

The Nation and Its Literature(s)

Representing People, Representing a People

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THE PAIRED CONCEPTS contained in the title of this volume—national literature and multinational states—harbour a single contradiction that is rarely addressed because it is rarely acknowledged. The power of literature both to create and reflect understandings of collective belonging has long been acknowledged as one of its central attributes. Assembled into a tradition identified as *national*, the literary works of a national literature are habitually accorded status as the privileged sign and progenitor of the nation-state, a fact attested to in forms as simple as the shelving of literature in bookstores and the arrangement of literature departments in universities. A moment's reflection, however, reveals the tension inherent in the lived experience of the nation and its literature(s). For although literature is amenable to the creation of a sense of the national collective, very few nation-states are reducible to representation in a homogeneous cultural narrative. Most countries comprise complex, multinational polities formed of a plurality of cultural communities (in many countries, accruing), each laying claim to the privileges and prerogatives of (literary) representation; *le récit national* is almost always a story of many, usually contested, narratives. The Romantic nation(-state) and the ideal of a corresponding national literature have struggled with this simple reality since the shared historical moment of their inception. Each chapter of *National Literature in Multinational States* addresses the persistent and

yet always imperfect link between literature and nation. It is neither the goal nor the effect of the collection to disqualify the notions of either nation or national literature, but rather to address some of the practical and theoretical limitations of their manifestations and, secondly, to illustrate particular instances where the two related notions exist in tension. Literary studies have long been occupied with the multiple intersections of literature and nation (Bhabha; Horton and Baumeister; Szeman). Likewise, the responsibility of the nation(-state) to acknowledge the place of subnational communities has been discussed, if infrequently, as a question of *politico-administrative* representation (Kymlicka; A. Smith, “Ethnic Nationalism”; R. Smith). As a matter of *literary* representation, however, the problems—cultural and political—of adequately portraying the diversity of multinational states within a unified national literature have not received adequate attention. *National Literature in Multinational States* is intended to offer diverse points of reflection upon this very lacuna.

In preparation for the individual discussions of literature and the nation presented in this book, the following introduction will seek to provide a contextualizing overview of the conceptual terrain, the cluster of concepts and processes that the contributors to *National Literature in Multinational States* return to in their separate ways. Key here is the very idea of the nation and its attendant ideology, nationalism. A formative construct in organizing social and political life since the latter half of the eighteenth century, the nation is a surprisingly difficult concept to capture in definitional specificity due to the competing and evolving visions of its historical sources and sociopolitical character. One of its finest theoreticians, Anthony Smith, has suggested that the idea of the nation has at best “appeared sketchy and elusive, at worst absurd and contradictory” (*National Identity* 17). The differences of definition that plague the term are of relevance for a variety of reasons, not the least because they signal significant differences regarding the origins and composition of the nation and, following from this, its claims to legitimacy as the primary claimant to the symbolic and political powers of the state. A further matter of overarching concern is the identification of the sources of the fissure complicating identification of a nation(-state) with its national literature. What was long understood as insoluble—the symbiotic relation

between nation and national literature—has become the basis of a contestation that emerges from two broad directions. The first and most frequent derives from subnational cultural communities disputing the adequacy of the national narrative and thus demanding revisions to, and inclusion in, an altered national story. A second more general but equally persistent challenge derives from alternative, usually supranational, constructs that challenge the nation's primacy as the privileged source of collective and individual identity. Central to both of these broadly conceived forms of contention is representation—literary and political—a topic that *National Literature in Multinational States* returns to repeatedly whether in affirmation of an evolving understanding of the nation or in the service of a contestatory vision of its composition and legitimacy.

Emerging from the collective effort of the book is the realization that both literature and the nation encompass interdependent and yet non-identical impulses. Both are grounded in the social; both assume a form of culture (Gilbert 198); both are instantiated through representation; and both find articulation in narrative. Yet each, ultimately, has a separate telos. Literature may be entrusted with the representation of *a people* as a portion of a nationalist project reified in a national literature; its first and broader allegiance, however, remains to represent *the people* who individually and collectively comprise all identity-bearing entities. Neither the nation nor national literatures are likely to disappear; their capacity to affirm a sense of collective belonging as the basis for the provisioning of material and spiritual needs remains too strong, too important to social life (Kymlicka and Straehle 224–29). Nonetheless, a common thread in most if not all of the chapters of this collection is a sense of dissatisfaction, a *ressentiment* born of imperfect representation within the national narrative, the national literature. The collective effort of *National Literature in Multinational States* suggests that any resolution to the conflicts lodged in the book's title, any effort to heal the fractures of the nation will require expansion of “our senses of peoplehood” (R. Smith 19). The better representation of both people and peoples will remain the imperative of both national literatures and their associated systems of social and political life.

