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THE NATION: AN IMAGINED COMMUNITY?¹

In revisiting the classics of social science, it is evident that even authors that acknowledge the division of societies into different classes, tend to treat societies as organic ‘totalities’, subject to rules of analysis that impart a sense of unity and homogeneity to events of the past. This tendency is also evident in historical analyses that neglect the deep ethnic and racial divisions that pervade political life, divisions that are particularly important in understanding societies of the Third World. In the same way, concepts so central to the study of social organization, like ‘national culture’, are based on a sense of social cohesion that simply does not reflect reality. In this way, the triad made up of the lettered practice – literature and journalism – the construction of the nation-state, and the organization of ‘national culture’, is based on a conflictive model that centers hopes for the future in the rational and teleological organization of a social utopia. This lineal model of modernity, originating in Europe and influenced by Hegel, assumes that no matter what the crisis in the present, modernity will overcome the obstacles it faces, and lead in the end to a future social utopia, be it capitalist or socialist. This inalterable course of history is based on the profound conviction that the crises suffered in different historical-economic cycles will transpire without throwing into doubt the overall lineal and progressive move toward social utopia.

Along this line of analysis, and when it comes to our understanding of the concept of ‘national culture’, our totalizing gaze of reality originates in the important and foundational works of the Hispanic- American nation, like *Facundo. Civilization and Barbarism* by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. These works were also the basis for the beginning of the paradigm of civilization and barbarism in the middle of the nineteenth century. In effect, *Facundo* is based on the empirical observation that life in the towns seemed backwards, and this idea is also evidenced in other foundational texts of Latin American nation-states. These works reflected the stark contrast between the ‘lettered cities’, a term that the Uruguayan critic Ángel Rama used to refer to urban centers, and the rural zones in the interior of our countries. This empirical evidence was drawn from the fact that the cities and principal ports of Latin America were modern like the centers of power in European civilization, thanks to the close commercial relationship they shared. The diffusionist ‘logic’ held the cultural models imported from the center of international economic power in high esteem, and called for their transfer to the interior of Hispanic-American societies, replacing autochthonous cultural forms with a totalizing perspective, and a ‘civilizing’ gaze.

Beginning with Sarmiento's work for example, the rationalizing and organizing discourses of the nation-states, particularly the positivistic discourses of the second half of the nineteenth century, were based on the premise that Latin American unity was already practically achieved. In this way, writers put emphasis on education, reinforcing one of the most important characteristics of the altruistic and ennobling vision of history dominant at the time: the good will of learned educators (journalists and men of letters). This characteristic was key because learned educators wanted to integrate Latin American countries into the community of refined nations by promoting a much closer link of Latin America's natural resources to the dynamics of the world economy. It turns out that the rationalizing model of these learned men was also coherent with the project that sought to expand the ideals of the rising bourgeoisie. The most traditional oligarchical sectors also took to this rationalizing model, thus establishing the foundations of the oligarchical-liberal States. This progressive and untainted version of history, that held the lettered city as the only verifiable seat of civilization, also answered to an ideology whose utopia hid the 'backwards', fragmented character of reality.

There appeared however a few notable exceptions that objected to the triumphalist perspective of history: at the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of works started to doubt the boundless good will imparted to modernity, and probed more cautiously into the formation of our nations. One of these notable exceptions was *Os sertões: campanha de Canudos* (1902) (*Rebellion in the backlands*, 1944) by the Brazilian writer Euclides de Cunha. The fictionalized essay was written while the First Republic in Brazil (1889–1930) was consolidating in terms of a positivistic model for the observation of reality, leaving behind the long stage of its institutional monarchy that began in 1808. But as the work of da Cunha testifies, the Republic was not created without bloodshed. The liberal politics of the Republic, impregnated with social Darwinism, did not survive without being put to the test by the violent opposition of rebel and millenarian movements such as Canudos, in the northeast state of Bahia. These movements stubbornly and fiercely opposed being assimilated into modernity as the secular Republic intended. For this reason, it would be useful to summarize the crisis of modernity that occurred in Latin America at the beginning of the twentieth century before I concentrate on da Cunha's impressive work.

