

Empire, Nation, and the Question of Space

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Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.

Edward Said

The struggle over geography is an abiding one. In recent times, decolonization – that is, the processes of dismantling the various European empires in Ireland, throughout the Asian and African continents, and in the Caribbean region – has been the most significant, and world-historical, instance of such a struggle. At the start of the twentieth century, the colonial world-system was a hierarchical one of metropolitan states of western Europe and their colonial possessions across the world. This is what Frantz Fanon was referring to when he described the world he lived in as one “divided into compartments” (37). In that dispensation, the metropolitan states ruled over the peripheral regions of the world – with the greater part of the Earth’s surface and the majority of its residents – through a set of economic, political, and cultural structures and strictures. This colonial world-system was reshaped through the processes of decolonization that underwrote the radical character of the twentieth century and saw the emergence of our contemporary world-system of nominally equal territorialized nation-states. Decolonization, as indeed with colonization before it, was undoubtedly a complex set of processes at whose heart lie issues of economic exploitation, political domination, and cultural hegemony. But these processes are also, and crucially, implicated in space, or, more properly put, in the project of space-making.

Space-Making in Colonial Capitalist Modernity

Speaking about the laboring process in the first volume of *Capital*, Karl Marx notes that human beings confront external nature “to appropriate

Nature's productions in a form adapted to . . . [their] own wants" (173). He goes on to state that by "acting on the external world and changing it, [they also change their] . . . own nature" (Marx 173). This interaction between directed human labor and external nature begins and continues the social production and reproduction of our lives, life-worlds, and indeed the world at large, gesturing toward what scholars have termed *the production of space*. The phrase "production of space" comes from Henri Lefebvre's seminal work by that name where he cautions against thinking of space as a mere container or a neutral setting in which life is conducted. Space for him is an ingredient, the means, and the outcome of social relations. Space encompasses physical geographies, the routines of everyday life, and symbolic meanings associated with it. Lefebvre is particularly invested in showing how space, in this complex register, is produced, reproduced, and undergoes a fundamental transformation under capitalism.

With the ascendancy of capitalist relations of production, labor power becomes a commodity that is used to produce other commodities – not for consumption by their producers but for exchange and profit. To say this another way, under capitalism, labor power is unmoored from the process of reproducing life and is transformed into an abstraction, or *abstract labor*. This process has a spatial correlate. Lefebvre notes that under capitalism local and rooted forms and notions of spatiality (typically signified as *place*) break down, with spatial existence now transforming into an abstraction that is "beyond immediate experience" (Smith 107–108). In sum, place is reconstituted into space. Over time, he suggests, this process transforms *absolute space* – spaces that were the product of "the bonds of consanguinity, soil and language" and associated with use-value – into *abstract space* (48). For Lefebvre, abstract space is the space associated with exchange-value and abstract labor that is "homogenous . . . [and] serves those forces which make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in their way . . . in short, of differences" (285, italics in original). He also notes that abstract space, like capitalism that is the condition of its production, tends to proliferate across the world. This is an important observation as it points to the space-making and indeed the *world-making* dimensions of colonial capitalist modernity that we typically signal through the conceptual shorthand *colonization* though it should, more accurately, be called *colonial globalization*.

Elaborating on the production of space on a global scale, Neil Smith notes that as more and more isolated labor processes are brought together in relations of exchange as wage labor (and thus rendered abstract), more and more absolute spaces are integrated into the world economy as abstract

