Space, Place and Hybridity in the National Imagination
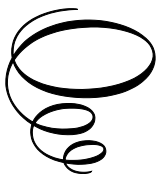
Space, Place and Hybridity in the National Imagination

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to be a dot in a painting by Miro.
Barely distinguishable from other dots,
it's true, but quite uniquely placed.
And from my dark centre
I'd survey the beauty of the linescape
and wonder—would it be worthwhile
to roll myself towards the lemon stripe,
Centrally poised, and push my curves
against its edge, to give myself
a little attention?
But it's fine where I am.
I'll never make out what's going on
around me, and that's the joy of it.
The fact that I'm not a perfect circle
makes me more interesting in this world.
People will stare forever—
Even the most unemotional get excited.
So here I am, on the edge of animation,
a dream, a dance, a fantastic construction,
A child's adventure.
And nothing in this tawny sky
can get too close, or move too far away.
                Moniza Alvi, "I Would Like to be a Dot in a Painting by Miro"

To speak, about wine even to the waiter, is to bring about an explosion. Up goes the rocket. Its golden grain falls, fertilising, upon the rich soil of my imagination. The entirely unexpected nature of this explosion—that is the joy of intercourse. I, mixed with an unknown Italian waiter—what am I? There is no stability in this world. Who is to say what meaning there is in anything? Who is to foretell the flight of a word? It is a balloon that sails over tree-tops. To speak of knowledge is futile. All is experiment and adventure.

                Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

      As has been extensively proved in former critical work on hybridity in the cultural sphere, from politics and sociology to literature and the visual arts, hybridity is both celebrated for its progressive political

agenda and criticised for its vagueness and imprecision. Many accuse it of being an umbrella term in fashionable use in academic circles but devoid of any real critical edge. Worse still, some critics claim it should not be used any longer as it tends to suggest the idea of a former purity or essentialism before cultural contact and because it has often been a way for Western scholars to speak in very abstract and theoretical terms of specific situations and contexts they do not sufficiently master or scrutinise. Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* insists on the idea of routes rather than roots, especially for African–Americans whose ancestors were torn away from their homeland because of slavery and the middle passage. And many postcolonial critics have seen this idea of an in-between space which is actually a non-place, a place of transit and precarious equilibrium, as an apt metaphor of many diasporic and migrant people all over the world whose own national affiliations are actually more than dual, as we will see in the last part of our volume. As to the issue of a lack of concern for the political and social context, or more precisely for the perspective of the oppressed postcolonial subject, this is a reproach that Gayatri Spivak levelled against postcolonial studies in general as early as 1988 with the publication of a ground-breaking lecture she gave three years before: "Can the subaltern speak?" In her paper she deplored the fact it was always elites, whether the descendants of former colonising nations or the descendants of formerly colonised people who actually managed to find a new privileged place to voice their own views and opinions but almost never the people whose rights, voices and bodies had been appropriated in the first place. She sees the same tendency in western hybridity studies today, which is to give more weight and authority to second-hand commentaries than to first-hand testimonies of actual experiences of oppression and alienation.

National identity on the other hand is often seen as outdated and manipulative but also highly divisive and ultimately vain in its utopian desire to create a common will to feel part of a community that is contingent, shifting and essentially imaginary. The concept has also recurrently been recuperated and instrumentalised by extreme nationalist and populist parties in representations celebrating the greatness of the nation and excluding certain minorities. But this is precisely why a more nuanced and ambitious approach to national imagination and its inherent hybrid nature seem of particular interest and urgency today. And Anderson's claim more than thirty years ago in *Imagined Communities* that the "end of the era of nationalism […] is not remotely in sight" is as valid as ever.[1] But here again,

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[1] "[…] the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time." (Anderson 1983, 2006, 3).

as with hybridity, the main difficulty lies in the apparent elusiveness of the concept, its resistance to both definition and analysis but also consensus.[2] National representations thus offer an interesting vantage point from which to try and analyse how a society within a state sees itself, what it retains of its past and how it keeps reinventing itself.

