



# OFFSHORE COSMOPOLITANISM: READING THE NATION IN RANA DASGUPTA'S TOKYO CANCELLED, LAWRENCE CHUA'S GOLD BY THE INCH AND ARAVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER

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*Following Ronen Palan's The Offshore World (2003) Connell understands the central feature of the offshore as the 'bifurcation of the nation state': the state splits itself in two by continuing to govern those areas that remain easy to legislate while surrendering to the international realm those which do not. Connell considers how the offshore can be understood as a form of cosmopolitanism, with a particular emphasis on the way that the obligations of the state are stretched to accommodate foreign businesses, foreign capital and even foreign citizens. Yet, as Connell demonstrates, the cosmopolitan promise of the offshore conceals the double nature of the nation-state which functions both as a node for discursive community formation and, simultaneously, as cover for the evasion of any communal responsibilities that this might imply. Reading Lawrence Chua's Gold by the Inch (1998), Rana Dasgupta's Tokyo Cancelled (2006) and Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger (2008) Connell examines how the idea of national belonging struggles to survive in representations of the offshore. In particular Connell's analysis shows that the difficulty that arises from trying to represent the offshore leads these texts to open up new perspectives on global capitalism by focussing upon its differential relationships to the state.*

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# OFFSHORE COSMOPOLITANISM: READING THE NATION IN RANA DASGUPTA'S TOKYO CANCELLED, LAWRENCE CHUA'S GOLD BY THE INCH AND ARAVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Following Ronen Palan's *The Offshore World* (2003) Connell understands the central feature of the offshore as the 'bifurcation of the nation state': the state splits itself in two by continuing to govern those areas that remain easy to legislate while surrendering to the international realm those which do not. Connell considers how the offshore can be understood as a form of cosmopolitanism, with a particular emphasis on the way that the obligations of the state are stretched to accommodate foreign businesses, foreign capital and even foreign citizens. Yet, as Connell demonstrates, the cosmopolitan promise of the offshore conceals the double nature of the nation-state which functions both as a node for discursive community formation and, simultaneously, as cover for the evasion of any communal responsibilities that this might imply. Reading Lawrence Chua's *Gold by the Inch* (1998), Rana Dasgupta's *Tokyo Cancelled* (2006) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) Connell examines how the idea of national belonging struggles to survive in representations of the offshore. In particular Connell's analysis shows that the difficulty that arises from trying to represent the offshore leads these texts to open up new perspectives on global capitalism by focussing upon its differential relationships to the state.

This essay has three interconnecting aims. The first is to explain the nature of the offshore as a form of contemporary globalisation with crucial implications for our understanding of the nation-state as the dominant form of contemporary governance. In particular, I suggest that far from being a form of government that is progressively marginalised by globalisation and the development of transnational institutions and forces,

the nation-state is able to use the offshore as a way of negotiating the tensions between national sovereignty and international interconnectivity. The offshore allows national governments to cede portions of their claim to governance in order to remain at the centre of international political economy. I then explore the implications this has for the concept of cosmopolitanism. I take as my starting proposition the notion that cosmopolitanism is usually understood as the antithesis of the nation because it seeks to embody a form of world citizenship as an alternative to national belonging. The antagonism between cosmopolitanism and the state can be found in the Stoic tradition, which placed moral obligations before political ones (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 157), and it continues through Immanuel Kant's Enlightenment formulation of cosmopolitanism which sees national laws as a threat to peace and proposes 'a united power' as 'a cosmopolitan system of general political security' (Kant, 2010, p. 23). In this tradition cosmopolitanism represents a demand for hospitality which challenges the nation-state to extend the rights and privileges of citizenship to all humans as cosmopolites.

As I indicate, however, this view of cosmopolitanism assumes that nations are genuinely closed systems which extend their privileges to all citizens evenly. What the offshore demonstrates is that nations already, and inherently, afford rights differentially so that the notion of citizenship masks a complex matrix of engagements with the state which are not capable of being reduced to a singular relationship. This inevitably has implications for the claims to hospitality that the cosmopolite might make, most especially because the offshore so frequently involves extending and demanding hospitality towards foreign capital, if not to foreign people. In this sense the offshore could be regarded as the acme of cosmopolitanism while, at the same time, serving as a mechanism which closes down a notion of reciprocal rights both intra- and internationally. My final aim is to consider how literary representations of the offshore are capable of interrogating its role. Through readings of Lawrence Chua's *Gold by the Inch* (1998), Rana Dasgupta's *Tokyo Cancelled* (2006) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) I suggest ways in which the representation of the offshore can be employed to mount a sustained critique of the nation-state and its rhetorical claims of inclusion by making visible the extent to which these serve and constitute global economic divisions.

