Chapter - III
THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURE AND NATIONALITY AS COLONISED SUBJECTS

I) The Construction of Culture as a Colonised Subject:

The concept of ‘negritude’ (has been used for cultural identity) in African postcolonial writing, Frantz Fanon’s essay ‘On National Culture’ is a well-known for the construction of a national culture, Homi K. Bhabha’s concepts of mimicry, hybridity which reveals the complex strategies of cultural representation and Edward Said’s conception of the ‘imperial culture’ helps to foreground culture as a colonised subject.

Postcolonial literature is often dialectic between imperial systems and native subversion. That is, postcolonial literature is an attempt to undo the discourse of Europe about native cultures to decolonize oneself. Moreover, postcolonial writing can be treated as a literature of transformation-cultural, psychological, social, and political. Social and political transformations are, of course, self-evident and with political independence nation-states achieve a measure of sovereignty. Psychological transformation is about the change in attitude – from slave to master, from dependence to independence. But perhaps the most important transformation of all is in the realm of culture. Decolonization is marked by a re-affirmation of one’s cultural values and systems. While the colonial master had rejected and destroyed native culture and superimposed the European one, decolonization seeks a retrieval of the forgotten rhythms of life. Decolonization in literature is characterised by a concern with native cultural identity. Postcolonial literature functions
as a counter-discourse, providing alternative representations to European ones. The first body of postcolonial writing in the 1950s and 1960s was explicitly decolonizing, working with new concepts of national identity, critiquing the former colonial ruler, seeking to retrieve their pasts and looking forward to the future.

One of the most influential concepts used to forge ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ for colonised peoples was Negritude. Negritude has been influential in Africa, the Caribbean and America. Today it is most often associated with the work of two writers and statesmen, Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor. Negritude works with many of the central tenets of the ‘myth of the nation’. One of its aims was to unite peoples living in different nations through their shared ancestry and common origins. Colonial discourses frequently represented black peoples as primitive and degenerate, having no culture of any real worth however, these writers wrote in praise of the laudable qualities of black peoples and cultures. In colonial discourses, blackness has been frequently evoked as the ultimate sign of the colonised’s racial degeneracy.

In a literary context, Fanon’s work has been used as a means of conceptualising the construction of identity under colonialism, and as a way of configuring the relationship between literary representations and the construction of national consciousness during the struggle against colonialism. Taking as his focus the operations of colonialism in a specifically African context, ‘On National Culture’ an essay collected in *The Wretched of the Earth*, begins with Fanon’s important critique of Negritude and the ‘native intellectual’. The term ‘native intellectual’
refers to the writers and thinkers of the colonised nation who have often been educated under the auspices of the colonizing power.

In the essay Fanon foregrounds the paradox of "national identity," while making it vital to the emergence of a Third World Revolution. He further encourages a materialist conceptualization of the nation that is based not so much on collective cultural traditions or ancestor-worship as political agency and the collective attempt to dismantle the economic foundations of colonial rule. Fanon argues that the passion with which native intellectuals defend the existence of their national culture may be a source of amazement; but those who condemn this exaggerated passion are strangely apt to forget that their own psyche and their own selves are conveniently sheltered behind a French or German culture which has given full proof of its existence and which is uncontested (Fanon 168). According to Fanon the search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped. Because they realize they are in danger of losing their lives and thus becoming lost to their people, these men, hot-headed and with anger in their hearts, relentlessly determine to renew contact once more with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people...it was with the greatest delight that they discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory and solemnity (Fanon 169).
Fanon continues that when we consider the efforts made to carry out cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch we realize that:

Nothing has been left to change and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism come to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave; they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality (Fanon 169).

On the unconscious plane, colonialism therefore did not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle, loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness, which is its very essence (Fanon 170). Colonialism denies the existence of one’s national culture therefore Fanon declares that in Africa, the native literature of the last twenty years is not a national literature but a Negro literature. The unconditional affirmation of African culture has succeeded the unconditional affirmation of European culture. On the whole, the poets of Negro-ism oppose the idea of an old Europe to a young Africa (Fanon 171). Fanon gives another example of the Arab world which was under colonial domination where colonialism has made the same effort in these regions to plant deep in the minds of the native
population the idea that before the advent of colonialism their history was one that was dominated by barbarism. Therefore struggle for national liberty in the Arab world has been accompanied by a cultural phenomenon known by the name of the awakening of Islam. Fanon praises Arab writers saying that the passion with which contemporary Arab writers remind their people of the great pages of their history is a reply to the lies told by the occupying power. The great names of Arabic literature and the great past of Arab civilization have been brandished about with the same ardour as those of the African civilizations. Today, Arab doctors and Arab poets speak to each other across the frontiers, and strive to create a new Arab culture and a new Arab civilization. It is in the name of Arabism that these men join together, and that they try to think together. Everywhere, however, in the Arab world, national feeling has preserved, even under colonial domination, a liveliness that we fail to find in Africa (Fanon 172).

Fanon argues that the Negroes who live in the United States and in Central or Latin America in fact experience the need to attach themselves to a cultural matrix because their problem is not fundamentally different from that of the Africans. The whites of America did not mete out to them any different treatment from that of the whites that ruled over the Africans (Fanon 173). In Fanon’s view the cultural problem in colonised countries runs the risk of giving rise to serious ambiguities. The lack of culture of the Negroes, as proclaimed by colonialism, and the exaltation barbarity of the Arabs, ought logically
to lead to the exaltation of cultural manifest stations which are not simply national but continental, and extremely racial (Fanon 174-5).

