Introduction: The Literature of Spatial Occupation – A Nonstate Research Agenda

"World literature" and "resistance" seldom appear together in the same sentence. Why is this?

Could it be because we have somehow come to consider world literature as "polite" literature – as the canon of masterpieces produced by elite networks of literary prestige?

Or could it be because we now regard world literature as what comes after the militant resistance literatures written from the 1930s to the 1970s, as if the magnificent narratives of decolonization and neocolonial agonistics that we associate with the postcolonial era have given way to a new literary dispensation – a more globalized literature perhaps, more cosmopolitan in its affinities, less committed to physical geographies of revolt?

A brief survey of the diverse texts that have been grouped together in recent discussions of world literature gives the lie to both of these explanations. No engagement with the complexities of resistance to colonial and neocolonial domination could be more searching than what we see in texts such as Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*, Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*, Édouard Glissant's *Pays rêvé, pays réel*, Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Tirana memoria*, Raúl Zurita's *La Vida Nueva*, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*, Habib Tengour's *Traverser*, Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, and Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War*. Nevertheless, the sense remains that explorations of resistance in literature belong to a past era, and that this literary dispensation has been supplanted by something altogether more urbane, more worldly – in short, by world literature.

The aim of this book is to provide a conceptual vocabulary that could begin to account for the forms of territorialized resistance on display in world literature and, in doing so, help us move beyond the false opposition between postcolonial literature (conceived primarily as a corollary of nationalist revolution) and world literature (conceived as the cosmpolitan alternative to such militant, territorialized literatures). This inert opposition has been perpetuated, I believe, because of our difficulty in identifying

and theorizing forms of mass-based, territorialized resistance whose terminus is not the capture and administration of the state. If we continue to view all forms of militant, territorialized resistance through a state-centric lens, it may in fact seem that there existed a period of nationalist revolution and state-building – namely, the postcolonial period, with its postcolonial literatures – which has now been superseded by an ensemble of deterritorialized investments, whose corollary is, somehow, world literature.

What this account overlooks, however, is the host of powerful, mass-based groups that occupy territory, evict security forces, and establish mechanisms of assembly and self-government – neither in the name of the state nor in the name of cosmopolitan governance projects. Outside of the theoretical binarism we have constructed – nationalism on the one hand, cosmopolitanism on the other – there is an entire world of territorially-based struggles aimed at constructing forms of self-government outside of the state, maintaining power bases in sustained conflict with the state, or assembling organs of struggle that are state-dystonic. What about the uprisings and strikes that were conducted outside of state-centric party politics, but that were nevertheless crucial to the decolonization process, from Sholapur (1928) and Kishoreganj (1930) to Dakar (1946) and Mombasa (1947)? What about land occupations conducted extra-legally, and often in direct confrontation with state forces (Cherán, 2011 to the present; Malawi, 1994 to the present; the Philippines, 1990s; Brazil, 1995 to the present)?

What about those historical flashpoints in which workers occupy workplaces and self-manage them, not in the name of state-centric legal struggles, but as forms of mutual aid and self-defense in a conflictive relationship with the state – as occurred in Greece (2012), Argentina (2001–2003), Iran (1978–1979), Portugal (1974–1975), Jamaica (1969), Algeria (1962), Budapest (1956), Poland (1956), Java (1945–1946), Germany (1919), and Turin (1919–1920)? At moments like these, a problematic evolves that is accounted for neither by contemporary theories of statecraft nor by the deterritorialized politics of cosmopolitanism. Such nonstate formations are territorially-based networks of occupation and self-defense; they are as remote as can be from the ideas of "global cooperation" and "global financial governance" espoused by cosmopolitan theory.[1] And yet, their organizational activity takes place outside the hierarchical power structures and centralized command structure of the nation-state. They constitute forms of nonstate space whose internal workings, organizational models, and political capacities have been largely overlooked both by theorists of

the nation-state and by theorists of cosmopolitanism, diaspora, and transnational migration.

