



# What is 'post-race' and what does it reveal about contemporary racisms?

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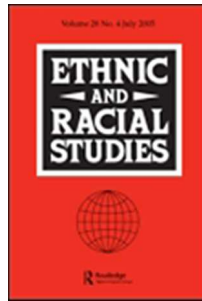
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**DAVID GOLDBERG BOOK SYMPOSIUM- ARE WE ALL  
POSTRACIAL YET?**

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**Sivamohan Valluvan: What is 'post-race' and what does it reveal about contemporary racisms?**

In this paper I will critically engage those aspects of Goldberg's *Are We All Postracial Yet* that I found to be particularly generative for thinking about contemporary racisms. These foci include the place of post-racial mystification vis-à-vis liberal market capitalism, animalization, and synchronic global relationalities. A case will be made for post-race being best understood in terms of how it both incorporates as well as exceeds the explanatory terrain already serviced by the concept of 'Cultural Racism' and/or 'New Racism'. A unique connection to Chamayou's recent *Manhunts* will also be advanced. I will read contemporary processes of post-racial animalization via Chamayou's key contention that Power is always about who is to be the *object* of force, who shall do the *enforcing*, and *how* is it to be enforced – a historically contingent force that results in particular technologies of classification, hunting, surveillance, internment, killing and fortification.

Keywords: post-race, neoliberalism, cultural racism, animalization, Manhunts (Chamayou), global relationalities

**Introduction: What is the Postracial?**

Goldberg's characteristically elegant *Are We All Postracial Yet* caps a journey (2009; 2013; 2014) that has generated what is probably the definitive theoretical account of the putatively 'post-racial' present.<sup>1</sup> Post-race denotes the commonplace yet hubristic ideological contention that contemporary liberal democracies have transcended the logics of race and racism. Within the context of such assertions, any seemingly new iteration of racism or racial inequality is considered merely an unfortunate echo of a residual but fast fading legacy; or, even more indicatively of contemporary neoliberalism's preferred modus operandi, culpability for instances of racism are reductively located at the level of the individual, an individual who is condescended as being constitutionally 'bad' who knew no better.<sup>2</sup>

The post-racial claim therefore actualises a unique hegemonic manoeuvre: whilst civic and populist racisms alongside the complementary structural racial inequalities persist undeterred, there is no longer an ideological framework willing to stand for these disparities – given that the prevailing ideological and institutional apparati themselves so insistently assert that the time of race and racism has passed, triumphantly eclipsed by the full realisation of liberal capitalism's much anticipated ethos of radical individualism. The post-racial also engineers a unique historicisation of the present, proudly appropriating the legacies of the Civil Rights, anti-colonial and anti-Apartheid<sup>3</sup> victories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century alongside the later campaigns that sought to win a greater prominence for non-white people in the cultural architecture of western capitalism and its state institutions. And instead of evoking these many indeed impressive legacies as a basis to spur greater anti-racist commitments and the fashioning of genuinely cosmopolitan horizons, these legacies are distorted, made instrumental in writing a script for the contemporary as one of simple and premature ('buried

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to discount the formidable contributions and debates charted by figures such as Barnor Hesse, Brett St Louis, Alana Lentin and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva.

<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, racism is parcelled away as being solely the preserve of avowedly extremist, Far-Right groups (e.g. the English Defence League, British National Party, and Britain First regarding the UK context). Racism thereupon obtains such a narrow remit that to fall foul of it requires the unashamed bombast of the above groups. I thank James Rhodes for drawing attention to this detail.

<sup>3</sup> One of the more galling moments in Britain's recent political pageantry was David Cameron's sombre lauding of the late Nelson Mandela's monumental political legacy. It would take an informed mind to remember that Cameron's younger political affiliations strongly wedded him to the rabidly anti-ANC, pro-Apartheid cheerleading of the Conservative Party, and its youth wings in particular. The notorious 'Hang Nelson Mandela' badges, posters and songs (*New Statesman*, 2013) allegedly sported by the younger ideologues of Thatcherism (Federation of Conservative Students) speaks for itself, even if Cameron himself did not have any direct involvement in these activities.

