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The Politics of Postcolonial Nationalist Literature

> To an irresolute nation, irresolute literature! But as soon as the elements of a people approach some unity, the elements of its literature draw nearer together and condense into a great prophetic work. Let us now bemoan the fact that we lack this great work, not because we lack it but because it is a sign that we are not yet the great people of which it must be a reflection; for it must reflect, it must be the reflection.
>
> — JOSÉ MARTÍ

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> Everywhere throughout the world one finds the same bad movies, the same slot machines, the same plastic or aluminum atrocities, the same twisting of language by propaganda, etc. . . . [O]n the one hand, [the developing world] has to root itself in the soil of its past, forge a national spirit, and unfurl this spiritual and cultural revindication before the colonialist's personality. But in order to take part in modern civilization, it is necessary at the same time to take part in scientific, technical, and political rationality, something which very often requires the pure and simple abandonment of a whole cultural past.
>
> — PAUL RICOEUR

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At the confluence of these quotations from the writer José Martí and the philosopher Paul Ricoeur it is possible to locate both the highest hopes for literature in the formerly colonized world, as well as the most serious challenge to the attainment of these hopes. For Martí, literature is an important sign of the existence of the nation; it is only when a great work of literature exists that the unity of the people that is the nation can itself be thought to exist. But if the function of literature for Martí is merely to "reflect" the progress made in the formation of the nation, writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, George Lamming, and many other postcolonial writers have envisioned a more active role for literature in the production of the nations that would come into existence at the end of colonialism. For these writers, a (genuine) literature is less a sign of the nation than an important — perhaps even the most important — force for bringing about a substantive political transformation of the colonial situation; it is literature that

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is seen as laying the cultural groundwork that allows the nation to become a reality. In addition to reflecting prenational political and social formations, literature is thought by these writers to be uniquely able to form and foster the values, identities, and culture of the new nation. For both Martí and these other writers, there is thus an essential role imagined for literature in the creation of the postcolonial nation: literature and the nation are conceptualized as being mutually dependent on one another in a way that gives to the writing of national literature an urgency and importance that it has perhaps entirely lost in the West.

If in the decolonizing world the great work of literature is, in Martí's sense, a sign of the nation, the nation can itself be seen as a sign—a sign that true political independence, authentic sovereignty, and real self-determination have now either been brought into existence or are, finally, even possibilities at all; a sign indicating the end of colonialism and, concomitantly, the completion of the long, painful struggle to throw off the shackles of foreign rule. But if the achievement of the nation thus signifies a whole set of political possibilities, Ricoeur's words suggest that the very form in which this politics is made possible must also be seen as threatening or limiting the actualization of these possibilities. For the nation is also a sign of modernity. With modernity comes progress, science, technology, market capitalism, a rationalized bureaucratic state, and the end of a whole series of what were often seen as constraining traditional practices and beliefs—all of which may be taken as an "improvement" over the situation of colonialism by both the colonized and the former colonizers, a step "forward" (in the terms of Eurocentric history and modernization theories favored by international development organizations) into the main currents of the stream of Western history. But this is only one side of what modernity represents. Modernity also names a cultural system that places economic practices at the center of social existence. More than anything else, it is this system, often described in terms of a "cultural imperialism" that persists even after the formal end of political imperialism, that works to undermine the often radical experiments that it was hoped could be carried out in the decolonizing world under the sign of the nation. The promise of the nation in the decolonizing world was not only located in its brute assertion of political independence, but in the possibility of introducing ways of organizing social existence different from those assumed or imposed by the West. If this is a promise that has remained tragically unfulfilled, it is, at least in part, because the nation is a political form that, as Ricoeur's words imply, denies possibilities as much as it actualizes them; this in turn means that the relationship between literature and the nation celebrated by Martí must itself be

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seen as complex and problematic, fraught with dangers as much as it is filled with possibilities. For as much as literature would like to produce the unique collective cultural identity that forms the basis of the nation, it is not at all clear whether the nation is a suitable form "within" which such an identity can best be fostered and expressed.

In this book, I undertake a comparative examination of the ambiguous, difficult, and often contradictory attempt by writers in three regions of the former British Commonwealth—Nigeria, Canada, and the British Caribbean—to create unique national cultures and literatures in the context of a global modernity whose chief *modus operandi* seems to be the erosion of particularity and uniqueness. What makes the creation of a national culture an especially difficult and ambiguous task in these regions is in part the number of discourses with which these writers have to contend and work through: anti-imperialist and imperialist discourses; the discourses of nativism and Western philosophy; modernist discourses promising progress and development; the discourse of nationalism related to modernism *and* anti-imperialism; and discourses concerning the role and political efficacy of literature, which of necessity must deal with imperialism, modernism, and nationalism all at once. These multiple, heterogeneous, and, in many cases, contradictory discourses and practices together form the "zone of instability" within which writers in these regions had to operate; and if the title of this book speaks of "zones" rather than a singular "zone," it is because in each of the situations that I examine the space(s) carved out by these discourses and practices must be seen as unique, bearing the traces of particular historical, social, and cultural trajectories, even though they are also related by their common link to the British Empire. What makes these zones unstable—like Venn diagrams in perpetual motion, in which overlapping areas are suddenly rendered singular, while elsewhere, at the very same time, other lines of force cluster thick and black, forming new and unexpected limits and possibilities—is not only the number of discourses and forces that these writers had to contend with and work through, but the fact that in the postwar period, these discourses and forces are themselves in states of profound instability and indeterminacy as the shape of the world rapidly undergoes an enormous number of important changes, changes that have been described, for instance, as the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, from production to consumption, and from internationalism to globalization.

