

Beyond the Nation: Post-Colonial Hope

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Abstract: Despite the reassertion of the nation-state during the Global Financial Crisis, the nation continues to be a contested term in post-colonial theory. Much contemporary post-colonial literature offers a utopian vision of identity beyond the boundaries of nation, ethnicity and race. This essay examines examples of post-colonial theoretical writing at the beginning of the twenty first century that appear to continue this trend of conceptual border-crossing. Paul Gilroy's *After Empire* with its concept of a convivial multicultural democracy and Edward Said's *Freud and the Europeans* with its radical critique of identity, offer different visions of freedom. The essay proposes the term 'transnation' to encompass the location of this utopian trend, a term that may resolve difficulties with the concepts of cosmopolitan or diasporic mobility, and reveal the utopian potential of the contemporary critique of nation.

Key words: Nation, Post-colonial, Transnation.

The global financial crisis that began in 2008 proved to be a curious boon to the credibility of the nation-state. That entity whose demise had been virtually assured by globalization theory in the nineties asserted itself against the neo-liberal fiction of the supremacy of the market. The global financial market, it transpires, is not God, and state treasuries have mobilized themselves to prove John Maynard Keynes correct yet again. Only the tax base of the nation state could resuscitate an economy brought to its knees by the greed, hubris and fraud of financial traders.

Yet in cultural terms the nation is perhaps an even more ambiguous phenomenon than it has been in the past, and this is particularly so in post-colonial theory. The nation-state has been critiqued in post-colonial analysis largely because the post-independence, post-colonized nation, that wonderful utopian idea, proved to be a focus of exclusion and division rather than unity; perpetuating the class divisions of the colonial state rather than liberating national subjects. However nationalism, and its vision of a liberated nation has still been extremely important to post-colonial studies because the idea of nation has so clearly focussed the utopian ideals of anti-colonialism. There is perhaps no greater example of this than India, where independence was preceded by decades of utopian nationalist thought, yet in Rabindranath Tagore we find also the earliest and most widely known anti-nationalist. For Tagore, there can be no good nationalism; it can only be what he calls the "fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship" (2002, 15)—the exquisite irony being that his songs were used as Bengali, Bangladeshi and Indian

national anthems. So the trajectory of colonial utopianism has been deeply ambivalent: on the one hand offering the vision of a united national people, and on the other a perhaps even more utopian idea of the spiritual unity of all peoples.

The years since 1947, when India led the way for other colonial states into post-colonial independence, has been marked by the simultaneous deferral of pre-independence nationalist utopias, and yet a vibrant and unquenchable *utopianism* in the various post-colonial literatures. This utopianism has taken many forms but its most significant post-colonial characteristic has been the operation of memory. Yet in the decades before and after the turn of the century utopianism has taken a significant turn—one affected by globalization, with its increasing mobility and diasporic movement of peoples—that might be cautiously given the term *cosmopolitan*. Again it is India that has led the way in its literature, not only because of the proliferation of South Asian diasporic writing, but also because India itself has thrown the traditional idea of the nation as imagined community into question.

That national ideal of one people, so successfully championed by Nehru has never been more challenged than it has by India's size and complexity. India shows us that the 'nation' is not synonymous with the state and despite the increasing mobility of peoples across borders, the proliferation of diasporas, the increasing rhetoric of international displacement, India reveals that before national borders have been crossed, the national subject is already the subject of a *transnation*. I want to propose the concept of transnation to extend the post-colonial critique of nation, (or more specifically the linking of nation and state) and to argue with the entrenched idea of diaspora as simply defined by absence and loss. Such a definition of the diasporic population as fundamentally *absent* from the nation fails to recognise the liberating possibilities of mobility. The transnation, on the other hand, represents the utopian idea that national borders may not in the end need to be the authoritarian constructors of identity that they have become.

The beginning of the twenty first century reveals a utopianism as powerful as it is different from the nationalist utopianism that began to grow in the early decades of the twentieth. This cosmopolitan utopianism reaches beyond the state and considers the liberating potential of difference and movement. This is, of course, dangerous territory because we have ample evidence of the melancholic plight of people who must move across borders, must in fact *flee* the nation either as economic or political refugees, or as subjects oppressed in some way by state power. Such people are decidedly unfree. Transnation may be mistaken to rest on a far too benign view of global movement and may encounter the objection that the idea of freedom from borders is in fact ignoring the plight into which globalization has thrown people disadvantaged by class, ethnicity, war, tyranny and all of the many reasons why they may need to escape. For this reason I treat the term 'cosmopolitan' with considerable caution, as a word complicated by overtones of urbanity and sophistication, a term much more successful as an adjective than a noun. The term 'transnation', while it pivots on a critique of the nation, and a utopian projection beyond the tyranny of national identity, nevertheless acknowledges that people live in nations and when they move, move within and beyond nations, sometimes without privilege and without hope.