The Nation: Origins, Definitions, Implications

National Literature in Multinational States appears at a time of one of the most startling developments of the twenty-first century—the pronounced resurgence of thinking about the nation and the still more vociferous resurgence of nationalism. A concept conventionally thought to have receded from prominence due to its supposed superseding by supranational organizations (Mathews) and its associations with some of the greatest crimes in human history has re-emerged as a driving force in the organization of political and cultural life around the globe. The undeniable—and to many, troubling—reappearance of the nation poses a host of both theoretical and practical questions that demand reflection even prior to considerations of how politics and the aesthetic interact in the shaping of national literatures.

What, for example, is a nation?¹ According to one reading, the nation exists prior to specific political considerations as a collective sharing a geographical space, a sense of common historical experience, unifying cultural and linguistic practices, and a psychological bond manifested in an ongoing commitment to a common destiny (Connor 379–80). Anthony Smith adjoins political and administrative dimensions to define an “ideal type” of nation as “a named community of history and culture, possessing a unified territory, economy, mass education system and common legal rights” (“Origins” 342). Stymied in the present, commentators frequently reach for explicative purchase in the past, appealing to accounts of the historical “rise” of the nation and nationalism. Historically understood, the nation is frequently conceived as having its roots in an *ethnie* (345), pre-modern peoples who shared a sense of cultural belonging and lineage but who remained subject to the political control exercised by supranational authorities, such as ecclesiastic, monarchical or imperial/colonial organizations. In this reading, a central shift occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the displacement of political control and the increasing self-awareness of nations as themselves constituent forces of the social and political order (Wimmer, *Waves of War*). The nation understood as a people becomes itself a font of political power and authority, an arm of an expanding understanding of democracy. Rather than a monarch or an elite retaining the unquestionable prerogative to guide the collective—*l'état c'est moi*—it is “we the people,”

the nation, that is sovereign, invested through the democratic process with the power to confer authority to a national assembly or monarch. A further elaboration of the story of the nation's emergence in the modern era emphasizes nationalism's fostering of nations as a prelude to the provision of the centralized bureaucracies, common languages, codified legal frameworks, educated workforce, and so on needed by industrial societies (Kramer 12–13). Ernest Gellner's claim that "it is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round" (55) provides famous expression to an influential theory of the constructedness of the nation, whereby various tools of modernity—including literary—are used in the creation of an "imagined community."

Important consequences derive from the choice to locate the nation in the deep cultural roots of an *ethnie* or, conversely, to theorize it as an "imagined" artifact of nationalism and the demands of modernizing, industrializing societies. Anthony Smith in *Myths and Memories of the Nation* outlines four dominant paradigms for understanding the nation and nationalism: the *primordialist*, the *perennialist*, the *modernist*, and the model advanced by Smith himself, the *ethnosymbolic* (3–19). According to the primordialist view, the nation exists outside of or prior to history as a fact of nature, the foundational basis of all aspects of human life. As the Abbé Sieyès famously expressed it on the eve of the French Revolution, "The nation exists before all; it is at the source of all. Its will is always legal; it is itself the law...A nation never leaves the state of nature" (53, 55).² The perennialist conception holds that the nation is a product of human culture rather than a component of the natural order and that nations emerge and recede historically as the basis of identifiable communities of cultural belonging whose roots run deep in shared territorial spaces and cultural practices. The third and perhaps reigning conception of the nation is the modernist. For the above-referenced Ernest Gellner, but also other influential figures such as Eric Hobsbawm and, most famously in the context of literary studies, Benedict Anderson, the nation does not pre-exist its "imagining" in the modern era; it is, itself, the product of nationalism, an ideology that emerged out of the processes of modernization launched in the wake of the revolutions of the late eighteenth century. The modernist nation materialized as the construct best able to produce the educational and cultural homogeneity required by

expanding industrial economies. Smith's ethnosymbolic approach to the nation accepts the modern, constructed emergence of many nations but also insists on the primacy of a historical connection between modern nations and prior, pre-existing ethnic communities or *ethnies*.

