The Nation and its Margins

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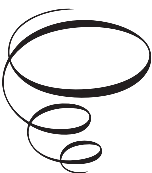
Rethinking Community

Edited by

Aditi Chandra and Vinita Chandra

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-4018-9
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4018-7

Dedicated to the four brothers, Girish, Harish, Shrish, and Apurva Chandra, for holding the family together through food and laughter with all our diverging perspectives. And for giving to us, as inheritance, the gift of celebrating heterogeneity.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No book was ever completed by one person, let alone an edited volume of essays. We have a small village to thank. We are tremendously appreciative of Ignacio Lopez-Calvo who is the founder and organizer of the annual East-West intercultural relations conference where early versions of these essays were presented. The eighth East-West conference, which was titled “Reconsidering Cultural Ideologies and Identities in India and Beyond” was held at Ramjas College, University of Delhi, India between March 17-19, 2016.

The conference would not have been possible without the dedicated assistance of the faculty, students, and staff of the Department of English, Ramjas College. They were exemplary hosts and made sure that the conference progressed smoothly and that everyone was comfortable and well fed! They formed an engaged and critical audience, which helped presenters and later these ten authors to strengthen their projects. Spanning Literature, History, Gender and Media Studies, this collection of essays is as interdisciplinary as the conference itself. We would, therefore, also like to thank all the other presenters at the conference who helped foster conversations that have likely found a place in this volume.

The ten essays in this collection were chosen out of approximately thirty submissions and went through a rigorous blind peer review process. We will be eternally grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers who spent their time commenting on and honing the scholarship included in these pages. Working with Cambridge Scholars Publishing has been a pleasure. Everyone we have communicated with has been patient with delays and quick to respond when things moved faster. Many thanks to Victoria Carruthers and James Brittain for reaching out to us and starting the proposal submission process. More specifically, sincere thanks to Adam Rummens for shepherding us through the time-consuming and difficult process of a collaborative project. Thanks also to Amanda Millar for working with us through the final stages of proofreading. Tremendous gratitude to the design team at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, specifically Courtney Blades and Sophie Edminson, for an absolutely stunning book cover. And lastly, abiding thanks to our families for their patience and constant support as we worked on completing this manuscript.

INTRODUCTION: BETWEEN THE BORDERS OF NATIONS, CREATING THIRD SPACES

ADITI CHANDRA

Since the fall of monarchical empires and decolonization movements across the globe, the nation has been the one abiding socio-cultural formation that has held diverse people together in unlikely communities. Unity-in-diversity—the idea that despite being different in terms of language and customs the millions of people who, by chance of fate, are born within a particular national boundary are essentially the same—is a theme that can be found at the origin narratives of all nations. Ernst Renan in "What is a Nation?" argues that the nation is conjured up as a community through an intense remembering of a glorious and cohesive historical past.[1] Janaki Nair has pointed out: "all nations need history like the body needs oxygen" but that the histories that support the nation are exercises in "historical myth-making."[2] Indeed, E.J. Hobsbawm has reminded us that "a nation without a past is a contradiction in terms."[3] But, Renan reiterates that ironically, this remembering is made possible only through forgetting the violence, traumas, and ruptures that led to this newly-formed community. Benedict Anderson has famously argued that the nation is an "imagined community"—a socially constructed group that brings together diverse peoples with nothing in common except the perception of a homogenous time and a "deep, horizontal comradeship" that seemingly binds them

[1] Ernst Renan, "What is a Nation? (Qu'est-ce Qu'une Nation?, 1882)" in *What is a Nation? And Other Political Writings*, translated & edited by M.F.N Giglioli, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
[2] Janki Nair, "Introduction: A Teach-In for a JNU Spring" in *What the Nation Really Needs to Know: The JNU Nationalism Lectures*, Noida, India: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016, pp. xvii.
[3] E.J. Hobsbawm, "Ethnicity and nationalism in Europe Today" in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan, London & New York: Verso Books, 2012, pp. 255-266.

together.[4] *Nation and Its Margins: Rethinking Community* challenges the idea that the nation-state is the only available form of community, and questions its hegemonic control over narratives of belonging. The essays in this volume attempt to go beyond just challenging mainstream polarizing narratives: they explore cross-cultural encounters which highlight narratives that escape the neat boundaries constructed by national identities. They serve to complicate our understanding of peoples and groups and the varying spaces they inhabit by allowing narratives that have been made invisible, by hegemonic national control, to emerge. Through interdisciplinary perspectives from History, Literature, Media Studies, and Gender Studies, this volume of essays throws light on moments of cultural encounters in the Global South (specifically South Asia, South-east Asia, West Asia, and Latin America), questioning what happens when diverse communities and voices came together to challenge the notion that claiming national identity is the only acceptable mode of being, belonging, and existing in the world. In doing so, they reveal other radically innovative forms of attaining cohesion and identity.

Nations are created and held together based on the idea that their citizens must necessarily be bound together by the sameness of history and experience. In addition, the characteristics of sameness that the nation desires of its citizens are determined by the dominant socio-cultural, religious, caste, racial, and gender groups. But, nationalism that extols the greatness of the nation does, indeed, celebrate diversity within its borders, hence the repeated use of the phrase "unity-in-diversity" by those who claim to envision pluralism in shaping national identity. This diversity, however, is only appreciated when it is in the service of the unity of the nation and subsumed within majoritarian narratives—often as tokens of alterity employed for tourism brochures. More critically, government projects and actions that seemingly highlight diversity merely pay lip-service to those causes and are only used as public relations efforts for consumption by social justice watchdogs.