Though the nature and function of the offshore is neither widely known nor well understood, the offshore is central to the contemporary neoliberal economy. Indeed, Angus Cameron and Ronan Palan

<sup>1</sup> This essay is the result of an ongoing collaboration on questions related to the offshore with Stephanie Jones and Nicky Marsh at Southampton University.

have argued that the cheerleaders for economic globalisation often confuse the offshore with globalisation in general (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.17). The offshore is construed as broadly a question of 'the market' and globalisation is defined as the exercising of rational choice in pursuit of favourable market-conditions. However, in *The Offshore World*, his extended study of the concept, Palan has argued that the offshore should not be understood simply in terms of spatial economics but rather as a political mechanism that permits the 'bifurcation of the nation state' (Palan, 2006, p.3). For Palan, the offshore is the function of government which allows the state to cede sovereignty over portions of the nation in order to maintain the general fiction of national sovereignty. While this depends upon the spatial differentiation of market conditions, it requires, more crucially, the state to split itself in two in order to liberate 'capital from social responsibility and a good portion of the taxation it would otherwise owe' while simultaneously 'discharging their traditional duties in the territories remaining under their jurisdiction as if nothing had happened' (p.3). What this reveals is that the offshore is central to the ability of the nation to continue to represent itself as the sovereign realm alongside the establishment of international orders of exchange. Palan goes further to suggest that historically the development of the offshore occurred simultaneously with the rise of national sovereignty (in Europe from the seventeenth century, and globally from the eighteenth century) as an international system of equivalent and competing sovereign realms. The implication of this simultaneity is that, while the offshore appears to threaten the concept of national sovereignty, it is in actuality a necessary component of the nation-state system that inscribes and sanctions the nation's legitimacy in the international realm.

If the parlance of the nation-state suggests that nations represent the conjoining of territoriality and jurisdiction, Palan notes that the offshore 'demonstrates to us that ... the juridical domain of the state corresponds only very roughly to its geographical territory' (p.26). States routinely hive off portions of their territory to legal spaces outside the jurisdiction of the state in the form of free trade zones (FTZ), tax exemptions, flags of convenience and Guantanamo-style prison camps. In doing so they sever the bond between territory and authority upon which the nation is presumed to depend. The roots of this situation are, for Palan, found in the history of the nation whereby the contemporary conception of the nation-state emerged only by stages. In the first stage, Absolutist

regimes set about 'the slow process of homogenization and centralization of power,' that gradually allowed the state to 'inscribe the nation ... as coextensive with a particular territory' (pp.150–2). These changes made possible a second stage that saw the sudden emergence of a philosophical 'ideology of nationalism' which valorised the nation by idealising the equation of people and territory which had been achieved in the previous stage. However, they also confirmed the necessity of the *state* as the 'mechanism' which allows the nation to actualise itself (p.153). The assumption of the nation's singularity, led to a third stage, one of democratisation, whereby 'a community of citizens' justified 'the concept of state closure' culminating in the United Nations system as 'the "territorialization" of the nation' (pp.154–7).

This history resembles established modernist accounts of the nation, such as Ernest Gellner's (1983) or Eric Hobsbawm's (1992), and indicates how very recently territory and popular autonomy have come to be aligned. Palan's aim in rehearsing this history, however, is to draw attention to the fact that the gradual emergence of national sovereignty coincided with the codification of the offshore in international law. The offshore depends upon three important aspects of this process for its formation: first, the ability of nations to assert territorial jurisdiction; second, a range of differentiated jurisdictions that tie competitive advantage to location; and, finally, a system of international agreement that legally assigns the *citizenship* of capital as it is invested internationally. For Palan, this reveals that, far from competing with the idea of national sovereignty, the offshore is a function of national sovereignty and, like the nation itself, is made possible only by the innately *international* character of nations. He argues that the crucial turn occurred when international law established the principle that 'the location of intangible assets is determined by the place where transactions physically take place' (Palan, 2006, p.105). The 'principle of sovereign equality' which was enshrined in Article 2 of the UN Charter in 1945 (United Nations, 1945), was effectively the principle which the Swiss exploited when they 'denied any sovereign claims over foreign accounts by the holder's real countries of residence' in 1934 (Palan, p.106). This, in turn, followed the nineteenth-century examples of US states which wrested control of the rules governing incorporation from the federal government (p.101) and of British law which sought to tax foreign investors in British companies (p.102). Contract law was able to exploit states' protection of each other's sovereignty since this was the basis for an international system of

mutual jurisdictional autonomy upon which their own sovereignty depended.<sup>2</sup>

