Nations and Difference: A Discussion about Diversity in Post-Colonialist Thought

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Abstract

The paper discusses the concepts of nation in post-colonial thinking, which emphasizes dimensions of discursive power and cultural difference. The aim is to examine, in particular, the consistency of new theoretical perceptions on the national question, comparing them to some theories that assume a sociocultural homogeneity. The analysis argues that postcolonial authors have virtues in observing significant aspects of cultural imaginaries and political practices, although their work also manifest some inaccuracies, particularly the assumption of a subject free of constraints and a dichotomous understanding of the state-society relationship.

Keywords

contemporary political theory, nation, culture, politics.

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In many analyses of the Nation-State, greater emphasis is often laid on institutional factors to the detriment of those that can provisionally be described as cultural. This fact can be explained by the relative lack of studies that encompass both the nation and nationalism[1]. Although modernity has been combined with these areas in social and political terms, there is a significant disagreement with regard to the theoretical canon. The 'nation' generally seems to be subordinated to other concepts such as ideology and collective awareness, which have attracted more attention in the classic studies of the social sciences. It is worth remembering that the question tends to be trivialized by theories that assume there is a direct relationship between the national phenomenon and conservative or authoritarian practices.

However, the national question seems no longer to be treated as a secondary factor with regard to other social issues that are really of fundamental importance, especially in the climate of globalization which involves vast flows of migrants and the reshaping of territories. In addition, the welcome given to debates prompted by, for example, perspectives of communitarianism and variations of republicanism, show how the current political and cultural demands require a theoretical reappraisal of the nation and its institutions. Despite its limitations which will be examined in this study, the post-colonialist theory [2]— might be of value in noting some of the heterogeneous meanings that are involved in the national question and provide the means to observe key aspects of the pressures of contemporary cultural differences. The definition of post-colonialist thinking arose at the beginning of the 1980s and is based on an understanding that seeks to deconstruct the assumptions of hegemonic discourses that disregard certain communities. In its attempt to conceptually redefine the national phenomenon and its links to the State apparatus, the theory treats culture as a central analytical dimension and binds it with political space. There are two concepts that stand out in this view. On the one hand, there has been criticism of the assumption that culture viewed as a reserved space for spiritual development can be contrasted with the ordinary field of politics. On the other hand, it can be questioned whether culture is a static dimension tied to a social homogeneity and if its identity can be recognized without friction. Culture thus reflects the capacities of an agency without being conceived as a field of imagination or political ideal. On the basis of some post-structuralist reference-points, post-colonialism questions certain historicist categories in which man can reconquer a self-defined nature and discover a kind of truth[3]. Thus it has become convenient to deny the fixed and exclusive assertions of certain meta-narratives by highlighting the "hybridization" of sócio-cultural meeting points. On the basis of the assumption that the representations of national identities can be weakened, these analytical studies focus on the minorities and the fluidity of identities that are opposed to the hegemonic discourses, and are thus no longer able to represent the complex dynamic features of the contemporary world. With regard to the question of the "post-modern" subject, this has no reliable fixed or essential identity since it is seen as being embedded in shifting forms of representation. (HALL, 2000, p. 12-13).

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By taking these propositions into account with regard to the new challenges of the nation, in the following section, I will attempt to highlight the relations between the cultural dimensions and the policies put forward by the post-colonialist authors. To start with, after drawing attention to the theory and singularities of the new reflections about the nation, I will analyze some illustrative theories, in particular the concepts of Benedict Anderson (2008) and Ernest Gellner (2006), by taking note of the assumption that there is a a certain socio-cultural homogeneity in the national phenomenon[4]. Following this, I will underline the main issues of post-colonialism by examining its criticism of the idea of unity in the Nation-State. Finally, I will attempt to show that the post-colonialist theory has some merit in that it makes clear an important relationship between culturally imaginary worlds and political practices, although this involves some misconceptions. This particularly applies to the assumption that a subject is free from any conditioning circumstances and has a dichotomous understanding of the relationship between the State and society. Hence it is worth pointing out that this presentational scheme — which opposes the illustrative arguments put forward earlier to the assumptions about post-colonialism analyzed later — does not reflect a teleological appraisal or any kind of superiority to these theories, because it only seeks to define the particular features of the post-colonialist ideas with regard to the question of the nation.

The central question that pervades the debate outlined here is closely bound up with the limits and potential value of thinking of the contemporary nation from a hypothesis of social cohesion. In view of this, will it be possible to analyze the national question as being based on the idea of a shared culture and in a univocal way? What are the limits to an understanding of national singularities given the importance attached to cultural differences as reflected in a certain "culturalization of politics" or "politicization of culture"? At the same time, to what extent are the post-colonialist ideas appropriate for an understanding of the cultural dynamics of political processes? And how far does the post-colonialist assumption of a repressive state apparatus imply a reductionist bias in reflections about the structural links of the state society?

The Nation and Modernity: The Question of Cultural Homogeneity

Initially, the nation was bound to concepts of popular sovereignty and citizenship that were spread by intellectuals and political movements in the 18th and 19th Centuries. When reflection was given to the legitimacy of the State and its territory, the nation was related to the idea of a common good or general will which had to be represented in the government sphere. In turn, the nation and different kinds of nationalism appeared to be possessed by a progressive vision which sought to expand the limits of certain territories to an extent that was suited to the citizens' exercise of sovereignty but was opposed to the old aristocratic, family or local ties. (HOBSBAWM, 2004, p. 44-47). Thus until the mid 19th Century, the nation represented the place where new political rights and territorial unity were institutionalized. (BREUILLY, 2000, p. 175; HOBSBAWM, 2000, p. 273).