According to Fanon, the native feels the need to turn backwards towards his unknown roots and to lose himself at whatever cost in his own barbarous people because he feels estranged and wish to escape from the supremacy of the white man’s culture. On the contrary, when the native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work he fails to realize that he is utilizing techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country. The native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements behaves in fact like a foreigner. He wishes to attach himself to the people; but instead he only catches hold of their outer garments (Fanon 180).

Fanon states that the cultured native should not concern himself with choosing the level on which he wishes to fight or the sector where he decides to give battle for his nation. In Fanon’s view to fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible. There is no other fight for culture that can develop apart from the popular struggle. To take an example, all those men and women who are fighting with their bare hands against French colonialism in Algeria are not by any means strangers to the national culture of Algeria. The national Algerian culture is taking on form and content as the battles are being fought out, in prisons, under the guillotine and in every French outpost that is captured or destroyed (Fanon 187).
A national culture according to Fanon is:

[Not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people’s true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions that are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is 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 (Fanon 188).

On the other hand, Fanon describes a national culture under colonial domination is a contested culture destruction sought in systematic fashion. It very quickly becomes a culture condemned to secrecy. This idea of a clandestine culture is immediately seen in the reactions of the occupying power, which interprets attachment to traditions as faithfulness to the spirit of the nation and as a refusal to submit (Fanon 191).

In Fanon’s view a frequent mistake is to try to find cultural expressions for and to give new values to native culture within the framework of colonial domination because the fact that in a colonised country the most elementary, most savage and the most undifferentiated nationalism is the most fervent and efficient means of defending national culture. For culture is first the expression of a nation, the expression of its preferences, of its taboos and of its patterns. It is at every stage of the whole of society that other taboos, values and patterns are formed. A national culture is the sum total of all these appraisals; it is the result of internal and external extensions exerted over society as a whole and also
at every level of that society. In the colonial situation, culture, which is
doubly deprived of the support of the nation and of the state, falls away
and dies. The condition for its existence is therefore national liberation
and the renaissance of the state (Fanon 196). Fanon says that it is the
nation which ensures the conditions and framework necessary to culture.
The nation gathers together the various indispensable elements necessary
to culture; those elements which can alone give it credibility, validity,
life and creative power (Fanon 197).

For Fanon, culture is the expression of national consciousness
therefore he says:

I will not hesitate to affirm that, in the case with
which we are dealing, it is the national
consciousness that is the most elaborate form of
culture (Fanon 199).

Fanon sum up his essay ‘On National Culture’ with necessity of the acts
of the intellectual therefore he says,

If man is known by his acts, then we will say that the most urgent
thing today for the intellectual is to build up his nation... It is at the heart
of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and
grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all
culture.¹

Fanon's critique of culture, sharply etched in The Wretched of the
Earth, which concludes that "the struggle for freedom does not give
back to the national culture its former values and shapes (Fanon 197-8)."
What is of overriding importance is how culture can anticipate
and reflect social change. Fanon argues that it is in the revolution that the old culture breaks apart. This is a radical posture to those who think Fanon actually advocates upholding traditional cultures or enforcing conservative cultural relations for the sake of national unity. In place of a detailed analysis of actual political conflicts and actual cultural developments that compromise the new social relations in the newly independent Algeria, there is a cultural determinism. Rather than working through the point of contact of Fanon and cultural studies - that is, how cultural processes can anticipate change - culture merely becomes the deadening weight of the past on the future. Rather than an anticipation of the future in the present, that is, new ways of life made in and through the revolution, culture is in this view only a reactionary element, a brake on revolution, and the basis on which the return of the old ways of life is ground. Culture becomes relied. In his view, culture acts as a barrier to change and helps round the authoritarian regime.

From a Fanonian standpoint Anthony says, the problem of viewing culture outside lived experience is that such a study of culture is many times at a loss to anticipate why culture changes.²

Neil Lazarus has argued that Fanon's thinking about culture in the colonial era is premised upon a preliminary assumption as to the decisiveness of the transformation wrought by the colonial encounter. For him, scarcely anything of pre-colonial African culture is able to survive into the colonial era. Since Christopher Miller fails to recognize this initial assumption, he is obviously in no position to put pressure upon it. Yet it is precisely here, ironically - and not with respect to any
supposed trivialization of precolonial African culture on his part that Fanon's theorization is legitimately susceptible to criticism. For the plain fact is that, throughout Africa and elsewhere in the colonial world, precolonial social, cultural, and ideological forms survived the colonial era meaningfully. Indeed, they continue to survive meaningfully today, in the "postcolonial" present.³

Bhabha points out that there are two 'primal scenes' in Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*: two myths of the origin of the marking of the subject within the racist practices and discourses of a colonial culture. On one occasion a white girl fixes Fanon in a look and word as she turns to identify with her mother. It is a scene which echoes endlessly through his essay 'The Fact of Blackness': “Look, a Negro... Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened.' 'What else could it be for me”, Fanon concludes, 'but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood'.⁴

