

The Nation as Problem and Possibility

The formation of national collectives . . . common in the detestable jargon of war that speaks of the Russian, the American, surely also of the German, obeys a reifying consciousness that is no longer really capable of experience. It confines itself within precisely those stereotypes that thinking should dissolve. It is uncertain whether something like the German as a person or German as a quality, or anything similar in other nations, exists at all. The True and the Better in every people is surely that which does not integrate itself into the collective subject and if possible resists it.

— THEODOR ADORNO (1965)

It is not the concept of the nation that is retrograde; it is the idea that the nation must necessarily be sovereign.

— PIERRE ELLIOT TRUDEAU (1968)

Literature and the Nation

The nation and literature have had a long history together. The intimate connection between land and community that is the foundation of the link between the geographical and cultural specificity of the nation is often traced back to Romanticism, and in particular, to the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder.¹ Herder claimed that “every nation is one people, having its own national form, as well as its own language.”² This Romantic theory of nationalism, echoed in the work of William Morris, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and others, influenced the development of nations and literature in the nineteenth century.³ In Europe, the nation quickly became the only legitimate form of political and social organization, as reflected in the consolidation and production of national languages out of diverse dialects, and by the development of numerous social and cultural techniques, processes, and institutions whose intent was to produce a homogeneous body of citizens loyal to the nation-state.⁴ Just as the nation became a seemingly natural way of organizing groups of people, so too did the belief that literary and cultural products reflected the unique national soil from which they organically developed. The system of “national literatures” that was developed during this

period and that continues to define contemporary literary studies provides ample evidence of this fact. Premised on the belief in the deep connection between “race, milieu and moment” (in Hippolyte Taine’s terms),⁵ the invention of national literatures was an outgrowth of the political concept of the nation, but also helped to determine and define the conceptual basis of the nation by highlighting the supposedly unique features of the national character. This can be seen, for example, in the British writer Henry Morley’s description of the connection between English literature and the English nation in 1873: “The literature of this country has for its most distinctive mark the religious sense of duty. It represents a people striving through successive generations to find out the right and do it, to root out the wrong and labor ever onward for the love of God. If this be really the strong spirit of her people, to show that it is so is to tell how England won, and how alone she can expect to keep, her foremost place among nations.”⁶ The first professor of American literature, Fred Lewis Pattee, began his introductory text on the subject with a description of the relationship between literature and the nation that by the end of the century had become all but indisputable: “The literature of a nation is the entire body of literary productions that has emanated from the people of the nation during its history, preserved by the arts of writing and printing. It is the embodiment of the best thoughts and fancies of a people.”⁷

The relationship of literature to the nation and of the nation to literature remains an important part of contemporary literary and cultural theory, if on somewhat different terms. Over the past few decades there has been an outpouring of articles and books that have addressed the nation from the standpoint of literature, and literature from the perspective of the nation.⁸ This renewed — or perhaps simply new — focus on the nation and literature is due in part to the increased attention that has been paid to the nation itself.⁹ Though these various studies draw different conclusions about what the nation is, as well as about the mechanisms that produce nations and nationalism, they share a common incredulity about how long it has taken for the nation to become an object of serious inquiry and a sense that the nation is, all things considered, a form of political, cultural, and social organization that is as theoretically suspect as it is empirically dangerous; Anthony D. Smith, for instance, writes that “at best the idea of the nation has appeared sketchy and elusive, at worst absurd and contradictory.”¹⁰ Changes in the academy that have allowed for and encouraged interdisciplinary work have also been important, permitting forms of textual analysis and inquiry that extend beyond a strict formalism to a consideration of such supposedly “extraliterary” factors as the nation or the national “context” of a literary work.

Perhaps the most important factor in prompting a renewed attention to the nation in literary studies, however, has been the emergence and institutional legitimization of the field of postcolonial studies. Though Edward Said's *Orientalism* has often been seen as the founding text of postcolonial theory, the theoretical and ethical roots of postcolonial studies can be found in the enormous burst of political and cultural energy that emerged from the widespread and rapid decolonization of the European imperial empires around the world. Many of the questions that consume the activities of critical intellectuals today — questions located at the intersection of concepts of migration and transmigration, nationalism and transnationalism, cultural hybridity and cultural imperialism, globalization and localization, and so on — have their origins in the events and texts of this period. The form in which decolonization took place was without exception through the establishment of new nations (if not always nation-states)¹¹ that both produced and were produced by the new national literatures that exploded into Western consciousness in the period following World War II. Postcolonial studies and the study of the phenomenon called “globalization,” which mine the rich historical deposits of this period both implicitly and explicitly, thus of necessity have to deal with the nation over and over again, both in terms of the reemergence of the Romantic coupling of nation and culture in the decolonized world *and* in terms of the apparent dissolution of the nation and its implications for culture in the wake of the recent intensification of the processes of globalization.

In her overview of the development of postcolonial literature, Elleke Boehmer notes that there are two distinct phases of nationalism and nationalist literature in the (post-)colonial world.¹² The first phase occurred in the period between the world wars. The guiding principle of this phase was Woodrow Wilson's assertion in his fourteen points that each people should have the right to self-determination. This principle became a rallying point for nationalist movements around the world, however disingenuous its articulation may have seemed in light of the consequent reentrenchment of the political and economic positions of the colonial powers between the wars. The movement against colonialism thus began in earnest long before the first colonies were to gain independence after World War II, a fact reflected both in political events and literary and cultural production: the explosion of new literatures in the former colonies was made possible by literary precedents established by prewar writers (in the Caribbean, for example, the prewar novels of C. L. R. James and Alfred Mendes paving the way for George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul, Vic Reid, etc.), just as the postwar political struggle for decolonization built on the gains established by pre-

war independence movements. There are definite continuities between this first phase and the anticolonial efforts of the postwar period that the trauma of World War II has tended to obscure. Nevertheless, as Boehmer notes, after World War II there was “a marked intensification and radicalization in nationalist activity. The key difference was the extent of support for outright, and even violent opposition . . . in politics this meant nation-state independence and new institutions, while in the economic realm it entailed control over productive resources and, in some cases, national ownership.”¹³ The nationalist literature of this second phase saw itself as the necessary cultural counterpart to this revolutionary nationalism, forging through the written word the new individual and collective identities necessary for the creation of new nations.

It is the second phase of nationalist literature that has come to be most frequently associated with the category of postcolonial literature. Though it is very common in discussions of postcolonial literature to characterize everything, from the “new national literatures” of the 1950s and 1960s to writing by contemporary authors such as Ben Okri, Salman Rushdie, Bharti Mukherjee, Jamaica Kincaid, and Rohinton Mistry, as *generically* postcolonial (obscuring significant differences in both geography and history) and, for that matter, also to include writing from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century into the category of postcolonial,¹⁴ it has been equally common to introduce a periodizing schema to account for differences *within* this second period. One of the most common ways of dividing up the postcolonial phase of nationalist literature is by limiting the degree to which the postcolonial is to be identified with nationalist literature as such, that is, by defining nationalism as an explicit characteristic only of the *early* part of this phase. In these schemas—and they can be found in works from Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* to Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*¹⁵—nationalist literature wanes alongside the waning of nationalist hopes in the third world. As the promise of independence is transformed into the reality of neoimperialism and democratic governments are replaced by military dictatorships, so too (or so the story goes) writing turns away from the nation as a site of political hope or as a form that can productively mediate culture and politics.¹⁶ Bolstered by much of the recent scholarship on the nation that suggests that it is nothing more than “a thing of social artifice—a symbolic rather than a natural essence,”¹⁷ there is therefore a developmental narrative built into these periodizing schemas. The early, explicitly nationalist literatures are seen as overly simplistic in intent and design, as overconfident in the political effectiveness of what are mostly imported cultural forms (preeminently, the novel), and so are doomed to political failure

just as Third World nationalism itself is. The nation itself comes to be seen as a dangerous form. Paul Gilroy's view of the nation has become a common one: without exception, it is now assumed that "raciologies and nationalism promote and may even produce certain quite specific types of collectivity, characteristically those that are hierarchical, authoritarian, patriarchal and phobic about alterity."¹⁸ Instead of engaging in the process of "imagining" the nation, more recent postcolonial literature and theory is therefore characterized as embarking on what is seen as a much more sophisticated examination of identity and hybridity. Unlike earlier, explicitly nationalist literatures, for example, recent postcolonial writing is seen as paying greater attention to those internal differences of ethnicity, race, gender, and class that nationalism attempted to suppress or mask. The nation has thus been transformed from the potential solution to imperialism to the chief cause of the inability of postcolonial societies to get beyond imperialism; it has come to represent "not freedom from tyranny, but the embodiment of tyranny."¹⁹

It might seem that contemporary postcolonial studies have thus dispensed with the nation, and with good reason. And yet the theme of the nation inevitably reappears over and over again, in both implicit and explicit ways. There is, first of all, the general theme of resistance that is inevitably connected to postcolonial literature. Although the very concept of the postcolonial tends to produce an idea of a world divided into two large opposing blocks (the colonizers and the colonized, the West and the Rest, etc.), resistance is very rarely conceived of in these large, abstract categories. Resistance is rather a way of preserving or defining the integrity and autonomy of one's own community against threatening outside forces; as often as not, this community continues to be conceived of in literature as a national community.²⁰ The vexed questions surrounding cultural autonomy and cultural imperialism are similarly conceived in terms of national cultures, even in recent discourses of globalization that propose to suspend the nation and focus instead on the relations between the "local" and the "global." It is striking, for instance, that, in Benjamin Barber's rather hysterical meditations on the production of the global "monoculture" he calls "McWorld," it is only cultural policy at the level of the nation that is seen as able to preserve any sense of global cultural difference; at the opposite end of the political spectrum, Fredric Jameson has said much the same thing (if for different reasons) in his reflections on the fate of national cultures in the era of globalization.²¹ Finally, however much the production of the nation in literature has been put into question, there certainly seems to be no sign of a similar challenge to the idea that nations produce their own distinctive literatures that are expressions of a unique national character.

Even if these literatures may no longer be explicitly “nationalist,” postcolonial literatures continue to be conceived institutionally as a conglomeration of numerous national literatures, each of which can only be appropriately studied against the framework of the national situation in and through which they have been produced.