It is all the more essential today with the acceleration of migration crises which are not always linked to the heritage of former colonisation. Many political and economic critical situations over the past two centuries have rendered the question of mobility a central and even dramatic one, both in western countries and elsewhere, independently of the colonial and postcolonial context. To that extent the questions of both hybridity and national representations analysed by Bhabha in his seminal book *The Location of Culture* in 1994 and which he tended to associate mainly to the colonial and postcolonial context, have to be enlarged to encompass more generally the question of mass migration, ever increasing mobility and all-powerful globalisation. Such a complexification, acceleration and massification of human flows has a highly disrupting impact on the very idea of national representations with the dramatic results that we witness today of a temptation to define western nations as shrines where universal human rights can be guaranteed while, on the other side of most western and developed nation-states' borders, anything can happen. If modern nation-states are to survive and keep their moral integrity they have to find a way to create a space of negotiation between inherited national representations and emerging new ones that can best represent the actual people now living within the boundaries of their national territory and resist the temptation to only define themselves as closed entities with watertight boundaries.

The tendency to consider hybridity as mostly concerned with colonisation has to be widened to that of any transcultural form produced by migration at large in the context of a fierce globalisation that seems to crush people "without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart", as Conrad once said.[3] Bhabha's ground-

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[2] "Nation, nationality, nationalism—all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse." (Ibid.)

[3] Joseph Conrad writes to his friend Cunninghame Graham in 1897 that he fears the world was created with no purpose whatsoever by a mysterious heartless and thoughtless machine: "There is a—let us say—a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold—it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. I feel it ought to embroider—but it goes on knitting. […] And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself; made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident—and it has happened... It knits us

breaking insight in *The Location of Culture* is precisely that the only
redemption for any community, nation or state is to pay attention to what
takes place in the "contact zones," the "third space[s] of enunciation" where
images, representations, ideologemes are reinterpreted, reinvented or
imagined anew because, precisely, they are taken up and negotiated by a
new community trying to find a common ground on which to regroup, so as
to pacify its conflicting interests, reassess its values and recognise the
coexistence of multiple cultural references.

> It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are
> constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that
> we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality
> or "purity" of cultures are untenable […]. It is that third space, though
> unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of
> enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no
> primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated,
> rehistoricized and read anew. (Bhabha 1994, 37)

In order to try and define national representations, space and place are
essential parameters. There are first and foremost the geographical features
of the state and its spatial delimitations but another aspect has to be taken
into account, a "space" that is more elusive and abstract, both cultural and
linguistic, the "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" (37).
The nation-ness of the nation-state swings between two attracting poles, that
of a *place of inscription* in a territory with well-defined borders at a certain
time in the country's history and on the other hand, a set of inherited
symbols, emblems, texts and cultural references, a nexus of major historical
events and figures which are more subjective, shifting and difficult to
define. This second pole is not so much a place as a space, *a space of
projection and negotiation*, a space less tangible, less durable, more porous
and liable to change, Bhabha's "third space of enunciation" where the very
same emblematic figures and features will be reinterpreted, "rehistoricized
and read anew" (37).

    This volume thus interrogates the very idea of the nation as an
imagined community[4] that is both necessary and full of contradictions and

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in and it knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and
all the illusions—and nothing matters. (in *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B.
Cunninghame Graham*, edited by C. T. Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1969), 56-57.
[4] "In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation:
it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and
sovereign.

the extent to which the very diverse origins and cultural references of the "old" and "new" people belonging to the nation, can only be apprehended in their complexity with the help of spatial dynamics and paradigms such as Bhabha's "intersection", "translation" or "displacement" (see quotation below). Bhabha underlines the fact that the nation-ness of the nation is an ongoing process oscillating between rootedness and a form of stability on the one hand and displacement and the eventual reaching of a new transitory stage of equilibrium on the other:

> I want to focus on the enunciative and identificatory processes in the narrow passage in-between the discourse of rootedness, and the "affect" of displacement. My interest lies in the transient intersection where the claims to national culture within the ontological tradition (the presentness of the past and the stability of cultural or ethnic ontology) are touched—and are translated by—the interruptive and interrogative memory of the displaced or displaceable populations that inhabit the national imaginary – be they migrants, minorities, refugees or the colonised. (Bhabha 1996, 191)