In the first decade of the 1900s, there was a reaction against the positivist ideas that prevailed during the last half of the nineteenth century. A number of authors began to look at liberalism with a critical eye. Three historical events served as catalysts for this reaction (Williamson 1992, pp. 304–306). First, the defeat that Spain suffered at the hands of the United States in 1898. Indeed, the war of independence in Cuba increased the fear in Latin America that Anglo-Saxon dominance would bring an end to the values of the Hispanic world. This event led to the re-valuation of Latin America's Hispanic spiritual

traditions and made Latin American's aware of the need to put a halt to the modernizing, utilitarian materialism of the United States. *Ariel*, the notable work by the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó, converged with the intellectual work of other great modernist writers, like the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío and the Cuban José Martí, giving clear evidence of the intellectual rejection of the United States, a movement that I will later describe as oppositional 'ariélismo', that influenced the first decades of the last century. Secondly, as I said earlier, the rebellion of Canudos in 1896 demonstrated the deficiencies of the liberal Republic recently established after a long constitutional monarchy in Brazil. I give a very different treatment to this literary-historic event, that served as the backdrop to Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *La guerra del fin del mundo* (The war of the end of the world), published in 1981. Whereas Vargas Llosa was inclined towards imputing an unquestionable superiority to the Brazilian state, and paints the extermination of the barbarian *jagunços* as a 'tragic necessity' in the name of modernity, my work finds in da Cunha's essay an impressive account of the clash produced between modernity and coloniality in Latin America. We well know that there is no precise referential author of coloniality. Coloniality should be thought of in terms of the experience narrated in a long list of disparate accounts, such as the writings of Frantz Fanon and the chronicles of Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, among other examples. To these, and to other examples that would be too many to cite, I would add Euclides de Cunha. Although there is no clear original author of coloniality, it does have a precise temporal beginning: it appears as the result of the asymmetry of power created in the colonization of America in the sixteenth century, which served as the foundation of a modernity that still tries to hide its miseries and contradictions (Mignolo 2000). Is it not a contradictory fact of modernity today that development agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund promote a faith in the market and in economic growth, at the same time that they marginalize and segregate the population excluded from the 'benefits' of development? Doesn't this increase in production parallel the destruction of life and of natural resources? The complicated struggle between modernity and coloniality is reflected as well in the third historical-literary event observed in the crisis of modernity: I am referring to the literature of the Mexican Revolution, particularly the novel *Los de abajo* (The underdogs) written by Mariano Azuela in 1915. This novel paints an accurate picture of the social and political cataclysm that led to the Revolution. Having said this however, I will concentrate on da Cunha's work below.

Euclides da Cunha, a notable journalist, geological engineer and positivist researcher, was sent to cover the Canudos Rebellion as a newspaper correspondent from Rio de Janeiro. The Canudos Rebellion was an event that shook the consciousness of Brazilian citizens at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a witness to the peasants of the northeast's heroic defense while under assault by the Republican troops, da Cunha felt himself

seriously questioned. This made him confront his own 'civilizing' inclination for positivistic liberalism that made him believe in the innate inferiority of the autochthonous. This contrasted with the compassionate respect that his writing gradually acquired for the inhabitants of Canudos, true *damnés de la terre* who should be categorized as a degenerate social group and rejected according to the rigor of positivistic science. Said in another way: the evolutionism of da Cunha entered into conflict with his observations of reality. The journalist realized that the Canudos Rebellion was not the product of the *jaquês*' blind capriciousness for the return to the traditional constitutional monarchy, but the result of a religious vision anchored in ancestral myths that were absolutely incongruent with the world of modernity. Intrigued by the opposing forces that prevented Brazil from becoming a uniform entity, *Os sertões* had a tremendous emotional force because of the tragedy in the contradictory and unresolved situation. This also made the work a revealing study of how racial determinisms come apart when faced with the humanity of the rebels, allowing us to see the complexities in a reality that resisted and still resists being studied as a homogenous unit, where modernity overcomes the retrograde and degenerated nature of those unable to enter into Western civilization. In *Os sertões*, da Cunha did not reject progress, but he realized that the fruits of progress could not only benefit the elites. What is more, he felt tormented by the fact that it was difficult to explain how this people could integrate into modernity without destroying their identity; how would they achieve the construction of the nationality so longed for? Is it not true that this is still a big concern that remains unresolved at the beginning of the present century?