It is only when it acquired ties involving ethnic and identity questions at the beginning of the 20th Century, that the nation began to be aware of a convergence between the political and cultural spheres. As a result, the question became more complex. In attempting to explain the cultural dimension of the nation, Weber (1999, p. 156) highlights the fact that on the basis of coercion, the nation instils permanent feelings into individuals who then begin to imagine that they have a common, social and political destiny. One of the main features of the nation was a providential "mission", which

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entailed cultivating a peculiar way of being. (Ibid., p. 175). However, Weber, experiences difficulties in defining the phenomenon because it would involve "an uninterrupted and extremely wide range of attitudes in this respect" (Ibid., p. 174). The nation becomes a theoretical challenge at the same time as it begins to constitute a central politico-cultural space of modernity. As Ernest Gellner (1993, p. 18) reminds us, although it is possible for modern man to think of a society without a State, it would be very difficult for it to be imagined without a nation. It should be noted that although the whole revolutionary undertaking after the 2nd World War was, in general, defined in national terms, it is generally accepted as reflecting a universal value. (ANDERSON, 2008, p. 26-34).

What needs to be stressed here is that this relationship of the nation with its cultural and political dimensions, began to be imagined both in its social movements and theories, on the basis of an assumption of a cultural uniformity which defined a large part of a subject's identity. In view of the individualism and anonymity of capitalist relations, the nation seems like a mechanism of social order by becoming a bond between the State and society (Cf. MILLER, 31-33). Although this includes the possibility of demands being made by diverse ethnic groups, the idea of the cultural and political unity of the nation persists in these theories. This assumption follows the basic argument of Ernest Renan (2000) which, despite being a politically constructed artifact — removed from the ideals of racial, religious or geographical purity and uniformity — this unity reflects a spiritual principle of cohesion for the nation. In the opinion of Renan (2000, p. 65-66), the national spirit expresses a political will to live in unity and this is based on a view of the past that is formed by memories of suffering and a "forgetting" of potentially disturbing questions.

With a view to confining myself to the objectives defined here, I wish to draw attention to two illustrative concepts that support the homogenizing assumptions of the nation. Both the understanding of the "cultural roots" of the nation defined by Benedict Anderson (2008) and the idea of "high culture" of Ernest Gellner (1993), (although with wide-ranging variables and dimensions), assume that a national narrative predominates which by being cohesive and successful can be superimposed on the particularism of the agents[5].

One of the first routes that Anderson (2008, p. 37-38) suggests should be taken in examining the relations of the political phenomenon of the nation with comprehensive cultural factors — or which can be conceived as "cultural roots" — is to note the dimension of immortality which by turning fate into continuity and contingency into significance, restores the fundamental principles of the great religions to the national imaginary world[6].In establishing a relationship between the nation and religion, Anderson draws attention to the fact that the former occupied the cultural space left by the relative ebbing of the latter, and that this is made possible by the fact that both express feelings and features of a similarly unconscious kind. An essential factor in the new cultural reality of the nation has been the decline of the political basis of the dynastic kingdoms, (especially the legitimacy of their divine character) and the composition of their subject peoples. This has resulted in the transformation of political organizations founded on blurred frontiers and among heterogeneous populations and allowed them to exercise sovereignty over their territories and citizens (ANDERSON, 2008, p. 47-49).

At least, if one goes beyond the changes caused by the fall of dynasties and religious imaginary worlds, the essential sign of the establishment of a national narrative has clearly been a new awareness of time. It is on this point that Anderson's theory is original, particularly in the idea of a "community in anonymity" in which people are beginning to

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synchronize their lives with those of others even if they do not have any expectation of obtaining knowledge about these "companions" (ANDERSON, 2008, p. 257). Anderson relies on the theories of Walter Benjamim, when he argues that the modern narrative that is based on relations of cause and effect and notions of progress, is opposed to the old notions that fail to make a sharp distinction between the past and present and confuse cosmology with history. Thus while the mediaeval view discerned a "messianic age" controlled by divine forces (Ibid., p. 54), modernity conceives a new notion of simultaneity that is expressed by coincidence; this is measured by calendars and clocks and characterized by something that is "homogenous, empty".

The importance of this cognitive-cultural change is apparent in the new structuring of novels and magazines — two genres that emerged in the 18th Century and reproduced the temporal conceptions that consolidated the national representation (Ibid., p. 51-69). The modern novels delineated a society that was stable and recognizable, as well as creating a conception of anonymity among the characters which although imagined as carrying out similar activities at the same time, involved an awareness of a socially homogenous reality. According to Anderson, "the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) in history" (Ibid., p. 56, my italics). The magazines, in turn, helped to form an imaginary world arranged in chronological order and create the image of a ceremony of the masses based on the notion of a synchronized consumption of printed matter by a large number of fellow countrymen in a way that allows the reader "to be continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life" (Ibid., p. 68). Thus the structural effect of "print capitalism" was a ring-fencing of national channels of communication which, when regarded as fixed and longstanding media, reproduce images of a cohesive community that has developed in a regular temporality.

