

George as representative of the "immigrant genre" (278). Through the metaphor of personal luggage, she explores how the novel's migrant characters, conscious of the "inauthenticity of all homes" (281), largely disavow national identity to express instead a sense of home based in familial ties. The final essay, Genaro M. Padilla's "Rediscovering Nineteenth-Century Mexican-American Autobiography," argues that contemporary Chicano personal narrative is heir to an earlier, neglected tradition treating similar issues of oppression and resistance. Particularly valuable is Padilla's consideration of how questions of literary production and genre in post-1848 Chicano/a writing can benefit from recent studies of Native American and African-American personal narrative.

The absence of such detailed cross-cultural contextualisation elsewhere highlights the collection's only major weakness: its failure to realize its objective of generating a "deeper understanding of the similarities and differences among American multicultural literatures" (viii). Buelens briefly links his "new (wo)man" and "mediator" roles to the contradictory roles imposed upon all American immigrants but doesn't consider whether his paradigm might illuminate non-Jewish ethnic literatures. Shostak's treatment of improvisation in Kingston's work suggests intriguing parallels with signifying in African-American literature, a connection that goes unremarked. This weakness aside, these generally well-written and accessible essays offer a valuable resource to those committed to exploring and celebrating the diversity of American literatures.

NINA VAN GESSEL

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Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*. Minneapolis, London: U of Minneapolis P, 1998. Pp. vi, 380. \$54.95, \$21.95 pb.

The nation has fallen on hard times. Once celebrated as the native, natural, nurturing site of personal identity and social enrichment, it now is reviled as an ideological weapon wielded by the West to subjugate its unruly other. Not too long ago, liberal critics comfortably assumed that all literatures were national in complexion, so that "American literature" was indisputably a distinct field whose novels, for instance, could be further subdivided (as Leslie Fielder did) into Northerns, Southerns, Easterns, and Westerns—each division marking a local sensibility as well as a cultural locale. If, as Frantz Fanon advised, "every culture is first and foremost national" in character, then the nation must serve as the guarantee of cultural authenticity. Its well-being becomes a precious heritage to be celebrated when it is robust and revived when it is sick. Accordingly, nations require suit-

ably trained scholars to act as custodians: criticism, too, takes on a national complexion. But, Etienne Balibar advises in the volume under review, the nation-state was never ordained by God or by nature, and its universalization in modern history has been a misfortune whose rise and fall can now be plotted: "And I shall be content to note that this institution, today, is irreversibly coming undone" (218).

If nationalism is regarded as a virus infecting modernity with an epidemic of spiteful ideologies, then the nation becomes the illness rather than the cure. Over the last decade, this diagnosis has appeared in books such as *Writing the Nation: Self and Country in the Post-Colonial Imagination* (ed. John C. Hawley), *Reimagining the Nation* (ed. Marjorie Ringrose and Adam J. Lerner), *Nation and Narration* (ed. Homi Bhabha), *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (ed. Andrew Parker et al.), and now *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*. The preposition "beyond" in the subtitle invites speculation about what lies on the far side of nationhood, when we are cast adrift politically, intellectually, and semiotically in a post-national world. The sixteen contributors to this collection accept the invitation with varying degrees of daring, although few are optimistic. If the nation corresponds to no natural, racial, or linguistic fellowship, but instead is an imaginary community or collective subjectivity (Benedict Anderson's phrases), then surely it can be reimagined in healthier terms. Cultural critics are still necessary, but their office is no longer to cure an ailing nation; instead, they must find a remedy for it by envisaging a broader, cosmopolitan fellowship. Ironically, as the editors note, cosmopolitanism is just as much a product of the Enlightenment's quest for universals as is nationalism. In fact, it "precedes the popular nation-state in history and nationalism in the history of ideas" (Pheng 22). Consequently, Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins propose the word "cosmopolitics," hoping that it will express "the global force field of the political" (31) without imposing a domineering perspective on the diverse cosmopolitanisms examined in their anthology.

There are some big names here (Anderson, Rorty, Appiah, Balibar, Spivak, Clifford), although their contributions tend to fine tune ideas that they developed in earlier books. The essays range in content and method from philosophical analysis of social allegiances, to anthropological studies of transnational groups like Chinese businessmen and the "Hmong diaspora" (an ethnic Chinese group), to reformulations of the cultural dynamic of postmodernist late capitalism (following Fredric Jameson's influential work), to the enthusiasms of a Balibar. Since it is impossible to survey the whole collection in a brief review, let me give a taste of it by commenting on some recurring issues. For the most part, the medicine tastes bitter.

