

Transnation and the Postcolonial City

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THE TRANSNATIONAL IS A HARD CONCEPT TO PIN DOWN SINCE IT SEEMS TO BE A portmanteau term now used to explain contemporary global mobility. In some ways globalisation is easier to think about than the messy interchanges that the term 'transnational' implies. But I want to introduce a concept that reconfigures the reach of the transnational. The world is more transitive than it has ever been as populations become more mobile, but what if this transitivity is not simply a matter of border crossing? What if the transnational does not begin when national borders are crossed, but already exists within nations themselves? What if the *transnational* begins by crossing internal boundaries?

I propose the term 'transnation', to describe the movement of peoples within (and only sometimes across) the geographical boundaries of the nation-state yet who circulate around the boundaries of the state in ways that render the nation less and less instrumental in the framing of identity. Throughout the world today relatively stable relations of dominance and subordination are being replaced by unstable and dispersed conditions of deprivation and insecurity, demonstrated most obviously in an unprecedented rise in the flood of refugees and asylum seekers. This has led to a surge in the construction of border walls and fences. Hassner and Wittenberg reveal that of the 51 fortified boundaries built between countries since the end of World War II; around *half* were constructed between

2000 and 2014. But while this dramatic flow of people across national borders has captured most of our attention in recent years, I want to redirect our attention to a much deeper destabilisation of the power of the nation state. This diminishing of the power of the state in the lives of people can be traced to the city, but most strategically, to the function of the postcolonial city. The city has always had a particular relationship with transnational movements. At some stage all such movements intersect in the global city. But there is an historical phenomenon called the postcolonial city that demonstrates the process by which the city became the focus of the transnation.

The idea of the transnation emerges when we distinguish the *nation* from the *state*. While the political boundaries of the state appear to identify all citizens, and locate them in a relation with other states, the actual circulation of people within the nation represents a subliminal flow of agency that the state can never hope to control. This goes even further than the ethnic and cultural division of groups within the state, such as Catalonia in Spain or the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq. It also goes beyond the insurgent activity of oppressed minorities. The transnation represents a constant realignment of contingent associations that transcend any political orientation. It doesn't necessarily involve any conscious position of separatism at all. It is the flow of people in their ordinary lives. This sets up an interesting variation of Althusser's notion of the power of ideology. While subjects may be interpellated as subjects by ideology the transnation suggests that such interpellation does not obviate agency. Interpellation *subjects* concrete subjects to Ideological State Apparatuses by 'hailing' them as such. But can subjects, on reflection, choose to ignore or refuse to be 'hailed' by ISAs or do so intermittently?

Transnation distinguishes itself from other transitive concepts such as migrant, international, transnational, diaspora, cosmopolitan – all terms that fail, on the whole, to account for subjects who may at various times identify with the nation, ethnicity, religion, family or tribe, sporting club, who may know nothing of the workings of the state except for their experience of local officials, who may never travel beyond national borders, but whose experience provides the constant theme of the ambiguous relation between the nation and the state. Transnation is the fluid, migrating *outside* of the state that begins *within* the nation. It is the mark of interpellated subjects flowing through and around ideology itself. Literature is valuable in understanding this if we read against the grain of national allegory. Jean Franco pointed out the inadequacy of Fredric Jameson's notorious designation of Third World literature as 'national allegories' (Jameson 69), suggesting rather that, we find 'the dissolution of the idea of nation and the continuous persistence of national concerns' (Franco 211).

The idea of a 'transnation' disrupts and scatters the construct of centre and periphery, which continues, after Wallerstein, to maintain its hold on our understanding of the structure of global relations. If we think of the 'transnation' extending beyond the geographical, political, administrative and even imaginative boundaries of the state, both within and beyond the boundaries of the nation, we discover it as a space in which those boundaries are disrupted, in which national and cultural affiliations are superseded, in which binaries of centre and periphery, national self and other are dissolved.

So the concept of 'the' transnation I am proposing is composed not only of diasporas but of the rhizomatic interplay of travelling subjects *within* as well as between nations. This space within and beyond the state might best be described by Deleuze and Guattari's term: 'smooth space' which they explain in the contrast between a woven textile and felt. A textile fabric is composed of interwoven vertical and horizontal components, warp and woof (Deleuze and Guattari 475). Felt, on the other hand is a supple solid, more like an 'anti-fabric'. It is an entanglement of fibres rather than a weave, one obtained by rolling the block of fibres back and forth, entangling, rather than weaving them. It is 'smooth' without being 'homogeneous.' According to Paul Gilroy it is not just the state but the ethnic absolutism of mainstream nationalism that tends to mummify the 'intrinsically fluid, changing, unstable and dynamic properties of culture'. (Gilroy 24) These dynamic properties of the transnation contest the rigidities of national doctrine within the boundaries of the nation through the proliferation of subject positions that make up the culture. By recognising this we overcome the centripetal tendency of migrant-diasporic-cosmopolitan-global studies in which the unassailable centre is whiteness.