My particular focus here is the relationship between literature and nationalism in the two decades following World War II, decades in which the future prospects for the colonies went from extreme political optimism to extreme

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political disappointment. In the case of Nigeria, this is roughly the period from the publication of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in 1952 to the publication of Chinua Achebe's *The Anthills of the Savannah* in 1987; in the British Caribbean, the period from the publication of George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* in 1953 to the collapse of the West Indies Federation in 1962; and in Canada, the two decades from the 1951 Massey Commission to the 1970 F.L.Q. (Front de Libération du Québec) crisis. The regions that I examine in this study differ enough politically, socially, and historically (not least in the way in which they were interpolated into the project of empire) that it will be immediately apparent that my aim is not to uncover some general logic that will be able to connect indiscriminately the literary production of all three regions, as proposed, for example, in some versions of postcolonial theory.[1] At the same time, my comparative emphasis suggests that it is important that these literatures and the zones of instability in which they were produced be examined against the common background not only of the Commonwealth, but also in terms of the unprecedented changes in the organization of the globe following World War II, which had particularly serious consequences for areas that were—and in many senses continue to be—peripheral to the West. Of course, "peripherality," as expressed in the dominant narratives of modernity (and of globalization), is an invented conceptual apparatus, an ideology that manipulates time and space in order to legitimate existing relations of political, economic, and cultural power—which is not to say that it doesn't have effects and consequences. While the confrontation between literature, modernity, and the nation takes different forms in each of the situations that I examine, it is only a comparative examination that reveals the extent to which this confrontation was (and is) an importantly *global* one, with widely different regions of the globe facing surprisingly similar problematics in the (belated) production of literature and the (equally belated) creation of nations and national cultures.

The need for the literatures of formerly colonized regions to grapple with the consequences and effects of modernity while attempting simultaneously to fashion nations has been noted from the very first studies of Commonwealth, world, or postcolonial literatures. In Bruce King's 1980 book, *The New National Literatures*, for example, the issue of modernity is identified as the central concern of the various new national literatures,[2] and the "double consciousness" experienced by a third-world intelligentsia trapped between cultures—the "local" culture of the colony and the cosmopolitan "world" culture introduced by Western civilization—has been a frequent theme of both colonial and postcolonial fiction,

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as well as of the criticism of this fiction. What has been left out of these accounts, however, is an attempt to problematize and interrogate the concept of "national literature" itself. While this has become a theme of much recent writing that attempts to make sense of what the global means for the continued salience and relevance of national (and nationalist) literatures,[3] certain assumptions about the function of literature with respect to the nation (ideologies of literature) and of the nation with respect to literature (nationalist ideologies) continue to remain largely unquestioned. Paik Nak-chung's recent defense of the contemporary necessity of a (South) Korean national literature rests, for example, on an idea of literature as perhaps the last cultural artifact that can embody the values and particularity of Korean national culture. Literature is seen as able to "contain the invasion of global consumerist culture" by preserving Korea's cultural heritage and offering Koreans the possibility of a "dignified life."[4] Paik is readily willing to concede that the notion of national literature is now a problematic one. At the same time, "literature" and the "nation" continue to function in his account in predictable ways: literature embodies/reflects/expresses a culture that happily resides in the defined and determined space of the nation. And while there is some truth to this equation of literature with the nation, it seems to me that what modernity (and later postmodernity) puts into question in those areas of the world whose cultures are threatened by the global is precisely this set of relations between literature, culture, and the nation that has been part of our conceptual vocabulary since Romanticism. One of the central imperatives of this book is to examine the post–World War II literatures of Canada, the Caribbean, and Nigeria by continually destabilizing the category of national literature and by interrogating both nationalist ideology and the ideologies of literature, in order to produce a more nuanced account of this period of literary history and of the relationship of literature to the nation more generally.

There are a number of other issues that arise in this study of national literature and culture, all of which may be broached through another theme that emerges out of a consideration of the belated national projects of these regions. It is here again that a consideration of these literatures through a contemplation of their zones of instability becomes important. In each region, the attempt to produce a national literature is most often expressed through an explicit concern with *space*. It is this interest in space, and the questions that it opens up, that will underlie my examination of the intersection of literature, the nation, and modernity in the period immediately following World War II—a largely "forgotten" period of literary and intellectual history whose politics have been repeatedly portrayed in

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an overly simplistic and reductive manner. What precisely I mean by space—a concept that has now become a fixture in a contemporary academy trying either to undo the tyranny of time (modernity) or to come to grips with the meaning and significance of globalization[5]—and how I propose to investigate it needs to be carefully laid out, since it is bound to be easily misinterpreted and misunderstood. By way of introduction to the overall project of this book, I want to discuss the multiple and related ways that space can be read in postcolonial literature. One of the reasons to think about space before the nation is in order to open up a different way of conceptualizing the nation: not as a preformed political structure that everyone already knows the shape of (say, the modern European nation-state), but as a problematic that draws together the hope of forming new collectivities, the role of culture and literature in the production of these collectivities, the political problems of organizing space, and, finally, the relationship of the writer or intellectual to the people—the specific zone of instability to which Fanon refers in the last of the epigraphs that begin this book.