One way to have a clearer view of the homogeneity produced by the national imagination is to observe the cultural features that underlay the feelings of patriotism. Unlike the assumptions that attribute it exclusively to irrationality, Anderson (Ibid.,p. 199-204) notes that the nation was much more often bound to a narrative of love and the family — reflected for example in references to procreation and the home — than to one of hatred and pathological problems and thus achieved a close relationship with disinterested conduct and the basic mechanisms of solidarity. The nation — which was a class without limits but which could at the same time, be open to those that wanted to take part and be "naturalized" — was, above all, a kind of unity, simultaneousness and homogeneity which was expressed in a choir with the same hymn-sheet for compatriots (Ibid., p. 203).

Assumptions of homogeneity can also be found in the analysis of Ernest Gellner (2006) about a "high culture" which involves the national phenomenon. The singularity of this thesis is its concept of a cultural dimension formed and directly reproduced by the político-institutional apparatus. Although it rests on assumptions and a use of variables that are very different from those defined by Anderson, one can detect in Gellner a conceptual similarity in so far as the national phenomenon, in the last analysis, involves cultural unity.

According to Gellner (2006, p. 21-25), nationalism arose from a meeting of ideas of progress and rationality with the evolution of the division of labor and social mobility. The reproduction of this set of ideological and structural traits required a social order based on the development of a national-educational system and the resulting cultural

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homogenizing of the people in a given territory. Gellner (Ibid., p. 26) states that although a complex division of labor involves several types of specialization, most of industrial society depends on general and standardized training through mass educational systems provided by the State. The national feeling arose from qualifications that are shared in these centralized educational environments which seek to meet the reproduction needs of industrial society. As a result, "the monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence" (Ibid., p. 33), which characterized a necessary convergence between culture and politics.

Given the limitations of this account, what matters is to attack the concept of culture put forward by Gellner, who defines what is a singular idea and the cohesion of national identity. In the opinion of this author, modern culture arose from educational systems that defined both the professional and moral boundaries of a society. It should be noted that Gellner does not conceive the cultural sphere as being grounded on constraints that have become widespread as a result of the great traditions but rather as a body founded by a "high culture" regulated by the State and based on the values of rationality and an institutionalized language that can serve technical and administrative needs. Thus, it is worth taking note that the cultural homogeneity produced by objective imperatives of socio-economic reproduction involves being attached to an impersonal society comprising disintegrated, replaceable and anonymous individuals (Ibid., p. 56). As Gellner makes clear, it is not the case that "nationalism imposes homogeneity, it is rather that a homogeneity imposed by an objective inescapable imperative eventually appears on the surface in the form of nationalism" (Ibid., p. 38).

Gellner (Ibid., p. 48-51) illustrates the way industrial societies have become homogenized by distinguishing between "savage cultures" and "high cultures" (or "cultivated [garden] cultures"). Thus, whereas savage cultures and their systems of norms and values are reproduced spontaneously without being consciously moulded, cultivated and complex cultures evolve in a way that is deliberately contrived. Gellner (Ibid., p. 49) challenges the representations of the nationalist ideologies who express and believe in the singularity of their popular cultures and does not hesitate to give prominence to the high cultures of modernity with the concomitant decline of the authority of traditional ties. In this sense, "nationalism is essentially the general imposition of a high culture on society where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority and, in some cases, the whole of the population" (Ibid., p. 56). Although Gellner may not fully account for the relationship between "savage" and "high/complex" cultural forms — and at times takes note of hybrid forms of nationalism that link tradition to the complex processes that produce forms of "social entropy" (Ibid., p. 56; 62-71) — his theory is based on the assumption that industrialization tends to result in a culturally homogeneous society with a high degree of social mobility and egalitarian expectations (Ibid., p. 72; 92-93).

Hence it is clear that the nation experiences feelings of satisfaction with an imaginary world that merges cultural frontiers with specific political spaces. Several other theories point out these essential features by linking national identity with the homogeneity of a single body in a more metaphorical sense because if something touches a part of the nation this will be felt by the whole of society (HROCH, 2000, p. 98). It can be inferred that the nation is experienced as something separate from its subjects and has aspects of religiosity based on symbols, sacred texts, sacrifices and rituals (KRAMER, 1997, p. 532-534). The cultural quality of the nation will also be expressed in the fact that in general, the phenomenon is not linked to conscious political ideologies but to questions

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of death and fate. Even though the national discourse can be rationalized, at other levels it cannot be verbalized, and is embodied in the memory of a common past and the density of obscure but unquestionable cultural ties. (HROCH, 2000, p. 86; ELIAS, 1997, p. 139). The nation is "a question of belief of a characteristically secular kind. Or in other words it can be supported without justification through superhuman powers" (ELIAS, 1997, p. 143). In addition, the nation, as an essential identity of modernity, reflects the imaginary world of a soveriegn people who are only divided on the surface by principles of class, status or ethnicity (GREENFELD, 1996, p. 10-11).

Norbert Elias (1997, p. 143-144) suggests there is an identification with the nation which occurs in such a cohesive way that the images of individuals and the national collective are confused. Thus the feeling of love for what is "ourselves" does not cease to be a kind of self-esteem. It is something that goes beyond identification because there are not two separate entities (the individual v the nation), but rather the expression of an "image of ourselves". Even an author like Charles Tilly (1996, p. 47), who prefers the concept of the "National State" to the "Nation-State" (with a view to distinguishing clearly between aspects of state centralization and other aspects of cultural homogeneity), ends up by assuming people are moving towards greater uniformity since the administrative powers in each territory are extending their power. Tilly (Ibid., p. 161-171) argues that the movement from indirect to direct government in modernity caused a change of political perspective from subordination to assimilation. This was a task that required States to bring about a greater degree of homogeneity among their citizens, which is reflected by a greater uniformity found in linguistic, religious, financial and legal areas for example. The consequences of these processes can be divided into two categories: either resistance — which leads to new kinds of separatist nationalism — or acclimatization to the socio-cultural and economic requirements. In this sense:

> "life is becoming homogenized within States and heterogenized among States — the national symbols crystallized, the national languages standardized and the national labor markets organized. War itself has become a homogenizing experience as soldiers and sailors represented the entire nation and the civilian population endured common privations and responsibilities" (TILLY, 1996, p. 181).