This neglect is especially surprising in the field of postcolonial studies, because of the major role that such nonstate networks and strategies have played in decolonization struggles and their aftermaths. As French *Pied-Noirs* fled newly independent Algeria, for example, abandoning their fields and factories, peasants and workers seized control of them and established rank-and-file management committees to direct production, outside the aegis of the National Liberation Front (FLN) and the postcolonial state. "The spontaneous actions by the workers," writes Thomas L. Blair, "burst unexpectedly upon the post-Evian interim Provisional Executive Council, placing it in a difficult political position" *vis-à-vis* the French state, which was keen to maintain the exiting *colons*' property rights over assets that had already been expropriated by nonstate networks.[2] This kind of rank-and-file self-management, initiated and carried through by nonstate networks, was "never envisaged by FLN leaders as a form of economic organization appropriate to post-independence Algeria"[3] – in fact, it had been neither theorized nor anticipated by the militia leaders who would become the principal state actors in the newly independent Algerian state. Nevertheless, the fledgling Algerian state moved quickly to recognize these new collectives legally as *biens de l'État* – in the process doing its best to subvert their autonomy. By 1963, these nonstate spaces had been subsumed into state forms of command, with state-appointed directors enjoying de facto power over workers' management committees, and the formerly independent workers' union UGTA was nationalized and used to suppress strike activity.

In other words, the militant reorganization of the vast majority of Algeria's processes of social production during decolonization was the work of nonstate forces, external to the FLN and its state-centric methods, and these nonstate forces then had to struggle against the centralization of power that nationalist leaders began to implement.

This agon between state and nonstate forces during the decolonization process is by no means unique to Algeria. From 1925 to 1926, 200,000 workers in Canton and Hong Kong revolted against British imperialism with an astonishingly long 14-month general strike, under the direction of a nonstate body of worker delegates: the Canton–Hong Kong Strike Committee. This massive nonstate network of armed pickets and committeepeople functioned as an effective countergovernment throughout the duration of the general strike, operating outside any party structure, and even maintaining nonstate judicial operations and prison facilities. Though the strike represented a staggering blow to British

commerce, the Nationalist party under Chiang Kai-shek, fearing a power network external to its own, forcibly ended it in October 1926, jailing many of the strikers and liquidating the nonstate networks that defined their activity. Once again, the initiative of nonstate networks proved essential to spearheading a crucial phase of the decolonization process, and, once again, their autonomous networks were dismantled by the centralized powers of the nationalist party.

Similar patterns would play out in Kenya, Ghana, Indonesia, and Guinea within the first months of independence, with state forces crushing and dispersing the nonstate networks that had helped bring them to power. One of the most instructive examples of this dynamic is the case of Sékou Touré, who led a massive nonstate coalition in a general strike in 1950, and helped organize the anti-metropolitan Confédération générale du travail – autonome, but who, upon achieving state power, suppressed all independent union activity and transformed Guinea into a single-party state. Here we have a figure who was crucial to the development of the nonstate labor networks that helped prepare the groundwork for the decolonization process, who, as head of state, would ban strike activity, fallaciously claiming that any strike, when "directed against an African government … affects African authority, reinforcing by this means … the authority [of the dominant power]."[4]

What all of this suggests is that to comprehend the complex geographies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' literatures of resistance, it is essential to understand the relationship between state space and something that has rarely been theorized in discussions of world literature – namely, nonstate space.

But what is nonstate space? Or, more precisely, where is it?

Broadly defined, "nonstate space" refers to social space that is made up of human networks, decision-making processes, and creative practices external to the nation-state and irreducible to its forms of governance. Examples of nonstate space can be found in regions where state power has fractured or disappeared, in pastoralist and nomadic societies that govern themselves in the absence of a state, as well as in nonstate networks and behaviors that exist within functioning states, as sites of contestation and counterpower.