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3 alive' [76, 161]) transcendence: a transcendence where race no longer matters and where only  
4 individual will and character either enables or hampers a person's life-chances.<sup>4</sup>

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6 Consequently, what materialises is a state of affairs where discursively time is called on racism,  
7 whilst structurally it continues unabated – i.e. 'racisms without racism' (159). Goldberg's seminal  
8 writing on this terrain stakes out in turn a deceptively simple but forceful claim: the post-racial is not  
9 merely a significant feature of contemporary racisms, but it is its very constitutive *base*. Put  
10 differently, *all racisms* of the present must be assessed by how they are instantiated in a time when  
11 it is claimed to be over. The popular curtain call on race and racism is seen by Goldberg as producing  
12 *unique* racial 'conditions' (26), 'logics' (60) and 'subjects' (106).<sup>5</sup> Attention turns therefore to how  
13 the same discursive frameworks continue to produce and circulate race-meaning whilst rendering  
14 overt references to race verboten<sup>6</sup> – 'Postracial racism speaks to processes where a racial subtext is  
15 pressed without an accompanying racial text' (Valluvan et al. 2013: 171).

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17 Some observers of racism will be wary of this attempt to ask post-race to do so much explanatory  
18 work. Making post-race generate such diffuse ontological purchase (i.e. 'conditions', 'logics',  
19 'subjects', and futures) is indeed a heavy explanatory load to bear. Accordingly, a certain suspicion of  
20 post-race as constituting a unique analytic frame has begun to surface in some circles, evident for  
21 instance in Meer's (2016: 395) recent claim that the 'post-race thesis [remains] analytically  
22 unappealing and empirically unpersuasive', unable to capture the 'messiness' of contemporary race-  
23 making and anxiety. Whilst Meer does not expand on this claim, there are certainly some aspects of  
24 this expansive analytic turn to the post-racial that I think warrant constructive interrogation.

### 25 26 **Liberalism for neoliberal times**

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28 First, it might be posited that the post-racial is in fact symptomatic of the *liberal conceit* writ large.  
29 Whilst this recognition (which is in fact central to Goldberg's 2009 *The Threat of Race*) does not  
30 dilute the importance of the post-racial illusion in configuring contemporary racial structures, it does  
31 situate post-race within wider and contiguous ideological drifts. In short, all neoliberalism is about  
32 writing out attentiveness to structural constraints. Recall for instance the emphatic post-Cold War  
33 pronouncements that we live in post-class times – an intuition central to the current wave of  
34 austerity regimes. It would after all be uncontroversial to observe that contemporary political  
35 culture is rife with pundits who routinely summarise the present as one without class, only  
36 consumers – or, even more perversely, class is presented as a self-afflicted condition. Or consider  
37 how deliberations about gender equality rest on a particular narration of the present where  
38 patriarchy's hold is seen primarily to be a historical sin of the past or the preserve of particular  
39 ethnic groups. Furthermore, an analogous cultural eulogising of past feminist, trade union, anti-  
40 racist and Gay Rights struggles respectively is marshalled in order to overdetermine the present as  
41 one of teleological triumph – see the recent spate of UK box-office sensations that look backwards  
42 for progressive political content (e.g. *Pride*, *Suffragette*, *Selma*, *12 Years a Slave*, *The Spirit of '45*,  
43 *Made In Dagenham*, *Indian Summers*<sup>7</sup>). Of course, activists and progressives of various traditions  
44 have always asserted that such structural impediments continue to matter, but the prevailing  
45 common-sense is indeed to picture the contemporary as one where social mobility is primarily an  
46 epiphenomenon of individual effort, whilst the state, as Goldberg rightly observes, is merely meant  
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51 <sup>4</sup> Goldberg (138), via a wittily literal reading of the Anthropocene, calls this particular neoliberal imaging of  
52 humanity – the era of 'new man' (private, solipsist, and uncompromisingly resilient).