Yet, smooth space is not separate from striated space. Smooth space circulates in, around and between the striations of the state, forcing us to rethink the phenomenon of transnational mobility. If we think of the plight of asylum seekers in southern Europe at the moment, then we might conclude, 'surely mobility is a sign of the increasingly transnational nature of modernity'. But in fact the excessive mobility of refugees and asylum seekers, and the increase in migrancy in general, emphasises the reality of the transnation, because while this is a movement *across* borders, it is a clear demonstration of 'smooth space'—It flows also *within* borders, despite the state's attempts to restrict such movement. This is one reason why nation-states view this influx with trepidation, because the transnation circulates around the structures of the state, not simply across borders. Unfettered mobility is held to be a threat to civil society, which means a threat to the state. This threat is not going to go away. The inequity produced by global capitalism is the driver of this unruly movement, and augmented by regional wars renders traditional national structures increasingly irrelevant.

There is an interesting distinction between 'denizens' who inhabit place precariously, and 'citizens' who are free to stay or go (Standing). Yet denizens, who are not free to move across borders legitimately, are just as capable as citizens to circulate around the cultural and political borders of the state. Furthermore, refugees problematise this distinction: they are neither denizens nor citizens yet they are quite decidedly on the move, notwithstanding the policy of the state to keep them incarcerated. Neither denizens nor citizens, their precarity makes the very stability of the nation state 'precarious', at least to politicians. We can't escape the fact that the cosmopolitan describes people in cities. Inevitably, the dynamics of global mobility involve people moving from city to city. So the city is a key factor in cosmopolitanism, as it is in the navigation of the transnation. Indeed, the city is where the transnation really begins.

Being 'on the move' is a condition of modern life, but one whose effects, says Zygmunt Bauman, are radically unequal.

Some of us become fully and truly 'global'; some are fixed in their locality—a predicament neither pleasurable nor endurable in a world in which the 'globals' set the tone and compose the rules of the life game. (2)

Paradoxically, to be at home in the world, the definition of the cosmopolitan, is, for Bauman, to be connected to property ownership. So that the truly global are those most habituated to the striations of the state and global capitalism. In addition, we can't escape the fact that the 'cosmopolitan' describes people in cities. Inevitably, the dynamics of global mobility involve people moving from city to city. So the city is a key factor in cosmopolitanism, as it is in the navigation of the transnation around the structures of the state. But the unruliness of cities is an historical consequence of imperialism.

The Transnation and the Postcolonial City

Transnationalism hinges on the crossing of national borders, either physically in diasporic movement, or more often in global activities—economic or cultural—that simply overstep these borders. But if the transnation characterises the internal mobility of populations as opposed to this border crossing its prime focus is the city, which has become the key locus of the cosmopolitan. My argument here is that the 'transnational' character of the city is the result of an historical process that found its greatest intensity in the postcolonial city. The critical feature of postcolonial cities is that they are the first stage, and the microcosm, of the mobility and cultural intermixing that global imperialism sets in motion. It is tempting to see the movement of colonised peoples to Imperial Metropolitan cities as a simple extension of the centuries old movement from

country to city. The colonial extension of this sees the rural/primitive colonials moving to the urban/civilised metropolis at the centre of the web of empire, the centre of 'civil society'. The myth of the country as the natural way of life (and the *characteristic* way of life of the nation) as opposed to the city as the place of worldliness and ambition, lies at the foundation of a prejudice that has made the postcolonial city invisible, merely a stage on the way to London, Paris or New York.

This is why we tend to think of the mobility of populations in terms of international diasporas. The circulation of imperial power, and its strategies of enforced mobilisation such as indenture and slavery, produced a reciprocal movement in colonised peoples; a movement back to the imperial metropolises and across those national boundaries established by colonial administrations. The spread of empire resulted in the spread of the colonised—an acceleration of migration and a rapid increase in diasporic populations around the world over the last half century. We can now quite legitimately read these major 'diaspora magnets'—imperial centres such as London and New York, Paris or Berlin—as postcolonial, or at least in postcolonial terms, as McLeod has demonstrated with *Postcolonial London* (2004).