Alterity, in other words, is exploited and brutally suppressed especially when dissent emerges from those locations. The unity that the nation seeks, despite diversity, curtails heterogeneity of expression, being, and thought. Therefore, hyper-nationalists, when criticizing someone or some group, also recognize communities through the very same homogenizing and generalizing lens through which they shape themselves. The nation holds itself together as a united entity by seeing itself in opposition to a demonized enemy Other,

[4] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London & New York: Verso Books, 1991.

who they must construct as different from themselves. But, despite this constructed difference, the hyper-nationalists cannot be attentive to the diversity within that Other. The enemy's heterogeneity is made invisible precisely because the nation-state imagines itself as a homogenous community. The hyper-nationalists, when criticizing the citizens of another nation or the dissenters within its boundaries, are insidiously creating an inverted mirror image for the masses to look into. They represent the Other, much like themselves, as a homogenous group without heterogeneity of thought, identity, and expression.

Resisting enforced consent to majoritarian discourses propagated by nation-states has gradually become dangerous across the globe. Challenging the hegemonic discourse of the nation has always spelt trouble but in the last few years it has taken on frightening proportions resulting in jail time and loss of life. To see examples in our contemporary milieus, one only has to look towards Edward Snowden—the American whistleblower of the National Security Agency—who is now on the run for his life, and the highly suspicious disappearance and murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi who openly criticized his government.[5] In India, academics, activists, students, and journalists questioning governmental authorities, have been labelled "anti-national" and verbally and physically attacked. Some have lost their jobs, been forced underground or charged with sedition, and unjustly jailed for their questioning stance towards the nation-state.[6] In Pakistan, marginalized communities such as the Ahmadiyas, Hazaras, and Shias are routinely under attack.[7] In Bangladesh, globally-

[5] "Edward Snowden: Fast Facts," CNN.com, updated June 4, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2013/09/11/us/edward-snowden-fast-facts/index.html. Mark Mazetti and Ben Hubbard, "It Wasn't Just Khashoggi: A Saudi Prince's Brutal Drive to Crush Dissent," New York Times, March 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/17/world/middleeast/khashoggi-crown-prince-saudi.html

[6] Clean the Nation: Inside the Facebook Group that plotted to get 'anti-nationals' sacked, prosecuted," Scroll.in, February 19, 2019, https://scroll.in/article/913666/clean-the-nation-inside-the-facebook-group-plotting-to-get-anti-nationals-sacked-and-prosecuted. "JNU Sedition Case: 3 Years Later, Charge-sheet to be filed against Kanhaiya Kumar, Others," The Wire, December 21, 2018, https://thewire.in/rights/jnu-sedition-chargesheet-kanhaiya-kumar. "Who is an Urban Naxal asks Romila Thappar," The Hindu, September 30, 2018. All articles accessed March 2019.

[7] Rabia Mehmood, "The never-ending ordeal of Pakistan's Minorities," Amnesty International, October 16, 2018, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/10/the-never-ending-ordeal-of-pakistans-minorities/. Accessed March 2019.

renowned photographer, Shahidul Alam, was arrested for being vocal against government violence.[8] Next door, in Myanmar two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo working on stories about Rohingya Muslims, were arrested in December 2017 and imprisoned for seven years.[9] While these journalists were released on May 6, 2019, fear has been instilled by their imprisonment and media repression continues.[10] Some of these events, especially those directly impacting a few individuals or located in the Global South, do not generate large-scale and long-lasting outrage because they are either lost in the multiplying din of ever-increasing sources of news (online, television, and print) or not reported enough. These episodes are also polarizing, at least in the Indian context, with some believing that the actions of governmental agencies against the dissenters are justified. Stringent action against anyone who questions the nation-state comes from an increasing desire to create homogenous and bounded national communities wherein only those who conform to the rules of the perfect citizen, as described by majoritarian narratives, are considered legitimate.

South Asia is not alone in this brutal silencing of dissenting voices and the marginalized. This is a matter of global concern. The United States and some European countries have routinely displayed frightening xenophobia and hatred towards immigrants. Most recently, it has manifested in the drastic reduction of refugees permitted to enter their borders despite the extensive checks that they must go through. When inside, immigrant communities of color often face discriminatory behavior in their daily lives on the basis of their religion or race. Some examples include: the heart-wrenching forced separations of migrant parents from their children at the U.S.-Mexico border, Donald Trump's demand for a wall along this boundary, his proposed ban on people from seven Muslim countries from entering the U.S., and the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union

[8] Eli Meixler, "Journalism Is Under Threat. Inside a Bangladeshi Journalist's Dangerous Journey From Photographer to Prisoner," Time.com, December 11, 2018, http://time.com/5475494/shahidul-alam-bangladesh-journalist-person-of-the-year-2018/. Accessed March 2019.

[9] "Imprisoned in Myanmar," Reuters.com, Series of news reports from September 2018 until February 2019, https://www.reuters.com/subjects/myanmar-reporters. Accessed March 2019.