From Space to Nation

There are many ways in which the concept of modernity and its effects can be described and explained, ranging from concepts and themes first introduced in the work of nineteenth-century sociologists such as Max Weber and Karl Marx to the work of contemporary theorists such as Marshall Berman, Cornelius Castoriadis, Jürgen Habermas, and Michel de Certeau.[6] In terms of the postcolonial world, the works of literature and the literary and intellectual formations that I examine suggest that it may be most useful to understand modernity as a specific way of organizing lived social space, which threatens the aspirations of these regions to form distinctive nations—nations that may try to be "modern" in terms of their political organization but nevertheless attempt to refuse the "pseudo-rationality" of modernity (Castoriadis), its rationalization of the life-world (Habermas), and/or its collapse of the consumer's space of "use" (de Certeau). The nation in the decolonizing world is thus envisioned as a potential buffer against modernity as much as it is seen as a sign of independence, that is, as an enclosed space (geographically, politically, culturally) that modernity cannot easily penetrate, a specific space (or place) as opposed to the abstract ones (or nonplaces)[7] increasingly produced by modernity. If space appears as a concern of postwar writing in Canada, the British Caribbean, and Nigeria, it is in part because of the unique relationship between literature and space that is assumed

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by writers in all three of these regions. There is, first, the relationship of literature, and of print culture more generally, to nationalism that has been so well described by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. For Anderson, the novel and the newspaper first introduce the possibility of social "simultaneity," that is, the ability to imagine the existence of an extended community in time, even without direct knowledge of other members of this community who exist at the distant edges of national space: "the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time," Anderson writes, "is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also must be considered as a solid community moving steadily down (and up) history."[8] But if these literatures express a particular concern with space, it is also because literature—and especially the novel—is seen as the privileged intellectual tool by which it is possible to delineate space, domesticate it, concretize it, manage it, and make it less abstract. In other words, the relationship of literature to the nation is but one dimension of the relationship of the novel to space more generally. The fact that the overriding concern of writers in the period and regions that I am studying is to produce the space of the nation (as opposed to other possible spaces) has usually been attributed to the widespread sense that the nation was the only legitimate discourse of political space available at the time. And while this is in part true, it has tended to rule out an examination of the actual uses of the concept of the nation in the decolonizing world, especially in the writing of literature. It has also ruled out a more detailed and explicit examination of the reasons for the conjunction of literature and the nation in the process of decolonization, which asks not only *why* the nation, but also why it is *literature* that was assumed to be a particularly potent spatial technology, questions which again probe at the ideologies of both nation and literature.

Writers in Canada, the Caribbean, and Nigeria in the period following World War II are concerned with space first as an attempt to reorganize the geographic space of empire, to produce against or within this space the sovereign space of a nation. This is a movement beyond earlier literary attempts to produce or reproduce an authentic connection between language and geographic space that the colonial experience was thought either to have severed or to have made impossible (as in attempts to adapt the language of British Romantic poetry to descriptions of the Canadian Rockies, the Africa savannah, or the Backpit country of Jamaica).[9] The necessity of the space of the nation is not argued for in terms of an appeal to a mythic or primordial past that gives it an historical reality and solidity—the usual means by which nationalisms are articulated—but in terms of

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a communal political project whose aim is to create a promising future out of a terrible past. This is due to the specific circumstances facing colonial nationalisms, which make it impossible, as Fanon puts it, "to try to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged." It is also due to the specific *form* that the project of the nation took in all three of these regions: *federalism*. Federations are specific kinds of national spaces: separated by geography, language, race, ethnicity, legal structures, and so on, the disparate spaces of federations have to be linked together in other ways. It seems to me that this is the specific project of the literature of these regions in the 1950s and 60s, which not only makes arguments for the existence of the postcolonial federation, but takes literature itself to be a "substitute" for this otherwise missing "historical logic" necessary for the production of the nation, the missing conceptual framework that might make a national federation work.

It is a project that is necessarily short-lived. For in the process of this first attempt to define space—an attempt that comes to be seen as somehow incomplete or that fails to account for some deeper, more widespread, organization of space in which the synecdochic relationship of the "nation" to a whole international system is revealed—the literatures of these regions already begin to turn their attention to the global space of modernity initiated by imperialism that makes national space transparent and permeable, turning it into an obvious fiction that is in the late-twentieth century no longer able to contain both the political and cultural differences that these literatures would hope to define *and* produce. The works that I will examine in this study are, therefore, among the first to confront what is now referred to as "globalization," a phenomenon that itself has been described in spatial terms as, for example, a "time-space compression of unprecedented intensity."[10] They are also among the first texts to see the central problem of intellectual practice in the global space of modernity to be a problem of *representation*. In the initial attempt to create the nation there is a sense that (especially) the novel could still represent "totality" in Lukács's sense; this is increasingly placed into question as space becomes abstract and globalized. If, following the collapse of projects of cultural nationalism in the 1960s, many writers were forced to abandon or seriously rethink their earlier ideas about the relationship of literature to space (Lamming writing *Water with Berries* eleven years after *Season of Adventure*, Achebe waiting twenty-one years between *Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*), this is due, it seems to me, not simply to the political failure of the various national projects, but to a sense of the inability of literature to adequately counteract the (increasingly) global space of moder-

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nity, a task that writers in these regions had perhaps come to identify too closely with that of writing itself.