But the crucial and unrecognised factor in this increasing mobility has been the postcolonial city. The first stage in this movement towards the imperial metropolis is the movement to this peculiar and palimpsestic space. Far from being mere accidents of modernity, postcolonial cities are a particularly intense demonstration of the diasporic movement of populations, microcosms of the global flow of peoples that intensifies during and after the period of European expansion. In most cases they are the destination of a population explosion so sudden that it quickly outstrips services and generates a sudden rise of shantytowns and a poverty-stricken city fringe. This is clearly the case with Mumbai, and in a different way with Johannesburg. One significant exception to this is Singapore, where the combination of relative ethnic homogeneity, the Chinese cultural values of obedience, and the fact that the city is itself a state, makes it much more centralised than most postcolonial cities. However, this merely makes the political evasions of the transnation more subtle.

Like European cities, postcolonial cities attract the rural poor because they maximise services, employment and modernity in general. They become the source of the country's modernisation and consequently a centre of the inequalities such modernisation brings with it. Rapid expansion exaggerates these inequalities and the city becomes a microcosm of the society, rather than an autonomous space, while at the same time bringing the issue of urban space to the forefront of the postcolonial concern with place. The comparative suddenness of the postcolonial city's emergence sees a blend of rural and urban,

a chaos of modes of production that seems at the physical level to be a form of dysfunction, reflecting, according to Chandoke, 'the unpleasant side of third world capitalism: the shanty towns made of rags, paper, and tin and their inhabitants who eke out a living residing as it were on the periphery of both the spatial and the social worlds of the urbanite' (2871). However, the rendition of the postcolonial city as a 'monstrosity', while economically plausible, fails to take into account the agency of citizens, whose circulation around civic structures mirrors the circulation of the transnation.

One way in which ideology attempts to control the unruliness and chaos of the city is through those myths of nationality that arise outside the city but which interpellate subjects as citizens. A classic example is the Mother India myth, which managed to resolve the paradox of the necessity for both modernity and traditional village life. The film that established this myth was produced in Bombay and the concept of the Bahrat – Mother India – is the pervasive discourse that unites town and country. But if the nationalist myths interpellate subjects as national, the unruly and rhizomatic nature of the city constantly disrupts its ideological operation. If we examine the claim that 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force', (Marx 64) we see that in the postcolonial city the ruling ideas are everywhere ignored and circumvented rather than openly contested by the unruly reality of the transnation. It is this unruliness on which the irrepressible dynamic of the transnation is grounded.

Bombay/Mumbai

A city such as Bombay reveals itself, at the level of social movement and literary production, to be an entirely different phenomenon from the European city. The apparent divisions of economic disparity cannot conceal the intense proliferation of classes, castes and origins. Nor can it conceal the ways in which the transformation of the city was controlled, even in colonial times by local elites. But few cities demonstrate as clearly as Indian cities the way smooth space circulates around the structures of the state. An iconic image of this is the regularity with which Indians help themselves to free electricity by plugging into the grid. There is no doubt that postcolonial cities were established as centres from which economic surplus was appropriated by the coloniser. There is also no doubt that they are infected with the economic inequities of all cities, and on some continents to an extreme degree. But the free-wheeling transgressions of cities such as Bombay demonstrate the power and spread of an alternative, black economy that arises as a consequence of the city's sudden absorption of an internal diaspora.

It may be literary works, works of the imagination, rather than social analyses, that best capture the exorbitant, enthusiastic and multi-layered reality of a city such as Bombay. As Moor says in *The Moor's Last Sigh*,

Bombay was central and had been so from the moment of its creation: the bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding, and yet the most Indian of Indian cities. In Bombay all Indias met and merged. In Bombay, too, all-India met what-was-not-India, what came across the black water to flow into our veins. Everything north of Bombay was North India, everything south of it was the South. To the east lay India's East and to the west, the world's West. Bombay was central; all rivers flowed into its human sea. It was an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, and everybody talked at once. (350)

This 'ocean of stories' may well get closer to the ambivalent heart of this amazing phenomenon than any empirical analysis.

A city such as Bombay breaks the National/Global binary by establishing itself as the threshold space between them. From its inception Bombay was a diasporic city, a city of immigrants who had never left the country. By encapsulating several features of the global movement of peoples, it provides a case study of several larger issues: the emergence of the sub-national social phenomenon of the transnation, existing in and around the structures of the state, a movement of peoples that extends from *inside* the nation into what we know more familiarly as global diasporas; the transformation of modernity; and the creative proliferation of postcolonial art and literature. We may see these as utopian formations that stand alongside the deepening of class divisions, the exclusion of women and the increasing marginalisation of large groups of people.