This is why the epigraphs chosen for the volume are not so much philosophical or political as really poetic. Moniza Alvi's celebration of the "dream," "dance" and "fantastic construction" to be found in Miro's poetic pictures and configurations is a case in point: like Miro's dot, any citizen is entitled to feel just as much a national as any other and his presence and idiosyncratic cultural background, references and values, contribute to the harmony of the whole nation. And he does not need to get closer to the mainstream "yellow strip" to get visibility and legitimacy: in other words, there are alternatives to policies of assimilation for a sense of nation-ness or "imagined community" to be felt and experienced. Similarly, Woolf celebrates in *The Waves*, her extraordinary and quite unique novel, the creative force of hybridity understood as cross-pollination, *intercourse* between languages and cultural spheres:

> To speak, about wine even to the waiter, is to bring about an explosion. Up goes the rocket. Its golden grain falls, fertilising, upon the rich soil of my imagination. The entirely unexpected nature of this explosion—that is the joy of intercourse. I, mixed with an unknown Italian waiter—what am I? There is no stability in this world. Who is to say what meaning there is in anything? Who is to foretell the flight of a word? It is a balloon that sails over tree-tops. To speak of knowledge is futile. All is experiment and

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It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of the fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the communion." (Anderson 1983, 2006, 6)

adventure. (Woolf 1931, 1992, 84)

The present volume's originality thus lies in its tackling of complex cross-cultural mutations in national definitions and representations through a close attention to both space dynamics and spatial configurations. The hybrid nature of such tentative national constructions and formations is never seen in the abstract and from a general perspective but analysed at a very close range.

In the first section the emblematic symbols of the nation will be assessed in their hybrid construction and nature: whether the actual place like the American wilderness, the Scottish Highlands or iconic emblems (the gumtree in Australia or the harp in the Republic of Ireland). In each case, the landscape, fauna and flora as well as the nationalist symbols have one main advantage, which is to cristallize the idea of the nation in an immediately recognisable and visible "inscape of national identity": "The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression" (Bhabha 1994, 143). But this is not to say that such immediately identifiable nationalist symbols, even when borrowed from "biophysical elements" as Fall puts it, are anything but social or political:

> The construction of space is fundamentally hybrid, involving both societal and biophysical elements, human and non-human. Nature, rather than being separate from the societal, is always social and political, always an intrinsically discursive construction. (Fall 2005, 267)

Marie-Christine Blin demonstrates in her paper how the representation of the American wilderness and more particularly Franconia Notch for world-famous painter Thomas Cole, the founder the Hudson River school, and Yosemite, for landscape architect and social critic Frederick Law Olmsted, was an attempt at defining a new aesthetic category, the American sublime, stressing the vigour and revitalising force of the new nation as opposed to the old continent. Such a new concept was a hybrid construction that differentiated itself from its European counterpart in emphasizing the notion of social redemption and regeneration through contact with pristine nature.

Anne Leguellec-Minel then tackles the question of national representation from the angle of the flora and here, the gumtree in Australia.[5] The article ponders whether the reification of the gumtree as an

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[5] She also wrote another article on the use of national emblems, their heavily political charge and their inevitable contradictions and limitations, in her study of the extinct thylacine as a privileged national icon: "The Tasmanian tiger, from extinction to

emblem of the nation can be seen as a form of hybridization of an Anglo-Celtic culture transplanted into Indigenous Australian space, or whether it merely constitutes an appropriation of an emblem of indigeneity. It focuses mainly on Hans Heysen's painting "Droving into the Light," its critical analysis in Kim Scott's short story "Into the Light" and Aboriginal painter Albert Namatjira's own representations of the gumtree. Such a reflexion then broadens to the larger political and ethical question of land in Australia and how best to genuinely share it and find the right "third space" of negotiation to achieve such a difficult task.