It seems to me that at the heart of these questions lies the presence of disparate cultures that did not converge to bring about a new civilizing project. The fact that these cultures did not coexist in harmony, flourishing reciprocally, also helps explain the inexistence of a 'national culture'. On the contrary, there was never any convergence, only opposition between the ancestral cultures and the successive variants of Western civilization that had acquired hegemony among the dominant groups. There is only one reason for this: the social groups that monopolized power (political, economic and ideological) since the beginning of the European invasion until today, social groups affiliated by descent or by circumstance to Western civilization, have sustained historical projects in which there is no room for local cultures to flourish. The dominant position of these groups, and the presence of their modernizing armies originating from the stratified order of colonial society, has been expressed in an ideology that only conceives of the future (development, progress, advancement, The Revolution itself) within the direction given to it by Western civilization. Cultural diversity, and more specifically, the presence of multiple local cultures, has been understood as an obstacle that impedes progress along the only certain path and toward the only valid goal. The coloniality of power and the coloniality of knowledge,

cognitive expressions inherited from the conqueror, do not permit one to see or to invent any other path: local cultures, like the Sertanera of the Brazilian northeast, are left for dead, or are expected to die before long, because their condition is one of unquestionable inferiority according to the colonizer's gaze, and has no future of its own.

Furthermore, given that Euclides de Cunha also considered the mestizo Sertanejo 'an instable hysteric', (1944, p. 97), he must have recognized that the peasants' stubborn defense of their customs called into question the scientific methods of observing reality. The biological sociology of the period was a limited and insufficient way to interpret the events. In effect, how was it possible following the positivist view, that a corrupt and degenerate ethnic group could oppose a modern army with such success, an army trained in the most advanced European technologies of warfare?

In *Os sertões*, the tragic and mystical figure of Antonio Conselheiro, the 'inverse of a great man' (1944, p. 142), the 'pietist that aspired to reach the Kingdom of God' (p. 139), the fearful *jagunco* who 'reproduces the mysticism of the past' (p. 137), forced da Cunha's evolutionism to falter tragically; in effect, it is not *kronos*, lineal and progressive historical time that distinguished the defeat of Antonio Conselheiro and his Sertanejo rebels, but *kairos*, a time loaded with the painful truth of deep crisis: there were two Brazils, two nations divided by the struggle between the opposing forces of modernity and coloniality. In effect, the actions of Conselheiro were a product of the struggle between two different historical projects. The struggle did not simply refer to alternative proposals within the framework of a civilization in common. Proposals like that would hypothetically alter the reality of the moment, but go without questioning the deep values of the civilizing project. Rather, it referred to different projects that rested on different ways of conceiving the world, nature, society and human beings; projects that postulated different hierarchies of values; that did not have the same aspirations, and did not understand what it meant to be fully human in the same way. They were projects that expressed two different directions of social organization. Even given all this, cultural unification projects like 'national culture' never proposed unity based on the creation of a new civilization that was a synthesis of the previous cultures, but proposed a unity dependent on the elimination of one of them (the Sertanejo culture in the case of Brazil) and the generalization of the other, of the celebrated of modernity. In reference to this flight from local culture in favor of the exogenous, the imported, da Cunha affirmed,

... After having lived for four hundred years on a vast stretch of seaboard, where we enjoyed the reflections of civilized life, we suddenly came into an unlooked-for inheritance in the form of the Republic. Caught up in the sweep of modern ideas, we abruptly mounted the ladder, leaving behind us in the centuries-old semidarkness a third of our

people in the heart of our country. Deluded by a civilization which came to us second hand; rejecting, blind copyists that we were, all that was best in the organic codes of other nations, and shunning, in our revolutionary zeal, the slightest compromise with the exigencies of our national interests, we merely succeeded in deepening the contrast between our mode of life and that of our rude native sons, who were more alien to us in this land of ours than were the immigrants who came from Europe. For it was not an ocean which separated us from them but three whole centuries. . . .