The Nation, National Minorities, the State

Anthony Smith's nuanced taxonomy of theories of the nation is particularly illuminating in the present context due to its identification of the subtle link between ethnic cultures and the nation, even the modernist, constructivist nation. As discussed in several chapters in *National Literature in Multinational States*—for example, those dealing with Canada and Nigeria—the place of subnational cultural groups within the nation is a matter of fundamental concern and frequently the primary point of fissure in the national imaginary. Smith emphasizes the *ethnie* as an important historical constituent of the nation. In the rough-and-tumble world of competing visions of the nation illustrated in this volume—where questions of origins and legitimacy gain urgency through their coupling with the exercise of power—the demand for recognition within the nation(-state) and its national literature extends beyond *ethnies* to include numerous other groupings of cultural identity. Thus, it is no longer the *ethnie* or the nation alone that maintains the exclusive privilege of representation, but also national minorities, ethnocultural groups, minority language communities, diasporic populations among various other forms of political and cultural membership. While different in scale, composition, and formal political status, as bearers of collective identity, each may claim the prerogative of recognition within the nation(-state) and the national imaginary. As the respective chapters of *National Literature in Multinational States* illustrate, these are the subnational collectives contesting the claims of cultural uniformity implicit in homogenizing understandings of the nation and, by extension, its national literature.

A further complexity related to comprehending the nation derives from the term's semantic flexibility. The word *nation* famously occupies space in the two conceptually related and yet distinct domains of the socio-anthropological and the political. A nation may designate either a group sharing defining, inherited cultural traits—a people—or

a political, territorial group that may or may not share a sense of ethno-cultural relatedness—a country. While terms such as *country*, *state*, *republic*, *commonwealth*, *colony*, or—a Canadian preference—*dominion* are subject to closer definitions, the word *nation* may be applied in reference to the cultural or the political. As a curious illustration of the complexities of the term, Franz Kafka the Jewish, German-language writer could speak of national literature in reference to two *kleine Nationen* within the Austro-Hungarian Empire: the territorialized political entity that would become Czechoslovakia in 1918 and the extraterritorial, diasporic cultural community formed by adherents of the Jewish faith regardless of their place or citizenship (Casanova 287–93).

The overlapping of nation and state, the cultural and the political, reflected in this semantic confusion is no mere coincidence; it is tied to the symbolic and practical importance for any nation of gaining access to political power and the associated potential to shape the national identity, including via recourse to a national literature. In the earliest stages of the nation-state's late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century history, the prospects for the nation were felt to reside with the capacities of the state. A people's self-identification as a nation was but a prelude to its emergence as a nation-state. In 1817, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel wrote that a given nation's "substantial purpose is to be a state and to maintain itself as such." For Hegel, without the political and administrative form provided by the machinery of state, the nation had no lasting substance or, in his terms, "no real history" (357).³ For better or worse, over the past 250 years, the nation-state has emerged as the dominant form of political life around the globe, initially, undoubtedly, because of its success in defeating dynastic and imperial systems and, subsequently, due to its ability to deliver to polities economic, cultural, and political advantages superior to those of other models (Wimmer, "Why" 30). Chief amongst these advantages—and certainly at play at the time of Hegel's writing—was the superior capacity of the nation-state to protect the autonomy of the collective "we," particularly in times of war and occupation. It is no mere coincidence that Johann Gottlieb Fichte's epochal rallying cry, *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (*Addresses to the German Nation*, 1808), was prompted by the outrage of Napoleon's defeat and occupation of Prussia in 1806–1807. More recently, in an age of anti-imperialism and

decolonization, aspirations to national sovereignty via the alignment of nation and state have led to the establishment of as many nation-states, if not more, as the exigencies of modernizing industrial economies identified by Gellner (Wimmer and Feinstein 767–70). Indeed, the generative power of historically *postmodern* ideologies and cultural developments in fostering nationalisms, nations, and nation-states is implicitly attested to in the very contents of this book. Most of the contradictions and fissures between nations and national literatures referred to in the respective chapters of *National Literature in Multinational States* occur in countries that emerged as political and cultural entities out of the cauldron of empire and colonialism. Nevertheless, whether emergent as modernist or ethnosymbolic nations—to reprise Smith’s terminology—a substrata of features related to the political and cultural motivations for positing the nation remains, including the question of the nation’s relation to the state and literature.