Equally, he stresses the primal moment when the child encounters racial and cultural stereotypes in children's fictions, where white heroes and black demons are proffered as points of ideological and psychical identification. Such dramas are enacted *every day* in colonial societies, says Fanon, employing a theatrical metaphor the scene which emphasize the visible the seen. I want to play on both these senses which refer at once to the site of fantasy and desire and to the sight of subjectification and power.⁵
Consequently, the Western educated native intellectual is in danger of identifying more with the middle-class bourgeoisie of the colonising nation rather than with the indigenous masses. This complicates the role the native intellectual plays in contributing to the people’s anti-colonial nationalist struggle. Like the Negritude writers, the native intellectual at first refuses the view that colonised peoples had no meaningful culture prior to the arrival of the colonisers. Fanon therefore asserts the idea of the nation as the focal point for anti-colonial resistance not least because it allows the native intellectual to address the specific historical circumstances and challenges of one particular colonised location. He is not wholly critical of the desire to champion indigenous cultures in defiance of colonialism’s derogatory representations of them. The construction of a specifically national consciousness is dependent upon important cultural activities. National consciousness and national culture are inseparable from each other; anti-colonial resistance cannot succeed without them. Writers, artists and intellectuals have a vital role to play in imagining the nation, and they participate centrally to resisting colonialism. Fanon suggests that the creation of a distinctly national culture moves through three phases. In the first, the native intellectual attempts what he calls ‘unqualified assimilation’ (Fanon 179). For example, this means that he or she is inspired by and attempts to copy the dominant trends in the literature of the colonizing power. In so doing the cultural traditions of the colonised nation are ignored as the native intellectual aspires to reproduce the cultural fashions of the colonizing power. Hence the native intellectual is
damagingly estranged from the indigenous masses, identifying more with the colonizing power rather than with those suffering the effects of colonialism.

In the second phase, the native intellectual grows dissatisfied with copying the coloniser and instead becomes immersed in the cultural history of the people. In this phase he or she ‘turns backwards’ and champions all things indigenous. Fanon calls this the literature of ‘just-before-the-battle’ when the native intellectual begins to reflect upon the past of the people. However, he or she still stands apart from the mass of the people and maintains ‘exterior relations’ (Fanon 179) with them only. That is to say, the cultural traditions of the colonised people are lauded uncritically. By championing the cultural treasures of the colonised nation the native intellectual becomes too concerned with cherishing the past and ignores the struggles taking place in the present. The native intellectual is in danger of fiddling while the country burns. Indigenous cultural traditions are venerated as if the very fact of their existence is enough to challenge the derogation of the colonised people. But, as Fanon points out, ‘You will never make colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little-known cultural treasures under its eyes’ (Fanon 179-80). Glorifying the cultural treasures of the past is not enough. Rather, a new way of mobilising inherited culture is required, one that puts it actively to work rather than passively on display. In so doing, the native intellectual becomes drawn into closer proximity with the people. This brings us to the third phase, or ‘fighting phase’ (Fanon 179), in which the native intellectual becomes directly involved in the
people’s struggle against colonialism. In this phase he or she becomes conscious of his or her previous estrangement from the people and realises that ‘[i]t is not enough to try to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged’ (Fanon 182). Rather than cherishing inert cultural traditions, a more dynamic relationship is attempted between the cultural inheritance of the past and the people’s struggle against colonialism in the present. Traditional culture is mobilised as part of the people’s fight against oppression and, consequently, is transformed in the process. If the native intellectual wishes to stay in step with the people, he or she must participate in the reinterpretation of traditional culture in the present with the aim of opening up the possibility of a new future.

In Bhabha’s view contemporary culture is hybrid, just like colonial culture. The idea of hybridity usefully characterizes the mechanisms of the colonial psychic economy. In the same way as the structures of colonial identity can also be found in contemporary contexts, the structure of hybridity is also found in contemporary cultures. The important point to recognize is that cultures are always retrospective constructions, meaning that they are consequences of historical process. Accordingly, when we come to study hybridity, we need appropriate critical forms. Interviewed for the journal *Art in America*, Bhabha suggests the following about his own writing:

In my writing, I’ve been arguing against the multiculturalist’s notion that you can put together harmoniously any number of cultures in a pretty mosaic. You cannot just solder together
different cultural traditions to produce some brave new cultural totality. The current phase of economic and social history makes you aware of cultural difference not at the celebratory level of diversity but always at the point of conflict or crisis.6

This passage brings together various important assumptions. In fact, Bhabha refuses totalizing explanatory schemes, and here he associates such schemes directly with one version of multiculturalism, which attempts to weld disparate cultures into harmonious wholes. Really, however, the last sentence is recalling us to the fact that those disparate cultures are in no way pre-existing, but are an effect of historical change, specifically of colonialism and post-colonialism: that is what is implied by the ‘point of conflict or crisis’. Cultural hybridity is not, then, something absolutely general. Hybridity may appear to go all the way down, in all cultures, but that would blur all difference into indifference, making all hybridity appears the same. Bhabha’s theory of hybridity is associated with mimicry and sly civility, but is also importantly a denial that there were cultures already there that became hybrid. This point becomes clear in the following long quotation from the essay ‘Signs Taken for Wonders’:

“[C]olonial hybridity is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledge’s enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority - its rules of recognition. Again, it must be stressed, it is not simply the content of
This passage stresses two things. First, we do not start with two or more cultures, more or less pure, and then trace their historical movements of hybridization. In the colonial situation, the production of cultures is an inevitable consequence of contested authority. In Bhabha’s reading, an apparently absolute cultural difference is actually a product of the strategies adopted by both sides in this story. In different ways, the two different cultures are not the source of conflict but are instead the effect of discriminatory practices. As in the case of the stereotype, Bhabha believes that hybridity calls into question traditional analyses of colonialism, which tend to merely reverse the terms of colonial knowledge. In an interview titled ‘The Third Space’, which makes direct connections between colonial discourse and the post-colonial ‘third space’:

[F]or me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories
that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.\textsuperscript{8}