The transnation is more than 'the international,' or 'the transnational,' which might more properly be conceived as a relation between states. The concept exposes the distinction between the occupants of the geographical entity—the historically produced

multi-ethnic society whom we might call the 'nation' and the political, geographic and administrative structures of that nation that might be called the 'state.' Transnation is the fluid, migrating *outside* of the state (conceptually and culturally as well as geographically) that begins *within* the nation. This is possibly most obvious in India where the 'nation' is the perpetual scene of *translation*, but translation is but one example of the movement, the 'betweenness' by which the subjects of the transnation are constituted. It is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. Nevertheless, the 'transnation' does not refer to an object in political space. It is a way of talking about subjects in their ordinary lives, subjects who live in-between the positivities by which subjectivity is normally constituted.

That the transnation is distinct from diaspora can be confirmed by seeing Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) as the founding text of a new generation. This generation was indeed characterised by mobility and hybridity and gained worldwide attention through Indian literature in English, literature from what might be called the 'third-wave' diaspora. It was characterised by a deep distrust of the boundaries of the nation, a distrust embodied in Saleem's despair. But Rushdie's novel had a different, more utopian vision as he explains in *Imaginary Homelands*

The story of Saleem does indeed lead him to despair. But the story is told in a manner designed to echo, as closely as my abilities allowed, the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration. This is why the narrative constantly throws up new stories, why it "teems." The form – multitudinous, hinting at the infinite possibilities of the country – is the optimistic counterweight to Saleem's personal tragedy. (1991, 16)

Saleem's personal tragedy is of course the tragedy of the post-colonial nation. But it is also the tragedy of the *idea* of the bordered nation itself, the very concept of a bounded utopian space within which a diverse people could come together as one. The saving grace, for Rushdie, is the capacity of a people to 'teem,' its irrepressible and exorbitant capacity to transcend the nation that becomes its most hopeful gesture. This way of describing national concerns deeply rooted in culture and myth engages the nation as a 'transnation,' a complex of mobility and multiplicity that supersedes both 'nation' and 'state.'

What is perhaps most striking about contemporary post-colonial utopianism is that it captures the spirit of liberation strengthened rather than suppressed by the massive absurdities of the 'War on Terror.' Marxist utopianism was generated paradoxically by the growth of neo-liberal capitalism, growing stronger and stronger during the latter half of the Twentieth Century as communist states imploded. But I think this growth can be matched by the deep vein of postcolonial utopianism that we find in literature, a vein of hope that becomes more prominent with the growth of transnational and diasporic writing. This is quite different from that nationalist utopianism that died under the weight of post-independence reality. This is a global utopianism now entering the realm of critical discourse, even in the most agonistic of critics.

While the utopianism of post-colonial literature has developed extensively during the Twentieth Century, I want to address examples of this utopian tendency in post-colonial criticism at the turn of this century. Paul Gilroy's *After Empire* (2004) and Edward Said's *Freud and the non-European* (2003) indicate that the element of hope circulating around the possibility of freedom from nation, (or at least from the ontological

constriction of national borders), and freedom from identity itself, may be gathering strength as a feature of twenty first century literature and criticism. Indeed, the characteristic these works all share is a utopianism deeply embedded in critique, a tentative hope for a different world emerging from a clear view of the melancholic state of this one.

Gilroy's aim is to see whether multicultural diversity can be combined with an hospitable civic order (1), whether a convivial acceptance of difference might be achieved in a different kind of multicultural society than the examples presently available, particularly in Britain. A key moment in the book comes when he considers Freud's rejection, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, of Christ's admonition to "love thy neighbour as thyself." Not all men, Freud concludes, are worthy of love (72). But Gilroy responds

I want to dispute his explicit rejection of the demand to practice an undifferentiated attitude toward friends and enemies, intimates and strangers, alike (...) I want to explore ways in which the ordinary cosmopolitanism so characteristic of postcolonial life might be sustained and even elevated. I would like it to be used to generate abstract but nonetheless invaluable commitments in the agonistic development of a multicultural democracy that Freud and the others cannot be expected to have been able to foresee. (80)

Like many forms of utopian hope, Gilroy's utopianism is critical, relying on "a planetary consciousness" in which the world "becomes not a limitless globe, but a small, fragile and finite place, one planet among others with strictly limited resources that are allocated unequally" (83). On such a planet the injunction to "love thy neighbour as thyself," an undifferentiated attitude toward friends and enemies, might become a necessity rather than a vain hope. This, at least, for Gilroy, is worth exploring.