Many writers have, of course, suggested that all of these lingering remnants of the nation should simply be purged from our thinking. Christopher Clausen, for instance, has argued that the concept of national literatures should be abandoned once and for all. He writes that “despite the fact that the notion of national character has long been discredited, the link that nineteenth-century cultural nationalism forged between the status of the nation to which it belongs and the status of the literature that expresses it has never been broken.”²² It is important to break this link, he believes, because “it elevates parochialism into an axiom of study for historical reasons that have rarely been challenged in recent criticism . . . Holding onto the model in which a national literature serves as a badge of independence [for postcolonial nations] now actually defeats the original purpose by excessively identifying each writer with his or her local ‘tradition.’”²³ Similarly, the apparently obvious link between nation and culture that has predominated since Herder, and continues to form the basis for the national cultural policy of almost every nation on earth,²⁴ has been challenged, for example, by the communications theorist Richard Collins, who writes that “the notion of ‘national culture’ is both an organizing category in the shaping of economic and cultural production, and a mystifying category error.”²⁵ He cites Canada as an example of a country that has almost no common national culture shared between significant segments of the population (Anglophones, Francophones, and recent immigrants), but that nevertheless “holds together remarkably well” as a nation.²⁶ What both these authors suggest is that even if the nation continues to play a part in our reflections on literature as well as on everything else, continually returning even when it has seemingly been banished for good, it is perhaps only because the effort to go beyond it has not yet been undertaken with enough force. The solution would be to take up ever more forcefully Arjun Appadurai’s suggestion that “we need to think ourselves beyond the nation . . . the role of [contemporary] intellectual practices is to identify the current crisis of the nation and in identifying it to provide part of the apparatus of recognition for post-national social forms.”²⁷

The ease with which Appadurai is willing to abandon the nation in virtually all of the essays collected in his recent book, *Modernity at Large*, comes from his

unproblematized acceptance of the ways in which the world has fundamentally changed in recent years. Accepted definitions of national citizenship and national culture have been placed into question as a result of global mass migration, which has produced what he refers to as “diasporic public spheres”; a global mass-mediated imaginary has evolved that transcends all national boundaries; and the long-developing internationalization of consumption and production has reached levels that Lenin could barely have dreamed of when he characterized the imperialism of his day as “the highest stage of capitalism.”²⁸ But as Masao Miyoshi, among others, has pointed out, it seems dangerous to take the new conditions of “globalization” as an inevitable, empirical fact about the present state of the world — as the beginning point, in other words, for critical reflection; to do so can blur the line between the imperatives of critical discourse and that of the celebratory discourse of globalization expressed by transnational corporations and nation-states alike.²⁹ After all, capital seems perfectly happy to exist in a “postnational” world of hybrid subjectivities, just so long as everyone continues to consume its products as well as its ideology. Furthermore, what Appadurai and others have taken as an actualized state of the globe — a world in which, it seems, everyone watches James Cameron movies, speaks on cell phones, and moves to take up a new life in some distant part of the globe (when they are not traveling to visit United Nations–designated world-heritage sites) — must itself be seen as an invention of a class of cosmopolitan intellectuals from whose vantage point the world may indeed look fully globalized. As other commentators have pointed out, the discourse of globalization is in many ways 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; it does so by claiming that the processes associated with globalization are inevitable — impossible to stop or alter in the slightest way.³⁰ By contrast, the discourse of the nation might still today fulfill a critical function, and not just because it represents “the least bad version of governmental practice,”³¹ because it remains “the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time,”³² or because “all modern history demonstrates that proletarian dictatorships have only taken root where they fused with a national liberation.”³³ The growing sense that the nation is an inherently negative, limiting political form that should be replaced by discourses that deal with “nomadism” or “deterritorialization” should be tempered not only by the continued empirical existence of nations, but by the real political possibilities that it might have once and may still represent, especially in those national situations in

which the “global” alternative to the nation represents in many cases no alternative at all. In other words, as Henry Giroux argues, “what must be resisted is the assumption that the politics of national identity is necessarily complicitous with a reactionary discourse of nationalism and has been superseded by theories which locate identity politics squarely within the discourses of postnational, diasporic globalism.”³⁴

But whether or not the nation is still an important political force today — an issue that has generated endless, if necessary, debate — it remains essential to an understanding of the literature of the decolonizing world. In part, this is, of course, a historical necessity, that is, it is only through an understanding of the nation and its relationship to literature that we can make sense of the national and nationalist literatures that emerged in various parts of the British Commonwealth after World War II.³⁵ It is thus important to continue to pay attention to the relationship between literature and the nation in order to avoid the creation of a historically undifferentiated, homogeneous body of postcolonial texts. But the nation remains important in yet another way. By failing to deal with the nation in postcolonial literature, we are in danger of misunderstanding the significance of the aesthetic and political problems confronted by the writers of the fifties and sixties, for the larger political imperatives underlying contemporary postcolonial literature and theory as a whole. One of the most troubling problems for recent postcolonial criticism has been, for example, the question of the “cosmopolitanism” of many postcolonial writers and of much of postcolonial literature.³⁶ Writers such as Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri, V. S. Naipaul, and George Lamming produce works of literature that in content may be about the third world, but that are intended to be read and consumed mainly by first-world audiences; indeed, most contemporary postcolonial writers reside in the first world, and may even be citizens of first-world countries. The worries that this raises about the political or cultural authenticity of these contemporary texts begs the question of the conditions assumed for authenticity, that is, the organic connection between the writer, his or her people, and the national soil that is thought to be a guarantee of authentic cultural expression. These questions of authenticity, of their possibility or impossibility, are already central to the problem of writing nationalist literature in the 1950s and 1960s. The answers to the questions concerning the authenticity of contemporary texts, and so many of the other questions concerning the politics of the postcolonial, can be found in the way in which these earlier writers handled the aesthetic and political dilemmas they faced — or if

not the answers themselves, perhaps a more sophisticated way of posing the question that doesn't turn the issue of authenticity (as just one example) into an antinomy for which there is no solution.

It has been relatively easy to move beyond the question of the nation in literary studies largely because the relationship of the literature of the "nationalist" period of postcolonial literature—for the purposes of this study, the literary fields that developed in Canada, the British Caribbean, and Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s—to the concept of the nation has rarely been analyzed in the depth that it deserves. There are at least two reasons for this. First, with perhaps the exception of Marxist studies of African literature,³⁷ the "literary" status of the literature of these three "postcolonial" nations has never been properly placed into question. While Marxist literary critics such as Terry Eagleton and Raymond Williams have drawn attention to the fluid and shifting definitions of "literature" over time, the reified bourgeois notion of literature that undergirds most contemporary Western literary criticism has tended to be applied unquestioningly to non-Western or postcolonial literatures. What this obscures is an understanding of postcolonial national literary production as a specific mode and form of intellectual practice with its own specific conditions of possibility; the focus instead has been on the analysis of literary meaning rather than on an examination of what historical, intellectual, and material conditions made it possible for these texts to "mean" in the particular ways that they do. If there has been relatively little attention paid to the question of *why* postcolonial intellectuals produced literary objects as a mode of political activity in the postwar period, it is largely as a result of the second reason why the relationship between literature and nation has been undertheorized. For the most part, the Romantic coupling of literature to nation (or more generally of culture to nation) continues to be assumed as the only relationship between these terms in the period of nationalist literature. It seems obvious to most critics that during a period of revolutionary energies, revolutionary literature would be written, and that during a time in which the nation was seen to be the only possible mode of politics, that it is the nation that would be invoked by a political literature. The dyad nation-literature has thereby managed to retain its identity as a kind of literary natural kind, the name for a species of creature no longer extant but about which textual fossil records allow us to theorize. Yet a closer analysis suggests that the "nation" in nationalist literatures must be seen as functioning in a more complicated way, and one that cannot be easily dispelled when the Romantic connection of literature and nation is brought into question.

In what follows, I develop more fully the general theoretical orientation that I will take in my examination of the intersection of literature and the nation in each of the historical and geographical sites I have chosen to examine. I do so by looking closely and critically at some of the prominent models that have been offered regarding the relationship of literature (and culture) to the nation (and politics), adopting from each certain important themes that need to be addressed in any account of the function and meaning of nationalist literature. I begin by looking at Frantz Fanon's essay "On National Culture," which offers one of the most sophisticated interpretations of the relationship of culture to the politics of nationalism written during the period of decolonization itself. Second, I examine what has become a canonical text on the relationship of literature to nation: Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Finally, through a careful rereading of Fredric Jameson's much (and unfairly) maligned essay, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," I propose a way of thinking about the nation that lets us see it as a fluid conceptual zone in which the difficult problems of what Jameson calls "cultural revolution" are posed and explored in a manner from which we still have much to learn.

"This Zone of Occult Instability": Fanon on National Culture

Frantz Fanon's "On National Culture," constitutes one of the first attempts to theorize the relationship between culture and political struggle in the process of decolonization.³⁸ Originally delivered to the Second Congress of Black Artists in Rome in 1959, which was attended by such internationally prominent intellectuals as Langston Hughes, Pablo Neruda, and Nicolás Guillen, and later published as a chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), it has been an influential and formative text in establishing the framework for the study of postimperial and postcolonial culture and cultural production. As is perhaps most clearly visible in *Black Skin, White Masks*,³⁹ Fanon emphasizes throughout his work the ways in which colonialism and imperialism operate through a form of cultural exploitation and degradation just as much as through the political and economic control of the colonies by their colonial masters. At the same time, in "On National Culture" he expresses a great deal of skepticism about any form of resistance to colonialism that addresses cultural imperialism without also engaging in the revolutionary work of bringing about an end to political and economic forms of colonialism. It is this aspect of the essay that has often been elided by critics who have chosen to emphasize Fanon's discussion of "the reciprocal bases

of national culture and the fight for freedom” (ONC 236–48), which appears to place culture and politics in a more dialectical relationship than is really the case in Fanon’s work; and though it has certainly been a foundational essay in thinking through the significance of culture for revolutionary politics, what it thus tells us about the politics of culture has sometimes been simplified in a manner that betrays both the complexity of the issues Fanon addresses and the complexity with which he attempts to address them.

The primary questions that Fanon addresses are announced only at the end of “On National Culture”: “What are the relations between the struggle — whether political or military — and culture? Is there a suspension of culture during the conflict? Is the national struggle an expression of culture? Finally, ought one to say that the battle for freedom, however fertile a posteriori with regard to culture, is in itself a negation of culture? In short is the struggle for liberation a cultural phenomenon or not?” (ONC 245) These are useful and important questions. The task of making sense of Fanon’s answers to these questions is, however, made difficult because of the multiple and ambiguous ways in which he uses the term “culture” throughout the essay. At times, culture is used in its anthropological sense as a term to describe a “collective mode of life, or a repertoire of beliefs, styles, values and symbols.”⁴⁰ In this sense, Fanon clearly believes that the struggle for liberation *is* a cultural phenomenon: the independence struggle necessarily produces a new culture that is no longer in the thrall of colonialism nor simply resumes a cultural inheritance that colonialism interrupted. But when he speaks dismissively of “men of culture” (intellectuals), and of the presumed politics of various cultural artifacts (literature, jazz, etc.), the opposite seems to be the case. While liberation is, for Fanon, a cultural phenomenon, it is not a product of “culture” understood in this latter sense — “culture” as the collection of predominantly “high” cultural objects, like paintings, novels, elite forms of music, and so on, that in a complex, mediated manner produce liberation by effecting (among other things) a change in the consciousness of the colonized.