space. As the capitalist mode of production becomes hegemonic the world over, it turns *place* into *space* at a global scale and produces a world separated “into legally distinct parcels, divided by great white fences, real or imaginary” (Smith 116). This process fashions the world as a concatenation of *bounded spaces* – that is, bounded territorial markets for the buying and selling of labor power and other commodities. In addition, it also engenders new *kinds*, and *conceptions*, of hierarchical spaces. Key among these spatial categories are the *metropole* and the *colony*, each with their distinct characteristics and connotations. During the colonial period, the metropole was typically expressed as a nation-state with a national culture marked with ideas of progress and superiority. Furthermore, these spaces were assumed to be at the vanguard of civilization and their citizens considered the lords of humankind. On the other hand, the semi-peripheries and peripheries of the world were deemed territorial possessions of the metropolitan states. Considered secondary spaces or non-places, their residents’ claims to nationhood, as indeed to full humanity, were necessarily denied. The processes of colonialism, then, shaped the world in a decisive manner: it produced a globally connected space that was also fundamentally hierarchical, signaling what several generations of scholars have called *the one and unequal world*.¹

The *border* or *boundary* was another crucial spatial category that was forged in the crucible of colonial capitalist modernity. It was key for separating out the spatial entities and identities of the metropolitan states and colonies from each other, and it structured – and continues to structure – human subjectivities in decisive ways. It would be quite unremarkable to say that our contemporary world is one that is composed of distinct territorialized units separated out by national boundaries. On the contrary, given just how naturalized our sense of living in a bounded world is, suggesting that the boundary concept has a colonial provenance and emerged at a specific historical moment may strike some readers as remarkable. The historicity of the border is illuminated by the historian Thongchai Winichakul in his study on Siam (Thailand). He points out that the interactions between the British and the Siamese were rife with discrepant understandings of what a border signified since, for the Siamese, “the limits of a kingdom could be defined only by [border] townships’ allegiance to the center of a kingdom [and the] political sphere ... only by power relationships, not by territorial integrity” (Winichakul 79). Winichakul notes that while the Siamese did not lack the terminology and concepts for boundaries, those categories tended to signify “areas, districts, or frontiers, not boundary lines. They mean[t] a

limit – an extremity without a clear-cut edge and without the sense of division between two powers” (75). His observations not only show the *historicity* and *modernity* of the boundary concept but also underline its centrality in shaping our identities that are, in the last instance, spatial.

The categories of space and identity typically converge and, just as typically, are expressed as bounded entities. For instance, when we say that we are Canadian or Chinese or Zambian, we appear to be speaking about belonging to a community that shares certain common cultural features. Yet this understanding of identity or *culture* that evokes a shared heritage is also signaled through a demarcation and carries within itself, if only implicitly, a sense of boundedness. A Canadian is not an American; Chinese culture is distinct from its Mongolian counterpart; to belong to Zambia necessarily means that the person does not belong to Tanzania; and so it goes. This is why Edward Said notes that culture necessarily “designates a boundary by which the concepts of what is extrinsic or intrinsic to the culture come into forceful play” (“Secular” 9). And while Raymond Williams is entirely correct to note that culture is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language,” it is nevertheless possible to suggest that the category of the nation is the readiest instance through which we encounter the idea of a *bounded culture* (*Keywords* 87).

The Nation and Its Imagination

Nowhere is this idea of the nation as a bounded culture articulated more cogently than in Benedict Anderson’s resonant formulation of the nation as an “imagined political community” (6). His qualification of the definition is particularly illuminating. Anderson writes that the nation is not simply an “imagined political community” but one that is, crucially, “imagined as both inherently *limited* and sovereign” (6, emphasis added). Elaborating on the idea of “limited,” he notes that no nation imagines itself as coterminous with all of humankind; no matter how large or populous, all nations have “finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” (Anderson 7). Anderson suggests that nations, once created, become “modular” and are “capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations” (4). Developing a theorization of the nation that relies on the secularization of eschatological time, and on Walter Benjamin’s notion of “homogenous empty time,” Anderson suggests that

the idea of the nation is predicated on the development of a sense of temporal simultaneity (Benjamin 264). In his formulation, time is freed from the trappings of sacrality and acquires the sense of “simultaneity [that is] . . . transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar” (Anderson 24). This emergent sense of temporality, for Anderson, is shaped through “print capitalism” – namely, the development of the novel and the newspaper that enables readers to imagine themselves to be simultaneously inhabiting the expanse of the nation (43–46).

