6

Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism: Making Place for Nationalism

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Cosmopolitanism, Communitarianism and the Subaltern

This essay takes as its point of departure, the debate between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism in international normative theory. It expresses several dissatisfactions with this debate, criticizing its inattention to politics and history, its Eurocentrism, and the simplistic imageries of threat on which attitudes towards boundaries in the debate are premised. In attempting to remedy these problems, it recasts the figure of the subaltern that haunts this debate — hitherto imagined as a passive recipient of Western largesse — as an active agent struggling for emancipation, and contrasts the potentials of cosmopolitanism and communitarianism to function as vocabularies in which such struggles might be articulated. The chapter then turns to the writings of two proto-postcolonial thinkers — James Joyce and Rabindranath Tagore — who reject the conventional opposition between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. Through a selective reading of their thought, it argues that rather than resolving the cosmopolitan/communitarian impasse, the tension between these normative worldviews running through their oeuvres, offers a protest sensibility that is better suited to the exigencies of subaltern struggle in the contemporary conjuncture.

International normative theory has been the site of a vigorous debate on the scope of justice. Those who regard this as universal

— '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.[1] Their critics are diverse, but one influential subset — 'communitarians' — argue that norms of justice can only arise from within bounded communities. In their view, the content of a community — its norms, values, traditions — is constitutive of a sense of justice.[2] In some versions of this thesis, the nation is seen as the politically most salient form of the community for this purpose.[3] One important consequence of regarding communities as sources of ethical value in their own right and boundaries as having irreducible ethical significance, is that it becomes permissible — sometimes obligatory — to ascribe priority to members of the community over non-members in certain contexts.

The different voices in this debate address the question of *what* obligations we owe to *which* others. Questions of political obligation become particularly vexed in the context of global problems of serious magnitude such as genocide, poverty and climate change, where the 'others' in question are people with whom we may share few of the ties that apparently bind us to fellow nationals. While the questions speak to urgent underlying issues, they have been framed in problematic ways.

First, a great deal of international normative theory is concerned largely with elaborating a normative framework that will usher in a more just 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,[4] because norms do not translate directly into praxis but require interpretation and application, both of which raise deeply political questions (who has the right of interpretation?; and in case of conflict, who is entitled to adjudicate between different interpretations?). And history is crucial because the legitimacy of norms may be shaped by perceptions of their provenance and praxis (where have they come from?; what has been done in their name?).

Second, although the charge of Eurocentrism has long been levelled against Western political theory, it does not seem to have had much impact in the field of what passes as 'international' normative theory. This field is international in its aspirations, in 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 little reference to the lifeworlds of subjects outside the West. Consider attitudes towards nationalism, as a case in point. The cosmopolitan literature's antipathy towards nationalism is indelibly marked by the Western experience of nationalism, in which a discourse that begins as a struggle to democratize absolutist states becomes 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 states, continues to see nationalism as the vehicle that delivered the very condition of Latin American, African and Asian postcoloniality.[5] The relative novelty and fragility of this transition in many parts of the world only reinforces the intensity of this attachment.

This inattention to history and politics is encouraged by the methodological assumption that the content of justice can be known in its entirety by engaging in thought experiments of the sort recommended by John Rawls.[6] Following Rawls, it has been widely supposed that conceptions of global justice might be articulated by imagining what it would be rational for reasonable individuals to conclude as being in their interest, were they to operate in ignorance of their citizenship and nationality (among other indications of their station in life).[7] The Rawlsian 'original position' is a device that claims to arrive at universal norms of justice by abstracting from particular experience. But the Rawlsian choosing procedure cannot claim to be universalistic, even on its own terms, unless the contracting parties in the original position operated, not only in ignorance of their own interests, but with substantial knowledge of subaltern lives that might inform their suppositions about what it would be rational to desire if they were ever to find themselves in the position of the subaltern.[8] By and large, the Rawlsian-inspired global justice literature makes little reference to the lifeworlds of subaltern 'others'.