The concern with space in the literature of the colonial and postcolonial world has already been noted by (among others) Fredric Jameson and Edward Said. While my approach to space—which is to read *through* (the problem of) space, rather than to read *for* its characteristic manifestations—differs from both of these authors, it is nevertheless useful to position my approach in the context of the intriguing proposals they set forth about third-world literature. In "Yeats and Decolonization,"[11] Said suggests that there are two moments of nationalist revival in the third world. The literature of the first moment, which Said calls "the period of nationalist anti-imperialism," is characterized above all by "the primacy of the geographical in it";[12] in Fanon's tripartite division of colonial literature, this moment corresponds roughly to the final stage of "national literature."[13] Said writes: "Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of his or her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of a local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. From what? Not just from foreigners, but also from a whole other agenda whose purpose and processes are controlled elsewhere."[14]

If the language of loss, revival, and restoration does not apply equally to all of the spaces formed by imperialism, including those of the Caribbean and Canada, where there is in a very real sense no possibility of recovering a mythic past that is not associated with imperialism (since it is imperialism that first brought these spaces into existence), the general spatial logic of imperialism that Said describes nevertheless appears as an important literary concern in these regions. This is true not only in the period that Said associates with this first moment of nationalism in the third world, the period from World War I to the 1950s, but extends as well into the second moment, that of the "liberationist anti-imperial resistance"[15] that attempts to go beyond the limits of the discourse of nationalism to a more profound transformation of imperial relations. Indeed, it seems wholly inappropriate to speak of the period after the 1950s, as Said argues, as no longer "nationalist" but as newly "liberationist." For while such a periodizing schema may adequately describe the historical experiences of regions such as Algeria, Vietnam, Cuba, Palestine, and South Africa—the areas that Said addresses—in much of the rest of the decolonizing world, and especially in the former countries of the British Empire, nationalism and the transformation of space suggested by

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nationalism continues to be an important determinant of literary production well into the 1960s and 1970s. While it is true that following the disappointing results of the initial wave of nationalism in the Third World there is no longer the same confidence in nationalism as a liberatory discourse, in the periods and regions that I examine here, the movement toward liberationist discourses seems nevertheless of necessity to have to pass through the matrix of the nation. As writers work through a definition and development of a national space that would provide the grounds for identity, self-determination, and political sovereignty, there is, of course, a realization by many of them that the discourse of nationalism is in many respects complicit with imperialism—complicit in its reproduction of the old colonial structures of government operated by the new nationalist bourgeoisie that Fanon discusses in *The Wretched of the Earth*;[16] in the ways in which the nation masks global capitalism's "differentiation of national space according to the territorial division of labour"[17] under the banner of sovereignty and independence; and in terms of the modernizing agenda that the nation ultimately shares with imperialism itself. At this point, one might imagine that the discourse of nationalism would be abandoned in favor of a more radical attempt to redefine postcolonial relations. Yet the discourse of the nation, and thus of space as well, continues to persist much longer than Said suggests, a fact that cannot entirely be accounted for by the idea that the discourse of the nation was the only one available after the war that might be thought to adequately effect a reorientation of space; once again, an explanation must be sought elsewhere, by reading the function and utility of the space of the nation in a different manner from that of critics who prefer to see the nation as an historical idea that has now run its course.[18]

The "whole other agenda" that Said discusses in exploring "the primacy of the geographical" in third-world literature is, of course, what I have been describing as the colonization of space by a global capitalist modernity, whose ultimate aim is to eliminate anything outside of itself. If in addition to the natural world, imperialism generated a "second" nature through its "domination, classification, and universal commodification of all space, under the aegis of the metropolitan center,"[19] Said suggests that "it is therefore necessary to seek out, to map, to invent, or to discover, a *third* nature, which is not pristine and prehistorical . . . but one that derives historically and abductively from the deprivations of the present."[20] How exactly *this* space is to be produced is perhaps the best way of characterizing the challenge undertaken by the writers of the decolonizing spaces of Canada, the British Caribbean, and Nigeria in the second half of the twentieth

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century. The fact that this "third nature" continues to be described within the general problematic of the nation is less an indication of a failure to move from a nationalist to a liberationist discourse than an indication of the diverse uses of the concept of the nation in the postwar period.