The idea of the modern nation as an imagined and delimited political community has distinct spatial implications because it is located on a specific extent of the globe – that is, a *territory*. Anderson, however, is largely incurious about the spatial implications of his theorization, though in a self-critical reflection of his work in its revised, second edition (1991), he notes that what he “had believed to be a significantly new contribution to thinking about nationalism – changing apprehensions of time – patently lacked its necessary coordinate: changing apprehensions of space” (xiii–xiv). In that edition Anderson includes a chapter – “Census, Map and Museum” – after a “brilliant doctoral thesis by Thongchai Winichakul, a young Thai historian, stimulated . . . [him] to think about mapping’s contribution to the nationalist imagination” (xiv). He argues that the genealogy of the “popular nationalist enthusiasm” of the new – that is, postcolonial – nation-states “should be traced to the imaginings of the colonial state” (Anderson 163). For him, the census, map, and museum are the “three institutions of power . . . [that] change their form and function as the colonized zones enter the age of mechanical reproduction” and shape popular national consciousness (Anderson 163). While Anderson’s comments on the census, map, and museum are undoubtedly insightful, more significant for us is his invocation of the *state* that often remains largely unremarked upon in theoretical considerations of the nation.

Key among theorists who make explicit the relationship between the *state*, *territory*, and the *nation* is Eric Hobsbawm. He tells us, somewhat counterintuitively, that nations “do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around” (10). Hobsbawm also adds that the nation “exists only as functions of a particular kind of *territorial state* or the aspiration to establish one” (10, emphasis added). Hobsbawm’s comments are significant not only because he signals a relationship between the territorial state and the nation but especially because he reminds us of the primacy of the state over the nation in the fashioning of the latter. To put Hobsbawm in conversation with Anderson, we could say that the territorial state shapes

or sanctions the imagination of the political community that is the *nation* and produces the distinctly modern, and normative, spatial form of colonial capitalist modernity: the *nation-state*.

The problematic of state power and its role in the shaping of the nation, however, finds its most astute and complex theorization in the work of Nikos Poulantzas, who notes that “in capitalist social formations, the nation is both of a specific character and closely bound up with the State [sic] Indeed, the state here exhibits the historical tendency to encompass a single, constant nation (in the modern sense of the term)” (95). Explaining this phenomenon, he writes that since capitalism transforms the conceptual matrices of space and time fundamentally, it also impacts the “reality and meaning of territory and historicity. These changes both allow and entail the constitution of the modern nation: by mapping out a . . . new relationship of the State [sic] to territory and historicity, they bring into being the modern nation and the nation State [sic]” (Poulantzas 97). In such a situation, Poulantzas writes:

the State [sic] establishes the peculiar relationship between *history* and *territory*, between the spatial and the temporal matrix. In fact, the modern nation makes possible the intersection of these matrices . . . the capitalist State [sic] marks out the frontiers when it constitutes what is within (the people-nation) by homogenizing the before and the after of the content of this enclosure. National unity or the modern unity thereby becomes *historicity of a territory and territorialization of a history* – in short, a territorial national tradition concretized in the nation-State. (114, emphasis in original)

Poulantzas’ totemic phrase – the “*historicity of a territory and territorialization of a history*” – points to the “peculiar relationship” that the state establishes between history and the territory it rules over. Poulantzas’ formulation could also be understood in narrative terms – the state emplots the category of the national in space and time to produce the nation-state, or, to say this another way, *the state narrativizes the nation-state*.