The many different Bombay¹ novels, poems and films all have different perceptions of the lot of individuals, but they all share a sense of the expansive character of the postcolonial city as epitomised in the radically hybrid nature of the metropolis and its subjects: the chutney identity for which *Midnight's Children* is famous; the radically unfocused identity of More Zoigoby in *The Moor's last Sigh* that expresses itself as a religious inbetweenness

I, however, was raised neither as a Catholic nor a Jew. I was both, and nothing, a jewholic anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel

¹ I refer to the novels as 'Bombay novels' and to the city as Bombay because for the most part the flowering of the Bombay novel occurred both before, and often in resistance to, the name change to Mumbai. Bombay best captures the identity of the city as a colonial construction. The name 'Mumbai' is, paradoxically, the sign of an ethnocentric identity that the postcolonial city earnestly resists, despite the name's obvious decolonising intent. In many respects 'Mumbai' indicates a much deeper change than the mere name.

cur. I was—what's the word these days?—*atomised*. Yessir: a real Bombay mix. (104)

'Chutnification' has become synonymous with postcolonial subjectivity, yet it is firmly located in the city because the city is a space of movement, collection, aggregation and interaction. Chutney, the metaphor of racial intermixing is a supremely Bombay image distinguishing itself from the linguistic partitioning that makes up the nation of India. Bombay may well be the source of that belief in hybridity for which Rushdie and Bhabha are so well known. Chutnification opens the way to a radical revision of the notion of subjectivity itself. It appears in the city's language—'Bambaiyya' which is essentially Hindi mixed with Marathi, Gujarati, English and slang.

Despite the obvious ethnic blending of More Zoigoby the concept of hybridisation can also be seen as a process of movement between categories of identity rather than the cultural blending implied in chutnification. This movement is one that disidentifies subjects from the state and other forms of boundary marking. It occurs in a transcultural space, a contact zone in which hybridity itself may be regarded as a space of negotiation rather than a form of contamination, a heterotopic space in which the boundary between self and other blurs, a space in which meaning is negotiated, where, in a sense, both writer and reader, speaker and listener, coloniser and colonised, citizen and subject, are changed in constitutive collusion.

The cosmopolitanism of Bombay is particularly focused in the co-existence of religions. Ashok Banker's *Byculla Boy* (1994)—the young Neilkant Jhaveri—is the product of a mixed-marriage. His mother is Christian and his father is a Hindu and *Byculla Boy* is a book about co-existence, a narrative of Bombay as the melting pot of minorities. In his grandfather's building Neil 'smells the armpit of India ... smells the burnt out immigrant communities, Jews, Muslims, Anglos. He smells the melting pot that is Byculla'. (219)

Although, as Roberts' protagonist Lindsay discovers in *Shantaram*, the polymorphous city concentrates into various quarters and bazaars, whether of trade or religion,

I realised that the demarcations, like so many other long and short lines of division in the complex, culturally polyglot city, were not as rigid as they seemed. The Muslim quarter had its Hindu temples, the Zhaveri bazaar had its vegetable sellers among the glittering jewels, and almost every tower of luxury apartments had its adjacent slum. (Roberts 204)

The same can be said for the demarcations of economic disparity: the city is far more fluid than it appears at first. Bombay is characterised by a troubling freedom: dis-identification with both village and nation leads to the acceptance of difference and variety, tolerance and intermixing. But this heady cosmopolitan mixture finds itself in conflict with two constricting forces: that of the nation-state on one hand, and, in the case of Bombay, of religious and ethnic fundamentalism on the other. For writer after writer, the Gandhian nation-state stands at odds with the multifarious and liberating character of the city. But at the same time the horror of Hindu fundamentalism under Shiv Sena, a fundamentalism that attacked the very identity of Bombay, operates as an equally oppressive force. For the Bombayite state power and race hysteria represent two forms of political oppression and in the case of the Shiv Sena and the riots of 1992, a form of tyrannical communalism that changed the city forever. If we broaden these concepts somewhat we can see that the two most significant impediments to cosmopolitan openness in general are the state, with its various forms of structuring oppression, and ethnicity, with its similarly rigid social and symbolic compulsions.