I use the term 'subaltern' in the 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'.[9] In postcolonial and subaltern studies, the term is usually interpreted broadly to include any person or group of inferior rank

whether because of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or any other identity. The adoption of a subaltern vantage point calls for a reframing of the central preoccupations of international normative theory. Debates between cosmopolitans and nationalists typically focus on the question: 'what obligations do we owe strangers?' But the question betrays an elitist conception of its audience. Anyone teetering on the brink of existence, on account of material deprivation or persecution, might be forgiven for not giving the question of their obligations to strangers much consideration. The question is of universal philosophical significance, for even those most marginalized in some contexts will occupy positions of power in others, in which capacity they might be well placed to harm strangers in their midst. But it fails as an opening gambit, politically and psychologically, insofar as its intention is to initiate a global conversation about 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 privileged Western audiences, with a view to persuading them to treat outsiders with respect. This is a laudable objective, but one that does not engage with the subaltern outsider. Can s/he be expected to be cosmopolitan too?

Liberal cosmopolitan thinkers identify individuality, universality and generality as their fundamental philosophical premises: in other words, individuals are the ultimate units of concern, equally, for everyone.[10] 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 satiated insiders. Rather than asking 'what do we owe strangers?', a more pressing question from their perspective might be 'what's in it for us?' Turning the question around in this way invites us, as normative theorists, to recast the figure of the subaltern that haunts our debates — hitherto imagined as a passive recipient of Western largesse — as an active agent struggling for emancipation, and to consider the potentials of cosmopolitanism and communitarianism to function as vocabularies in which such struggle might be articulated. This, in turn, could have larger implications for the re-imagination of political pluralism, multiculturalism, and other theoretical attempts at the articulation of diversity in the context of larger wholes (whether of the 'nation' or indeed 'humanity' itself).

Prima facie, cosmopolitanism's promise of universal inclusion appears appealing from a subaltern point of view. Its promise to weigh equally the claims of every person who would be affected by the choice of particular policies could have radical distributive implications.[11] Conversely, the communitarian claim that it is permissible or necessary to give ethical priority to one's compatriots appears to be a profoundly selfish one, given the gross inequalities that exist between political communities in the world today. But 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 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'.[12]

Similarly, he writes that it was Enlightenment cosmopolitans who often advanced moral justifications for later exercises in European imperialism.[13] 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 in precisely those times and places where universal political communities (that is, empires) were being constructed, and partly also because those ideas provided attractive justifications for projects of empire-building.

Analogously, Petter Korkman has suggested that cosmopolitanism is in some way an offspring of the global capitalist world market. Early Enlightenment thinkers such as Hugo Grotius, Samuel von Pufendorf and Emerich de Vattel, saw the cultivation of cosmopolitan sentiments of a universal love for humanity as motivated by primarily egoistic considerations. In this 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 civilizing role in international relations, so that the promotion of commerce becomes both rational and a matter of moral duty. 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 recognize them. The language of individual liberal rights and duties are ultimately an expression of this effort to reorganize human relations as market relations. Universal community is, therefore, not an end in itself, but a means to the end of carrying out business, with cosmopolitan sociability functioning as the ideological superstructure of a world capitalist market.[14] Little wonder, then, that critics have noted that ideas of world citizenship have been championed by, or at least come 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 and credit cards.[15]

One is tempted to suggest that although the praxis of cosmopolitanism by elites might 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 political action and mutual support among the less powerful.[16] If inclusion in the polis has usually had to be fought for, the subaltern as an individual would appear to stand little chance in that fight without a strengthening of collective consciousness. Historically, perhaps it is communitarianism — and more particularly, nationalism — which has been the instinctive 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'.[17]

