National Consciousness and Literary Cosmopolitics

Weihsin Gui

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Articulating Adorno with Postcolonial Critique

Fanon, Said, Spivak

Nationalism is an inevitable phenomenon of global modernity, and its emergence and consolidation go hand in glove—or more appropriately, hand on globe—with European conquest and colonization of peoples the world over and with the struggles against colonialism and for self-determination by these formerly colonized peoples from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Therefore, a thorough understanding of nationalism as it takes shape after World War II can be achieved not only by examining the works of anti- and postcolonial thinkers writing in and from the post-colonies themselves, but also by turning to one of Europe’s most trenchant self-critics, Theodor Adorno, who, with his colleagues in the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, was appalled by the degradation and destruction wrought by the relentless rationalization of society and culture, of which the colonial enterprise was one important facet. Aimé Césaire, an early twentieth-century Martinician poet and politician with firsthand experience of French colonialism, argues that in European colonial regimes there was “no human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production” (42). Colonialism is both a material and an intellectual and instrumental project involving a brutal conquest and binary categorization of colonizer and colonized in a
Manichean opposition of dominating and submissive subject positions. The latter became instruments of production, either lifeless cogs in or mere chattel gobbled up by a vast machinery of material extraction; the former turned into instruments of policing and punishment, the better to service the colonial engine of production. Hence Césaire’s pithy summation: “My turn to state an equation: colonization = ‘thingification’” (42). Now, if one were to take Césaire’s polemic at face value, then he is not incorrect in identifying colonization as a process of turning people into things, but by setting the word in quotation marks—“‘thingification’”—Césaire intimates that there is more at stake in the idea of thingification and in the state of being a thing than a reductive identification with colonization. The simple equation of two things runs precisely along the channels laid out by the instrumental logic of colonialism, something Césaire, with the astute craft of a politician and a poet, would surely not concur with. Instead, he “state[s]” the pithy equation not to summarize or repeat this dominating logic but, with all the irony expressed by a set of quotation marks, to highlight the irrationality of colonialism’s identitarian and instrumental structures.

Writing in West Germany shortly after the end of World War II and at the beginning of a Cold War that sundered his home country in two, employing a vocabulary that is more philosophical and less anticolonial than Césaire’s, Theodor Adorno critiques the identitarian and instrumentalizing demands of administered life in the late twentieth century as capitalism moves from an industrial toward a financial mode of accumulation. This critique appears in several venues, most notably in Dialectic of Enlightenment, but my focus is on a later essay, “Culture and Administration.” By administered life, Adorno means the management of not only our everyday existence but also our entire cultural and political structures of social relations for the maximum extraction of value and the efficient conversion of that value for the purposes of exchange or accumulation of surplus. Culture, both as the quotidian customs and practices of social life (“low” or “ordinary” culture) and as the intellectual and artistic achievements and endeavors (“high” or “elite” culture), is confronted by an administration consisting of the authoritarian state and business corporations in league with or co-opting state power. Administration demands that culture “be measured by norms not inherent to it and which have nothing to do with the quality of the object, but rather with some type of abstract standards imposed from without” (Adorno, “Culture and Administration” 113). Culture and cultural producers are instrumentalized by state and corporate power, just as Césaire describes colonized people turning into instruments of production within Europe’s colonial-capitalist system. Adorno also points out that this dominating relationship does not leave administration
itself untouched: “at the same time the administrative instance—according to its own prescriptions and nature—must for the most part refuse to become involved in questions of immanent quality which regard the truth of the thing itself,” just as Césaire observes European colonial officials transforming into the very instruments for policing and punishment they prescribed as necessary for maintaining the colonial politico-economic order (“Culture and Administration” 113). Adorno, like Césaire, does not construe the instrumentalizing relationship between administration and culture as absolute even as he highlights its irrationality; at the end of his essay he cautions that “no matter how reified both categories are in reality, neither is totally reified; both refer back to living subjects” (“Culture and Administration” 130). This suggests that if we were to become involved in and broach questions about the truth of things themselves or thingification itself (as Césaire would have it), we might disclose other aspects of the relationship between administration and culture besides that of instrumentalization. While Césaire equates with quotation marks, Adorno gestures with question marks: Césaire’s pithy equation is partly an ironic summation of the identification between colonization and thingification but also a hint toward other possibilities inherent in the process of thingification and in things; Adorno’s concluding remark is doubtless a condemnation of administrative domination but also a reminder that we discard or dismiss the things and thingness produced by administered life at our peril, for other nonadministered, nonidentical possibilities can be traced in the products of administration where culture has been identified with exchange value.

This book regards nationalism and the postcolonial nation-state as things emerging from the encounter between European colonialism and anticolonial, self-determining liberation struggles and between the administrative power of modern states and corporations and the lived experience and literary expositions of postcolonial cultures. My objective in the first section of this chapter is to connect Theodor Adorno’s critique of instrumental rationality and administered life to that of anti- and postcolonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, all of whom take issue with colonialism, imperialism, and (especially for Said and Spivak) globalism. My comparison of Aimé Césaire’s and Theodor Adorno’s perspectives on thingification paves the way for situating Adorno within a postcolonial framework, rather than casting him as postcolonial theorist avant la lettre or suggesting that postcolonial theory is purely derivative of European philosophy. Adorno’s refusal of identitarian and instrumental thinking (what he famously calls “negative dialectics”) has important connections to the ways in which key critics of colonialism and imperialism Fanon, Said, and
Spivak approach the problems and possibilities of nationalism in a global moment. While discourses of globalism tend to construe nationalism and the nation-state as obsolete social and political formations, I argue that we should not dismiss them so swiftly, for in a global moment we must revise our understanding of nationalism and postcolonial nations as multivalent objects situated in a force field of cosmopolitical relations rather than reject them outright as self-enclosed concepts, subjects, or identities, or refuse the possibility that they might contain a liberatory promise of political consciousness and cultural critique. Given the close connections between literature and nationalism outlined in my introduction, the questions I ask in this book are literary ones in that they are as much concerned with what Adorno calls the immanent quality or the formal and stylistic strategies of literary writing as they are with reconsidering the objective bases of nationalism as cultural critique and political consciousness instead of as identities premised on race, ethnicity, religion, or other primordial attributes. I argue that it is only through attention to the formal and stylistic turns of postcolonial writing by Kazuo Ishiguro, Derek Walcott, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Preeta Samarasan, and Twan Eng Tan that we are able to grasp the quality of the object or the truth of the thing that is national consciousness in a global moment, and we are better able to grasp these truths disclosed and mediated through fiction and poetry by bringing Adorno’s thinking to bear on postcolonial theory and literary criticism.