The critical energy of Fanon’s essay comes from its attack on the politics of negritude. His critique is one that has since become familiar, echoed, for example, by Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka.⁴¹ For Fanon, the problem with negritude is both temporal and spatial. The program advocated by intellectuals associated with negritude (Léopold Sedar Senghor’s “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century” constituting the most cogent defense of negritude)⁴² has two aims: the recovery of a rich, vibrant African cultural past that imperialism sought to negate and destroy, and the affirmation of a common African culture

shared by various African nations as well as by the communities of the African diaspora around the world. Fanon takes exception to both of these aims. While he believes that the recovery of a devalued cultural heritage is an important first step in opposing colonialism, it is also a limited one, because it consigns African culture to the past, to a world of tribal villages rather than reflecting the present-day reality of an Africa of skyscrapers and freeways. Intellectuals concerned with revolutionary change must, for Fanon, concern themselves with the dynamic culture of the present, and of the future, that is being generated through the very process of the struggle against imperialism. There is for Fanon a second problem with extolling the riches of an African cultural past: the evocation of Africa's cultural glories does not produce the political effect that proponents of negritude would want to claim for it. As he writes, "you will never make colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little-known cultural treasures under its eyes" (ONC 223).

To his criticism of negritude's inverted temporality—a concern for the past that should be an interest in the future—Fanon adds a second criticism. This has to do with negritude's excessive spatial generality, expressed in the form of a cosmopolitanism that seems to negate the determining and determinate importance of social, historical, and geographical context. By claiming a cultural inheritance that extends geographically to virtually every part of the world, negritude negates the fact that profound differences exist, for example, between the experiences of Africans in Chicago, Nigeria, and Tanganyika (ONC 215–16). Fanon sees the spatial generality of negritude emerging as a genuine reaction to the logic of colonialism. He writes that since "colonialism did not dream of wasting its time in denying the existence of one national culture after another," it makes sense that "the reply of the colonized peoples will be straight away continental in its breadth" (ONC 212). An emphasis on the continental or intercontinental dimensions of black culture tends, however, to impede a more materialist exploration of the relationship of culture to the particularities of history, economics, and politics in different parts of the globe. What negritude fails to account for as a result is, Fanon claims, that "every culture is first and foremost *national*, and that the problems which kept Richard Wright or Langston Hughes on the alert were fundamentally different from those which might confront Léopold Senghor or Jomo Kenyatta" (ONC 216; my emphasis).

As expressed in the series of questions posed at the end of "On National Culture," it is the question of the relationship of culture to politics that is Fanon's primary concern. Yet if "every culture is first and foremost national," then this

question must itself of necessity proceed through a consideration of the shape and meaning of the nation. What the nation means for culture and for politics, how it is connected to each of them, and how it produces or is produced by them, therefore, become important questions. Why the nation is the appropriate “unit” or “container” of culture, that is, why culture is *national* as opposed to international, or (in all of the numerous modalities of these terms) local or regional is a question that Fanon never addresses directly. Indirectly, as a response to negritude’s cultural idealism, the assertion of the national basis of culture can be understood as an attempt to assert a more materialist analysis of culture by counteracting a spatial generality with that of a more specific space. Nevertheless, in the context of Africa, it would seem to be difficult to see the nation as anything other than a colonial imposition on the continent, a division of peoples and geography that fails to comply with even the most basic logics of the typical (i.e., European) nation, formed as a geographic division of space on the basis of ethnic or linguistic grounds, however violently invented these might be. The nation in Africa reflects the struggle of imperial powers over the resources of the continent — nothing less, nothing more. By presuming a necessary identification between culture and nation, Fanon appears to be in danger of repeating the error he and others have identified in negritude, implicitly supporting the Manichean logic of colonialism through an affirmation of its invented divisions: white/black, rational/emotional, modern/premodern, *national/African*.

It needs to be remembered, however, that for Fanon, if culture is somehow necessarily “national,” it is not because of its link to some primordial ethnic or national past. The “national culture” that interests Fanon is the one being produced in the present struggles for independence for the future. The struggle for independence and cultural autonomy is framed by the nation, it seems, because of the importance of a specifically national independence for *international* political legitimacy. Indeed, the importance that Fanon attributes to the nation arises out of his suspicions regarding a false cosmopolitanism or internationalism — what the Second Comintern identified as a first-world, “petty bourgeois internationalism”⁴³ — that argued for the irrelevance of the nation on the eve of national independence in the third world. In this respect, Fanon echoes views expressed by other third-world political leaders, such as Sun Yat-sen, who cautioned that first-world nations, “hoping to make themselves forever secure in their exclusive position and to prevent the smaller and weaker peoples from again reviving . . . sing praises to cosmopolitanism, saying that nationalism is too

narrow; really their espousal of internationalism is but imperialism and aggression in another disguise.”⁴⁴

Fanon addresses this issue explicitly in the conclusion of the essay. In the final paragraphs, he attacks the notion that “national claims . . . are a phase that humanity has left behind” (ONC 246–47). Rather, national consciousness—which he states “is not nationalism” (ONC 247)—is the starting point for any genuine internationalism. As he writes, “it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows” (ONC 247–48). It is not, then, a regressive or parochial nationalism that Fanon is advocating, but simply a sense of the nation as the space where a people’s culture takes place, a space that correspondingly defines who “the people” are, or rather, who they will come to be as a result of revolutionary struggle. National culture is therefore in a sense the culture of the dictatorship of the proletariat (given Fanon’s Marxist inclinations), though with its own regional or national inflections. This sense of the nation is not without its problems, as can be seen by looking at a related formulation in Amílcar Cabral’s “National Liberation and Culture.”⁴⁵ Cabral describes “national culture” as the “master line” that connects across the diversity of a nation’s “cultural panorama”; to create a national culture means to bring diversity into a “confluence,” to “resolve contradictions and define common objectives . . . within a national framework.”⁴⁶ There is something potentially sinister about this forward-looking, revolutionary nationalism. But the possibility that a national culture might limit a diversity of cultural expression *within* the nation—which is presumably the kind of thing that Fanon associates with “nationalism” rather than the nation—is not one that Fanon is either concerned with or seems prepared to address.

In contrast to various forms of nativism, Fanon emphasizes the continual transformation of culture: the shifting modalities of present reality that form “the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will be formed” (ONC 225). For Fanon, intellectuals who focus on reviving the nation’s cultural past forget that “the forms of thought and what it feeds on, together with the modern techniques of information, language, and dress, have dialectically reorganized the people’s intelligences and that the constant principles which acted as safeguards during the colonial period are now undergoing extremely radical changes” (ONC 225). One of the essay’s central issues—perhaps *the* central one—has to do then with how intellectuals can contribute to the development of the anticolonial revolution, how one form of national culture (the “culture” of

books, treatises, plays, etc.) can contribute to the production of national culture understood as a whole way of life. In this sense, Fanon's essay often reads like an African version of Mao's instructions and warnings to the intellectuals and writers assembled at Yan'an.⁴⁷ At the core of this discussion is a familiar antinomy: "The first duty of the native poet is to see clearly the people he has chosen as the subject of his work of art. He cannot go forward resolutely unless he first realizes the extent of his estrangement from them" (ONC 226). The separation of the intellectual from the masses has to be overcome if she is to be able to participate in the fight for freedom in a meaningful way. Yet it seems as if this estrangement, insofar as it appears built into the very definition of what constitutes an intellectual, is a logical and epistemological impediment as much as a political or ethical one. Fanon commonly ascribes only two positions to intellectuals: either they are nativists, "hypnotized" by the "mummified fragments" of the "dead-husk of culture" (ONC 227); or they have been seduced into mimicking the colonizer's national culture. Both of these positions distance the intellectual from the national culture (and it is safe to assume therefore that what is meant by "national," is a national *popular* culture) that is being forged through the process of national liberation. So, too, does the association of intellectuals with various forms of cultural production that Fanon characterizes as separate from the actualities and realities of "lived" or "revolutionary" culture. Writing literature, for example, is treated at times by Fanon as little more than a second-order activity whose importance to and utility for the struggle for national independence is precisely one of the things that needs to be established in "On National Culture," since, on the surface at least, writing literature seems to be little more than a waste of revolutionary energies that could be better expended on the direct struggle for independence.

In "On National Culture," the role of the intellectual or cultural producer in establishing national culture is therefore always suspect. In one sense, for Fanon, intellectuals *can* play a role in forming national culture, as long as they commit themselves to being one with the people. Their role is that of a "cheering section," urging on the political struggle without truly participating in it or explicitly affecting it. At one point, Fanon describes "national culture" as *just* this sort of activity: "the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (ONC 233). This stands in sharp contrast not only to his earlier claim that national culture emerges out of "the fight which the people wage against the forces of occupation" (ONC 223), but also with his

subsequent discussion of the “reciprocal bases of national culture and the fight for freedom” (ONC 236–48), the section of the essay to which most critical attention has been paid.

This final section of “On National Culture” appears to express a more dialectical relationship between culture and politics and culture and the nation. This is exemplified in Fanon’s description of the “literature of combat,” the only true or authentic national literature, that is characterized by the native writer’s decision to address his or her own people (ONC 239–40). A literature of combat “calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation . . . it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space” (ONC 240). As Fanon describes it, true national literature functions as a kind of technology of freedom that does not simply praise revolutionary efforts, but generates and shapes the national consciousness that makes national revolution possible. Fanon’s description of the storyteller opens up a similar political role for culture: “The storyteller replies to the expectant people by successive approximations, and makes his way, apparently alone but in fact helped by his public, towards the seeking out of new patterns, that is to say national patterns” (ONC 241). It is the nation that is born out of this dialectic between the intellectual and the people through “successive approximations” as the storyteller produces his stories with the people (who are themselves in a constant state of transformation) in mind. Even here, however, Fanon is careful to assign to the nation a *priority* over national culture. The nation, he claims, gives life to national culture “in the strictly biological sense of the phrase” (ONC 245),⁴⁸ and not the other way around.

Where are we then left with respect to Fanon’s questions that I set out at the beginning of this discussion? If nothing else, what we can see is that “national culture,” an apparently obvious and straightforward concept, employed constantly in all sorts of political discussions and debates, is in reality an enormously difficult and ambiguous concept that can be utilized rhetorically in all kinds of ways. Fanon is never clear about what the concepts “nation,” “culture,” and “national culture” finally signify, and even less so about how these concepts intersect. Does culture create the nation? Or is the nation necessary for culture? What role does the writer play in producing national revolution and what role do the people play? And why a *national* revolution? Though there is a temptation to try to wrest a single meaning for all of these concepts, to assign to Fanon a

particular position on the efficacy and utility of culture in the pursuit of revolutionary activities, it is perhaps by highlighting the multiple valences of each of these terms and their multiple links both to each other and to a complex set of political questions, that this essay is most useful. It is, in other words, precisely by *not* settling any of these issues that we can grasp that for Fanon the nation and national culture name a political problematic rather than a concrete solution, a problematic to which there are no easy answers.