While Poulantzas and Hobsbawm provide astute conceptualizations of the emergence of metropolitan nation-states, their insights need to be qualified for the colonial context. In the colonies, we find the colonial states seeking to thwart the national ambitions of the residents of their territorial possessions while anticolonial nationalisms strive to seize state power and establish an ante-colonial state, which is the utopian horizon of its decolonizing politics. In such a milieu, the task of historicizing a territory and territorializing its history – in sum, the narrativization of

the nation – is taken up by the dominant classes in an anticolonial social formation. These sections fashion the ideological processes that find expression as anticolonial nationalism – the condition of possibility for decolonization; that is, the capture of state power and the establishment of a nation-state.

The emergence of peripheral or non-Western nations has been the subject of some creative theorizations. Outlining his understanding of the development of the Indian nation, Partha Chatterjee critiques Anderson's notion of the modularity of the nation form to suggest that the postcolonial world should not be understood as "perpetual consumers of modernity [who choose their] imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas" (5). Asserting that Indian nationalism was different from that of its metropolitan counterparts, he notes that "anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society ... by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual" (Chatterjee 6). This process, he claims (although without much explanation), is the "fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa" (Chatterjee 6). Furthermore, Chatterjee claims that anticolonial nationalism acknowledges the superiority of the West in the "outer," material domain but declares the spiritual realm as its "sovereign territory and refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain" (6). It is in this "inner," spiritual domain – the domain of vernacular language, the family, and religion – that the imagined community of the Indian nation is brought into being. Only after constituting a horizontal comradeship in this domain, he contends, can nationalism launch its struggle against the modern regime of disciplinary power – namely, the colonial state. Chatterjee outlines three broad themes of the nationalist project: the appropriation of the popular, the classicization of tradition, and the contradictory impulse of the hegemonic domain of nationalism to stress colonial difference in the "inner" domain while attempting to eradicate it in the "outer" (72–75).

Perhaps the most significant attempt to think with the categories of space and state about the nation beyond the so-called West is Manu Goswami's theorization of the genesis of the modern Indian nation. Developing her argument through a critical engagement with Chatterjee's work, Goswami notes that he takes for granted "what must be accounted for, that is, the sociohistorical constitution of notions of India as a bounded national space" (26). Instead of "presupposing an

autonomous sociocultural domain exempt from colonial and capitalist mediation or positing indigenous practices as untranslatable in any but local terms,” she insists that the colonial and nationalist forms should be understood as having been “coproduced within a common, if asymmetrically structured, social field” (Goswami 23–25). Building on Lefebvre’s claim of the state as a “spatial framework of power” and Poulantzas’ idea of the “historicization of territory and the territorialization of history,” Goswami contends that Indian nationalism produced the nation-space of India from the colonial state-space of British India (165–208). In her formulation, Indian anticolonial nationalism effected a “complex re-articulation and re-signification of specific *Puranic* [mythical] spatiotemporal schemas” that were “sacral, concentric, infinite, and fundamentally open [with] no demarcated or fixed limit” (Goswami 154, 158). Such a process of resignification, Goswami contends, is effected through rail travel in colonial India that produces British India as a continuous and bounded space for Indian travelers. Consequently, the Indian nation is produced as a specific chronotope that is an expression of the “territorialization of [*Puranic-Itihas* – that is, mythical histories of India] . . . that marked a modernist and historicist discourse of nationhood [and] identified upper-caste Hindus as the organic, original, core nationals from the standpoint of . . . a fictive unity between past and present” (Goswami 10; also see Basu).

While Goswami foregrounds the spatial in her theorization of the nation, her otherwise-compelling account does not engage the role of ideology in imagining and naturalizing the (conception of the) Indian nation-space. This is particularly surprising not only because she begins her study by noting that “making the nation appear natural [is] central to the project of nationalism,” a statement that seems like a classic delineation of the operations of ideology, but also because literary-critical categories such as the “chronotope,” “myth,” and “resignification” are fundamental to her argument (Goswami 1). Indeed, this omission underlines the salience of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s observation: “Benedict Anderson’s book *Imagined Communities* has made us all aware of how crucial the category ‘imagination’ is to the analysis of nationalism . . . compared to the idea of community, imagination remains a curiously undiscussed category in social science writings on nationalism” (149).