53 <sup>5</sup> These iconic subjects that the post-racial works through are according to Goldberg's schema: Blackness, the  
54 Muslim-Gazan, and the Migrant, (125-151).

55 <sup>6</sup> See also a recent research piece by Harries (2014) about how post-racial deceptions prevent victims of racism  
56 from articulating their experiences.

57 <sup>7</sup> This is not a criticism of the film-makers themselves, but rather, draws attention to how certain kinds of films  
58 can garner such box-office acclaim whilst the important themes it entertains are jettisoned from broader  
59 political discussions of *present* social conditions.

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3 to facilitate and/or securitize the endeavours of private, rational-choice actors. It certainly remains a  
4 valid truism that each of these different structural formations are autonomous, exercising their own  
5 vagaries and exclusions; but the broader ideological continuities in terms of legitimating and  
6 rewashing these multiple inequalities does I think require firmer acknowledgment when situating  
7 the *specific* purchase of post-race.  
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### 9 **Cultural and New racism?**

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11 Second, it is certainly the case that race, originally deployed as a primordial and immediately visible  
12 category, can no longer be named, only continually insinuated – e.g. racial meanings and stereotype  
13 continue to be propagated concomitant to a blanket ideological denial that race is even  
14 consequential to the making of life. Goldberg, akin to an influential argument put forth by Makdisi  
15 regarding the spatial and architectural workings of Israeli supremacy, identifies this status quo as  
16 ‘the erasure of the erasure’ (75). The primary erasure of rights and capabilities as actualised by  
17 racism and the subsequent erasure of any *reference* to the processes that have rendered these  
18 inequalities and exclusions – i.e. ‘racisms without racism’ (159) or *making invisible the making of*  
19 *people invisible* (Makdisi, 2010: 535<sup>8</sup>).  
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22 But it should also be noted that other contiguous taxonomies, always folded into the historical play  
23 of racial formations, are indeed regularly named, evoked and asserted – not least ethnicity, religion  
24 and citizenship: e.g. Chinese couples make for authoritarian but effective parents (‘Tiger Moms’);  
25 Muslims are self-segregating, insular and of suspicious loyalties; African-Americans are prone to  
26 criminality, dependency and nihilistic materialism; or migrants are work-shy and/or work excessively  
27 (depending on what brand of hysteria one subscribes to). These intersecting appeals to the ethno-  
28 racial, ethno-religious, and ethno-legal constitute the active nomenclature which articulate  
29 contemporary racial and nationalist formations – but if so, the social is not characterised by a  
30 question of race no longer being named, but rather, *how* is it in fact named. Again, this reading is  
31 certainly consonant with the wider argumentation of Goldberg – whose fundamental claim is that  
32 race continues to circulate but it is racism that is denied. But if so, it would be instructive to corral  
33 here the wider body of racism research that has sought to reveal the remade terms by which race  
34 does indeed get named but becomes cloaked in the decorum of post-racial propriety – i.e. no more  
35 talk of biology, genetics, and *intrinsic* inferiority.  
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38 A theory of racism is of course a theory of modernity. Theories of racism have accordingly always  
39 had to reckon with modernity’s complexity in circulating racial frameworks – not least via the  
40 cementing of the ethno-national’s everyday allure and the remaking of religious hierarchy vis-à-vis  
41 secular liberal individualism. It is therefore particularly helpful I think to draw upon certain already  
42 well-established concepts when charting the precise mechanisms by which the post-racial operates –  
43 concepts such as anti-Muslim racism/Islamophobia, ‘new’ and ‘cultural’ racism, and even  
44 Orientalism. Some might of course consider extant conceptualisations of cultural and new racism to  
45 be somewhat artificial – in terms of actualising all too clean a break with previous forms of allegedly  
46 biological and scientific racism. This charge of false periodization is something I would second – not  
47 only in that it understates the role of ‘cultural attributes’ in generating previous racial exclusions, but  
48 in all too hastily writing out the biological, genetic and formally legal (e.g. see citizenship and  
49 residency regimes[Byrne, 2014]) from accounts of the contemporary. But in spite of these  
50 challenges, I do find these concepts when properly purposed helpful for working through the full and  
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55 <sup>8</sup> The full quote in its original context regarding the Israeli security wall is: ‘From the Israeli point of view, the  
56 effect is not only to render the Palestinians on the other side invisible but, even if only in fits and starts, to  
57 render the process of rendering them invisible itself invisible. When possible, then, the wall as the signifier of  
58 erasure is itself erased in turn—as though there were some magic trick that could erase the Palestinians from  
59 the landscape without the trace of that erasure being evident’ (Makdisi, 2010: 535).  
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3 expansive thrust of the post-racial thesis. I am particularly drawn here to Alexander's (2016) recent  
4 reply to Patterson's (2015) *The Cultural Matrix* for an instructive précis of how central culture –  
5 framed as a discrete property of different ethno-racial groups – has become to both the  
6 operationalization as well as rationalization of racism and racial outcomes. Consequently, given the  
7 complex profile of 'culturalism' in steering contemporary racisms, it would be instructive I think for  
8 the broader post-race literature to give this terrain a wider and/or more direct incorporation.  
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### 10 **Animalization**