(p. 161)

As the passage above confirms, da Cunha discovered that the rebellion of Canudos did not have the return to monarchical-constitutional order as an end like the proponents of liberal republicanism believed. What the rebellion opted for was a resurgence of 'a religiosity that is diffuse and incongruent' with modernity (p. 161), demonstrating that the often mentioned national unity, the 'fraternal and horizontal' community that Benedict Anderson theorized as 'imagined' (Anderson 1983), is just another myth of modernity created to legitimate the political hegemony of the dominant sectors. For this reason, I now turn to demonstrating how the text of da Cunha can be used to critique Anderson's theory.

Anderson tries his best to present the notion of a 'deep horizontal camaraderie' as fundamental to the 'imagined community'. However, this notion obscures and distorts the experience of Latin America, where the ties between the different social and ethnic sectors were ties of 'dependence', not 'camaraderie', (Lomnitz 2001). In contrast to the historical experience of the European nations, Latin American dependence started with colonization. The way in which the new Latin American States of the nineteenth century treated the legacy of the sixteenth century definitively marked the direction the nation itself took. In other words, given that the ties of brotherhood and fraternity between different ethnic and social groups were not strong enough in Latin America to construct 'the nation', in the same way different ways of understanding nationalism surfaced during the postcolonial era, a result of intellectual borrowing from Europe that in the end was false and unstable.

There is no doubt of the importance of the religious act in the organization of local cultures. As I demonstrated in another essay on the work of José Carlos Mariátegui, the 'religious factor' is vital to the explanation of how the Andean world is organized. The strength of the religious myth in the Sertanera population proves that Anderson's affirmation of nationalism as a kind of cultural succession to the universalism of premodern religions is erroneous. Although Anderson situates the birth of nationalism at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the conditions that made way for the development of nation- states occurred much earlier, with

the expansion of Europe in the sixteenth century (Mignolo 2000). From Anderson's point of view, European expansion created the image of a civilizing development that was plural and independent, and this pluralism or relativism eventually transformed into a kind of secular historicism from where the individualized collective entities – the nations – competed with one another.

One of the most surprising and interesting aspects of Anderson's book is the affirmation that nationalism developed first in the colonial world, to later expand to Europe. This way of looking at the geopolitics of the concept took historians of Latin America by surprise, as they were accustomed to thinking in terms of the European influences of liberalism and the Enlightenment, and not from the concrete reality of Latin America. But, in spite of such an original observation, it is difficult to accept Anderson's argument that the Hispano-American nations were constructed in terms of an extensive and horizontal camaraderie. I will not pause here to speculate whether nationalism was, as Anderson argues, a valid substitute for the centrality that religious structures had during the Colony. On the contrary, I will critique the claim that national construction was a 'fraternal and horizontal camaraderie' (1983, p. 25).

Claudio Lomnitz has noted that one of the principal weaknesses of the Anderson book is the argument that nationalism formed from a single imagined fraternal community (Lomnitz 2001). According to Lomnitz, what Anderson forgets is that in Latin America the division between a 'strong' and 'weak' citizenship has always existed, and the 'weak' (children, women, the indigenous, the uneducated) have been traditionally dependent and subjugated. Given that these distinctions deeply marked the heterogeneous nature of our reality, it is difficult to agree that the power of nationalism lied in the ties of fraternity that the State continues to instill in future citizens in classrooms, even today. Throughout history, using their written and oral communicative capacities, the 'strong' and first-class citizens have interpreted the 'others' by way of their cultural products, be they from journalism or literature. It is now a known fact that in the eighteenth century, a predominantly male 'public sphere' opened up giving rise not only to the novel, but also to literary criticism (Eagleton 1984). From there the importance that 'the lettered' acquired in Europe and in the Americas was in opening public spheres that would help to consolidate the building of nations. In this way, it is not strange that both the novel and journalism would have been the instruments capable of 'representing' the type of community that Anderson describes as imagined.

This critical look leads me to revise the definition that Anderson gives of the nation; to affirm, contrary to the concept of imagined community, that the deep fraternity among complete citizens – the criollos or criollo-mestizos – opened a relative 'public sphere', where the lettered role of journalists and writers was to mediate between the State and a half-formed citizenry, poor and weak, an embryo of citizenship that even today lives subjugated and

dependent. The role conferred on the lettered intellectuals also needs to be revised with greater care.