Bhabha is attempting to formulate in his essay ‘DissemiNation’ the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of 'the people' or the nation' and make them the immanent subjects' and objects of a range of social and literary narratives. Bhabha’s emphasis on the temporal dimension in the inscription of these political entities - that are also potent symbolic and affective sources of cultural identity- serves to displace the historicism that has dominated discussions of the nation as a cultural force. The focus on temporality resists the transparent linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes; it provides a perspective on the disjunctive forms of representation that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture. It is neither the sociological solidarity of these terms, nor their holistic history that gives them the narrative and psychological force that they have brought to bear on cultural production and projections. It is the mark of the ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy - and an apparatus of power - that it produces a continual slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories, like the people, minorities, or 'cultural difference' that continually overlap in the act of writing the nation, What is displayed in this displacement and repetition of terms is the nation as the measure of the liminality of cultural modernity.\textsuperscript{9}
According to Bhabha the incommensurable experiences of struggle and survival in the construction of a national culture, is nowhere better seen than in Frantz Fanon’s essay *On National Culture*. Fanon writes against that form of historicism which assumes that there is a moment when the differential temporalities of cultural histories coalesce in an immediately readable present. He focuses on the time of cultural representation, instead of immediately historicizing the event. He explores the space of the nation without immediately identifying it with the historical institution of the state. As Bhabha’s concern here is not with the history of nationalist movements, but only with certain traditions of writing that have attempted to construct narratives of the imaginary of the nation-people, he is indebted to Fanon for liberating a certain, uncertain time of the people. The knowledge of the people depends on the discovery, Fanon says, 'of a much more fundamental substance which itself is continually being renewed’, a structure of repetition that is not visible in the translucidity of the people's customs or the obvious objectivities which seem to characterize the people. 'Culture abhors simplification', Fanon writes, as he tries to locate the people in a performative time: 'the fluctuating movement that the people are just giving shape to'. The present of the people's history, then, is a practice that destroys the constant principles of the national culture that attempt to hark back to a 'true' national past, which is often represented in the reified forms of realism and stereotype. Such pedagogical knowledges and continuist national narratives miss the zone of occult instability where the people dwell. It is from this instability of cultural
signification that the national culture comes to be articulated as a
dialectic of various temporalities - modern, colonial, postcolonial,
'native' - that cannot be a knowledge that is stabilized in its enunciation:
'it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation.\(^\text{10}\)

Unlike Fanon and Bhabha the other theorist who treated the
postcolonial culture as an imperial culture in his writing is Edward Said.
According to Edward Said culture is both a function of and a source of
identity and this explains the return to some form of cultural
traditionalism in post-colonial societies, often in the form of religious or
national fundamentalism. In his view imperial culture can be the most
powerful agent of imperial hegemony in the colonised world. Gauri
Viswanathan's well-known thesis of the invention of the discipline of
English literature study to 'civilize' India is a good example of this.
Alternatively, culture also becomes one or the most powerful agents of
resistance in post-colonial societies. The continuing problem with such
resistance is that a de-colonizing culture, by becoming monist in its
rhetoric, often identifying strongly with religious or national
fundamentalism, may tend to take over the hegemonic function of
imperial culture. By 'culture', Said means:

[First of all,] 'those practices, like the arts of
description, communication, and representation,
that have relative autonomy from the economic,
social, and political realms and that often exist
in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims
is pleasure. [Second,] and almost imperceptibly,
culture is a concept that includes a refining and
elevating element, each society's reservoir of the

II) The Construction of Nationality as a Colonised Subject

Nation or Nationality as a colonised subject is an important issue in postcolonial writing especially in the writers like Benedict Anderson, Frantz Fanon, Partha Chatterjee, and Homi K.Bhabha. Consequently Anderson’s conception of nation as a ‘imagined community’, Fanon’s views on ‘national consciousness’, Chatterjee’s discourse on nation and Bhabha’s nationalist representations are equally important in forming the nation as a colonised subject.

Postcolonial writers, especially the first generation from the 1950s and 1960s, were conscious of their role in nation-building, since the nation is also a cultural construct, built out of and upon the artistic, folkloric, theoretical, and philosophical discourses about the nation. The contours of the nation are geographical, economic, political, and cultural have been a continuing theme in postcolonial writing. Post colonial literatures seek to erase the colonial pasts of the colonised nations. Resisting and rejecting the western constructions of their nations as primitive, savage, and ancient, postcolonial writers seek to retrieve a pre-colonial past that would help them define the nation, and more importantly, project a destiny, a future, that is, they seek to reconstruct
the nation without the frames of reference used by the colonial masters. The past, present, and future are harnessed in postcolonial texts where trauma (colonial), pride (nationalism) and hope (Postcolonial) merge. Nelson Mandela’s first ‘State of the Nation’ address captures the postcolonial theme succinctly:

The time will came when our nation will honour the memory of all the sons, the daughters, the mothers, the fathers, the youth, and the children who, by their thoughts and deeds, gave us the right to assert with pride that we are South Africans, that we are Africans and that we are citizens of the world...we must constrained by and yet, regardless of the accumulated effect of our historical burdens, seize the time to define for ourselves what we want to make of our shared destiny.  

This sense of postcolonial destiny is often tempered with awareness that things are not exactly wonderful in the post-colony. In the postcolonial world the segments of the population saw themselves being marginalised by the new native rulers. Postcoloniality brought in its wake a new process of exclusion whereby certain groups/classes dominated other ethnic groups, communities, races and classes, who, therefore, became disempowered, ‘colonised’, and marginal in the independent nation. Gyanendra Pandey has argued that:

“minorities are constituted along with the nation, a nation constructs and colonised specific communities”.  

In India, Dalit writing represents the best example of subaltern self-representation. They also constitute sharply-edged critiques of postcoloniality. The literature of postcoloniality that configures ‘nationhood’
generally emphasizes the modes of constructing, imagining, and representing the nation, the role of locality, community, and space in the making of a national identity, issues of cultural identity, especially for Aboriginal writing in post-colonial societies, and politics of nativism, the centrality of religion and spirituality in the construction of national identity, the continuation of colonialism through other forms, especially by post colonial elites, the marginalization of certain communities and identities within post colonial communities and identities within post colonial societies.