[10] Dominic Faulder, "Myanmar media repression deepens despite release of Reuters pair" Nikkei Asian Review, May 14, 2019, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Myanmar-media-repression-deepens-despite-release-of-Reuters-pair . Accessed May 2019.

or Brexit.[11] Couched in national security and economic terms, these actions are symptoms of the same hyper-nationalistic and xenophobic malaise.

There is a frightening similarity between the homogenizing tendencies of today's mainstream hyper-nationalists—some of whom are heads of State—and the extreme right-wing terrorists (for example, Islamic State and far-right white nationalism). Both denounce and are afraid of what has been described as the "gray zone"—the ability of individuals to belong to and feel affinity with multiple communities and, at the same time, to also question those communities. The gray zone has also been described as the ability of people from varying political, cultural, and religious backgrounds to coexist. In November 2015, *Dabiq*, the online magazine of the militant group variously known as Islamic State (ISIS), Daesh, or ISIL, included an article titled "The Extinction of the Grayzone." It celebrated the creation of two distinct camps in the world—the camp of Islam under their rule and the camp of the Western crusaders.[12] Published a week after the attacks at the headquarters of the Paris-based satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, the anonymous author of this article described the gray zone as a space inhabited by any Muslim who has not joined either ISIS or the crusaders. Throughout the article, the Muslims who refuse to inhabit any one side are

[11] "Timeline of the Muslim Ban," American Civil Liberties union (ACLU), https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban. "Bolsonaro backs Trump's border wall ahead of White House Meeting," The Guardian, March 19, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/19/jair-bolsonaro-donald-trump-wall-immigration. Julia Ainsley, "Thousands more migrant kids separated from parents under Trump than previously reported," NBC News, Jan 17, 2019, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/thousands-more-migrant-kids-separated-parents-under-trump-previously-reported-n959791. Annalisa Mirelli, "The US and UK have let xenophobia bring them to the brink," QZ.com, Jan 19, 2019. Josh Gabatiss, "Brexit strongly linked to xenophobia, scientists conclude," The Independent, Nov 27, 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/brexit-prejudice-scientists-link-foreigners-immigrants-racism-xenophobia-leave-eu-a8078586.html. Gary Younge, "Britain's Imperial Fantasies have given us Brexit," the Guardian, Feb 3, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/03/imperial-fantasies-brexit-theresa-may. All articles accessed March 2019.

[12] Laila Lalami, "My Life as a Muslim in the West's Gray Zone," The New York Times, Nov 20, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/my-life-as-a-muslim-in-the-wests-gray-zone.html. Murtaza Hussain, "Islamic State's Goal: "Eliminating the Grayzone of coexistence between Muslims and the West," The Intercept, Nov 17, 2015, https://theintercept.com/2015/11/17/islamic-states-goal-eliminating-the-grayzone-of-coexistence-between-muslims-and-the-west/. Both articles accessed February 2019.

called "the grayish," "the hypocrites" and, "the grayish hypocrites."[13] A similar desire to create two distinct and opposing sides is at the heart of George Bush's call, "you're either with us, or against us," that he repeatedly made after 9/11.[14] Similarly, those who find affinity with white nationalism believe that all Muslims, Jews, Communists, and people of color are out to destroy the white population of the world and are constructed as the 'enemy Other.'[15] The nation-state too fears the gray-zone, which allows for an interrogation of one's communities and an embrace of expansive forms of cultural belonging. People defined as "grayish," refuse to fall prey to stereotypes and posit a pluralistic approach when encountering those from differing socio-cultural, religious, racial, or national groups.

In 2009, the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a powerful TED talk at Oxford titled "The Danger of the Single Story." In it she described the ways in which complex human beings, communities, and regions of the world are reduced to a single narrative or a "single story" about them. For example, diverse people from the vast continent of Africa are understood only as poor, starving, and without any means and Mexicans are seen only as desperate migrants. People, and in turn communities, are much more than a single narrative that is manufactured about them. Adichie's point is that each individual life contains a heterogeneous compilation of stories. Reducing people to only one story takes away their individuality, humanity, and dignity. The same can apply to religious, regional, linguistic, and even national communities. Single stories about people and places, Adiche argues, are tools by which those in power control how we understand and interact with those without power. She says that the consequence of the single, unidimensional story is that it "robs people of dignity … [making the] recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar." It is this empathetic search for multiple narratives about any community or person that also allows for the emergence of similarities instead of focusing on irreconcilable barriers through us versus them narratives. How we tell

[13] Laila Lalami, "My Life as a Muslim in the West's Gray Zone," The New York Times, Nov 20, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/my-life-as-a-muslim-in-the-wests-gray-zone.html, accessed February 2019.

[14] "You're either with us or against us," CNN.com, Nov 6, 2001, http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/, accessed March 2019.

[15] Colin P. Clarke, "The Cult of Brevik," The Slate, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/03/anders-breivik-new-zealand-right-wing-terrorism-inspiration.html. "Connections In Hate Between NZ And Norway Shooters," NPR.org, https://www.npr.org/2019/03/16/704039092/connections-in-hate-between-nz-and-norway-shooters. Both articles accessed, March 2019.

stories and consequently frame communities by selective narrativization is an exercise in turning complex identities into simplistic ones. The simplistic framing of narratives often comes at the expense of silencing inconvenient voices—the disenfranchised at the margins of the nation-state or those dissenting against it. Inhabiting the "gray zone" means denying the single story; it means denying the notions of pure black and pure white and embracing diversity; of celebrating the hybrid and rejecting the idea of unidimensional and homogenous communities.