Hence, even with the singularities and scope of the work — which it is not the place here to examine in detail — seems to superimpose the notion of independent bodies on their concept spaces, by reproducing symbolic meetings of authenticity and tradition that are staked out both within and outside (VERDERY, 2000, p. 244-245). In contrast, t he post-colonialists lay stress on dimensions of power and cultural heterogeneity which characterized societies by going beyond economic or strictly political divisions. Although, as the history of anti-colonial movements shows, the nation might be a space for creative interaction, it also undermined the freedom of its subjects. Rather than looking at político-institutional factors in the formation of a nation, it is worth examining the more all-encompassing features of social power, with its symbolic violence and concealment of differences. It is becoming necessary to be aware of exactly how these phenomena involve discursive devices that seek to represent difference as unity (HALL, 2000, p. 62). Running parallel with this, it has become essential to reflect on how certain formal political arrangements are liable to be challenged by the continuous construction of new identities.

The State, the Nation and Ambivalence in Post-Colonialist Thinking

The key question for authors who are governed by post-colonialist thinking and largely

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influenced by the effects of contemporary migration to the old metropolises, is to examine both the ways that images of social unity are imposed by the State and the fact that there is a disparity between formal-institutional politics and the social practices that produce cultural identities. Despite the wide range of ideas, the new uses of the concept of nature and culture in post-colonialist theories assume, in general terms, that politics is not circumscribed within a particular "space", but is scattered among a variety of informal processes. The State in turn, does not appear as a predetermined object but as a body that is attributed with power relations that pre-date its own existence. The analysis is thus shifted to an awareness of how the apparatus of the Nation-State is linked to groups that are very often antagonistic and present within its boundaries. Thus it should be noted that when set alongside State representations that seek to homogenize a given population, there are creative forms of distinct collective identities. As Frantz Fanon argues, when the post-colonialist authors are used as classical reference-points, "it [culture] abhors all simplification. In its essence it is opposed to custom, for custom is always the deterioration of culture" (1979, p. 186). As a result, the work of intellectuals in restoring cultural homogeneity, while being detached from political practices and appearances, seems to be devoid of meaning[7]. As a realm of discourse, culture has not only reflected a given structural condition because it is an agency for the creation of interests or identities that are combined in a dynamic way with political, economic and intellectual dimensions (SAID, 2007a, p. 39-41). Gayatri Spivak (2006, p. 359) suggests that a questioning of the forms of essentialism, must be tempered with an awareness of culture as a set of premises that may be active or in play, but are neither precise nor rigid, although to some extent, they also constitute a set of organized and reproduced beliefs.

Thus an analysis that is conducted on the assumption that a nation is a sphere without movement is self-contadictory. Although the objective of the national discourse is "essentializing", the fact is that this representation has not succeeded in encompassing the cultural diversity of social spaces. The complexity of the culture and nation means they are suited to reflecting hybrid and heterogeneous dimensions in a way that suggests the marking out of their frontiers by static concepts, only looks forward to certain narratives or is designed "to prevent counter-narratives from emerging" (SAID, 1999, p. 13). A famous work that draws attention to the complex entanglements of culture and the nation is found in the attempt by Homi Bhabha (1994) to reveal the obscure way of experiencing the locality of a culture. It is obscure because it refers to a temporal and symbolic dimension that cannot be directly apprehended and is something distinct from the historical and cultural representations that are generally taken into account in national discourses. The space of the nation will never be horizontal which suggests the need to question organic theories of cohesion and social wholeness. If we recall Fanon, a reflection can be suggested that goes beyond narratives governed by origins and closed subjectivities in which the first thing a native "learns is to stay in his place" (FANON, 1979, p. 39). Following this path, what must be learnt is how to observe the interrelationships or negotiations of cultural differences that do not necessarily depend on a tradition. The modern condition itself which is not only characterized by progress but also by terror, cannot express uniform identities but only variations and discontinuities that do not correspond with a symmetrical inter-subjectivity (GILROY, 2001, p. 109-110).

Bhabha (1993; 1994) recognizes the potential symbolic and affective importance of the nation but stresses the errors of historicism which dominated most of the analyses. One of the main failings was to regard the nation or people as empirical sociological categories

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or holistic cultural entities without being aware of their ambivalent qualities. The author argues that the nation expresses the liminality of modern culture that corresponds with the heterogeneity of the entire space of social representation. The space of the nation cannot be horizontal because it requires a duplicity in its writing or in other words "a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a central causal logic" (1994, p. 202). This temporal duplicity reflected the productive character of culture and was a force of both subordination and reproduction, and creation and production (BHABHA, 1993, p. 3-4). On the one hand, the people appear as a historical object of a nationalist pedagogical system based on discourses about origins. On the other, the people are the subject of a process of significance that must eradicate any originating relationship in a way that can show the living principles of the present. In this climate, the national narrative becomes ambivalent because there is a schism between "pedagogical-continuist" temporality and the repetitive strategy of the performative dimension. This is something that can be seen in the imposition of the in-between temporality, with regard to the heterogeneity of the population the minority groups and the local tensions arising from cultural difference (BHABHA, 1994, p. 209). Bhabha (Ibid, p. 218-219) resorts to Fanon to explain the uncertain time of the "people", based on a pattern of repetition that involves the continual renewal of performative time. From this standpoint, Anderson is mistaken in providing a national narrative based on sociological solidity and a succession of pluralistic factors that bring about a fixed and homogeneous identity. The present should not be viewed as being based on the idea of an empty and homogeneous time but rather assumed to be a succession of unsynchronized events, since in contrast with the requirements of the pedagogical discourse, the social significations are not a given fact, but constitute their own expression.