Compelling as they may seem, these conclusions would be too hasty. Marx and Engels' famous declaration that 'the working men have no country',[18] echoed by Virginia Woolf in respect of women,[19] might be regarded as exhortations to cosmopolitan resistance addressed to subalterns. As efforts to forge new forms of community across national boundaries, working-class and feminist internationalisms might be seen as attempts to fashion subaltern

cosmopolitanisms. As for the political economy of the cosmopolitan gaze, there is much to be said for the possibility of subaltern access to cosmopolitan scripts. Adapting Benedict Anderson's account of the origins of nationalism to the conditions of a globalizing world,[20] Arjun Appadurai has suggested that we are witnessing the emergence of 'post-national' 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 mass media now provide the basis for the imagination of post-national communities.[21] In Appadurai's view, migration is not the prerogative of the privileged: the demographic basis for a post-national world is provided as much by refugees, migrant labour, trafficked women and illegal aliens, as by wealthy frequent flyers. One might object that the link between cosmopolitanism and mobility (even subaltern mobility) begs questions about the possibilities of cosmopolitan identification for the subaltern immobile.[22] Yet even as labour flows are policed ever more stringently by states, flows of capital and information might be seen as foisting a sort of 'forced cosmopolitanism' 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 cosmopolitanization of their lives.

Attitudes towards boundaries in the debate between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism tend to be premised, even if only implicitly, on assumptions about the locus of threats to fundamental interests, with boundaries regarded as potential defences against those threats. The debate might therefore be seen as a conversation about the relationship between space, threat and boundaries. One further aspect of this debate that appears naïve from a subaltern perspective is that hegemonic variants of cosmopolitanism and communitarianism frequently adopt simplistic assumptions about the locus of threat.

Many liberal cosmopolitans are keen to minimize the importance of state sovereignty precisely because they see the post-colonial state as the primary locus of threat to human rights and the 'international' as the source of remedies. 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'.[23]

Missing from this analysis is any acknowledgement that human rights might be threatened by global structures such as capitalism or actors external to the state. As Anne Orford has demonstrated,[24] 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 sanitized space populated by heroic actors ready to rescue people in these benighted locales. Conversely, communitarian voices — emanating both from within the academy[25] and the ranks of postcolonial elites — have tended to valorize state sovereignty by exaggerating the risks of neocolonial predation by external actors and obscuring the culpability of postcolonial states in impeding the enjoyment 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.[26] Hegemonic understandings of both cosmopolitanism and communitarianism seem to need the presence of sanitized spaces — the 'international' for the cosmopolitan, the 'state' or 'political community' for the communitarian — from which salvation will be forthcoming.

In contrast, taking its cue from the Subaltern Studies historiography, which reads the subaltern as disenfranchised by both the colonial and native bourgeoisie, this essay starts from the premise that threats to the subaltern agency are located both outside and within the political communities in which they find themselves. Ill-served by both hegemonic cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, subaltern attitudes towards boundaries cannot assume the existence of sanitized spaces: indeed to be subaltern is *not* to have a safe space, but always to have to struggle to create one. If this is the case, how might subalterns think about actually existing state boundaries?

In the following section, I present the views of two proto-postcolonial thinkers — James Joyce and Rabindranath Tagore —

who complicate the received wisdom on the putative oppositionality of cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Both were critics of nationalism, even as they desired the success of the national liberation movements with which they were associated. They advocated cosmopolitan sensibilities in the high noon of nationalism, while remaining unwilling to completely repudiate nationalism. Their refusal to commit to either side of this political theoretic divide seems to have come from an awareness that subaltern self-determination was threatened both from within and outside the political communities they were helping to imagine. This awareness of the diffuse nature of threat seems to have induced them to occupy a space between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, in which boundaries are seen as potential instruments of both repression and refuge.

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James Joyce and Rabindranath Tagore

When a signature petition in support of world peace, disarmament, and a host of other worthy internationalist causes begins to circulate in his college, Stephen Dedalus — the protagonist of James Joyce's bildungsroman *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* — is not impressed. At first, the lofty goals of the campaign elicit his weary disinterest, but he is also angered by the absurdity of their being urged on the world by one of its absolutist monarchs — Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. Less aware of these international political dynamics, Dedalus's friend Davin — described as a simple-minded peasant boy, steeped in the myths of Ireland and widely thought of in the college as a 'young fenian' — has signed the petition. When a bemused and scornful Dedalus asks him whether this means that he has turned his back on Irish nationalism, Davin is perplexed. Confounded by Dedalus's refusal to support pacific internationalism and his insistent mockery of Irish nationalism, it seems to Davin as if Dedalus cannot give his allegiance to anything or anyone. 'I can't understand you', he bursts out. '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?'[27] Davin's repeated entreaties to Dedalus to 'be one of us', provokes the latter to a bitter denunciation

of Irish nationalism, citing its betrayal of its most loyal sons and its suppression of individual freedom. For Dedalus, 'Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow'.[28]