The next chapter offers a more optimistic case study of a hybrid national emblem successful in uniting the people, rather than advantaging one community over the other—the harp in Northern Ireland. Despite its rival use in both nationalist and unionist folklore and culture, it has not become a subject of dispute but rather a conciliatory icon in the service of national unity and cohesion. Lauren Brancaz analyses two case studies in this article, the activities of the Belfast Harp Orchestra (BHO) and those of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and they both illustrate the efforts which have been made in Northern Ireland since the late twentieth century to defuse the political tensions associated with the harp and to ascribe it a neutral cultural significance which is common to the whole island of Ireland.

The last chapter of this first part focuses on Scottish identity and its foregrounding of a specific place and its attendant cultural features—the Highlands. Marion Amblard points to the discrepancy between the inherited binational identity forged in the wake of the Treaty of Union and more particularly in the nineteenth century, and contemporary Scotland and its more complex and hybridized nature. She studies the hybrid artworks Ross Sinclair has produced since 1994 in his Real Life Project, ranging from paintings to sculptures, installations, videos and songs, in an attempt to provoke his audience into thinking for themselves about identity and more precisely national identity.

In the second section the notion of space and place in national imagination focuses even more strongly on an imagined and constructed "third space" of both enunciation and conflicting representations, the entanglement of competing and concomitant self-defeating visions and voices, between ex-colonised and ex-coloniser, between public and private spheres, between clearly identified social and cultural coordinates and imagined ones. The emphasis is less on specific places or emblems or even

identity: myth in white Australian society and fiction" (in André Dodeman & Elodie Raimbault, eds., *Literary Location and Dislocation of Myth in the Post/Colonial Anglophone World*, Leiden, Brill/ Rodopi, 2018, 67-83).

historic moments and more on cultural and ideological references and landmarks.

In their joint article, Angela Giovanangeli and Kim Snepvangers examine how curatorial art practice today can help improve relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in creating a space of memorialisation and imagination that counterbalances former national narratives obliterating certain historical moments of violence in the encounters between settlers and indigenous people. They focus on a case study, the 2016 exhibition organised in the Campbelltown Arts Centre near Sydney to commemorate the dramatic Appin Massacre that took place in 1816 and led to the death of dozens of Aboriginal people who were rounded up, shot at and forced to jump off a cliff. They analyse the deliberate choice of a mixed team of organisers, an Australian curator and a Canadian one, Australian Indigenous artists as well as Canadian Indigenous artists, as a successful attempt to render the commemoration more interactive and participatory, even on the part of the audience. The hybrid and dual memories of both Canadians and Australians, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, converge for a collective reimagining of the nation's past, present and future.

Another article dealing with the double vision afforded by the comparative study of Canadian and Australian perspectives is offered by Lauren Jannette's reflection on the strategy recruitment offices had to adopt during the First World War to convince as many volunteers as possible to join in the war effort. They had to both tap into shared loyalties towards the British empire and insist on each country's growing and thriving national sentiment as a newly independent dominion. But whereas in Canada the diversified ethnic, linguistic and cultural affiliations of its constituent communities didn't permit any strong emphasis on British heritage, it was not so for Australia where the First World War and the Anzac soldier figure became an integral part of the nationalist canon essentialising Australianness as white, male and proud of its extraordinary courage and resilience supposedly inherited from the first British settlers.

In the next chapter on India in the 1970s, the question of India's national myth-making as an independent postcolonial nation having learnt from its past colonial experience to beware of binary power dynamics and social oppression is shown to be only partly true. In the popular Bombay Hindi films released in the 1970s new Indian elites had replaced most of the former colonial elites but the feelings of alienation and oppression of many Indian people were still present. So, instead of a happy development in a modern independent India where the postcolonial process could have brought the freedom, mobility and opportunities often associated to

hybridity, Saswati Sengupta and Sharmila Purkayastha show that there seems to be a reproduction of very similar superstructures proving postcolonial theory wrong as far as underprivileged classes are concerned. The paper pays a particular attention to what they call a "spatial history of metropolitan modern India" and their demonstration exposes the deceptive nature of many triumphalist visions of hybridity in postcolonial criticism when applied to independent India, pointing on the contrary to the near absence and impossibility of any real social mobility or empowering displacement.