Connecting Theodor Adorno’s critical theory with nationalism might seem at first glance counterintuitive, as Adorno is not the first name that comes to mind when we think about nationalism. However, in his last lectures on Hegel and in the final section of his book *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno takes up the question of nationality as part of a critique of Hegel’s idea of world history and interrogates the concept of the nation through his elaboration of negative dialectics. For Adorno, negative dialectics extends Hegel’s dialectic of philosophy and world history while also negating the assumption of synthesis or reconciliation that forms the third moment of the dialectical tension between concepts and objects. Whereas for Hegel the dialectic leads up to the synthesizing moment that involves an identification between concept and object, Adorno’s negative dialectics challenges this identity thinking, by which he means the identifying and equating of objects and objective reality with concepts and conceptual categories by a rationality that is no longer reflective and critical but instead instrumental and dominating. Writing together with Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno argues that far from “liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters,” instrumental rationality has caused “the wholly enlightened earth
[to be] radiant with triumphant calamity” (1). Horkheimer and Adorno’s cautionary pronouncement comes out of a specific historical experience with European fascism as well as the commodity culture of the United States during the mid-twentieth century. Both German philosophers understood that although the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century attempted to overcome the iron grip of myth and religion on human existence, its deployment of instrumental rationality had, in the twentieth century, become so extreme that “in the preemptive identification of the thoroughly mathematized world with truth, enlightenment believes itself safe from the return of the mythical” (Horkheimer and Adorno 18) when it has actually turned itself into a kind of myth and “a thing—a tool, to use its own terms” (19). In such circumstances, the concept of knowledge, “a product of dialectical thinking, in which each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not,” is arrested, hypostasized, and “defined as the unity of the features of what it subsumes” (11).

The significance of Adorno’s critique of Enlightenment thought is that it enables us to perceive state-sponsored narratives of patriotism—official state projects of nation-building and the formation of a homogeneous national identity—as evidence of instrumental reason at work. Individuals literally need to stand up and be counted in order for the state to create the quantitative identity of the nation, which (contra Fichte) does not give humanity the “freedom to make itself what it really is originally” (46) and instead makes itself appear to be a natural condition of human existence that must be absolutely defended against intrusion and contamination by those who are qualitatively different or nonidentical. For Adorno and his Frankfurt School colleagues, instrumental reason, as a foundational principle of the Enlightenment with its scientific organization and technological innovation, is a driving force behind Europe’s colonization of the rest of the world and culminated in the mass destruction and atrocities of the twentieth century, because “it was closely related to the exchange principle in which everything was reduced to an abstract equivalent of everything else in the service of universal exchange” such that “the qualitatively different and non-identical was forced into the mould of quantitative identity” (Jay, Adorno 37). Following the logic of the exchange principle and quantitative identity, the instrumentalization of the world also led to “the domination of nature,” which meant not only the “scientific control” and shaping of the natural world to meet humanity’s needs and desires or “the subjective domination of objects,” but also “the comparable domination of subjects” or humans either as individuals or as collectives (37–38). Therefore, “domination of the external natural world led to control of man’s internal nature and ultimately of the social world as well.
‘Progress’ turned out to spawn its antithesis, a barbarism all the more brutal because of its use of modern techniques of control” (38). The same techniques of control were used by European powers in their conquest of the New World through the creation of colonial states and, in the aftermath of various decolonization movements, still exist today in their independent but authoritarian and neocolonial counterparts. This dominating and homogenizing nationalism can be encapsulated in the term *instrumental nationality*, which highlights its roots in instrumental rationality or reason, and distinguishes it from a radical national consciousness which appears in the writings of anti- and postcolonial intellectuals.

The radical bent of anticolonial and postcolonial national consciousness can be further explicated in terms of negative dialectics. In his 1964 lecture on Hegel and the principle of nationality, Adorno argues that the Hegelian idea of world history incarnated in particular national spirits leads to “fetishization of the concept of the nation” (*History and Freedom* 111), and the European Romantic vision of national character “culminates in the delusions of racism,” such that “a form of association that is essentially dynamic, economic, and historical misunderstands itself as a natural formation” (106). In terms that recall Stuart Hall’s analysis of the suturing effect of national culture on different particular identities in the service of a unified national identity, Adorno observes that “precisely because the nation is not nature, it has ceaselessly to proclaim its closeness to nature, its immediacy and the intrinsic value of the national community” (107). In other words, the misrecognition of nationalism as a unified identity rather than a social and political consciousness brings about the need to foreground race or another apparently naturally binding primordial force as the basis for community. What Adorno elucidates here is the process by which instrumental reason identifies the nation as a concept defined by an essential national character or spirit and presents itself as an encapsulation of a natural condition of lived experience when it actually elides or reduces the objective reality of a people’s cultural life. Adorno argues that Hegel’s “theory of history in terms of national spirits is now outdated” and that “it is no longer possible to say that the world spirit inhabits a particular nation as Hegel could in his day” (110), because in the late twentieth century “nations, or many nations, are transforming themselves […] into something like huge companies, vast economic entities,” thus revealing how the nation as a “historical form of progressive rationalization has ceased to be the most rational way of doing things and it survives only in the interests of the existing relations of production” (105, 111). Yet despite its failings, Adorno does not completely dismiss the nation as a form of social organization and political consciousness, but suggests that turning
away from the fetishization of the nation may enable “something that would change the form of society itself and put an end to the abstract organization that acts so repressively towards its members” (111). What Adorno suggests here may also be thought of as a transition from a national identity stitched together by state-sponsored patriotism toward a national consciousness that is responsive to and interwoven with cosmopolitics. This transition requires a critical rationality that can detect and challenge the abstract organization of instrumental nationality that represses the objective reality of popular socio-cultural formations.