In "Modernism and Imperialism," Fredric Jameson argues that—with the exception of the "special case" of Irish literature, and specifically the work of James Joyce—imperialism leaves its traces "spatially, as formal symptoms, within the structure of first-world modernist texts themselves."[21] Colonialism means that a significant portion of the economic structure is located "outside" of the West, a fact that creates a crisis of representation: "daily life and existential experience in the metropolis—which is necessarily the very content of the national literature itself, can now no longer be grasped immanently; it no longer has its meaning, its deeper reason for being, within itself."[22] For Jameson, modernism and a distinctively modernist "style" offer a solution to this crisis through their attention to space: the self-subsisting interiority of modernist writing manages to contain things "within" in order to make up for what cannot be represented "without." As validation of this hypothesis concerning modernism, Jameson proposes an assessment of a border situation, "one of overlap and coexistence between these two incommensurable realities which are those of the lord and the bondsman altogether, those of the metropolis and of the colony simultaneously."[23] This border case is found in a national situation whose underlying structure is that of the third world, while the "surface" of its social reality, "perhaps through the coincidence of its language with the imperial language,"[24] is more akin to the first world. Literature produced in such a situation would transform the style of modernism by its very different, colonial relationship to space, while still retaining many characteristic features of first-world modernist writing. The national situation that Jameson has in mind here is Ireland, and it is not entirely surprising that it is James Joyce's *Ulysses* that is the exemplary text in the validation of his hypothesis, with its objective rather than symbolic treatment of space, and its ability to explore the (physical and psychological) space of Dublin instead of dealing with space only by transfiguring it into the formal and aesthetic space of modernism.

While Jameson suggests that texts that would validate his hypothesis are "not, in this period, to be found in what will come to be called the Third World,"[25] meaning presumably the period of European modernism at the beginning of this century, by the second half of the century the countries and regions that I examine occupy the same kind of border situation as Ireland—belonging (in a sense)

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to the first world through their desire for political modernity as well as through their linguistic similarity with the center of Empire and to the third world by virtue of their experience with colonialism. If earlier third-world texts were interested only in refusing and repudiating imperial culture (as Jameson suggests), the novels of the second half of the twentieth century are much more aware of the need to deal with the totality of the imperial relationship. It is precisely in terms of their exploration of space in the form of the nation that this awareness is exhibited. The novels that I will be examining in Canada, the Caribbean, and Nigeria do not (with few exceptions) exhibit the same degree of linguistic or formal experimentation as *Ulysses*.[26] But like Joyce's novel, these novels do not represent space as a symptom that can be identified only formally or structurally. It is rather *everywhere* apparent, available to be read in terms of theme and content as well as form. One of the reasons that it is difficult to find large numbers of texts in the regions that I will be examining that are clearly modernist is because the relations constitutive of imperialism, or rather, the undoing of these relations, are central concerns of the texts: imperialism is not elsewhere, as it is in E. M. Forster's *Howard's End*, the text that Jameson examines, and so space does not appear as a formal symptom of something that cannot otherwise be represented. What Jameson finds exemplary about *Ulysses*—the existence of history, the signs of community, the possibility of public space, and so on—is to be found in all of the texts that I will examine, since, like *Ulysses*, they constitute explorations of spaces that are modern but not yet *of* modernity.

This study, then, is an examination of these writers' attempts to create, in Said's sense, the "third" nature that is the continuation of a literary process begun by *Ulysses*. But here I would like to begin to move back from space to nation. What I will examine is not what *space* is a symptom of, but rather, what the *nation* is a symptom of in the writing of third-world literature. In other words, I am not interested in producing a catalog of the appearance of space or of spatial discourses in the *content* of the literature of the decolonizing world, nor in showing the historical conditions that make possible certain formal innovations that may be described (as Jameson does in the case of modernism) as "spatial." Instead, what I will explore in each of the situations under analysis is the "intellectual field," the zone of instability, within which all of the issues of space (as a form of defensive nationalism, the privileged role of literature to space, the literary reworking of imperial space, the mapping of a nascent globalization, etc.) that I have outlined above arise. The nature of these zones, and the set of questions that an investigation of them prompts us to ask about the conjunction of literature and

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the nation in the third world, are the subject of the first chapter of this book. Overall, what I will explore, with respect to the difficult and paradoxical task of trying to create national cultures in the midst of the belated modernity brought about by colonialism, is what problems the practice of writing literature was intended to solve and, further, the significance of the conjunction of literary practices with the discourses of nationalism and the nation.

Postcolonial Spaces

Examining the literature of these regions and this period with the idea of space in mind is also to explore and critique simultaneously three other related areas of contemporary critical concern from a new vantage point. The first of these involves the theories of nation-formation that have become widespread over the past decade or so — the amount of recent theoretical writing seeming to make up for decades of comparative silence about so important a topic as the nation. With respect to literary and cultural studies, some of the most influential of the many contemporary writers to deal with the subject of the nation have been Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Anthony D. Smith.[27] There is no agreement among these writers on the exact mechanisms that produce nations and nationalisms, on the relationship of contemporary nationalist movements to "classical" European models, or on the future of the nation as the primary organizing unit of the globe. If there is one strand of agreement among these competing models, it is an awareness of the artificiality of the nation, an artificiality that nationalisms manage to transform into "facts of nature." It is only by seeming to persist through time and by being linked to imagined, mythic pasts — pasts often defined in ethnic terms — that what are inventions of national elites for their own purposes can become objects of mass loyalty. The process by which the artifice of the nation is suppressed, and the nation reified into a fact not of history but of nature, would thus appear to be an important, even essential, characteristic of both the nation and nationalism.