What seems to me to most complicate Fanon's attempt to address the questions he poses at the end of "On National Culture" — as if it is only after working through all of the various combinations I have outlined here that the questions themselves finally emerge clearly — is the introduction of the "nation" into what is really a meditation on the politics of culture. The concept of the nation seems to bring with it all sorts of ambiguities that multiply the already difficult questions that he tries to address. In one respect, the anticolonial "nation," understood in Benedict Anderson's sense of the nation as an "imagined community," is only brought into existence through the struggle against colonialism; in another sense, both in terms of the people conducting the struggle and the space in which the struggle takes place, it must already be presumed to exist: the independence struggles in Algeria and Guinea-Bissau, for example, are separate ones, each responding to their own historical circumstances and their different colonial legacies, however much they might also be animated by theories and philosophies that circulate internationally. In one sense, "national culture" can simply denote the whole way of life of the people within the space, either the preexisting culture or the one to come; in another, it refers to a much more determinate and determining set of discursive and institutional practices (those of the "literature of combat," for example) that presumes to define the very essence of the people of the nation. In "On National Culture," the concept of national culture also swings ambiguously from high to popular culture, with one often pitted against the other in an attempt to define the soul of the nation. Finally, to all of this must be added Fanon's sense of the nation as a kind of generative principle that exists prior to and is the condition of national culture: "the nation gathers together the various indispensable elements necessary for the creation of a culture, those elements which alone can give it credibility, validity, life, and creative power" (ONC 245). It is not entirely surprising that to the multiple questions that Fanon poses regarding the political efficacy of culture in the independence struggle, his essay suggests multiple answers: yes, no, maybe.

What is it that introduces all of these various formulations, all of these possi-

ble meanings of national culture? Or to put it another way, what is specifically *national* about culture? The answer to this question is to be found not in Fanon's opposition of the nation to a bourgeois internationalism, but in one of the key themes that emerges out of Fanon's consideration of national culture, and one that will prove to be an essential component of any examination of literature and the nation in the third world: the question of the role of intellectuals in the revolutionary anticolonial struggle. Fanon rejects any easy connection between, for example, the writing of nationalist literature by an intellectual elite and the creation of the nation or of national culture. As in so many of his writings,⁴⁹ in "On National Culture" Fanon expresses what I have already described as a deep suspicion about the third-world intellectual. The intellectual seems to be an inevitably compromised figure, positioned between worlds in such a way that his or her contribution to the revolutionary struggle must always be treated as suspect; she is necessarily estranged from the people by virtue of being an intellectual and must resolve this estrangement before engaging in politics. And yet, the intellectual appears to have something important to contribute to political struggle *as* an intellectual—in the case of Fanon's analysis, the production of a "national consciousness" through the writing of a literature of combat. In part, this literature can only be written once the writer overcomes his or her estrangement and decides to address the people genuinely; and yet, it must also be recognized that it is only the intellectual's estrangement that makes possible the introduction of this largely foreign concept—"literature"—into the midst of the revolutionary struggle in the first place.

There are thus two points to take from "On National Culture" regarding the relationship between culture (and literature) and the nation (and politics). First, Fanon's analysis reveals a much more theoretically sophisticated attempt to deal with national culture than that presumed in the Romantic coupling of culture to nation: we are here already well beyond the simple equation of race to national culture or revolutionary writing to revolutionary results. Second, what begins to emerge is that the "nation" is the name for a specific problem of cultural production in the postwar world as much as it is the name for a geopolitical formation. In other words, what is "national" about culture is in part an expression of the difficulties faced by third-world intellectuals with respect to politics, a fact that is performatively enacted in Fanon's own ambiguity with respect to national culture. One aspect of this difficulty is located in the politics of culture with respect to the people—the problem of how to speak to and for the people, how to direct them while being directed by them. The nation forms the conceptual and rhetori-

cal space within which this difficulty is worked out. It is in this sense that the nation is the “zone of occult instability where the people dwell” that the intellectual must travel to in order to be suffused with light. The nation is also a concept that balances out the third-world intellectual’s inevitable cosmopolitanism (or modernity), which threatens his or her claim to authenticity. Fanon’s famous claim that “it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows” (ONC 247–48) is by itself an incomplete thought. To this should be added the final words of “On National Culture,” which directly follow Fanon’s more famous statement: “And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the only source of all culture” (ONC 248). If culture is born at the intersection of the national and the international, the local and the global, then the claim that “every culture is first and foremost national” means something different from what is normally assumed. It is another dimension of the meaning of this phrase and its significance for nationalist postcolonial literature that will become clear through an examination of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*.

The Imaginary Nation: Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*⁵⁰ articulates what has become the most common and perhaps least contested understanding of the connection of literature to the nation in the academy today. The influence of the book on the discipline of literary criticism and on virtually every field that touches upon the question of the nation has been staggering: the description of the nation as an “imagined community” has become ubiquitous, though what is meant by either of these terms (“imagined” or “community”), let alone what they mean when taken together, has rarely been examined in detail. In projects as different as Gregory Jusdanis’s and Stathis Gougouris’s work on the development of Greek national culture to Robert Lecker’s assessment of the work of the nation in Canadian literary criticism to Arjun Appadurai’s description of the new work of the imagination that follows the end of the nation, the idea of the nation as an “imagined community” acts as a fertile and suggestive term, with “imagined” being used both in a technical sense as essentially equivalent to the psychoanalytic “imaginary” (in Gougouris’s *Dream Nation*) and in a simpler, everyday sense to suggest that it is possible through a collective force of will simply to “imagine” the nation in an entirely different way (in Lecker’s *Making It Real*).⁵¹

It is easy to understand why Anderson’s theory of the nation as an imagined community has enjoyed particular success in the field of literary criticism. For

instead of having to make sense of the more abstract or mediated ways in which literature contributes to the formation of the nation — as one element, for example, of the institution of state-sponsored education discussed by Gellner in *Nations and Nationalism* or as a device or *techné* that reinforces ethnic or linguistic particularities within a nation — in Anderson's account the central disciplinary object of literary criticism, the novel, is placed at the epicenter of the nation's *raison d'être*. Instead of having to devise complicated models by which the writing and reading of literature can be understood as having an effect on the formation and perpetuation of the nation and national culture (to have to spell out, with great difficulty, the operation of "levels," "mediation," and so on), Anderson makes the novel and the nation roughly congruent. This means that the theoretical and pragmatic questions with which Fanon and Cabral struggled regarding the relationship of culture to politics are resolved immediately, and all sorts of otherwise very difficult epistemological and critical questions are rendered easy and unproblematic.

One effect of Anderson's model has been then to close off the analysis of the relationship of literature to the nation, or if not to close it off entirely, to limit it to a contemplation of literary content, that is, to the ways in which various novels "imagine" the nation or how through novels the nation is imagined by readers.⁵² This has obvious problems, not the least of which has been to render the nation into nothing more than a set of ideas shared by a community and, even more restrictedly, to ideas that are expressed or manifested uniquely in cultural objects like the novel. Even though Anderson himself deals with different national circumstances and situations, the concept of the nation as an imagined community has circulated in such a way as to have made it into a universal expression of the form of modern nation, limiting work on the specific function of the novel in various national formations. Finally, foregrounding the impact of "print-capitalism" in the formation of the modern nation has tended to sideline its role in producing transnational connections as much as national ones, as well as the development of other communication technologies in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (such as semaphore, telegraphy, national road systems, etc.) that were also understood explicitly as technologies of nation-building.⁵³

This is not to suggest that Anderson's understanding of the relationship of the novel to the nation is not useful or that it is (to put it too bluntly) incorrect. *Imagined Communities* remains an important and essential text on the nation, and on literature with respect to the nation, for at least two reasons. First, Anderson's claim that the idea of the nation developed outside of Europe in the form of the

“creole nationalisms” of South America has challenged the largely Eurocentric terms in which third-world nationalisms have been examined. No longer the space to which the nation is exported as an alien category, the colonies become instead a site to which the nation “returns” after a prolonged, transformative detour through Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Second, as misleading and open-ended as the idea of the nation as something “imagined” has become, it nevertheless introduces a way of thinking about the nation that emphasizes its discursive character — an important corrective to social scientific studies of the nation that have tended to look primarily at the historical and institutional elements of the nation in exploring its growth and development.

It is in this second sense that the novel is seen by Anderson as playing a key role in the production of the nation. Anderson’s chief insight about the relationship of the novel to the nation, besides that of the shared period of their historical genesis, is to see that the novel did not merely represent the nation, but was a form that “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation” (IC 25). It does so in a number of ways: by helping to encourage a standardized national language; by encouraging literacy; and, in Timothy Brennan’s words, “by objectifying the ‘one, yet many’ of national life . . . mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles.”⁵⁴ Indeed, the particular form of the realist novel seems to be an almost exact homology of the kind of imagining that is required to produce the defined space of mutual identification and group solidarity that is the nation. Anderson exemplifies this in terms of José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi’s 1816 novel, *El Periquillo Sarniento* (The itching parrot): “Here again we see the ‘national imagination’ at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside. This picaresque *tour d’horison* — hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries, Indians, Negroes — is nonetheless not a *tour de monde*. The horizon is clearly bounded: it is that of colonial Mexico. Nothing assures us of this sociological solidity more than a succession of plurals. For they conjure up a social space full of *comparable* prisons, none in itself of any unique importance, but all representative (in their simultaneous, separate existence) of the oppressiveness of *this* colony” (IC 30).