The importance of negative dialectics to the relationship between the concept of nationalism and the objective reality of culture is that, in contrast to the binary opposition of transnational culture and the monolithic nation-state in most discourses of globalism, we begin to see the nation–culture relation as fraught with tension but also as allowing reciprocity and transformation. If, as Adorno avers, “to think is to identify,” and “conceptual order is content to screen what thinking seeks to comprehend,” then what we need to move past the epistemological screen and to begin comprehending the particularities of objective reality is the “disenchantment of the concept” (Negative Dialectics 5). To perform this disenchantment, negative dialectics focuses on the traces and residues of objective reality in concepts so as to illuminate the dynamic tension between concepts and objects that was stabilized or hypostasized by instrumental rationality, because “objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder [. . .] they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy” (5). Since “to change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics” (12), Adorno’s disenchantment of the concept is a negation and a reversal of the subordinating relationship between the concept over the object that both retains and connects the concept and object together like a hinge. It does not dismiss or reject concepts outright as false consciousness in favor of a complete embrace of objects or objective reality, nor does it claim that a total understanding of objective reality is possible without any form of conceptual mediation. As one commentator on Adorno’s philosophy observes, “for Adorno, experience is the process in which ideally, that is, in its fullest possibility, one (a subject) is affected and somehow changed by confrontation with some aspect of objective reality (an object). Experience has, in a sense, a structure of reciprocity and transformation” (O’Connor 2). If the lived experience of radical culture, which is much vaunted by proponents of globalism, is, in Adorno’s terms, “the constant adjustment of concept to other ideal material,” and if such “valid knowledge can be nothing other than a rationally compelling arrangement of these concepts” (O’Connor 35), then negative
dialectics points to an arrangement or a reconfiguration of national consciousness and cosmopolitics as intertwined concepts as opposed to the triumph of postnational globalism in which transnational flows render nations moribund and obsolete.

**Frantz Fanon:**

**The Crystallization of National Consciousness**

Despite the European or Eurocentric context of Adorno’s philosophy, both his work and that of the Frankfurt School have important implications for anticolonial discourse and postcolonial criticism. In the preface to the 1969 edition of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno draw connections between the crisis of Enlightenment thought, the Cold War, and anticolonial movements. “In the period of political division into immense blocs driven by an objective tendency to collide, horror has been prolonged. The conflicts in the Third World and the renewed growth of totalitarianism are not mere historical interludes” in “the transition to the administered world,” and Horkheimer and Adorno argue for a “critical thought” that will “take up the cause of the remnants of freedom, of tendencies toward real humanity, even though they seem powerless in face of the great historical trend” (xi). Their emphasis on the need for critical rationality even when the world situation seems hopeless accords with the sentiments of anticolonial and anti-imperial critics such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, critics whose works form the cornerstone of anticolonial thought and postcolonial criticism.

Fanon’s analysis of colonial racism in the Caribbean and Africa along with the struggle for national liberation against the French colonial government and the Algerian neocolonial state has often been read through the lens of psychoanalysis and Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential critique of the Hegelian dialectic of recognition between master and slave, self and other. However, there is a case to be made for Fanon’s thinking as a form of negative dialectics that goes beyond psychoanalysis and Sartre’s existentialism. As Nigel Gibson points out, Fanon’s “recasting of Hegel’s dialectic in *Black Skin, White Masks* is negative, because, for the Black, dialectical development is blocked off in non-reciprocity; the Black is frozen by the gaze of the white” (32). Fanon’s reframing of Hegel’s dialectical recognition also departs from Sartre’s own quarrel with Hegel, because “unlike Sartre, for whom the idea of mutual recognition is a tragic farce [. . .] Fanon believes in its possibility” (Gibson 32). Sartre’s tragically farcical gloss on mutual recognition comes from the
instrumentalization of the slave or colonized other by the colonial master, but Fanon reads this relationship as one of critical rationality, because “the native’s certainty during the modern period of decolonization is not really a return but a leap to a reason far more critical than the White master’s” (Gibson 39). It is this critical leap of reason, a negative or “an untidy, open-ended dialectic” (Gibson 41), that I will trace in Fanon’s analysis of the white-black/master-slave/self-other dialectic in *Black Skin, White Masks* and his discussion of national consciousness and national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth*. As Fanon explains, in the conventional Hegelian dialectic of recognition, “man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him. [. . .] His human worth and reality depend on this other and his recognition by the other” (*Black Skin* 191). This recognition is supposed to be reciprocal, but in the racialized colonial situation, the white master “shut off the circuit,” making “the two-way movement unachievable,” thereby “keep[ing] the other within himself” (192) and turning the black, colonized other into an “animal-machine man” who, after the formal end of colonialism, becomes “a slave who was allowed to assume a master’s attitude” (194).

