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CONCLUSION

National Culture and Globalization

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In this book I have focused on the different ways in which the notion of the nation has been taken up as an issue for literary production in three postcolonial situations. I argued that the literature and criticism of the period most commonly associated with an explicit nationalism in the projects of political and literary decolonization are both more complex and forward-looking than they are usually thought to be. Literary histories that see the engagement of postcolonial texts with the nation as the expression of a problematic or crude (if perhaps inevitable) politics have not paid sufficient attention to the ways in which the nation names the particular political circumstances of the (post)colonies after World War II: not the problem of how to create a nation-*state*, but the more abstract one of how to create genuine collectivities in the midst of modernity and the developing conditions of what we now refer to as globalization. The literary and intellectual discourses of this period have further to figure out how to address this problem within the framework of an array of paradoxical and often contradictory discourses: those of antiimperialism and imperialism, nativism and modernity, and the possibilities and problems of the nation and national culture, all of which can neither be avoided nor fully embraced. I focused on one axis along which these

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problems have been taken up: the way in which literature and literary discourses tried to make sense of this discursive and political zone of instability. The writers that I have focused on in this study understand both the problems and possibilities of thinking the nation in the context of these multiple discourses; they also understand, in a way we seem at times to have forgotten, that the writing of literature complicates these issues as much as it clarifies them.

It might seem as if this book introduces another zone of instability—one introduced by the project of the book itself. Even given my articulation of the links between the regions and moments that I've placed side by side at the outset, the ways in which literature articulates the nation (and vice-versa) and the ideologies of literature and nation intersect and connect in these different postcolonial moments may still appear too different to sustain the comparison I have endeavored to make. It's not only the presence of Canada that disturbs the homologies that a comparative project of this kind looks for in disparate national, cultural, and historical circumstances: even Nigeria and the West Indies, connected in so many ways, do not exhibit strict similarities in the ways that literature and the nation intersect in the decades following World War II. Nevertheless, it is Canada that seems most out of place in this triad. Indeed, my own analysis suggests this, since in the chapter on Canada I focus on criticism rather than literature as the site at which discourses of the nation were most prominently articulated. If Canada is postcolonial, it is necessarily so in a very different way from either Nigeria or the Caribbean, a fact that a study like this one has to account for and be clear about; the label "postcolonial" does not do this work all on its own.

I hope that I have been clear in locating and identifying these differences, just as I hope that the reasons for considering these three regions together are apparent. Diana Brydon has argued that "withholding the status of 'authentic' colonialism from countries such as Canada . . . makes it harder for all Canadians to identify and combat the particular kinds of postcolonial experience they are currently undergoing as they watch their economy shrink, jobs disappear, and cultural sovereignty erode."[1] Part of my aim in looking at these particular zones of instability is to offer a slightly different map of the postcolonial that frames the historical, political, and cultural experiences of diverse spaces on the globe against a larger, globally connected set of forces that, in one way or another, produce these experiences *and* their difference from one another. In some respects, it seems absurd to claim the status of postcolonial for a country like Canada. Yet at the same time, as Brydon points out, not doing so can produce a

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misleading sense of the relationship of different spaces and forces to one another. Canada may belong to the G8 and get high marks on the United Nations Human Development Index. In terms of both its economic and cultural history and its colonial experience, it nevertheless shares a good deal more with the (British) Caribbean than with some of its partners in the G8 such as Germany and France, who have grumbled recently about Canada's membership in this exclusive club as its economy slips out of the ranks of the top ten (as measured in terms of GDP). If we were to rely exclusively on OECD statistics as a guide to the connections that we could legitimately make between different regions of the globe, there is a great deal that we would miss. It is only a crude materialism that would believe the economic to be determinant in this way.

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I have explored the way in which, in these three very different places, the general logic linking the nation and literature is remarkably similar, due in part to similarities in the way in which these spaces have been interpellated into the global political-economic system over the past two centuries. In each case, the problem of creating a nation and national cultural in and through literature manifests itself with particular force in the limits and possibilities of intellectual activity. An examination of each situation exhibits no precise homologies between them, but reveals provocative connective strands, both theoretical and empirical. I hope the lack of an overall defining logic (which would produce precise connections rather than broad interconnections) is seen as a virtue of this study rather than a vice. In trying to establish general laws or some larger governing logic out of the consideration of individual cases, the temptation is to locate the cause of everything that happens in each case within a larger metanarrative. The gesture that I want to make here is different from this. My analysis of the recent prehistory of our present moment is meant to help us understand better our own attempts to make sense of the problematic first named in these zones of instability: that of the fate of national cultures (revered and reviled at the same time and for good reason) and of the idea of the nation more generally in the era of globalization, and also the problems and possibilities that literature and criticism face in gauging and making sense of this fate.