A nation’s assumption of the powers and privileges of the instruments of the state has obvious implications for national literatures. As Paul Gilbert notes, “it is the *state*...which *constructs* a national literature” (200), from whence the anxiety of subnational cultural groups rightly jealous of the state’s powers to construct and thereby determine identity. Will Kymlicka and Christine Straehle speak with salutary frankness of the contradictory effects of most, if not all, endeavours at nation-building, which necessarily include a homogenizing drive to uniformity in the creation of a common sense of national identity. Hegemonic articulations of *the* nation—whether presented as legitimized by the long-standing traditions of an originary *ethnie* or as the product of the modernist, constructivist imperative to “imagine” the collective—necessarily entail a threat to pre-existing cultural communities, whether understood as ethnocultural groups or national minorities: “the essence of nationalism is precisely about political movements and public policies that actively attempt to ensure that states are indeed ‘nation-states’ in which the state and nation coincide...We need to recognize that state nation-building is often connected to minority nation-destroying” (230–31). Aware of this inevitable threat to their sense of national identity, subnational cultural collectives remain acutely attentive to all forms of political and cultural representation, including the composition of the national

literature—long an essential tool in nation-building. Another important dimension of “nation-destroying” unremarked upon by Kymlicka and Straehle, but illustrated in several contributions to *National Literature in Multinational States*, is the manner in which national minorities can in themselves destabilize the fixedness of their “national” identity. Here the challenge to the integrity of the national identity comes not from internal minorities seeking inclusion, but via changing understandings of the nation itself. Viewed historically, most nations—whether nation-states or national minorities—demonstrate significant alterations with regard to their self-conception, changes that are illustrated in the very national literature evoked to demonstrate the specificity of the national identity. The “invention” of a community assumes its ongoing “re-invention.” The constructivist logic of the inherent malleability of the “imagined” nation-state that renders possible revisionist claims upon the nation-state applies equally well to national minorities themselves, as is attested to in historically evolving understandings of their “national” literatures.

Kymlicka and Straehle identify the implicit threat that homogeneous narratives of origins and belonging pose to cultural groups inadequately contained within the national imaginary. There are still others. For instance, what people form *the* people? What constitutes the national *we* laying claim to sovereignty, and how is this collective configured? What are the criteria and limits of membership? Ernest Renan in his influential lecture “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” (“What Is a Nation?”) identified the intractable nature of the problem in characterizing as a “chimera” the appeal to such broad, inherited categories of belonging as language, race, religion, and so on—the very elements at the foundation of the ethnonational ideal of the nation. Since then, the pervasive even primordial heterogeneity of social life that Renan recognized in 1882 has grown exponentially, particularly after the Second World War, as liquidity and mobility have become reigning values in an ever-globalizing world. Capital, manufactured goods, and ideas, but also whole populations and even individual senses of identity are increasingly claiming the right to unfettered movement free of impediment, whether political or ideological. That the national fabric is woven of many threads—its compositional warp and weft subject to continual historical change—seems incontestable.

Literature: Writing the Nation, Rewriting the Nation

If the nation is indeed woven of many threads, then one of the greatest of looms is imaginative literature, as evident in its continued evocation as a privileged shaper of the national imaginary. In the earliest expressions of European nationalism, the nation, language, and literature are woven so tightly as to be indistinguishable. For Fichte in the above-referenced *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, for instance, even with the loss of the state to foreign occupation, the nation remains a nation in its language and literature (140). The national vernacular served as a kind of archeological site revealing the earliest traces of the national identity. While language continues to serve as an essential vessel of cultural meaning, the Romantic conception of its powers as expressed by Fichte and many other literary nationalists has proven untenable. It is inadequate not simply in the case of the numerous authors such as Kafka who, through their choice of language, straddle disparate national identities, but also in reference to those countries whose emergence in the nineteenth century as nation-states—such as France, Italy, Germany—entailed the suppression of local languages and dialects. A related inadequacy is to be noted in the case of those nation-states that are multilingual or, further, those with postcolonial national literatures written in the language of the former colonial metropole. Nonetheless, the late eighteenth-century linkage of nation and language has had far-reaching implications for literature and, to the extent that literature continues to be called upon in the building of nations, continues to harbour implicit assumptions concerning the author, the nature of literary representation, and the role of national literary institutions.