The construction of nation as a colonised subject links together the diverse literatures of the postcolonial nations. During the nationalist, anti-colonial struggles, the presence of the European other united the various tribes, class, and minorities in the ‘Third World’ country. Resistance and anti-colonial struggles in African and Asian nations were not simply movements against imperialism. They are also supposed to liberate the native culture from its own oppressive structures. That is, revolutionary struggles were also movements for social transformation of the native space. This was hardly an early job since, in most cases the country was made up of innumerable fragments. Most postcolonial works deal with space as it is intimately connected to issues of community, cultural identity, and nationhood. For postcolonial literature to be about the nation, the writer must be located within the space of the home. Postcolonial writers locate the self firmly within communities and their spaces. Space for many of them is lived space brought alive through relationships, emotions, histories, and memories. In case of
Indian poets and novelists, the site of the family with its myriad emotional bonds and personal relationships are almost always spatialised. Community lives are connected to the space of the land. Ila’s grandmother in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* suggests that Ila has no right to live in England. This is what the old woman says:

> She does not belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country...years of war and blood-shed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother’s blood and their father’s blood and their son’s blood.... War is their religion. That’s what it takes to make a country (Gosh 77-8).

Bhabani Bhattacharya’s social realist fiction, written in the decades immediately after India’s independence, provides useful starting point to explore the ways in which space, community, identity, and the nation are dealt with in postcolonial writers. He thematizes a major debate of post-Independence India. Similarly, the birth of the Indian nation, according to Salman Rushdie:

> ‘[I]s an extra festival on the calendar, a new myth to celebrate...a country which never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will except in a dream we all agreed to dream... India, the new myth – a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a table rivaled only by the two other mighty fantasies-money and God.\(^\text{15}\)

According to Benedict Anderson nations are ‘imagined communities’, located literature-specifically the novel-at the centre of the ‘imagining’, Anderson argues that the novel was a technical form for ‘re-presenting’ a kind of imagined community that becomes the nation. The literature in
the postcolonial context, constantly refers to the idea of nation. Literary texts do indeed construct the nation through ‘imagining’ spaces and territories. Nations of the mind assume as much significance as ‘real’ ones, and Anderson is quite accurate in this formulation. A novel or poem that provides a particular image of the nation is influential in shaping the public imagination of belonging, territory, and nationhood. C.L.R. James in *The Future in the Present: Selected Writing* underscores this role of the writer and the literary text:

[The writer] exercises an influence on the national consciousness which is incalculable. He is created by it but he himself illuminates and amplifies it, bringing the past up to date and charting the future.\(^{16}\)

The postcolonial nation has to negotiate the difficult balance between individual and community, region and nation, diversity and homogeneity. Thumboo’s poetry captures the stresses involved in such a process of nation building. The task, as some postcolonial writers have identified it, is not to reiterate notions of boundaries and territory, but to assume responsibility for material suffering within the nation-state. Wole Soyinka, a major commentator on his country [Nigeria] writes in *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* as:

I accept Nigeria as a duty; that is all. I accept Nigeria as a responsibility, without sentiment. I accept that entity Nigeria as a space within which I am bound to collaborate with fellow occupants in the pursuit of justice and ethical life…Expressions such as ‘territorial integrity’ and the ‘sacrosanctity of boundaries’, those
relies of a colonial master-slave bequest that abjectly glorify the diktat of colonial powers, are meaningless in such a context.\textsuperscript{17}

The nation has become one of the most important modes of social and political organisation in the modern world. Most commentators agree that the idea of the nation is western in origin. It emerged with the growth of Western capitalism and industrialisation and was a fundamental component of imperialist expansion. It is almost second nature these days to map the world as a collection of different nations, each separated from the other by a border. But borders between nations do not happen by accident. They are constructed, defended and bloodily contested by groups of people.

In his influential book \textit{Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism}, Benedict Anderson defines the nation first and foremost as ‘an imagined political community’ (p.6). This is because ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (p. 6). Individuals think they are part of a greater collective, that they share a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ (p. 7) with many others. In a similar view Timothy Brennan points out in his essay ‘\textit{The National Longing for Form}’ in \textit{Nation and Narration}, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, that the nation refers ‘both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous - the ‘\textit{natio}’ - a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging’ (Timothy 45). So, central to the idea of the nation are notions of collectivity and belonging, a mutual sense of
community that a group of individuals imagines it shares. These feelings of community are the emotive foundation for the organisation, administration and membership of the ‘state’, the political agency which enforces the social order of the nation. But the British cultural historian, Raymond Williams, has commented as:

‘Nation’ as a term is radically connected with ‘native’. We are born into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and ‘placeable’ bonding is quite fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from that to anything like the modern nation-state is entirely artificial.¹⁸

As Anderson argues, a defining feature of the nation is the standardisation of one unitary language that all of its members can understand. Although people from different parts of the nation may use regional variations, in theory all of the nation’s people come to learn a standard language which enables them to communicate freely with each other. In addition, Anderson points out that the imagining of the nation displays specific features exemplified by two particular forms of writing: the realist novel and the daily newspaper. Anderson argues that ‘these forms provided the technical means for “re-presenting” the kind of imagined community that is the nation’.¹⁹

There is further an important element that is often fundamental to nationalist representations is the constructions of ‘otherness’. The placing of imaginative borders between nations is fundamental to their existence, not least because borders divide the nation's people from others outside. But, particularly the construction of the nation’s borders
is a process fraught with difficulties, and has all too often been its undoing.

