however. Instead, the ideal cosmopolite is receptive towards the other without attempting to annihilate the differences between them. As a result, she comes away from each encounter with difference with a deeper, more self-critical understanding of herself.

As many have pointed out, what is absent from so much of Appiah’s work (including this epilogue) are the economic differences exacerbated by the globalization he glorifies. In our post-1989 moment when capitalism has inherited the earth, he chooses to virtually ignore class and political economy. This oversight makes sense. After all, class cannot be folded so easily into his cosmopolitan vision of peaceful coexistence. While religious, ethnic, gender, and other cultural differences should certainly be celebrated, many would agree that class differences should not. When Appiah does raise the issue of economic redistribution he is usually dismissive. In Cosmopolitanism, for example, he critiques Peter Singer’s argument that cosmopolitanism should not just be about the acceptance of others but the active struggle for their material wellbeing. Singer’s The Life You Can Save (2009) urges his better-off readers to sacrifice some of their privileges and even donate at least five percent of their income to charitable agencies. But for Appiah, Singer goes too far. He writes, “If so many people in the world are not doing their share — and they clearly are not — it seems to me I cannot be required to derail my life to take up the slack.”

Readers frustrated by such class evasions might appreciate Walter Benn Michaels’ contribution to this book. In his short and scathing piece, Michaels accuses today’s cosmopolites of being more concerned with “the difference between cultures than the difference between quintiles” (61). He directs his ire at NYU, which, like many elite universities, promotes itself as a cosmopolitan site of difference. But Michaels notes that while one may find the Asian American Women’s Alliance or the Iranian Jewish club on campus, one will be hard-pressed to find a poor kids’ club. As he puts it: “The difference between the poor and the rich does not offer an opportunity, much less an occasion, to celebrate difference” (64).

Unlike Michaels, however, many of Cosmopolitanisms’ contributors are actually interested in exploring what it would mean to celebrate the cosmopolitanism of the
poor. In his eponymous essay on the subject, “Cosmopolitanism of the Poor,” Silviano Santiago attempts to do just that. His piece expands cosmopolitanism from the realm of privileged jet-setters and cappuccino-sippers to include refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants. Although he concedes these peoples “had cosmopolitanism thrust upon them by traumatic histories of dislocation and dispossession,” he is ultimately more interested in the ways in which they manage to forge their own cosmopolitan cultures and cites the cultural closeness between Brazil and African nations in a global black resistance as one example of this (3).

The stakes of Silviano’s subaltern cosmopolitanism are particularly illuminated in this collection’s lively debates about Afropolitanism, which constitute one of Cosmopolitanisms’ most important and exciting scholarly contributions. Afropolitanism, as Achille Mbembe defines it here, is an “aesthetic and a particular poetics of the world” practiced by a growing population of increasingly mobile and worldly Africans. Afropolites often live outside Africa or in a different African country from their place of birth. Usually, they are artists who measure themselves “not against the village next door, but against the world at large” (107).

But as fellow-contributors Emma Dabiri and Ashleigh Harris warn, Afropolitanism can often reproduce “African-flavored versions of Western convention and form,” the fruits of which are often only enjoyed by the richest Africans (204). Both Dabiri and Harris importantly draw our attention to the ways in which Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism more generally are often just the superstructural shadows of imperialism and capitalism. Indeed, as they show, Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism are usually not equal exchanges between different cultures around the world but the expansion of Western, and specifically American, imperialism into the peripheries. In their arguments, Dabiri and Harris echo longstanding Marxist critiques of cosmopolitanism as a guise for imperialism and capitalism. In his Prison Notebooks, for example, Gramsci rails against the cosmopolitan intellectual. For him, the cosmopolite is lackey for the pernicious traditions of imperialism and the rise of a rootless managerial class. His words ring especially true today when supposedly cosmopolitan supranational institutions are either powerless (like the UN) or instruments for American imperialism (the World Bank and the IMF).

But while Gramsci urges us to nurture a national culture without nativism, Dabiri and Harris do not. Like Mbembe and many other cosmopolitan thinkers, they do not harken back to the traditional forms of anti-imperialist nationalism championed by African decolonization. Instead, both find great promise in the long history of transnationalism in the Global South. Indeed, as they argue, pre-colonial Africa was never a collection of self-contained tribal identities but a constant exchange of cultures, religions and commodities. For them, this proves that cosmopolitanism need not only be imposed by the US and other imperial centers but can also be an equal exchange between peripheral cultures. Ato Quayson reiterates this key point in his own contribution about the return of Afro-Brazilians to Accra in the nineteenth
The forms of cosmopolitan resistance Mbembe, Santiago, Quayson, Dabiri, and Harris advance do not go so far as to call for the expropriation of the bourgeoisie nor do they make claims upon the state. But, as Santiago insists, “although their subversive mode is soft, their political stock may be strong and little influenced by the festivities generated by the governmental machine” (36). While some might criticize this as an instance of what Walter Benn Michaels bemoans as cosmopolitanism’s focus on culture over economics, it cannot be dismissed so easily. After all, this cosmopolitanism from below is a testament to the endurance and vibrancy of subaltern cultural exchange against imperialism’s odds. In doing so, it draws our attention to the subversive spaces within the apparently smooth circuit of capitalism and empire.