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12 There is however something to the contemporary realisation of racial exclusion that goes beyond  
13 the representation of ethno-racial groups along discrete, pathological and incompatible cultural sets.  
14 Namely, there is still a particular kind of race-making that is always about a broader ontology of  
15 human and non-human (or less-than-human) which renders racism's capacity for violence,  
16 indifference and visceral psychoanalytic charge so distinctive. Goldberg's recurring discussion of  
17 'animalization' (48-59, 85-88, 110-112) when situating the post-racial is therefore particularly  
18 welcome when trying to think beyond the current focus on the 'cultural' and 'new'. And whilst the  
19 terminology of 'affect' (Ahmed, 2004; Hughey, 2015; Jones and Jackson, 2014) that has become so  
20 prominent in certain social science circles might have given a particular analytic breadth for thinking  
21 about the 'infrahuman' (Gilroy, 2000; 2010), it remains instructive of Goldberg to remind students of  
22 racism that race-making is as much about humiliation and making the racial Other *unbearable*  
23 (repulsive, dirty, threatening, mutinous, grim, lecherous, swarming, proliferating, etc.) as it is about  
24 more direct rationalizing appeals to cognitive sense-making systems ('they take jobs', 'are a fiscal  
25 and/or security threat', are 'prone to criminality', are 'misogynistic'). Goldberg's passing account  
26 (132–145) of how news cycles framed the recent Ebola crisis and bombing of Gaza respectively does  
27 substantiate particularly well this analytic emphasis on 'animalization' and 'anthroporaciality' (138-  
28 139), a move which is also compellingly present in Pitcher's (2014: 98-128) recent *Consuming Race*.  
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32 There is also an interesting and I believe underexplored analogue to be had here with Chamayou's  
33 (2012) beguiling, if synoptic, tour de force, *Manhunts*. Chamayou's core contention is that Power in  
34 its diffuse and various historicised forms (e.g. colonial and nation-state racism, bourgeois merchant  
35 supremacy, feudal aristocratic privilege, Vatican-cum-monarchic rule, Antiquity patricianism) always  
36 draws upon a particular making of who is to be hounded, rounded up, kept at bay, and so forth  
37 along a broad continuum of coercion and exclusion. Put simply, power is always, in part, about who  
38 is to be the *object* of force, who shall do the *enforcing*, and *how* is it to be enforced – a force which  
39 results in particular technologies of classification, hunting, surveillance, internment, killing and  
40 fortification. When transposed to the particular exigencies of contemporary racism, a variety of  
41 subjects – be it the young black man in the metropolis, the refugee braving the unforgiving seas, or  
42 the Muslim roaming war-torn lands or his/her suburban mosque – all become objects of a unique,  
43 historically contingent state force. And this application does certainly rally particular affectively  
44 loaded representational coordinates (i.e. animalization) that makes this force both viable and  
45 necessary.  
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### 48 **Synchronic racisms**