Paul Gilroy in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* states that, nations are created ‘through elaborate cultural, ideological and political processes which culminate in [the individual’s] feeling of connectedness to other national subjects and in the idea of a national interest that transcends the supposedly petty divisions of class, region, dialect or caste’ (Paul 49). These feelings of connectedness have proved a valuable resource to many anti-colonial movements. During several struggles against colonial rule in the twentieth century, the myth of the nation has proved highly potent and productive. It was popular with a variety of independence movements because it served many of their intellectuals and leaders as a valuable ideal behind which resistance to colonialism could unite. Amilcar Cabral, a leading figure in the independence movement in Guinea-Bissau, described in *National Liberation and Culture’ in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, edited by Williams and Chrisman, that the contemporary conflict within several African colonies specifically as one of ‘national liberation in opposition to imperialist domination’ (Cabral 54-5). The nation became mobilised as a powerful symbol which anti-colonial movements used to organise themselves against colonial rule.\textsuperscript{20}

Fanon gives the example of oral storytellers who modify their work in order to participate in the forging of national consciousness as:

[T]he oral tradition - stories, epics and songs of the people - which formerly were filed away as
set pieces are now beginning to change. The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernise the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and types of weapons (Fanon 193).

As Fanon’s work intimates, literature could have an important role to play in the construction of a national consciousness. Cesaire’s Notebook of a Return to My Native Land is only one example of many literary texts from several countries with a history of colonialism during this period which were involved in creating and exploring national consciousness, as many critics of Commonwealth literature correctly noted at the time. As the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe famously remarked in his lecture ‘The Novelist as Teacher’ that:

‘[H]ere then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse - to help my society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration’. 21

An excellent, highly-recommended comparative discussion of the relations between literature and nationalism is given by C. L. Innes in her essay ‘Forging the Conscience of Their Race”: Nationalist Writers’, looks at the work of nationalist writers such as W. B. Yeats in Ireland; Senghor, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka in West Africa; and Joseph Furphy in Australia. She discovers a set of similar concerns in each, generated no doubt by the fact that different groups of nationalists were caught up in a similar dialectic, wherein the metropolitan imperial power categorises all other groups in opposition to its own self-image. Innes
notes several characteristics in much nationalist writing which used European languages and literary forms. First, Nationalist writers asserted the existence of a culture which was the antithesis of the colonial one. This often meant celebrating the derogatory characteristics assigned to them in colonial discourses. Second, they emphasised the relationship between the people and the land in order to underline the illegitimate intrusion of the colonisers, asserting a unity between people and place. Third, there was a tendency in some nationalist writing to gender representations of colonial domination and nationalist resistance. Several nationalist texts featured plots which involved the conflicts of fathers and sons, through which is figured the patriarchal authority of the coloniser and resistances to it. This went hand in hand with a feminisation of the nation as a motherland.22

Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s novel *A Grain of Wheat* is an example of constructing national consciousness. This novel concerns the achievement of Kenyan independence (‘Uhuru’) on 12 December 1963. It explores several issues: how a writer contributes to the forging of national consciousness by narrating the people’s struggle; the process of forging national symbols as well as the pitfalls; the challenge of independence; the danger of neo-colonialism. It is set during the four days leading up to Uhuru. Its central characters are members of the peasant community of Thabai Ridge, and through their memories Ngugi examines how the struggle for independence impacted on the ordinary lives of the peasant class. Much of the novel occurs in ‘flashback’ and bears witness to the 'Mau Mau' Rebellion to colonial rule. On 20 October
1952 a State of Emergency was declared in Kenya and several leading figures in the push for independence were arrested. As a consequence, many peasants left their homes and took to the hills where they waged a guerrilla war against the colonial powers. In Ngugi’s novel we hear about the leading figures in the independence movement, such as Jomo Kenyatta, but only indirectly and as part of the wider memories of the central characters. This shows us that Ngugi’s prime focus is on ordinary people, not their leaders. So, Ngugi is following Fanon's lead in making the people the subject for his novel, and the fortunes of the Thabai community can be read as a mirror of the fledgling nation as a whole. As Ngugi writes in his essay ‘Moving the Centre’, the very choice of writing a novel in the 1960s that examined the lives of ordinary Kenyans was part of a wider struggle for the right to name the world for ourselves. His narrative constitutes a vital attempt to give voice to the people’s collective identity and history. In A Grain of Wheat an unnamed narrator specifically uses a collective' voice and phrases such as “[I]earned men will, no doubt, dig into the troubled times which we in Kenya underwent”. He locates himself as belonging to the people of Thabai. In the following phrase the narrator characteristically speaks for the people and to the people: “Most of us from Thabai first saw him at the New Rung’ei Market the day the heavy rain fell. You remember the Wednesday, just before Independence? Wind blew and the rain hit the ground at an angle” (Ngugi 178).

In terms of Fanon’s work on national culture, the narrative voice of the text contributes to the construction of a national consciousness.
This sense of creating a narrative of the people is borne out by the novel’s representation of the Thabai villagers. *A Grain of Wheat* gathers the stories of a series of interrelated characters, none of which is granted the position of its primary hero or heroine. These characters have their own chequered past which we learn through a series of flashbacks and memories. One of them, Kihika, has been killed by the time of Uhuru. Kihika is remembered as one of the heroes of the anti-colonial movement and had fought as a freedom fighter in the hills. He was betrayed to the colonial forces and subsequently murdered. Another key figure is Mugo. For much of the novel Mugo is believed to have sheltered Kihika while on the run. He is celebrated for this and for defending a female villager, Wambuku, from being beaten while digging a trench for the authorities, for which he is sent to a detention camp. He returns to Thabai as a hero, but few suspect that he betrayed Kihika and caused his death. Also sent to a detention camp was Gikonyo, a carpenter and husband of Mumbi, Kihika’s sister. Initially a strong supporter of the anti-colonial struggle, Gikonyo freed himself from detention by confessing his oath of allegiance to the ‘Movement’. His return to Thabai is marred by his discovery that Mumbi has borne a child to Karanja, his childhood rival and the colonialists’ puppet Chief of Thabai during the State of Emergency. Karanja betrayed those fighting for independence, and is wrongly believed by many in Thabai to have been responsible for Kihika’s death. Jealous of Gikonyo’s marriage to Mumbi, during the Emergency Karanja attempted to use his office to seduce Mumbi, who steadfastly refused his advances and remained
committed to her absent husband. Only when she learned from Karanja that Gikonyo had been freed did she lower her defences, which Karanja ruthlessly exploited.