The next article studies the question of hybrid national identities in Britain itself and whether they correspond to a myth or a reality. Raihan Rosman tackles the issue of culture for British men and women whose parents still have their own cultural references inherited from their place of origin but who nevertheless try to convince their children to only assimilate the culture of their adoptive country and forget about the culture of their own family. She examines the respective advantages and disadvantages about choosing to simply forget about your dual culture and heritage or accepting having a hyphenated identity in which the two identities and cultural spheres simply cohabit in the same space? In Yasmin Hai's *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughters: Becoming British*, the father tries to disconnect his daughters from their filiation (his Indian background and the mother's Pakistani background) and privilege affiliation instead in trying to desperately mimic British ways. And yet his daughter Yasmin progressively rediscovers her own heritage, especially Islam, in a journey of self-discovery towards the acceptance of a complex hyphenated identity as British, Asian and Muslim.

And it is this partly unaccountable and elusive nature of both one's identity and one's affinities and affiliations which is the object of the third section of this volume. National identity is first and foremost a state invention and narrative that a citizen is expected to assimilate and adhere to. But the abyss between self-identification and national sentiment is often difficult to bridge or simply to overlook. If national identity is supposed to cement an "imagined community" according to Anderson, the truth is individual and collective imagination can diverge significantly.

The first article is really an essay, a beautiful essay on the sense of place for a writer. As an acclaimed Canadian writer herself, Aritha van Herk reflects on what place represents for writers and people in general and she points to its elusive and ghostly nature. The places that keep haunting us long after we left them, places of childhood or places which left a deep imprint on our consciousness and our unconscious are always hybrid. Contrary to the oversimplified inscription of national representations, tending to foreground one place or space to the detriment of another as being

more representative of the collective national community, the places Aritha van Herk is most interested in, her earliest memories of place, are linked to anonymous, invisible and insignificant places in regard to national grand narratives but this is such an apparent absence of cultural or political recognition that renders their appeal all the more personal, potent and ineluctable. Her approach is both phenomenological and philosophical but this is actually an essential question whose political and social ramifications should not be underestimated. Aritha van Herk insists that no place is actually without history or importance despite colonial delusions about a place only gaining existence and significance once given a name and settled.

        Her argument could be further developed to include the question of social and political invisibility, a recurrent problem which is only just being recognised by sociologists and politicians alike. The inability in many western nation-states to really take into account the perspective, voices and interests of people living in nondescript or invisible zones such as multicultural suburbs or scarcely populated and isolated parts of the countryside, have brought about acute political crises and a distrust of political leaders and national representation worldwide. Defining one's national identity as deeply connected to a local community and geography is not necessarily synonymous with a form of chauvinism or exclusionary discourse. It is sometimes the approach that people will experience as the most genuine, the most natural and accessible for them to really experience not only intellectually but in a very concrete and straightforward way, what it means to be part of both an "imagined" and a real community.

        In his own way, this is the conclusion that Imed Sassi comes to when he remarks that one of the most alienated characters in the Canadian novel he has chosen to examine finally chooses to anchor both her personal and national identities in one region of election. In his article on Canadian fiction, Imed Sassi thus explores the complex issue of national affiliation and identification with a thorough close study of one of Margaret Laurence's works, *The Diviners*. Despite its relatively old date of publication, the novel remains very topical today for its reflexion on what constitutes a citizen's sense of place and national identity. Imed Sassi thus shows all the complexity different affiliations and master-narratives can lead to and how both mother and daughter, Morag and Pique, end up refashioning their personal and "national" identity as mostly linked to the place they now live in, Manawaka, Manitoba. It is particularly striking for Pique, a Metis girl, who finally finds an ultimate connection with her motherland in precisely fusing into the landscape, feeling a deep and authentic sense of belonging with this nurturing and defining place her natural surroundings have become for her. In a country with two main inherited cultures, British and French

cultures, on top of all the respective identities and cultures of the various first nations people living in Canada, multiculturalism is part of Canadian national identity but this does not make it any less complex and this is what Jordan Bolay also explores in insisting on the power dynamics at work in such categorisations and definitions.