This volume is a celebration of the "gray zone." The essays discuss a variety of themes: how a critique of nationalism could emerge even amidst India's struggle for self-determination against British colonial rule; how a regional language shaped local identities and challenged colonial and national discourses; they celebrate hybridity and communities that defy borders; they highlight that cultural identities have always-already been fractured and never been unidimensional; and reveal the frightening nature of the modern nation-state's use of cyber surveillance. Through literary and historical case studies, they seek dissonances within homogenizing narratives and show that there are many other forms of belonging and community formation that look beyond the nation. As the world keeps dangerously spinning towards militarized borders, xenophobic violence, religious, racial, sexual, and caste discrimination, and the shutting down of discomfiting dissent, this volume makes a timely contribution that questions such exclusionary discourses.

Sarvani Gooptu's essay traces Rabindranath Tagore's journeys through, and writings about, Asia and the West. It highlights his mission to educate the public about the countries of the world, their histories, and cultures. She focuses on Tagore's English and Bengali articles that were published between 1900 and 1940. Gooptu argues that Tagore's mission of cultural unity attempted to establish a sense of respect and awareness of cultures other than one's own, in the hope that it would end the self-absorbing nationalism that he feared might degenerate into aggressive imperialistic tendencies. He believed that cultural exchanges would bring different nations into closer humanistic ties, which would create far more effective and lasting bonds than political alliances and treaties. Tagore believed in a 'unity of souls, not political union.' Gooptu concludes that "a re-understanding and a re-evaluation of [the] ideas of nationalism and nation is periodically needed has been painfully proven in India." This is precisely the project of this collection, and the reason we start the book with her essay on Tagore. The essay ends with Tagore's words that are prescient in our times: 'The idea of the Nation is one of the most powerful anaesthetics that man has invented. Under the influence of its fumes 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—in fact can feel dangerously resentful if it is pointed out.' And 'if we want any merit from interaction with other countries it can only be through 'maitri' (friendship) and the use of the language of love. What one gets from the exploited is a compromise, only friendship can bring total commitment.'

Mithilesh Kumar Jha examines the ways in which the writing of histories has shaped the "struggle for political power" and self-determination in a diverse range of 19th-century Maithli texts, which come from modern-day Bihar and Jharkhand. Jha argues that the language, Maithli provided a powerful tool for the people of this region to represent themselves and shape their identity. He explains that while Mithila, the region in northern Bihar, was praised, by colonial administrators and Indic priests, as the seat of Sanskrit learning, the language, Maithli, was not given its due. Maithli was ignored, not just by the colonial authorities but also by the emergent Indian nationalists who supported the development of Hindi, Hindustani, and Nagari script. Jha provides close readings of five texts that recount the history of Mithila and the languages that were studied and spoken in the region such as Persian, Urdu, Hindi, and Maithli. Jha asserts that these texts "helped in developing a geographic unity among the inhabitants." This essay reveals that even when the broader, national movement for Indian independence was gaining momentum, the shaping and development of regional identities remained a significant way to project Mithila, its history, language, and culture "as a separate and distinct geographical and political unit within India." While these texts accept that Mithila is part of the larger national frame of India, Jha's analysis shows that they paved "the way for a distinct consciousness about Maihtili identity." These texts became the starting point of the struggle for recognizing Maithli as a distinct language and even shaped the demand for the separate province of Mithila.

Like Jha, Navras Aafreedi in 'Anglicization of India's Baghdadi Jews and their Emergence as Intermediaries between the British and the Indians' also examines language as a marker of community identity. Aafreedi shows that the Baghdadi Jews' linguistic allegiance towards English rather than any Indic language reflects their desire to identify with the British in colonial India. Examining the migration and eventual settling down of the Baghdadi Jews (a term used for Jewish merchants from the Arab middle East, broadly speaking), Aafreedi makes sharp distinctions between other Jewish communities in India, namely the Bene Israel and the Cochini, and rejects the homogenization of a singular Jewish mode of being in India. Aafreedi discusses how Baghdadi Jews, despite being on the receiving end of colonial racism at times, made the "business-friendly" choice of being

culturally assimilated with the British rather than the locals. While hanging on closely to their Jewish identity, they also made strong attempts, through dress and language, to connect with the ruling white community. These were survival strategies employed by a small community that was a minority. Their gradual anglicization allowed the Baghdadi Jews to become intermediaries between the rulers (British) and the ruled (Indians) and therefore also "allowed them to contribute disproportionately to their country's cultural and commercial life." Social ambivalence and indeed, the seeming, unethical leaning towards the colonial masters, allowed an extremely small community of foreign-origin to thrive in India.