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It is clear that in many ways we now occupy a very different space (or different spaces) from the ones that I explore here. Provocatively, Fredric Jameson has suggested that recent historical events affirm "the failure and death, not of communism, but rather precisely of federalism as such (the USSR, Yugoslavia, even Canada)."[2] With few exceptions (Australia, Canada, India, and South Africa, for instance), federalisms of the kind that I have been looking at are no longer topics

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of discussion for politicians or political scientists. In the 1950s and 1960s, the federal model was championed as the political form best able to contain regional and ethnic tensions and conflicts. Yet the recent decomposition of nations into their component parts has been characterized almost exclusively as the reassertion of ethnic and racial identities against the traumas experienced within the confines of the nation-state and *not* as the end of one particular form of nationalism whose decline needs to be better understood: the federation. The global reappearance of the vocabulary of blood and belonging has been seen in part as a series of local reactions to globalization: the reassertion of difference, particularity and identity against the universality of global modernity. But the decomposition of the nation or federation can be read in another way as well. The absence of "intermediary" forms between the local and global has led to the wholesale disappearance of the public sphere: the larger forms of organization available to localities today are no longer primarily political in character, but take the form of agreements (GATT, WTO, NAFTA, etc.) between sovereignties that understand themselves as economic units. Nations relate to one another today as businesses rather than polities, which is another reason why claims about the death of the nation should be understood as ideological rather than empirical statements about the state of the world.

But there is another, even more fundamental way in which things are different now. For those whose profession it is to examine cultural products or even whole cultures (from literary critics to anthropologists), the challenge posed by globalization is that new approaches must be taken and new discourses devised to explain the present. Everything is suddenly up for grabs, open to doubt, in need of revision. It *is* no longer possible to imagine the world as a collection of autonomous, monadic spaces, whether these are imagined as nations, regions within nations, or cultures demarcated by region or nation. Yet it is just this sense of space and, in particular, the intimate relationship of culture and cultural objects to definite, determinate spaces that continues to be presumed in the disciplinary tasks of most of the humanities and social sciences: literary studies are still divided into national specialties; area studies continue to dominate the social sciences; and even cultural studies as a field begins not with a rejection of the nation as an appropriate "field" of study (think of the national cultural histories written by E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, and Richard Hoggart)[3] but with a complication of the national field through the introduction of the serious study of popular and mass culture. If culture has for a long time been understood as "the particularizing, localizing force that distinguished societies and people from

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one another,"[4] globalization has thus forced us to think of a different space for culture — to think of culture as "deterritorialized,"[5] or as something that is not merely "local" "national" or "regional," but which is also already global.[6]

This is one of the reasons why comparative projects like this one are essential. But having said this, it is also important to realize that to think about culture in a world that has been "globalized" is a difficult, complex task, that is full of ideological traps and pitfalls. While it is easy to produce abstract models for culture that emphasize the new translocality or deterritorialization of culture, it is much harder to actually make sense of the complicated ways in which culture is produced at the intersection of a variety of "global" and "local" forces, as well as the way in which culture is constantly being both deterritorialized and reterritorialized. One of the dangers of focusing on globalization as it is either represented in or produced by various cultural objects such as literature, film, music, television programs, and so on, is that it is all too easy to substitute models of global cultural space for the reality of global culture. The existence of all sorts of hybrid cultural forms that we in the West, and particularly in the Western academy, now have access to, from postcolonial literature to fusion music and cuisine to global cinema, along with a transformed global economic system that has become "global" in a different way from what it has been even in the recent past, seems to validate the thesis of a massive transformation of cultural space, its liquidation into flows that intersect unpredictably to produce new cultural forms and identities. If this sense of cultural deterritorialization is intended at least in part to replace a simpler version of cultural imperialism in which resistance to hegemonic cultural forms was futile, it is important not to err too far on the other side as well, seeing resistance in so many locations that it is hard to understand why the world isn't already fundamentally different from what it in fact is.

And this is why it still remains important to think about the nation in literary studies. For even while it might now seem as if postcolonial literature circulates within a very different set of sociohistorical coordinates from those that Fredric Jameson outlines in "Third-World Literature," the nation continues to remain an ineliminable structural presence within the contemporary "cultural pattern." Far from rendering national allegory useless, globalization makes it an increasingly important interpretive mode or problematic; this is no doubt why, seemingly counterintuitively, the nation has become more and more prominent in Jameson's own attempts to make sense of the phenomena associated with globalization.