All of the essays negotiate between nation and cosmos: between local constituencies, which traditionally have secured identity and be-

longing ("humans live best on a smaller scale": Appiah 97), and the new global network of overlapping allegiances created by modern technology and world trade. But how are they to design a grand cosmopolitan model if they begin with the premise that "all universals are merely particulars in disguise" (Robbins 251)? All admit that there are many forms of cosmopolitanism just as there are many kinds of nation, some more attractive than others. There is the cosmopolitanism of immigration and exile, of global capital and transnational corporations, of ethnic and religious solidarity, of globe-trotting intellectuals, pop stars and tourists, of organized crime, of humanitarian NGO's (nongovernmental organizations like Greenpeace), and even of multicultural theory. Everyone is on the move. In order to chart these movements, several essays follow an inductive argument leading to a high level of generality; indeed, this pattern is encouraged by the book's pursuit of a cosmopolitanism that lies beyond mere internationalism. That is, writers refuse to view the world as an aggregation of rival nations paying lip service to a factitious universality, and instead seek a truly generous sociability in which differences can be respected while local pieties are preserved—a "rooted cosmopolitanism," Kwame Anthony Appiah calls it. Such discussion, with its vague talk of "post-Fordist restructuring, cultural loosening, and transnational mobility" (Rob Wilson 352), is pushed to even loftier abstraction by the resolve that, since nations are imagined communities, they must be superseded by a new social imaginary, a supreme fiction that paradoxically renounces its supremacy in deference to other social fictions. Evidently the most important thing is to achieve a viable intellectual standpoint. In other words, critics are still our best cultural physicians, but they can do little more than declare their good intentions through poststructuralist ambiguities. "But history is larger than personal good will," warns Spivak (337), who provides a mordant commentary on the current fashion for multicultural studies as an unwitting agent of transnational capitalism.

Most of the essays also share a liberational motive in the sense that they regard the nation as a form of exclusion or coercion, a trap to be escaped. This means that they also hope to articulate a compensating vision of social and artistic freedom, although this motive is often left implicit, and only occasionally blossoms into a utopian longing for freedom without borders. Balibar observes that international borders are fictional crossings where passports are displayed and identities have to be declared, so a world without borders might also be a world without identities. If identity requires some kind of local authentication, then who will we be in a post-national world? What sense of belonging can we trust? Not everyone has the luxury of floating weightlessly across borders. At this point, several of the essays launch a counter-argument to define a new cultural specificity that will confer a

flexible identity without succumbing to the old essentialism of national authenticity. Cosmopolitics occupies a ticklish position. It renounces two arrogant attitudes — cultural essentialism on the one hand, “the imperial pedigree of universalism” (Scott Malcomson 237) on the other — which it seeks to replace with two imagined communities, one local, the other global, only to confess that at present these new communities are unimaginable. They can be named: “non-imperial (and non-rational) cosmopolitanism,” “our new worldliness,” “translocal connecting,” “a density of overlapping allegiances,” “deterritorialized nationalisms,” “rooted cosmopolitanism.” But these freshly-minted words do not create the (imaginary) social realities that they name. The world may be a text, but it is not one that we are free to write at will. Consequently, Malcomson modestly recommends a “cosmopolitanism of pedagogical patience” (236). Spivak advises that Westerners have fallen prey to their own intricate theories; they will just have to leave the job to others, who can form “a global movement for non-Eurocentric ecological justice” (338).

JON KERTZER

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Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside The Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998. Pp. xx, 332. \$45.00.

Gauri Vishwanathan's study is a sensitive and compelling treatment of the complexity of conversion and belief in modern society. In her view, religious conversion is one of the most unsettling events in the life of a society, and her study raises the important issue of the place of minority religious groups in the secular nation state. The fundamental issue is the failure of governments and majorities to allow the right of self-definition to minorities. Minorities, or those who convert to minorities, tend to insist that they can at one and the same time be members of a minority tradition and loyal citizens of the nation or larger society in which they live. This is a particularly contentious issue in India (the focus of most of her cases or examples), where adherence to a minority religion, particularly if that religion is perceived in some sense as foreign, is often regarded as an anti-national activity.

Viswanathan argues for the recovery of the subjective in the experience of conversion. Conversion, she contends, is rarely, if ever, simply an act of assimilation; nor, on the other hand, is it an entirely spiritual act undertaken without relationship to cultural, economic, social or political contexts. Rather, conversion can be an act of cultural, political and social criticism as well as a statement of allegiance to a deeply felt religious conviction. As such, conversion is a destabilizing act in modern secular societies, “altering not only the demographic patterns but also the characterization of belief as communally sanctioned as-