Although *A Grain of Wheat* is not a conventionally realist novel due to its complex structure of memory and flashback, it does promote the unities of time and space that Benedict Anderson identified as crucial to the imagining of the nation. It focuses on a specific location common to all the characters, Thabai village, and in the characters’ memories we gain a sense of what each was doing during the same period of time. The novel raises all kinds of issues relevant to the myth of the nation and the coming of independence. One issue is the construction of icons which anchor the people’s feeling of a common national identity, a process that Ngugi both acknowledges and questions.23

In general, the nation is first and foremost a Western idea, one which emerged at a certain moment in Western history due to specific economic circumstances. How enabling is it, then, for anti-colonial nationalist movements which are attempting to challenge their subservience to Western views of the world? As Partha Chatterjee explains in his influential book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, the origins of the nation in the West have much to do with the pursuit of a set of human ideals often identified as the European ‘Enlightenment’. From this vantage, European forms of nationalism are ‘part of the same historical process which saw the rise of industrialism and democracy’ and ‘nationalism represents the attempt to actualise in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress’ (Chatterjee 2).
However, this ‘liberal’ view of the nation repeatedly comes up against a dilemma: how can nationalism also facilitate illiberal movements and regimes which create internecine violence, political crises and civil war? Chatterjee points out that there is a conflict right at the heart of nationalism which he calls the ‘liberal dilemma’: nationalism may promise liberty and universal suffrage, but is complicit in undemocratic forms of government and domination. The sense of the Western nations as representing the very best in human progress and civilisation, firmly committed to a project of modernisation, becomes all too quickly a way of legitimating colonial expansion in moral terms. That is to say, colonialism can be justified with recourse to nationalism as a liberal, morally just, crusade to conquer the perceived ignorance and savagery of others. The ‘liberal dilemma’ of nationalism becomes particularly problematic in colonial contexts. In using nationalism, many anti-colonial movements attempted to appropriate the liberal aspects of Western nationalism which promised the moral and political rights of liberty and political self-determination for the people. But as Chatterjee argues, they could not avoid also perpetuating nationalism’s ‘illiberal’ and colonial aspects too. Nationalism sought to demonstrate the falsity of the colonial claim that the backward peoples were culturally incapable of ruling themselves in the conditions of the modern world. Nationalism denied the alleged inferiority of the colonised people; it also asserted that a backward nation could ‘modernise’ itself while retaining its cultural identity. It thus produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intel-
lectual premises of ‘modernity’ on which colonial domination was based. (Chatterjee 30)

Chatterjee argues that anti-colonial nationalisms inevitably have to use one of the chief tools of the colonialists, and this makes them culpable in continuing to traffic in colonial ideas. Not only have many once-colonised nations derived their national borders from the map-making of the colonial powers, the nation as a concept is also derived from European colonial thinking.

One of the most influential and challenging interventions in the debate concerning nationalist representations is Homi K. Bhabha’s essay ‘Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation’. Bhabha’s essay first appeared in a collection of essays Nation and Narration. It is reprinted in The Location of Culture. It reveals nationalist representations as highly unstable and fragile constructions which cannot ever produce the unity they promise. This is because, in Bhabha's argument, they become split by similar kinds of ambivalence to those that threaten the coherence of colonial discourses. In making this argument, the essay might make us think about the worrying similarities between colonial discourses and nationalist representations. It is the aim of nationalist discourses to create community out of difference, to convert the ‘many’ into ‘one’. Nations have been extremely important in discussions of colonialism, specifically forms of nationalism involved in anti-colonial struggle and post-colonial reconstruction. They have enabled stable cultural identities, as well as grounding necessary political structures: oppressed peoples have
identified with clear national identities. Therefore, nations have seemed a vital organizing principle for many writers in post-colonial studies. However, Bhabha rejects the well-defined and stable identity associated with the national form. It is not that he rejects national identity entirely, but that he wants to keep such identity open. He achieves this by examining the ‘narration’ of nations. In his view, nations have their own narratives, but very often a dominant or official narrative overpowers all other stories, including those of minority groups. Such minority or marginalized groups have privileged perspectives on the thinking of national identities, helping to make them more inclusive and realistic.

Bhabha, like many other thinkers, takes Benedict Anderson’s book *Imagined Communities* as a starting point to think about nations. Perhaps the title will seem straightforward enough, with that word ‘imagination’, perhaps a little too easily bisected: imagination. However, it is important to remember that imagined things are not imaginary or unreal, at least not in the sense that we could dismiss them from our thinking. You could argue that imagined communities are simultaneously real and unreal, ghostly or virtual. Although it is possible to think increasingly in terms of virtual communities enabled by new technologies, communities surpassing or exceeding the nation, Anderson’s book reminds us that the nation itself has always been a virtual community. This is true in several senses. First, he suggests that, although the nation-state is historically specific and relatively recent, nations themselves always have an air of a historical permanence: “If nation-states are widely conceded to be “new” and “historical,” the
nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future.”