Employing Adorno’s critical terminology, one would say that the objective reality of the black colonized other is instrumentalized by the identity thinking of the white colonial master’s conceptual apparatus embodied in colonial society and its institutions. Just as “the concept in itself, previous to any content, hypostasizes its own form against the content” and “objectifies by the logical identity” what is nonidentical to itself (*Negative Dialectics* 154), the black colonized other is imposed upon by the white colonial master whose own human worth and reality depend not on recognition received from the colonized other but rather on the subjugation of the other as a productive object in the colonial economy—a slave or worker in the plantations or factories. “The black man was acted upon” by the largesse of the white master both in servitude and after emancipation, and “went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another” (Fanon, *Black Skin* 194, 195). Faced with this impasse, Fanon argues, “in order to achieve certainty of oneself, one has to integrate the concept of recognition” instead of waiting for recognition to come from an external subject such as the colonial master (192). Since the concept of recognition is withheld, instead of dismissing recognition as false consciousness the colonized other must integrate it into and fall back upon his or her own objective resources in order to begin a process self-recognition that will ultimately move beyond the limits of the self—in Fanon’s words, “I go beyond life toward an ideal which is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth” (193).
This paradoxical integration of conceptual recognition into a process of self-definition without another being who bestows recognition and then departs from the subjective certainty of self-worth toward an objective truth points to the connections between Fanon’s recasting of the Hegelian dialectic of recognition and Adorno’s negative dialectics and aesthetic theory. The artwork is “a thing that negates the world of things” and is thus “helpless when called on to legitimate itself to this world” when the terms are defined by the world at large (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 119), and it is paradoxically because of “the substance of personal experience” built into the artwork that “the elements of art” are not “abandoned but secured when art is fundamentally challenged by its experience” of the administered world that seeks to make the work a commodity (120). “The aim of artworks is the determination of the indeterminate,” and this determination is different from the instrumentalization of the object through concepts because the “organization” of the personal or objective experience in the artwork allows them to “become more than they are” (124). This recalls the task undertaken by Fanon’s colonized other who “ask[s] to be taken into consideration on the basis of [his or her] desire” rather than the one-sided recognition imposed by the colonial master, and emerges from self-recognition to declare that “I am not only here-now, locked in thinghood. I desire somewhere else and something else” (*Black Skin* 193). Far from being narcissistic or solipsistic, the colonized subject’s self-recognition of the substance of objective personal experience clears the way for a negation of the tyranny of the colonial master and the disenchantment of the concept of recognition in the colonial situation.

Fanon, in his final work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, extends this negation and disenchantment from individual self-consciousness to the level of national consciousness and the problem of instrumental nationality in newly independent countries, and it is in this collection of essays that we see the dialectical tension between European modernity and the Third World that motivates Fanon’s radical vision of an anticolonial politics and culture writ large on a national and an international scale. In the opening essay Fanon emphasizes that the struggle for decolonization involves a violence that, far from being a result of simple *ressentiment* and hatred of the white colonial master, is the expected reaction in a dialectics of colonialism which is itself “the encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces that in fact owe their singularity to the kind of reification secreted and nurtured by the colonial situation” (*Wretched of the Earth* 2). The reification Fanon has in mind here—the process through which the colonizer “fabricated and continues to fabricate the colonized subject” (2, original emphasis)—is the instrumental rationality of the European Enlightenment interrogated by Adorno that
creates “a colonial world” that is “compartmentalized, Manichaean and petrified, a world of statues” (Wretched of the Earth 15). Violence, both symbolic and physical, will continue to plague the newly independent societies unless the Manichaean “term-for-term correspondence between the two arguments” (50)—European colonial mastery and native colonized subjectivity—can be dialectically negated and new possibilities envisioned. If the Manichaean binary is not reconfigured, as Fanon cautions in his discussion of the “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness,” then the collective struggle for liberation will become instrumentalized in the hands of the local bourgeoisie, who merely fill the shoes of the European colonizers such that the newly independent nation fails at “organizing the state on the basis of a new program of social relations,” and instead allows “the transfer into indigenous hands of privileges inherited from the colonial period” (100), thereby culminating in a reactionary movement “from nationalism to ultranationalism, chauvinism, and racism” (103) in which the neocolonial masters no longer wear white masks but have black skin. A critical national consciousness must avoid the instrumentalization of the nation into a chauvinistic, racialized identity to be used as a template for molding the individuals under its dispensation. On the contrary, Fanon urges the leaders of the new nation to consider how, “since individual experience is national, since it is a link in the national chain, it ceases to be individual, narrow, and limited in scope, and can lead to the truth of the nation and the world,” and on these terms the project of “nation building” must be understood as the capability and responsibility of “every citizen [. . .] to embrace the nation as a whole, to embody the constantly dialectical truth of the nation” (140–41) as a social formation rather than as an absolute or homogenized racial identity.

The social reconfiguring of the colonial Manichaean binary is carried out on a literary level by the native intellectual or writer, who can no longer depend on a precolonial past to preserve a vision of native cultural authenticity and must, according to Fanon’s arguments about national culture, recognize “that modes of thought, diet, modern techniques of communication, language, and dress have dialectically reorganized the minds of the people” (Wretched of the Earth 161). Although Fanon’s injunction that “the first duty of the colonized poet is to clearly define the people” might appear at first glance to encourage a didactic and determining function for literature, he elaborates the artistic task set before the native writer in terms that recall Adorno’s analysis of the modern artwork and its relationship to its social and political conditions of possibility: “It is not enough to reunite with the people in a past where they no longer exist. We must rather reunite with them in their recent counter move which will suddenly call everything into
question; we must focus on that zone of hidden fluctuation where the people can be found, for let there be no mistake, it is here that their souls are crystallized and their perception and respiration transfigured” (Wretched of the Earth 163). What Fanon describes as the counter move of the people is a movement of negative dialectics rather than the antithesis or second movement in a conventional dialectical structure, since Fanon’s counter move does not fit neatly into a binary or ternary structure but instead “call[s] everything into question.” The people for Fanon are both a collective body and a social formation, and native writers and their literary works should not try to reunite with the people in a halcyon, nonexistent past by creating a nativist identity based on cultural authenticity. Instead, writers and their texts should represent and engage with the people as a social formation emerging gradually through transfiguration and crystallization of their political and cultural consciousness, and “the crystallization of the national consciousness will not only radically change the literary genres and themes but also create a completely new audience. Whereas the colonized intellectual started out by producing work exclusively with the oppressor in mind [. . .] he gradually switches over to addressing himself to his people” (Fanon, Wretched of the Earth 173)—or, as Adorno would say, “the historical relation of subject to object, of individual to society” is “precipitated” and “crystallized” (“Lyric Poetry” 160) in literature. With this aesthetic register in mind, it becomes clear that the relationship between literature, culture, and nationalism Fanon has in mind differs greatly from the European Romantic concept of literature as cultural Bildung for the nation. National consciousness is the self-recognition and political awareness of a colonized people unfolding in a negatively dialectical fashion against European colonialism, and national culture “is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong” and not a “folklore where an abstract populism is convinced it has uncovered the popular truth” (Wretched of the Earth 168).