As everyone knows, the nation has been one of the main sites of struggle in

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globalization — whether globalization is understood as the name for a set of real, empirical processes that characterize variously the cultural, social, and economic dimensions of contemporary capitalism or as the name for a number of competing narratives about the evolving shape of the contemporary political landscape and of the character of any future polity.[7] It has been frequently suggested that globalization has rendered the nation-state irrelevant, because (for instance) the nation no longer seems to retain any juridical power or control over capital or labor, both of which cross borders and evade state surveillance with increasing ease (though far more so in the case of capital and its associated modes of credit, finance, etc., than in the case of the physical bodies of individual laborers). Then there is the (more or less) antithetical position, which holds that the decline of the nation and nation-state has been much exaggerated. Not only are most companies "tethered to their home economies and are likely to remain so," but also the actions of sovereign nation-states alone have produced new forms of sovereignty through international regulatory mechanisms like the GATT and NAFTA and nation-states have ensured compliance with the global operations of the market at a national level.[8] More recently, commentators have wanted to suggest that neither of these two poles adequately makes sense of the complex, heterogeneous position of the nation-state within globalization. This is, in part, as Jean and John Comaroff point out, because "there is no such thing, save at very high levels of abstraction, as '*the* nation-state'": in many polities, either the "nation" or the "state" doesn't exist as such, while in other places there exists a deep fissure between state and government that makes it impossible to speak of anything that approaches typical ideas about what a functioning nation-state looks like.[9] Put differently, "the processes by which millennial capitalism is taking shape do not reduce to a simple narrative according to which the nation-state either lives or dies, ebbs or flourishes. Its impact is much more complicated, more polyphonous and dispersed, and most immediately felt in the everyday contexts of work and labor, of domesticity and consumption, of street life and media-gazing."[10]

Whether it has died or still lives, the nation-state has long represented the specifically modernist political project of creating citizen-subjects defined through their attachment to national identities. Connected to this project (which on its own is easy to be suspicious of) is a whole history of left political engagement that has made effective use (or so the story goes) of this historical compromise between capital and labor to bring about the social gains associated with left activism over the past one hundred and fifty years or so. Whether or not the powers of the

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nation-state have declined over the past several decades, the nation as such is frequently evoked or imagined as the only possible site of progressive politics (due largely, it seems, to its scale) and thus as something that should be fought for in order to maintain or preserve the political project of the left.[11] This desire for the possibilities (incorrectly) associated with the nation-state cannot help but be confused with more empirical analyses of its function within globalization, which is perhaps why the defense of the nation continues to be associated with a left that in the past sought to distance itself from nationalism.[12] Against this position, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have strongly asserted that "it is a grave mistake to harbor any nostalgia for the powers of the nation-state or to resurrect any politics that celebrates the nation."[13] For them, the relative decline of the sovereignty of the nation-state is the result of a historical, structural process — the globalization of production and circulation, backed up by those supraterritorial agreements that have incurred the wrath of antiglobalization protestors — and is not "simply the result of an ideological position that might be reversed by an act of political will." They also point out that "even if the nation were still to be an effective weapon, the nation carries with it a whole series of repressive structures and ideologies" of which a properly left politics should be appropriately wary.[14] Too simple demands concerning the political or conceptual necessity of the nation or of the nation-state need to be treated with proper caution, or need to be seen as a potentially debilitating form of nostalgia for political possibilities that no longer exist.

It is possible to mistake Jameson's recent interest in the nation as little more than nostalgia for a modernist form of politics (a politics that believes in the citizen rather than the consumer) in very much the same way that some critics have taken his interest in the third (or indeed, the second) world as a search for an Other to a capitalism that "has no social goals."[15] A cursory reading of either of Jameson's most explicit attempts to theorize globalization does little to dispel this impression. In "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," he laments the "tendential extinction of new national cultural and artistic production" that is the consequence of the domination of the global cultural industries by the United States and endorses state support of culture in places like France and Canada.[16] He also makes the claim that in the first world the powers of the state "are what must be protected against the right-wing attempts to dissolve it back into private businesses and operations of all kinds," a point he reaffirms in "Globalization and Political Strategy," where he states outright that "the nation-state today remains the only concrete terrain and framework for political struggle," even though the

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struggle against globalization "cannot be successfully prosecuted to a conclusion in completely national or nationalist terms."[17]