The implication of Palan's history of the offshore is that nations were never the hermetic sovereign realms that they purported to be. Instead, international contractual systems were producing variegated state-sovereignty even at the very moment that nations were being constituted as the sacred union of a people, actualised within a given territory by a democratically elected state. This has significant implications for thinking about cosmopolitanism especially as it pertains to a question of the rights of citizenship. My working understanding of the term 'cosmopolitanism' here is a demand for rights; it manifests itself as the request to be treated as, or in the same way as, a citizen. The notion of citizenship is central to the etymology of cosmopolitanism and even as it is generalised into an ethical concept it retains a reference to the citizen as the enfranchised subject. This necessarily implicates nations which retain the ability to define the limits of citizenship and so, in practical terms, remain the guarantor of rights, even within the frame of universal rights. As it pertains to citizenship the offshore raises certain problems for a traditional view of the nation as an historical community of juridically equivalent citizens. This is most obvious where the offshore transforms citizenship, in the form of national membership, into a saleable commodity that states are prepared to sell to wealthy individuals in the form of tax services. Palan's totemic instance of this is the sale of Swiss nationality to the British actress Elizabeth Taylor (pp.61, 159) but, more recently, reports have emerged of an offer to Icelandic authorities by 'investors from the US and Canada' of 'up to \$15bn' in return for 'Icelandic citizenship' (Sigmundsdóttir, 2011). If the language of social-contract theory is a slightly old-fashioned way to talk about the nation-state, instances such as these make it clear that citizenship (or national membership) is literally reducible to the form of a contract.

The contractual nature of citizenship raises necessary questions about the concept of cosmopolitanism as hospitality. If the cosmopolitan ethos depends upon a presumption that belonging and the rights that follow from it are universally extendable, the fact that it is possible to buy citizenship draws cosmopolitanism into the realm of neoliberal globalisation, lending weight to the familiar accusation that cosmopolitanism is a form of elite privilege

<sup>2</sup> It is also obvious that this principle is continually breached yet, because it is enshrined in international law, such breaches require political negotiation and public justification. The most evident example of this is recent years has been the protracted negotiations used to legitimise the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

(Brennan, 2001). However, this raises the obvious objection that cosmopolitanism and neoliberalism are not synonyms and that it should remain possible to define the cosmopolitan without reference to conceptions of mobility and freedom that neoliberalism seeks to claim as its own. And while this is true, it nevertheless seems necessary to interrogate the notion of citizenship which lies at the core of cosmopolitanism. As an inclusive ideal cosmopolitanism demands the extension of rights and its endpoint is universalism. However, its emphasis on worldliness means that it tends to express this inclusion in international terms and to imagine citizenship as intra-nationally coherent. Contrary to this view, the evidence suggests that, despite the claim to rules-based criteria of membership, nations tend to extend membership and the rights that this confers in a piecemeal and haphazard way. For instance, in the UK, the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts of 1962 and 1968 effectively revoked the rights to British citizenship which had been conferred upon citizens of the British Empire under the British Nationality Act of 1948; in some cases leaving people effectively stateless (Doty, 1996, pp.243–6). While this example could be construed as exceptional, the fluid nature of state borders means that such inclusions and exclusions are relatively commonplace: recent historical events such as the formation of an independent Bangladesh in 1971, the division of Czechoslovakia into Slovakia and the Czech Republic in 1992, or the secession of South Sudan in 2011, all illustrate the contingency of national unity. The border regions in all these cases remain vexed as illustrated by the Indian government's decision to construct a fence along its entire land border with Bangladesh (Buerk, 2006) or continuing violence in the border regions of Sudan and South Sudan (Abdelaziz and Laessing, 2013).