The fact that "nonstate space" refers to any social space outside of state-centric forms of regulation means that its potential purchase is extremely broad, ranging from the self-governing peoples of the Andes, the Himalayas, and Southern Africa, to maroon and pirate communities from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, to nonstate social movements and

organizations of colonial and neocolonial spaces. The concept of nonstate space therefore occupies an interdisciplinary zone of engagement that has already begun to be defined by scholars such as M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, Arturo J. Aldama, and Maximilian C. Forte working on indigeneity from a transnational perspective, as well as scholars such as Kathryn Milun, Maia Ramnath, Elinor Ostrom, and Derek Wall, whose work engages in the nonstate configurations that belong, respectively, to land rights legislation in Australia and the Western Sahara, the Indian decolonization movement, common pool resource problems, and the history of the commons in England, Mongolia, and India.[5]

What has not been attempted yet, however, is a literary geography that explores the specific potentialities and limits that representations of nonstate social configurations exhibit, with a view to articulating how such nonstate capacities take shape differentially in divergent geopolitical contexts. One of the main contributions such a project would be in a position to make would be to delineate the tropological resources, epistemologies, and micropolitical strategies that belong to representations of political communities external to state-centric social structures, as opposed to those whose tactical horizon is defined exclusively by the conquest or reform of the state apparatus.

This book represents a first step in the direction of such a literary-historical mapping. It stages an investigation into some of the ways in which nonstate space has been represented in world literature from the early twentieth century to the present, and its main goal is to help develop a language that can account for the representation of capacities for self-government that have evolved in nonstate configurations across a wide variety of geopolitical contexts. Accordingly, this book does not attempt an exhaustive account of nonstate space in world literature so much as articulate a research agenda in the humanities that will require much more effort to define and develop itself. Nevertheless, this book's focus on territorially-based, nonstate forms of self-government points beyond some central conceptual impasses faced by transnational theory today.

Consider, for example, the oscillation in contemporary transnational theory between the image of the postcolonial state as a class-stratified, compradorized space and the image of it, in the words of Pheng Cheah, as a "necessary … political agent for defending the peoples of the South," made all the more exigent because "transnational networks are, in and of themselves, neither mass based nor firmly politically institutionalized."[6] According to this theoretical optics, the postcolonial state may often be, in Fanon's words, little more than a "manager for Western enterprise,"[7]

but, in the absence of any viable nonstate political configuration, state sovereignty is resurrected as the only realistic weapon that postcolonial populations are in a position to wield.

This theoretical caution is understandable, given the role that states have often played as defensive bulwarks against Western projects of underdevelopment. As Radhika Desai points out, "contender states … accelerate … development to contest imperial projects of dominant states" and "this politico-economic dialectic, and not the market or capitalism conceived in exclusively economic terms, is responsible for productive capacity spreading ever more widely around the world."[8] This state-sponsored combined development, she notes, "generally empowers working classes and popular sectors,"[9] and is given short shrift by cosmopolitan theories which mistakenly claim that "nation-states were not relevant to explaining the world order."[10] Gregory Jusdanis similarly argues that cosmopolitanism's dreams of global "peace and prosperity … come at the expense of small societies," and that the "utopian world of scattered diasporas, open borders, and hybrid identities" simply does not possess a political agent of sufficient force to protect vulnerable nations.[11]

Clearly, therefore, postcolonial states have, at times, implemented progressive social policy and acted to loosen the stranglehold of Western imperialism. No doubt Tariq Amin-Khan is correct when he argues that strong statist policies in the postcolonial world have kept "predatory transnational capital more or less at bay" for significant periods, strengthened the postcolonial industrial sector, and instituted the kinds of land reform that promote economic self-reliance.[12] What is being drawn attention to here, instead, is that every national liberation movement is composed of some elite actors whose power networks embody the future postcolonial state *in statu nascendi* and other, nonstate, actors whose massive productive and associational capacities must first be used to bring the postcolonial state into being, but which are, in case after case, forcibly separated from institutions of power once the state has established itself. As state theorist Göran Therborn explains, "representative politicians must establish some rapport with the population at large, but once elected … party leaders and prime ministers are usually made and unmade by parliamentary groups, rather than by extra-parliamentary bodies of their party."[13] In postcolonial states, this structural distance between state and nonstate networks is especially dangerous, given the ex-colonizer's usual capacity to intimidate and control the thin superstratum of state actors that has been set up to govern in the name of the nation as a whole.

