

## *Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism: making place for nationalism*

*Paper to be presented at SGIR 2010. The paper presents, in a condensed form, some of the key arguments of my new book **Third World Protest: Between Home and the World** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).*

### *Orientations*

The literature of international normative theory has been the site of a vigorous debate between those who insist that the scope of justice ought to be universal, and a variety of positions that defend limits on the scope of justice. Exponents of the first view—whom we might call ‘cosmopolitans’—weigh equally the claims of all individuals who would be affected by policies or institutional arrangements, out of a belief in the equal worth of humanity in all persons regardless of their membership of particular communities.<sup>1</sup> Critics of cosmopolitan thinking are too diverse to classify under a single rubric. One influential subset—whom we might label ‘communitarians’—argue that norms of justice can only arise from within bounded communities. In their view, the content of community—its norms, values, traditions—is in some way constitutive of a sense of justice.<sup>2</sup> In some versions of this thesis, the nation is seen as the politically most salient form of community for this purpose.<sup>3</sup> One important consequence of regarding communities as sources of ethical value in their own right and boundaries as having ethical significance, is that it becomes permissible (and in some versions of the thesis, obligatory) to ascribe priority to members of the community over non-members in certain contexts. Communitarians sometimes claim, additionally, that the universal obligations posited by cosmopolitans are motivationally over-demanding and therefore psychologically infeasible. This is because, in their view, moral motivation is strongly linked to identity and community is constitutive of identity, the upshot of which is that people are thought to lack the motivation to discharge obligations owed to those with whom they do not identify.

The different voices in this debate are essentially addressing the question of what obligations we owe others, or perhaps more accurately what obligations are owed to *which* others. This

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), Henry Shue, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and US Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), Darrel Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

discourse of political obligation becomes particularly vexed in the context of global problems such as genocide, poverty and climate change, where the ‘others’ in question are often distant others whom we neither know nor see, and with whom we may share few of the ties of race, religion, ethnicity or language that appear to bind us to our fellow nationals. While these issues are of undeniable political, and indeed existential, urgency, they have spawned a rather arid academic debate that is problematic in two key respects.

First, a great deal of the work that constitutes the field of international normative theory is concerned very largely with elaborating a normative framework that will usher in a more just and humane world. This endeavour focuses mainly on the content of norms, while remaining insufficiently attentive to the political mechanisms by which norms are enforced or undermined, or the history of ideas and practices associated with such norms. Yet politics is inescapable, as Fred Dallmayr reminds us, because norms do not translate directly into praxis but require careful interpretation and application, both of which raise eminently political questions (who has the right of interpretation?; and in case of conflict, who is entitled to adjudicate between different interpretations?).<sup>4</sup> And history is crucial because the legitimacy of norms may be shaped by readings of their provenance and praxis in the world (where have they come from?; what have they done?).<sup>5</sup>

Second, although the charge of Eurocentrism has been levelled against Western political theory for some time, it does not seem to have had very much impact in the field of what passes as ‘international’ normative theory.<sup>6</sup> This field is ‘international’ in its aspirations, in the sense that it is concerned with the ethics of world ordering. Yet it is dominated by Euro-American theorists (or theorists working in Euro-American universities), and its theoretical production makes very little reference to the politics and self-understandings of subjects in the non-Western world. The implications of this might be more obvious if we were to consider attitudes towards nationalism, as a case in point. The cosmopolitan literature’s antipathy towards nationalism is no doubt shaped by the Western experience of nationalism, in which a discourse that begins as a struggle to democratise absolutist states, ends up being yoked to those states in projects of imperialism and fascism. There is little cognisance in this literature of the postcolonial attachment to nationalism, which, despite the subsequent depredations of postcolonial nation-states, continues to see nationalism as the vehicle that delivered the very condition of Latin American, African and Asian postcoloniality.<sup>7</sup> The relative novelty and fragility of this transition in many parts of the world only reinforces the intensity of this attachment.

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<sup>4</sup> Fred Dallmayr, ‘Cosmopolitanism: Moral and Political’, *Political Theory* 31, no. 3 (2003): 434.

<sup>5</sup> My attempt to bring history, politics and ethics together is influenced by Fred Halliday, ‘The potentials of Enlightenment’, *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 5 (1999): 108, who calls for a linking of the domains of speculative political theory (which is concerned with reasserting the values of the Enlightenment) and historical sociology (which asks whether purposive action in pursuance of those values is possible within the constraints of the contemporary world).

<sup>6</sup> The very distinction between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ political theory is problematic, but that is perhaps a topic for another article.

<sup>7</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 110.

This inattention to the history and politics of attitudes towards norms in the non-Western world may simply be a reflection of the more general inattention to history and politics described above. That general inattention in turn may stem from the methodological assumption that the content of justice can be known in its entirety by engaging in thought experiments, such as the imagination of what it would be rational for reasonable individuals to conclude as being in their interest, were they to operate behind a veil of ignorance that denied them knowledge of their citizenship and nationality (among other indications of their station in life). The Rawlsian original position is a device that claims to arrive at universal norms of justice, *precisely* by abstracting from particular experience. Yet Rawlsian norms themselves end up being contingent on empirical claims, some of which are highly contested. One thinks here of Rawls's justification in *The Law of Peoples* of a rather meagre level of assistance to what he calls 'burdened societies', based on the empirical claim—derived from Amartya Sen's work on famines—that domestic political culture rather than, say, external vulnerabilities are a more powerful determinant of aggregate levels of well-being.<sup>8</sup> Even ideal theorising of the Rawlsian variety, then, cannot ultimately avoid an engagement with contentious questions of history and political economy.

In this paper, I hope to make a tentative beginning towards addressing some of these deficits in what I consider to be an otherwise valuable literature. In particular, I want to reflect on the potentials of cosmopolitanism, and more particularly on the putative opposition between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, from a subaltern postcolonial perspective. I use the term 'subaltern' in the highly inexact but nonetheless useful sense suggested by the historian Ranajit Guha, who uses the category to refer to all non-elite 'classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country.'<sup>9</sup> In postcolonial studies, the term is usually interpreted broadly to include any person or group of inferior rank (literally, 'below the alter') whether because of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or any other identity.<sup>10</sup> A 'postcolonial perspective', following Robert Young, does not commit me to a particular theoretical approach but instead identifies a dialectical predisposition that takes into account both the broad historical facts of decolonisation and the determined achievement of sovereignty, but also the realities of nations and peoples emerging into new contexts of domination.<sup>11</sup>

The adoption of this vantage point almost immediately casts the central preoccupations of the field of international normative theory in a somewhat exotic and elitist light. Debates between cosmopolitans and nationalists typically focus on the question 'what obligations do we owe strangers?' But the question betrays a rather elitist conception of its audience. Anyone teetering on the brink of existence, on account of material deprivation or persecution by state

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<sup>8</sup> John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). For a criticism of Rawls's use of empirical evidence, see Andrew Hurrell, 'Norms and Ethics in International Relations', in *Handbook of International Relations*, eds. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse & Beth Simmons (London: Sage, 2002), 140.

<sup>9</sup> Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha & Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 40.

<sup>10</sup> For a Marxist criticism of the term, see Tom Brass, 'Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements, and the (re-)Emergence of a (Post-) Modernised (Middle) Peasant', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 18, no. 2 (1991): 173-205.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 58.

or non-state actors for example, might be forgiven for not giving the question of their obligations to strangers much consideration. Philosophically, the universal relevance of the question is undeniable, for even those most marginalised in some contexts will occupy positions of power in others. Politically, the question fails as an opening gambit insofar as its intention is to initiate a global conversation on justice. To ask what obligations one owes strangers seems to presuppose an audience that can afford the luxury of thinking about strangers. The political economy of the field of academic cosmopolitanism means that the question is usually posed by Western authors to largely satisfied Western audiences, with a view to persuading those audiences to treat outsiders with respect. But what of the subaltern outsiders? Can they be expected to be cosmopolitan too?