The concept of the offshore reframes these disparities and exclusions by suggesting that the extension of rights follows capital and that it is capital's claim to territorial belonging and the protections that this entails which stretches the rights of citizenship in ways that might be recognised as cosmopolitan. This is most obvious when nationality is understood to be a contractual arrangement because, once nationality is understood in these terms, it becomes more amenable to the complexities thrown up by multiple contracts and, accordingly, states have incrementally relaxed prohibitions against dual or multiple nationalities. The Indian state's recent introduction of the Person of Indian Origin and Overseas Indian Citizen schemes, for instance, which extended some of the rights of Indian citizenship to non-residents, typifies this trend as the extension of rights was intended to facilitate inward

investment into the Indian economy (Dickinson and Bailey, 2007). These schemes employ the offshore as a solution to the competing imperatives of sovereignty and capital by utilising the romantic conception of citizenship to attract mobile capital. A compelling reason to study the offshore, then, is that it makes visible the extent to which cosmopolitanism is implicated in capital's ability to supersede the demands of citizenship. The offshore uses the state's loudly-proclaimed right to legislate as a means of protecting capital from the claims of the state. Without the rhetorical 'fiction' of sovereignty the offshore would not be possible because nations need to preserve the autonomy required to exempt capital from its social responsibility. As such the offshore facilitates capital's demand for the cosmopolitan extension of rights while simultaneously denying this possibility to the majority of the nation's population who remain subject to its jealously-guarded sovereign power.

These observations are not incidental to the study of the novel which, as a literary form, has long been associated with the nation. The connection between the nation and the novel springs from the assumption, most ably proposed by Benedict Anderson (1991) that nations needed to reconcile their claims to legitimacy, which were based upon cultural longevity, with their historical newness as a form of politics. In line with this, theorists such as Homi Bhabha have read nationalism as a form of 'narration' (1990) that is able to achieve this purpose and to see the novel as one of the forms capable of mapping the imaginary world onto the political map of the nation-state (Anderson, 1991). As Timothy Brennan has put it:

█ Socially, the novel joined the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media, helping to standardize language, encourage literacy, and remove mutual incomprehensibility. But it did much more than that. Its manner of presentation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation. █

(Brennan, 1990, p.49)

In these terms, the novel fulfilled the twin roles of creating a common culture and simultaneously of drawing the boundaries of the imaginative community who could occupy the national culture that it was partly responsible for creating. The narrative enclosures that the novel was able to effect have been seen as crucial to the growth of the genre, not least because the rise of the novel appeared in tandem with the spread of nationalism as the political model of international organisation.

However, if the novel can be understood as a

literary form that emerged as a way of narrating the national connection between collective experience and place, the subsequent histories of both the nation and the novel suggest that this analysis must come under review. Notably, under the conditions of what has come to be called globalisation, the potential for a collective, nation-bound experience has observably declined as situated individuals inhabit overlapping and discontinuous 'imagined worlds' (Appadurai, 1996, p.32). It is worth also considering the enduringly permeable nature of the nation. For instance, Anderson persuasively argues that the revolutions in America and France made the nation a modular structure which could be adopted globally and laid across particular local conditions (Anderson, 1991). In this sense, the nation typifies the contradictory expression of universalism as particularism. Moreover, despite the accompanying rhetorical assertion of the uniqueness of the national culture, the interplay and commerce between nations inevitably led to cultural exchanges which complicated and altered localised nation-cultures. As Franco Moretti has argued, the novel clearly represents an example of this kind of exchange, and therefore, its role in producing a national culture needs to be reassessed. In 'Conjectures on World Literature' he seeks to disrupt a nationalist historiography of the novel by arguing that most *national* traditions of the novel follow a common pattern by which 'the modern novel first arises ... as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials' rather than 'as an autonomous development' (Moretti, 2000, p.58).

The force of Moretti's analysis springs from his attempt to use, as an analogy, Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory (p.55). This undoubtedly has its limitations, especially as he does not adequately explain how the inequalities of the economic world-system are mappable onto their literary counterparts. Wallerstein's use of the core-periphery dyad concentrates on the global division of labour into core and peripheral production processes and, while he concedes that it is possible to talk of core and peripheral zones as a kind of 'shorthand', he insists that it is to production processes and not states that these terms refer (Wallerstein, 2004, p.28). In translating this into literary terms Moretti appears to ignore this distinction, something that he implicitly acknowledges when he later states that the 'world-system model may be useful at other levels, but has no explanatory power at the level of form' (Moretti, 2003, p.79). To define a work of fiction as core or peripheral approaches Wallerstein's terminology from the opposite direction to Wallerstein himself: it construes the originating region as the

determining factor and runs the risk of handing power back to the institutional canonisers at the very moment that power is purportedly wrested from them.