In his chapter on Katherine Govier's *Between Men*, Jordan Bolay analyses to what extent the discourse on nationness and national narrative in 1980s Canada tended to be highly monological and patriarchal. He explores the ways, both narrative and deconstructive, Katherine Govier has of reconfiguring national history in filling out its gaps and reintroducing voices and points of view that were often erased from national grand narratives. Her main character Suzanne Vail, a young assistant professor of Western Canadian history is trapped in a man's world with very codified ways of doing research and writing. She interests herself in local history and more particularly still, the disappearance of a murdered Cree woman in 1889. In exploring the hybrid interstitial spaces between historical closure and certainty and archival fragmentation and spectrality, men and women, words and bodies, commodification and a sense of self, Bolay offers a very challenging and provocative foray into the complex area of feminist studies, colonial/postcolonial approaches and Derridean deconstruction. Suzanne Vail's "third space of enunciation" becomes an aesthetics based on the trace, the spectral and the liminal, as a way to reintroduce obliterated voices, bodies and subject positions, which is not without its own colonial limitations and ambiguities.

The last article of this section is a very fine and nuanced analysis of the notions of nation and modernity as often implying a forgetting or an erasure of the past and all the people that will not fit into the new definitions of the nation. This is a very illuminating foray into the "the double time" and *double space*, so to speak, of the nation that Bhabha alluded to in his seminal book *The Location of Culture*.[6] Nishat Zaidi has chosen to study the work of a Pakistani writer, Intizar Hussain, who was born in India and emigrated to Pakistan in 1947 and who deplores such deliberate erasure of one's cultural past and heritage. She illustrates very convincingly the "contentious [and] unequal interests and identities"[7] of the people within the

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[6] See "Dissemination: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation" in Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (Bhabha 1994, 139-170), and particularly "The time of nation", pp. 139-146 and "The space of people" pp. 146-152.

[7] "The people are neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the 'social' as homogeneous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population."

"space of the nation" and how newly created Pakistan tended to overshadow and obliterate its Indo-Islamic past because of the political context and in complete contradiction with the history of the Indian continent.

In the third section, the very notion of nationality, identity and a sense of place are reassessed to highlight their transitory and precarious nature as imaginary constructs. It is no coincidence if the national place/space becomes highly mobile, sometimes unreal or even utopian. The three chapters in this section each illustrate in their own respective ways how both national imagination and the very idea of place are being revised and challenged continually, whether through film, utopia or poetry.

The very first chapter opening this section is a case in point on two main accounts. It shows very convincingly how such a film genre as the Western and more particularly still the "post-Western," enables various European filmmakers to question the myth of the American West and more broadly still American national identity and values, while at the same time but targeting the national identity or emblematic places of their own country. Jesús Ángel González thus manages in "Transnational post-westerns in Irish cinema" to tackle the highly complex national affiliations of a country torn between Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States, namely Ireland. He focuses mainly on two films, *Into the West* (1992) and *Mickybo and Me* (2004) to show how the hybridized genre of the transnational post-Western brings to the fore recurring social and historical tensions or issues which remain mostly unresolved such as the plight of the Travelling community, the contradictions of the Celtic Tiger and also the traumatic past and reactivation of "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland. His research on the transnational post-Western opens up avenues of thorough recontextualization and questioning of such notions as national identity and foundation myths but also and just as importantly, the difficulties experienced worldwide of integrating racial, ethnic, or social minorities.

The next two chapters seem to suggest that poetry is also a perfect medium to not only challenge and reinvent national imagination but to also offer a space of temporary peace, hope, joy and utopia. Samia Hodaithy shows in her article on Naomi Shihab Nye's highly personal collection of poems *Transfer* that literature and poetry more particularly can offer a space of projection for political aspirations that transcend tensions and polarisation and offer instead a form of utopian hybrid space where a reality of violent conflict suddenly vanishes to be superseded by an imagined community of interests centred on hope and peace. The central metaphorical network

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(Bhabha 1994, 146)

around the idea of *transfer* applies to the two communities involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict who are called upon to try and imagine how it would feel to experience the other community's forced displacement or semi-voluntary transfer. It also crucially enables non-Palestinian non-Jewish readers to better apprehend and relate to issues that remain highly complex and alien to them. In the best of scenarios new solutions could also emerge from the tentative construction of such utopian sites of co-construction and collective imagination.