What this means for our analysis is that nonstate space exists not merely in those movements that reject the state outright – anarchist and syndicalist movements, or the various other anti-state movements of recent history. Nonstate space also exists in struggles that take the nation itself as their zone of contention. Indeed, many of the productive and associational assemblages that are the lifeblood of nationalist revolution are nonstate assemblages of workers, peasants, and other ordinary citizens, possessing organizational networks and channels of solidarity that are separate from state-centric leaders and that often come into conflict with them.

In part, this is because of the difference between the *nation*, as a site of collective investment belonging to the inhabitants of a shared territorial space, and the *state*, as an embodiment of the political institutions, police powers, and bureaucracies that are erected to govern in the name of the nation. As Vilashini Cooppan points out, this idea of the nation, as the "projection and protection of an internal collective personality" is in no way reducible to the juridical and political institutions of the state.[14] It is not surprising, therefore, that many nationalist struggles are overwhelmingly comprised of nonstate networks and assemblages – especially in the case of anti-colonial revolutions, in which the colonizer comes to be associated with state functionality and the nation becomes a site of investment for nonstate organizational efforts. The profound importance of anarchism to Filipino nationalists like José Rizal and Isabelo de los Reyes is just one of the more striking examples of this coexistence of nationalist strategies and deeply anti-state networks and methods. As Benedict Anderson has shown, Rizal's attraction to propaganda by the deed and Isabelo's decision to "radicalize and organize the working class in Manila" had their roots in anarchist politics, which these nationalists adopted as an integral part of anti-colonialist praxis.[15]

The observation to be made here is that even within the domain of nation-based struggle, a wide variety of attitudes toward nonstate networks and organizational forms exists. In nationalist movements spearheaded by military cadres or operatives within the colonial legislative structure, nonstate spaces and networks may never enter into the public dialogue surrounding the independence struggle, except in the specter of forms of "disorder" that must supposedly be suppressed in the name of law and order. By contrast, in nationalist movements that rely heavily from the beginning on self-organized blocs of workers, peasants, and other ordinary citizens, public dialogue often enshrines such nonstate networks as the heart of the nationalist movement, to the point of projecting

the state-to-be as nothing more than the self-administration of already-existing nonstate networks.

The point of this study is not to measure the success of states in making good on their promises to reflect and represent nonstate networks. Rather than draw up a balance sheet of state failure and state welfare along these lines, I choose to focus on the specific potentialities for group formation, decision-making, and self-defense that nonstate networks possess in and of themselves, regardless of whether at some point they become channelized into investments in the nation as a unit of sovereignty. I proceed in this way because in working my way through literary representations of nonstate workers' organizations, rural insurgencies, strike campaigns, mutual-aid networks, and alternative governance systems, I noticed that the literature of nonstate networks simply speaks a different language than literature focused on the internal workings of the nation-state and its protagonists. Instead of triangulating narrative primarily through a national "superaddressee" of the kind E. San Juan describes, who is supposed to personify the "close dialectical unity between the individual and the mass," such works often track disconnected processes of reciprocal self-constitution, in which nonstate actors emerge and achieve synergy without reference to centralized state leaders.[16] And instead of poetic portraiture focused on the moral agonies leaders face in distributing resources, such literature returns again and again to scenes of auto-appropriation, in which ordinary people take ownership of their workplaces and land, without the mediating presence of states, parties, or their bureaucracies.

Literary treatments of nonstate processes such as these therefore have tropological organizations all their own, which are distinct from literatures of national *Bildung*. Novels devoted to nonstate processes, such as Claude McKay's *Banjo* and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Le papillon et la lumière*, often feel plotless, since their action is not organized around the *crise de conscience* of a central, national protagonist, the aftermath of which is meant to allegorize a postcolonial national dénouement. Other novels, such as Ousmane Sembene's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* do have robust underlying plot structures, but often invest more narrative energy in diegetically undeveloped scenes of auto-appropriation and self-organization than their overall systems of characterological motivation can easily support. Similarly, the nonstate poetic imaginations I analyze here are remote from investments in individual lyric figures, using highly fractured verse forms to imagine futural nonstate constellations.