Nations, in other words, are form of mythology. Bhabha rephrases this thought to emphasize the connections between nation and narration: Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizon in the mind’s eye.

For Bhabha a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. Man, Gentleman, does not improvise. The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory, this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more - these are the essential conditions for being a people. Therefore a nation is a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. A nation's
existence is...just as an individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life. That, I know full well, is less metaphysical than divine right and less brutal than so-called historical right. According to the ideas that I am outlining to you, a nation has no more right than a king does to say to a province: 'You belong to me, I am seizing you.' A province, as far as I am concerned, is its inhabitants; if anyone has the right to be consulted in such an affair, it is the inhabitant. A nation never has any real interest in annexing or holding on to a country against its will. The wish of nations is, all in the entire sole legitimate criterion, the one to which one must always return.27

The nation in fiction, as Bruce King has pointed out:

Nationalism is an urban movement which identifies with the rural areas as a source of authenticity, finding in the 'folk' the attitudes, beliefs, customs and language to create a sense of national unity among people who have other loyalties. Nationalism aims at... rejection of cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas.28

Kohn and Kedourie, for Example, both define nationalism by suggesting it has a totalitarian edge:

'Nationalism is a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state.'29

Many of the novels often attempt to assemble the fragments of a national life and give them a final shape. They become documents designed to prove national consciousness, with multiple, myriad components that display an active communal life. In this sense, it is important to see how
contemporary nationalism has affected the English tradition as a whole - that is, not only the English speaking former colonies, or in the fate of 'World English Literature's' reception into the academy, but in the writing of English cultural criticism itself. The nation-centered origins of literary studies distort the coverage of that vast realm of experience arising from imperial contacts. Thus, for the most part, the English criticism of empire has been, until recently, almost all of one kind: the slightly ill-at-ease, slightly ashamed, but enormously forgiving recognition of imperial themes in writers from 'the center': Forster on the possibilities of intercultural communication, Conrad on the savagery of civilized man, Lawrence on the liberating chaos of primitive religion, Greene on the political intrigues of European governments in cultures they do not understand.

Similarly, in *Fiction and the Colonial Experience*, Jeffrey Meyers illustrates the kind of criticism widely found in English studies of the 'colonial novel'. He recognizes liberally that “Europe [has] impose[d] its manners, customs, religious beliefs and moral values on an indigenous way of life’, and that the reverberations from centuries of foreign domination constitute 'one of the most significant historical developments in our century’.”

He explains that 'the colonial novel runs parallel to the rise and fall of western colonialism', as if the colonial cycle had run its course. By doing so, he separates himself sharply' from the discourse of critics, from the former colonies who, despite their innumerable, divisions and
outlooks, are unified in identifying a postwar structure of neocolonial dependency.

In general the novels in the postwar period are unique because they operate in a world where the level of communications, the widespread politics of insurgent nationalism, and the existence of large international cultural organizations have made the topics of nationalism and exile unavoidably aware of one another. The idea of nationhood is not only a political plea, but a formal binding together of disparate elements. And out of the multiplicities of culture, race and political structures, grows also a repeated dialectic of uniformity and specificity: of world culture and national culture, of family and of people. One of many clear formulations of this can be found in Fanon's statement that it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. These universalist tendencies - already implicit in the concept of 'inalienable rights' - is accentuated by the break-up of the English and Spanish imperial systems, with their unities of language, their common enemies, and their contiguous terrain. Examples of the persistence of this motif might be found, for instance, in the controversial role of the terms 'Africa' in the writing of the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe.

Thus, of course, not all Third World novels about nations are 'nationalistic'. The variations range from outright attacks on independence, often mixed with nostalgia for the previous European status quo (as in the work of V.S. Naipaul, Manohar Malgonkar, and others), to vigorously anti-colonial works emphasizing native culture
(Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Tayib Salih, Sipho Sepamla, and others), to cosmopolitan explanations of the 'lower depths', or the 'fantastic unknown' by writers acquainted with the tastes and interests of dominant culture (Garcia Marquez, Wole Soyinka, Salman Rushdie and others).  

Simon During argues that this is not to deny literature's ability to function as a signifier of national identity or heritage. One must also accept that in so far as the history of the West is a tale of exploitation of other societies, all European cultural practices are touched by imperialism. Yet nationalism is something other than imperialism writ as large as this. It is, quite specifically, the battery of discursive and representational practices which define, legitimate or valorize specific nation-state-or individuals as members of nation-state. Nationalism attaches to the modern state, revealing itself fully in subjects whose being is saturated by their nationality. One can certainly be nationalist without being imperialist. Indeed, as a citation from Hazlitt indicates, nationalism has often seemed a mode of freedom. Its most powerful form of cultural nationalism was in fact developed against imperialism. Herder, who invents the word 'nationalism' (in German), links a series of concepts - *Volk, Bildung*, language-as-consciousness and act, empathy, organic form, in an effort to connect with, and respect, what we must now call other cultures.  

But this conceptual chain immediately penetrates imperialism in a twist indicative of the way a single discourse may work to contradictory ends. For the notions 'culture' and 'nation' align, early-nineteenth-century Europe becoming a scene of individual cultures chasing after
nationhood. Imperialist thought possesses itself of culturalism then, too, because cultures are even more worth fighting for than nations; hierarchies of cultures seeming to fix identities, whereas hierarchies of nations merely seeming to belong to history and politics. Under this dispensation an imperialist nation competing with others, must regard itself as having a world-historical culture. Let us consider nationalism first for revolutionary France, in the word of Abbe Sieyes:

The nation is prior to everything. It is the source of everything. Its will is always legal. . . Nations on earth must be conceived of as individuals outside the social bond; or, as is said, in the state of nature.  

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