In the spirit of Régis Debray’s “Marxism and the National Question” and Tom Nairn’s *The Break-Up of Britain*, Anderson’s book originates as an attempt to deal with what Nairn refers to as “Marxism’s great historical failure” — its lack of attention to the nation.⁵⁵ Anderson’s reflections on the nation emerge out of

his specific attempt to make sense of the emergence of nationalism throughout the 1970s in South Asian communist countries where one might have expected a commitment to internationalism rather than to nationalism. His theory of the emergence and development of the nation is nevertheless intended to be universal—a global theory of nationalism as opposed to simply a discussion of nationalism in South Asia. It is the universalizing character of Anderson's theoretical reflections in *Imagined Communities* that has drawn a good deal of the criticism directed toward the book. Gopal Balakrishnan and Partha Chatterjee, for instance, have suggested that Anderson's discussion of the development of the nation has limited applicability to the postcolonial nation.⁵⁶ Chatterjee in particular is critical of Anderson's description of third-world nationalism as essentially "modular" in character, a nationalism sutured together Frankenstein-like from preexisting models of nationalism developed elsewhere: the "creole nationalisms" of the Americas, the linguistic nationalisms of Europe, and the "official nationalism" typified by Russia. Chatterjee asks: "If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized."⁵⁷

Chatterjee suggests that anticolonial nationalism can in fact only be understood as premised "not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the 'modular' forms of the national society propagated by the modern West."⁵⁸ This is a point that is often misunderstood when looking at anticolonial nationalisms, Chatterjee claims, because nationalism in the decolonizing world has been taken "much too literally and much too seriously" as a political movement, even though "anti-colonialism nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power."⁵⁹ Using India as his primary example, Chatterjee shows how anticolonial nationalism works through a division of "the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual."⁶⁰ He writes: "The material is the domain of the 'outside,' of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East has succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and

its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctiveness of one's spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anti-colonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa."⁶¹

In his criticism of Anderson's universalistic tendencies, Chatterjee unfortunately produces a universalism of his own. For while the substance of his criticism of Anderson might be generally correct, it is nonetheless not at all clear whether the "formula" that he outlines can itself be easily transposed to all other anti-colonial situations. One of the things that makes the division of the "spiritual" and the "material" possible in India is, as Chatterjee points out, the evolution of Bengali in India as the language of national culture, with English reserved for the business of the country — both its political and economic business. The dynamics of colonialism are such, however, that in many former colonies, such a division is rendered difficult and problematic by the fact that there is no linguistic cultural "reservoir" available other than the colonial language, which thus has to act as the language of business *and* of national culture. The trauma experienced by many postcolonial writers is precisely to be found in their sense of a lack of an authentically indigenous language or literary form that could act as the "spiritual," "inner" domain of cultural identity, although forms of creole and regional English complicate this to some degree.⁶² In nations such as Canada, those of the West Indies, and Nigeria, the "inner" therefore *also* seems to be a realm in which the West has proved its superiority. In these three regions, it is possible to see a continuum along which the colonization of the inner, spiritual domain can be measured — the "settler colony" of Canada experiencing the collapse of the "inner" and "outer" to the greatest degree (though here one needs to be careful to distinguish between French and English Canada), while Nigeria, with its rich cultural and social traditions that existed prior to colonialism, experiencing it to a more limited degree. Nevertheless, even in Nigeria, the language of the spiritual domain seems *of necessity* to be English, the only possible language shared by an elite (made up of an unhappy and unstable combination of Igbo, Hausa-Fulani, and Yoruba) for the purposes of running the country, but also, as Achebe and Soyinka both argue, for the writing of a truly national literature.⁶³

The greatest problem with extending Anderson's equation *novel*=*nation* to these postcolonial sites, however, has to do with historical, cultural, and technological circumstances that have made the novel (or print-culture more gener-

ally) an increasingly difficult site at which to imagine the imagining of the nation. Since the end of World War II, it could be argued that representational technologies such as radio and television have largely supplanted the novel and have come to be almost coextensive with what is left of the contemporary public sphere.⁶⁴ In Nigeria and the Caribbean, illiteracy, lack of the leisure time and disposable income required for “serious” reading, and an underdeveloped tradition of reading for noninstrumental purposes (i.e., for “pleasure” as opposed to school examinations), has made the novel a minor cultural form with very little public or popular presence; in Canada, necessities of geography have meant that the discourse of nationalism has been mediated in the twentieth century by more highly developed technologies than by literature, for example, radio, television, and telecommunications. Whatever the importance of the novel in the creation of nineteenth-century European nations, it is simply too great a leap to imagine that the novel has played or can play a similar role in these postcolonial regions. This is true, I think, even if the idea of national culture or the nation is defined primarily as a concern of the elites,⁶⁵ since it is not at all clear whether the novel has played much role even in the deliberations of the postcolonial nationalist elite.

If the separation between the “spiritual” and the “material” that Chatterjee claims is definitive of anticolonial nationalism in India has a counterpart in Canada, the Caribbean, and Nigeria, it is to be found precisely in the relationship of the novel to these other representational technologies. In these regions, it is the aesthetic and moral “seriousness” of the novel that has been seen as (potentially) the spiritual reservoir of national culture; in the postcolony, radio and television are by contrast too obviously extensions of the state’s political and economic apparatuses, both in terms of their relationship to nation-state propaganda and as one of the primary means by which the “foreign” intrudes into national culture. As I hope will become apparent in my examination of each of the sites under consideration in this study, the formative character of the novel with respect to the nation is a theme that is raised by writers and critics in each of these regions. Yet it is difficult to reconcile this with the limited societal impact of the novel, and with the fact that the novel, along with other literary genres “borrowed” for use in these regions, must *also* be seen as forms of foreign “technology” that might impede the development of national culture as much as they could help to produce it. So while it may not be possible to see the relationship of the novel to the nation in the way that Anderson imagines, it is perhaps as a means of resolving this absence of a language that could operate definitively as the “spiritual dimen-

sion” of national culture that the writing of literature assumes an important place in the intellectual production of the nation. The problem faced by Fanon returns here again with renewed force. For if this relatively minor cultural form contains the “spirit” of the national culture (and thus of the nation itself) it becomes imperative to reconnect it to “the people” by whatever means possible; this imperative arises as a common theme of third-world literature and criticism, particularly in that literature that sees itself as nationalist.

It should be noted that the suitability of “print-capitalism” as an explanation of third-world nationalism is something that Anderson himself has begun to question. In “Imagining East Timor,” he tries to account for the “the very rapid spread and development of Timorese nationalism,” which poses a problem for his general thesis. He writes: “My theoretical writings on nationalism have focused on the importance of the spread of print and its relation to capitalism, yet in East Timor there has been very little capitalism and illiteracy was widespread . . . What was it then that made it possible to ‘think East Timor’”? Anderson’s conclusion is that the nation imagined as “East Timor” — “an expression which comes from the Mercatorian map, on which a penciled administrative line divides Timor in half” — has in fact been produced by the gaze of the colonial state of Indonesia. Just as in the colonial Dutch East Indies, where all of the natives understood that they were all seen simply as (generic) colonized subjects in the eyes of the colonizers regardless of difference in island of origin, religion, or ethnicity, so too the Indonesian state has consistently referred to the people of East Timor as the “East Timorese,” even though there are at least thirty different ethnic groups living there. Another factor that Anderson points to is the state-sponsored spread of religion in Indonesia, originally devised as a response to the official atheism of the former Communist regime. Prior to the state requirement that each Indonesian have an official religion, the East Timorese were primarily animists; afterwards, due to historical and geographic circumstances, East Timor became almost entirely Catholic. Anderson writes that “this Catholic community in some sense substitutes for the kind of nationalism that I have talked about elsewhere, which comes from print capitalism.”⁶⁶

Anderson sees the situation of East Timor as an exception to his general thesis regarding the relationship between print capitalism and the nation. But, at least with respect to the development of postcolonial nations, the case of East Timor seems to represent the rule rather than the exception. This *negative* form of nation-formation, one in which the affinities of national identification are the result of external definitions that blur race, ethnicity, and class into one category —

the “colonized” — seems to provide the founding moment of national identity in almost every postcolonial situation (a fact that Chatterjee captures in his phrase “anti-colonial nationalism”). Even so, the situation of the former British colonies is once again further complicated in terms of language. In East Timor, Tetun has become the language of religion and of national identity, functioning in the same manner as Bengali in nineteenth-century India, while Indonesian in East Timor has played the same role as English in India, providing access to the larger, outside world. Again, in the British Commonwealth there is no such internal *elite* language distinct from the language of the colonizer that might provide the basis for the creation of a national culture, nor is there the high degree of religious differentiation that characterizes the relationship of East Timor to Indonesia.

As provocative as Anderson’s thesis regarding the place of the novel in the formation of the nation might be, it thus hardly seems to be an adequate way of assessing postwar, postcolonial nationalist literature. A straightforward reading of numerous literary manifestos from Canada, the Caribbean, and Nigeria regarding the revolutionary power of the novel with respect to the nation might of course suggest otherwise. From Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi wa’ Thiong’o in Africa, to George Lamming, Wilson Harris, and C. L. R. James in the Caribbean to Dennis Lee and Robert Kroetsch in Canada, writers have proclaimed the imaginative power of literature to create nations along very similar lines to Anderson’s thesis. The connection that these writers make between literature and the nation is, however, nevertheless different from that made by Anderson, for whom it is the *form* of the novel and the newspaper rather than its content that makes national imaginings possible. For these writers, the connection largely remains that of the Romantic coupling of culture and nation, even if literature seems to have very limited material force in these regions.

Instead of addressing questions either of literary content or form when mapping out the function of literature with respect to the nation, what is needed is a different way of looking at this relationship that emphasizes the production of nationalist literature in the postcolony as a form of intellectual practice with its own specific limitations and possibilities and that takes into account the way in which the “nation” functions as a conceptual space for the articulation of the political dilemmas faced by third-world writers with respect to the people. This new model of national literature must also be able to assess the way in which “literature” acts as the “spiritual” dimension of the nation in the absence of an unique national language. It seems to me that, built on the insights into the category of national literature offered by a reading of Fanon and Anderson, such

a model is offered by Fredric Jameson's idea of "national allegory," which not only takes into account both of these elements of nationalist literature in the decolonizing world but extends and develops them further. This is, however, by no means a clear, straightforward reading of Jameson's essay on third-world literature. What I will do is draw out the ways in which Jameson's discussion of national allegory points to both a mode of interpretation of postcolonial texts that focuses on its collective, political dimension and to a way of thinking about the nation that makes it more than just the name for a primitive political stage that we're lucky to have left behind. This may be true of the nation-state; the nation, perhaps not just yet.

"By Way of a Sweeping Hypothesis": Jameson's National Allegories

Fredric Jameson's proposal that all third-world texts be read as "national allegories" has been one of the more influential and important attempts to theorize the relationship of literary production to the nation and to politics. Unfortunately, its influence and importance has thus far been primarily *negative*. For many critics, Jameson's essay stands as an example of what *not* to do when studying "third-world" literature from the vantage point of the first-world academy. His attempt in the now infamous essay, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multi-national Capitalism," to delineate "some general theory of what is often called third-world literature"⁶⁷ has been attacked for its very desire for generality. The presumption that it is possible to produce a theory that would explain African, Asian, and Latin American literary production, the literature of China and Senegal, has been (inevitably) read as nothing more than a patronizing, theoretical orientalism or as yet another example of a troubling appropriation of Otherness with the aim of exploring the West rather than the Other. The best-known criticism of Jameson's essay along these lines remains Aijaz Ahmad's "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory.'"⁶⁸ More informally and anecdotally, however, within the field of postcolonial literary and cultural studies, Jameson's essay has come to be treated as little more than a cautionary tale about the extent and depth of Eurocentrism in the Western academy, or, even more commonly, as a convenient bibliographic marker of those kinds of theories of third-world literature that everyone now agrees are limiting and reductive.⁶⁹

Looking back on Jameson's essay through the haze of fifteen years of postcolonial studies, as well as through the equally disorienting smoke thrown up by the

explosion of theories and positions on globalization, one wonders what all the fuss was about. In hindsight, it appears that almost without exception critics of Jameson's essay have willfully misread it. Of course, such misreadings are to be expected. The reception given to this or that theory has as much to do with timing as with its putative content. As one of the first responses to postcolonial literary studies from a major critic outside the field, Jameson's essay in the mid-1980s provided postcolonial critics with a flash point around which to articulate general criticisms of dominant views of North-South relations expressed within even supposedly critical political theories, like Marxism. It also provided a self-definitional opportunity for postcolonial studies: a shift away from even the lingering traces of Marxist interpretations of imperialism toward more deconstructive ones exemplified by the work of figures such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha.⁷⁰ While criticisms of Jameson's views may have thus been useful or productive in their own way, they have nevertheless tended to obscure and misconstrue a sophisticated attempt to make sense of the relationship of literature to politics in the decolonizing world. I want to argue here that Jameson's "general" theory of third-world literary production offers a way of conceptualizing the relationship of literature to politics (and politics to literature) that goes beyond the most common (and commonsense) understanding of the relations between these terms.⁷¹ Indeed, what the concept of "national allegory" introduces is a model for a properly materialist approach to postcolonial texts and contexts, one that resonates with Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks's recent characterization of postcolonial studies as "interested above all in materialist critiques of power and how that power or ideology seems to interpellate subjects within a discourse as subordinate and without agency."⁷² The question I will pursue here is the relationship of allegory (as a mode of interpretation) to the nation (as a specific kind of sociopolitical problematic) and what this relationship entails for an examination of the nation in postcolonial literature, specifically in the decades immediately following World War II.