The notion of duplicity put forward by Bhabha is expressed in the assumptions of the post-colonialist authors when they define the nation as a unifying discourse aimed at subjugating a people (although this kind of discourse always has limitations in encompassing the diversity of a socio-cultural setting). Thus the implacable distinction and specific cultural features that characterize the agents and groups tend to be involved in a discursive power which, with its colonialist leanings, seeks to represent this complexity by means of binary and essentialist operations (HALL, 1994, p. 249). The tendency towards a discursive submissiveness becomes important in the work of Gayatri Spivak (1994), She suggests that there is a need to make an analytical separation between forms of "representation" (vertreten), which are articulated in the power of the State and economic relations — as well as an assumption of knowledge and the possibility of replacing (or speaking on behalf of) the people who are represented — , in forms of "re-presentation" (darstellen), which must be linked to aesthetic dimensions and stage management. However, it is essential to note that owing to systematic and ideological conditions, the agents are very often not represented in an autonomous way, and thus what is involved in their representation, is the idea of subjects who are divided, displaced and submissive. These forms of representation can even extend to historical imaginary worlds and not only define predetermined temporal meanings but also general political movements and thus constitute a "domestication of politics" (CHAKRABARTY, 2008, p. 148). As a result, with regard to the interpretations of politics in the past and present, a narrative of order was instituted which tends to restrict and deny the legitimacy of open and creative movements[8].

Several authors note that the duplicity of the national question is perceived in its own historical significance and that this can be expressed both as an ideal that gives

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legitimacy to wars, xenophobia and authoritarian regimes and offers libertarian models of anticolonial cultural resistance (CHATTERJEE, 1993, p. 3-6; FANON, 1979, p. 128-133; SAID, 1999; SAID, 2007b, p. 57-59, BHABHA, 1993)[9]. Concerning the libertarian aspect of the national imagination, it can be noted that the much discussed politico-cultural movement in India, for example, was expressed much earlier at the time of the outbreak of the popular movements that led to independence. This means their essential point is the division of social practices into two dimensions: the material that refers to "foreign" spheres of the economy, science and the State and the other which is spiritual and characterizes the identity itself that must be preserved (CHATTERJEE, 1993). Nationalism as a creative sphere, exists at a time when an idea of national culture is founded that despite being modern, is not regulated by Western standards, especially those of sceptical rationalism. As a result, the actions and demands unfold outside the sphere of the State, and maintain links to a tradition that diverges from the Western disciplinary standards that seek to introduce legislation of a different kind and that represent an exclusive type of civil society. There was no reason for them to be constrained by an understanding of movements of social construction, liberal conceptions, and above all, by what divides the world into public and private domains. (CHATTERJEE, 1993, p. 10-11). In contrast with the epistemic violence of the colonial project, the creative dimension of the agents corresponds with the championing of other distinctions such as the spiritual and material and the internal and external[10]. As several other political movements show, the cultural resistance of national imaginations could establish other communal memories and other historical formulations which have the potential to lead to open and self-critical collective representations (SAID, 1999, p. 273-274; FANON, 1979, p. 38).

What matters is that these representations are often not regular and remain stuck in an inert particularism which does not seek to discover the truth of a people and prevents cultural transformation. Given the fact that culture is action, it is necessary to respect the movement of history that is characterized by a "hidden disequilibrium" which constantly leads to reflection and renewal (FANON, 1979, p. 188). However, the post-colonialist authors do not cease to suggest that the ambivalence of the national construction remains, evenin creative and transformative conditions. The agents of national construction appear to be, at the same time, both sibjects and objects of the new discourses. Following the case of Indian decolonization, it should be noted that the new State planning also reflected a passive revolution which maintained the institutions of the colonial period.It also preserved the situation of the pre-capitalist classes who became allied to a national scheme of modernization which, to some extent, involved maintaining order and control of social conflicts. (CHATTERJEE, 1993, p. 212).

Thus one of the key premises of the post-colonialist stance is its criticism of the inability of certain theories to observe the duplicity of the national narrative. This has resulted in studies that strengthen a synchronic narrative and add a clear visibility to social space. In this way, "the narrative of social cohesion can no longer be signified as a sociological solidity, in Anderson´s words [...] where the social space is clearly bounded by such repeated objects that represent a national and natural horizon" (BHABHA, 1994, p. 221). In so far as the ambivalences are emphasized, an attempt is made to discern both the ways of questioning the hegemonic discourse and the relative power of the pedagogical narrative of the Nation-State. By taking account of the opening of post-colonial subjectivity, the theory raises questions about forming an identity that requires a competitive and static alter ego, based on the creation of the concept of "ourselves"

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which is interpreted as an identity that is necessarily different from that of "others" (SAID, 2007a, p. 441; 1999, p. 26-27, HALL, 1994, p. 246-247). Since the national culture does not express a unity even within its inner self, it is even more illogical to assume that there will be something unique with regard to what is found outside it. As a result, the problem of defining the border-lines is always being converted into chance processes of hybridization and new political antagonisms (BHABHA, 1993, p. 4).