Vijayta Mahendru in 'Sikhs in the United Kingdom: From 'Immigrants' to 'Transnational Community' writes about another religious community that has defined its identity through migration—the Sikhs. She shows how the Sikhs as immigrants to the U.K. demanded "full and equal inclusion in society, while claiming the recognition of their identities in the public sphere." Focusing on the three waves of Sikh immigration from India to the West via Africa, Mahendru also examines three specific cases of this community's collective agitation for the right to wear the "physical manifestations" of their faith such as the turban, beard, and the sheathed dagger. These "indispensable articles of the Sikh faith" she contends "violate publicly accepted dress codes in western societies." Her analysis shows the fragility of the nation-state. The United Kingdom frames itself through the language of multiculturalism and unity-in-diversity but fails to live up to those goals when faced by the sartorial demands of the Sikhs. This community's struggle to first assimilate into the new host society and later come together to uphold the symbols of their faith has also brought the "assumption of congruence between political unity and cultural homogeneity into sharp relief." Mahendru concludes by asserting that the Sikh diaspora is not invested in the politics of nationalism and rather committed to building a strong transnational community representing a "move towards post-territorial sovereignty."

Sudipto Mitra and Purba Hossain in 'Protests in Print: Resistance Against Indian Indentured Labour in Nineteenth Century Bengal' go beyond the bounds of the national framework in writing the histories of the anti-colonial movement in India. Through a meticulous analysis of nineteenth century print media and public discourse, Mitra and Hossain locate the beginnings of the anti-indenture movement in surprising places such as British anti-slavery societies and trace its origins as a regional struggle in Bengal, which they argue occurred much before the movement was folded into the larger struggle for Indian national independence. Empowering the indentured labourers themselves, the authors trace dissent

to reactions against atrocities that result in the deaths of labourers. Mitra and Hossain contend that the anti-indenture movement helped shape the struggle for nationhood rather than it owing its existence to the national struggle. It was the anti-indenture movement that was influential in shaping the nationalist politics of the early twentieth century and gave it the “rhetoric of rights” rather than the assumption that the labourers received emancipation as their movement acquired prominence in the wider struggle for national independence. Moving out of a nationalist framework, even during a time when self-determination was emerging, and locating the early history of the anti-indenture movements that worked in tandem with anti-slavery movements in Britain involving local and colonial elites, dismantles an us versus them narrative and allows for heterogenous histories of the anti-colonial struggle.

In ‘The Indian Encounter with Western Medicine: Recounting Women’s Experiences from the Late Nineteenth Century,’ Sharmita Ray examines the question of community formation, and the fractures therein, through the lens of gender. She traces how western medicine made inroads into India under colonial rule, the significant role played by women, both European and Indian, and the struggles faced by them. Ray frames women as “propagators and recipients of western medicine.” This analysis reveals the ways in which western medicine could, at once, be intrusive for Indian women while also creating circumstances where women could demand to be treated on their own terms. It was, ironically, the practice of ‘purdah’ that kept women of the household away from men, not connected through familial links, that facilitated the entry of European, American, and Indian women into the medical workforce. This essay shows how a form of hybrid medicine, open to female participation is shaped by women, despite patriarchy and norms of caste purity, on the insistence of female patients. Medicine has typically been understood as a component of the West’s “civilizing mission” and as a tool of empire in the colonized space. But through the training of European and Indian women in western medicine, so that they could treat Indian female patients, the hybrization of western medicine starts to occur in late 19-century India. Due to the important role played by women, both as doctors and patients, the early introduction and practice of western medicine in India escapes the homogenizing discourse of the colonial state. This coming together of European and Indian women to create a medical practice on their own terms subverts the colonial state’s intention of using western medicine to homogenize and control the colonized.

Tapasya Narang and Titas De Sarkar look at texts that bring together two very disparate cultures, and the ways in which this hybridization destabilizes monolithic hegemonic stereotypes of both traditions. Narang’s

essay titled ‘Indian Mythology in Derek Mahon’s *An Autumn Wind’* analyses the poetry of the Northern Irish poet Derek Mahon, who deals with “a whole range of literary associations from Greek and Roman mythology to Indian and Chinese scriptures, borrowing fragments from different sources and innovatively reworking them to address contemporaneity, without an expression of loss at being unable to appropriate authentic or coherent cultures.” She explores Mahon’s juxtaposition of the contemporary world of flux and plurality with seemingly inherited traditions of the past. She argues that Mahon’s poetry challenges the idea of the role of the poet in “naturalizing traditional and inherited ways of reading by assuming a revivalist approach and engendering nationalist exclusivist ideologies.” Instead, he wants his audience to grapple with the fragmented reality of modern times. Narang gives a sensitive an incisive reading of Mahon’s representation of India and Indian mythology from the perspective of an Irish poet.

Titas De Sarkar’s essay, ‘Words know no Borders: Decoding Youth Culture in the Twentieth-century World’ compares two literary movements from Calcutta, India and San Francisco, US in the 1950s and 1960s, and explores “such notions of desires and anxieties which cut across geographical boundaries” in the youth cultures that became a “site of resistance, artistic conflict, and reflection of codes of conduct” imposed by society. Sarkar asks why these writings were taboo in almost exactly the same way in two completely different economic trajectories, across multiple national and cultural borders. ‘Stark Electric Jesus’ (1964) by Malay Roychoudhury, the founding member of the Hungry generation of poets, and ‘Howl’ (1956) by Allen Ginsberg, the seminal Beat poet and counter-culture figures respond to broader cultural and social structures, Sarkar argues. He points out how similar conservative reactions were against the two poets who inhabited geographical and cultural spaces far away from each other. “The question then arises as to how and why they were so successful in irking the institution, which from San Francisco, US, to Calcutta, India, was run by very different kinds of government,” Sarkar asks. He tentatively offers the explanation of the similarity between the two poets as emerging from the coping mechanisms of a generation of misfits who share optimism across national boundaries. Sarkar’s essay points to the hybridization of cultures that borrow from each other to respond to different situations in similar ways because of the shared human response to resist.