Nevertheless, when Moretti sets out his vision of a world 'literary system' as 'one and unequal' he approaches world literature in a way that is reminiscent of the offshore. The offshore is the mark of a world(-system) of sovereign regimes whose independence is precisely a corollary of their mutually agreed autonomous singularity. Underwritten by the assumption that the state is autonomous and sovereign, individual states are able to exploit the inequalities of value and jurisdiction to compete for mobile capital. Where it exploits the offshore, capital's mobility is not purely neoliberal but also cosmopolitan because it depends upon the extension of rights, of belonging and citizenship, which are at the core of the cosmopolitan appeal to worldliness. In doing so it lays bare the truism that all states are not equal and, furthermore, neither are all citizens. Crudely, what the offshore reveals is the priority of class interests over national interests. Exploiting the global offshore, a class of rentier capitalists exists outside and between states while maintaining the illusion of national sodality in order to create the economic relations that permit them to do so. If the novel has traditionally been understood as an important component in maintaining this illusion, the transnational focus of the contemporary novel should be seen as something which diminishes its capacity to play this role. The benefit of thinking about the novel through the concept of the offshore is that it bolsters this shift by highlighting the manner in which a nationalist historiography draws attention away from the world relations that sustain it.

This is not only evident in the metacriticism of literary history, however, and a reading of individual novels with a transnational focus reveals both that the fictional depiction of the offshore is an important component in their ability to transcend the nation state as the fictional locale, and also that this depiction constitutes a space for critique of the offshore as a system of value exchange. Precisely this tendency is evident in the novel *Tokyo Cancelled* by Rana Dasgupta which comprises thirteen stories told over a single night in an unnamed airport by a collection of stranded international travellers. The settings for these stories are diverse including, among other places, Argentina, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Nigeria, Poland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States. The nationalities of the story-tellers are oblique but, it is implied, equally varied. The text can therefore be seen to typify a prevalent trend in contemporary fiction which increasingly tries to represent its

characters' ability to move between locations and demonstrates a diminishing concern for unity of place.<sup>3</sup> While *Tokyo Cancelled* can be understood as a novel that encapsulates the transnational character of contemporary living, it is important to note, too, that the individual stories frequently realise this through a representation of the offshore. Dasgupta offers stories that involve international call centres and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), international shipping and flags of convenience, and international free-trade or export processing zones. All of these involve the transfer of capital between jurisdictions in order to evade regulation and excise.

Although the depiction of such features of contemporary capitalism often appear incidental to the narrative, upon scrutiny they are central to the narrative structure of the stories in which they appear. For instance in the story 'The billionaire's sleep' the eponymous billionaire is cursed with chronic insomnia that renders him infertile. Attempting to circumvent his affliction he illegally procures a cloned child which triggers a series of fantastical events that culminate in a cataclysmic conclusion. Characteristic of the novel's mingling of fairytale and contemporary neoliberalism the story is made possible through the use of offshore activity. For instance, the cloning process is offshored to evade regulation and the source of the billionaire's wealth is an Indian call-centre that services American customers. While dressing up his offshore BPO in the rhetoric of national solidarity, the billionaire's 'factory' actually removes his workers from the Indian diurnal cycle and virtually transports them into the North American day (Dasgupta, 2006, p.56). The billionaire's insomnia becomes a metaphor for his workers' social displacement, leading the offshore to take the form of a malady. Similarly, in 'A Rendezvous in Istanbul' a Ukrainian woman must journey to rescue her lover who is magically confined to an impounded container ship in Marseille. However, alongside this there is another kind of magic, whereby the owners of the ship,

3 It is clearly not possible to give a thorough account of this tendency here. However, in addition to the substantial success of diasporic writers, whose fiction records a complex history of border-crossings, it is possible to detect a tendency for fiction to displace the nation as the centre for action. Recent examples might include, David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* (1999) or *Cloud Atlas* (2004), which interweave storylines from locations as disparate as East Asia, the Southern Pacific and Europe, Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2009), which sprawls Europe and the Americas, suggesting necessary, but not determining, interconnections between place, or Aleksander Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008), which draws parallels between East European exiles to the USA in 1908 and 2008 to narrate a journey across Eastern Europe that disrupts the unities of both time and place.