The Place of the Literary

Several materialist theorists of literature and culture have, however, taken up the category of imagination – or ideology, as such – to think about how

it shapes our ideas of space. Locating space at the nexus of material and mental processes, they have indicated how we make sense of space as such, and of specific spaces such as the colony and the nation. Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* is perhaps the single most important study of this kind. It offers readers a delineation of the changing notions of the city and the countryside in English literary representations from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, as well as an elaboration of the concept of landscape as a sociospatial and aesthetic category. Commenting on the ideologically slanted depictions of the country and the city, Williams notes that the "contrast [between town and country] depends, often, on just the suppression of work in the countryside, and of the property relations through which this work is organised" to present the rural as a space of unsullied nature – typically expressed as "here nature, there worldliness" (46). For him, capitalist exploitation, especially of the countryside, signals a crisis of perspective that is negotiated by "dissolv[ing it] into a landscape" (46). The category of landscape, Williams writes, is a way of looking at the land that "implies separation and observation" (120). It also suggests a "self-conscious observer . . . who is not only looking at land but who is [also] conscious [of] . . . doing so, as an experience in itself, and who has prepared social models and analogies from elsewhere to support and justify the experience" (121). Offering readers a set of coordinates to examine the landscape aesthetic – property relations, distance from the land, a crisis of perspective, the mystification of labor and the concomitant idealization of nature, the self-conscious observer, and the categories of the pastoral and counter-pastoral – Williams presents the landscape form as a visual ideology that emerges from the enclosures and the disappearance of the commons that marked the capitalist mode of production establishing its roots in England.

Williams' text is also one of the first major literary critical works to draw attention to the centrality of the colonies – and of slavery and colonialism as such – to the development of an industrial Britain. In the penultimate chapter (suggestively titled "The New Metropolis"), Williams notes that the major industrial or "metropolitan" societies "through a system of trade, but also through a complex of economic and political controls" produced the colonial world-system (279). Drawing on the country–city analytic to explain European imperialism, he writes that what "happened in England has since been happening even more widely, in new dependent relationships between all the industrialized nations and all the other 'undeveloped' but economically important lands. Thus one of the last models of 'city and country' is the system we now know as imperialism" (279). Crucially,

Williams does not leave out the brutal reality of slavery but connects it as an integral aspect of the capitalist mode of production:

European societies and their immigrant settlers were beginning to organize increased production . . . [I]n tropical regions, they began organizing “labour”: that polite term for the slave trade from Africa – anything from three million slaves in the seventeenth century to seven million in the eighteenth. The new rural economy of the tropical plantations – sugar, coffee, cotton – was built by this trade in flesh, and once again the profits fed back into the country-house system. (280)

The most significant aspect of Williams’ discussion of imperialism is his insistence that imperialism was not something that happened elsewhere but a process that connected the colonies to the metropole in an unequal and exploitative relationship. He notes that “the nature of British society” changed owing to an “organized colonial system and the development of an industrial economy” that emerged out of “an intricate process of economic interaction, supported by wars between trading nations for control of the areas of supply” (280). In so doing, he illuminates colonialism and slavery as conditions of possibility for the “development” of Britain, and of the metropolitan nations of Europe in general.

Despite Williams’ groundbreaking work in illuminating the nexus between representation, space, and empire, the mantle of pioneer in this regard typically falls on Edward Said and his texts *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) and *Orientalism* (1978). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said critiques Williams, if somewhat tendentiously, to claim that the “few tantalizing pages in *The Country and the City* that touch on culture and imperialism are peripheral to the book’s main idea” (65).² Said proposes, instead, to connect empire to secular criticism through a “geographical inquiry into historical experience [because no one] is outside or beyond geography . . . [nor] free from the struggle over geography” (*Culture* 7). Elaborating further, he posits his project as an investigation into the

structures of location and geographical reference [that] appear in the cultural languages of literature, history, or ethnography, sometimes allusively and sometimes carefully plotted, across several individual works that are not otherwise connected to one another or to an official ideology of “empire.” (52)