Vinh Phu Pham’s ‘Death of an Empire: Subjectivity and Asian pragmatism in José Martí’s “Annam”’ studies the portrayal of Viet Nam by Cuban author Jose Marti who is well known for his enduring commitment to social justice and equality, and is often called the voice of the people.

Pham locates this story as an unusual one because, as he points out, in 19th-century Latin American literature the new feeling of nationalism drove writers to "highlight the particularities of their country in order to distinguish themselves from their neighbors," but Marti performs the rare deed of writing about a territory beyond the Americas and Europe to focus on Viet Nam in his short story "un paseo por la tierra de los Anamitas," published in 1889 in the collection *La edad de oro*, exhibiting very strong cross cultural sympathy. Instead of focusing on the greatness and modernity of his own nation, as other Latin American writers of his time were doing, Marti writes about a place considered to be "mysterious and exotic entities outside the realms of high civilization." Like Sarvani Gooptu's reading of Tagore, Pham explores the way that "these *imagined communities* of peoples, places, and networks can generate, through Martí's language of sympathy, a unifying humanistic idealism that has the capacity to survive long after the idealized nation-states themselves." Pham articulates the idea of trans-nationality as a unifying sentiment that transcends national borders, which is more humanistic in nature than political. He argues that Marti's project was not to see the political within the post-national, but to talk about the ideal state through the language of sympathy. Like other essays in this volume, Pham concludes that "the ideas which Martí presents on nationalism in "un paseo por la tierra de los Anamitas" is indeed an articulation of trans-nationalism, wherein the true object of discussion is not the fate of Cuba via Annam, but the symbolic gestures that sees a commonality beyond immediate boundaries."

The final essay in this volume, 'A Sovereign Surrender? Digital Modernity and the Subject of Neoliberal Control' by Debaditya Bhattacharya moves away from national boundaries to cyberspace and interrogates digital boundaries and control. He argues, "My contention places itself in opposition to the official narratives of digital humanities, which claim to be furthering democratic access to knowledge and potentially infinitizing the production of it. In this, I seek to understand the current proliferation of technological media not as a moment of emancipatory excess, but as essentially marking a neoliberal moment of control and containment." He returns to the question of the political versus the human: "My agenda here is to renegotiate the question of the political in the field of the technological, and to look at ways in which the logic of 'excessive access' is in effect a mode of alienation between the digital and the human-in-humanities." Bhattacharya looks at the process of domination in cyberspace in the way that difference is policed by the state. He incisively points out that "it is in this moment of charity that the state simultaneously consolidates its claim to sovereignty by bringing those invisible-because-geographically-remote

masses within its own machinery of surveillance. The widening of technologized publics is conversely an enlistment of larger numbers of citizen-subjects within the network of control." While the other essays in this volume challenge conventionally acknowledged state boundaries and strive to complicate state narratives by cross cultural encounters, Bhattacharya sees humankind as becoming "unknowing, uncritical, and unthinking mass of governable subjects." He sees this occurring through the state's psycho-technological surveillance through the ownership of services and devices by its citizens. The emphasis returns, then, on humane empathy across cultures to break down artificial barriers that homogenize and polarize peoples and communities.

Our attempt has been to create a no-man's land—a third space perhaps—that escapes homogenizing authority bounded by national borders. Indeed, it is the sincerest hope of the editors and contributors of this volume that the readers of this text will play a small role in healing our wounded world and guide us towards a gentle gray zone. Initial versions of these essays were presented at the eighth annual East-West intercultural relations conference at Ramjas College, Delhi University. This annual conference, which has been conceptualized by Ignacio Lopez-Calvo, travels to diverse universities across the globe every year and inspires dialogue on cultural encounters and fosters the diversities that inhabit our world. We are heartened that the celebration of the gray-zone that has been expressed in this collection will be continued by the existence of this forum.

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MISSION OF CULTURAL UNITY: TAGORE'S UNIVERSALISM AS A PANACEA FOR AGGRESSIVE NATIONALISMS

SARVANI GOOPTU

The dawn of the twentieth century was unique since it bred and fostered nationalistic ideas among Indians, and, at the same time, also displayed first hints of disillusionment about the very same ideas of patriotism and nationalism. Rabindranath Tagore and other intellectuals wanted to diffuse the concentration of patriotic feelings to one's own country and spoke about the need to look beyond the nation. Tagore's pointed out the need '...to establish contact with the whole world. ...India should not remain in utter obscurity. We should be able to take our part in helping the world in her present situation and occupy an honoured place in the reconstruction of civilization. India should be linked both with east and west.[1] It is to Tagore's credit that, through his ideas, he was able to influence many intellectuals in different parts of the world. There was, in him and other contributors to the periodicals of the time, a complicated conclusion regarding the lands of the East and West that they described to their readers. Unlike contemporary essays, which dealt with a particular issue or a viewpoint, these writers had multiple burdens of representing a point of view or ideal and at the same time make a description of a place or people interesting and attractive to the reader. Thus, even though there was a commitment to patriotic revolt against the colonizing West, there are many articles which describe in glowing terms the wonders of the western world. In the descriptions of the countries of Asia, the dichotomy is far less. The main sentiment that underlies the descriptions of Asian countries is refraining from binaries of their good and our bad or vice versa and an expression of similarities and explaining away the dissimilarities. There is in fact a propreitorial familiarity in the visitors who are writing about these places wherein they seem to be proud of identifying the sources of similarity. From the second decade of the twentieth century, nationalistic