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50 In light of these digressions via the play of animalization, force, 'culture' and the neoliberal form  
51 more broadly, it is necessary to re-centre here the specificities of post-racial racism. Goldberg argues  
52 that the rewashed terms of racisms' exclusionary remit relies fundamentally on the illusion that  
53 racism has passed. This makes for an extraordinarily efficient racial structure. Namely, there is  
54 nothing to name – indeed, any charge of racism is promptly negated by the claim that it is anti-  
55 racists themselves who fetishize race, a fetishism for the discredited logic of the past that any self-  
56 respecting progressive is implored to renounce. Anti-racists are thus reduced to the fate of wailing  
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Cassandras. Consider for instance Goodhart (2014), a figurehead of British anti anti-racist polemics, and his 'less is more' thesis.<sup>9</sup> For Goodhart, the more that racism wanes (which is of course taken as a given), the more that anti-racists and misguided latte-drinking liberals evoke the spectre of racism (i.e. the proverbial 'race-card'). The idiocy lies hereby not with racism, but with anti-racism.

In this context, racist discourses always masquerade as being claims of a different order – defensive postures about security, about the welfare state, about a beleaguered 'white working-class',<sup>10</sup> about the commitment to sexual and gender equality, about international stability, about the EU and its largesse, about scarce resources, or about history and the putative unity and public morality of pre-war colonial Britain. And any concerted effort to break the deafening silence about racism in the midst of all this chicanery is what becomes identified as the primary instantiation of racism. Herein, if the broader structures that produce multiple exclusions, oppressions and/or exploitations cannot itself be named ('erasure of the erasure'), it is the ultimate realisation of a hegemonic racial common-sense – an inequality without descriptors, without sense, without presence. It is one thing to have a world that is unequal, it is quite another if that inequality cannot even be noted.

On this score, there is an interesting secondary analytic emphasis that shadows much of Goldberg's argument. It is intimated here that the post-racial structures steering contemporary racisms become best discernible only if seen through a relational sociology (as opposed to a historically comparative method) that takes the world at large as its rightful analytic and political canvas (123-124, 152-53; Goldberg, 2015; Bhabra, 2007). The post-racial deceptions of the present are best revealed not by bringing it into analytic relation to what *previously* informed a particular location, but rather, in relation to the political processes and exclusions unfolding synchronically at other locations. Though I suspect that Goldberg's immediate analytic emphasis is slightly different, I purpose this argument as suggesting that the racial meanings as generated globally are continuously absorbed into the political and social vicissitudes of a local space; but in so doing, race need not be actively named given that the circuitous force of its signification already operates through established, globally resonant tropes. Put differently, certain iconic racial meanings are always-already cued through broader, and increasingly digital, global mediations – e.g. the rabid Muslim; the black criminal; the lecherous or scheming, undeserving migrant.

Goldberg's call for a globally construed relational analysis chimes particularly sharply in light of certain problematic tendencies common to contemporary academic output (Valluvan and Kapoor, 2016: 379). Partly owing to the national technologies of academic formation and the policy-led drawing of empirical boundaries,<sup>11</sup> excessive analytic credence is I believe given to a particular national or metropolitan *history*. This preference for locally rooted historical contingencies (which in itself is not a problem) does unfortunately come at the analytic expense of those factors and developments occurring synchronically across multiple coterminous global nodes. Put glibly, regardless of where one is writing from and about, Western Asia always matters; Israel/Palestine always matters; the dissemination of an American consumer culture and its particular configuration of racial titillation and status always matters; the rise of East Asian economic clout always matters. It is these global circulations which are all co-constitutive of the racisms that are operationalized within a particular local and/or national context.