What these works bring into view through these means is technologies of association that are external to state bureaucracy and state command. The most distinctive characteristic of these technologies of association is that they project alternative governance systems, rooted in shared spaces of group-formation and decision-making. In each literary itinerary my chapters trace, I show how these nonstate networks stand in direct contrast to the structures of hierarchy and command that anticipate new state formations.

This is why I emphasize the *spatiality* of these nonstate networks and processes. This book's focus is not the "virtual electronic neighborhoods"[17] that Arjun Appadurai describes in his account of diasporic imaginaries, nor is it the nomadic, deterritorialized human flows that Gilles Deleuze imagines as the substrate of globalization. As Imre Szeman points out, this invented " 'post-national' world of hybrid subjectivities" is often little more than "a political fiction whose intent is to transform the remaining spaces of the public in terms of the neoliberal logic of the private (capitalist) enterprise."[18] Within this kind of cosmopolitan optics, Weihsin Gui argues, "culture's mobility, heterogeneity, and radicalism are encompassed by globalization and become symptoms of its administration."[19]

The nonstate spaces I analyze have little in common with these cosmopolitan fictions of globalized, migratory identities, both because these deterritorialized flows are often theoretical fictions that replace the real misery of economic migration with a fantasy of global travel, and because these cosmopolitan worldscapes are really only *spaces* in the loosest sense of the term: imaginary maps of consumption patterns or migratory trajectories that often develop no mass-based forms of political agency. What if we replaced this loose, undefined spatiality – really, the abstract, agentless space of global capital – with Merleau-Ponty's definition of space as the lived schema by means of which humans project and test out their capacities for action on their environment? In this account, space is not defined as an empirical extension of matter, but as the "sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears."[20]

Nonstate space, in this sense, would refer to the schemata of purposive action humans acquire by virtue of traversing the shared spaces that make social reproduction outside the state possible. Conceived in this way, nonstate space could be imagined as a lived projection of the transformative actions made possible by people's relationships to the infrastructures, built environments, production processes, and associational dynamics that structure their everyday lives. It is at this level of complex, interlinked

reproductive practices, I'd propose, that spaces of self-government outside the state first become palpable – sometimes in the barricades that protect sites of nonstate medical care, food production, and community self-regulation from state interference, sometimes in the communication networks that mobilize ordinary citizens to occupy city squares, highways, ports, and industrial areas with incredible speed.

Spaces like these embody mutual-aid processes, self-defense assets, and forms of goods creation that function as real existing counterpowers to the state. And it is precisely this capacity to erect state-dystonic forms of self-government that distinguishes nonstate assemblages from other forms of grassroots political activity, whether they be reform movements, minority-party electoral drives, or lobbying efforts of various kinds. While such grassroots movements often overlap with nonstate assemblages, borrowing personnel from and voicing solidarity with them, they are nevertheless perfectly commensurable with state command functions, seeking primarily to change the existing distribution of resources within state bureaucracies. Nonstate space, by contrast, emerges only when recourse to the legal apparatuses of the state has been forcibly withheld by the authorities or collectively abandoned by nonstate actors, with struggle being reopened on the terrain on which the basic structures that make social life possible are contested – not just discursively, but by means of conflicting spatial occupations, expropriations, and relations of force.

If the term "nation" refers to the matrix of investments populations sustain with respect to language, ethnicity, and culture, nonstate space could be imagined as the entire range of lived relationships to technology, production, transport, group-formation, and ad hoc communications networks that ideologies of nationhood seek to capture and direct. This is why, while national affiliation exists as a durable psychological investiture, nonstate space is rarely made the object of conscious reflection or emotional cathexis – that is, until the process of "loyalty transfer" to nationhood breaks down.[21] Indeed, nonstate space typically emerges only as a collective experience of *rupture* within the primordial fabric of social organization, which opens up a space of social reproduction administered by ordinary people themselves, outside of state-centric forms of legitimation and ideological habit. *Vis-à-vis* the well-worn and constantly reinforced channels of national identification, nonstate space could be imagined as a zone of pre-predicative experience, in Husserl's sense: a world of functional equilibria, kinesthetic facilitations, and interhuman adjustments that function pre-rationally to distribute social space, and which rarely