An early development of the age of literary nationalism of relevance to the author and language was the advent of the national genius. Writers such as Shakespeare, Voltaire, Goethe, Pushkin, Mickiewicz, Shevchenko, and (even!) Ossian, as well as others, are purported not only to tender metonymic expression of the national character but to demonstrate a given nation's distinctive contribution to humanity (Thiesse 31). The nation-expressing role of the national genius was conceived as intrinsic to the author's very being as a product of the national soil and need not rely on conscious participation in a nationalist project. The tendency to identify authors with the quintessence of national character has greatly

diminished, undoubtedly as a part of what Perry Anderson has identified as “the shift from character to identity” in “the discourse of national difference” (n.p.). The identification of national writers nonetheless retains a prominent role not simply in the marketing of a nation’s literary institution but in the more focused undertaking of projecting a given understanding of the nation, even in discrete moments of historical time: for example, Michel Houellebecq’s consecration as the author of the *gilets jaunes*—era of France (France 24) or Chinua Achebe’s importance as an Igbo, Nigerian, and African writer.

While individual authors around the globe continue to play outsized roles in the articulation of a national identity, the “imagining” of the nation is necessarily a collective effort—the result of works accumulated and shaped into a tradition. The complex matter as to *how* individual works of literature achieve representation of the national—by what aesthetic mechanisms salient features of the nation are instantiated in a work of fiction—is rarely discussed in detail. Far more frequently, the theoretical claim that nations are cultural constructs, that they are “imagined communities” written into being in literary texts, is simply asserted in lieu of an explanatory account of the actual aesthetic processes at play in “writing” a given nation or national literary tradition. Reasons for this reticence are plenty. Gilbert is surely correct in observing that “there is no literary taxonomy of national literatures. Each is inescapably *ad hoc*, as each reflects different political requirements” (213). Even in the absence of such a taxonomy, however, a number of frequently recurring elements offer themselves for consideration as the familial resemblance of a taxonomic face. Robert Lecker has identified one source of resemblance in the “realist-nationalist equation” (38). While the realist mode cannot claim exclusive hold on the literary representation of the nation, the advantages of the appeal to the mimetic potential of fiction seem palpable. From the novels of Walter Scott to those of historical metafiction, explicit reference to the nation in the invocation of formative historical events and personages create obvious links. The narrative substantiation of the nation need not be limited to reference to the nation in a literal sense, however. Fredric Jameson, for instance, has suggested that so-called third-world texts ought to be read as “national allegories” that “necessarily project a political dimension” (“Third-World Literature” 69; *Fables of Aggression*).

Jameson's text has been criticized for what has been seen as its grossly generalizing tendencies, and yet the notion of allegory—as a mode both of literary production and of interpretation—offers real, if circumscribed, promise in conceptualizing the link between fiction and nation. Even with those texts that are not allegories in a strict generic sense, the invitation to read allegorically facilitates interpretation of the classic “elements of fiction” in light of their illumination of the sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociohistorical forces that gave rise to the nation: for example, historical events of relevance to the nation are given fictional treatment; a given protagonist's life traces the fortunes of the nation; a three-generation family structure parallels the historical development of the nation; language choices express the national vernacular; a marriage plot recapitulates the future-oriented choices of the nation, and so on.

Although the representation of the nation is possible in all genres of literary production, including poetry and drama as illustrated in *National Literature in Multinational States*, in the modern era it is the novel that has superseded such earlier genres as epic, folk literature, and drama to claim pride of place. The evident association of nation and novel has been theorized by numerous commentators (Moretti, Parrinder, Craig) in the general spirit of Timothy Brennan's observation that “the rise of European nationalism coincides especially with one form of literature—the novel” (49). Beyond the coincidence of their historical rise, however, the reasons for the novel's affinity with the nation are undoubtedly many—beginning with the “formal realism” (Watt 9–37) of the novel that provides the theoretical foundation for the considerations of both Lecker and Jameson. Inheritor of the epic's concern for the history and destiny of the tribe, the novel is most amenable to the sweep and scope of synecdochal representation of the nation in the particulars of the novel. The novel's heightened capacities to create extended trajectories within narratives is indicative of a still more elemental source of the juncture of literature and nation: narrative. Edward Said's insight that “nations themselves *are* narratives” (xiii) has thus been developed by a number of scholars (Bhabha, Brennan, Whitebrook, Parrinder, Craig) who see in narrative the primary source of the novel's nation-building capacity. It is narrative that, particularly in the form of the novel, most successfully recapitulates the nation's need to assemble the many—characters, languages, symbols, myths—into

a single story of collective origins and future development. Importantly, novel and narrative are both almost endlessly malleable and hence also apt media in the ongoing project of not simply “imagining” the nation but in “rewriting” its literary form. What seems certain is that due to its representational power, literature, whether conceived as national or not, will remain at the forefront in both creating the unity of the nation(-state) and in revealing its fissures.