This is a problem that should be of particular concern to cosmopolitans, given their commitment to universality. Leading cosmopolitan thinkers argue that cosmopolitanism is distinguished by its individuality, universality and generality, which is to say that all individuals are ultimate units of concern, equally, *for everyone*.<sup>12</sup> This means that it should be possible for everyone to espouse a cosmopolitan worldview. Yet the preoccupations of subaltern outsiders are likely to be rather different from those of satisfied insiders. Rather than asking ‘what do we owe them?’, a more pressing question from their point of view might be ‘what’s in it for us?’ What indeed might we find in cosmopolitanism for the subaltern?

At first glance, rather a lot. Cosmopolitanism’s promise of universal inclusion appears obviously appealing from a subaltern point of view.<sup>13</sup> Yet this appeal should be tentative and *prima facie* because universalism by itself is a rather empty concept, offering little reason for celebration unless we endorse the ethical content of whatever is being universalised and the political means by which it is to be made universal. Admission into a universal polity is not straightforwardly liberating unless the terms of inclusion have specific emancipatory content. Perhaps it is cosmopolitanism’s egalitarianism—its promise to weigh equally the claims of every person who would be affected by the choice of particular policies or institutional arrangements and the radical distributive implications of this maxim<sup>14</sup>—that seems more compelling from a subaltern perspective. Conversely, the communitarian claim that it is permissible or necessary to give ethical priority to one’s compatriots appears to be a

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 169; Simon Caney, ‘Review Article: International Distributive Justice’, *Political Studies* 49, no. 5 (2001): 977.

<sup>13</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Toward a New Legal Common Sense: Law, Globalisation and Emancipation* (London: Butterworths, 2002), 460, asks ‘who needs cosmopolitanism?’ and then replies ‘whoever is a victim of intolerance and discrimination needs tolerance; whoever is denied human dignity needs a community of human beings; whoever is a non-citizen needs world citizenship in any given community or nation.’

<sup>14</sup> Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, 143-53, argues for the global application of Rawls’ difference principle whereby resources should be distributed so as to maximise the condition of the least well-off human being. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, 132-33, recasts the obligation to alleviate poverty as one to do no harm (rather than one to do good) and argues that the obligation applies with equal force to the domestic and the foreign poor. Shue, *Basic Rights*, ch. 6, attacks three grounds commonly offered for giving ethical priority to one’s compatriots.

profoundly selfish one—at least from a consequentialist viewpoint, given the gross inequalities that exist between political communities in the world today.<sup>15</sup>

To leave the argument here would be to engage purely with the ethical content of cosmopolitan norms, while ignoring their genealogy and the socio-historical conditions of their production. Even a brief consideration of the history of the idea of cosmopolitanism in Western thought reveals its deep implication in the conception and practice of empire and capitalism. Anthony Pagden has argued persuasively that European ideas of cosmopolitanism emerged in tandem with the spread of European empires: ‘just as Cicero was writing as the Roman republic was being replaced by the Roman Empire, so Zeno was writing at the very moment that the independent Greek city states were being absorbed into Alexander’s ‘world’ empire...one of the greatest of the Roman Stoics [Marcus Aurelius] was also an emperor, and...Seneca wrote for Nero.’<sup>16</sup> Similarly, he writes that it was European Enlightenment cosmopolitans who often advanced moral justifications for later exercises in European imperialism.<sup>17</sup> Stoic, Cynic and Enlightenment cosmopolitanisms may have emerged in tandem with the spread of empires, partly because the ideas of universal moral community that they recommended seemed practicable at precisely those times and in those places where universal political communities (i.e. empires) were being constructed, and partly also because those ideas provided attractive justifications for projects of empire-building.

One might also regard cosmopolitanism as being implicated in the spread of a capitalist world market. There is a distinct view in early Enlightenment thinking, evident in the work of figures such as Grotius, Pufendorf and Vattel, which sees the cultivation of cosmopolitan sentiments of universal love for humanity as being motivated by primarily egoistic considerations. In this admittedly contested view, human beings’ desire for survival (but also their greed for superfluities) necessitates trade and commerce, which in turn demands the cultivation of universal sociability. Commerce is seen to play a civilising role in international relations, with the result that the promotion of trade and commerce becomes both rational and a matter of moral duty.<sup>18</sup> Because trade is enabled by the institution of private property, the moral imperative to promote trade is in effect one to impose property rights—by force if necessary—on those parts of the world that do not yet recognise them. The language of individual liberal rights and duties are ultimately an expression of this effort to reorganise human relations as market relations. Universal community in this view is not an end in itself, but a means to the end of business, with cosmopolitan sociability functioning as the

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<sup>15</sup> See the criticism of David Miller’s work in Michael Freeman, ‘Universalism, Particularism and Cosmopolitan Justice’, in *International Justice*, ed. Tony Coates (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 82: ‘Miller’s particularistic ethic is unattractive because it endorses only a weak, low-cost humanitarianism and thereby endorses a great deal of collective selfishness and is indifferent to a great deal of human suffering.’

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Pagden, ‘Stoicism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Legacy of European Imperialism’, *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 7, no. 1 (2000): 6.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires: Europeans and the Rest of the World, From Antiquity to the Present* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), 145. For a contrary view, see Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> But see Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 114, where though the ‘spirit of commerce’ is invoked as having pacifying implications, it is not used to justify unrestricted free trade.

ideological superstructure of a world capitalist market.<sup>19</sup> Little wonder, then, that critics have noted that ideas of world citizenship have been championed by, or at least comes most readily to, elites who are able to experience a sense of inhabitation of the world as a whole thanks to their ability to travel and transact across borders, armed with visa-friendly passports, credit cards and invitations to conferences such as this one.<sup>20</sup> In short, the cosmopolitan gaze has historically been that of the powerful and wealthy.

The upshot of the argument so far would appear to be that although the praxis of cosmopolitanism by elites would be good for subalterns, subalterns themselves could never *be* cosmopolitans. Nor would they want to be. While the material self-sufficiency of elite cosmopolitan theorists confirms them in their individualism and enables them to recommend the repudiation of particularistic attachments such as ethnic solidarities, such attachments are often a resource for effective collective action and mutual support among the less powerful.<sup>21</sup> Put differently, if inclusion in the polis has usually had to be fought for, the subaltern as individual would appear to stand little chance in that fight. Subaltern inclusion seems more likely as a result of the strengthening of collective consciousness and subaltern community.<sup>22</sup> Historically, perhaps it is communitarianism—and more particularly, nationalism—which has been seen as the ‘natural’ vocabulary of grievance and resistance (one thinks here of Isaiah Berlin’s view of nationalism as ‘a response to a wound inflicted upon a society’<sup>23</sup>).

Compelling as they may seem, these conclusions would be too hasty and simple. Perhaps it is atomistic individualism, rather than cosmopolitanism per se, which is inimical to effective subaltern agency.<sup>24</sup> As efforts to forge new forms of community across national lines, working class and feminist internationalisms might be seen as attempts to articulate subaltern cosmopolitanisms. Marx and Engels’ famous declaration that ‘the working men have no country’,<sup>25</sup> echoed by Virginia Woolf in respect of women,<sup>26</sup> might be regarded as exhortations to cosmopolitan resistance addressed to subalterns.

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<sup>19</sup> Petter Korkman, ‘The Vital String of Mankind: Sociability and the Foundation of Natural Law and Universal Rights’, paper presented to Commemorative Conference on Alberico Gentili: ‘A Just Empire? Rome’s Legal Legacy and the Justification of War and Empire in International Law’, NYU School of Law, March 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Craig Calhoun, ‘The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travellers: Toward a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 872.

<sup>21</sup> Craig Calhoun, ‘“Belonging” in the cosmopolitan imaginary’, *Ethnicities* 3, no. 4 (2003): 545.

<sup>22</sup> This criticism of individualism can be found in Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Colonialism is a System’, in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 41, who indicts French colonialism in Algeria for, among other things, imposing ‘an individualistic and liberal legal code in order to ruin the frameworks and the development of the Algerian community...it *fabricates* ‘natives’ by a double movement which separates them from their archaic community by giving them or maintaining in them, *in the solitude of liberal individualism*, a mentality whose archaism can only be perpetuated in relation to the archaism of the society. It creates *masses* but prevents them from becoming a conscious proletariat by mystifying them with the caricature of their own ideology.’