Although Fanon wrote his essay “On National Culture” as a speech delivered in 1959, his remarks are still salient today in light of the various claims of globalism that the nation is obsolete and untenable: “Humanity, some say, has got past the stage of nationalist claims. The time has come to build larger political unions, and consequently the old-fashioned nationalists should correct their mistakes. We believe on the contrary that the mistake, heavy with consequences, would be to miss out on the national stage. If culture is the expression of national consciousness, I shall have no hesitation in saying, in the case in point, that national consciousness is the highest form of culture” (Wretched of the Earth 179). If “the nation is not only a precondition for cul-
ture, its ebullition, its perpetual renewal and maturation[,] it is a necessity” (177), then in a situation where instrumental nationality predominates and national culture is hypostasized as national identity, the function of literature as an artwork of critical rationality must be to recall and represent this critical connection between nationalism and culture through a negation of figures and tropes associated with the patriotic ideal of identity thinking. Literature’s crucial role in negating consolidated identities and negotiating between national consciousness and global currents is explored by Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who in their discussions of contrapuntal reading and transnational literacy respectively extend Fanon’s famous exhortation that “national consciousness, which is not nationalism, is alone capable of giving us an international dimension” and that “it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrives” (Wretched of the Earth 179, 180).

**Edward Said:**

**Counterpoints of Nationality, Nationalism, and Nativism**

Inasmuch as Frantz Fanon was important to Edward Said’s formation as an anticolonial thinker and as an advocate of Palestinian nationalism, Adorno too is a key figure, who informs Said’s position as a professional critic of culture and literature and as an intellectual in exile. While Said’s name and work are recognized as foundational to the field of postcolonial literary criticism, Said in his later years distanced himself from this field, dismissing the term postcolonialism itself because “there is a quality of reification in a label, of a school, a dogma, an orthodoxy” (“Conversation with Bill Ashcroft” 88). Despite Said’s repeated claims to being a humanist rather than a theorist, of practicing a criticism based on secular worldliness rather than wordy sophistry, and his insistence on a contrapuntal reading of literary and cultural texts rather than a deconstructive analysis, there is in Said’s invocations of Adorno a profound critique of imperialism and patriotism in the United States of America that is in the spirit of critical theory, if we understand that secular criticism and critical theory are both engaged in a similar intellectual exercise of mapping the workings of power, tracing its effects, and marking its limitations while imagining alternative ways of thinking and being. Said is professing what Adorno calls an “immanent analysis” (Aesthetic Theory 180) or critique of imperial power and patriotic identity not only from the standpoint of an outsider but as an exile working as a scholar and teacher of the humani-
ties at a prestigious university within the United States, which, as Said often reminds his readers, is not only a nation-state but also a global superpower. To say that Said’s work is informed by Adorno’s thinking is to understand his analyses of Orientalism and culture and imperialism, his seemingly contradictory insistence on radically oppositional thought with a deeply humanist emphasis, and his nuanced distinction between nationality, nationalism, and nativism or between euphoric and enlightened nationalism as expressed in the perspicacious language of critical theory rather than the sinuous syntax of poststructuralism. It is not to claim that Said’s work is somehow above theory or merely derivative of the Frankfurt School, for, as Said himself avers, one can be instructed and inspired by but cannot simply imitate as intransigent a thinker as Adorno (Reflections on Exile xxxii).

In his lectures on humanism Said at first stakes out a position that is adamantly antitheoretical, eschewing what he calls the “structuralist anti-humanism” of thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 10). Yet Said’s insistence on humanism is not of the classical sort that celebrates the triumph of the human subject as the center of all knowledge and experience. Instead, his project is a reconceptualization of humanism as the critical function of scholars who research and study literature and the humanities in our contemporary world, because “there can be no true humanism whose scope is limited to extolling patriotically the virtues of our culture, our language, our monuments. Humanism is the exertion of one’s faculties in language in order to understand, reinterpret, and grapple with the products of language in history, other languages and other histories” (28). Said is keenly aware of his “dialectically fraught” position as an eminent professor of the humanities at Columbia University and considers it necessary to chastise the essentialist patriotism and global hegemony of the United States from within the American academy, and this he sees as “the crystallized role of the American humanist, the non-humanist humanist as it were” (77). One cannot miss the Adornian inflection of Said’s thinking: he argues that American humanists must maintain their dialectically fraught position with “the consistent sense of nonidentity” (Adorno, Negative Dialectics 5) toward dominant political and sociocultural concepts without completely rejecting them, and the effort “to change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics” (Adorno, Negative Dialectics 12). The apparent contradiction of the term “non-humanist humanist” can be understood by Said’s insistence on the negatively dialectical turn toward nonidentity rather than conceptual determination or resolution, because Said is arguing for a humanism understood as “critique [. . .] that gathers its force and relevance by its democratic,
secular, and open character” (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 22) and for the role of the humanist in the American academy as that of “accept[ing] responsibility for maintaining rather than resolving the tension between the aesthetic and the national” (78). Said’s emphasis on maintaining rather than resolving such tensions makes Adorno’s thinking especially prominent in his text, as he refers to the dangers inherent in patriotic “nationalism, religious enthusiasm, and the exclusivism that derives from what Adorno refers to in his work as identitarian thought” (56). The non-humanist humanist and nonidentitarian intellectual must examine how “discreetly separated elements enter into a readable context” and how “through their own movement the elements crystallize into a configuration” (Adorno, “The Essay as Form” 102). Such configurations offer us “insight into the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept [that] would end the compulsive identification which the concept brings unless halted by such reflection. Reflection upon its own meaning is the way out of the concept’s seeming being-in-itself as a unit of meaning” (Adorno, Negative Dialectics 12), Said first reflects upon the history of humanism as a philosophical concept and then proceeds to reconfigure humanism out of its being-in-itself, or its “withdrawal and exclusion” (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 22), into a salient vocation for the American intellectual.