As a means of addressing these and other related topics, *National Literature in Multinational States* offers ten chapters from contributors who discuss a spectrum of representative literary and national contexts in a matter at once synoptic and context specific. The respective contributions fall into two broadly conceived categories of analysis. The first grouping focuses on the complex Canadian situation. Here, the potential contradictions of, and challenges to, a national literature within a multinational state are examined with reference to Canada’s dominant national, national minority, and ethnic communities. The second turns to diverse international contexts in Europe, the Caribbean, India, and Africa; disparate in terms of their global range, these latter contributions effectively illustrate the imposing range of differing understandings of the nation (-state) and national literatures in republican, regional, and postcolonial settings.

The Canadian Nation(s), Canadian Literature(s)

For numerous reasons, Canada provides rich terrain for examining the subject of national literature in multinational states. A modernist nation-state formed in the striking absence of a single founding *ethnie*, shared cultural traditions, historic territoriality, or even a unified vision for future development, the Canadian national project has always been more nakedly ideational in the attempt to compose a national narrative out of changing understandings of the past, present, and future of the people(s) who inhabit the country. The national “we” has always been contested, as Canadian literature reveals, even at those times when a given understanding seemed most assured in its hegemonic power. Multiculturalism, the current paradigm of national identity, was launched as a sociopolitical project close to fifty years ago as a means of knitting together the fissures of a potentially fractured polity. Measured from the perspective of

social cohesion, multiculturalism has shown significant success, though it, too, is currently under pressure for perceived failures in assuring the same degree of recognition and sociocultural, socioeconomic benefit to all communities within Canada. Unsurprisingly, then, Canadian literature reveals divided, complex responses to issues of the nation. Paul D. Morris, for instance, reads unease in what he identifies as the seeming reticence of recent Governor General's Award-winning authors in either French or English to treat, explicitly, the topic of the nation or even deploy overt markers of the same. This absence is particularly noteworthy in the context of the literary institutions of the country's two "founding nations," both of which were conceived as nationalist enterprises.

Modernist in conception, the Canadian nation-state also famously features both national minorities—the French in their disparate expressions across *la francophonie canadienne*—and peoples, *ethnies*, who may legitimately lay claim to a more perennialist understanding of the nation. Turning from Canada's pan-national identity as a country formed out of two founding nations, Matthew Cormier and Matthew Tétreault examine the aspirations and revindications—literary and national—revealed in the now established institutions of Acadian and Métis writing. Both of these national "minority" traditions exemplify the complications and advantages of identifying and promoting a national imaginary. The complications are most apparent in reference to the implications for the Canadian nation-state as a whole and, as such, exemplify the central premise of *National Literature in Multinational States*. Acadian and Métis literatures, in substantiating a sense of their respective (competing) national identities, perform two functions simultaneously. As a matter of national identity, as Cormier and Tétreault reveal, Acadian and Métis writers and cultural figures have shaped an understanding of their respective nations out of a reading and writing of their collective historical experience. Regardless of the nature of the relation to the colonial past or to *la francophonie canadienne* or even to the pan-Canadian nation-state, through this exercise of cultural agency, they posit the nation as a social and historical presence. While advancing their respective national projects, however, they are also inescapably influencing Canada by contributing to a necessary recalibration of the pan-Canadian national narrative, an undertaking also being advanced by still other—First—nations within the country. It is to be noted,

moreover, that a readjustment in national self-understanding of the kind experienced by Canada is also to be observed in these national minority communities themselves. The literary production of both the Acadian and Métis nations reveals not so much the existence of an “eternal” nation, a *Volksgeist*, waiting to be written into history, but the historical evolution of changing manifestations and understandings of each nation. The studies by Cormier and Tétreault also show the particular efficacy of literature in, as Benedict Anderson would have it, “imagining” communities. The Acadian and Métis experience as presented by Cormier and Tétreault also seems at least partially to confirm Gellner’s thesis that nationalism creates the nation. Historically denied the nation-building instruments of an independent state, these national minorities have articulated an intensified sense of the nation, particularly since the 1970s, in the wake of an accumulation of nationalist thought and the political, institutional, and literary means of instantiating it from within multicultural, multinational Canada.