While this might seem to be an affirmation of the kind of view of the nation that Hardt and Negri warn against, in the context of Jameson's supple examination of the contradictions and antinomies of globalization a different reason for foregrounding the nation emerges that is of a piece with its presence in his discussion of third-world literature. In both of his recent articles on globalization, Jameson tries to gauge the significance of the global export of American mass culture (through its intersection with the economic, social, and technological) in order to understand what it might mean to try to oppose or to resist its spread around the world. This is, of course, an expression of the cultural imperialist thesis in a nutshell: an understanding of globalization that, while still predominant in the cultural imagination of academics and the general public alike, has been criticized as misunderstanding the contemporary operations of culture and power.[18] But while on the surface Jameson seems merely to express a Western academic's worries about the disappearance of traditional ways of life, the reappearance of the nation as a conceptual concern complicates our desire to see globalization as something to be either lamented or celebrated. For instance, what Jameson finds disturbing about the global triumph of American cinema is that it marks "the death of the political, and an allegory of the end of the possibility of imagining radically different social alternatives to this one we now live under. For political film in the 1960s and 1970s still affirmed that possibility (as did modernism in general, in a more complex way), by affirming that the discovery or invention of a radically new form was at one with the discovery or invention of radically new social relations and ways of living in the world. It is those possibilities—filmic, formal, political, and social—that have disappeared as some more definitive hegemony of the United States has seemed to emerge."[19] This demand for the persistence of other modes of national culture has little to do with the nation as such. It isn't the case, for example, that Jameson lauds French film because it is formally or thematically richer than American film, either due to its relationship to some purer national essence (say, summer misadventures in the provinces as an adolescent, an apparently inescapable theme for French filmmakers) or because it is produced outside of the strict demands of the market (as a result of state subsidies). Rather, in our present political and cultural circumstances, the nation names for Jameson the possibility of new social relations and forms of collectivity not just "other" to neoliberal globalization, but the possibility of imagining these kinds of relations at all. Such forms of collectivity are

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not to be found in some actual national space: "today no enclaves—aesthetic or other—are left in which the commodity form does not reign supreme."[20] Rather, the nation is now part of the new problem of contemporary cultural revolution, a part of the problematic of globalization than one cannot avoid even if one shares Hardt and Negri's suspicions about the politics of actually existing nation-states; it once again names a reified "cultural pattern," though with different valences and different connections to other concepts and problems than before.

The nation stands for three things in Jameson's recent reflections on globalization. It identifies, first, the possibility of other modes of social life that are organized in strikingly different ways from the American-led "culture-ideology of consumption." Other "national situations" offer models of different forms of collective and social life—not, it is important to add, in the form of "traditional" or "prelapsarian" modes of social being, but in the form of "rather recent and successful accommodations of the old institutions to modern technology."[21] Second, the nation is the name for a frankly utopic space that designates "whatever programmes and representations express, in however distorted or unconscious a fashion, the demands of a collective life to come, and identify social collectivity as the crucial centre of any truly progressive and innovative political response to globalization."[22] These words at the end of "Globalization and Political Strategy" are actually meant to define the word "utopian" rather than the nation. The link between the two terms is made possible in a note that appears a few pages earlier, where Jameson claims that "the words 'nationalism' and 'nationalist' have always been ambiguous, misleading, perhaps even dangerous. The positive or 'good' nationalism I have in mind involves what Henri Lefebvre liked to call 'the great collective project,' and takes the form of the attempt to construct a nation."[23]

Finally, Jameson discusses the nation not in order to settle the case either for or against globalization—rejecting, for instance, the false universality of the "American way of life" in favor of one of so many other (rapidly evaporating) national models, which themselves have never yet yielded positive social alternatives—"but rather to intensify their incompatibility and opposition such that we can live this particular contradiction as our own historic form of Hegel's unhappy consciousness."[24] If "Globalization and Political Strategy" ends with a discussion of utopia, "Notes on Globalization" ends with a discussion of the necessity of the dialectic, and of the Hegelian dialectic in particular. The aim of the dialectic is to understand phenomena in order, finally, to locate the contradictions behind them: in Hegel's *Logic*, the discovery of the Identity of identity and

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nonidentity that reveals Opposition as Contradiction. But this is not the final moment. "Contradiction then passes over into its Ground, into what I would call the situation itself, the aerial view or the map of the totality in which things happen and History takes place."[25] Such a map of the moment when the nation is thought to have been superseded once and for all can only be produced if the nation, the Ground of an earlier moment, is put into play in the dialectic rather than suspended from the outset.

And here we find that we have looped back around to Jameson's discussion of the ineliminable horizon of those objective "cultural patterns" that third-world writers have to confront just as much as first-world critics. Which is a long way of saying that far from obliterating the Marxian problematic, especially with respect to the contemporary use and abuse of culture, globalization makes it more important than ever.

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