This study reads a wide variety of texts – Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Aida* as well as Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, to name just a few – to demonstrate how the colony or the non-West is configured in the texts. Said’s focus on the

representation of colonial space in *Culture and Imperialism* continues his engagement with the idea of “imaginative geography” that he develops in his seminal work, *Orientalism*.³ Readers will recall that Said delineates orientalism as

a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of “interests” which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than *expresses*, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world . . . (12, emphases in original)

We cite this extract at length as it underlines Said’s investment in the spatial – notice, for instance, his use of words such as “geographical distinction,” “world,” “two unequal halves,” “landscape” – as he outlines his project. Elsewhere in that study, drawing on the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, Said notes that “space acquires emotional or even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here” (55). He adds further that “imaginative geography and history helped the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away . . . [and] from the earliest times in Europe the Orient was something more than what was empirically known about it” (55). While Said’s assertion that the historical trajectory of orientalism can “accommodate Aeschylus, . . . Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx” has been justly critiqued, *Orientalism* as a study is nevertheless insightful in drawing attention to the politics of representation and, indeed, the complicity of representation as such in the process of “othering” (3).⁴

Patrick Brantlinger’s *Rule of Darkness* (1988) is one of the most significant studies of British literature and imperialism that develops the research agenda outlined in the works of Williams and Said. The study, focused on British literary and cultural productions from 1830 to 1914, examines texts ranging from Robert Southey’s *The Curse of Kehama* and “Botany Bay Eclogues” and William Thackeray’s novels to pamphlets and novels on Africa and literary depictions of the Indian Uprising (called the Sepoy Mutiny by the British) of 1857. A work that straddles literary criticism and cultural history, *Rule of Darkness* shows the emergence of certain tropes

through which colonial people and spaces were made intelligible in the colonies. Brantlinger illuminates, for instance, how the novels of H. Rider Haggard and John Buchan, along with abolitionist, missionary, and eugenicist writings, were complicit in the ideological production of Africa as the "Dark Continent." Likewise, his examination of British literary and cultural productions depicting the Indian Uprising demonstrates how they presented India as an irrational space of violence and sexual depravity.

Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995) is another powerful engagement with imperial power and its entanglements with literature, culture, and space. It begins with a memorable reading of the treasure map from Haggard's novel *King Solomon's Mines* that shows that, if inverted, the map is the "diagram of a female body . . . spread-eagled and truncated [and] the only parts drawn are those that denote female sexuality" (McClintock 3). Developing an intersectional analytic, McClintock suggests the map brings together three major themes of European imperialism: the transmission of patriarchal power, "the emergence of a new global order of cultural knowledge; and the imperial command of commodity capital" (2-3). Crucially, the map also shows the *spatialization* of gender, race, and class, and this is made more explicit as she develops the ideas of "panoptical time" and "anachronistic space" (McClintock 30-42). For McClintock, panoptical time emerges as imperialism transforms temporal registers into "a geography of social power . . . [and] a map from which to read a global allegory of 'natural' social difference" (37). Likewise, as the notion of

imperial progress across the space of empire is figured as a journey backward in time to an anachronistic moment of prehistory[,] the agency of women, the colonized and the industrial working class are disavowed and projected onto anachronistic space: prehistoric, atavistic and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity. (McClintock 40)

In other words, McClintock underlines imperialism's logic of "othering" that fashions the colony, the domestic sphere, and locales of labor as backward spaces.