Paradoxically, the ground on which the possibility of a convivial diaspora rests is the melancholia of a post-imperial Europe, and of Britain in particular. The imperial melancholia first articulated by Mathew Arnold in 'Dover Beach'—a peculiarly Victorian version of the condition "started to yield to [a post-imperial] melancholia as soon as the natives and savages began to appear and make demands for recognition in the Empire's metropolitan core" (99). Consequently, "immigration, war and national identity began to challenge class hierarchy as the most significant themes from which the national identity would be assembled" (99). Former colonial subjects were confident that "their reasonable requests for hospitality would be heard and understood. They had no idea," says Gilroy, "that those requests were impossible to fulfil within the fantastic structures of the melancholic island race" (111).

Interestingly the idea that diasporas might be moving beyond the boundaries of nation, becoming at least potentially 'border free' is greeted with dismay by the conservative Roger Scruton in his book *England: an Elegy*. Scruton bemoans the extension of citizenship to "twentieth-century commonwealth immigrants from the former empire who seized on the idea of British nationality as a means of having no nationality at all, certainly no nationality that would conflict with ethnic or religious loyalties, forged far away and years before" (cited in Gilroy 2004, 125). We can understand the suspicion with which any attempt to transcend nationality might be regarded by those for whom the idea, as well as the reality, of national identity has become more and more confused and attenuated just as it has become more urgent.

The strongest aspect of Gilroy's analysis is his discourse on melancholia, particularly when he tracks it down into the popular culture phenomena of Ali G and his reception, and the television series *The Office*. But his vision of a convivial multicultural democracy is disappointingly obstructed by a melancholic litany of problems to be overcome, and obstructed by an underestimation of post-colonial art and literature. At one point he observes that "the feral beauty of postcolonial culture, literature and art of all kinds is already contributing to the making of new European cultures (...) but the arts alone cannot provide an antidote to the problems that make culture and ethnicity so widely and automatically resonant. Something bolder and more imaginative is called for" (157). We might ask whether something *more* imaginative than art and literature is possible. Clearly literature manages a better vision of utopia than Gilroy has managed in this book, an obstruction that needs response from post-colonialists.

Gilroy's advocacy of a multicultural democracy is not without its critics. We should make the obvious point that conviviality is not only hampered by the present condition of post-imperial melancholia but by the very conditions that drive people across borders in the first place. Refugee populations can be decidedly melancholic themselves. This may make the utopianism I am detecting in the literature more than a little ambivalent because I want to suggest that freedom may be *both* melancholic and convivial. This may suggest that "freedom" is an empty signifier. When we see the ways in which national politics all over the world employs the term, we may be inclined to the conviction that it really is meaningless. Amitav Ghosh puts it succinctly in *The Shadow Lines*

That word 'freedom' is the great gaoler, the illusion behind countless deaths in the name of the nation (...) behind all those pictures of people killed by terrorists and the army is the single word 'free'. Whole villages killed so that the terrorists will be destroyed and the country made free. (1988, 232)

This is prompted by his grandmother selling her jewellery to support the war effort. "I had to, don't you see? For *your* sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out" (232). The fiction of freedom has imprisoned his grandmother as securely as chains. J.M. Coetzee makes a similar point in *Diary of a Bad Year* when he exposes the anomaly of the US 'spreading democracy' forcing people to be 'free' (2007: 9).

But at the same time, the driving force of post-colonial writing is emancipatory, and if we examine that tendency in the writing and ask: What is this freedom that impels it? Can a truly free subject exist? One answer must be that freedom, like consciousness, can never exist in the abstract, it must be realised in the terms 'freedom from' and 'freedom to.' Freedom can only exist in the act of struggle against coercion, 'freedom to' may only be realised in the struggle of 'freedom from' domination and the transformation of power. This then is the dynamic function of the utopian impulse. Not to construct a place, but to enact the utopian in the engagement with power. Liberation in this way comes through transformation. The vision of utopia is located in the act of transformation of coercive power, a certain kind of *praxis* rather than a specific mode of representation.