Understanding Said’s later self-positioning as a non-humanist humanist who is inside and outside of dominant conceptual regimes clarifies his early writings about Orientalism, culture, and imperialism as a negatively dialectical critique of (on the one hand) Euro-American instrumentalized representations of the non-West as well as (on the other) essentialized and patriotic self-representations stemming from the “euphoric nationalism” (Reflections on Exile 530) that succeeds independence struggles in Europe’s former colonies. Although Said invokes Michel Foucault’s idea of discourse in Orientalism’s opening pages (Orientalism 3), his methodology actually consists of mapping a wide range of texts in the Orientalist force field in a constellation and bringing them into dialectical tension with one another: “Foucault believes that in general the individual text or author counts for very little; empirically, in the case of Orientalism (and perhaps nowhere else) I find this not to be so. Accordingly my analyses employ close textual readings whose goal is to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution” (Orientalism 23–24). Said’s methodology, as that of “a critical historian of Orientalism” (148), takes Said both inside and outside of Orientalist studies: his detailed analyses of the life and writings of Silvestre de Sacy, Ernest Renan, and T. E. Lawrence, for example, not only recognize their immense
contribution to European knowledge of the Arab world but also investigate their ideological construction of the Orient in the process of acquiring and disseminating such knowledge; critical rationality shades into instrumental rationality as “the Orient is overlaid with the Orientalist’s rationality; its principles become his” (129). The instrumentalization of European Orientalist scholarship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reaches its apotheosis in the twentieth century as the tensions between Europe and the Arab world are apparently resolved by “a new dialectic [that] emerges out of this project. What is required of the Oriental expert is no longer simply ‘understanding’: now the Orient must be made to perform, its power must be enlisted on the side of ‘our’ values, civilization, interests, goals” (238), which marks “the major shift in Orientalism [. . .] from an academic to an instrumental attitude” (246, original emphasis). Such instrumentalization of attitudes and knowledge not only affects Europeans but also gives rise to a primordially charged “patriotism” (333) as Arab communities in the late twentieth century respond to Orientalist representations and tropes without “going beyond the stifling hold on them of some version of the master-slave binary dialectic” that resolves into “extreme xenophobic nationalism” on both sides of the cultural divide (351, 333).

Extending Fanon’s reconceptualizing of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, Said uses the term “reinscription” to designate a process in which the colonized person is able “to rechart and then occupy the place in imperial cultural forms reserved for subordination, to occupy it self-consciously, fighting for it on the very same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior Other” (Culture and Imperialism 210, original emphasis). But this subordinated and inferior Other can be neither valorized nor essentialized as a superior subject position as often occurs in both the former colonial metropolis and the newly independent postcolony. Said argues for a negatively dialectical understanding of a critical subject position that offers “not just the negative advantage of refuge in the émigré’s eccentricity” but “also the positive benefit of challenging the system, describing it in language unavailable to those it has already subdued” (333). Adorno’s importance for Said becomes clearer in Culture and Imperialism (intended as a sequel to Orientalism), because Adorno’s work exemplifies “essayistic and algorithmic criticism” that is “oppositional and secular” rather than “systematic and doctrinal” (Reflections on Exile 168, 170). This forms the basis for Said’s own conceptualization of “contrapuntal analysis” that can cultivate a “simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts” (Culture and Imperialism 18, 51).
A contrapuntal reading traces how a literary or cultural text “is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization, resistance, and finally native nationalism. At this point alternative or new narratives emerge, and they become institutionalized or discursively stable entities”; this in turn reminds us that “we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations [. . .] but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions” (Culture and Imperialism 51, 52). Analyzing William Butler Yeats’s poetry in relation to decolonization, Said observes that even though his early poems express a certain degree of nativism, they are points of departure rather than permanent scaffolding for erecting an insular identity, because “there is a good deal of promise in getting beyond them, not remaining trapped in the emotional self-indulgence of celebrating one’s own identity” (229). As Adorno reminds us in his essay on lyric poetry, thinking once set in motion by the poem cannot be constrained and exhausted by the textual limits of the poem itself; so, too, for Said thinking and “moving beyond nativism does not mean abandoning nationality, but it does mean thinking of local identity as not exhaustive, and therefore not being anxious to confine oneself to one’s own sphere” (229). Despite his own characterization as a cosmopolitan critic in both physical and intellectual exile from his Palestinian homeland and situated in an American academy where political quietism seemed the prevailing mood, Said is not “advocating a simple anti-nationalist position,” because “nationalism—restoration of community, assertion of identity, emergence of new cultural practices—as a mobilized political force instigated and then advanced the struggle against Western domination everywhere in the non-European world” (218). Using terms recalling Fanon’s distinction between various kinds of national thinking, Said argues that anticolonial national consciousness turns against those it is supposed to liberate when it shifts from “nationality” to “nationalism” and then into “nativism,” a “progression” Adorno would construe as a shift from critical toward instrumental reason as the movement from nationalism into nativism becomes “more and more constraining” for postcolonial societies because their composition becomes increasingly exclusive and homogenized (Culture and Imperialism 229). Because the promise of liberation inherent in anticolonial struggles for nationality and nationalism has been “hijacked by a host of dictators and petty tyrants, enshrined in various state nationalisms,” and hurriedly resolved into a patriotic national identity mapped onto nativist ideals, postcolonial literature and criticism in a global moment must proceed contrapuntally, for “in trying to connect experiences across the imperial divide, in re-examining the great canons, in producing what in effect is a
critical literature,” they “cannot be [. . .] co-opted by the resurgent nationalism, despotisms, and ungenerous ideologies” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 54). Literature and the interpretation of literary and cultural texts play a key role in formulating a critical nationality, or contrapuntal “new and imaginative reconceptions of society and culture” that apprehend and “avoid the old orthodoxies and injustices” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 218) of instrumental nationality’s insistence on nativism.

**Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:**

**National Identity, Native Informants, and New Immigrants**

The hypostatization of national identity is also the target of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s critique of the diasporic longings of “New Immigrant[s]” (“Teaching for the Times” 177) who have moved to Euro-America. These new immigrants are called upon by the dominant powers there to serve as “Native Informant[s]” and to teach about their respective cultures and countries, thereby serving as avatars of their respective national identities (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* ix). While it is undeniable that Spivak’s methodology explicitly draws on Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction, I argue that her analyses of literary texts that eschew anticolonialism’s ossification into patriotic identity and her strategic assumption of but refusal to identify with both subject positions of the native informant and new immigrant are consonant with Adorno’s tracing of negative dialectics between subject and object and between the artwork and its social world. Spivak’s thinking puts pressure on dominant binary oppositions and subject positions, for she not only makes an “attempt to undo the often unexamined opposition between colonizer and colonized implicit in much colonial discourse study” (*Critique* 46) but also reexamines postcolonial invectives relying on an unqualified nativist polemic, as “no perspective critical of imperialism can turn the other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been an incommensurable and discontinuous other into a domesticated other that consolidates the imperialist self” (*Critique* 130, original emphasis). In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak’s “strategy” is “to persuade through the discontinuity of odd connections or reconstellation” (65), to reveal how “truth, the constellation of subject and object in which both penetrate each other,” cannot “be reduced to subjectivity” because “what is true in the subject unfolds in relation to that which it is not, by no means in a boastful affirmation of the way it is” (Adorno, *Nega-
The unfolding of three subject positions sharing such a conceptual overlap that they have similar initials—native informant, new immigrant, national identity—within the larger field of globalization is performed through a literary cosmopolitics of “transnational literacy” (Spivak, “Teaching” 177) that requires the ability to “counterfocalize” from dominant discourses toward “the making of an alternative narrative” (Spivak, “Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching” 22), negating the determinate boundaries of these three subject-concepts and opening them up to the objective realities within which they are situated.

Although Spivak, in a recent interview, laments that “we cannot take national liberation as a model of anything any more,” this comment must be placed within the context of another statement in the same interview that “in the name of anticolonialism you get the kind of national identity politics that can lead to fascism” (“Position without Identity” 248). We can see here that, like Said’s distinguishing of nationality, nationalism, and national identity, Spivak too employs a graduated measure of nationalism, a spectrum of increasingly confining and constraining terms: anticolonialism, national identity politics, and, finally, fascism. On the other hand, Spivak has reservations about celebrating postnationalism and globalism, because “it is easy to cultivate ‘postnationalism’ in the interest of global financialization by way of the ‘international civil society’ of private businesses” and “powerful non-governmental organizations” (Critique 381), such that “the developing national states are not only linked by the common thread of profound ecological loss [. . .] but also plagued by the complicity, however apparently remote, of the power lines of local developers with the forces of global capital” (380). Nationalism seems, at first glance, to be a futile endeavor condemned either to run afoul of fascism or to fall into lasting impoverishment through global financialization. However, Spivak’s insistence on transnational literacy and the parabasis (literally, “stepping aside”) and counterfocalization of literary reading allows us to understand nationalism in terms less fatalistic. Spivak hints at this when she says that “we cannot think of sovereignty in terms of last century’s nationalist struggles” because “reinventing the state” through national consciousness involves more than political and territorial sovereignty (“Position Without Identity” 246, original emphasis); such reinvention of the state aligned with critical rather than instrumental nationality involves literary reading and a keen sense of aesthetics.

It is to two key moments of reading and differentiation between national identity and national consciousness in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason that I now turn. My concern is less with the content of the literary texts themselves and more with Spivak’s discussion of these texts in relation to
nationalism and politics. In the first moment, Spivak offers a reading of the *Bhagavad Gita*, an important episode in the epic *Mahabharata*, to problematize both Hegel’s interpretation of it as an example of India’s ahistoricity and Hindu nationalist interpretations of the text as a timeless repository of cultural nationalism. Spivak performs “a crudely ‘dialectical’ reading” of the *Gita*: moving away from Hegel’s reading that is invested with the “ideological motivation to prove a fantasmic India as the inhabitant of what we would today call the ‘pre-conscious’ of the Hegelian Symbolic” (*Critique* 47), and conjures a hypothetical reader of the *Gita* in order “to point out the moves in the *structure* and *texture* of the text [. . .] that will persuade the assenting reader or receiver of the epic to transform myth into scripture” (46, original emphasis). Spivak, taking up the position of her hypothetical reader, suggests that the dialogue between the mortal prince Arjuna and the god Krishna offers “a graphic and visible sublation (negation and preservation on another register) of the apparent phenomenality of lived time and affect” by an overarching, divinely sanctioned Time defined by a universal Law, “in the interest of the felicitous presentation of the *concrete* social order” (56, original emphasis), thereby confounding Hegel’s use of the *Gita* “as proof of eons of a-historicity” (50) and temporal stasis in Indian culture and thought. Spivak occupies the standpoint of the native informant, but she does not allow her standpoint to be taken for a nativism that successfully recovers a true or authentic interpretation of the *Gita*. The reading Spivak offers is “‘mistaken’ because it attempts to engage the (im)possible perspective of the ‘native informant,’ a figure who, in ethnography, can only provide data, to be interpreted by the knowing subject for reading,” but Spivak’s project is to “transform into a reading-position the site of the ‘native informant’ in anthropology, a site that can only *be* read, by definition, for the production of definitive descriptions” (49, original emphasis). This dialectical reading of the *Gita* is not an act of recovery that definitively describes the classical text *contra* Hegel, but rather an act of reconfiguring the native informant as an active and critical epistemological position instead of a passive repository of information for the European inquirer. Spivak indeed employs an important Adornian term when she states that she is “refusing the centralized interpelation to be a native informant” and trying “to produce such a ‘contemporary reader’ [of the *Gita*] in the interest of active interception and reconstellation” (50). By reconstellating the native informant as a reading position, Spivak is also taking issue with another approach toward the *Gita*, this time by “the indigenous elite nationalists” coming after Hegel who insist that the text “is supra-historical” and can be a basis for Hindu cultural nationalism because of its “timeless core” (60, 61). Their “search for ‘national identity’” defined as
“a muscular fundamentalism or nativism” (63) instrumentalizes the negation and sublation of temporality in the *Gita* into a well-defined, well-muscled national body.