<sup>23</sup> Isaiah Berlin, ‘Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power’, in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Hogarth Press, 1980), 349.

<sup>24</sup> Although see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), for a classic account of the individualised and unorganised forms of protest of the weak.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2004), 29; Alejandro Colas, ‘Putting Cosmopolitanism into Practice: the Case of Socialist Internationalism’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 23, no. 3 (1994): 513-34.

<sup>26</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Penguin, 2000), 234.

As for the political economy of the cosmopolitan gaze, there is a great deal to be said for the possibility of subaltern access to cosmopolitan scripts. In an argument that essentially adapts Benedict Anderson's classic account of the origins of nationalism<sup>27</sup> to the conditions of a globalising world, Arjun Appadurai has suggested that we are beginning to witness the emergence of 'postnational' communities. Just as New World nations were imagined in particular ways corresponding to the migratory and professional mobility options of creole elites conjoined with the phenomenon of 'print capitalism', global migration and global mass media now provide the infrastructural basis for the imagination of postnational communities.<sup>28</sup> Importantly, in Appadurai's view, migration is not the prerogative of the privileged: the demographic basis for a postnational world is provided as much by refugees, exiles, migrant labour,<sup>29</sup> trafficked women and illegal aliens, as by wealthy frequent flyers. One might still object that the link between cosmopolitanism and mobility (even subaltern mobility) leaves serious questions about the possibilities of cosmopolitan identification for the subaltern immobile.<sup>30</sup> Yet even if labour flows are policed ever more stringently by nation-states, flows of capital and information on their own might be seen as foisting a sort of 'forced cosmopolitanism' even on rooted subalterns, albeit unevenly. If anyone can live in locales entirely of their own creation, it is the powerful; the weak find it harder to resist the encroachment of external influences and the consequent cosmopolitanisation of their lives. We might say, then, that hybridity emerges first on the terrain of the weak.<sup>31</sup>

What I have been trying to do in the foregoing paragraphs is to unsettle any easy association of either cosmopolitanism or nationalism with elitism or subalternity. Insofar as the literature of international normative theory seeks to concretise these associations, it provides a partial and potentially misleading account of the emancipatory potentials of these normative optics. In the following section, I present—in a highly unequal fashion that reflects the current state of my knowledge, rather than a ranking of their importance—the views of four postcolonial thinkers who refused the easy opposition between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. All four were fierce critics of nationalism, even as they fervently desired the success of nationalist movements of their time and place. They advocated cosmopolitan sensibilities, while remaining unwilling to completely repudiate nationalism. These thinkers are important for my purposes in this paper, not only because they embody a tension between cosmopolitanism

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<sup>27</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 21.

<sup>29</sup> Vinay Gidwani, 'Economic liberalisation, urban work, and the politics of fracture: A geography of uneven development post-1990', paper presented at the meeting of the American Association of Geographers, Philadelphia, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Meyda Yegenoglu, 'Cosmopolitanism and nationalism in a globalised world', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 111, 120.

<sup>31</sup> See Mike Featherstone, 'Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity', in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, eds. Rob Wilson & Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 65, who, from similar intuitions, writes that the postmodern emphasis upon the mixing of codes, pastiche, fragmentation, incoherence, disjunction and syncretism were characteristic of cities in colonial societies, decades or even centuries, before they appeared in the West. 'From this perspective, the first multicultural city was not London or Los Angeles but probably Rio de Janeiro, Calcutta or Singapore.'

and nationalism that is inadequately reflected in the literature,<sup>32</sup> but also because they are engaged in the task of thinking through the potentials of cosmopolitanism and nationalism from the perspective of nations struggling for independence and still marginal to the community of states that constitute the world of international relations. The thinkers themselves are hardly marginal; all four are extremely well known though perhaps somewhat ghettoised in the academy, locked up in fields such as comparative literature and postcolonial studies. As such, I make no claim to undertaking subaltern normative theory, though all four might be seen as reflecting on the condition of marginality. Finally, my criticism of Eurocentrism in the literature notwithstanding, none of these thinkers can be described as ‘non-Western’ in any easy fashion, given their intellectual influences, their professional locations in some cases, and the highly cosmopolitan itineraries of their lives.

*Joyce / Tagore / Said / Fanon*

There is a celebrated passage in **James Joyce’s** *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which Stephen Dedalus confounds his friend Davin with his refusal to sign a socialist petition advocating universal peace and disarmament *and* his insistent mockery of Irish nationalism. ‘I can’t understand you’, says a perplexed Davin. ‘One time I hear you talk against English literature. Now you talk against the Irish informers. What with your name and your ideas...Are you Irish at all?’ Dedalus’s response to this provocation reveals a deep bitterness about Irish nationalism: its expectation of sacrifice from its people despite a history of Irish collaboration with the invading English, its betrayal of its most loyal sons, and most crucially its suppression of individuality (‘When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.’) Yet the invective hurled against Ireland in this passage (‘Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow’), does not ultimately amount to a disavowal of belonging (‘this race and this country and this life produced me...I shall express myself as I am’).<sup>33</sup>

Joyce scholar Kevin Barry locates Joyce in a group of cultural renegades including John Eglinton, Thomas Kettle, James Connolly, Thomas McDonagh, R. W. Lynd and the contributors to a short-lived Irish literary journal called *Dana*. These critics broadly opposed the notion that cultural nativism was the most effective means by which Ireland might oppose British cultural dominance, insisting on a broadening of the literary revival beyond national boundaries, the recognition of difference within Irish life, and an insistence on cultural criticism. Yet in contrast to most other contributors to *Dana*, who espoused a straightforward modernism intent on dispensing with tradition, Barry characterises Joyce as a ‘perverse traditionalist’ whose writings remain immersed in the methods and themes of the past, neither revering them nor eliminating their complexity. As he puts it, ‘sporting with the past, abusing

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<sup>32</sup> See Chris Brown, *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 27, who argues that ‘the cosmopolitan/communitarian classification is more or less inclusive for the modern age – all variants of international relations theory can be seen as falling into one or the other camp without too much violence being done to the intentions of the theorist.’

<sup>33</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1965), 218-21.

it, always implicated in it, [Joyce's writings] refuse to jettison history while they release the present from its grip.<sup>34</sup>

This attitude towards history is evident in Joyce's commentary on Irish politics, of which a series of articles written in Trieste between 1907 and 1912 are an important collection. Here, the refusal of cultural nativism seems to come precisely out of a deep awareness of Irish history, not least the ironic fact that a great many of the leading figures of Irish nationalism were not of Irish descent at all. Joyce frequently deconstructs the very notion of an Irish essence, as for example in the following passage, which is also revealing of his view of nationalism:

Our civilisation is an immense woven fabric in which very different elements are mixed, in which Nordic rapacity is reconciled to Roman law, and new Bourgeois conventions to the remains of a Sircian religion. In such a fabric, it is pointless searching for a thread that has remained pure, virgin and uninfluenced by other threads nearby. What race or language...can nowadays claim to be pure? No race has less right to make such a boast than the one presently inhabiting Ireland. Nationality (if this is not really a useful fiction like many others which the scalpels of the present-day scientists have put paid to) must find its basic reason for being in something that surpasses, that transcends and that informs changeable entities such as blood or human speech.<sup>35</sup>

Even as he insists that nationalism cannot be constructed on something as fluid and indeterminate as race or language, Joyce leaves tantalisingly open in this passage the possibility that a *raison d'être* for nationalism can be found. While recognising that this reason inheres in the role that nationalism claims to play in liberation from the tyranny of imperialism, Joyce's insistence on 'something that surpasses, that transcends' the immediacy of the preoccupations of Irish nationalists means that to be justifiable, nationalism must be directed against all forms of tyranny. As he puts it, 'I do not see what good it does to fulminate against English tyranny while the tyranny of Rome still holds the dwelling place of the soul.'<sup>36</sup>

In the same year (1916) that *Portrait* was first published in book form, another literary modernist in another British colony published a novel called *Ghare Baire* (translated into English as *The Home and the World*), which expressed a similar refusal of imperialism and authoritarian nationalism. In language that virtually echoes Dedalus's determination to fly by the nets of nationality, language and religion, the autobiographical protagonist of this other novel, written by the Indian Nobel laureate **Rabindranath Tagore**, speaks of the need to 'save the country from the thousand-and-one-snares—of religion, custom and selfishness', which nationalist agitators were laying amongst the people.<sup>37</sup> Although there is no evidence that Joyce and Tagore were influenced by each other's work, it is no coincidence that two novelists from Ireland and India crafted these fictional kindred spirits contemporaneously,

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<sup>34</sup> Kevin Barry, 'Introduction', in *James Joyce: Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xxx-xxxii.