The postcolonial city is the place from which we might not only understand the disarticulation of the state's subjects from its own nationalist ideology, but from which we may best understand the increasing global movement of peoples. It refines our understanding of the movement between nations, from 'postcolony' to metropolis by capturing the essence of that movement in the term *transnation*. Whether we go as far as to claim that the nation has become an absent structure in globalisation it is still the category with which concepts of identity must first contend (although ethnicity and religion have seen a rapid rise in importance in identitarian politics). One of the key assumptions of modernity, and indeed of nations themselves, has been that cultures are, by their nature, national in character. The discovery that culture, as well as capital, can actually flow between national boundaries undermines the modern narrative of nation, and the last two decades have seen a concerted attack on the idea of the modern nation state as a repository of culture. Led in large measure by postcolonial theory, the global imaginary has been characterised by heterogeneity, hybridity, fluidity and movement; by the emerging transnational character of culture; by the transformation of the global at the level of the local and the diasporic circulation of local cultures throughout the globe.

Because the postcolonial city demonstrates in heightened form the age-old movement from country to city, with the addition, in a city such as Bombay, of a profusion of languages, cultures, castes and classes, it becomes the perfect example of the smooth space of the transnation. It seems uncontainable by even the structures of city government much less that of the nation. Nevertheless, two striations dominate the political reality around which the smooth space of the

postcolonial city swirls: they are the forces of state control and corruption and the growth of fundamentalist violence. To understand the significance of this smooth space we need to examine the extent to which literature sets the city, with its unruly profusion, its complexity and endless adaptability, against the hegemonic structure of the state and the mindless certainties of fundamentalism. This is particularly so in the Bombay novel, which arguably owed its very flowering in the 1980s to the perception of a corrupt state, a corruption ideally represented by the tyrannical rule of Indira Gandhi. In the novels of Mistry and Rushdie, but particularly in Mistry, the Indira Gandhi era offers a ready metaphor for the spectral but invasive presence of the state with its corruption and injustice. As *Midnight's Children* describes it "The Widow's arm is long as death and its skin is green the fingernails are long and sharp and black" (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 208)

Johannesburg

Like other colonial cities Johannesburg, as the economic giant of Africa, drew migrants from all over the continent. The fractious relationship postcolonial cities have with national mythology, which invariably locates itself in the non-urban heartland, is greatly magnified when a white state apparatus controls a black nation. Most colonial cities are established by the colonial administration, freshly minted to further its economic agenda, and in the case of Johannesburg, it arose as a gold boomtown, having no other reason to exist than the discovery of gold in the 1880s.

This character of gold boomtown meant that Johannesburg maintained a diverse, intermixed urban population as its economic centrality drew migrants from all over Africa. The official response to this was panoptic: a prison built in 1892 by Paul Kruger's Zuide-Afrikansche Republiek (ZAR) was extended in 1899 by the addition of ramparts to become a fort. The fort served as a bastion against British incursion during the South African War (1899-1902) but it never played a crucial military role. Its more endemic function was to act as a vantage point from which Kruger's forces could survey the foreign miners (uitlanders) in the mining camp that was Johannesburg below, and who, Kruger believed, were plotting to overthrow him (Gevisser 509).² When the jails closed in 1983, the site lay abandoned for many years, until in 1996, the judges of the newly established Constitutional Court announced that this was to become the home of the Court.

² Its most striking and perhaps symbolic features are the ramparts camouflaged as a hill, while the facade, with its ZAR coat of arms, was built on the inside. As Mark Gevisser notes this is a compelling image of the Dutch colonists' laager mentality, and in retrospect a metaphor of the inwardness and shortsightedness of their heirs, the Afrikaner nationalists (Gevisser 510).

The Constitutional Court is itself a symbol of the ambivalence accompanying the country's liberation from apartheid and ascendancy of the ANC. Built on the site of the notorious Number 4 prison it symbolised the discourse of rebuilding and reconciliation dedicated, claimed Thabo Mbecki at its opening, to 'decisions dedicated to the defense and advancement of liberty and human rights' (quoted in Garson). This utopian goal of a building dedicated to the service of national ideology, frames the conflict between ideology and utopia that has been unresolved since Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*. However much the Constitutional Court is represented as a symbol of freedom, it cannot escape the fact that its function, however hopeful is to serve the apparatuses of national power. Space is structured in the service of state ideology while retaining the utopian element that Ernst Bloch claims is a paradoxical presence in all ideology.

This paradox stands for the contradictory and uncontrollable nature of the city itself. The most influential theorist of spatiality, Henri Lefebvre, contends that the imagined qualities of space open it to transformation by those who are subject to the urban apparatuses of power. '[P]lans and programs imposed from above' are thwarted by 'grassroots opposition, in the form of counter-plans and projects' that reinterpret and repurpose inherited spaces (383). Lefebvre argues that all citizens have a right to the city, a right to difference, and that reimagining space is the key to its transformation: 'To change life is to change space; to change space is to change life' (quoted in Merrifield 108). This precisely describes the function of the transnation and the status of the city as its most dynamic location. For Lefebvre, all citizens have a right to the city, a right to difference, and that reimagining space is the key to its transformation. This dynamic of change, of mobility and border crossing is precisely the core of the transnation.