Abin Chakraborty's paper offers an interesting counterpoint to Samia Hodaithy's article in also studying the effects of poetry but from a more optimistic vantage point, with greater emphasis on the pleasures of experienced cultural hybridity rather than a mostly abstract and disembodied form of geopolitical reconciliation. The poetry of Moniza Alvi, a British poet of Pakistani origin, thus recurrently uses restless tropes of mobility corresponding to the nomadic articulations of self and its attendant spatial reconfigurations. Such fluidity and Deleuzian "smooth space" in Moniza Alvi's poetry appear as welcome antidotes to the xenophobic and racist discourses that are currently dominating nationalist political discourses across the world.

In our very last section, the very notion of national identity is put to the test by first questioning the myth of purity and homogeneity at the core of so many national representations in New Zealand and then by foregrounding the need to find another term and concept to designate a new sense of national affiliation, that of transnationalism and even postnationalism in many recent novels.

In Christine Lorre-Johnston's article on New Zealand, it is the ongoing transformation of the country and its inhabitants which occupies centre stage more than the fabricated lies of a 100% pure national landscape or identity. Photographer Peter Black does not try to celebrate the hybrid nature of new intercultural or transcultural forms born in a contact zone between different ethnic, social and linguistic backgrounds. His agenda is much humbler and pragmatic: he wants to portray New Zealanders as they really are today, a very mixed "crowd" which is a far cry from the sugar-coated images the tourist industry and the government alike tend to try and give of the nation. His work exposes the nondescript urban, industrial, and human reality vastly ignored by a commercial strategy of nation branding foregrounding the "purity" of New Zealand's pristine landscapes still miraculously untouched by globalisation and foreign influences. His street and industrial photographs give instead visibility to the "impurity" brought about by rapid and thoughtless economic development in New Zealand. Belying the fabricated myth of an *awfully* monochromatic green nation, in

which Māori and Pākehā cultural heritage supposedly blend harmoniously, his pictures capture the whiff of degradation emanating from the ruthless exploitation and corruption of the natural and social environment. Andre Dodeman's article examines Yann Martel's contention that nationalism is becoming obsolete and should ultimately be replaced by either postnationalism, cosmopolitanism or local inscription. Justin Trudeau's claim in 2015 that Canada was the first postnational state is scrutinised in Yann Martel's novels *Self* (1996), *Life of Pi* (2001), *Beatrice and Virgil* (2010), and even more centrally, in *The High Mountains of Portugal* (2016). Andre Dodeman shows how Martel uses the crossing of different national borders but also, from a wider perspective still, other types of boundaries such as dividing lines between male and female, human and animal, to suggest identity is a transformative process no metanarrative, whether national or otherwise, can fully account for. This being said, Martel tends to obliterate the question of nation-ness and nationalism and the reasons why they still command today "such profound emotional legitimacy."[8] In the final chapter of the section, Amar Acheraïou puts the concept of hybridity into perspective in recontextualising it in its successive contexts: from the nineteenth-century theories on race and the fear of miscegenation and degeneration to the 1990s celebration of cultural crossings and encounters. He also points to the genealogy of the concept from ancient Greece and Rome onwards. In so doing, he shows how indissolubly linked the concepts of hybridity and politics really are. He also insists on the centrality of the question of both "race" and persistent monolithic categorizations and hierarchies when dealing with hybridity. He deconstructs the idea of a progressive hybrid third space in several well-researched case studies, notably the mixed-race Americans of white and black descent as well as the Metis community in Canada. Acheraïou adeptly demonstrates that hybridity understood as mixed ancestry is not always synonymous with emancipation and is actually regularly conducive to a form of alienation because of ongoing binary thinking and "racial" prejudice. He also very convincingly shows that

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[8] Anderson's point is still valid today with the rise of populism and nationalism all over the word and the election in two of the most powerful nation-states of both Donald Trump and Boris Johnson on a very simple programme, that of making their country great again. "My point of departure is that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider […] why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy." (Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1995), London: Routledge, 2006, 123).

hybridity and nationalism are not necessarily incompatible as there are as many types of national identification and claims as there are of hybridity, thus concluding that the spatial metaphors extensively used by postcolonial criticism in the wake of Bhabha's seminal work *The Location of Culture* have to be completed by a detailed and nuanced approach of the historical, political, ideological context as well as the complex enunciative dynamics being deployed.