ostensibly based in the UAE, mysteriously disappear leaving only their bill for unpaid taxes. As with 'The billionaire's sleep' the substance of Dasgupta's modern fairytale is catalysed by the economic conditions of the offshore through which the fixed moorings of the nation-state are loosened by the ability of financial capital to evade its social responsibilities. The sailors in 'A rendezvous in Istanbul' must bear the cost of this evasion since they are held by the authorities in lieu of lost tax-revenue.

Potentially the most interesting exploration of the offshore occurs in the story 'The lucky ear cleaner'. Here, a young barber, Xiaosong, from Hunan Province in southern China, is persuaded by his mother to travel to Shenzhen in pursuit of modernity's proverbial lure of 'streets ... paved with gold' (p.338). Once in Shenzhen he is spotted by a business-owner and employed with increasingly more responsibility and sums of money far beyond his expectations. Suddenly inducted into the way that 'the laws of money' shape 'places, people, and things', Xiaosong finds himself able to 'make sense' of the city: 'its expanse of rocketing towers ... easily legible, like a simple bar graph whose unwritten axes and labels were each day more obvious and intuitive' (p.344). The description of the very townscape of Shenzhen as money at its most abstract suggests that Xiaosong's induction into global capitalism has allowed him to translate place into value. Yet what is most interesting about this sparse short story is the way that it illustrates how the offshore transforms the surface of the nation. This is most evident in the representation of Xiaosong's migration from rural to urban China which is rendered in terms more usually associated with international migration. When travelling between Hunan and Shenzhen he is smuggled as freight in ways that clearly resemble the conditions of international migration under contemporary neoliberalism. Even more suggestively, however, his employer castigates Xiaosong for casually 'walking around in the streets' without papers and secures him a 'temporary residence permit' to ensure he does not 'end up in some Custody and Repatriation Centre' (pp.342-3). It is clear that the scale of the nation is reconfigured here to resemble the supposedly *external* migrations between nations. To make sense of this it is necessary to return to the idea of the offshore as the bifurcation of the state, and to recognise its implications for Shenzhen as a Special Economic Zone. Originating in Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms of the 1980s, Shenzhen forms part of China's attempt to embrace neoliberal capitalism while still maintaining the central authority of the Communist Party. The jurisdiction of the People's Republic is fractured in the classic compromise

between capital and sovereignty. Consequently, parts of China operate in the nature of foreign territories even while they are notionally still part of the contiguous nation-state. Xiaosong's movement between Hunan and Shenzhen is conceptually a movement in and out of the nation: on- and offshore.

China's implementation of its 'one country, two systems' policy (Xiaoping, 1987) starkly illustrates the operation of the offshore. However, in more quotidian ways this model has become ubiquitous. A common form is the use of foreign-trade zone, or FTZs, in which companies are treated as positioned outside the nation for tax purposes while continuing to reside within the geographical borders of the nation and exploiting its local resources and labour to export capital abroad. In Lawrence Chua's novel *Gold by the Inch* this kind of offshore is given a prominent place as a means of underscoring the fractured nature of the nation and of questioning its claims to autonomy. In a highly theoretically-informed novel that includes, among other things, quotations from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967) on the dependency of post-colonial economies, the FTZ is given considerable symbolic status which resonates with the treatment of the nation in the novel as a whole.

The novel's narrator is emblematic of Chua's general critique. A naturalised American citizen of Malaysian descent who holds Thai nationality, and who has returned to Penang to visit his father's family, his national designation is complex. Much of the novel attempts to understand his precise position within particular national contexts while drawing the reader's attention to the manifold contradictions he embodies. For instance, the nations of Thailand and Malaysia are presented as composed of a patchwork of ethnic Chinese communities, the result of a series of historical migrations, while simultaneously being the source of globally dispersed ethnic identities which nurture ambivalent nostalgic feelings of belonging. When crossing the border from Malaysia to Thailand, the narrator is required to demonstrate his Thainess through the cultural shibboleths of Thai food: the evidence of nationality is his ability to eat sticky rice and *nam prik num*. Yet this picture of national cultural unity is undermined throughout by the narrator's ambivalent relation to Thailand's sex-tourism industry. On the one hand, his relationship with Jim, his American lover, is narrated in the language of colonial and neoliberal investment and debt (pp.54-8), and he is also able to impersonate and pass for a local prostitute (pp.114-20). On the other hand, he himself pursues Thong, a Thai boy who works in one of Bangkok's bars, while trying to believe that he is actually his lover.