<sup>35</sup> James Joyce, 'Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages', in *ibid.*, 118.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>37</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, tr. Surendranath Tagore (London: Penguin, 2005) [hereafter *TH&TW*], 136.

given their location in comparable discursive fields. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland and Bengal were in some ways remarkably similar places, characterised by a comparable mixture of distinct modes of anti-colonial protest: constitutional agitation, cultural nationalism, mass-based passive resistance in the form of strikes and boycotts, punctuated by sporadic acts of terrorism and insurrection.<sup>38</sup>

Set in Swadeshi-era<sup>39</sup> Bengal, *The Home and the World* personifies the conflict between cosmopolitanism and nationalism as seen from the vantage point of a nation attempting to wrest its freedom from imperial rule, in the form of a love triangle involving two men and a woman. Most readings of the novel see cosmopolitanism as being personified in the character of Nikhil, a wealthy but enlightened zamindar (landlord), whose progressiveness is manifested in his views on gender relations, the need for female education, the welfare of his poor tenants and, most crucially for the narrative, his views on nationalist agitation. Nikhil is a supporter of the goals of the Swadeshi movement (swaraj or self-rule), but critical of its methods. In particular, he refuses to use his authority as a zamindar to enforce the nationalist injunction against buying British-made goods, knowing full well that the impact of the boycott was likely to fall hardest on poorer consumers who tended to purchase cheap imported goods in preference to expensive indigenous substitutes.<sup>40</sup> Nationalism is represented by Nikhil's friend Sandip, who shares none of the former's reticence as far as the ethics of mobilisation are concerned. Passionately committed to the success of the Swadeshi movement, Sandip unapologetically uses Hindu religious symbolism in an effort to primordialise the nationalist identity he seeks to construct. When this alienates the Muslim minority, who also bear the commercial brunt of the boycott in their capacity as petty traders reliant on the sale of foreign cloth, he ruthlessly urges his followers to bring them into line.

The female character, Bimala, who is married to Nikhil, occupies a pivotal position in the novel as the personification of Bengal,<sup>41</sup> torn between the values espoused by the two men. She is the terrain on which the two men duel, the prize for whose affection they compete, but also the arbiter of the novel—her modulating feelings towards the male characters are a metaphor for public perceptions of the political efficacy of their competing worldviews.

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<sup>38</sup> Young, *Postcolonialism*, 168, 302, 313, 318. Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), ch. 2.

<sup>39</sup> The Swadeshi (literally, 'of one's own country' or indigenous) movement, which convulsed Bengal from 1903-08, was provoked by the imperial British government's announcement of its intention to partition Bengal into two provinces, one of which was to have a Hindu majority and the other a Muslim majority. Although justified on grounds of administrative convenience, the move was widely interpreted at the time as yet another manifestation of imperial divide-and-rule. The anti-partition movement began meekly with speeches and petitions, but had moved well beyond its bourgeois origins by 1905, mobilising large numbers of people around a programme comprising a political boycott of colonial educational and government institutions and an economic boycott of foreign goods, accompanied by a nurturing of indigenous substitutes. Although the movement failed to prevent the partition, it was unprecedented in its efforts to bridge the elite-subaltern divide and featured a number of tactics and idioms that Gandhi would later deploy more successfully. For background, see Sarkar, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> This relative price disparity was very likely a consequence of colonial tariff policy, although we are not told this in the novel.

<sup>41</sup> Tanika Sarkar, 'Many Faces of Love: Country, Woman and God in *The Home and the World*', in *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*, ed. P. K. Datta (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 34.

Bimala becomes increasingly enamoured with Sandip's fiery rhetoric, which seems to offer a more potent form of political agency able to deliver the nation from imperialist subjugation. Conversely, she becomes intellectually and sexually estranged from Nikhil, whose less heroic social work, geared towards long-term societal transformation and carried out in almost complete obliviousness of the British presence, seems less promising. Yet Bimala is increasingly assailed by doubt. Sandip has persuaded her to steal money from her husband's safe for the nationalist cause—an act that she regrets almost immediately as it begins to vitiate her relationships with members of her own household. In the world outside, the pernicious consequences of Sandip's political activism are beginning to unfold. When Swadeshi activists begin to punish those found contravening the boycott, tensions are inflamed and the Muslims riot in protest. But Bimala's second thoughts come too late to save her relationship with Nikhil, who is wounded—possibly fatally<sup>42</sup>—in the course of trying to quell a communal riot.

Bimala's remorse at the end of the novel is usually read as a vindication of Nikhil's position, shot through with the deeply pessimistic sentiment that Sandip's views are more politically resonant in the world. Martha Nussbaum, for example, has read the book as the 'tragic story of the defeat of a reasonable and principled cosmopolitanism by the forces of nationalism and ethnocentrism.'<sup>43</sup> This is, in my view, too simple a reading, particularly given the broader context of her article, which appears to set up an oppositional relationship between patriotism and cosmopolitanism. Nikhil straddles both, his patriotism being expressed metaphorically in his unflinching devotion to Bimala even in moments of frustration, misunderstanding and betrayal, but also more literally in his endorsement of the goals of Swadeshi, in his (admittedly disillusioned) financial support for Sandip,<sup>44</sup> and in his unceasing efforts to redefine rather than cede the patriotic space.<sup>45</sup> The novel is therefore more plausibly read as a conflict between two forms of patriotism, as suggested by Ashis Nandy—one that is unreasoned, authoritarian and demagogic, and another that is critical, reflective and uncoerced.<sup>46</sup> But Nandy's reading, like Nussbaum's, remains too one-sided in its persistence in seeing the novel as essentially a critique of the politics of Sandip.

I would argue that *The Home and the World* is also a critique of Nikhil and his politics of cosmopolitanism. Indeed, in having both male protagonists exist the scene towards the end of the novel, Tagore repudiates both cosmopolitanism and nationalism, leaving Bimala alone to reconsider the future trajectory of her self-assertion. In silencing both the main characters at the end, Tagore was recommending neither of them. In a highly persuasive reading, Michael Sprinker has suggested that Nikhil is not merely ineffectual but also deeply paternalistic in

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<sup>42</sup> We are left in some doubt as to his fate in the novel, but in the film adaptation of the book by Satyajit Ray, it is very clear that Nikhil has died.

<sup>43</sup> Martha Nussbaum, 'Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism', in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>44</sup> *TH&TW*, 27.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 129: 'Our country...has been brought to death's door through sheer fear—from fear of the gods down to fear of the police; and if you set up, in the name of freedom, the fear of some other bogey, whatever it may be called; if you would raise your victorious standard on the cowardice of the country by means of downright oppression, then no true lover of the country can bow to your decision.'

<sup>46</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 13-14.

his insistence on bestowing *his* conception of freedom on others.<sup>47</sup> This is most obvious in his attempts to educate, modernise and ‘civilise’ Bimala, something that Nikhil acknowledges in a moment of self-flagellating introspection about the causes of their estrangement.<sup>48</sup> There is no corresponding critique in the novel of the conservatism of Nikhil’s politics of rescue-from-above insofar as this operates across class lines. In a crucial sub-plot in the narrative, clearly intended to draw out his character, Nikhil permits a poor tenant who has been evicted by a nationalist zamindar as punishment for contravening the Swadeshi boycott, to live on his land. This episode contrasts the bad zamindar with the good zamindar (Nikhil), but zamindari per se does not come under attack.