The ideological labor that undergirds the colonial production of the colony as an "other" space peopled by brutes and barbarians is countered by the anticolonial insistence on the spatial coevalness of the colonies and their residents' claims to full humanity. Literary and cultural productions play a crucial role in articulating these anticolonial demands for nationhood, as has been convincingly shown by Timothy Brennan in his essay "The National Longing for Form" (1990). Connecting "nation" to representation, he notes that they depend "for their existence on an apparatus of

cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role” (Brennan 49). Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of “heteroglossia” and elaborating on Anderson’s claim about the centrality of the novel to the nation, Brennan argues that the literary form “accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the ‘one, yet many’ [logic] of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles” (49).⁵ But the singularity of Brennan’s intervention is in his creative use of Erich Auerbach’s delineation of realism.⁶ Commenting on the “composite” quality of the novel, Brennan notes that it accompanies

a changing concept of “realism” itself, which acquired its present association with the lower classes only after the Enlightenment when, as Auerbach describes, realism came to involve: “the serious treatment of everyday reality, the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject matter . . .” [as it] brought together the “high” and the “low” within a national framework – not fortuitously, but for specific national reasons. (52)

Though the spatial is repeatedly alluded to in the essay through its invocation of categories such as “form,” “territories,” and “border,” Brennan does not engage the category explicitly in his essay. More recently, Sandeep Banerjee has engaged space and representation from the vantage point of decolonization in *Space, Utopia, and Indian Decolonization* (2019). Drawing on Ernst Bloch’s characterization of the “Principle of Hope,” he posits decolonization as a kind of utopian spatial desire that insists on “a better *locus* of being and living” (Banerjee 5, emphasis in original).⁷ Banerjee constellates colonial and anticolonial texts, reading them to suggest that “anti-colonial texts . . . are engaged in the utopian task of re-imagining the [space of the] colony as the postcolony . . . [while] perform[ing] the pedagogical task of providing an aesthetic education about it” (5). Banerjee moves away from the category of the nation to think with the category of the postcolony, an inchoate utopian space of a decolonized future. He demonstrates that the imagination of the postcolony ranges from the parochial to the universal and that, while “all counter-colonial spatial imaginaries are utopian in their negation of colonialism, they are, nevertheless, radically different from – and at times mutually incompatible with – each other” (Banerjee 9).

The studies that we have discussed not only examine the literary and the spatial together, and in relation to each other, but also consider the ways in which the literary domain shapes our sense of space. All representations, by definition, are located, and implicated, in space – they depict space, and in

so doing offer readers ways of knowing space. They provide readers with a cognitive education about space. Representations also provide readers with ways of feeling and relating to space, thereby offering an education of their sentiments. Furthermore, representations provide readers with definite if intangible ways of being in a space, thus shaping our senses of place. And if place is space invested with meaning, representations are a key aspect of place-making. They are means through which we infuse the abstract and disenchanted spaces of capitalist modernity with symbolic meanings and transform space into place. In so doing, we give abstract spatial categories – “nation,” “frontier,” “home,” to name just a few – specific meanings and connotations, naturalizing these categories into real and tangible ones and making them fundamental aspects of our existence. In sum, we provisionally suggest, the literary provides readers with an aesthetic education about space.

Notes

- 1 The origins of the idea of the “one and unequal” develop out of Leon Trotsky’s conceptualization of “combined and uneven development” (CUD) in the first chapter of his history of the Russian Revolution. For an elaboration of CUD, see Löwy. CUD has been an important analytic for understanding and theorizing colonial and capitalist immiseration in various parts of the world, and it gave rise to what has been called “dependency theory” and theory of the “development of underdevelopment” (see Amin; Frank; Wallerstein).
- 2 For a reading of *The Country and the City* that underlines its preoccupation with empire, and its critical method as one that anticipates Ngũgĩ’s globaleclectal reading, see Banerjee, “World Literature.”
- 3 For another discussion of Said, see Chapter 9.
- 4 For a critique of the historical and theoretical inaccuracies of Said’s *Orientalism*, see Ahmad.
- 5 See Bakhtin.
- 6 See Auerbach.
- 7 See Bloch.

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