But one is often left wondering how and whether these subversive spaces could ever cohere into a viable force for challenging the powers that be. Contributor Leela Gandhi adamantly answers these questions in the negative. In her piece “Utonal Life,” she uses utonal music and the difference between minor and major in musical theory to illustrate the role of minor anti-imperial struggles against dominant globalization. For her, anti-imperialism must be engaged in a form of minor politics built on “myriad subjective, nonconformist, immature, inconsequential, heretical, and minor practices” (65). She thus resists the major’s normative and institutional politics, while refusing to overturn them. Instead of a grand utopian project, her minor politics strives to open up new heterotopian cultures that offer alternative ways of being. These subversive spaces are not meant to add up to anything or cohere into a collective resistance that would overtake the dominant order. Rather, “its sole interest is to make dissensual coexistence manifest whenever shared life is at risk of monopolization by a major mode” (66, emphasis added).

Gandhi’s minor politics and its anarchist principles of decentralization, horizontality, and spontaneity reiterate much of the anti-imperialist thought advanced in postmodern political theory today. In their much-discussed volume Multitude, for example, Michael Hart and Antonio Negri urge their readers to abandon the category of “the people” for the “multitude,” a composition of “innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity.” Unlike the centralized organizations such as Internationals or parties, the multitude is a global network of local anti-imperial struggles that refuse to make claims on the state or being reduced to a singular party form.

This sort of minor politics is often understood as the historically appropriate mode of struggle against neoliberalism’s rhizomatic structures. As Hardt and Negri write, “it takes a network to fight a network.” In this context, neo-anarchism’s growing popularity in the west—from the alter-globalization movement to Occupy Wall Street—might be understood as the proper mode of resistance in our era of relentless neoliberalism and its attack on more traditional form of organizing such as labor unions and political parties oriented around and through the state. Furthermore,
this sort of minor politics might also offer a solution to what David Hollinger, in his contribution to this book, calls the “problem of solidarity” in the face of the plethora of different ethnicities, cultures, and religions globalization confronts us with.

In their celebration of the local, the spontaneous and the decentralized, however, Gandhi and others can sometimes confuse a liability imposed upon the left with a freely-chosen opportunity. Their fixation on autonomy and spontaneity at the expense of large-scale, emancipatory institutions of collective organizing, such as the political party, can even mirror neoliberalism’s own commanded individualism and flexibility. (In The New Spirit of Capitalism, Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski even go so far as to argue that that the ’68 autonomists’ demands “to live, to express oneself, to be free” actually inspired neoliberalism’s own ethos of flexibility.)

While Gandhi’s quotidian form of resistance “widen the ambit of shared truth,” it becomes problematic when it forecloses any engagement with the nation-state. Despite contemporary cultural studies’ continuous proclamations otherwise, the nation-state remains an intractable instrument for capital accumulation, resource extraction and the enforced inequality. As Timothy Brennan writes, “Nation-states are not only, as we customarily hear today, imagined communities: they are also, and no less fundamentally, manageable communities.”

Today, even multi-national corporations continue to rely on domestic state measures such as tariffs, political trade bans on problematic nations, highly policed free-market zones and subsidizing. As Homi Bhabha points out in his own contribution to Cosmopolitanisms, 90% of all world-wide trade policies of tariffs are still controlled by nations rather than interregional bodies.

Ignoring this not only cedes the nation-state’s power to capitalists and the right, it also elides the nation-state’s crucial function as a tool for indigenous and subaltern peoples to assert their sovereignty and to petition the state through a shared cultural identity. Cosmopolitan theory today often succumbs to this in its frequent dismissals socialist nationalism as “institutionalized” and “ossified” — to use Mbembe’s words. In doing so, it ignores the many socialist movements of the last few years that have organized through or around the nation-state in the Global South, including India, Nepal, Peru, and the Philippines, to name a few.

Unlike Mbembe and others, Bruce Robbins is the only contributor to think about the nation-state as a tool for progressive change. To do so, he draws on Orwell’s writing during World War II when Britain was undergoing rationing to defeat the Nazis. For Robbins, this sacrifice proves that nationalism can be used not just for reactionary ends but as means of stretching people beyond themselves to some greater collective good. While Robbins acknowledges the transnational urgency of climate change, he, like the other contributors to this volume, insists that one cannot immediately jump from the particular to the universal. Instead, one must understand the universal through one’s particularities, including one’s nationality. Without ever answering this question, Robbins ponders how nationalism can be put in the service
of cosmopolitanism for global projects for ecological justice or against nuclear war.

While Robbins recognizes the nation-state's double-nature as both a product of imperialism and a necessary, though temporary, tool for justice, he and the other contributors in this collection curiously never mention internationalism (i.e. the global cooperation of anti-capitalist, state projects). This shows, if anything, the need to explore the relationship between cosmopolitanism and internationalism. Must these two forms be in opposition? Or can we pursue a more heterodox approach that draws on both? How, for example, can transnational subaltern cultures in the Global South and cosmopolitanism institutions of human rights and humanitarianism also engage with anti-colonial struggles for sovereignty in Palestine, Catalonia, Northern Ireland, Ukraine, and First Nations, as well as state-socialist projects in Venezuela and Cuba, and the rise of democratic socialism in the United States and England where leftists are increasing working through the institutions of the state and parliamentary democracy? Although readers will not find answers to these questions, let alone calls for an international proletariat to break free from their chains, they will find some of the sharpest, contemporary takes from the most influential cosmopolitical theorists to think alongside and against. The book offers a broad set of fascinating considerations readers should be very invested in addressing and answering.
Notes

4. For more on contemporary cosmopolitanism's dismissal of decolonization projects see Timothy Brennan’s *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (2006).