I therefore want to include both the melancholic and the convivial in the transnation first by questioning the binary itself. Edward Said is a good case study here for observing the actual ambivalence of exile. He constantly grieves over exile as "a

uniquely punishing destiny” and as “the mind of winter,” but at the same time confirms it as the most empowering and liberating feature of the intellectual’s own worldliness. The transnational subject is perhaps both melancholically and productively free at the same time. When we think about it, the problem with nation is ideological in the classic Althusserian sense: we are born into nation, not just a nation, which is obvious, but into “nationness,” the ideology of nation as a category of identity, a category that is continually reinforced by the state. All of us, even against our better judgement, find ourselves feeling proud, or more often, ashamed of our nation. This is because, whether we like it or not, it is *ours*.

We all have occasion to dwell upon the tenacious power of this ambivalent tie to nation. When a friend asked me in a discussion about this whether I wanted to give up my own Australianness I realized that there are moments far beyond the stereotypes of national identity when choosing to belong to a nation may be important. This is when the individual subject can choose to identify with the collective community that we imagine constitutes the nation. Such an occasion occurred on February 13, 2008 when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offered an apology to Aboriginal Australians for the Stolen Generations on behalf of all Australians—an intergenerational apology that had a profoundly cathartic effect on Australian society. In this case the nation did not exist to constrict identity in a metaphor of geographical borders, but existed as an opportunity for identification, a chance to take responsibility for injustice and for shame. This was not a moment of state administered national identity, but a moment of decisive identification that actually characterises what I have called the transnation. The transnation is not just diaspora, but the outside of the state that begins within the nation—the potential for all subjects to live beyond the metaphoric boundaries of the nation state. This never occurs more powerfully than when we choose to take responsibility for the nation’s shame.

Given that we can never shake ourselves free of the nation, the idea of Transnation is built on the possibility of a national citizen being *at the same time* a transnational subject. The genuinely utopian possibility this presents is that of a ‘transnational citizen.’ The closest thing we have to this transnational citizen/subject is a member of the second-generation diaspora, who offers the most interesting possibilities of transnation, of the actual liberating ambivalence of diasporic subjectivity. The second generation finds itself born into a transcultural space and indicates an interesting way in which the borders may be crossed.

But there are other groups who live in the perpetual space of the border, who can say in the words sung by the Chicano group Los Tigres del Norte—“I didn’t cross the border, the border crossed me.” Borders continue to cross the transnational subject born into competing ideologies. The borders from which we might be free are therefore not simply the boundaries of the nation but those of nationness, and ultimately of identity itself. It is the strange contrapuntal relationship between identity, history, and nation that needs to be unravelled. For the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa the US-Mexican border, the “chainlink fence crowned with rolled barbed wire,” is an “open wound” some 1,950 miles long. Such a line divides a people and their culture on both sides of the border. But it is not just a border in space, it is a lived border “running down the length of my body” splitting her very being (Anzaldúa 1988, 193). The concept of the border is disrupted in many ways in postcolonial literatures, but most powerfully in the relationship between memory and place: memory rather than nostalgia and place rather than nation.

The first border from which we need to be freed then is not that of nation but of identity itself and here Edward Said's essay *Freud and the European* provides a fascinating entry. This is primarily a discussion of Freud's late work *Moses and Monotheism*, an attempt to disrupt the status of Moses as the father of Jewish identity by claiming that Moses was actually Egyptian, and had imported monotheism from Pharaonic culture. Freud's intervention is not only an attempt to disrupt the monolithic character of Jewish identity but more importantly to attack the rigid boundaries of identity itself.

Said's strategy is to situate Freud's excavation of Jewish identity in the context of present day Palestine. The investigation of Moses' identity is an exploration of the non-European origin of the Jewish people. Victims of a specifically European anti-Semitism under Hitler, the 'invasion' of Palestine and establishment of a Jewish state nevertheless relied implicitly on the assumption that the Jews were European 'like us' (and hence Britain's support for Zionism and eventually America's unquestioning support for Israel). This maintains an unresolved paradox: if the Jews are dispersed and mistreated because they are foreigners as Freud maintains, they also occupy Palestine as a returning, 'civilized' 'European' population. The issue of Jewish identity under these circumstances is, psychologically, a continual cycle of repression and return.