While the chutnification represented by Bombay might lend itself more readily to Homi Bhabha's 'third space of enunciation' Edward Soja's concept of Thirdspace is even more applicable to the spatial potentiality of the postcolonial city. While Firstspace refers to the 'concrete materiality of spatial forms'—the objective, material and formal elements of space (75) such as buildings, gardens and streets—and Secondspace to representations of space—such as plans for redevelopment projects—Thirdspace is more elusive, comprising

a knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centres and peripheries, the abstract and concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the transformation of (spatial) knowledge into (spatial) action in a field of unevenly developed (spatial) power. (Soja 31)

Just as the hybridisation of Rushdie's novels can be seen as a constant movement across the boundaries of identity, so the Thirdspace, as conceived by Soja is a constant interplay between centres and peripheries that demonstrates how the transnation works.

Two recent South African novels, Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* (2010) and Zadok's *Sister-Sister* (2013) reveal the ways in which the rhizomatic interrelation of race, class and gender circulate around and beneath the social and spatial structures of the city. By representing the city as a contested space, a complex of subterranean systems they reveal the insurgent dynamic of the margins. Both novels offer a science-fiction account of the hidden layers of the city that expose, in a radical way, the fluidity, mobility and complexity of the postcolonial city.

Zoo City imagines a Johannesburg in which people who have committed a crime are magically attached to an animal and those who receive such punishment are said to be 'animalled' and also known as 'aposymbiots', 'apos', or 'zoos'. The novel's main character, Zinzi December, is a former journalist and recovering drug addict who was 'animalled' to a sloth after getting her brother killed. She lives in the once Whites only but now poverty stricken black suburb of Hillbrow, which is nicknamed 'Zoo City' for its large population of animalled people, refugees and the dispossessed. Zinzi is attempting to repay the financial debt she owes her drug dealer by charging people for her special skill of finding lost objects, as well as making use of her writing abilities by drafting fraud emails. *Zoo City* has the obvious dimension of a cross-species complexity, which raises the added spectre of race in a postcolonial environment not far from a situation in which Africans were regarded as less than human.

Both novels focus very distinctly on the body and in particular the unregulated or abnormal body. For Lefebvre 'the whole of social space proceeds from the body' which 'prefigures the layers of social space and their interconnections' (405). Barbara Hooper claims that the body functions as civic metaphor—the 'body and the body politic, body and social body, body and city, body and citizen-body' (quoted in Soja 114). She believes the individual body is used as a sign of the health or disease of the social body, and that a public imaginary 'obsessed with the fear of unruly and dangerous elements' is driven to control these bodies by constructing borders and policing them (114). The radical subversion of normal bodies in the form of aposymbiots lays the ground for a different way of conceiving social space.

Beukes and Zadok's representations of being-in-the-city reveal the urban dimensions of race, class and gender segregation that characterise colonial dominance. At the same time, they reveal how these spaces can be transformed

through a 'critical spatial imagination' (Soja 31). The transnation is not solely the province of the marginalised, but the marginalised characters of these novels show more clearly that outsiders are much more readily aware of the spaces surrounding the structures of the city which are themselves replicated in the political structures of the state. This is particularly true of the female subjects on whom these novels are based. But as Lisa Dowdall points out the subterranean spaces are central to the literary geography of the novels, confirming 'the significant role they have played in the development of Johannesburg as a metropolis and South Africa as a modern nation-state' (71).

Zinzi, Thuli and Sindi ... are skilled navigators of the vertical dimension of the postcolonial urban landscape, delving beneath the city's surfaces to investigate sewers, subways and drains that offer potential passage or refuge. Yet in their subversion of the original means for which these structures were designed and built, the characters suggest that their purposes, imagined and actual, are not fixed but rather adaptive and improvisational. (Dowdall 72)

The vertical nature of the city, which renders it both palimpsest and rhizome, extends from the heights of Hillbrow, Zoo City, with its abandoned apartments, fire escapes and improvised walkways, down to the stormwater drains and tunnels. All these levels are in turn layered by history. The subterranean spaces of the city are significant because it is the subterranean dimension of the nation-state in which the transnation moves and has its being. These below ground drains and tunnels are spaces of a memory that has not been captured by History and are critical in relation to the concept of Thirdspace. When Zinzi walking along an underground canal is pushed by the flow of water into an alcove, she sees 'the modern cement giving way to ancient brickwork ... a Victorian relic from the town's golden days' (209). It is this navigation of vertical and subterranean histories that characterises the demotic movement of national populations.