Nonetheless, even Tagore’s limited critique of Nikhil suggests that *The Home and the World* is as much a criticism of the benevolent pretensions of imperialism and universalist modernisation, as it is of nationalism. This alternative reading is borne out by Tagore’s more didactic pronouncements on cosmopolitanism and nationalism, in which he distanced himself from both polarities. In an essay on nationalism published a year after *The Home and the World*, he declared that ‘neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatory of nation-worship, is the goal of human history.’<sup>49</sup> Elsewhere, he concludes a reflection on identity politics in education with the hope that ‘the institutions we are setting up today express both our national and our cosmopolitan consciousness.’<sup>50</sup> But what did this mean?

Tagore’s antipathy towards nationalism is clearly and forcefully expressed in a number of writings; his criticisms of cosmopolitanism are more subtle, implicit and easily missed. It is possible that he felt a greater imperative to direct his critical energies against nationalism, given that it was the hegemonic discourse of his time. Yet despite this critique of nationalism, it was evident from his political anti-imperialism and his unparalleled contribution to the culture of Bengal that he was working towards many of the same goals as the nationalists.

Tagore attitude towards nationalism was shaped by his encounter with the Swadeshi movement, of which he was initially a leading personality<sup>51</sup> but later a severe critic. The decisive factor seems to have been his growing awareness of the extent to which the movement relied on coercion for its effectiveness. Such coercion typically took the form of destruction of property, physical intimidation and assault, social ostracism or the use of caste-

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Sprinker, ‘Homeboys: Nationalism, Colonialism, and Gender in *The Home and the World*’, in *Rabindranath Tagore’s The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*, ed. P. K. Datta (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 114, 120.

<sup>48</sup> *TH&TW*, 197-8: ‘I have begun to suspect that there has all along been a vein of tyranny in me. There was a despotism in my desire to mould my relations with Bimala in a hard, clear-cut, perfect form. But man’s life was not meant to be cast in a mould. And if we try to shape the good, as so much mere material, it takes a terrible revenge by losing its life... I did not realise all this while that it must have been this unconscious tyranny of mine which made us gradually drift apart... she could not be open with me, because she felt that, in certain things, I despotically differed from her.’

<sup>49</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, tr. Surendranath Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1917), 5.

<sup>50</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Hindu University’ (1911), in *Towards Universal Man* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1962), 156.

<sup>51</sup> Sumit Sarkar, ‘*Ghare Baire* in its Times’, in *Rabindranath Tagore’s The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*, ed. P. K. Datta (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 145; Krishna Dutta & Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The myriad-minded man* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2005), 145.

sanctions against those found violating the nationalist injunction against patronising foreign goods or institutions.<sup>52</sup> The result was a serious alienation of subaltern groups such as Muslims and lower-caste Namasudra peasants, and the eventual eruption of Hindu-Muslim riots in East Bengal in 1906-07, all of which were fictionalised in the violent denouement of *The Home and the World*. This early awareness of the subaltern experience of nationalism later developed into a more profound critique, expressed in a series of lectures on the subject delivered in Japan and the United States in 1916-17. Here, Tagore criticises nationalism as a powerful mass delusion, under the influence of which ‘the whole people can carry out its systematic programme of the most virulent self-seeking without being in the least aware of its moral perversion.’<sup>53</sup> He accuses nationalism of fostering ill-will between nations on account of its triumphalist exceptionalism, and of curtailing individual freedom within nations. There is even an eloquent critique of international society for demanding that political subjectivity be expressed in the form of nationhood before membership on equal terms is granted in this society.<sup>54</sup>

These criticisms of nationalism recur in a series of highly public disagreements with Gandhi, which offer a striking contrast between Tagore the rationalist modernist committed to the slow and painstaking transformation of social attitudes, and Gandhi the master tactician given to exploiting existing prejudices and popular beliefs insofar as these assisted in the enterprise of nationalist mobilisation.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Tagore was horrified by Gandhi’s characterisation of the 1934 Bihar earthquake as divine retribution for the practice of untouchability (even though he shared Gandhi’s goal of eradicating that egregious social practice). He disagreed with Gandhi’s attempt to persuade people to boycott and burn foreign cloth by describing it as ‘impure’. And he was irritated by Gandhi’s exhortation to his followers to set aside a few hours every day to spin khadi on a charkha—an activity that Gandhi viewed as a collective egalitarian project symbolising the dignity of labour, but that Tagore saw as promoting a mind-numbing uniformity that crushed individual creativity and rebellion.

Tagore was well-positioned to critique Gandhian hegemony because his anti-imperialism could never, credibly, be doubted. There were several key moments, particularly before Gandhi’s assumption of the leadership of the national moment, at which his voice led the anti-imperialist chorus. One thinks here particularly of his resignation of his knighthood following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, an event that he described at the time as being ‘without parallel in the history of civilised governments.’<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, his criticisms of nationalism tended to be ignored by his compatriots, perhaps on account of his failure to articulate alternatives to the political structures that he was criticising. At times it seemed as if he was not very interested in politics at all, with education and social reform being of much

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<sup>52</sup> Ranajit Guha, ‘Discipline and Mobilise’, in *Subaltern Studies VII*, eds. Partha Chatterjee & Gyanendra Pandey (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 82, 89; Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, ch. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Tagore, *Nationalism*, 42.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 31, 79, 83.

<sup>55</sup> For a sense of these disagreements, see the following essays by Tagore (‘The Call of Truth’ (1921), ‘The Cult of the Charkha’ (1925), ‘Striving for Swaraj’ (1925)), and the replies by Gandhi (‘The Great Sentinel’ (1921), ‘The Poet and the charkha’ (1925)), reprinted in *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates Between Gandhi and Tagore 1915-1941*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, Letter to Lord Chelmsford (Viceroy of India), 30 May 1919, reprinted in *ibid.*, 187.

higher priority.<sup>57</sup> Far from constituting a retreat from politics, this attitude stemmed from a particular understanding of imperialism, not as the cause of India's ailments, but as symptomatic of pre-existing social evils such as casteism and the rigid adherence to anachronistic traditions, which fragmented the body politic. Without serious attention to these social weaknesses, he believed that independence from Britain would simply leave India vulnerable to other predators.<sup>58</sup> Tagore viewed politics as a sort of superstructural realm resting on a social base.<sup>59</sup> The emphasis on education and social reform was his way of building the social foundations of a more emancipatory political system.

It is therefore to his writings on culture, rather than politics, that we must turn to observe the tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism articulated most clearly. It is impossible in the course of a brief essay like this one to do justice to Tagore's unparalleled contribution in the form of novels, short stories, plays, essays, songs, poems and paintings to the Bengali literary and artistic canon. His commitment to the revival of the Bengali language was accompanied by a strong emphasis on vernacular education and the occasionally expressed worry that the excessive use of English would lead Indians to turn exclusively towards the West for inspiration.<sup>60</sup> This did not quite make Tagore a cultural nationalist. It was more his way of preparing the ground for an egalitarian interaction of cultures.

Tagore was passionately committed to enabling the interaction of cultures of the East and West, both from a normative conviction that universal Truths could only be revealed through the comparative study of diverse cultures,<sup>61</sup> and from a historical appreciation of the inescapable hybridity of all cultures including 'Indian' culture.<sup>62</sup> He welcomed contact with British and European cultures as the latest in a long series of external influences that he likened to tributaries feeding the stream of Indian thought. He lauded these influences as 'providential' on account of their revitalising effect on an Indian culture that had grown stagnant and unreflective, insisting that India had much to learn from Europe not only in material but also in moral and cultural respects.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Dutta & Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, 123, 145, 299. I am reminded of Waiyaki, the protagonist of Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*, who, in trying to mediate between colonialist and nativist influences, hesitates to enter politics but throws himself into education.