The result is that it can be assumed there is a strengthening of cultural identities of transition alongside the tendency towards a cohesive representation of nationalities (HALL, 2000, p. 88). These identities, as illustrated by the new diáspora of post-colonial migrations, crossed the natural frontiers and manifested a kind of cultural negotiation. They underline the limits of hegemonic discourses — the space for the anomie of the nation — and the instability of the "free-floating movement" of societies which mould the present without marking the references to a real past or a predetermined future. In reality, this future is often mediated by utopian ideals that are not confined to linguistic or textual sources and are signs of performative attitudes (GILROY, 2001, p. 93-96). Culture becomes vibrant and in constant movement and points to something that unlike systems of belief and organized opinions, is irreducible to the subject of a discourse. (SPIVAK, 2006).

Since there is an intrinsic relationship between identities and the configuration of pooweer, the key point to note is the political character of the national construction. In addition, the post-colonial thinking questions the border-lines of the Nation-State as an exclusive and appropriate field for understanding political interaction and draws attention to the relationship between the global and local which pervade decentralized and hybrid identifications. It is this comprehensive character of the national ethnic minorites that tends to encompass global and transcultural factors of contemporary political phenomena. The classical concept of "society" is no longer meaningful as a system of well-defined frontiers, because the reality reflects new representations of time and space that are used to rebuild local and global concepts (HALL, 2000, p. 67-68). The idea of the "Black Atlantic" manifests the reshaping of as identities in which cultures create new relationships that are a long way from the fixed stereotypes of the national narrative and political arrangement of the Nation-State. Gilroy (2001), on the basis of the story of the development of "Negro" musicals and an assumed "mediation of distant suffering", seeks to describe these relationships in detail since they are largely detached from territories and notions of belonging. Hence, he provides a record of a non-national history that is decentralized, cosmopolitan and characterized by a diaspora. This narrative is contradicted by another theory, which lays stress on national affiliations and an absolute notion of difference. The dispute between these two concepts reflects the conflict that defines many of the cultural and political relations of the contemporary world and is grounded on theories that at times emphasizes the local and at times the global sphere. The post-colonialist view seeks to think about the frequent convergences between these two dimensions.

This possibility suggests that the movements have the potential to represent not a plurality, as understood by liberalism, but rather, a politics of difference that challenges the pedagogical ideals of the State. In contrast with the concepts of "cultural roots" of Anderson and "high culture" of Gellner, about which the agent will have little choice, there was a space "outside" the hegemonic discourse which can become a place for political intervention. Thus it did not make sense either as a homogeneous narrative or a pluralistic discourse of cultural diversity. In the case of post-colonialism, the trappings of culture were always open and recombined with increased emphasis. In addition,

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if there is a positive dimension to the nation or national movements, this is only evident in a movement of decentralization, in so far as no group or class can play the role of a "demiurge" (FANON, 1979, p. 162)[11]. At the same time, the temporality of the symbols destabilizes the discourse of tolerance and attempts at a cultural separation that are adopted by certain political practices of multiculturalism. Stress must be laid on the inportance of separating the concepts of diversity and difference which are the same representatives of ambivalence in the cultural question (BHABHA, 1994, p. 49-50). While the notion of diversity corresponds to the epistemology of a knowledge based on predetermined customs, the concept of difference reflects a process of "enunciation" that combines symbols and values in a creative way. Thus whereas culture in the relativist tradition of culture presupposes a primordial system, in difference this is seen as a problem because it is subordinated to a redefinition of significance carried out by different classes, genders and races.

Although it depends on particular social circumstances, the collective imaginary world of the post-colonialist theory is also open to new discourses that allow a solidarity or hybridism that is detached from both the individually-interested forms of rational choice and the contractual arrangements that establish and hierarchize identities. (CHATTERJEE, 1993, p. 220-222). The ambivalence of the cultural and national question is manifested in the fact that the whole attempt to assume the existence of a cohesion that underpins stable systems of values, must necessarily come up against a movement opposed to a differentiation that denies certainties and expresses new demands. Hence there is a cultural dimension that is closely bound up with political practices both of domination and resistance. One of the ways of being aware of the cultural opening is to note the fact that the nation remains an inconvenient issue in the narrative of modernity which reflects the limits of the disciplinary apparatus that is always being challenged by new ideas and imaginations. (Ibid., p. 236-237).

Final Comments: The Benefits and Drawbacks of The Post-Colonialist Understand of The Nation

The theories about the national question have the merit of underlining that the nation is someting built since it os far removed from a given nature and often even from the history itself of a territory. Not even languages can be taken as a concrete realm of particularity because very often the elites spoke different langiages from those subordinated to them. (GEARY, 2005, p. 52). Hence there is a considerable difference in the concepts of the nation portrayed by the different authors examined here. Within limits, there is a contradiction between a perspective that assumes the existence of untiy and one that lays emphasis on difference. It should be noted that the notions of culture and politics follow these directions and either correspond to homogenizing perceptions or point to heterogeneity and hybridism. In the case of the latter perspective, the assumptions of unity look like masks that assist in perpetuating inequality so as to hide conflicts and constrain the dynamics of society.