Despite their exuberant and racially charged symbolic features the novels exhibit the workings of the transnation, spatially and metaphorically, in first, second and third space. They demonstrate why literature is ideally placed to elaborate the various dimensions of the transnation. Particular cities evoke particular cultural implications and Soja's spatial theory is perfectly suited to revealing the lateral and vertical movements of the transnation in a city such as Johannesburg.

Singapore

Singapore completes a trio of strikingly different postcolonial cities. The people of Singapore find themselves in a predicament unlike those of any other

postcolonial city except Hong Kong. Indeed, these two city-states, invented to be strategic and economic hubs, are unique in their populations' contest with the myth of nation, with their newly authoritarian regimes and with their complicated struggles over language, and the visions of the future they generate. The question arises: in what way does the literature from these postcolonial cities, drawn relentlessly into the web of global capital, offer a vision of hope grounded in the possibility of circulating around the mutual structures of city and state?

Singapore is a colonial invention, a fishing village appointed to be an imperial centre in the Empire's spread across the world. This is true of many colonial cities but no others have been founded so manifestly as centres of the global economy, and this raises quite peculiar problems with their populations' relationship to history, culture and place. Singapore is a settler nation in which the majority of people are not descendants of the White colonial settlers but of Chinese colonised migrants. It has no deep cultural and economic past that was erased by the colonial power. It began life as a city-state in completely modernist terms of statehood. Its cultural symbol, the chimerical Merlion, initially devised by the Singapore Tourism Promotion Board, is more Disneyland than cultural mythology.

As well as being a global hub, and contrary to common perceptions of the island city-state, Singapore is a transitional space, a space of flow, both a geographical and metaphorical island, a city-state in which writers must contend in different ways with the authoritarian regime of a one-party state. Yet this flow occur on at least two levels, one being the level of the global economy—a level that never touches the ground, and the other the level of place, the level of people.

Somewhat astonishingly, Prime Minister of Singapore Goh Chok Tong, in a 1999 National Day Rally speech, endorsed this distinction in derogatory fashion as a distinction between cosmopolitan citizens and 'heartlanders':

One group I call the 'cosmopolitans', because their outlook is international. They speak English but are bilingual ... They produce goods and services for the global market ... The other group, the heartlanders, make their living within the country. Their orientation and interests are local rather than international. Their skills are not marketable beyond Singapore. They speak Singlish... (Poon 36)

This goes a long way to explaining how Singaporeans see themselves today as stuck in an interstitial space between the global and the national, a space defined in terms of class. While Goh framed it as a distinction between the past and the future, it corresponds to two ways of conceiving the nation, the transnational,

and the transnation. The class dimension of cosmopolitanism is one reason for wariness about the term. Goh saw clearly that the 'transnational' was the domain of the educated 'cosmopolitan' elite. Although Singapore is characterised by a widespread desire to enter this cosmopolitan club it is denied to a large section of the society, a stratum that despite its occupation of the 'transnation' exists below the normal political discourse of the city-state.

The Singapore transnation, despite its apparently democratic nature, is perhaps more intersected with the striations of an authoritarian state than many cities. In this situation the role of literature is extremely important in communicating and extending the operations of the transnation. It apprehends the actual multiplicity of subject positions that are closed down by the homogenising ideology of the state. The *transnational* city is the global hub, the economic and judicial centre, very distinct from the transnation because 'effective participation in transnationality is restricted for the most part to the elite in various societies' (Dirlik 47) More than any other postcolonial city Singapore demonstrates the actual distinction between the 'transnational' and the 'transnation'. But there is a further distinction characterised by the contest between a repressive government and the fluid circulation of peoples it administers. This is interesting because the political striations in Bombay and Johannesburg are less repressive than Singapore, which appears the more advanced and modern city. Lee Kwan Yu's advocacy of a 'quietist nationalism' meant intolerance for dissent, as Kirpal Singh observes,

You cautioned me against being frank
Ours, you said, was not a society
Tolerant of robust, opposing views
We prefer, you advised
More public agreement, less public argument (Patke 77)

'Public agreement' is a characteristically Singaporean strategy of national homogenisation. Singh's rather mild reflection takes little account of the virtual hysteria that attends any robust critique of government, even from opposition politicians, many of whom have been bankrupted by defamation suits.