<sup>58</sup> Tagore, *Nationalism*, 113.

<sup>59</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Congress' (1939), reprinted in *The Mahatma and the Poet*, 174.

<sup>60</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Vicissitudes of Education' (1892), and 'The Centre of Indian Culture' (1919), in *Towards Universal Man*.

<sup>61</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, 'East and West' (1922), in *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology*, eds. Krishna Dutta & Andrew Robinson (London: Picador, 1997), 212-3.

<sup>62</sup> Tagore, *Nationalism*, 14.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 89, 109. See also Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Changing Age' (1933) in *Towards Universal Man*, 342; 'The Problem of India' (1909), in *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology*, 239. In this regard, Tagore radically disrupts the split consciousness of the typical bourgeois nationalist of the time, who would have been intent on mimicking the West in material respects, but rejecting all things Western in the spheres of spirituality and culture (Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50-1.

Yet he was keen that such interaction take place in an egalitarian fashion and painfully aware that this was not yet the case.<sup>64</sup> His argument for cultural cosmopolitanism is therefore qualified in the following way, in an essay setting out his views on education:

...before we are in a position to face other world cultures, or cooperate with them, we must build up our own by the synthesis of the diverse elements that have come to India. When we take our stand at such a centre and turn towards the West, our gaze shall no longer be timid and dazed, our heads shall remain erect. For, we shall then be able to look at truth from our own vantage ground and open out a new vista of thought before the grateful world.<sup>65</sup>

Elsewhere, he writes that ‘when we have the intellectual capital of our own, the commerce of thought with the outer world becomes natural and fully profitable’; but adds almost in the same breath that ‘to say that such commerce is inherently wrong, is to encourage the worst form of provincialism, productive of nothing but intellectual indigence.’<sup>66</sup> A similar tension between openness and rootedness is encoded in a series of natural metaphors scattered across a number of other writings:

But now we are overtaken by the outside world, our seclusion is lost forever. Yet this we must not regret as a plant should never regret when the obscurity of its seed-time is broken...we must not, in foolish pride, still keep ourselves fast within the shell of the seed and the crust of the earth which protected and nourished our ideals; for these, the shell and the crust, were meant to be broken, so that life may spring up in all its vigour and beauty, bringing its offerings to the world in open light.<sup>67</sup>

The butterfly will have to be persuaded that the freedom of the sky is of higher value than the shelter of the cocoon.<sup>68</sup>

The nursery of the infant should be secluded, its cradle safe. But the same seclusion, if continued after the infant has grown up, makes it weak in body and mind.<sup>69</sup>

Tagore is not a cultural protectionist, for he remarks unsentimentally that when the barriers separating cultures are broken down, ‘only that will survive which is basically consistent with the universal’, and later, that cultures ‘must pass the test of the world-market, if their maximum value is to be obtained.’<sup>70</sup> It is clear, though, that he believes seeds, cocoons and cradles to be necessary—for a time—to provide the space within which to build the intellectual capital that makes intercultural exchange mutually profitable. If these are seen as metaphors for nationalist identity-consolidation, then we might read Tagore as making a case for nationalism as a necessary, but necessarily temporary stage, through which subaltern

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<sup>64</sup> Tagore, *Nationalism*, 14.

<sup>65</sup> Tagore, ‘The Centre of Indian Culture’, 220.

<sup>66</sup> Tagore’s reflection on non-cooperation and cooperation (1921), reprinted in *The Mahatma and the Poet*, 62.

<sup>67</sup> Tagore, *Nationalism*, 67.

<sup>68</sup> Tagore’s reflection on non-cooperation and cooperation, 55.

<sup>69</sup> Tagore, ‘The Centre of Indian Culture’, 220.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 219-20.

cultures must pass before they could interact on equal terms with other cultures on the world stage.<sup>71</sup>

The tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism in resistance is more explicitly addressed in the work of **Edward Said**, whose oeuvre—taken as a whole—offers an opportunity to think about the distinct political ends to which these normative worldviews might be deployed. On the one hand, Said is the author of a number of works which exemplify a cosmopolitan scepticism of stable, essentialised identities. Thus, *Orientalism* might be read as a critique of a Western tendency to construct the ‘Orient’ in a singular and undifferentiated fashion as an underdeveloped space, given to sensuality and despotism, and in all respects inferior to a ‘West’ that was rational, developed and humane. Although the book has been accused of a sort of reverse-essentialisation on account of its reductionist reading of what was in fact a more complicated set of Western representational practices,<sup>72</sup> Said defended it as ‘explicitly anti-essentialist, radically sceptical about all categorical designations such as Orient and Occident.’<sup>73</sup> Likewise *Culture and Imperialism*, in tracing the links between metropolitan cultural texts and the imperial periphery, reveals a number of iconic works of the Western canon to be hybrid and radically impure.<sup>74</sup> We are reminded that it is Australian wealth that makes possible the *Great Expectations* that Pip entertains, that the order and civility of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* is premised on the profits generated by slave plantations in Antigua, that it is impossible to make sense of Verdi’s *Aida* without reference to the politics of its commissioning by the Khedive of Egypt who saw this as an integral element of his effort to gain admission into international society. As a literary and cultural critic, Said insists that essentialised identities are mythical abstractions, even lies: ‘cultures are too intermingled, their contents and histories too interdependent and hybrid, for surgical separation into large and mostly ideological oppositions like Orient and Occident.’<sup>75</sup>

Yet as a prominent spokesman for Palestinian self-determination, Said has been described as ‘an active and important producer of the evolving Palestinian identity.’<sup>76</sup> In his considerable writing on the Palestinian experience of dispossession and resistance, Said speaks insistently of a Palestinian identity, nestled within a larger Arab identity, but distinct and discrete from Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian and other national identities in the region.<sup>77</sup> In these writings, we are no longer reminded of the fluidity of identity, of mixing, hybridity and impurity. It is almost as if the nationalist Said must deploy the very techniques of identity essentialisation that the cosmopolitan Said has savaged.

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<sup>71</sup> See also Isaiah Berlin, ‘Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality’, in *The Sense of Reality; Studies in Ideas and their History*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 1997), 264.

<sup>72</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 2000), 183. See also Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 6.

<sup>73</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995), 331.

<sup>74</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 52, 137.

<sup>75</sup> Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), xi.

<sup>76</sup> Abdul R. JanMohamed, ‘“Worldliness-Without-World, Homelessness-As-Home”: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual’, in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 104.

<sup>77</sup> Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (London: Vintage, 1992); Edward W. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination 1969-1994* (London: Vintage, 1994), xlv.

Benita Parry describes this tension as one between a ‘cognitive recognition of cultural heterogeneity and the political need for solidarity.’ Said recognises the subject as decentred and culture as hybrid, but also acknowledges the potential of imaginary collectivities constructed under conditions of subjugation to confront and perhaps overcome those conditions.<sup>78</sup> This is correct, although I am not sure that Said experiences these tensions in separate realms—the cognitive and the political—as if Said the literary critic could afford to acknowledge the messiness and hybridity of identity, while Said the political activist must insist on stability, solidity and solidarity. Even within the realm of the political, Said believed that political exigencies of different sorts pulled in both directions, demanding both split and united selves.

We can see this clearly in Said’s view of nationalism as something that is both necessary and unfortunate. Nationalism is necessary, particularly ‘for those of us just emerging from marginality and persecution’ as a means of reclaiming identities that have long been denied or suppressed.<sup>79</sup> Yet Said relentlessly criticises nationalism for its tendency to engender a politics of hierarchy and supremacism, for its reliance on myth-making and indoctrination and its laundering of the cultural past, and for its dangerous malleability in the hands of states, which are prone to abusing it as an ideology to legitimate various sorts of oppressions.<sup>80</sup> How does Said reconcile his conviction in the indispensability of nationalism to subaltern struggle, with his equally acute recognition of its oppressiveness?