In all three of the cases that I examine in this book — and this is indeed part of my rationale for proposing to study these specific regions together — the nation is formed (or tries to be formed) under very different conditions. In Canada, the Caribbean, and Nigeria, it is the very artificiality of the nation that is an essential component of the literary attempt to create the nation. This is perhaps inevitable not only because of the belatedness of the nation but also because nation building involved a federal project in each case. The artificiality of the nation is highlighted

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not as something to be overcome, but as the starting point for the new nation. Of the three cases that I examine here, Nigeria has had the most potential to develop a nation through the evocation of a mythic past that was suppressed by the colonial experience. Yet while various discourses of nativism and negritude very actively and forcefully suggested the need for just such a revival of a lost cultural past, its orientation was always *extranational*, claiming either a pan-African perspective or one that spoke to the entire situation of the global African Diaspora. The two Nigerian writers that I will be examining in detail, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, are both known as outspoken critics of negritude, seeing in its focus on the past and its decision to embrace uncritically one side of the West's Manichean division between black and white, an inadequate basis for a national culture that they believe is essential for Nigeria.

For both Achebe and Soyinka, the beginning point of the Nigerian nation is the spatial boundary of the Nigerian state. The boundary is, however, artificial even as far as nations are concerned, being merely a legacy of European colonial struggles to control as much of the continent as possible. Both authors are aware of the impossibility of creating a nation whose boundaries are congruent with its ethnic divisions, since over 250 ethnic groups exist in Nigeria, of which the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Ibo are merely the largest. These facts may suggest that there is no possibility of creating a Nigerian nation. Yet both Achebe and Soyinka see the nation as essential to Nigeria. If the nation cannot be created around the pole of ethnicity or through the evocation of a mythic past, it is then for both authors to be anchored in the possibilities of African modernity and, in particular, the possibility of a nation whose identity comes from the fact that it is *not* a nation in the usual senses of this term: rather than being tied to the past, Nigeria is to be a nation that is relentlessly modern. If most nationalisms are invented through a process in which its invention is subsequently forgotten or suppressed, for these writers the Nigerian nation is to be created through a nationalism in which its invented, artificial nature is foregrounded. For both Achebe and Soyinka, Nigeria is to be a nation whose defining cultural difference from other nations is the fact of cultural difference itself; and it is literature that they see as playing an important part in making a shared national space across the lines of ethnic difference possible. Both writers express an enormous amount of confidence in the power of literature to assist in the cause of the nation; one of the central issues that I look at in my chapter on Nigerian literature is how this faith in literature changes (or doesn't change) as a result of the collapse of the Nigerian

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nation-state in the ethnic strife of the Biafran war—a collapse from which it is perhaps only now beginning to recover.

If it is difficult to create the Nigerian nation through either the invention of a common mythic past or by claims of a continuous ethnic occupation of a certain portion of the space of West Africa that colonialism had interrupted, in the British Caribbean and Canada these modes of nation-formation are even more tenuous and problematic. National space in the British Caribbean would seem to be less arbitrary than in Nigeria or Canada, simply because of the physical fact that—with the exceptions of Belize and Guyana—the former colonies are all islands. It is important to note, however, that prior to the political independence of the three major island-states (Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados) in the 1960s, there was a concerted attempt to produce a larger political unit in the Caribbean: the West Indies Federation (1958–62). The rationale for federation was driven in part by the demands of modernization. Many intellectuals saw the federation of the islands as the only viable form of Caribbean sovereignty, since it would produce a political unit with a larger population than any one individual island (and so one better able to compete with other nations), while also assuring that there would be no unnecessary and costly duplication of bureaucratic and political structures. The other rationale for federation had little to do with the evocation of a mythic past or with claims about a shared ethnicity that could link these disparate islands together, for although much of the population of the West Indies is of African ancestry, for the large East Indian populations in Trinidad and Guyana such claims about a common ethnicity could only appear as a threat to their place in the federation. Rather, as in Nigeria, the argument for federation was made on the basis of the essentially multiethnic character of the Caribbean. This unexpected outcome of British colonialism in the West Indies was to give the British Caribbean a distinctiveness among nations that correspondingly gave the new federation an advantage over older nations: the diasporic, worldwide movements of peoples that was already beginning to provoke crises in Europe, and the ethnic strife and struggle for the self-determination of ethnic minorities that would become such an enduring feature of the postwar world, were issues that the Caribbean was already uniquely equipped to deal with in a way that other nations were not. Of the authors whose work I examine in my chapter on the Caribbean, it is George Lamming who most forcefully makes these points about a common multiethnic West Indian space. While V. S. Naipaul, the other author whose work I examine in detail, expresses doubt over the possibilities of West

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Indian modernity, parodying the attempts to create workable political structures, his negative vision of the political future of the Caribbean throws into relief the problems and dilemmas of meaningfully creating such a peculiar national space within global modernity.