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<sup>9</sup> See also the *Prospect* (2010) Issue, 'Rethinking Race: Has Multiculturalism had its Day', published during Goodhart's influential tenure as founding Editor of the putatively left-of centre periodical. This publication is widely considered a landmark moment in British political culture's confident assent to a post-racial era and all its characteristic motifs.

<sup>10</sup> See here the enchantment of British nationalist punditry with an unusual entity that is said to be the 'white working-class'.

<sup>11</sup> See discussions on 'methodological nationalism' as parsed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2009) and Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002).

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4 With my own research priorities in mind, this observation becomes particularly important regarding  
5 the proper place of the UK vis-à-vis European mediations of anti-multiculture, new nationalist  
6 anxieties. What I consider to be British academia's tendency towards an Anglophone provincialism  
7 has obfuscated awareness of how the primary constitutive forces in the making of 'new racial  
8 subjects' (Redclift, 2014) and national crises within the 'post-racial UK' (Kapoor, 2013) are in fact  
9 processes common to the entirety of Western Europe. I am also thinking of how racial hysterias are  
10 circulated transnationally – see how the rapidly thickening anti-Muslim sentiment in the UK rests on  
11 a regional and/or international parade of events (each renewing the previous): Paris after Paris,  
12 Copenhagen after Toulouse, Cologne after Birmingham. Or how the European demonization of the  
13 migrant can constantly assume different points of emphasis as necessary (the Eastern European, the  
14 Roma, the Muslim Arab, and the black African). Or how a war-making neoconservative climate  
15 across Europe continuously absorbs Israeli reference points, the latter 'recharging' particularly  
16 complex, 'deadly' and intricately knotted anti-Semitic tendencies within Europe (141-142).

### 19 **Conclusion**

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21 It is clear that attentiveness to the post-racial as charted by Goldberg facilitates an original and  
22 intricate insight into what constitutes the racisms of today. Goldberg's working of this concept  
23 allows for considerable clarification regarding the place of contemporary racisms vis-à-vis  
24 animalization, global relationalities and, more broadly, the neoliberal visualisation of humanity. I  
25 also hope that this discussion has made apparent that the analytic value of post-race is perhaps best  
26 understood in terms of how it both incorporates as well as exceeds the explanatory terrain already  
27 serviced by the concept of 'Cultural Racism'.  
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30 In concluding, I also wish to suggest that the considerable ideological deceptions of the post-racial  
31 must not be allowed to obscure the alternative resonance often attributed to the term – namely,  
32 post-race as the hope that we might one day work beyond the violent, exploitative and divisive  
33 modernist ontology of race (St Louis, 2015). The final pages of *Are We All Postracial Yet* does  
34 elegantly engage this alternative tradition that has, after all, been so central to much anti-racist  
35 history and scholarship. Goldberg articulates here a daring and ultimately affirmative fashioning of  
36 an anti-racist, 'non-racial' humanism – a vision of humanism that does not slip into the neo-imperial  
37 and anti-difference tropes humanism is otherwise prone to (180-181). Whether others will agree  
38 with Goldberg's preference for the 'non-racial' as a more workable and sincere political horizon – as  
39 opposed to the post-racial's deceptive and normative baggage – is a matter for future debate. But it  
40 remains vital of Goldberg to issue this important reminder regarding the need for political horizons  
41 that are less saddled by the appeal of 'ethno-national' community. Put differently, any visualization  
42 of a future that is to be characterised by 'freedom' (180) must be able to more purposefully harness  
43 the already considerable anti-communitarian, cosmopolitan dispositions being routinely cultivated  
44 by various activists and denizens the world over (Gilroy, 2004; Valluvan, 2016).  
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