Similarly, in her analysis of J. M. Coetzee’s novel *Foe*, Spivak attends “to the rhetorical conduct of the text” as it “stages writing and reading” rather than relying on “traditional historically contextualized interpretation” that “might produce closures that are as problematic as they are reasonable and satisfactory” (*Critique* 174), which explains why she interprets the *Gita* as a dialectical problem of temporality and social order staged through the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna rather than as evidence of ahistorical thought or a historically embedded classic with a timeless core of Hindu cultural nationalism. Focusing on the failed efforts of *Foe*’s Susan Barton to teach Friday the word “Africa,” Spivak points out that “Africa is only a timebound naming; like all proper names it is a mark with an arbitrary connection to its referent, a catachresis. The earth as temporary dwelling has no foundational name. Nationalism can only ever be a crucial political agenda against oppression. All longings to the contrary, it cannot provide the absolute guarantee of identity” (188). Like the impossible yet necessary conjuring of a contemporary native informant who reads and reflects upon the *Bhagavad Gita*, Africa in Coetzee’s novel is a catachresis, a sudden and unexpected yoking together of two terms or concepts that produces knowledge and insight unavailable to each concept as it exists singly. Here the catachrestic connection is between the signifier “Africa” and the national longing for a foundational name or an absolute guarantee of identity, and, to recall Adorno, “artworks would be powerless if they were no more than longing, though there is no valid artwork without longing. That by which they transcend longing, however, is the neediness inscribed as a figure in the historically existing. By retracing this figure, they not only are more than what simply exists but participate in objective truth to the extent that what is in need summons its fulfillment and exchange” (*Aesthetic Theory* 132). Spivak’s reading of this episode of pedagogical failure in *Foe* suggests that the novel is inseparable from a longing for a renascent national identity, as no artwork can be completely free of longing. This identity is signified by the word “Africa” with its connotations of historical burdens of conquest, enslavement, anticolonial struggles, and self-determination, but the retracing of the figure of Africa in Friday’s unsuccessful elocution transcends what is longed for and participates in the objective truth of what is in need, the former being what Spivak calls an absolute guarantee of national identity and the latter a crucial political agenda against oppression, or national consciousness. This explains Friday’s inability to learn the word “Africa”: the
national identity that is longed for is figuratively retraced in Foe as a national consciousness whose fulfillment and exchange are deferred or yet to come, precisely because we are still in the thrall of an instrumental nationality. This catachrestic insight informs Spivak’s final reflection on Coetzee’s novel: “perhaps this is the novel’s message: the impossible politics of overdetermination [. . .] should not be regularized into a blithe continuity, where the European redoes the primitive’s project in herself. It can, however, lead to a scrupulously differentiated politics, depending on ‘where you are’” (Critique 193).

The politics of postcolonial nation-states are overdetermined by contrapuntal elements of colonialism’s residual structures, anticolonial self-determination, and neocolonial struggles; the trajectory of sociocultural life in these nations thus cannot be regularized as a blithe and smooth continuous transition from colonial oppression to independence struggle to national identity. The vocation and position of the reader-critic—“where you are”—must be to scrupulously differentiate between the overlapping elements of colonialism, anticolonialism, and neocolonialism in the postcolonial lifeworld and also between the nation as a sociocultural formation and the state as an apparatus of power.

This differentiation between the nation and state is part of the transnational literacy Spivak advocates, although she does not explicitly name it as such. Distinguishing between what she calls the “nation thing” and national identity, Spivak explains the former as “collectivities bound by birth, that allowed in strangers gingerly” and as “in existence long before nationalism came around” (Nation and Imagination 13–14), whereas national identity—what Spivak calls “mere nationalism”—is marked by “possessiveness,” “exclusiveness,” and “isolationist expansionism” (32). But lest we construe the nation thing as a throwback to a primordial, natally determined social formation, Spivak, drawing on her own background as a child growing up in India, points out that “the love of my little corner of ground” is “more like comfort” than “the declared love of country, full-blown nationalism” in a patriotic fashion, and that “this rock bottom comfort, with which the nation thing conjures, is not a positive affect” (14, 15). The comforting relationship between the individual and the nation thing exists at the level of the personal and the private, and “this possibility of the private is not derived from a sense of the public” (15). As the nation thing does not conjure a positive affect, it should contain a negative or negating quality not reducible to the instrumentalization of nationalism under patriotic imperatives in which “this underived private has been recoded and reterritorialized as the antonym of the public” (16). The attachment and comfort one feels toward one’s bit of ground can be expanded and reimagined in a broader, nonexclusionary manner into
a national consciousness consisting of a cultural politics rather than a cultural identity, and this involves “the de-transcendentalizing of nationalism, the task of training the singular imagination, always in the interest of taking the ‘nation’ out of nation-state” (51). Taking the nation out of nation-state means interrogating nationalism as “a seamless identity” (53) and reconstellating the nation through a “comparative imagination” that can undo the “possessive spell” of the “collective imagination constructed through rememoration” (40) rather than rejecting nationalism and the nation thing outright. In the same way that postcolonial countries are situated within a cosmopolitical force field and imbricated with sociocultural formations that are both deterritorialized and attached to other territorial countries, so too the comparative imagination operates cosmopolitically, “keeping the civic structure of the state clear of nationalism and patriotism, altering the redistributive priorities of the state, creating regional alliances, rather than going the extra-state or non-government route” (55). Literature, and “the literary imagination,” Spivak reminds us, “can continue to de-transcendentalize the nation and shore up the redistributive powers of the regionalist state in the face of global priorities” (58). This de-transcendentalization involves the negation of patriotic nationalism—“an affect that the abstract structure of a functioning state harnesses largely for defense” (54)—and a transnational literacy “trained in the play of language(s) [that] may undo the truth-claims of national identity” (48). The comparative imagination encourages us to understand literary texts in their relationship to nationalism as “nexuses of meaning [. . .] to the extent that they negate meaning” rather than consolidate meaning as rememoration (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 153–54). Transnational literacy examines the relationship between national identity and national consciousness in terms of “identity and contradiction,” where “contradiction is nonidentity under the rule of a law that affects the nonidentical” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 6). The law Adorno speaks of here can be regarded as the principle of comparative imagination rather than collective imagination, and it affects the nonidentical—that which has not been instrumentalized under the spell of a declared love of country—by reconstellating it toward a critical nationality.