PART I

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND AESTHETICS: ICONIC PLACES AND EMBLEMS

CHAPTER ONE

THE AMERICAN SUBLIME AS A HYBRID
OF CLASSIC AESTHETIC CATEGORIES

MARIE-CHRISTINE BLIN

Over the first three centuries of interaction between settlers and their environment, American nature, first demonised by the Puritans, became a source of pride for the nation in the nineteenth century. In this evolution the development of landscape painting played a key role, helping Americans come to terms with the "perceptual challenge" (Hyde 1993, 351) the wilderness represented.

All the artists of the first American school of painting, the Hudson River School, and more particularly its founder Thomas Cole, were deeply influenced by European pictorial conventions. These were especially expressed in the seventeenth-century canvases of the Ideal Landscape painters, the Italian Salvator Rosa and the French Claude Lorrain, mostly called just Claude in English. The former was mainly associated with the Sublime and its scenes of "desolation, solitude and danger, impenetrable forests," rocky dells, blasted trees, thunder and lightning (Fuseli in Wilton and Barringer 2002, 12). Claude's work, on the contrary, with its elegantly composed and balanced views, was related to the Beautiful. It used trees as repoussoirs or coulisses, like curtains framing a theatre stage in the dark foreground to guide the eye towards the lighter distant background.

The distinction between these two aesthetic categories was well established by the beginning of the eighteenth century but was given wider recognition thanks to Edmund Burke's treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and was even further clarified by Uvedale Price in his *Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1794). The Beautiful became a model for a new art-form, landscape gardening, and its followers enunciated rules by which nature might be "improved." The Reverend William Gilpin developed the theory of the Picturesque, a branch of the

Beautiful, which stemmed from variety, rough textures and small scale (Wilton and Barringer 2002, 13).

Though the distinction—not to say opposition—between the Sublime and the Beautiful had been clear-cut since the seventeenth century, Cole very early sensed there was in the woods of New England a radically different, truly American, atmosphere, a hybrid of the European Sublime and of the Beautiful which he called the American Sublime. Decades later, the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted shared more or less the same view when he claimed "the union of the deepest sublimity with the deepest beauty of nature" was the major characteristic of the Yosemite Valley in California.

How did America's—and American artists'—perception of nature evolve for such conflicting categories to merge into a new hybrid and redefine the Sublime in the United States in the nineteenth century? Did Cole and Olmsted's reflections go beyond purely aesthetic considerations? If so, what purposes did they have in mind? These are the questions this article will attempt to answer.

With the exception of promotional literature, whose aim was to attract settlers to the New World, the representation of the American wilderness was mostly negative from the arrival of the first Europeans. In sixteenth-century English society, the writings of the explorer Martin Frobisher and those of the geographer Richard Hakluyt—who promoted Elizabethan expansion and in particular the colonisation of North America—shaped the image of the newly-discovered lands. The former, relating his travels on the north-east coast of Canada in 1576, 1577 and 1578, like the latter, who gathered under the title *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* all the knowledge available on the matter at the time, insisted that the climate, the topography, the fauna and flora, as well as the Natives, were unprepossessing. The adjective "monstruous" even predominates in the former's descriptions (Slotkin 2000, 32). Confronted with the forests covering most of New England, the colonists felt overwhelmed, for the world they had left behind was much less forested. They were not prepared for a country "wilde and overgrowne with woods," as John Cotton expressed it in *Mourt's Relation*, or for the "thicke Wood" Francis Higginson mentioned in *New England's Plantation* (Heimert 1953, 362). They had to conquer and master the wilderness to find shelter and food, and were too busy to appreciate an environment that threatened their survival (Nash 2001, 24, 26).

Besides, conquest and religion went hand in hand and the Puritan hostility towards the natural environment further compounded the situation. A sentence often quoted to illustrate it is that of William Bradford, of