What I have been describing in Nigeria and the Caribbean is an attempt to create the nation *negatively*, that is, through an appeal to what other nations were *not*, or at least, *not yet*.[28] This process reaches its apotheosis in Canada, which in 1971, after decades of intensive debate about Canadian nationalism and Canadian identity, became the first country in the world to declare itself to be "officially" a multicultural state, that is, to proclaim an *identity* of *nonidentity*, at least insofar as identity is normally configured within the nation. While Canada did not undergo a process of political decolonization in the same way as Nigeria or the Caribbean states did in the 1960s (indeed, it could be argued that Canada experienced intensified cultural and economic imperialism), and while the issue of space in Canadian politics and literature has a much longer tradition than in either of my other two cases (being a theme taken up by both Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan), it is significant that anxiety over the tenuous existence of the Canadian nation also reached a peak in the decades following World War II. A major consequence of the war was to reorient global power away from Britain toward the United States. The dissolution of empire and the sudden (newly) hegemonic presence to the south of a linguistically and culturally similar state, though one much more assured of itself as a nation, brought about the urgent need for a specifically Canadian definition of the nation. With respect to issues of American cultural and economic imperialism, Canada—which Peter Worsley has called "the world's richest underdeveloped country"[29]—understood itself as being in much the same position as third-world countries whose cultural life and economic and political sovereignty was daily in danger of collapse. The physical proximity and cultural similarities of the United States and Canada made the threat appear even greater: the encroachment of Americanization cum modernity had to be resisted at all costs to preserve what was specifically Canadian, even if what *this* might be was only to be decided in the very process of resistance.

Given the extent to which this process of Americanization was felt to be a threat, and, perhaps more important, given Canada's far greater economic resources, it is perhaps no surprise that while in Nigeria and the Caribbean the task of producing a national culture fell to intellectuals and writers, in Canada the state itself was actively involved in the production of the Canadian nation during the period from 1945 to 1970. Following the 1951 Massey Commission Report

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on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, which made resistance to the American cultural threat official government policy, the state established the National Library (1953) and brought into being the Canada Council (1957), the major cultural funding body of the federal government. The latter had an enormous and direct impact on literary production, both by providing funding to individual authors and by making funds available to book and magazine publishers in order to provide outlets for Canadian literary production. The most important literary initiatives to grow out of these programs were the establishment of the New Canadian Library series (1957), which practically invented a Canadian canon where none had existed before and first made the widespread teaching of Canadian literature in universities and high schools a possibility,[30] and the production of *The Literary History of Canada* (1965), which was (incredibly) the first such history produced in Canada. Even given these overdetermined conditions for the production of Canadian literature in the 1950s and 60s, it is in literary criticism rather than in literary production itself that it is possible to see the explicit creation of a national literature. The Canadian situation is thus already different from the Caribbean and Nigeria. It is interesting to note that both the literary and nonliterary attempts (the establishment of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation TV in 1952, the opening of the Trans-Canada Highway and the launch of the Alouette I communications satellite in 1962, the adoption of the Maple Leaf flag in 1964, etc.) to forge a unitary Canadian nation—a space, in essence, infused with "Canadianness"—were unable to include Quebec in any significant manner. The obsession with the creation of a distinctively Canadian culture was an anglophone one, even if ironically the high point of this national quest for self-definition was reached at the 1967 World Exposition in Montreal. While in Nigeria and the Caribbean the project of nation-formation began with an acknowledgment of the multiethnic character of the nation, the adoption of multiculturalism in Canada in 1971 must be seen as the rear-guard action of a national project whose failure was announced with the murder of Pierre Laporte by the F.L.Q. in 1970.

Given the regions and the period that I examine, it is inevitable that this study must adopt a position with respect to the field of postcolonial theory. A rearticulation of the postcolonial problematic offers a second point of connection between the issues addressed in this study and those of contemporary theory. The critical work of many of the writers that I will be considering in this study have been important in defining and giving coherence to the field of postcolonial criticism[31]—or at least giving it whatever coherence it now enjoys: in recent

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years, it has seemed that the field of postcolonial criticism has become equivalent to the body of articles and books that hope either to define and clarify or to contest and deny the utility of the concept of the postcolonial itself.[32] It therefore seems necessary that I take on directly the major themes and theories of postcolonial criticism in this study. Yet, if I seem to shy away from "using" or "deploying" postcolonial theory in my consideration of what are, after all, a group of amongst the most canonical postcolonial writers and situations, it is because I feel that it is important to consider the work of these writers in the context of the problems that they attempted to address and sought to resolve. Reading these works retrospectively means that the "true" concerns of these writers are often distorted and issues are imposed on them that properly originate only within contemporary critical work. This is, of course, in one sense, an inevitable part of any kind of intellectual endeavor, the inescapable hermeneutical circle that one enters into in the process of all interpretation. Nevertheless, as much as possible, in this study I undertake what I understand to be an examination of the immediate "prehistory" of postcolonial theory and criticism in part in order to excavate some of its hidden desires and buried logics, rather than starting with the work of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and others and "applying" it to what has been already identified in advance as postcolonial literature. Without wishing to suggest that there is a narrative of development in postcolonial theory (e.g., Achebe [early]—Said [middle]—Bhabha [late]), it seems to me that what these "early" works suggest is the degree to which the postcolonial problematic continues to be haunted by the specter of the nation. It is a haunting that contemporary postcolonial theory has sought to exorcise or repress; Said's division of third-world literature into "nationalist" and "liberationist" phases is but one example of the mechanisms through which this repression has operated. Making the nation and space central issues in postcolonial theory is, it seems to me, one way of overcoming the frustrating and limiting "culturalism" of contemporary postcolonial theory that has been identified by critics such as Arif Dirlik and Aijaz Ahmad.[33] My argument here should be seen as one that stresses the importance of a dimension of postcolonial studies that seems to have been neglected or sidelined in the pursuit of other (equally important) questions. Postcolonial studies have taught us an enormous amount about the problems of identity and subjectivity as these are inflected through race, ethnicity, gender, and various forms and modalities of power. I see this book as supplement to such studies, one that looks at the ways in which the texts and contexts of the postcolonial also speak to the problem of the