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[1] Notes, *Modern Review* XXXVII, no. 4 (April 1925): 483.

aspirations become apparent in these narratives, and past links as civilizing missions by the Indians overtake the cosmopolitan mindset that was more evident in the earlier period.

This mission of cultural unity that Tagore wanted to achieve would establish a sense of respect and awareness of cultures other than one's own, and would end the self-absorbing nationalism that he feared might degenerate into aggressive imperialistic tendencies. Cultural exchanges would bring different nations into closer humanistic ties, which would create far more effective and lasting bonding than political alliances and treaties. Tagore not only used his creative works in poetry and prose as a means to establish these bonds but, like the pilgrims of yore who travelled to distant places to disseminate the 'true word,' Tagore carried his mission of cultural unity to the lands of the West and East in order to establish cultural linkages and to connect the populations of the world in a humanistic bond, which even today may be the only panacea to aggressive nationalisms of the world. Tagore's travels accompanied by his friends and followers were faithfully documented by the local periodicals and newspapers, since the entire country was waiting to learn about Tagore's mission to create a cultural bond in the East and West. In this article I have tried to highlight the reflection of these visits on those who were writing in the popular journals to spread Tagore's ideals.

Not only was the spirit of Tagore's ideas and speeches discussed in the vernacular press, his 'pilgrimages' led to a veritable flood of writing on travel to distant lands, highlighting important landmarks and easy travel routes. A study of this travel literature is interesting not only because it is very entertaining but also because it reveals various shades. The travels are informative and pictorial; and sometimes, they are not original but translations of writings by famous travellers. The ones written in the first person are a wonderful reflection of their writers as well as their perceptions of the societies and cultures they describe. There are also differences in the portrayal of the people encountered, since the reader is always kept in mind. There are also certain educative considerations that contribute to the writings when he or she is describing the lands visited. In all cases, comparisons with India are constantly made, in order to make the articles interesting and worthwhile to the Bengali reader. Interestingly, differences in perception arise in the travel writing of the West and East. The travellers from Bengal have certain preconceptions which they carry on their visits. The western lands are alien and, information about the material achievements of those cultures and its reasons is of utmost importance. 'The East has instinctively felt, even through her aversion, that she has a great deal to learn from Europe, not merely about the

materials of power, but about its inner source which is of the mind and of the moral nature of man.'[2] The open admiration of the disciplined life of the West as well of the freedom of the individual is generally accompanied with both exhortation to Indians to adopt those disciplined ways as well as caution against getting swept away by excessive individualism, as Dwijendralal Roy wrote in his letters from England in the 1890s.[3] In the case of Asian countries it is the eyes of the heart that seem to be used—similarities are highlighted in art and culture, and ties with the past are described. Objectively speaking, here too there are distinctions in the vision of South and Southeast Asia and East Asian countries. Japan and China are described more admiringly, though affinities are drawn more with China while Japan is admired from a distance. In the case of South and Southeast Asia, travellers seem to have a proprietorial attitude probably influenced by the Greater India research of the 1920s and 30s. This over the period of 1900-1940 is not this simplistic or unilateral and there are many layers and complications with changing events and time.

Besides writing, Tagore also inspired action. He experimented with cultural links at Vishwa Bharati when he brought in teachers from different parts of Asia and also incorporated the art and culture of the Asian countries into the curriculum. He took world tours and sent emissaries to acquire knowledge about the art and culture of other countries, and this knowledge he then applied in his university activities. Tagore and other intellectuals spoke about a different and more long lasting colonization[4] that had been achieved by India, since her influence was not through arms but spread through philosophical ideas and culture. This was something no western colonial power had visualized. These ties of friendship and interaction could be revived since the travels by scholars to the countries of Southeast and East Asia were, for most part, greeted with warmth. This sense of pride in the achievements of the past was highlighted in the writing in these journals. The idea of nationalistic pride underlying the research of Indian historians and philologists may have aroused fear of excessive pride in the mind of Tagore, but a perusal of the writings in the periodicals, though inspired by Tagore's universalism, showed hints of national pride in the highlighting of similarity along with a celebration of the difference in the cultures of the Asian countries. But in

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[2] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (1917) (Calcutta: Rupa and Co., 1992), 44.

[3] Dwijendralal Roy, Bilater Patra, in Rathindra Nath Roy ed. *Dwijendra Rachanabali*, v. 2, (Calcutta: Sahitya Sansad, 1989) (3rd ed) see also Sarvani Gooptu, *The Music of Nationhood: Dwijendralal Roy of Bengal,* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2018).