Yet, contrary to the conventional reading of Dedalus as wanting to leap out of a stultifying provincialism into a liberating post-national identity, Marjorie Howes has drawn attention to the extent to which he continues to inhabit the very intellectual structures that he disavows. Even as he rejects the prevailing forms of cultural nationalism, vowing to 'fly by' the 'nets' of nationality, language and religion (in an allusion to the classical tale of Daedalus and Icarus), he continues to think of the 'nation' in precisely the terms those forms offer him.[29] In a reading influenced by David Lloyd's account of the centrality of the autobiographical form to nationalist discourse, Emer Nolan argues that although Dedalus is devoted to the elaboration of a narrative that is diametrically opposed to the aspirations of contemporary cultural nationalism, 'none the less the aestheticist self-creation offered by Dedalus offers a structural homology to the artistic mission to which it is ostensibly opposed. In his resolutely individualistic self-fashioning, Dedalus ironically re-enacts the self-making and self-discovery of the nationalist cultural project'.[30] Indeed, the novel closes with his determination to 'forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race'[31] — an enterprise that many nationalists would be happy to claim as their own.

Dedalus's ironic nationalism parallel's Joyce's relationship to the Irish Literary Revival, of which he was a critical member — both in the sense of being important and dissenting.[32] While critical of the exclusivist 'Irish Ireland' current of the Revival and of the caricature of Irishness being produced by it, Ireland continued to play a central role in his work, placing Joyce — in common with other leading members of the Revival — at the heart of the project of 'narrating the nation'. Yet as Seamus Deane has written, whereas for the revivalists the idea of Ireland was an invigorating and positive force, for Joyce it was a negative place which threatened artistic freedom and squandered the talents of its people.[33] The ends of liberation were best served, in Joyce's view, not by drawing flattering portraits of this society by romanticizing its rural and peasant life, but by subjecting it to the gaze of an unflinching realism that rendered Irish life in all its desperation, poverty and ugliness. In Deane's reading of Joyce's project:

If Ireland was to be seen, it would be in the full light of an Ibsenite dawn, not in the glimmer of a Celtic twilight …The mirror held up to Culture was going to reflect a reality no-one had presented before. Dublin would find it an unwelcome sight, but Dublin and Ireland would be liberated by it.[34]

But it was not only Irish nationalism that was the target of Joyce's withering gaze. In his short story 'After the Race', Jimmy, an Irishman, cavorts with a group of continental and other acquaintances after a day spent watching cars race each other. When at the after-race party, Jimmy gets into a political argument with the Englishman Routh, threatening to strain the atmosphere of cosmopolitan camaraderie, the host attempts to defuse the situation by proposing a toast 'to Humanity'.[35] Later they drink toasts to Ireland, England, France, Hungary and the US, as if to bury their material differences in an imagined comity of nations. A card game ensues in which Jimmy loses heavily and Routh emerges the winner. There is an insinuation of cheating ('they were devils of fellows') and the outcome of the game seems to reinforce the essential inequality between the Irish and English members of the group. Howes has read this story as suggesting that 'cosmopolitanism and universalist ideals can function as a covert European nationalism, and can help to sustain imperialism rather than to dismantle it'.[36]

The key to understanding Joyce's mockery of both cosmopolitanism and nationalism lies in the spatial imaginaries of threat that inform his thinking about liberation, visible in his more explicitly political writings. In an essay entitled 'Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages', he is categorical about the culpability of the English in oppressing Ireland, declaring that 'Ireland is poor because English laws destroyed the industries of the country … because, in the years in which the potato crop failed, the negligence of the English government left the flower of the people to die of hunger …'[37] And he is emphatic that the Irish have a right to resist their subjection: 'If a victorious country tyrannises over another, it cannot logically take it amiss if the latter reacts. Men are made that way; and no one, unless he were blinded by self-interest or ingenuity, can still believe that a colonising country is prompted by purely Christian motives when it takes over foreign shores …'[38] But he is equally scathing about the local oppressions that shackle the Irish, singling out the Catholic Church for especially

severe condemnation. 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'.[39] Deane elaborates on Joyce's understanding of the relationship between these tyrannies:

> The remodelling of the national character, undertaken by groups like Sinn Fein and the Irish Revival, is indeed a heroic enterprise, but it is a futile one unless it accepts that the remodelling has to begin with the problem of fidelity to Rome rather than with the problem of fidelity or infidelity towards the British system. It is Rome, not London, which rules the Irish mind. London will readily use Rome for its purposes. But the Roman imperium is the more subtle and pervasive because it encroaches on the territory which should be ruled by the artist.[40]

Convinced that Irish freedom was shackled by Rome *and* London, Joyce struggled against these dual tyrannies, ruthlessly parodying both the narrow-minded provincialism of Irish nationalism and the civilizing pretensions of British imperialism.

In the same year that *Portrait* was first published in book form (1916), 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 echoes Dedalus, the autobiographical protagonist of this 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 nationalists were laying.[41] It is no coincidence that two novelists from Ireland and India crafted these fictional kindred spirits contemporaneously, given their location in comparable discursive fields. Early twentieth-century Ireland and Tagore's native state of Bengal were in many ways remarkably similar places, characterized by a comparable mixture of different forms 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.[42]

Set in Bengal at the height of the Swadeshi movement (1903–08) against the proposed partition of the province, *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 personified in the character of Nikhil, a wealthy but enlightened zamindar, whose progressiveness is manifested in his views on gender relations, the welfare of his tenants and, most crucially for the narrative, his views on nationalist agitation. Nikhil is a supporter of the goals of the Swadeshi movement (aiming at 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 is likely to fall hardest on the poor. Nikhil's friend Sandip personifies nationalism. Passionately committed to the success of the Swadeshi movement, Sandip unapologetically uses Hindu religious symbolism in an effort to primordialize 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 unhesitatingly advocates the use of coercion to bring them into line.

Nikhil's wife Bimala occupies a pivotal position in the novel, torn between the values espoused by the two men.[43] Symbolizing Bengal, 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 an allegory for public perceptions of the political efficacy of their competing worldviews. Bimala becomes increasingly enamoured of 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 preoccupations with social work appear unpromising as a means of political emancipation. But 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 the household. Meanwhile, Sandip's political activism is beginning to wreak havoc in the world outside. When Swadeshi activists punish Muslims found contravening the boycott, communal tensions erupt in riots. But Bimala's second thoughts come too late to save her relationship with Nikhil, who is fatally wounded in the course of trying to quell the unrest.

Bimala's remorse at the end of the novel is usually read as a vindication of Nikhil's position, shot through with the pessimistic sentiment that Sandip's views are politically more resonant in the world. Martha Nussbaum,[44] 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.' This is too simple a reading, particularly given the broader context of her article, which appears to set up an opposition between patriotism and cosmopolitanism. Nikhil straddles both, his patriotism being expressed quite emphatically in his endorsement of the goals of Swadeshi, in his (admittedly disillusioned) financial support for Sandip, and in his unceasing efforts to redefine rather than cede the patriotic space.[45] The novel is therefore more plausibly read as a conflict between two forms of patriotism, as suggested by Ashis Nandy[46] — one that is unreasoned, authoritarian and demagogic, and another that is critical, reflective and uncoerced. But Nandy's reading, like Nussbaum's, remains too one-sided in its persistence in seeing the novel as a critique of the politics of Sandip alone.