The contrast to this is Isaac Deutscher's idea of the 'non-Jewish Jew' the great secular intellectuals, such as Spinoza, Marx, Heine and Freud himself, who operate as powerful critics of society, strengthened to a great extent by their exile and diasporic unhousedness. They agreed "on the relativity of moral standards, giving not one race, or culture or God a monopoly of reason and virtue." Said adds that the essential component of this state is its irremediably diasporic unhoused character, a character that is not exclusively Jewish but can "be identified in the diasporic, wandering, unresolved, cosmopolitan consciousness of someone who is both inside and outside his or her community" (53).

All these represent limits that prevent Jewish identity being incorporated into "one, and only one, Identity." Freud's symbol of these limits was that the founder of Jewish identity was himself a non-European Egyptian. The irony here is the Zionism represents a people moving backwards into a European form of nationalism, relying on an implicit Europeanness for the specific purpose of reinventing this repressed 'one true identity.' "Freud had no thought of Europe as the malevolent colonizing power described a few decades later by Fanon" (50-1) and he had no idea that this colonizing process would be repeated in Israel: "Europeans who had superior title to the land over the non-European natives" (51) like the French in Algeria. Moses had to be a non-European "so that in murdering him the Israelites would have something to repress, and also something to recall, elevate and spiritualise during the course of their great adventure in rebuilding Israel overseas" (51).

The extraordinary thing about Israel, and perhaps why *Freud and the non-European* is so interesting to the concept of the transnation is that it is the only example we have—with the possible exception of Liberia—of a diaspora moving centripetally into the borders of a specially created nation, a *reversal* of the accelerating global dispersal of peoples during the twentieth century. This makes it a very interesting case study of the pathology of national identity. The fact that this nation just happened to be another people's homeland is but one of the many sordid consequences of what appears to be now, and indeed was seen to be by many European Jews at the time, a *regression* from diasporic ethnicity into nationality. The consequences of this regression are virtually a

parable of the dire effects of national borders. Just how dire is remarked on by Gilroy when he recounts the occasion when Rachel Corrie, a 23 year old US citizen, a member of the international solidarity movement active in Palestine was crushed by an Israeli army bulldozer as she attempted to prevent the machine from demolishing a home in the Gaza strip. Gilroy quotes from an email sent to her parents before her death: "I really can't believe that something like this can happen in the world without a bigger outcry about it. It really hurts me (...) to witness how awful we can allow the world to be" (2004, 91). He ponders that sentence: "How awful we can allow the world to be," repeating it "for the lucidity with which it brings together collective responsibility, planetary consciousness, and the horrors of imperial injustice into contact with one another" (91-2). But it also brings to awareness the extent of the regression from a planetary consciousness occasioned by the toxic combination of nation and identity. The key to this dystopian catastrophe for Palestinians was that the state of Israel, something about which Freud himself was remarkably ambivalent, was built upon the idea of a stable Jewish identity founded in Moses the Egyptian.

This speaks, for Said, to other identities

In other words, identity cannot be thought of or worked through itself alone; it cannot constitute or even imagine itself without that radical originary break or flaw which will not be repressed, because Moses was Egyptian, and therefore always outside the identity inside which so many have stood and suffered (...) The strength of this thought is, I believe, that it can be articulated and speak to other besieged identities as well – not through dispensing palliatives such as tolerance and compassion but, rather, by attending to it as troubling, disabling, destabilizing secular wound – the essence of the cosmopolitan, from which there can be no recovery, no state of resolved or Stoic calm, and no utopian reconciliation even within itself. (2003, 54)

Said appears to be locating the cosmopolitan firmly in the register of the 'melancholic' in a characteristic mode of agonistic critique. He is using the word 'utopian' here in the standard way, as a vain and unachievable ideal. But what if the idea of identity as unresolved, destabilizing and constantly protean rather than fixed and imprisoning, is itself a form of utopianism, a recognition of hope? In the question of identity Said has always been paradoxical: while exile might be a 'secular wound,' generating the 'mind of winter,' it is far from disabling, being the profoundly enabling feature of the intellectual's relationship with regimes of identity control such as nation, ethnicity, culture and religion. Exile is the invigorating condition of the public intellectual. Not only have Said's intellectual heroes been exiles of one kind or another, but indeed his very *concept* of the intellectual, is founded on the empowering freedom from boundaries. The freedom from borders is itself a deeply paradoxical freedom, for it entails immense risk, it means disembarking from the comfort of Identity, and perhaps the comfort of home, for the much more stormy waters of becoming. In this way exile, that "uniquely punishing destiny" becomes utopian, the region of hope, perhaps the only region from which truth can be spoken to power.