Tellingly, even at the end of the novel, which coincides with the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, the narrator's escape, which sees him return to the allegedly safe enclave of the US dollar-economy (p.205), appears contradictory because, as Nicky Marsh notes, it also marks the narrator's return to Jim, his abusive and exploitative lover (Marsh, 2011, p.310). In other words, even in his metaphorical imitation of mobile capital, the narrator ultimately reaffirms inequalities that arise from class privilege rather than national belonging.

National borders are treated as a highly malleable and permeable fabrication. Anticipating Palan's language, Chua describes the border as 'an apparition ... a strategic fiction to break the world down into concepts, spaces, limitations' (Chua, 1998, p.96). This observation is not simply a product of the narrator's elite mobility since the novel also depicts a steady flow of Thai piece-workers travelling to work in the Malaysian timber industry. Significantly, these migrants are likened to 'packages [of] DNA or Pringles. Waiting to be brought across the Thai-Malaysian border' (p.145). This alignment of the workers' genetic code with a saleable product of mass consumption is in turn linked to the detritus that litters the train line between the two countries which comprises discarded food packaging as well as 'memory chips cast off from factories in the Free Trade Zone; produce of the fertile land' (p.146). In the same way that, in a mockery of agricultural tradition, computer parts produced in the FTZ are likened to the country's traditional crop of rubber, the factory itself implicates the Malaysian landscape in a contest for power. The notion that the border is a 'fiction' prompts the narrator to look up the road where the mosque, one of 'the monuments to Malaysia's official culture', sits opposite the FTZ factory that employs his cousin Martina (p.96). The narrator uses this pairing to suggest that the factory has superseded national time by replacing it with the rationalised 'schedule' of the working day: trapped within the 'territory' of this schedule, the workers' time is reduced to 'a splinter in the machinery of the nation' (p.96).

In their reading of *Gold by the Inch* alongside IMF discourses of neoliberal development, Joseph Medley and Lorraine Carrol argue that international development exploits the compliance and passivity of rural Asian women to reconstitute them as the ideal workers of advanced capitalism. While the factory utilises their submissiveness to produce obedient workers it also inculcates in these women a sense of independence born of a liberal rhetoric of personal freedom and responsibility. The result of this is to

irreparably detach these women from the very culture of village life which has produced their particular relations to work (Medley and Carrol, 2010, pp.293–4). Chua certainly addresses these questions, particularly through Martina's complaint about co-workers' attempts to 'copy men' (Chua, 1998, pp.92–3; italics original). However, the real force of this in the novel is arguably the way that the neoliberal moulding of the population mirrors the moulding of the political landscape through the extra-territoriality of the offshore. What this suggests is that the offshore's role in enabling the mobility of capital also leads to the removal of resources, value, and even the indigenous population beyond the reach of the nation.

The connection between the disruption of the national space and inequalities within the nation is also central to Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, my final text for discussion. This novel can be seen to challenge the triumphalist vision of India as a front-runner in twenty-first-century global trade through its portrayal of India as divided between those who benefit from development and those who do not. This is partly achieved through a depiction of Indian rural communities that highlights the continuing privilege of a traditional land-owning elite. Significantly, in its exploration of India's new economy, the novel also frequently alludes, if somewhat fleetingly, to the role played by the offshore in sustaining the inequalities between different classes, or castes, of Indians. For instance, the narrator Balram Halwai draws a direct link between the political corruption of regional politics and the international economics of offshore finance. The local politician known as the Great Socialist is claimed 'to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money' (Adiga, 2008, p.98). Balram's fracture of the offshore into the language of black and white evokes a theme of racial division which runs through the novel, where by whiteness is associated with wealth and privilege. Balram is obsessed with the skin disease vitiligo that can lead 'one of ours' to appear as 'An American!' (p.123) and he urgently desires sexual congress with 'golden-haired women' in imitation of his master's privilege (p.232). However he also anticipates a 'century ... of the yellow and the brown man' (p.7), whereby India and China supplant Europe and America as the dominant powers in world trade. Set against this, the racial division of the offshore neatly encapsulates its capacity to move value between nations as a way of insulating it from the poor. In particular, it conforms to Nicholas Shaxson's claim that

'capital flight' from Africa reveals that 'colonialism left through the front door, and came back through a side window' (Shaxson, 2011, p.1).