However, even when the potential analytical theories are taken into account, two points need to be underlined that have tended to be ignored in post-colonialist thought, especially when compared with traditional reflections on nationalism and the Nation-State. In the first place, the theory seems to overlook the systematic processes and situations that condition the conduct of agents, which is something that can be explained by the partial inclusion of the poststructural doctrine that there was no previous reality to the discourses. Thus it

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is worth discussing whether the constitution of a movement can be always "invented" and is devoid of determining factors, or if political action must necessarily be contingent, unstable and fragmented. The problem with this theoretical standpoint is that the concept of agency (which is based on the possibility of reversal or the deconstruction of codes and meanings), seems to be unduly free from social or political imperatives[12]. This direction is expressed in the nature of the indeterminacy and hybridism of the subjectivities that are assumed to lie in the post-colonialist texts, since the constitution of a social movement can never be regarded as the formation of a homogenous mass. When a new concept of the nation appears, for example, it can only exist in a heterogeneous time. Yet what is the relation of "the act of enunciation" and the "position of translation", (the concepts of the post-colonialist theory that express feelings of autonomy and freedom) with the structural requirements of a social context? What singular mechanisms tie creative acts to the discursive apparatus that seeks to control the agents? The theory does not seem to have a suitable reply, which accounts for a certain feeling that very often it is not related clearly to the dimensions of culture, the economy and politics.

It is worth bearing in mind that all political practices depend, to a certain extent, on the circumstantial representation of the concept of "ourselves" to establish the right conditions for struggle. As well as this, to be successful, the hybrid discourse itself must be grounded on the border-lines of the new frontiers of identity (COSTA, 2006, p. 108). Thus hybridism must be restricted to a specific moment of the building of the collective subjectivity; otherwise, the movement will be lost in the uncertain paths of an unlimited "enunciation". What is important is that the struggles incorporate a relational factor which involves past actions and reactions to the opposed groups. Although they might embody a creative dimension with indefinable a priori frontiers (HALL, 1994, p. 244), not much thought seems to have been given to political relations without some degree of structured conflict and opposition to interests that have been more or less staked out. In the case of the nation, the related question is divided between the State's attempt to establish a meaning for citizenship and collective imagination — which are not always authoritarian — and a movement that is freer from ordinary practices, and also does not cease to be combined with a certain structure and social language and bound in a specific time and space.

In the second place, when the post-colonialist authors radically distinguish between the imposition of political rationality on the one hand, and a creative and hybrid agency on the other, they seem to lose sight of the complexity involved in forming collective identities and the modern political apparatus. Treating the Nation-State and society as a dichotomy is accompanied by two particular risks. The first is to overlook formal activities or public policies that have a relative degree of autonomy — something which is confirmed by the struggles carried out in the main modern political institutions. When attempting to understand the relations between the State and politics, it does not seem to be appropriate to regard the State in a one-dimensional way as if the apparatus remained the same in any space. The second risk is to open up a wide gulf between political and social bodies that can hamper a critical perception of the discourses that give legitimacy to the market and economic relations as exclusive mechanisms of interaction.

These risks reveal that the post-colonialist approach can leave one of its crucial concerns on one side: to be fully aware of the complexity of the whole social or political fabric. Although the nation may be, to a large extent, fabricated and hence requires the deconstruction of its discourse, the fact that for centuries it has been present in the imaginations of the people and social movements, suggests that it also includes fundamental values. Thus, despite the fact

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that the national ideal incorporates a static concept of culture, these values can represent both a sujective choice and a particular restructuring of a society. The agents cannot invent national communities if there are no objective conditions for their formation (HROCH, 2000, p. 86; GEARY, 2005, p. 30). It is for this reason that when culture is embodied in the national ideal, it is both a constraint and an invention and situated between determining factors and creative processes. What is of crucial importance is that even with the process of social objectification, modernity provides an opportunity for some sphere of popular will to enter the imagination of national politics. It is thus important to retrieve the old concepts of the thinkers of the 18th and 19th Centuries which stress the potential value of the sovereignty of the people in every nation (BREUILLY, 2000, p. 175; HOBSBAWM, 2000, p. 273).
The nation also reveals a positive relationship between a State undertaking that seeks legitimacy and a popular subject that precedes the State (Cf. RINESI, 2004). Although it is referred to as a potentially effective means of bringing about a hybrid "enunciation", it seems to be inconsistent with the idea of only recognizing the value of a "universal stranger", detached from any formal socio-political sphere (BANETH-NOUAILHETAS, 2006, p. 71).

On the other hand, going beyond the possible problems of disregarding systematic questions and a rigid dualism between the agency and power, the post-colonialist reflections can be fertile ground for pointing out theoretical paths that can allow one to address contemporary phenomena of identity. The question that seems most relevant is to show how some traditional understandings fail to take sufficient note of the complex and all-encompassing relationships between spheres of culture and politics[13]. Culture in this case should also be seen as a constituent of political reality and not just as a reflex of a structural body that is effectively of fundamental importance (Cf. BHAMBRA, 2007). In the case of the national phenomenon, the post-colonialist understanding observes that this can be open to various directions and different subjectivities which highlight conflicts in the whole cultural and political field. For example, criticism can be made of the direct relationship between the State and the nation in the theories of citizenship and political obligations that can be found in much of the liberal tradition. (CALHOUN, 2008, p. 46-49). When related to the political agency, the cultural and national dimension are involved in a social dynamic which causes tensions that can hamper the understanding of a "civil society" devoid of problems and constantly able to assimilate minority groups.