If the role of the lettered intellectual in the formulation of the romantic project of State-building was fundamental in the middle of the nineteenth century, the role of the intellectual was also important at the end of that century, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, at about the same time that da Cunha wrote *Os sertões*. Lettered intellectuals played a key role in critiquing the modernizing 'barbarism' of North America that threatened to extinguish the spiritual values of Latin America. This anti-imperialist intellectual movement called 'arielismo', arising from the pen of modernist writers, like José Enrique Rodó and Rubén Darío, writers who resisted the overwhelming influence of Anglo-American culture. Their critiques were based on the exotic and highly cultured examples of opposition to the scientific positivism that organized the authoritarian states in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Ariel, written in 1900, is a meditation about the nature of civilization and allowed Rodó to contrast two forms of society, symbolized by the literary figures of Ariel and Calibán. The figure of Calibán, associated with the United States, represented a state in which mercantile utilitarianism, combined with the excessive appetites of the masses, produced a new barbarism that distanced Hispano-American societies from moral values and spiritual ideals. Contrasting this barbarism, Ariel, a spiritual figure, represented Hispano-American civilization, guided by an intellectual elite capable of subordinating the materialist inclinations to the mandates of reason and the well-tempered spirit. Although in this essay Rodó admired North American dynamism, he believed that Latin America should preserve the Greco-Latin values that approached the democracy of the masses and capitalism with caution.

In the 1910s and 1920s, the intellectual impact of *Ariel* was enormous. In effect, it awoke the Latin American desire to affirm their own culture. More specifically, it fostered resentment and contempt for the United States and its cultural expressions. As I affirm in another essay (Sanjinés 2003), this anti-imperialist but not necessarily popular model of national organization was constructed, in the case of Bolivia, by Carlos Montenegro's *Nacionalismo y coloniaje* (1943). This work is considered a foundation of 'revolutionary nationalism', where the role of the lettered was particularly clear given that Montenegro analyzed the history of the country through the prism of different literary genres (the epic, drama, tragedy, comedy and the novel). I think that *Nacionalismo y coloniaje* is an example of the way attachment to the high expressions of Western lettered culture impeded the appropriate understanding of the national being (Sanjinés 2003). I reach this conclusion because Montenegro, in contrast to the work of da Cunha, did not stop to look diligently enough at the colonialism that his book attacked and denounced. I think that his propensity for the West also impeded his observation of the

disparities and the disjunctions that characterize Bolivia, even today. Montenegro's 'arielismo' or anti-imperialism led him to fight against the social and economic oppression in which the country had fallen as a result of the surrender of its upper classes to Western models of observation, with an alternative intellectual project that was not daring enough to reflect the local fragmentations. This logic could have called into question European historicism and its epistemological premises.

This brief and critical look at Montenegro's book leads me to the question whether it is possible to continue invoking this type of 'arielismo', to continue defending Latin America without questioning the epistemological categories from which we want to build such a defense. If this were not the case, in what ways could the latent possibilities of subjugated peoples be developed? The factor that impeded the confrontation between Latin America and the United States and also prevented Latin America's ability to secure itself successfully in this confrontation was, as José Carlos Mariátegui observed in the 1920s, the prolongation of elements of its colonial past, combined with a postcolonial model — the 'liberal' nationalism of the new republics in the nineteenth century — that marginalized and repressed the local cultures and the popular sectors. Now then, and following the logic of 'arielismo' explained above, one of the minor symptoms of emergent globalization of the Latin American economies was precisely the rejection of subaltern studies, postcolonial theory and multiculturalism on the part of certain intellectual sectors of Latin America. They consider them a type of colonization of thought by theories elaborated in the North American academy, from the perspective of what is often referred to as *area studies*. Echoing the concept developed by Edward Said, these intellectuals accuse postcolonial studies and subaltern studies of a kind of 'neoarielismo', in which the configuration of Latin America of its societies and cultures, is given in an eccentric and anomalous manner.