But the power of the transnation is the capacity to circulate around the structures of the state and global capital. The subject in the 'smooth space',³ of the transnation cannot avoid the effects of the transnational whether he or she participates in it or not, but these effects can be avoided, manipulated or circumvented. How does one assert agency in a country like Singapore shaped by

³ Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between the 'striated space' of state institutions and state power and the 'smooth space' of the social fabric, a distinction between the warp and woof of woven cloth and the rolled entangled fibres of felt (Deleuze and Guattari 528).

a nationalist discourse that is paranoid about dissent? Paradoxically, it occurs in language, and particularly the language of the cosmopolitan elite, the language of the coloniser.

The adversarial and transformative relationship with the colonial language is a well-known feature of postcolonial cultural analysis. Very often forced to learn English, colonised subjects throughout the empire appropriated and transformed the language in the service of self-representation. But whereas this relationship is usually between English and mother tongue, in Singapore we discover a literature and a language that must perform a double work of establishing identity in relation to two behemoths, Putonghua and English, neither of which may be a mother tongue. Hence we find the curious situation of English and its transformations being deployed in resistance to the authoritarian language policies of the state. The literature in English plays out some of the peculiar tensions of this city, placed as it is between the two world languages with the largest number of speakers, which in turn represent the tension operating in them between a rapidly growing Chinese state and the particular location of the city as a transnational space. Singapore generates a literature in English based on the dialectic between centralised top-down language policies and demotic expressions of cultural identity. In turn this cultural identity, as in all postcolonial situations, is variously hybrid, multiple and changeable.

The English language occupies an ambivalent site of resistance indicated by the emergence of *Singlish*. In a city where the mantra “English for utility, mother tongue for culture and values” is endlessly reiterated *Singlish* has a subversive function. Like most subversion it is generated by the vision of the possibility of resistance to the state. *Singlish* not only sets up an adversarial relation to Standard English but much more annoyingly to the authoritarian state, which has quite specific directives about language. As represented in much Singapore poetry *Singlish* is not ‘bad English’ but a language with its own logic, its own rhythm and music. Listen to two mothers talking in Yap’s “2 mothers in a HDB playground”;

We also got new furniture, bought from diethelm
 The sofa is so soft, I dare not sit. They all
 Sit like don’t want to get up, so expensive
 Nearly two thousand dollars, sure must be good (Yap 1980: 55)

The significance of *Singlish* in literature is the ease and subtlety with which it functions as a vehicle of social critique. The inscription of the “colloquial” form is an implicit recognition of the multi-dimensional power struggle that may occur in language, a struggle that benefits from its subtlety in a society extremely sensitive to political criticism. But at the same time it demonstrates the way in

which language, and implicitly the language policies of the state facilitate class division.

Singlish and other vernaculars remind us of the very different kinds of ontological phenomena that are speaking and writing. The spoken word is communal in a way that the written word cannot be and while the written word has its potentiality, its horizon in the imagination, it presents itself to us on the page in a way that is absolute and uncontested in its tangibility. The spoken word, in contrast, has its potentiality in its connection with a community. This more than anything is the political work of *Singlish* in Singapore: it establishes itself as an adversary to the structures of the state as well as the structures of the standard language which the state demands as necessary for a prosperous economy. The written word has edges that the spoken word does not. So an interesting thing happens when the spoken word, whose breath is the spirit of a communal connectivity uncontainable by the state, a transnation, is written down. It has edges but the edges are blurred. This blurring occurs whenever the vernacular is transcribed in English. The vernacular enacts rather than represents, and its location on the page both confronts and affronts. When transcribed it unsettles the propositions of the page. It brings uncertainty. It identifies by difference. But the movement from voice to text is political. The text confirms the insurgency of language.

Conclusion

The literature from these three postcolonial cities shows us the various ways in which the 'smooth space' of the transnation may be conceived. Bombay offers the exuberant chutnification of culture, ethnicity and religion; Johannesburg the lateral and vertical spaces of the city as metonyms of racial difference; and Singapore the insurgent linguistic transformations of an appropriated English. These represent very different forms of mobility. Each of them reveals the ways in which the postcolonial city hinges on a 'transnational' complexity but more importantly they display different dimensions of the transnation's circulation around the structures of the state. The social space of the city is much more than the structural or political organisation of its form. Soja's theory of Thirdspace, in a similar way to Deleuze's 'smooth space' offers a view of the different ways in which citizens may navigate the structures that serve to confine them. In their revelation of the ways in which national citizens transit and circumvent the call of the nation they demonstrate both the dynamic of the transnation and its intensification in the postcolonial city.

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