One of the first things that has to be made clear about Jameson's account of third-world literature is that the concept of "national allegory" is exhausted by neither of its component terms. Jameson is aware of the fact that the "nation" and "allegory" are concepts that have both fallen into disrepute: the nation, because of the historical experiences of first- and third-world countries with the virulent nationalisms of the twentieth century, as well as the vigorous criticism that has been directed toward the nation over the past several decades; allegory, because of the naive mode of one-to-one mapping that it seems to imply, a presumed

passage from text to context that is epistemologically and politically suspect. Attaching these terms to a theory of third-world texts has a tendency to conjure up once again the whole specter of development theory and practice, in which technologies that have become antiquated in the West are passed along to countries where such outmoded technologies (including conceptual technologies such as the “nation” and “allegory”) might, in Hegelian fashion, still be of some use. There is no doubt that some of the initial discomfort felt by many critics with the concept of “national allegory” arises out of a resistance to the political implications of each of its component terms — resistance to the sense, that is, that either of these terms still has a relevance for the “underdeveloped” third world that the terms have (as Jameson admits) lost in the “developed” first (in this way becoming the literary-critical equivalent of pesticides long banned in the West that continue to be produced in the U.S. for sale in the third world).

Jameson writes (infamously) that “all third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*” (TWL 69). Here again, the claim that Jameson makes about third-world texts (“by way of a sweeping hypothesis” [TWL 69]) cannot help but distract from his broader aim, which is not to pass aesthetic judgment on third-world texts, but to develop a system by which it might be possible to consider these texts *within* the global economic and political system that produces the third world *as* the third world. For Jameson, third-world texts are to be understood as national allegories specifically *in contrast* to the situation of first-world cultural and literary texts. He argues that there is a political dimension to third-world texts that is now (and has perhaps long been) absent in their first-world counterparts. This corresponds to a difference between the social and political culture of the first and third worlds — a difference that must, of course, be understood as broad and conceptual and that should not be seen as unreflexively rendering homogeneous two extraordinarily heterogeneous categories.⁷³ Jameson believes that in the West, the consequence of the radical separation between the public and the private, “between the poetic and the political,” is “the deep cultural conviction that the lived experience of our private existences is somehow incommensurable with the abstractions of economic science and political dynamics” (TWL 69). In terms of literary production, this “cultural conviction” has the effect of limiting or even negating entirely the political work of literature: in the first world, literature is a matter of the private rather than the public sphere, a matter of individual tastes and solitary meditations rather than public debate and deliberation. The relations between the public and the private in the

third world are entirely different: they have not undergone this separation and division. Literary texts are thus never *simply* about private matters (although, as Michael Sprinker points out in his review of Jameson's essay, they are never *simply* private in the first world either, however difficult it might be to see this now).⁷⁴ In the third world, Jameson claims, "*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (TWL 69).

This is a strong and sweeping claim, whose precise meaning in "Third-World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism" can be grasped only by careful attention to Jameson's description of allegory, his claims about the relationship of psychology to politics in the first and the third worlds, and his description of the significance of the term "culture" and the relationship between culture and politics more generally. Of the concept of "allegory," Jameson writes that "our traditional concept of allegory—based, for instance, on stereotypes of Bunyan—is that of an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalence: this is, so to speak, a one-dimensional view of this signifying process, which might only be set in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain the more alarming notion that such equivalencies are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text" (TWL 73). Read in this more expansive way, the allegorical mode is not limited to the production of morality tales about public, political events—tales that could just as well be described in journalistic terms as in the narrative structure of novels or short stories. On the contrary, "the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogenous representation of the symbol" (TWL 73). If in the third world, private stories are *always* allegories of public situations, this does not thereby imply that of necessity third-world writing is narratively simplistic or overtly moralistic, or that all such texts are nothing more than exotic versions of Bunyan, as might be supposed in the terms of a more traditional sense of allegory. The claim is rather that the text speaks to its context in a way that is more than simply an example of Western texts' familiar "auto-referentiality": it necessarily and directly speaks to and of the overdetermined situation of the struggles for national independence and cultural autonomy in the context of imperialism and its aftermath (TWL 85).

Why third-world texts speak more directly of and to the national situation has to do with what Jameson sees as the very different "relationship between the libidinal and the political components of individual and social experience" (TWL

71) in the first and third worlds. One of the results of the deep division between the public and private spheres in the first world is that “political commitment is recontained and psychologized or subjectivized” (TWL 70). Again, for Jameson, the very opposite is the case in the third world. The division between public and private that is characteristic of the West is *not* characteristic of most third-world societies, or perhaps this should be read (in 1986 if not in the present) as *not yet* or *not yet completely*.⁷⁵ This assertion could be taken (again, in Hegelian fashion) as a claim that socially and aesthetically, the third world lags behind the first in its development.⁷⁶ But—and I think that this is how Jameson intends it—it also highlights a genuine, material difference between the first and third worlds that is expressed socially and culturally. The attempt to maintain a different form of social life while accepting the material and technological advantages offered by the West has constituted one of the major challenges faced by non-Western societies for whom modernity *has* been belated; it does not seem to me inconceivable to imagine a different organization of private and public in societies that were the subjects of colonialism as opposed to its agents.⁷⁷ In any case, the lack of a corresponding division between public and private in the third world means for Jameson that “psychology, or more specifically, libidinal investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms” (TWL 72). If political energies in the first world are psychologically interiorized in a way that divests them of their power, it could be said that in the third world the “sphere” of the psychological does not function as a containment device in which what is dangerous in the public is sublimated and defused. In the first world, these sublimated energies may, of course, return to the public sphere in the mediated form of various cultural products; even so, unlike the situation of the third world, in the first world such cultural products would nevertheless be taken to be imbued with only *private* significance or with only the most banal form of larger public meaning, that is, as indicators of “styles” or “trends,” the Hegelian *Geist* reborn as successive waves of (essentially similar) commodities. Another way of characterizing this division between first and third worlds within Jameson’s own vocabulary is to say that the history that is everywhere actively repressed in the first world is still a possible subject of discourse in the third world (consider, for instance, his discussion of the repressed spaces of Empire in British modernism).⁷⁸ Of course, this characterization of the large-scale societal differences between the first and third worlds, Jameson adds, must be read as “speculative” and general and open to “correction by specialists” (TWL 72).

Jameson’s characterization of the different relationships in the first and third

worlds between private and public, and so of the psychological or the libidinal, must be read further in terms of his subsequent discussion of the concept of “cultural revolution”; otherwise, it is possible at this point to see his characterization of the vast social, political, and cultural gulf separating the first from the third world as a form of Eurocentrism or exoticism in which—as in the early moments of Modernist art—what is lacking in the civilized West is found at the heart of its “uncivilized” exterior. Jameson links the idea of “cultural revolution,” which has most commonly been used to refer to the massive set of social and cultural changes undertaken by communist regimes (in China in particular), to the work of figures with “seemingly very different preoccupations”: Antonio Gramsci, Wilhelm Reich, Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse, Rodolph Bahro, and Paolo Freire. It is in the connection that Jameson makes between cultural revolution and “subalternity” that the significance of “national allegory” as an interpretive strategy for third-world texts begins to come into focus:

Overhastily, I will suggest that “cultural revolution” as it is projected in such works [Gramsci, Reich, et al.] turns on the phenomenon of what Gramsci called “subalternity,” namely the feelings of mental inferiority and habits of subservience and obedience which necessarily and structurally develop in situations of domination—most dramatically in the experience of colonized peoples. But here, as so often, the subjectivizing and psychologizing habits of first-world peoples such as ourselves can play us false and lead us into misunderstandings. Subalternity is not in that sense a psychological matter, although it governs psychologies; and I suppose that the strategic choice of the term “cultural” aims precisely at restructuring that view of the problem and projecting it outwards into the realm of objective or collective spirit in some non-psychological, but also non-reductionist or non-economic, materialist fashion. When a psychic structure is objectively determined by economic and political relationships, it cannot be dealt with by means of purely psychological therapies; yet it equally cannot be dealt with by means of purely objective transformations of the economic and political situation itself, since the habits remain and exercise a baleful and crippling residual effect. This is a more dramatic form of that old mystery, the unity of theory and practice; and it is specifically in the context of this problem of cultural revolution (now so strange and alien to us) that the achievements and failures of third-world intellectuals, writers and artists must be placed if their concrete meaning is to be grasped. (TWL 76)

It is *this*, then, that the concept of “national allegory” points to—the ways in which the psychological points to the political and the trauma of subalternity

finds itself “projected outwards” (allegorically) into the “cultural.” Very crudely, the cultural is what lies “between” the psychological and the political, unifying “theory and practice” in such a way that it is *only* there that the “baleful and crippling” habits that are the residue of colonialism can be addressed and potentially overcome. A “cultural revolution” aims to do just this—to produce an authentic and sovereign subjectivity and collectivity by undoing the set of habits called subalternity. While these are not habits that can be modified by the transformation of political and economic institutions alone, this does not mean the exclusive attention to the subjective (the psychological) *or* to the cultural is sufficient in and of itself either. The idea of “habit” is for this reason a particularly apt way of understanding the legacy of subalternity, since it draws attention to the ways in which subalternity cannot be reduced simply to “mental” or “psychological” states, but must be seen as residing in the unconscious and inscribed somatically in a whole range of bodily dispositions. The problem of cultural revolution accounts for the presence of the political in the psychological by means of a level of mediation comprised of cultural objects like literary texts and provides a framework in which it is possible to assess “the achievements and failures of third-world intellectuals” (TWL 76) with respect to the task of reclaiming something positive from the colonial experience.