The Canadian nation-state is composed of more than founding, and First, nations. The recalibration of the Canadian idea of national self is being prompted not only by the national minorities discussed by Cormier and Tétreault but also by forces emanating from transnationalism and the defining presence of immigrant communities in Canada. The ethnic minorities that influenced the shaping of the national imaginary half a century ago in the adoption of multiculturalism as state policy provide the topic of the collection’s two following chapters. Taking Anita Rau Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, Sabujkoli Bandopadhyay discusses representations of the South Asian communities of Canada focusing on the historically shifting negotiations required by members of these communities as they navigate between changing notions of the nation and nationalism in India and in Canada. The protagonists of Badami’s novel—like so many other members of diasporic communities—are compelled by the contradictions of national ideologies to manoeuvre between sometimes conflicting national and ethnic affiliations. Bandopadhyay reads Badami’s novel of individuals caught in the ambiguities of divergent models of identity as offering three possible responses to the difficulties of a hybridized national identity, a condition increasingly common to members of mobile communities in Canada and around the world. The multiple national affiliations and identities induced by immigration call forth for adaptations

for the individuals themselves but also their national home(s). In the concluding chapter to the section on the Canadian situation, Asma Sayed takes up the perennial nationalist issue of language in its intersections with the nation and institutional power to address the fascinating topic of the Canadian response to literature written in languages other than the country's two official languages. Sayed calls for a national literary institution that expands its representation of the national not merely by accommodating but by actively fostering heritage-language works as a consequential extension of the logic of multiculturalism and the further evolution of the national imaginary. Among the many issues raised in Sayed's chapter is that of the "national" affiliation of diasporic writers, a complex matter that also serves to highlight yet another fissure in the conventional understanding of the culturally homogeneous nation-state. Although illustrated with reference to languages and works from Canada's South Asian diasporic communities, Sayed's contentions apply equally well to the numerous other heritage and Indigenous languages present within Canada.

International Contexts

Canada illustrates well the strains upon both the nation(-state) and the ideal of a unifying national literature that derive from the constructivist logic of the modernist nation. For the Canadian nation-state, transformation is prompted by competing identity-bearing collectives seeking recognition and status—representation—within the national imaginary; for Canada's national minorities, related pressures are being applied by historically evolving conceptions of national identity. Canada's historical experience and social composition thus exemplify a particular constellation of challenges to the nation; there are still others that derive from the very concept of the nation itself, however. Prominent is a fundamental questioning of the legitimacy of the nation as the privileged vehicle of identity and representation. As a matter of sociopolitical organization, various supranational, transnational structures have been theorized as significant alternatives to the nation-state. Within the literary-cultural realm as well, expressions of transnationalism provide an alternative to excessively restrictive ethnic and territorialized notions of the nation with their emphasis on myths of fixed origins. Doris Hambuch's discussion

of Dutch-language literary representations of a Caribbean transnational space in “‘No Nation Now but the Imagination’: No Caribbean Nation without the Dutch Caribbean” offers a particular example of the issue. In an argument reminiscent of Stuart Hall’s discussion of Caribbean cultural identity as “not an essence but a *positioning*” (226), Hambuch reveals how the Caribbean cultural realm, while largely a product of colonialism, has the potential to offer the multiple advantages of cultural diversity that are unavailable to the individual nation-states of the region. The Creole languages used throughout the Caribbean tender, in themselves, a kind of metonymic representation of the hybridization of historical memories, cultural practices, and communal collaboration that creates a national whole bigger than the sum of its nation-state parts. The writers and Dutch-language works analyzed by Hambuch reveal how the Dutch Caribbean contributes to the imagining of a transnational Caribbean cultural space.