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collective; at least in part, it is this problem that made postcolonial studies so urgent and important in the first place.[34]

A second point with respect to the postcolonial: as with any comparative project, my choice of regions and authors to examine is hardly accidental. Part of the reason that I have chosen to examine Canada, the Caribbean, and Nigeria is to examine the entire range of situations in which postcolonial literature is, or at least has been thought to be, produced—from a consideration of a situation of explicit colonial intervention (Nigeria), to a country whose status as a colonized country is both more complex and much less certain (Canada), to a region like the Caribbean that, having been both colonized like Nigeria and "settled" like Canada, acts as a bridge between these two extreme poles of postcolonial situations. While I explore these three regions in order to address a range of questions regarding the conjunction of the literature and the nation in the decolonizing world—the explicit question of "space" in the Caribbean, the involvement of the state in Canada, and the politics of literature after the nation in Nigeria—I also examine the literature of these particular regions in order to work simultaneously within and against the "postcolonial" in an effort to probe the limits of its utility as a general descriptive term of the contemporary global condition.

Finally, this study constitutes in many ways an elegy for a certain vision of the function of artistic activity, a specific understanding of the role of the artist that reached its fullest expression in the twentieth century. If the various laments over the absence of public intellectuals in modern life, the worries over the decline of a reading public for serious literature, and the concerns of the "public art" movement are any indication, it is a vision of the artist's or intellectual's role that is still with us—even if it is beginning to seem clear that such a role may no longer be a viable one. I am speaking of the relationship in the twentieth century of the artist to politics, whether this has taken the form of the avant-garde or the official doctrines of socialist realism. If the twentieth century has witnessed the greatest separation of art from life, as in the establishment of the bourgeois credo of "art for art's sake" that Pierre Bourdieu has examined,[35] there has also been a concentrated effort by various avant-gardes to overcome the false autonomy of art, to bring art back to the public, back to the life-world.[36] Postcolonial writers do not necessarily see their work as belonging to the tradition of the European avant-garde; indeed, writers such as Achebe and C. L. R. James are critical of the overly intellectual quality of European writing and of the Western vision of culture (limited mainly to "high" culture) in general. Nevertheless, their explicit desire

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for their literary work to bring about political effects, to break through impasses at the level of politics or economics by a modification of culture or consciousness, aligns them with the avant-garde against bourgeois conceptions of culture. And yet, there is something in this commitment to literature, regardless of how much it is transformed in order to make it more amenable to mass consumption, that, especially in an era dominated by electronic media, betrays certain bourgeois inclinations and limitations. The novel in the third world is supposed to be a transgressive form. But as Timothy Brennan writes,

> It is precisely here that the greatest paradox of the new novel can be seen. For under conditions of illiteracy and shortages, and given simply the leisure-time necessary for reading one, the novel has been an elitist and minority form in developing countries when compared to poem, song, television, and film. Almost inevitably it has been the form through which a thin, foreign-educated stratum (however sensitive or committed to domestic political interests) has communicated to metropolitan reading publics, often in translation. It has been, in short, a naturally cosmopolitan form that empire has allowed to play a national role, as it were, only in an international arena.[37]

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It is in the postcolonial literature of the 1950s and 1960s that it is perhaps most clearly possible to assess what remains for literature with respect to politics today.

In the context of the unstable zone of questions and concerns that I have outlined, the overall plan for this book is comparatively straightforward and stable. The first chapter establishes the theoretical framework by which these various nationalist literatures will be examined. Through an examination of the wealth of contemporary writing on the nation, and on the relationship of literature to the nation, as well as through a detailed consideration of the work of Frantz Fanon, Benedict Anderson, and Fredric Jameson, I argue that the "nation" in postcolonial literature must be seen as a concept or a figure that ultimately relates back to the practice of "literature" itself in these regions—its possibility, its political efficacy, and its potential ability to transcend the divisions between intellectuals and the people in order to form new polities in the decolonizing world. In the post–World War II period, ideologies of literature and nation fold unstably in on one another as they try to articulate a new politics of the collective. Chapter Two explores the ideology of literature with respect to the nation in the Caribbean, as exhibited both by the theme of exile and by the literary attempt to forge a new kind of national space: the short-lived West Indies Federation. The third chapter examines the fate of nationalist literature after the

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hopes for the nation have been all but crushed. It does so through an investigation of the post-Biafra novels of Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe in the context of their earlier formulations of the intimate connection between literature and the nation in Nigeria. Chapter Four explores the persistence of the theme of the nation in Canadian literary criticism. In particular, it considers the function of nationalist (and antinationalist) criticism in light of the (relative) absence of an explicitly nationalist literature in Canada in the postwar period and in the context of the long-standing collective neurosis regarding Canadian national identity. The conclusion considers the limits of the nation with respect to global space and the challenge that this new space presents for any future understanding of the concept of culture.

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