In his most pessimistic moments, Said views this dilemma as a tragedy incapable of resolution.<sup>81</sup> In more optimistic moments, he appears to believe that the worst excesses of nationalism might be mitigated through a kind of methodological transparency and self-awareness. In this vein he writes that ‘with regard to the consensus on group or national identity it is the intellectual’s task to show how the group is a constructed, manufactured, even in some cases invented object, with a history of struggle and conquest behind it, that it is sometimes important to represent.’<sup>82</sup> Yet if successful nationalism requires the naturalisation and primordialisation of identity, or ‘forgetting’ as Renan put it more bluntly,<sup>83</sup> it is not clear how the intellectual can draw attention to the invented nature of identity without being subversive of the nationalist project itself.

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<sup>78</sup> Benita Parry, ‘Overlapping Territories and Intertwined Histories: Edward Said’s Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism’, in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 20, 30.

<sup>79</sup> Edward W. Said, ‘Identity, Authority, and Freedom: The Potentate and the Traveller’, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2001), 402.

<sup>80</sup> Edward W. Said, ‘Nationalism, Human Rights, and Interpretation’, in *ibid.*, 421-5.

<sup>81</sup> Jennifer Wicke & Michael Sprinker, ‘Interview with Edward Said’, in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 236-7: ‘It’s the tragedy, the irony, the paradox of all anti-imperial or decolonising struggles that independence is the stage through which you must try to pass: for us independence is the only alternative to the continued horrors of the Israeli occupation, whose goal is the extermination of a Palestinian national identity.’

<sup>82</sup> Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Ernst Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’: ‘L’oubli, et je dirai même l’erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d’une nation, et c’est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger.’

Said achieves greater clarity on the need for, but also the pitfalls of, nationalism, when he turns to **Frantz Fanon**, the foremost theorist of the Algerian revolution. Fanon's classic statement of resistance is concerned as much with independence from colonial oppression, as with liberation from a nationalist bourgeoisie that perpetuates the poverty and misery of subaltern classes. Resistance, for Fanon, is a bifocal enterprise in which the people must pass 'from total, indiscriminating nationalism to social and economic awareness.'<sup>84</sup> Without such a transition from nationalist to a humanist socio-economic consciousness, he argues, the oppressive nationalist bourgeoisie remains entrenched. Its dependence on the metropolitan bourgeoisie makes it both too weak to play the historic role of a true bourgeoisie (i.e. to generate the conditions conducive to the formation of an industrial proletariat), but also too strong to be easily dislodged. As a result, the postcolonial economy continues to be characterised by quasi-feudal productive relations and is consigned to a permanently peripheral position in the world system. Domestically, the revolutionary leader becomes 'a screen between the people and the rapacious bourgeoisie', using moral and political capital accrued from his leadership of the liberation struggle to obviate challenges from below; the revolutionary party ossifies into an instrument of control and pacification. In such circumstances, a people who remain trapped within a nationalist mindset lack the necessary consciousness with which they might challenge their own bourgeoisie.

Fanon appears to present the nationalist struggle against the colonial occupier and the cosmopolitan struggle against the nationalist elite as sequential stages, although there is room for debate on this point.<sup>85</sup> A recent biography reports that although he was extremely critical in private of elements of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) elite—particularly figures such as Boussouf and Bentobbal on account of their failure to envisage anything for Algeria beyond independence—he remained a loyal and disciplined militant of the organisation in his public statements and writings, reluctant to distance himself from these men before the Algerian struggle had been won.<sup>86</sup> Said, however, reads Fanon as arguing that the two dimensions of the bifocal struggle must be contemporaneous, so that 'loyalty to the group's fight for survival cannot draw in the intellectual so far as to narcotise the critical sense, or reduce its imperatives, which are always to go beyond survival to questions of political liberation, to critiques of the leadership, to presenting alternatives that are too often marginalised or pushed aside as irrelevant to the main battle at hand.'<sup>87</sup> Said's harsh attacks on the Palestinian Authority for its authoritarianism, corruption and alleged incompetence in

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<sup>84</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, tr. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 2001), 115.

<sup>85</sup> On the one hand, Fanon's sensitivity to different strands of anti-colonial resistance (tensions between urban and rural, moderates and radicals, legal and illegal tendencies within the party) suggests that social and economic consciousness develops—and needs to develop—in the thick of struggle against the colonial oppressor. On the other hand, he calls for struggle against the national bourgeoisie *after* independence from the colonialists, even suggesting at one point that 'what can be dangerous is when [the people] reach the stage of social consciousness before the stage of nationalism. If this happens, we find in under-developed countries fierce demands for social justice which paradoxically are allied with often primitive tribalism' (ibid., 164). Yet the very fact that Fanon offered this analysis *before* Algeria had won its independence suggests that he was keen to foster the development of social and economic consciousness even before the nationalist struggle had been won.

<sup>86</sup> Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*, tr. Nadia Benabid (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 104-5, 112, 159.

<sup>87</sup> Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 30.

agreeing to a 'peace process' that perpetuated the Israeli occupation, alongside his continuing criticism of Israel and the international community, were a measure of how seriously he took this imperative to struggle simultaneously on two fronts.<sup>88</sup>

The question of whether such struggle is better pursued sequentially or simultaneously is a legitimate one. The argument for sequentiality is largely a pragmatic one: there may be little prospect of liberation from a bourgeoisie of any sort without independence from a colonial occupier. Yet proponents of simultaneity would argue that the postcolonial struggle for liberation is made more difficult by the hegemony acquired by a revolutionary leadership during the anticolonial struggle. That hegemony must therefore be contested during the struggle itself, if the liberation is not to be owned by its elite leadership. In the context of Palestine, however, the debate over the sequentiality or simultaneity of independence and liberation is perhaps rendered moot by the fact that Said's major criticism of the Oslo Accords concerned the very incompleteness of the 'independence' from Israel that they heralded. The Accords, as he saw them, enabled Israel to defer negotiations on virtually all the difficult questions surrounding Palestinian statehood (borders, refugees, Jerusalem, settlements), perpetuating its hold over the Occupied Territories whilst absolving it of responsibility for the living conditions of Palestinians. Conversely the Accords gave the PA enough sovereignty to enable it to exercise coercive authority over its people, who were thereby robbed of the prospect of either independence or liberation.<sup>89</sup>

We might see in Said's late advocacy of a bi-national one-state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict, a final attempt at reconciliation of his cosmopolitan and nationalist commitments.<sup>90</sup> Yet it is crucial to recognise that even the one-state solution does not dispense with the need for nationalist consciousness. For although the demand here is not for a separate state, it may still take a nationalist struggle to win recognition and equal protection before the law for a long-denied and suppressed national identity within the framework of a single state.

### *Beyond nationalism-as-transitory-stage*

The thinkers studied in the preceding section are interesting for the purposes of this paper because they refuse the oft-reiterated opposition between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, but more particularly because they are concerned with the emancipatory potentials of both from the perspective of subalternity. They defend nationalism as a necessary means of gathering together subaltern energies with a view to constructing the agency with which conditions of subjugation might be combated. But they insist that only a cosmopolitan humanist consciousness can provide critical perspective on the oppressions immanent in the process of resistance, which itself generates winners and losers. There is an acute sensitivity in the moment in which they are writing, to impediments to self-determination emanating from both within and outside the political communities they are helping to construct. In this

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<sup>88</sup> Edward W. Said, *The End of the Peace Process* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003). For a more measured critique of the PA, see Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), ch. 5, 6.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> See Edward W. Said, 'Art, Culture and Nationalism', 'What Can Separation Mean?', and 'Truth and Reconciliation', in *The End of the Peace Process*.

respect, the thinkers surveyed here evince a more complicated awareness of threat and a more nuanced attitude towards boundaries than is evident in some contemporary normative theory.