The Home and the World is also a critique of Nikhil and his politics of cosmopolitanism. In a highly persuasive reading, Michael Sprinker has suggested that Nikhil is not merely ineffectual but also deeply paternalistic in his insistence on bestowing *his* conception of freedom on others.[47] This is most obvious in his attempts to educate, modernize and 'civilize' Bimala, something that Nikhil acknowledges as a cause of their estrangement in a moment of self-flagellating introspection.[48] There is no corresponding auto-critique of the conservatism of Nikhil's politics of rescue-from-above insofar as this operates across class lines. In a crucial sub-plot, Nikhil takes in a poor tenant (Panchu) who has been evicted by a nationalist zamindar as punishment for contravening the Swadeshi boycott. This episode contrasts the good zamindar (Nikhil) with the bad zamindar (Harish Kundu), 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 critical of the benevolent civilizing pretensions of imperialism and universalist modernization, as it is of nationalism. Indeed, in having both male protagonists exit the scene towards the end of the novel, Tagore repudiates both cosmopolitanism and nationalism, leaving Bimala alone to reconsider the trajectory of

her self-assertion. In silencing both male characters at the end, Tagore was recommending neither of them. 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'.[49] 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'.[50] But what did this mean?

Tagore's attitude towards nationalism was shaped by his encounter with the Swadeshi movement, of which he was initially a leader, but later a critic.[51] The change seems to have been precipitated by 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-sanctions against those found violating the nationalist injunction against patronizing foreign goods or institutions.[52] 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 fictionalized 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 delivered in Japan and the United States in 1916–17. Here, Tagore criticizes 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'.[53] He accuses nationalism of fostering ill-will between nations on account of its triumphalist exceptionalism, and of curtailing individual freedom within nations.[54] These criticisms of nationalism recur in a series of public disagreements with Gandhi,[55] in which Tagore is pained by Gandhi's mobilization of popular prejudice to serve nationalist ends as exemplified, for instance, by the latter's characterization of the 1934 Bihar earthquake as divine retribution for the practice of untouchability, or his advocacy of a boycott of foreign cloth by

describing it as 'impure'. Perhaps most controversially, he was irritated by Gandhi's suggestion that every Indian spin khadi on a charkha or spinning wheel — an activity that Gandhi viewed as a collective egalitarian project symbolizing the dignity of labour, but that Tagore saw as promoting a mind-numbing uniformity that crushed individual creativity and rebellion.

Tagore's critique did not capture the public imagination, partly because he was ahead of his time, writing in the high noon of nationalism, but partly also because of his failure to articulate alternatives to the political institutions he was criticizing. At times it seemed as if he was not interested in politics, with education and social reform taking priority.[56] Far from constituting a retreat from politics, this attitude stemmed from an understanding of imperialism, not as the cause of India's ailments, but as symptomatic of pre-existing social evils such as casteism and unreflective adherence to anachronistic traditions. Without serious attention to these internal weaknesses, he believed that independence from Britain would simply leave India vulnerable to other predators.[57] Tagore viewed politics as a superstructural realm resting on a social base.[58] Education and social reform took higher priority because they would lay the social foundations upon which a more emancipatory political system could be built.

It is therefore to his writings on culture, rather than politics, that we must look 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 to the Bengali literary and artistic canon in the form of novels, short stories, plays, essays, songs, poems and paintings. 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.[59] This did not 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 the interaction of cultures, both from a normative conviction that universal Truth could only be revealed through the comparative study of cultures,[60] and from a historical appreciation of the inescapable hybridity of all cultures, including those of the Indian subcontinent.[61] 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 revitalizing 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.[62]

Yet he was keen that such interaction should take place in an egalitarian fashion and painfully aware that this was not yet the case.[63] His argument for cultural cosmopolitanism is, therefore, qualified in the following way:

> [B]efore 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.[64]

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'.[65] A similar tension between openness and rootedness is encoded in a series of natural metaphors scattered across a number of other writings:

> 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.[66]
>
> The butterfly will have to be persuaded that the freedom of the sky is of higher value than the shelter of the cocoon.[67]
>
> 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.[68]

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'.[69] 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 and its boundaries as a necessary, but necessarily temporary, stage through which subaltern cultures must pass before they could interact on equal terms with hegemonic cultures.