[4] Rabindranath Tagore, Brihattara Bharat (Greater India), *Kalantor*, (Calcutta: Vishwabharati Granthanbibhag, 2002) Reprint (first pub in 1937), 300-309

the end there was more than an underlying hint that if the Indian mind-set could be moved away from western orientation and an alternative focus of civilizational development discovered, British colonialism would be undermined and Indians empowered.

I must reiterate that all these ideas with their subtleties cannot be comprehensively dealt with in one paper and this is only a small part of a larger research. For this paper I have limited my discussion to articles in English from *Modern Review* and from Bengali literary journals like *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Antahpur, Aryadarshan, Bharati*, *Bharatbarsha*, and *Prabashi* between 1900 to 1940.

Through travel writings and descriptive essays, there is a mission to educate the public about the different countries of the world, their history and culture. In every article, a link was established with India, whether in the past or present, whether political, religious or cultural. In 1924, 'Chin O Japaner Bhraman Bibaran' (descriptions of travels in China and Japan) was published in *Prabashi*, where Tagore wrote that his travels were not prompted by any desire for propaganda but were the fulfilment of a long-time dream to understand the life force of an ancient civilization. Despite all the storms the country has faced for centuries, from revolutions, invasions, and civil wars, the inner strength of the huge population has remained undiminished. One should come to the country to pay homage to it in the same way one goes on a pilgrimage.[5] This inspired a number of return visits by intellectuals to India and Santiniketan. Anath Nath Basu wrote about the welcome that Santiniketan gave to Chinese poet and scholar Xu Zhimo (Su Simo), a professor of Peking University who was inspired by Tagore when he visited China. According to Xu the ancient Sino-Indian cultural and spiritual contact had been revived by Tagore's visit. Most Chinese had been unaware of India; Tagore's personality impressed everyone so much that they wanted to renew the contact between the two civilizations. To keep the memory of Tagore's visit fresh, a society had been set up in China, called the Crescent Moon Society. Basu gave detailed descriptions of how Kalabhavan was decorated for the visit of the Chinese scholar and how Xu addressed the students after enjoying a cultural programme organised by Dinendra Nath Tagore.[6]

A large number of essays are travelogues in which places of tourist attraction are highlighted. The articles encourage visitors to travel to these places. The easiest travel routes are discussed in detail. Hemendralal Roy

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[5] Rabindranath Tagore, 'Chin O Japaner Bhraman Bibaran', *Prabashi* 24(2)(1), (1924): 89-90.
[6] Anath Nath Basu, 'Santiniketan e Chainik Sudhi Su Simor Abhyarthana', *Prabashi* 28 (2)(6), (1928): 386.

wrote about his travels to Thailand in *Prabashi* in 1924. He gave details about how to reach Thailand via Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, about similarities between India and Thailand, with descriptions of the settlers and the Indian influence in architecture. He ends on a note of admiration, observing that an Asian state so close to India was prospering on its own.[7] In *Bharatbarsha*, Ganesh Chandra Maitra published a pictorial journey of Burma in 'Brahma Prabasher Chitra.'[8] In the same journal, there is a descriptive essay on Korea, where Bharat Kumar Basu lauds various aspects of life in that country, but laments that there has been a destruction of traditional handicrafts and customs with the Japanese occupation in 1904; however, he observes, Korea has achieved something great—their women have been emancipated.[9] There is a serialized travelogue by the magician P. C. Sarkar in *Bharatbarsha* called 'Japaner Pothe.' He travelled all over Japan and visited all the tourist sites, and his performance was deeply appreciated—he was named the Houdini of India and given a giant pack of cards with an inscription that said, 'in appreciation of the great achievement you have made in the art of Indian conjuring.'[10] There is an interesting article in *Bharatbarsha* about a globe trotter on a bicycle tour through China. On his way to Mongolia, Kshitish Chandra Bandopadhyay fell among dacoits and was kidnapped when his bicycle was hit by a bullet. He fell unconscious and when he came to he discovered that he was in a room surrounded by Chinese soldiers. Realizing that he was not among dacoits, he demanded to be taken to meet their leader. When he was taken to the Captain's room, he noticed that behind the captain's desk were pictures of Lenin and Stalin. The Captain asked his name and then whether he was from India. He wanted to know the purpose of Bandopadhyay's visit and if he could prove that he was not a government spy. Bandopadhyay showed him his identity papers and a letter from Mahatma Gandhi appreciating his feat. The reaction was most gratifying; the Captain immediately set him free saying that he had deep respect for the Mahatma.[11]

Women's travel narratives have a dimension of their own. The exploration of the western countries by women belonging to a colonized

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[7] Hemendralal Roy, 'Shyamrajya', *Prabashi* 24 (2)(1), (1924): 64-73.

[8] Ganesh Chandra Maitra, 'Brahma Prabasher Chitra', *Bharatbarsha*, 14(1), (1927): 75-86.

[9] Bharat Kumar Basu, 'Korea', descriptive essay, *Bharatbarsha*, 18(1), (1930): 273.

[10] P. C. Sarkar, 'Japaner Pothe', *Bharatbarsha*, 25(2), (1937): 62-69.

[11] Kshitish Chandra Bandopadhyay, 'Chine Doshyuder Haate', *Bharatbarsha* 26(2), (1938): 261-65.