The relationship between the cultural and subalternity may be seen, of course, as almost generically definitive of the intellectual work that has been produced under the sign of “postcolonial” theory and criticism. For example, to point to one of the earliest works (retrospectively) in postcolonial criticism, what other than the “habit” of subalternity does Frantz Fanon address in *Black Skin, White Masks*? One of the most important things that postcolonial critics have added to our understanding is the degree to which cultural and discursive domination was (and is) a necessary and essential aspect of colonialism and imperialism. Where Jameson differs from most postcolonial critics, however, is in his insistence that “culture”:

is by no means the final term at which one stops. One must imagine such cultural structures and attitudes as having been themselves, in the beginning, vital responses to infrastructural realities (economic and geographic, for example), as attempts to resolve more fundamental contradictions— attempts which then outlive the situations for which they were devised, and survive, in reified forms, as “cultural patterns.” Those patterns themselves then become part of the objective situation confronted by later generations.

He continues:

Nor can I feel that the concept of cultural “identity” or even national “identity” is adequate. One cannot acknowledge the justice of the general poststructuralist assault on the so-called “centered subject,” the old unified ego of bourgeois individualism, and then resuscitate this same ideological mirage of psychic unification on the collective level in the form of a doctrine of collective identity. Appeals to collective identity need to be evaluated from a historical perspective, rather than from the standpoint of some dogmatic and placeless “ideological analysis.” When a third-world writer invokes this (to us) ideological value, we need to examine the concrete historical situation closely in order to determine the political consequences of the strategic use of this concept. (TWL 78)

There are then (at least) two levels of mediation that must be considered in the movement from the psychological to the political (and back again) through the cultural. Culture mediates; to understand precisely how it does so, it must be understood that the cultural forms and patterns that produce this mediation are themselves the product of an earlier process of mediation — now reified into the forms and patterns of culture that are to be used as the raw materials of cultural production. While few critics now would object to the need for the analysis of any form of cultural production to take into account the circuits of economics and politics that make the text possible in the first place, the significance of this second mode by which culture mediates remains all too often unexplored. In other words, what is often missing is the realization that all mediation in the present takes place through the reified cultural forms (and culture in general) of the past; all attempts to resolve the “fundamental contradictions” of the present through cultural production must pass through the concretized history of previous attempts to solve the contradictions of earlier infrastructural realities that have since changed in form and character. This is not to say that culture must be understood as somehow necessarily belated, or that it therefore always “misses” the present, which is to misunderstand in any case what it might mean for cultural forms to attempt to resolve historical contradictions. It is, rather, to point out the need for a more complicated understanding of the process of mediation that considers not simply the site of mediation (say, the text), but also the way in which this site is itself the product of mediation. It is this sense of mediation to which Adorno was trying to draw our attention, too, when he said that “mediation is . . . not between the object and the world, but in the object itself.”

Far from reducing the complexity of third-world literary production, the

concept of national allegory enables us to consider these texts as the extremely complex objects that they are and *not* just as allegories of one kind or another of the manichean binaries produced out of the encounter of colonizer and colonized (however ambivalently one might want to understand it). It also foregrounds (metacritically) the cultural-social situation of the reader of the texts, and, indeed, the very fact that every interpretation or reading is a kind of translation mechanism that it is best to acknowledge rather than to hide the workings of; the critic, too, works out of a cultural situation that forms the raw material for her readings that is the product of earlier mediations.⁷⁹ Understood through the lens of the idea of “cultural revolution” that Jameson outlines here, the concept of national allegory suggests a number of things about how we should think about postcolonial or third-world texts in the context of the period of decolonization and globalization. First, postcolonial literary production needs to be understood as forming “vital responses to infrastructural realities . . . as attempts to resolve more fundamental contradictions” (TWL 78). In other words, it is fruitful to look at this form of cultural production as a particular kind of cultural strategy (which may or may not be successful), rather than to “read” simply and immediately as “literature,” in the sense in which this concept is well understood in the first-world academy.⁸⁰ Second, careful attention needs to be paid to the deployment of “ideological values” by third-world writers themselves, values that sometimes have a resonance in the Western academy because of the ways in which they politically re-empower the project of Western literary criticism. One of the most important of these values may be that of the “nation” and its strategic use in the literature produced during decolonization; another is to be found in the unquestioned assumption on the part of many critics of the almost necessary social significance of postcolonial literature (or at least, its significance in a straightforward way). Another way of putting this last point is that, in the examination of postcolonial literature, what needs to be considered is the condition of possibility for the practice of writing *literature* in these regions, for it is only in this way that we can understand the precise and complicated ways in which this older, imported “technology” participates in the task of cultural revolution that is so important to third-world societies.

Whatever one might think of this formulation of mediation and of its utility for postcolonial literary studies, it might nevertheless seem as if I have come far afield from the initial concept of “national allegory” in producing it. This elaboration of national allegory appears to be more or less akin to the general interpretive schema that Jameson has developed with remarkable consistency over the

course of his career, specifically in works such as *The Political Unconscious*. And if *this* is what national allegory is finally about, one has to wonder why Jameson would have generated a neologism that cannot help but invite confusion. Why, after all, *national* allegory and not something else? In elaborating how this mode of interpretation has specific relevance to the theorization of the role and function of culture and literature in the context of decolonization and postcolonial nation-building, I want to review briefly the history of national allegory in Jameson's own work. For if there is anything that is troubling about the use of national allegory as a mode of analysis of third-world literary texts, it is to be found in the changes that this concept undergoes throughout Jameson's work, coming to be, finally, nothing less than a substitute term for the kind of dialectical criticism that he would like to apply to *all* cultural texts—whether third world or not.⁸¹ National allegory names a possibility and a limit for texts that Jameson first sees in the fiction of Wyndham Lewis, then in third-world texts, and finally, as a condition of contemporary cultural production as such. What is missing in Jameson's discussion of national allegory is a discussion of the *nation* to match that of allegory. Though it might seem as if the nation has an important role to play in understanding third-world texts, on the question of the nation itself, Jameson has surprisingly little to say in "Third-World Literature": the nation is more or less simply conflated with the "political" and, when it is not, it becomes a term that seems to make reference to a kind of collectivity or community that is idealized when it should itself be placed into question. It is in this lack of attention to the issue of the nation in the concept of "national allegory" that the strain of the transposition of this concept from an earlier formulation becomes apparent.

The term "national allegory" first appears in *Fables of Aggression* as a description of Wyndham Lewis's novel, *Tarr*. As it is presented in this early work, national allegory originates as a much more straightforward concept than it comes to be in the discussion of third-world texts: it refers to the way in which individual characters with different national origins stand-in for "more abstract national characteristics which are read as their inner essence."⁸² When dealing with any one such correspondence between character and national essence, this allegorical mode becomes a form of "cultural critique." For Jameson, the unique characteristic of Lewis's texts is to have assembled numerous national types into one setting, thereby producing "a dialectically new and more complicated allegorical system . . . that specific and uniquely allegorical space between signifier and signified" (FA 90–91). In *Fables of Aggression*, "national allegory" is thus the name for a specific, formal characteristic of Lewis's novel rather than a concept

that suggests an entire system or mode of reading and interpretation. Indeed, the more general logic that Jameson suggests as the only way to account properly for the possibility in Lewis's novel of this "now outmoded narrative system" (FA 93) seems to have become transformed with reference to third-world texts into the principle of what is now "national allegory" itself. In characteristic form, Jameson draws attention to the fact that an explanation for national allegory as a formal principle of *Tarr* can only be found in history — though not in the sense that historical conditions "caused" the formal organization of *Tarr* or that the novel is "a 'reflexion' of the European diplomatic system" (FA 94). Instead, he suggests, our attention should be directed toward "the more sensible procedure of exploring those semantic and structural givens which are logically prior to this text and without which its emergence is inconceivable. This is of course the sense in which national allegory in general, and *Tarr* in particular, presuppose not merely the nation-state itself as the basic functional unit of world politics, but also the objective existence of a system of nation-states, the international diplomatic machinery of pre-World-War-I Europe which, originating in the 16th century, was dislocated in significant ways by the War and the Soviet Revolution" (FA 94).

According to Jameson, all literary and cultural forms provide an "unstable and provisory solution to an aesthetic dilemma which is itself the manifestation of a social and historical contradiction" (FA 94). National allegory can therefore be seen as a once but no longer viable formal attempt "to bridge the increasing gap between the existential data of everyday life within a given nation-state and the structural tendency of monopoly capital to develop on a world-wide, essentially transnational scale" (FA 94). In other words, the formal qualities of *Tarr* point to the fact that life in England can no longer be rendered intelligible with the "raw materials" of English life alone; narrative resources must be sought elsewhere, and what lies "outside" England is for Lewis (objectively and structurally) a system of nation-states (and their attendant national cultures): "the lived experience of the British situation is domestic, while its structural intelligibility is international" (FA 95).

It is striking that the words that Jameson uses to describe the "problem" to which Lewis's national allegory is a solution are almost exactly those that he uses later to describe modernism's characteristic spatiality.⁸³ Jameson suggests that "space" is a formal symptom of modernist texts *in general*, because they, too, encounter the representational crisis exemplified in Lewis's *Tarr*: the need to make sense of life in a "metropolis" whose immanent logic — that of imperi-

alism—lies beyond its national borders. Just as in his discussion of *Tarr*, the emphasis is on form, even though the term “national allegory” is not used. It is significant that in the reemergence in the third world of what was described as an “outmoded” category by the time of the Soviet Revolution, Jameson’s discussion of national allegory is no longer posed in terms of the work of form on specific “aesthetic dilemmas,” nor in the form of a “representational crisis” that involves and invokes the bounded space of the nation. Instead, national allegory names the condition of possibility of narration itself in the third world. It names it, further, as a *positive* condition, one in which there remains a link, however threatened, tenuous, and political, between the production of narrative and the political. It is this connection that in the first world has been shattered so completely that third-world texts appear “alien to us at first approach” (TWL 69).

What I think this suggests is that the nation *has* disappeared from third-world national allegories. What Jameson describes as “national allegory” could just as easily have been called “political allegory”: the nation seems to serve little purpose here and can only inhibit analyses of third-world literary texts insofar as it seems to point to the nation as the (natural) space of the political in the third world. So again, why *national* allegory? It does not have to do with the historical reemergence of the international system of nation-states—or of the emergence of a new form of this system, which we might too hastily identify as globalization—which formed the “structural and semantic givens” for Lewis at the beginning of this century. Nor does it seem to me that third-world literary texts face the representational problems of modernism: in the third-world, lived reality is *never* seen as intelligible only in terms of the “national” situation, and so there is correspondingly no aesthetic or formal necessity to grapple with what amounts to the “absent cause” of lived experience. The “nation” means something else entirely, something different from the empirical community or collectivity for which the cultural revolution is undertaken. Jameson’s evocation of the nation in his discussion of third-world literature should be taken instead as a reference to a reified “cultural pattern” that “having once been part of the solution to a dilemma, then become[s] part of the new problem” (TWL 78).