Such a reading helps us to interpret the most striking image of the offshore in the text, which takes the form of Balram's definition of outsourcing towards the end of the novel. Outsourcing, he explains, means 'doing things in India for Americans over the phone. Everything flowed from it – real estate, wealth, power, sex' (p.298). This definition is interesting for several reasons. First, the presentation of India as primarily a service economy runs contrary to Balram's desire to shed his status as a servant and become an independent entrepreneur. In this respect the idea that everything flows *from* outsourcing may imply the kinds of capital transfers so characteristic of the offshore. At the same time, the word *flow* conjures up an image of the more traditional source of Indian prosperity, namely the Ganges. The Ganges is subject to a sustained assault in the novel as part of the narrator's attempt to discredit the traditional symbols of Indian culture. Rather than the giver of life, the Ganges becomes 'the black river', a 'river of Death, whose banks are full of rich, dark, sticky mud whose grip traps everything that is planted in it, suffocating and choking and stunting it' (pp.14–5). While the river is here associated with the stranglehold of high-caste rural landowners on lower-caste initiative and mobility, outsourcing seems to Balram to offer an alternative economic model that promises to free Indians from the fixed sociogeography of both the river and of caste. However, it is debatable whether this really affords Balram the kinds of privilege he is hoping for. For instance, while a major motif of the narrative is Balram's attempt to escape from the Darkness (poor India) into the Light (wealthy India), his work in Bangalore takes place entirely at night. Recalling 'The billionaire's sleep' in Dasgupta's novel, this may suggest that Balram's apparent escape from India's traditional sociogeography merely sees him transported to another 'darkness', as the superimposed temporality of the American time-zone comes to govern the life of the Indian worker as a new symbol of inhospitable geography. In these terms, the novel's main themes of light and darkness, of caste, and of the Ganges become implicated in Balram's ambiguously naive depiction of the offshore.

Read together, these three novels suggest the value of a critical application of the offshore. Pace Moretti's revision of Wallerstein's centre-periphery model, the offshore *can* serve as an explanatory structure for questions of form. To the degree that the offshore represents a concealed rupture in the surface of the nation-state, this can be read directly onto the formal

attempts to represent the nation in contemporary fiction. In each of the novels the portrait of the nation that they provide is of a state that is internally divided. None of these texts seeks to remedy this condition in that they do not embody a 'compromise' that attempts to reconcile foreign and local material. Instead, they accentuate intra-national differences and inequalities by indicating their connection to capital's mobility. Since the idea of the nation cloaks the bifurcation of the state, critical readings that attend to the offshore highlight the willingness of the contemporary novel to forgo the nation as narrative limit. Like the nation, cosmopolitanism masks the internal inequalities of class because it presupposes an intra-national equivalence of citizenship. Offshore cosmopolitanism undermines cosmopolitanism's ethical claim by revealing how the cosmopolitan mobility of capital produces variable forms of citizenship that reinforce real divisions within the nation-state.

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## TRICK QUESTIONS: COSMOPOLITAN HOSPITALITY

Eleanor Byrne

### Abstract

*This paper consists of two texts. The first explores the limits of cosmopolitanism in practice, taking as its subject the Life in the UK Citizenship Test, inaugurated under the Labour Government in 2005. It argues that the test exemplifies the predicament of all attempts at cosmopolitan hospitality as unconditional welcoming, through a discussion of the relation between questioning and welcoming the stranger. Establishing the relationship between cosmopolitanism and hospitality as envisaged in Derrida's reading of Kant it asks what kind of cosmopolitan hospitality is either possible or desirable by exploring what Derrida calls the 'perversions' inherent in the structures of hospitality. It focuses on the concept of the 'trick questions' that the state asks the foreigner observed by Derrida in his reading of The Apology of Socrates; questions that seem to invite answers but foreclose the possibilities of a free response. The second text asks how this logic that Derrida identifies can be pushed or coaxed into new ways of addressing the perceived threats of 'unconditional' hospitality through a reading of 'unconditional hospitality' as queer in the work of Tove Jansson.*