The title of Hambuch’s chapter cites Derek Walcott’s implicit identification of an alternative to the nation claim as the privileged source of identity: “no nation now but the imagination.” For many writers, it is not the nation that serves as the primary font of identity and affiliation, but other sources, including literature itself understood as a republic of letters. Vladimir Nabokov, for one, famously claimed the right to travel freely between languages, countries, and national literary traditions, asserting that “the writer’s art is his real passport” (63). For many, the nation and nationalism conventionally understood are much too constraining, unable to accommodate the system of shifting sources of identity that the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah has evoked in the image of “nesting memberships” (20). Jerry White, in his chapter on the French Catalan-language author Joan Daniel Bezsonoff, offers the example of a writer who, in both his life and fictions, depicts the complexities of “nesting memberships” in gestures that complicate the French republican model of national identity. Despite his commitment to facets of his composite identity—most immediately his native language, Catalan, and his partial Russian heritage—Bezsonoff remains a resolutely French author whose primary affiliation rests with France. White demonstrates how Bezsonoff writes against the conventional French republican model of national unity with its historical imposition of standard French, not to

weaken it, but to complicate and enrich understanding of what is in effect the reality of a complex multilingual, multicultural state. For Bezsonoff, there is no contradiction in being a *Catalan* French author; his writing can serve republican universalism and a pluricultural France.

The final three chapters of the volume turn from Europe to India and Nigeria, contemporary nation-states whose cultural and political roots long predate the late eighteenth-century rise of the nation. Here, complex issues of past and present mix in a crucible of forces, including European colonization, religious beliefs, economic globalization, minority nationalist aspirations, and the imperatives of national unity within contexts of great ethnosocial diversity and economic disparity. Clara A.B. Joseph's contribution illustrates the frequent crudeness of theoretical configurations of the nation that are often more beholden to the abstractions of ideology than to the subtleties of historical experience. Joseph discusses her experiences translating Geo Thadikkatt's *Mar Joseph Cariattil*—a play from 1983 that treats the struggles of the Thomas Christians of India in the eighteenth century—against an anti-colonial account of Indian nationalism. The prominent view that Indian nationalism arose in Indigenous responses to Western colonialism and their associated discourses is serviceable, though it risks a form of essentialism in remaining insufficiently attentive to cultural influences that complicate the national narrative. Joseph demonstrates how the very act of translating Thadikkatt's play from Malayalam to English—in effect *re-representing* in a different language a depiction of cultural experience—requires tact and sensitivity to alterity that often surpasses the accepted ideological constructions of the nation. The centuries-old (pre-colonial) history of the Thomas Christians in India, the reception of the play, and Joseph's own experience in translating it reveal the multiple pitfalls of eliding the complexities of historical experience in nationalist attempts to reify the nation. Albert Braz and Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike in their respective analyses of literary works from Nigeria focus on the multifaceted problems associated with the inability of state and society to agree upon the composition of the national *we*. In Nigeria, the ethnic conflicts that have riven the country have been compounded by the legacies of colonialism but also by ethnoterritorial disputes engendered by perceptions of ethnic difference. With the example of Nigeria

and the Ogoni author Ken Saro-Wiwa, Braz identifies a flaw too often associated with nationalism: “history suggests that strife is inevitable unless nation-states accommodate the ethnonational diversity within their own borders” (167). This seemingly intractable problem is further aggravated by the often-violent struggle for control of economic and political resources—in Nigeria’s case, the country’s rich but unjustly distributed oil reserves. Umezurike indicates how the past, supranational scourge of colonialism has evolved to include the predations of transnational capitalism. The failings of the nation(-state) are evinced not merely in the unjust distribution of economic benefits but also in the pollution both of humans in their relations and the environment that sustains them.

NOTES

1. The literature on the theory of the nation—its origins, composition, and relevance—is vast. The ideas presented here have been greatly influenced by B. Anderson, Gellner, Greenfeld, Hastings, Hobsbawm, Kohn, Kramer, Renan, Seton-Watson and, above all, A. Smith.
2. “La nation existe avant tout, elle est l’origine de tout. Sa volonté est toujours légale, elle est la loi elle-même...Une nation ne sort jamais de l’état de nature.” Authors’ translation here and throughout the chapter.
3. “In dem Dasein eines *Volkes* ist der substantielle Zweck, ein Staat zu sein und als solcher sich zu erhalten; ein Volk ohne Staatsbildung (eine *Nation* als solche) hat eigentlich keine Geschichte, wie die Völker vor ihrer Staatsbildung existierten und andere noch jetzt als wilde Nationen existieren. Was einem Volke geschieht und innerhalb desselben vorgeht, hat in der Beziehung auf den Staat seine wesentliche Bedeutung”; (“In the existence of a *people* the substantial aim is to be a state and to maintain itself as such. A people with no state formation (merely a *nation*, as such), actually has no history, like the peoples that existed before the rise of states and others that still exist as savage peoples. What happens to a people, and takes place within it, has its essential significance in relation to the state”).

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