Attitudes towards boundaries in the debate between cosmopolitans and nationalists are often premised, at least implicitly, on assumptions about the locus of threats to freedom and self-determination. The debate might therefore be seen as a conversation about the relationship between space, threat and boundaries. A number of contemporary contributors to this debate adopt astonishingly simplistic assumptions about the locus of threat, which in turn inform their attitudes towards boundaries. Thus, many liberal cosmopolitans are keen to minimise the importance of boundaries precisely because they see the postcolonial state as the primary locus of threat to human rights. In Charles Beitz's view, to give just one example, 'the role of human rights in international political discourse has two aspects: first, human rights may serve to justify interference in the internal affairs of states or other local communities; second, they may argue for various external agents, such as international organisations and other states, to commit the resources required for effective interference.'<sup>91</sup> Missing from this analysis is any acknowledgement that human rights might be threatened by global structures or actors external to the state. As Anne Orford has demonstrated compellingly, contemporary narratives of intervention are informed by a spatial allocation of culpability in which problems are represented as arising from local dynamics internal to the putatively dysfunctional states that are the objects of intervention, while the 'international' is read as a sanitised space populated by heroic actors ready to rescue people from crises that are seen entirely as creatures of postcoloniality.<sup>92</sup> Conversely, communitarian voices—emanating both from within the academy<sup>93</sup> and the ranks of postcolonial elites—have tended to valorise state sovereignty by exaggerating the risk of neo-colonial predation by external actors and obscuring the culpability of postcolonial states in impeding the meaningful exercise of self-determination by their societies. One thinks here of the frequent use of anti-imperialism by postcolonial elites as a rhetorical shield behind which to bludgeon domestic opponents into submission.<sup>94</sup> Recognising that subaltern agency may be threatened both from sources external to the political community and from the community itself, the thinkers surveyed in this paper seem to inhabit a space between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, in which boundaries are believed to be necessary but contingent on their performance, and in which community is seen both as a potential source of repression and refuge.

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<sup>91</sup> Charles R. Beitz, 'Human Rights and the Law of Peoples', in *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy*, ed. Deen Chatterjee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), emphasis mine.

<sup>92</sup> Anne Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, 'Humanitarian Intervention and State Sovereignty', *International Journal of Human Rights* 6, no. 1 (2002): 81-102.

<sup>94</sup> Ian Phimister & Brian Raftopoulos, 'Mugabe, Mbeki & the Politics of Anti-Imperialism', *Review of African Political Economy* 31, no. 101 (2004): 385; Stephen Chan & Hasu Patel, 'Zimbabwe's Foreign Policy: A Conversation', *The Round Table* 95, no. 384 (2006). This is also true, to some extent, of the 'Asian values' thesis (see Karen Engle, 'Culture and Human Rights: The Asian Values Debate in Context', *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 32, no. 2 (2000): 329; Sarah Pritchard, 'The Jurisprudence of Human Rights: Some Critical Thoughts and Developments in Practice', *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 2, no. 1 (1995)).

Yet their positions raise a crucial question, on which I offer some brief and tentative thoughts here in conclusion. Each of the figures studied here appears to see nationalism as a transitory stage through which subaltern resistance must pass, but which upon achieving its goal of recognition of equal worth must subsume itself in universality. But is the work of nationalism really completed with the achievement of sovereign statehood? This is another way of asking whether the sensibility that these thinkers sought to articulate is appropriate only to the moment of emergence of insurgent nations into international society, or offers a more enduring way of thinking about boundaries and identity.

Subaltern studies scholars have shown us that while subaltern energies were successfully harnessed by nationalist elites during the national struggle, subaltern subjects remained essentially estranged from the mentalities and apparatus of the modern nation-state. Yet their relationship with the international continues to be mediated by the state, and more particularly by the relationships that their elites have with the international. In states where elites have an antagonistic relationship with the international system (one thinks here of those deemed 'rogue' states by the powerful), the situation sometimes mimics the colonial encounter in which an external civilising authority confronts an internal nativist opposition. The thinkers studied here speak most obviously and relevantly to these sorts of circumstances. But the articulation of cosmopolitanism and nationalism may also be relevant to subaltern resistance in circumstances where elites enjoy a relationship of complicity with, or dependence on, external actors.

To think this through, let us shift the focus of analysis from the moment of emergence to a moment of postcolonial crisis in which the very viability of the nation-state as a political community is at stake in conditions of contemporary capitalism. It has been suggested that, far from withering away as a result of the operation of neoliberal capital, the postcolonial state has been 'transnationalised'.<sup>95</sup> This is a condition in which key elements of the state develop close linkages with external actors, either under pressure from self-interested local elites, or because the state has become beholden to those external actors for its survival in moments of extreme vulnerability such as crushing debt. In such circumstances, the state's need for, and responsibilities to, global capital, begin to take precedence over its obligations to meet the socio-economic needs of its subaltern classes. A small but significant section of the anti-capitalist movement regards the state as irredeemably mortgaged to capital and therefore writes it out of the utopias it seeks to construct.<sup>96</sup> But others such as Samir Amin have argued that transnationalised states might yet be 'renationalised' via popular nationalist movements in the periphery. These would be nationalisms of a very particular kind: not nationalisms for new states and distinct from the official nationalist discourses wielded by states, but perhaps better seen as 'nationalisms against the state'<sup>97</sup> intended to democratise unrepresentative

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<sup>95</sup> Josée Johnston, 'Pedagogical guerrillas, armed democrats, and revolutionary counterpublics: Examining paradox in the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas Mexico', *Theory and Society* 29, no. 4 (2000): 472.

<sup>96</sup> Michael Hardt, 'Today's Bandung?', in *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?*, ed. Tom Mertes (London: Verso, 2004); see also Tom Mertes, 'Grass-Roots Globalism', in *Debating Empire*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 2003).

<sup>97</sup> David Lloyd, 'Nationalisms against the State', in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, eds. Lisa Lowe & David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 182, 192.

states. Amin continues to believe that only a universalist social and political consciousness can regulate the global economy, but this is a socialist cosmopolitanism that relies on the success of popular peripheral nationalisms.<sup>98</sup> Insofar as popular nationalisms can perform this democratising role, rather than being relegated to a transitory adolescent phase, nationalism should perhaps be seen as a recurring and potentially renewing discourse that has the capacity to repair the unmooring of the state and nation, and might be allied to larger projects of global redistribution.

To suggest that such articulations of nationalism and cosmopolitanism are already embodied in particular agents is always a risky business. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to find subaltern social movements that appear to be engaged, on the one hand, in a kind of ‘nationalism against the state’ by raising the spectre of neo-colonial invasion, resuscitating the old heroes and forgotten ideals of arrested national revolutions and accusing the postcolonial state of having betrayed the historic promises on the basis of which it came into existence. Simultaneously, such movements also tend to frame their grievances in global, cosmopolitan terms, sometimes with the instrumental purpose of obtaining external allies who might pressure their otherwise hostile or unresponsive states from the outside, or with a view to transferring protest to an international arena when domestic spaces for contention have been blocked.<sup>99</sup> Whether such discourses of global framing amount to a robust normative cosmopolitanism, or are instrumentally deployed simply with an eye to consumption by powerful and potentially useful audiences, is a critical but contextual question to which no generalised answer can be given here.

The point I am trying to make is that the continued articulation of cosmopolitanism and nationalism as vocabularies of resistance in conjunction with one another—rather than in the oppositional fashion presented in the normative theory literature—underscores the enduring relevance of the sensibilities articulated by the postcolonial theorists studied here, beyond the temporal contexts in which they were writing. It does, however, call into question their view of nationalism as a discourse whose work would be accomplished with the achievement of sovereign statehood. Ultimately, I am denying both a dialectical resolution and a magical subsumption of one into the other. Instead, I suggest that both cosmopolitanism and nationalism might perform valuable ethico-political work in subaltern resistance; yet either unalloyed by the other offers a rather simplistic view of the relationship between space, threat and boundaries. Normative theory that does not hold both in tension seems to fail the needs of our non-ideal world.

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<sup>98</sup> Cited from Pheng Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 39-40, whose argument has shaped my thinking on the possible continuing relevance of the thinkers studied in the previous section.

<sup>99</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Margaret E. Keck & Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). I have attempted to demonstrate the simultaneity of these discourses and the tensions that they generate in the case of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (Karnataka State Farmers’ Association), in Rahul Rao, *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), ch. 5.