Said's own utopianism cannot be repressed. Despite his agonistic refusal of a 'utopian reconciliation' to displacement and exile, he goes on to ask the question, "can we find a language or a history that might aspire to the condition of a politics of diaspora life?" Can it ever become the not-so-precarious foundation in the land of Jews and

Palestinians of a bi-national state in which Israel and Palestine are parts rather than as antagonists of each other's history and underlying reality? Said's answer is "I myself believe so." What remains so poignant about this assurance is that it is a hope that flies in the face of the most depressing, the most dispiriting present reality. A bi-national state? The border between Israel and Palestine is the very epitome of the concept of border. Said's hope displays a utopianism from which utopia is hidden from view. But utopianism without any visible utopia is the fuel that drives the quest for liberation.

Such freedom comes only by rejecting or overcoming the shadow lines of history and geography. One of the most powerful critiques of these shadow lines is of course Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) a book whose critique of borders shows the kind of critical foundation upon which later cosmopolitan utopianism could be built. This novel asks: "How is it possible to live in a way that might escape the borders of nation, maps and memory?"—and the metaphorical answer to this lies in the most subtle of boundaries: the boundary of the mirror. Mirrors appear both as objects and metaphors in the novel because mirrors disrupt the clear border of identity and difference. The clearest statement of this comes late in the novel after the narrator has pondered the absurd power of lines on the map. Speaking about the people who made the map that divided India and Pakistan

What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that there had never been a moment in the 4000 year old history of the map when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines – so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking-glass border. (228)

The mirror is the border that dissolves borders, by revealing the other as the same. Mirrors function in several ways in the novel: national and other borders create a barrier beyond which we see in the other, if we look hard enough, an image of ourselves; borders are dissolved in the 'mirroring' of vicarious experience and photographs. The nameless narrator's habit of living vicariously through the memories and imaginations of others is a form of border dissolving in which the experiences of the other become one's own, and in which one's self may become defamiliarized. This is one way in which memory can avoid nostalgia and refashion the present.

The mirror may be Ghosh's metaphor for the dissolving border of Gilroy's convivial multicultural democracy, a utopian vision of "an indiscriminate attitude to friends and enemies alike" that comes about by seeing the one who is othered by the borders of nation, maps and identity, as the same. It is tempting to see the mirror, the looking glass border, as a metaphoric location of the Third Space of Enunciation. But the mirror goes much further, dissolving the persistence of all borders of identity. It is a spectral contact zone, created by the phantom border of the mirror, indiscriminate but ultimately revealing. The Indian Ghosh looking at himself in the other across the Pakistani border may seem to achieve an easier reflection than that attempted across the borders of race, ethnicity and religion. But this is the first border towards freedom: the *national* border. The metaphor of the mirror might encapsulate what Gilroy sees as the question of the political agency of art and literature, for it might capture perfectly the capacity for borders to dissolve as the other becomes the same, but it cannot remove those borders of nation, race, ethnicity and religion. Yet the potency of literature lies in its utopian

potential, its capacity to *imagine* a different future. For liberation is not possible until it is first imagined.

The utopian energy propelling each of these very different texts is the possibility of a freedom from the borders of nation and identity. Where Roger Scruton sees post-colonial immigration as a scandalous attempt by people to dispense with nationality, we can see at least that it can be done. Whether it is possible to dispense with the other borders of ethnicity, religion and cultural tradition is another story. Certainly Said's location of Freud's deconstruction of Jewish identity in the context of Palestine leads him to suggest that the borders of identity itself can be overcome.

For Said the person who embodies this utopian freedom that comes from being outside, from crossing the borders of identity and nation, is Jean Genet. In *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* he says: "Here is a man in love with "the other," an outcast and stranger himself, feeling the deepest sympathy for the Palestinian revolution as the "metaphysical" uprising of outcasts and strangers" (2004, 84). Genet is "the traveler across identities, the tourist whose purpose is marriage with a foreign cause, so long as that cause is both revolutionary and in constant agitation" (85).

Genet made the step, crossed the legal borders, that very few white men or women ever attempted. He traversed the space from the metropolitan centre to the colony; his unquestioned solidarity was with the very same oppressed identified and so passionately analyzed by Fanon. (87)

I believe Said saw Genet as a prophetic sign, in this age of civilizational conflict, of a freedom that whether possible or not, encapsulated the hope upon which post-colonial liberation is built. Yet the possibility of such freedom seems to require something even deeper, something provided by the metaphor of the mirror, for not only does the mirror show that the other is the same, but that true freedom comes when we become other to ourselves.

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