Beyond Nationalism-as-transitory-stage

Joyce and Tagore are relevant to the concerns of this essay because they complicate the oft-reiterated opposition between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, but more particularly because they are concerned with the implications of both for subaltern liberation. As literary artists, they are critical of nationalism's stifling of the individual spirit. Yet their literary oeuvres work in ironic alliance with the nationalists, 'narrating the nation', restoring pride in language and place, and helping to imagine the political community that struggles for the achievement of sovereign statehood. There is an acute sensitivity in the moment in which they are writing, to the impediments to subaltern liberation emanating from both within and outside the political communities that they are actively helping to produce. Tagore, in particular, attempts to mitigate this tension by regarding 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 completed with the achievement of sovereign statehood? Is the political sensibility of these writers appropriate only to the moment of the emergence of insurgent nations into international society, or does it offer a more enduring way of thinking about boundaries and identity from the perspective of the subaltern?

To think this through, let us shift the temporal focus from the moment of emergence to one of a postcolonial crisis in which the very

viability of the nation-state as a political community is questioned in conditions of contemporary capitalism. Neo-Gramscian scholars have suggested that, far from withering away as a result of the operation of neoliberal capital, the postcolonial state has been 'internationalized'.[70] This is a condition in which elites develop close linkages with external actors, either out of self-interest, or because the state has become beholden to those actors for its survival in moments of vulnerability such as indebtedness. In such circumstances, the state's need for, and responsibilities to, global capital, begin to take precedence over its obligations to 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 struggles for.[71] But others such as Samir Amin have argued that internationalized states might yet be 'renationalized' via popular nationalist movements in the periphery.[72] Amin believes 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. These would not be nationalisms for new states and would be distinct from the official nationalist discourses wielded by states. They are perhaps better seen as 'nationalisms against the state',[73] intended to democratize unrepresentative states — typically, by raising the spectre of neocolonial 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. Insofar as popular nationalisms can perform this democratizing 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 from its nations, and that might be allied to larger projects of global redistribution.[74] To map such articulations of nationalism and cosmopolitanism onto actually existing agents is a risky endeavour. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to find social movements in the space of 'anti-globalization' protests that appear, on the one hand to articulate a 'nationalism against the state', and on the other, to frame their grievances in cosmopolitan terms, often with a view to attracting the support of international allies who might help to pressure their otherwise hostile or unresponsive states into becoming more representative of their nations.[75]

This continued articulation of cosmopolitanism and nationalism as vocabularies of resistance in conjunction with one another — rather than as necessarily antinomic —underscores the enduring relevance of the sensibilities articulated by the thinkers 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. As I have argued in this essay, both cosmopolitanism and nationalism might perform valuable ethico-political work in subaltern resistance, even as hegemonic variants of both can also function to disenfranchise the subaltern. From a subaltern perspective, then, the question is not *whether* cosmopolitanism or nationalism but *when* cosmopolitanism and nationalism.

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Notes

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Research Symposium: Postcolonial Cosmopolitanisms Tuesday 24th May, 2011 2-5pm S0.20, Social Sciences Building How do we, with our manifest differences, live together in the world? What are the ways in which cross-cultural difference have been imagined and managed across history and in different parts of the world? What forms of social organization, political structures, and cultural systems have facilitated or hindered coexistence? This symposium showcases the work of three up-and-coming academics from Boston University who are all working in the broad fields of postcolonialism and cosmopolit... By definition, postcolonialism is a period of time after colonialism, and postcolonial literature is typically characterized by its opposition to the colonial. However, some critics have argued that any literature that expresses an opposition to colonialism, even if it is produced during a colonial period, may be defined as postcolonial, primarily due to its oppositional nature.Â Many critics now propose that the term should be expanded to include the literatures of Canada, the United States, and Australia. In his essay discussing the nature and boundaries of postcolonialism, Simon During argues for a more inclusive definition, calling it â€œthe need, in nations, or groups which have been victims of imperialism to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts or images.â€ The cosmopolitan literatureâ€™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 beingyoked to those states in projects of imperialism and fascism. There is little cognisance in thisliterature of the postcolonial attachment to nationalism, which, despite the subsequentdepredations of postcolonial nation-states, continues to see nationalism as the vehicle thatdelivered the very condition of Latin American, African and Asian postcoloniality.Â Leading cosmopolitan thinkers argue that cosmopolitanism isdistinguished by its individuality, universality and generality, which is to say that allindividuals are ultimate units of concern, equally, for everyone .