The connections that 'neoarielistas' make between Latin American cultures and the North American academy are simply an inefficient critique of the latter's supposed cultural domination. In affirming the value of 'lo latinoamericano' as an aesthetic-utopian opposition to the United States, 'neoarielismo' repeats the problem of being — as 'arielismo' was in the past — a reply that does not successfully challenge North American cultural hegemony. In other words, 'neoarielismo' reveals its incapacity to articulate Latin America in a hegemonic way. That is to say, it has no way to group all the heterogeneous and multifaceted elements that comprise the many cultures of the region, nor does it have the capacity to produce an interpellation that is genuinely 'national-popular', evoking the concept of Gramsci. Neoarielismo produces and reproduces a perpetual division between the culture of the intellectuals — including well-meaning leftist 'letrados' — and the bigger mosaic of the multifaceted cultures of the popular sectors. In this way, neoarielismo does not represent 'the popular' but rather the discomfort and

the distress of the intellectual groups of petty-bourgeois formation, the majority mestizo-criollos, threatened with displacement on the national scene by the strength of neoliberalism and cultural globalization on the one hand, and by an ethnically and socially heterogeneous popular subject on the other, in whose name they once claimed to speak.

In this sense the neoarielista position, still dominant in the cultural and academic strata in Latin America, reproduces the anxiety constitutive of the original arielismo of Rodó and the other modernists who, as I already said before, manifest a profound anti-Americanism, together with a contempt or fear of the masses and democracy. Are there any viable alternatives to neoarielismo?

As John Beverley indicated (Beverley 2005), if the struggle between capitalism and socialism was essentially a fight to see which of the two systems could produce a better version of modernity, then history has handed down its verdict: capitalism. If we limit the possibilities of socialism to just the ability to achieve complete modernity — a fact that, from a different point of view, da Cunha's *Os sertões* questions at the beginning of the twentieth century — we would be condemned to a defeated left. The possibility of reformulating a new Latin America 'from below', to put it this way, is tied to the question of how to imagine a new version of the socialist project, liberated from the teleology of modernity, and of the 'nation', imagined by the dominant sectors as the inevitably unitary phenomena of modernity. The challenge of ideological articulation that this task entails is to fuse the de-hierarchization of the cultural, the opening towards difference and to new forms of liberty and identity, with a clear sense of the need to displace capitalism and its institutionality, both bureaucratic and cultural. To achieve this task it seems to me that the most useful position is the posture represented by diverse forms of 'theory', like the subaltern and postcoloniality. These are more useful than the neutral, nationalist, criollo-mestizo position of neoarielismo. These 'theories' are concerned with the reconceptualization of those 'from below'. In order to discuss this subject briefly, I will return to the spine-chilling ending of da Cunha's work.

'... The entrance of the prisoners into camp was a moving sight ... The line of prisoners ... came to a halt a hundred yards beyond — an ugly cluster of ragged, repulsive-looking human bodies ... a legion of disarmed, crippled and mutilated, famished beings ... Then there was the horrible hag, a wrinkled and skinny old witch ... who alone raised her angry eyes darting sparks, to look the bystanders in the face ... In her spindling arms she carried a small child ... That child was a horrifying sight to behold. The left side of its face had been torn away some time ago by a splinter from a grenade, and the jawbones, white as could be, now stood out from the crimson edges of the wound, which had healed over.

The right side of her face was wreathed in a charming smile —a pitiful half smile which was once extinguished in the vacuum, the gash, on the side. That was the most monstrous sight in all the campaign, to see that old woman reeling along, like one afflicted with locomotor ataxia, down that long line of unfortunates.

(pp. 472–473)

Who were these turbulent and macabre *jagunços*? Were they a multitude?; maybe a people without a nation? Following John Beverley here (1999, 2004), I would be inclined to define them by combining the idea of ‘multitude’ with ‘subalternity’, the ‘poor in spirit’ that the Sermon of the Mountain mentions. But, I should recognize that there is an important difference between these two notions: the multitude, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have theorized it (2000, 2004), evokes the head of Hydra with many faces, a collective subject arising from globalization and cultural deterritorialization. Subalternity, on the contrary, express a class, gender and occupation, that is to say, a specific identity, of flesh and blood, that loves, suffers and dies.

For Maquiavelli, the first modern thinker of national liberation movements, and for whom the idea of national unity was behind all his writings, the notion of a ‘people without a nation’ constituted the heterogeneous, the servile. This notion comes very close to that of multitude and responds to a way of doing politics that goes beyond the limits of the nation and of representation, traditionally related to the idea of hegemony. Multitude, a notion far removed from national unity, comes to be an amorphous social subject, arising outside of global capitalism and of the anachronistic system of national borders. But, in my estimation, this notion of multitude, that is referred to today to define social movements, does not explain the nature of the *jagunços* described above very well.