Instead of seeing nationalist literature as a “vital response to infrastructural realities”—which I would not deny that it also clearly is—the evocation of the *nation* in the production of third-world literature must also, or perhaps even primarily, be read in terms of what Jameson describes in one of the long quotations cited above as a reified “cultural pattern” that “having once been part of the solution to a dilemma, then become[s] part of the new problem” (TWL 78). The

“nation” is the name for a discursive, epistemological problematic as much as it the name for some collectivity; it names the problem of attempting to speak to and on behalf of this collectivity. This is especially the case for literature that is *explicitly* nationalist, literature, in other words, in which one aspect of the allegorical has been rendered literal, not just “conscious and overt” in comparison with the “unconscious” allegories of first-world cultural texts (TWL 79–80), but *conscious of this consciousness*. This means that a new proposition should be placed alongside Jameson’s understanding of national allegory: *nationalist literature is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the third-world intellectual with respect to his or her culture and society*.

Just as Jameson suggests that it would be incorrect to “resuscitate” the mirage of the centered subject, it is important to see the crisis of intellectual authority with which we have become familiar in the first world—from Gramsci’s reflections on the organic versus the traditional intellectual to Foucault’s discussion of the specific versus the universal intellectual⁸⁴—as a central part of intellectual practice in the third world as well. Jameson is, of course, well aware of this fact. Although he suggests that “in the third-world situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual” (TWL 74), the enthusiasm for a third-world subject position that in the first-world has “withered away” (TWL 74) has to be tempered by his comments concerning the “poisoned gift of independence” (TWL 81) given to third-world writers. Radical writers in the third world face the dilemma of “bearing a passion for change and social regeneration which has not yet found its agents” (TWL 81). This is, Jameson points out, an “aesthetic dilemma, a crisis of representation: it was not difficult to identify an adversary who spoke another language and wore the visible trappings of colonial occupation. When those are replaced by your own people, the connections to external controlling forces are much more difficult to represent” (TWL 81). The postcolonial nationalist literature that I will be examining in the remaining chapters of this book constitutes both an attempt to resolve this dilemma, as well as a self-reflection on this dilemma and the problem of the lack of the agents necessary for political change.

Decolonizing the (Concept of the) Nation

Before embarking on an examination of some of the specific uses of the concept of the nation in the post–World War II literature of the British Caribbean, Canada, and Nigeria, I want to summarize the points I have been making in this

chapter about how the concept of the nation should be understood in these contexts. Two general, theoretical points emerge out of the alternative genealogy of the nation that I have sketched out here — alternative, at least, to what I have claimed is the dominant position on the nation within postcolonial studies (and, indeed, with critical and cultural theory more generally), which sees the early fascination with the nation in postcolonial literature and theory as an empirical and theoretical error that we are fortunate now to have moved beyond. I have pointed out several problems with this view, not least of which is that it repeats and entrenches a progressivist (modernizing) view of the contemporary theoretical enterprise that it seems difficult to break out of: newer is better, and instead of seeing the nation as the name for a whole cluster of problems at a specific moment in time, we have tended to take the failure (has it been a failure?) or tentativeness of the nation-building project during decolonization as an indictment of the nation per se. What I am suggesting here should not be mistaken for an expression of nostalgia for the nation-*state*, which has been a political form premised on identity rather than difference in ways that are politically dangerous. Rather, what I have drawn attention to throughout this chapter is that the nation and national culture, especially as expressed in the literature of various decolonizing regions in (roughly) the 1950s and 1960s, is other than what it has been assumed to be. The aim of this project is to take the concept of the nation seriously in order to better understand what problems it names and what possibilities it represents; it does so because while we may believe that we are ready to think and feel beyond the nation, the issues and problems that circle around this concept in this first (or second) moment of postcolonial national literatures are *not* ones that we have gone beyond. Newer may be better, but we still have more to learn from even the immediate past.

This is really already the first of my general points: for writers and intellectuals in the third world, the nation names a *problematic* — not only the problem of how to create new collectivities (whose final shape may end up being very different than that of the European nation-state), but also the problem of creating the space of a new collectivity *as* an intellectual, *as* a writer, and *through* literature (most often, and certainly in the cases that I will be discussing here, through the novel). These problems are connected in ways that are almost impossible to separate out without altering the nature of the problematic. This I take to be the lesson of Fanon's brilliant formulation of the myriad questions that are involved in thinking about the nation, national culture, revolution, literature, and the intellectual. Fanon ends with questions instead of beginning with them; these

same questions animate the textual readings in the chapters that follow. In this context, my examination of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is meant to question the too easy link between the novel and nation within literary criticism, while Partha Chatterjee's perceptive criticisms of the utility of Anderson's formulations, especially with respect to postcolonial spaces, opens up another theme that runs throughout the rest of the book. If the model that Anderson develops is inappropriate for some of the former spaces of the British Empire, it is for reasons other than those that Chatterjee has suggested in his analysis of the nation in India.⁸⁵ In the regions I will be looking at, literature represents a "spiritual" dimension of the postcolonial collectivity that gives life to the possibility of the uniqueness of the nation even in the midst of a leveling modernity. This is true, of course, only for an intellectual elite who already believe that literature possesses such spiritual powers; a faith in these powers of literature constitutes one of the important elements of the larger problematic of the nation in the period of decolonization.

The second theoretical point emerges out of my reading of Fredric Jameson's attempt to produce what he describes as a "general theory of what is often called third-world literature." There are a number of lessons that can be learned from a more rigorous reading of Jameson's most maligned essay. What is especially pertinent for this study is Jameson's materialist recharacterization of the situation of the third-world intellectual. Instead of accepting at face value the claims and stated aims of postcolonial intellectuals and writers concerning the nation or seeing in literature a straightforward allegorization of the postcolonial nation, Jameson's discussion of national allegory prompts us to consider the entire cultural situation—and not just *empirically* (as historical "background"), but *theoretically* as the logic informing a particular historical formation. In particular, it forces us to consider the concept of the nation in the ways in which I have been arguing for it here: not as a pre-given, pre-understood political formation, but as a theoretical problematic that exists at the center of the struggle over subalternity and for a substantive cultural revolution.

Further, Jameson's formulation of national allegory reinforces Fanon's placement of the intellectual (and the activity of the intellectual) at the center of the problem of cultural revolution. In literary terms, what is produced under the "sign" of nationalist and national literature is a meditation on the problems and possibilities of cultural revolution and, correspondingly, on the politics of literature and of the intellectual. In each of the subsequent chapters I will keep an eye not only on the multiple ways in which literature corresponds to various "in-

frastructural realities,” but also on the manner in which the idea of literature itself exists as one of the enduring colonial “cultural patterns” that has become “part of the objective situation confronted by later generations” (TWL 78). I do this as a way of grounding my analyses materially. I also think that such a procedure addresses a more general problem that exists today in contemporary postcolonial studies. Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks has recently described a malaise or melancholia that has beset postcolonial studies as it enters the new millennium.⁸⁶ It seems to me that revisiting Jameson’s theory of third-world literature—both its problems and its productive potentialities—provides a (perhaps unexpected) way out of this malaise. One of the things for which Jameson has been criticized throughout his career is his insistence on totality as a central concept in social and political criticism. In the context of postcolonial studies, it is easy enough to see how this appeal to totality could be mistaken as a Eurocentric, universalist claim par excellence.⁸⁷ But this is to conceive of the concept of totality far too rigidly and unimaginatively, and in the process of doing so, to “fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable.”⁸⁸ It seems to me that what is missing in many theories of postcolonial literary production (and what thus produces the malaise that Crooks points to) is just such a map of the relative effectivity of different forces in the globalscape.⁸⁹ In any case, my argument here should also be taken as an implicit argument on behalf of totality—not the “bad” totality that legitimates theories of modernization of development, but the totality constructed by an antitranscendental and antiteleological “insurgent science” that “is open, as open as the world of possibility, the world of potential.”⁹⁰ In this study, at least, totality appears in part as the possibility of meta-commentary—not as a secondary step in interpretation but as a condition of interpretation per se. What national allegory names is thus the conditions of possibility of a metacommentary that considers the problematic of the nation that I have outlined here.⁹¹

Two final points of clarification. First, even given the claims made on behalf of totality above, this study is not meant to call postcolonial studies into question, a set of critical practices that I have described elsewhere as the most important ones to have emerged over the past half-century.⁹² It is not meant as a substitute or replacement for theories of identity and subjectivity that the postcolonial cannot do without. At the same time, this project does not simply constitute an addendum to theories that view totality with suspicion. One of the reasons that my readings concentrate on relatively canonical texts is to highlight points of

difference *and* similarity with interpretations of these texts that have been offered from other viewpoints. It is perhaps in considering these similarities and differences that a much needed rapprochement can begin to be developed between theories of totality and those that focus on the (post)colonial subject.

Finally, as I hope is clear in the comparative character of this study, the utility of the theoretical frame that I have developed here is to be found, finally, in the examination of specific, concrete sites—in the relationship, in other words, of specific literatures to specific national problematics. As should be equally clear, it is the specific character of these sites that have framed the development of my theoretical orientation, though the linear structure of a book in which theory is presented before practice has a way of confusing this fact. What should be absolutely clear is that for all my discussion of *the* nation, even a cursory examination of the relationship between literature and nation reveals that there is not one relationship, but *many*—as many as the literatures that bear the names of nations (American literature, British literature, Nigerian literature, etc.), and even more, since these already accepted national designations leave out untold literatures that work across the boundaries of established nations in an effort to produce larger units of identification (Caribbean literature, African literature, etc.), as well as literatures that contest the formation of national literatures through the production of regional literatures that are often conceived of as the seeds of new national projects (Southern literature in America, Québécois literature in Canada, Basque literature in Spain, etc.). My aim is not to suggest that the spaces that I take up in this study are, finally, all the same. Whatever work the term “post-colonial” undertakes, whatever knowledges it produces, its function is not to level very different spaces into a single narrative about colonialism, imperialism and its aftermath. At the same time, there is a reason why comparing these three regions isn’t simply arbitrary or beholden to that logic of Empire that these spaces have, in their own ways, tried to escape. The problematic of the nation in Canada, the Caribbean, and Nigeria shares what Wittgenstein would describe as a “family resemblance” to one another due to the circumstances and mode of their interpolation into the global world-system. Yet they also differ enough that my own desire for a certain order and logic to this book was exploded. In my examination of the problematic named by the nation in Canada in the 1950s and 1960s, it made no sense to offer the kind of literary readings that I present in the case of the West Indies and Nigeria. I hope that why this is the case will become apparent in the arguments that I present in the remainder of the book.