When related to a view of culture as the basis of any political action and the constituent of reality, another key question of post-colonialist theory is the apprehension of a certain ambivalence in the national phenomenon. The assumption of irregularity allows one to be aware of another temporality and a different representation of a predetermined articulation of certain discourses. Although the predominant material of the economic and political institutions are defined by Western rationality, when account is taken of new possible courses of action, it can be shown how these have been, and can continue to be, appropriated in various ways Thus there is a challenge with regard to the idea that modernity and the nation are necessarily characterized by the culture of individualism and impersonality. The fact is that the nation can be examined as an imaginary world that can be represented in different ways. It can be defined as existing between domination and creativity and this reflects the limits of a certain configuration of the modern Nation-State and the opening up of the cultural field in its relations with the political dimension.

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Notes

1. I refer here to the lack of general studies that treat the national issue as a structural phenomenon of modernity. Even though there are several analytical studies that are in line with particularism and the building of nations and specific national identities — as the social sciences themselves in Brazil show — it is well known that there are very few studies that seek the generic and universal aspects of the phenomenon.

2. The border-lines of the post-colonialist theory have been the object of a good deal of discussion. In the opinion of some people, the classification should serve to name authors and theories that have migrated from peripheral regions to central countries. Others draw attention to the authors that share the same theoretical premises while coming from different regions. In addition, there has been a disciplined discussion about whether or not the realm of theory should be confined to literary criticism and if it should incorporate for example, the Indian school of Subaltern Studies or the so-called Cultural Studies. I will adopt here a comprehensive approach to the theory with authors from different subjects, as well as thinkers like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy who a few decades ago were linked to the academic activities of the central countries, and use similar concepts to those generally proclaimed by the founders of this position: Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. At the risk of failing to point out the singular features of each author, I believe that the benefits of seeking to conduct a fuller analysis of the national question in post-colonialism, offset any possible drawbacks.

3. For an analysis of the relation between post-colonialist theory and post-structuralism, see (2006).

4. However, it is not assumed here that the ideas of these and other authors can be summed up in the specific terms of national homogeneity. The intention is only to stress the distinction drawn by the analytical studies of the post-colonailists between the current assumptions underlying the social theory of the nation and the different kinds of nationalism. For a balanced view of the various other aspects of the research studies on the nation, see Calhoun (2008) and Kramer (1997).

5. Hence it is worth noting the singularity and intentionality of this interpretation since the complex and valuable work of both authors

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cannot be summarized in the terms that are highlighted here. Anderson, for example, draws on a wide range of variables that depend on various social and historical settings. These include for example the models of American kinds of nationalism of the "creole pioneers" or official and conservative types of nationalism" in parts of Europe. Gellner, in turn, includes a full discussion of different historical directions that define the forms of the nation, from the elitist model of "nationalism in the Habsburg Empire" to the formats of "nationalism involving unification" of the 19th Century and "diaspora nationalism".

6. However, the author himself draws a distinction between the two representations (Anderson, 2008: 42). Unlike the sacramental nature of "truth-languages", like Latin or Mandarin that gave the great religions their bearings, and allowed those who learnt them to be converted, the nation is based on profane vernaculars that staked out territories and gave new opportunities for migration.

7. Spivak (2006: 360) draws attention tio the fact that "culture" is a term that intrinsically belongs to the history of West European languages. It forms a part of the colonialist way of conceiving other realities and less powerful groups such as those that are static and without movement, in contrast with the assumption about the value of dynamism and enlightenment, of the societies that analyze them.

8. Chakrabarty (2008) for example, shows how most of the anti-colonial movements were defined by developmentalist temporalities which cited the peasant farmers as a class that was destined to be transformed into a working-class or citizen groups. From an essentialist standpoint, these movements were analyzed through a biographical perspective which only focused on the leaders or a few exceptional individuals and rejected the original concepts of collectivism and political action. In effect, these historical narratives ended by influencing the politics of the future and restricting the autonomy of social agents.

9. In criticizing the grim picture of nationalism, Said (2007b) links traditional and conservative humanism to imperial political practices which distinguish clearly between what is pure and virtuous on one side from what is anarchic and malign on the other. Said argues that negative nationalism is a latent tendency in all cultures.

10. One of the means of bringing about submission through "epistemic violence" is noted by Spivak (1994: 77). It involved the introduction by the colonial power of an educational system based on the representation of a "high culture" of Sanskrit and a historical interpretation in which the brahmins, as members of the indigenous elite shared the views of the British legislators and thus gave legitimacy to the colonial administration.

11. Nonetheless, at times Fanon (1979) adopts the utopian vision of a "new man" based on the "totality of the people" which resulted from the dialectic of historical movements and is something other than hybridism, which was presumed to be unforeseeable among the contemporary post-colonialist authors.

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12. It is worth looking at the particularities of the post-colonialist authors at this point. Although Said, for example, stresses the ambivalence and incompleteness of the contemporary representations, he does not accept post-modern ideas that only emphasize the local and contingent and undervalue history and economic determining factors (Said, 2007a: 463-464). In a similar vein, Gayatri Spivak (1994) criticizes poststructuralist assumptions that conditionally remove ideologies and assume that the oppressed are able to speak in an autonomous way.

13. It should be noted that the post-colonialist perspective, unlike a post-modern attitude which is at times linked to it, presupposes a plan of political action. This is because the contemporary condition should not be characterized by a celebration of fragmentation but by a stance that criticizes the limits of ethnocentric ideas and explains the history of minority groups.

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