Were the *jagunços* an ‘extending’, ‘expansive’ form that designated a social subject that was far from being defined as proletariat, and that could not be limited to the category of ‘remunerated workforce?’ Were they, in other words, an excess that modernity could not control? Hardt and Negri, who use Paolo Virno’s metaphor of the ‘exodus’ to describe the partition of the multitude from the nation-state, confirm this point of view. But, on the other hand and inversely, wasn’t their potential for mobilization against power dependent on the very existence of the Republic and of the nation? My impression is that, outside the national territory, the *jagunços* would not have been more than an expression of multiculturalism, an aspect of the superstructure of capital. But in contrast to the notion of multitude, an idea that I consider to be rather slippery, it seems that ideologically speaking, the *jagunços* were looking to affirm their identity, including respect for their values, their religious beliefs, their languages, their territory and the defense of their rights and community.

To summarize, it seems to me that the reconceptualization of the nation from the point of view of 'those from below' is far from the fraternal imagined community of 'those from above'. This re-conceptualization of the nation draws more from the notion of the subaltern than the notion of multitude. To put it in another way, the notion of 'the people' is a notion that is closer to subalternity than multitude and depends on the recognition of the socio-cultural differences that separate the hegemonic sectors from the subaltern sectors. It is in this sense that Dipesh Chakrabarty, the historian of South Asia, affirms that:

... Subaltern studies, as I think of it, can only situate itself theoretically at the juncture where we give up neither Marx nor the 'difference', for, as I have said, the resistance it speaks of is something that can happen only 'within' the temporal horizon of capital, and yet it has to be thought of as something that disrupts the unity of that time. ...

(2000, p. 95)

In effect, this passage from Chakrabarty allows us to conclude that the equation between the nation-state and the modern depends on the temporality that equates the people with modern citizenship. Subalternity, on the other hand, breaks with this temporal unity and in opting for the opposite, settles on the concept of 'ungovernability' – the capacity for resistance that the poor and needy defenders of Canudo exhibited – is precisely the space of resentment, disobedience, marginality and insurgence. In this line of thought, it is just a fantasy to think that the 'return of the plebeian' (García Linera 2000) could occur under the civilized form of 'civil society'. In its usual sense, the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* of Hegel, tied to lineal sense of time and development, requires a formal education, technical and scientific knowledge, a nuclear family, a political party, business and private property, all categories that exclude large sectors of the population who do not attain full citizenship. This exclusion, this limitation, is precisely subalternity.

What then replaces the notion of 'civil society?' Would it be 'hybridity', as Hardt and Negri think? I doubt that this would be the correct alternative because the concept of hybridity, that separates and deterritorializes the binary opposition State/civil society, ends up surrendering to the market and globalization. Given that subalternity is in search of the opposite effect, we would have to say, as a means of conclusion to this work, that the crisis of nation as imagined community, measured in the politics of the multitude and under conditions of globalization that have weakened the State, requires paradoxically the legitimation of the territory and the nation-state. But this re-legitimation also requires that we rethink concepts like the nation, national identity, citizenship and democracy. In my opinion, the notion of multitude that Hardt and Negri propose in *Empire* as well as their most recent book

Multitude, does not contribute enough to this reclassificatory effort. In my opinion, we will have to be more careful in defining subalternity as ‘historical agency’. Although the notion is insufficiently articulated in the works mentioned above, the concept of subalternity as historical agency would help us visualize the new society in which we aspire to live. In the last instance, I reiterate that the reconceptualization of the nation requires a way of thinking located at the limits of the temporality of Western history. As Euclides da Cunha says at the beginning of the twentieth century, the unresolved struggle between modernity and coloniality creates ‘excesses’ that are very difficult to control, and that go undetected if one surrenders uncritically to points of view, like Benedict Anderson’s imagined community, that can only see the situation from the ‘outside’ of Western epistemology, and forget to weigh and assess the concept with the disjunctive qualities of the local.

Note

- 1 This essay was originally published in Spanish in the book *Modernidad y Pensamiento Descolonizador*, published by the Universidad Para la Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia (U-PIEB) and the Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos (IFEA), in August 2006.

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